



# *Blackwork Journey Blog*

June 2011



## *Royal Wedding*

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The UK Royal wedding in April was watched around the world as everyone waited to see what the bride's dress would look like and when it was eventually revealed, it did not disappoint!

Katherine Middleton's wedding dress was designed by Sarah Burton, creative director of Alexander McQueen. She chose British brand Alexander McQueen for the beauty of its craftsmanship and its respect for traditional workmanship and the technical construction.

The ivory satin bridal gown, with a fitted bodice and nine-foot train, was decorated by hand with lace appliqué flowers. It was made amid such secrecy that the needlewomen from the Royal School of Needlework who worked on the dress were not even told the identity of the designer or that the project was a royal commission, lest it leaked out. They were led to believe that the dress was destined for a television period drama.

The large team - aged from 19 to 70-something - comprised staff, tutors and graduates from the school, alongside students from Britain, Japan, the US, China, Switzerland, Holland, Thailand, Germany and Slovakia. Conditions were so stringent that the embroiderers were required to wash their hands every 30 minutes to keep the lace pristine and the needles were renewed every three hours. The lace designs were applied to the delicate net background with fine cord-like thread and minute stitches. To maintain a flawless appearance, no securing knots were used.



*Katherine's Wedding 29th April, 2011*

French lacemakers Sophie Hallette made the lace. Sophia Hallette has been making lace since 1887 and the lace selected by Sarah Burton was an exclusive model designed in 1958 and manufactured on artisanal looms that are more than 100 years old. Roses, daffodils and shamrocks were cut out from the original lace and hand-sewn onto the silk tulle of the decollete, sleeves and train.

It is expected that the gown will pass to the Royal ceremonial dress collection, which houses costumes from the 18th century to the present day. It includes the wedding dresses of Queen Victoria and Princess Margaret.





Patron: Her Majesty The Queen  
President: HRH The Duchess of Gloucester



# PRESS RELEASE

**29 April 2011**

## **The Royal School of Needlework's hand embroidery expertise helps Sarah Burton create Miss Catherine Middleton's wedding dress**

The skilled embroiderers of England's Royal School of Needlework (RSN) contributed their technical embroidery expertise to create the bespoke lace on the wedding dress, veil and shoes and enable Sarah Burton to achieve her artistic vision for the bride

The lace design and process was influenced by traditional Carrickmacross lace which originated in Ireland in the 1820s. Carrickmacross lace uses an embroidery technique called appliqué – the lace is worked by applying organdie fabric to a delicate net background and edging each motif with fine cord-like thread. Sarah Burton sourced a series of lace motifs to create a unique design, applied by the RSN and arranged to fit each part of the dress perfectly following her creative vision. Each lace motif (some as small as a 5 pence piece) was applied with minute stitches every two to three millimetres.

One of the hallmarks of the RSN is that our embroiderers can work collectively on a project yet it will look like the work of one person. The team for this project comprised RSN Studio staff, former staff, tutors, graduates and current students from the RSN's Certificate, Diploma and Foundation Degree programmes. The RSN welcomes students from all over the world and the team for this project included British, Japanese, American, Chinese, Swiss, Dutch, Thai, German and Slovakian students.

Famous for its high standard of technical hand embroidery, since its founding almost 140 years ago, the RSN's mission has always been to keep the traditional art of hand embroidery alive. Essential to the RSN's work is its attention to detail. Hands were washed every 30 minutes to keep the lace and threads pristine; needles were renewed every 3 hours and only short lengths of thread were used, each no longer than 30 cm. Also, to maintain an even appearance, no securing knots were used and it was important that the back of the work looked as neat as the front, another RSN hallmark.

The RSN is proud of maintaining the core skills of hand embroidery and the fact that all embroidery commissions are undertaken at its Hampton Court Palace-based Studio in the UK.

The RSN's Chief Executive, Dr Susan Kay-Williams says

'The Royal School of Needlework was absolutely delighted to be called upon to work on this unique and eagerly-awaited commission. Our involvement with this very special event continues our long tradition of work for royal occasions. The RSN has a bank of highly-skilled embroiderers to call upon for a large commission such as this and their combined experience, knowledge and skills have contributed enormously to this project. I am immensely proud of the way the whole RSN team worked together to achieve Sarah Burton's design for such an exquisite wedding dress.'

**- ENDS-**

#### **Notes for Editors**

- The RSN was founded in 1872 and will celebrate its 140th year in 2012
- The RSN was granted Royal patronage in 1875. Its current Patron is Her Majesty The Queen
- The RSN is a charity. It receives no government support and has to generate all its own funds from student fees, donations and Studio commissions
- The RSN is the only embroidery school in the world which teaches so many types of hand embroidery to the highest standards
- The RSN has created many pieces for past Royal events including The Queen's coronation train in 1953 and the Buckingham Palace balcony hanging for The Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002.
- [www.royal-needlework.org.uk](http://www.royal-needlework.org.uk)

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Further to my article on Ollivier Henry last month, I have just received a photograph of one of his latest costumes which was so beautiful that I thought I would share it with you. To see such exquisite work in one month from two such different sources has been very satisfying. Readers Gallery provides an opportunity for you to display your work for others to enjoy and my Guest Book is there for your comments.



*Theatre costume by Ollivier Henry*

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### *Sharing ideas*

Sharing ideas via the internet is one way of keeping the interest in crafts alive for the next generation to learn and enjoy. I think we have a responsibility to pass on the skills that we have gained to ensure that these crafts do not disappear.

In England, there has been a revival in knitting and crochet amongst younger women and new magazines have been published to cater for this renewed interest. There are groups across the world like the Embroiders Guild in the UK and the American Needlework Guild who do sterling work in promoting all aspects of embroidery, but there is a need to promote the less high profile groups such as the Braid Society, the Smockers Guild and many more as they all have an important role to play!

Many small needlework shops are under threat from the larger internet stores, but they play an important role in the community and deserve our continued support if they are not to disappear. Many of these stores are turning to the internet to promote and develop their ideas through on-line classes. This is an innovative way of recruiting members who may live in isolated communities and have no access to local stores. Needlework forums, blogs and individual websites all help to disseminate information, but it comes down to knowing how to look and what to look for. Social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube also provide new avenues to explore and will become increasingly important.

Mary Corbet's site: [www.needlenthread.com](http://www.needlenthread.com) is a very good example of an informative and interesting site with excellent sections on Hand Embroidery Techniques, patterns and resources. Dip into sites such as this to strengthen your own knowledge and then pass the information on!

Let me know what you think about passing skills on to the next generation and how you think it could be best achieved. I look forward to your E-mails.

Happy stitching!

*Liz*