Opus Anglicanum: What is the significance of English medieval embroidery, why did it change in style during the fourteenth century and what is its legacy?

During the Middle Ages, England was renowned for producing exquisite embroideries. English medieval embroidery was commonly known throughout Europe during this period as Opus Anglicanum and this 'English Work' was very highly regarded, especially during the so-called golden years between 1250 and 1350. Beautifully embroidered vestments were worn by the clergy and played a significant part in religious ceremonies. Demand for Opus Anglicanum, particularly from the Church, was significant at this time and the quality of both the workmanship and materials was magnificent. Kings, popes and high-ranking prelates coveted English medieval embroidery. It vied in importance as an art form with painting and sculpture and also became collectable. Its monetary value was comparable to other forms of medieval art and was revered and venerated accordingly.

The aim of this paper is to determine the significance of English medieval embroidery in the Middle Ages and its continued importance today. The focus will be to demonstrate its power and influence and by examining how it was used as a notion of gift-giving and for diplomatic gifts, this will put its significance into context.

In addition, the style of English embroidery changed around the middle of the fourteenth century and this paper will discuss the possible reasons for this as well as the reasons that so few extant pieces remain today. Some vestments, for example, were taken apart and used for different purposes. The reasons for this repurposing and how certain pieces have survived will also be investigated. Embroidery conveyed messages within both religion and secular society during the Middle Ages and in considering why it was used for this purpose, this paper will provide an explanation of its significance. Consideration of who commissioned English embroidery during the Middle Ages and the purposes for which was it created, will illustrate the significance of Opus Anglicanum.

The Bayeux Tapestry is the most famous and iconic medieval embroidery and yet its origin, (English or French), is still being debated so reference to it is included in this paper.

The main characteristics of Opus Anglicanum and what made it so distinctively English will be discussed as will the stitches and techniques used and the specific reasons for their use. The matter of why English embroidery was so highly regarded on the Continent will also be explored in order to put into context its significance at the time and also today.

By considering and debating the theories surrounding these questions and considering the opinions of others who have written on this subject, it is hoped that the reader will have an awareness of the relevancy of the issues discussed.

Society in England during the Middle Ages was primarily a religious one, Christianity was the only religion at that time and specifically Catholicism. Embroidered liturgical vestments were used to convey messages and, as the majority of the congregation were illiterate, iconography was used to tell biblical stories that could easily be understood. The most significant biblical scenes relating to the Christian ceremony being conducted were embroidered down the centre of the rear of the vestments so that when the priest was facing the altar with his back to the congregation, the stories depicted could be clearly seen.

The imagery and iconography used on vestments were frequently framed by architectonic elements. Architecture was a common influence within art during the Middle Ages and was referenced in various art forms. (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Retable fragment dated 1325-50 showing architectural influences.

A significant percentage of Opus Anglicanum was ecclesiastical and it was used to display the wealth and power of the Church as well as in secular society. It was considered an art form as important as painting or sculpture in medieval times. Roth, (Roth, M. (2016) Director's Foreword *in* Browne, C., Davies, G. and Michael, M. A. (eds.) *English Medieval Embroidery – Opus Anglicanum,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press. p.vii) Director at the Victoria & Albert Museum, states:

> In this art form, perhaps above all others, England could claim to be the artistic vanguard; the result of this artistry became known as opus anglicanum.

English embroidery was clearly considered hugely important in medieval times as it was governed by a strict set of rules and was so highly prized that it took a 7-year apprenticeship to train an embroiderer, the skills often having been passed down through the generations within a family. To put this into context and to evidence just how specialised this art form was, it should be considered that in modern times, occupations such as doctors and architects train for a similar period; embroidery in the Middle Ages must have been considered very important indeed.

Bailey (2013, pp.47-49) states that in 1363, Edward III declared that nobody whose annual income was less than 400 marks would be allowed to wear embroidered garments or clothes made with gold thread. She viewed this as an attempt to control an 'excessive desire for finery' because the demand for such opulent garments was so great. Skilled workers such as embroiderers, only earned between 2¾d and 8¼d per day at that time so it was clear that Edward III wanted English embroidery to be the preserve of the wealthy.

Davies and Michael (2016, p1) assert:

> Embroidery was central to the experience of luxury in medieval culture. Rich textiles were among the most important signifiers of wealth and status, and members of society's elite were marked out through the quality of their clothing and accessories.

Textiles were important as external signs of wealth, power and social status (King, 1987, p.157). Given the costs of the materials and, to a much lesser degree, the labour to create religious and secular embroideries, (payments of which are detailed in pipe rolls, treasuries and related correspondence, together with Edward III's decree), a reasonable conclusion that can be drawn is that only the wealthy could afford to commission such highly detailed and labour-intensive works of art. Domestic embroidery was limited to those who had the time and the means to do such a time-consuming pastime. The majority of ordinary people in the Middle Ages were not wealthy and they would need to spend most of their time working in order to provide for their families: this further demonstrates this art form was not available for consumption by the masses but rather aimed at the higher echelons of society, highranking clergy including the reigning pontiff, and royalty.

Boak (2013, p7) states:

> From its earliest beginnings, the Christian church has been one of the most important and extensive artistic patrons. Sumptuous textiles, whether vestments for wear or fabrics for furnishings, have always been an aspect of

this, alongside architecture, painting, illuminated manuscripts, metalwork, painted and stained glass, and sculpture.

Opus Anglicanum was used as a vehicle for gift-giving amongst kings, popes and the aristocracy and symbolized generosity and loyalty between donor and recipient as well as showing devotion to God when donated to the Church. Henry III was well known for being a generous donor to the Catholic Church and there are many examples of gifts of Opus Anglicanum in the pipe rolls where he has commissioned copes and various vestments to donate to the reigning pontiff. Donations to the Church were seen as a virtuous act and it is likely to have been one of the reasons for the King's generosity to the Church as he would have believed that it would ensure his place in Heaven. Another reason for this generosity would have been to maintain good relations with the Church and the Pope as religion and politics were inextricably linked.

Benefactors mentioned Opus Anglicanum in their wills and sometimes stipulated the Christian feasts at which they were permitted to be worn. This could be one of the reasons that some copes have survived as they would not have been worn out by frequent use.

English embroidery was distinct from European embroidery in both the use of stitches and style. The main stitches used in English embroidery during the Middle Ages were split stitch and underside couching. One of the reasons that Opus Anglicanum was so distinctively English is that the figures in the designs, both humans and animals, had very expressive faces: the embroiderers used split stitch in concentric circles for features such as the cheeks and chins. This also gave the designs another dimension. (Figure 2).

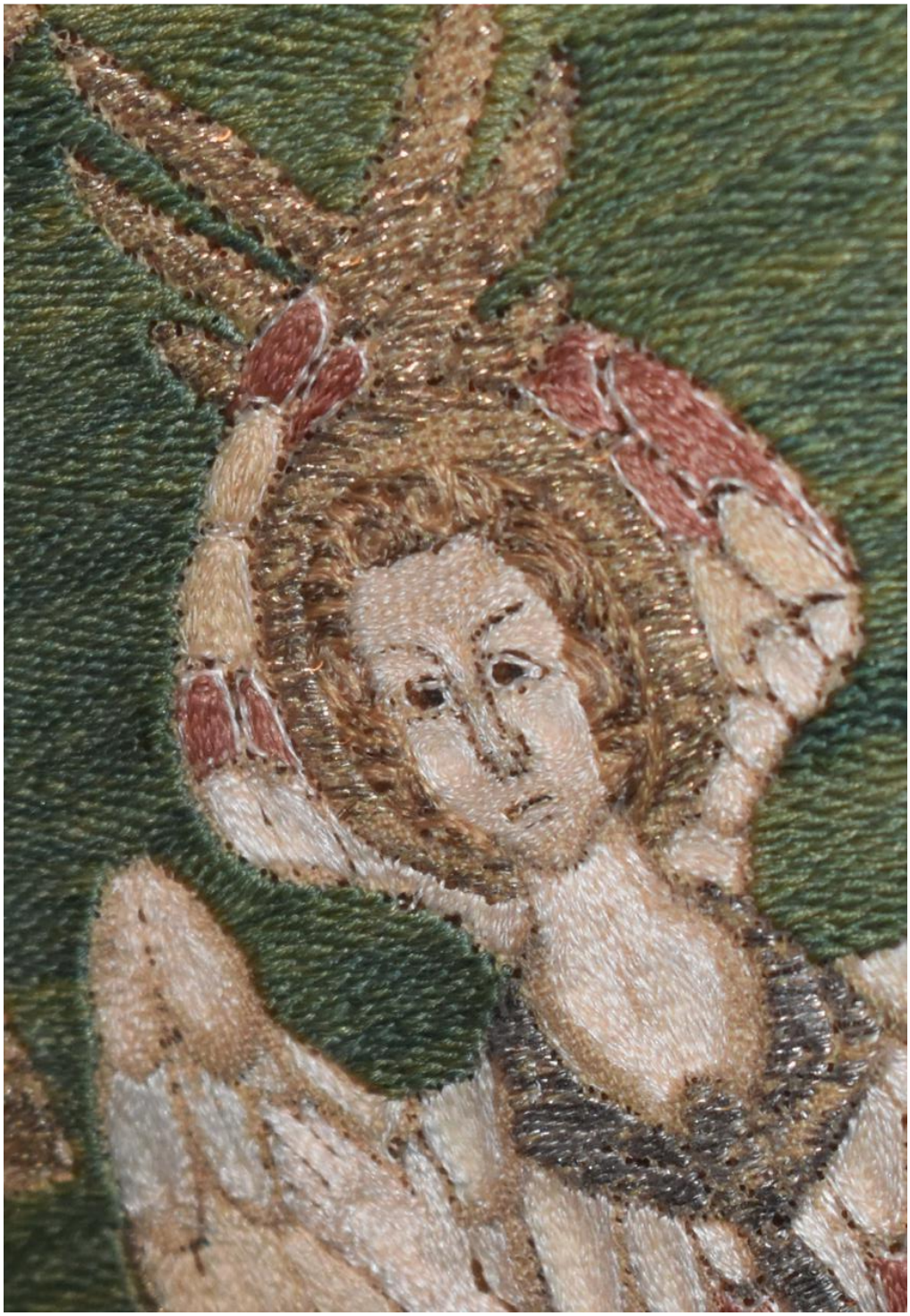

Figure 2. The Syon Cope - Detail of stitches most commonly used in English medieval embroidery.

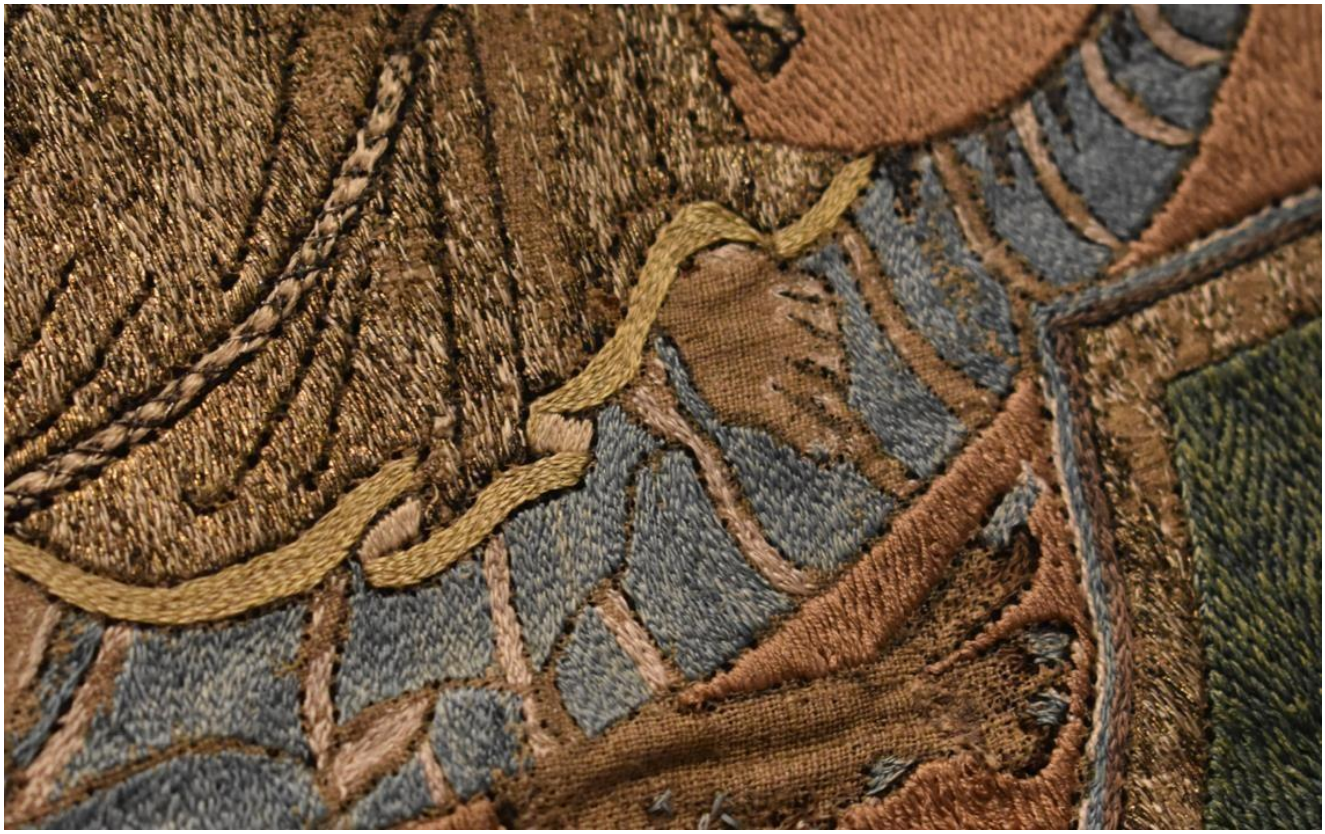

Figure 3. The Syon Cope. Detail showing fine stitches.

Underside couching was employed to allow flexibility for the wearer as such a vast amount of embroidery would have been very stiff had alternative stitches been used. Although the stitches were not unique to embroiderers in England and were commonly used throughout Europe, it was the way in which they were used that identified the embroidery as having been made in England. An example is shown on the Syon Cope (Figure 3). Split stitch in blue and cream with underside couching producing a chevron design in green and gold.

Heraldry was often included and embroidered arms of the donor on ecclesiastical vestments was not uncommon. This was included in the design so that the donor could be acknowledged in prayers and indicates the pious society in which the medieval donor lived as well as showing their generosity to the Church.

Other reasons for incorporating arms within the embroidered designs was so that the Church could not sell it and also it helped to prevent theft from Church treasuries as was common. (Davies, 2013, p.196).

The Marnhull Orphrey (http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O100809/the-marnhull-orphreyorphreys-unknown/) is an example of where heraldry was employed within embroidery. It was discovered, still in use, by Grace Christie in Marnhull, Dorset in 1935 while researching for her book written in 1938. Upon examination, Christie declared that it was 'typically English in both design and technique' and confirmed that it had not been restored or conserved in any way. Christie's evaluation of this piece signifies the esteem in which she is held by the Victoria & Albert Museum.

The Church disapproved of heraldry being included in ecclesiastic embroidery and one reason for this was perhaps because it was difficult to re-gift. Re-gifting was a common practice within both the Church and secular society. Butchart (2018, p53) goes further:

> Such diplomatic gifts and a taste for ostentation were not always viewed favourably. The fashion for including a personal coat of arms in embroidery designs, so that the donor could be acknowledged was criticized and monastic orders attempted (largely unsuccessfully) to reduce the display of heraldry in churches.

However, it is to the benefit of modern-day scholars that heraldry was included as it has not only identified the commissioner but also helped to identify the beneficiary.

Embroidery was a lively trade in London and in the St Paul's area in particular. Tiny needles, shears and various other embroidery tools used in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were excavated in the area. This is evidenced in Lucia Marchini's review (2016) of the Opus Anglicanum exhibition at the V&A in 2016-17. There was a thriving second-hand market too and some merchants dealing in embroidery became very wealthy as a result. There were several people involved in the business of embroidery: In addition to the commissioner, the designer and artist, the embroiderers and the vestment makers (if ecclesiastical), there were the middle men, sometimes women, who negotiated their prices and liaised between the commissioners and the makers.

The value of Opus Anglicanum in the Middle Ages was high compared with other art forms. Davies (2009, p.91) notes the stark different between the wages of a farm labourer at about 2 pence per day and a particular London embroiderer who was paid £40 to embroider a cope. This again evidences the value of embroidery and indeed how highly embroiderers were considered and the esteem in which they were held. That the Pope directly employed an embroiderer, rather than using a merchant to supply him, perhaps illustrates his voracity for such work. This, in turn, demonstrates the wealth and power of the Catholic Church during that period.

Matthew Paris, or Matthew of Paris, although English, was a Benedictine monk residing in St. Albans Abbey. He was also an English chronicler, artist in illuminated manuscripts and cartographer. Paris wrote about Pope Innocent IV upon his hearing about English embroidery worked with gold (Paris, M. 1246 cited in King, D, (1987):

> …having noticed that the ecclesiastical ornaments of certain English priests, such as choral copes and mitres, were embroidered in gold thread after a most desirable fashion, asked whence came this work? From England, they told him. Then exclaimed the Pope, 'England is for us surely a garden of delights, truly an inexhaustible well; and from there where so many things abound, many may be extorted.' Thereupon the same Lord Pope, allured by the desire of the eye, sent letters, blessed and sealed, to wellnigh all the Abbots of the Cistercian Order established in England, desiring that they should send to him without delay, these embroideries of gold which he preferred above all others, and with which he wished to decorate his chasubles and choral copes, as if these acquisitions would cost him nothing. This command of my Lord Pope did not displease the London merchants who traded in these embroideries and sold them at their own price.

Royal patronage had an effect on the economy and a direct influence on fashion as it does today. According to Staniland (1991, p.12), Matthew Paris believed that Henry III's prodigality would have had a positive effect on the production of embroidery. A gold embroiderer called Gregory of London was employed in Pope Urban IV's household by the Prior and Convent of Bermondsey. Staniland believes it was likely he was embroidering for the Vatican and with a significant salary, would have no doubt

deprived the merchants of London. She also writes that Paris believed that the London merchants benefitted from the trade rather than the embroiderers themselves.

English embroidery was innovative too. Woven velvet imported from Italy was relatively new in the fourteenth century and using this fabric in embroidery would have signified the wealth and power of the Church. It would not have been necessary to use embroidery to completely cover vestments made with this luxurious fabric as the inclusion of the velvet alone would have conveyed opulence and luxury and therefore wealth and power.

The Butler-Bowdon Cope is an example of a cope made with red Italian velvet (Figure 4). It was, however, dismantled and recycled to make mass vestments probably before 1721. (Coatsworth & Owen-Crocker, 2017, p.115). It was reassembled in the nineteenth century and again in the twentieth century. Grace Christie examined the cope before its final restoration at the Victoria & Albert Museum, (Coatsworth & Owen-Crocker, 2017, p.115) again demonstrating that she was considered an authority on English medieval embroidery and gives further credence, if it were needed, to her monumental work, *English Medieval Embroidery: A brief survey of English embroidery dating from the beginning of the tenth century until the end of the fourteenth*.

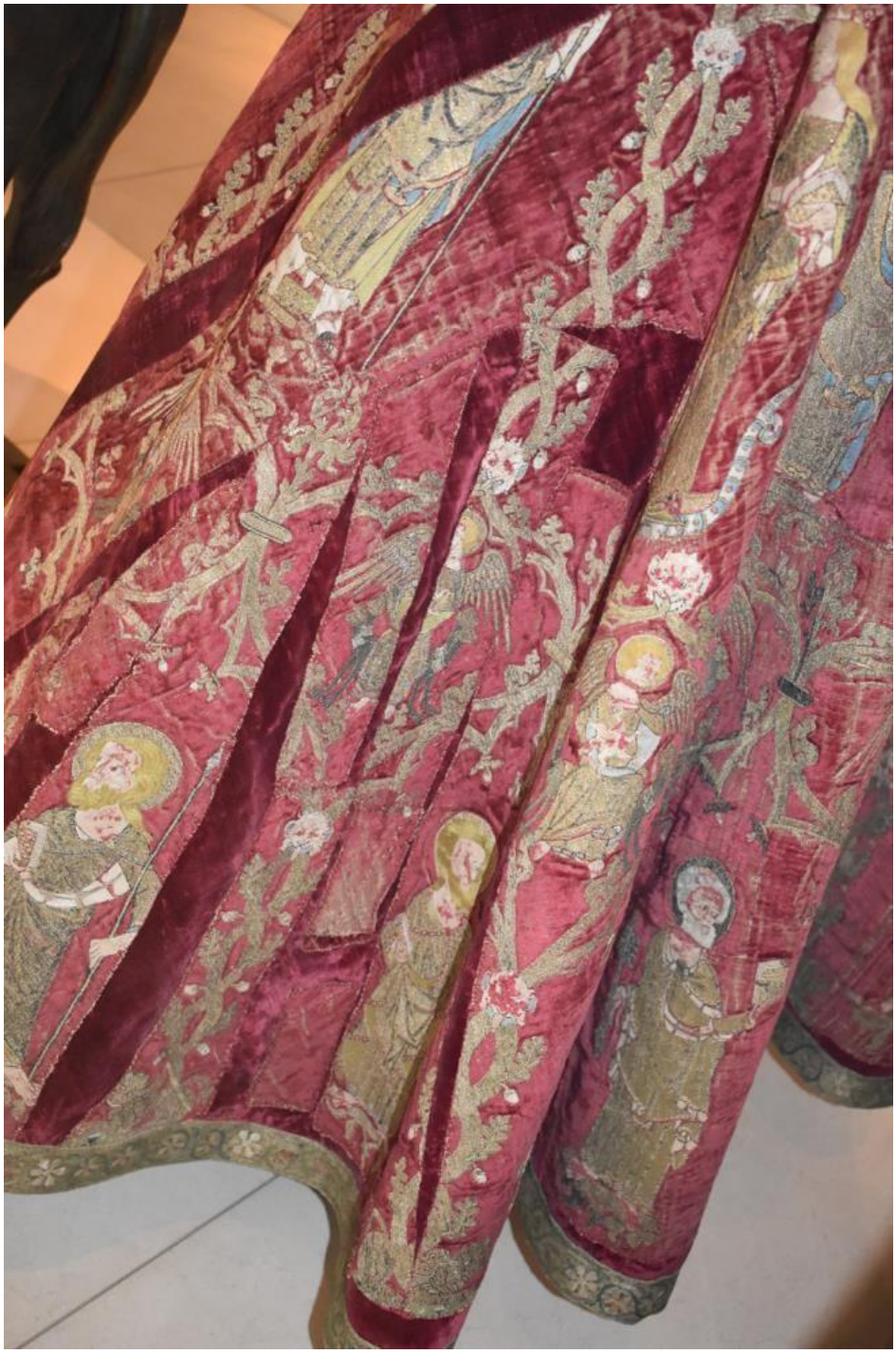

Figure 4. The Butler-Bowdon Cope showing reconstruction.

Another example of this innovation is demonstrated by imagery such as the lute on the Steeple Aston Cope (https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-steeple-aston-cope) and the Victoria & Albert Museum states that this was probably the earliest depiction of a lute in medieval art (V&A, 2018).

That current scholars know as much as they do about the commissioning and making of Opus Anglicanum is due to 'documentary references in inventories, fiscal accounts, correspondence and histories' (Davies & Michael, 2016, p.1) and records kept at the royal treasuries and the papal curia. Pipe rolls, the annual accounts of royal expenditure maintained by the Exchequer specifically record the costs of Henry III's commissioning of Opus Anglicanum.

They would not, however, have specifically named it as such in the rolls, as this was a term used in Europe to describe work carried out in England and as Henry was King of England, the accounts would not need to state this. However, the descriptions of embroideries in the rolls are detailed such that they are recognisable as English work. The Vatican records describe embroideries made in England specifically as Opus Anglicanum and Christie (1938, p.3) stated that:

> The 1295 Vatican inventory mentions Opus Anglicanum a hundred and thirteen times, a number greatly exceeding the embroideries noted as being of other specified workmanship.

The Bayeux Tapestry, the most famous and iconic medieval embroidery, thought to be the only extant piece of secular embroidery of that size dating back to the medieval period, is long believed to have been made in England and the reason it is mentioned herein, however, cannot be debated at length in this paper. To date, there is no evidence to conclusively prove where it was created or who commissioned it. Until recently, it was debated as to whether it had either been made in England or Normandy and there are good arguments on the subject to support both theories. However, Beech (2005, p.xi) argues that it was actually made in Saumur and that William the Conqueror commissioned it. His hypothesis is based on portrayals in the embroidery and worth considering in the debate.

This is a secular piece of embroidery, however, Strong (1998, p.45) asserts:

> Although the tapestry records the conquest of England, its purpose was a religious one to show that perjury following an oath taken over relics, as had been done by Harold, drew retribution on that person and his kinsmen. In this

way, the invasion and the defeat and the death of Harold are presented as Acts of God.

Schuette and Muller-Christensen (1964, pp.22-23) state that the Bayeaux Tapestry is either French or English demonstrating that when the book was written, it was still debated as to whether it was of French or English origin. Stenton (1965, p.9) also acknowledges the debate and asserts that the Tapestry is 'an elaborate pictorial narrative' having been composed shortly after the Battle of Hastings but that its intrinsic value cannot be taken to assume that the story implied by the Tapestry should be regarded to be a factual representation of history.

The Bayeux Tapestry is likely to have survived because it was created using purely simple materials and without gold (Synge 2001, p.37). Given that many medieval embroideries were destroyed to extract the gold, precious materials and precious and semi-precious stones, this could be considered a reasonable theory. In questioning its provenance, however, one has to consider why the English would create such a piece of artwork if they were the vanquished at the Battle of Hastings. The debate continues, for the time being, at least.

Nevertheless, the Bayeux Tapestry is certainly venerated as an historical document of some note and its importance is further evidenced by the fact that it has its own museum. It is due to be exhibited in the UK in 2020 (BBC, 2018) and although this is not intended to prove its provenance, it could be argued that the French may concede that its origins might indeed hail from England. This embroidery is entirely different from the distinctly English fine embroidery known as Opus Anglicanum in form, scale, materials, stitches and subject matter created over the following 200 years, but this does not conclusively prove or disprove its provenance.

If this embroidery is the work of the English, it will demonstrate two things at least: how embroidery was considered as an art form during the Middle Ages and also, how embroidery in England changed in style from rudimentary, almost crude and coarse needlework to the opulent and magnificent work created between about 1250 -1350. This is a debate that will continue unless or until further evidence comes to light and until that point, any conclusion as to its origins would be conjecture.

Following the golden years of embroidery, the style and, arguably, the quality of English embroidery changed. Whilst modern day scholars such as Christie, Staniland, Hartshorne and Heard have their theories concerning the changes in style of English medieval embroidery, in considering all the possible reasons for the changes, it could have occurred as a result of a series of developments and that collectively they ultimately had quite an impact.

Staniland (1991, p.50) asserts:

> After the fourteenth century the quality of English embroidery declined severely, the well drawn designs degenerating into crude clumsiness, and the fine split-stitch giving place to a coarse satin-stitch.

Hartshorne (1847, p.293) contended that until about 1600 when the Stuarts came to power, English medieval embroidery was 'in its highest perfection' after which it 'sunk into a style of debasement'. This opinion differs from Staniland's in that their timelines for this so-called decline were quite different although they both viewed the changes as negative. Christie (1938, p.28) acknowledged that whilst the Plague naturally had an effect on the production of Opus Anglicanum, it merely accelerated the end of the golden age and that there were 'signs heralding the coming decline'. Christie acknowledged that this decline, as some see it, was likely to have happened without the Plague's destruction. Tonkin (2013) concurred and believes that a combination of competition from abroad, the Plague, stresses in the economy and wars all had their place in changes in English embroidery and is of the opinion that the changes constitute a decline in standards from about 1350.

In writing about the same period however, Heard (Heard, K. (2016) Still 'verais, popres e beaus'? English Ecclesiastical Embroidery from the Wars of the Roses to the Early Reformation *in* Michael, M. A. (ed) *The Age of Opus Anglicanum* London: Harvey Miller Publishers. p.133) considers that the time-consuming skilled techniques, expensive materials and elegant modelling that made English embroidery so well respected and arguably an art form, that it could be considered one of England's highest artistic achievements during the medieval period. Heard acknowledges that

embroidery produced during the latter years of the Middle Ages was certainly more commercial and cheaper to produce. She ventures to suggest, however, that the demand for more simple vestments could have been due to the requirements of the Church rather than for any other reason. This was certainly the case during the Reformation.

The Plague claimed between a third and a half of the population in London where the majority of embroidery was undertaken. There were also civil wars and changes in the Catholic Church negating the need for such ornate embroidery and imported materials from abroad were more easily obtained. Fashions changed and also competition from Europe would all have had an effect on its production.

With a significantly reduced population in London and embroiderers having to undertake a lengthy training period, there was simply not enough time to train new apprentices to the standards required for this hugely time-consuming and highly skilled art form. This, it could easily be argued, may well have been a major contributory factor to the changes in English embroidery at that time and is a logical explanation. Given that such high standards needed to be achieved in order to become a professional embroiderer and that the skills necessary were often handed down through families, a natural conclusion that could be drawn is that when the people required to hand down these skills perished in the Plague, there were fewer skilled embroiderers to pass on those skills.

These theories alone could explain the development of a different style of embroidery in the latter half of the fourteenth century. That is until one considers the Butler-Bowdon Cope (Figure 4) and the Chichester-Constable Chasuble, both of which were highly likely to have been made in the same workshop at the same time. If the dates that they were created are correct according to the Opus Anglicanum exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the Victoria & Albert Museum (2016, p.213 & p.218), then the changes in style could not be attributed to the Plague: the above-mentioned vestments are recorded has having been made between 1335 and 1345 and the Plague occurred between 1348 and 1350. Both vestments are made with embroidery sewn onto a red velvet ground rather than the complete surface having been covered in needlework as was typical during the golden years.

Examples of vestments made during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century below clearly show a change in style and use of embroidery. The fifteenth century chasuble (Figure 5) with a dark blue velvet ground has limited embroidery and the detail (Figure 6) demonstrates less refined stitching and using a more basic design. In fact, the folds of the cope depicted in figure 6 are stitched horizontally and not defined like the embroidery undertaken during the golden years, an example of which is the Syon Cope (Figure 7). On the sixteenth century cope (Figure 8), the design is scattered over the vestment but does not cover the whole ground like the Syon cope, for example, that was made in 1310-1320. The detail of the velvet ground and the less refined stitching is evident (Figure 9). The use of simple stitching would have made the vestment much quicker to produce and therefore much cheaper to make.

Figure 5. Chasuble dated late fifteenth century with blue velvet ground.

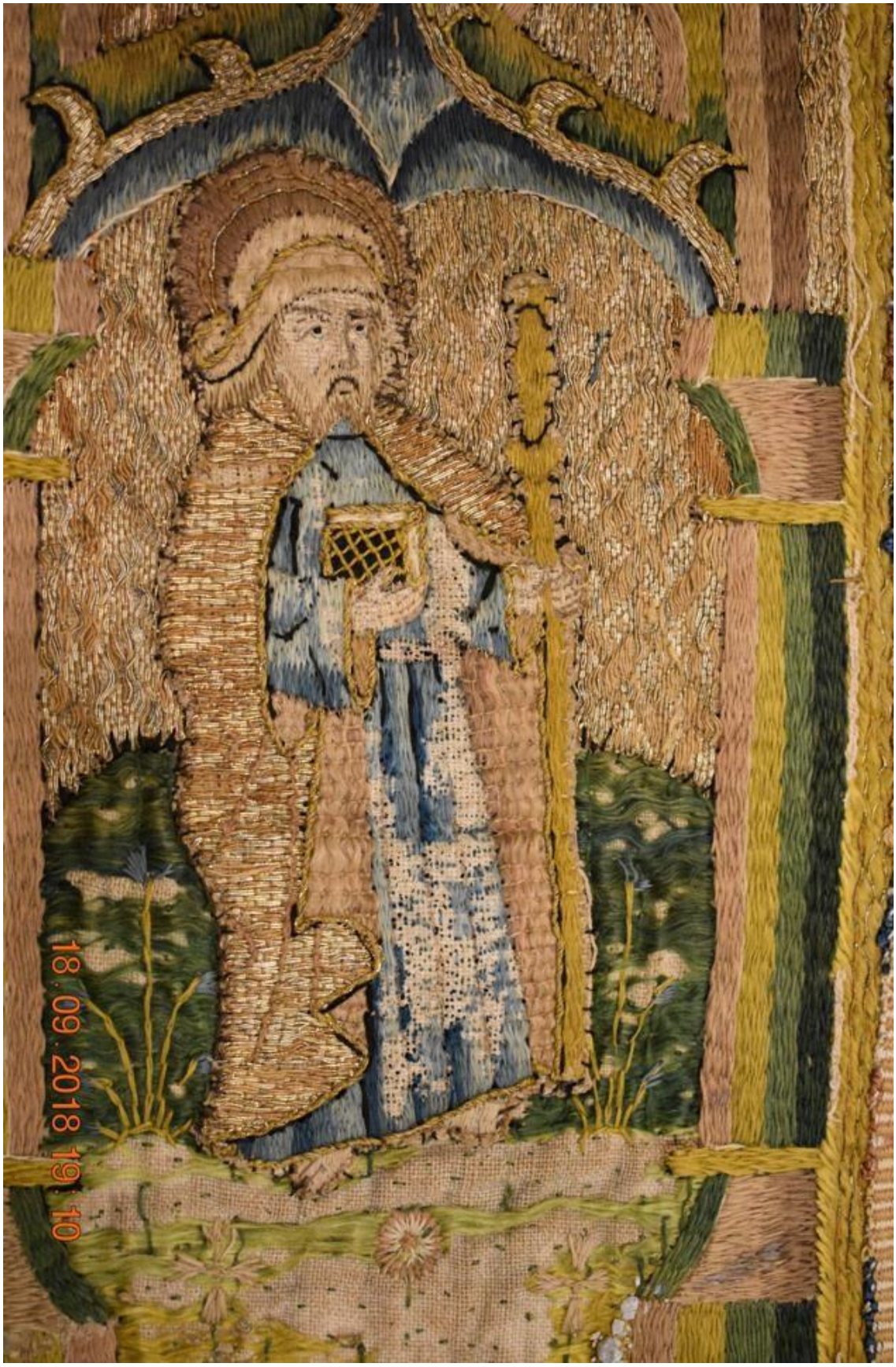

Figure 6. Detail of above chasuble.

Figure 7. The Syon Cope showing how stitches were used to make the clothing look like it is draping.

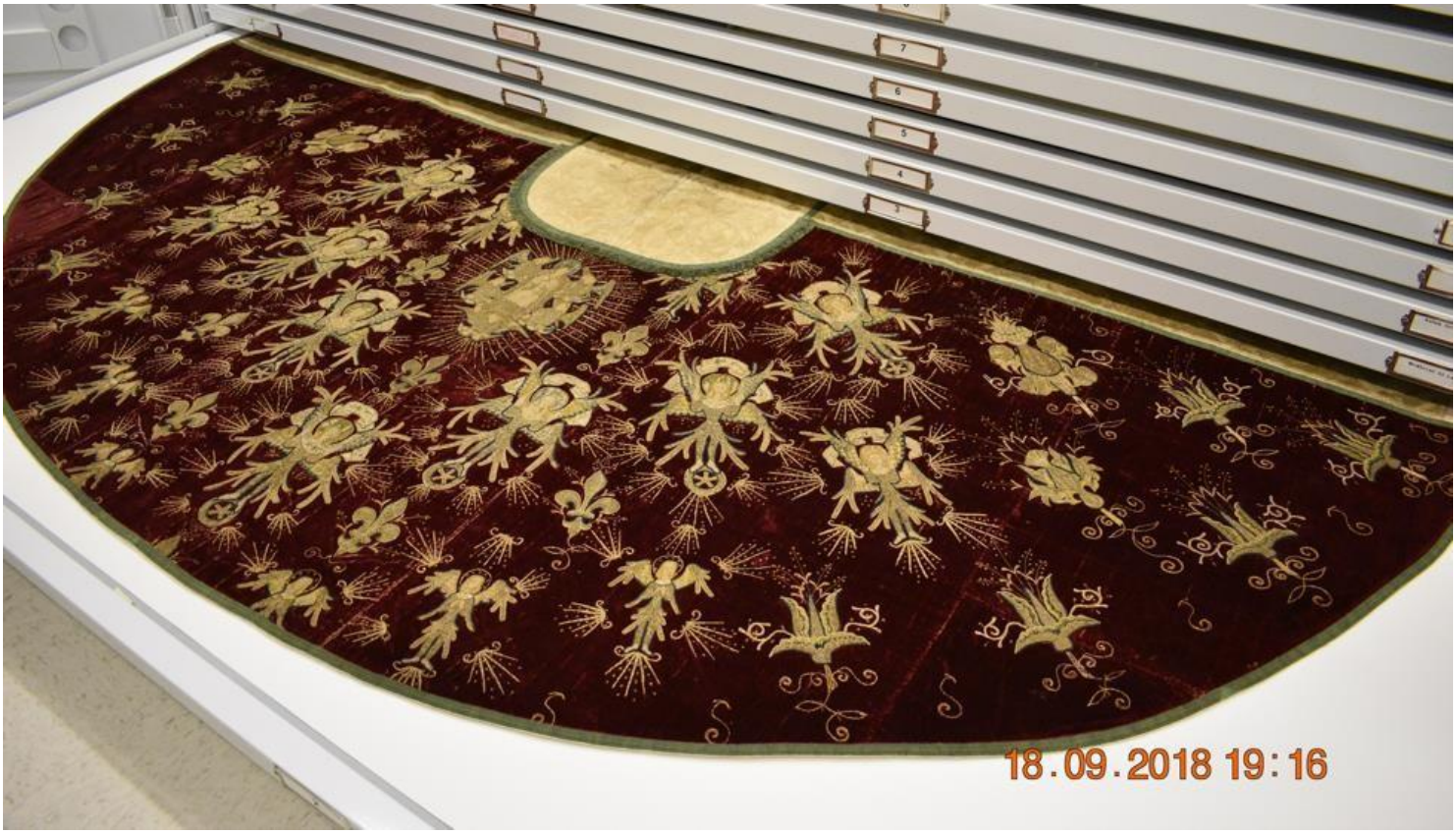

Figure 8. Cope dated early sixteenth century with plain red velvet ground.

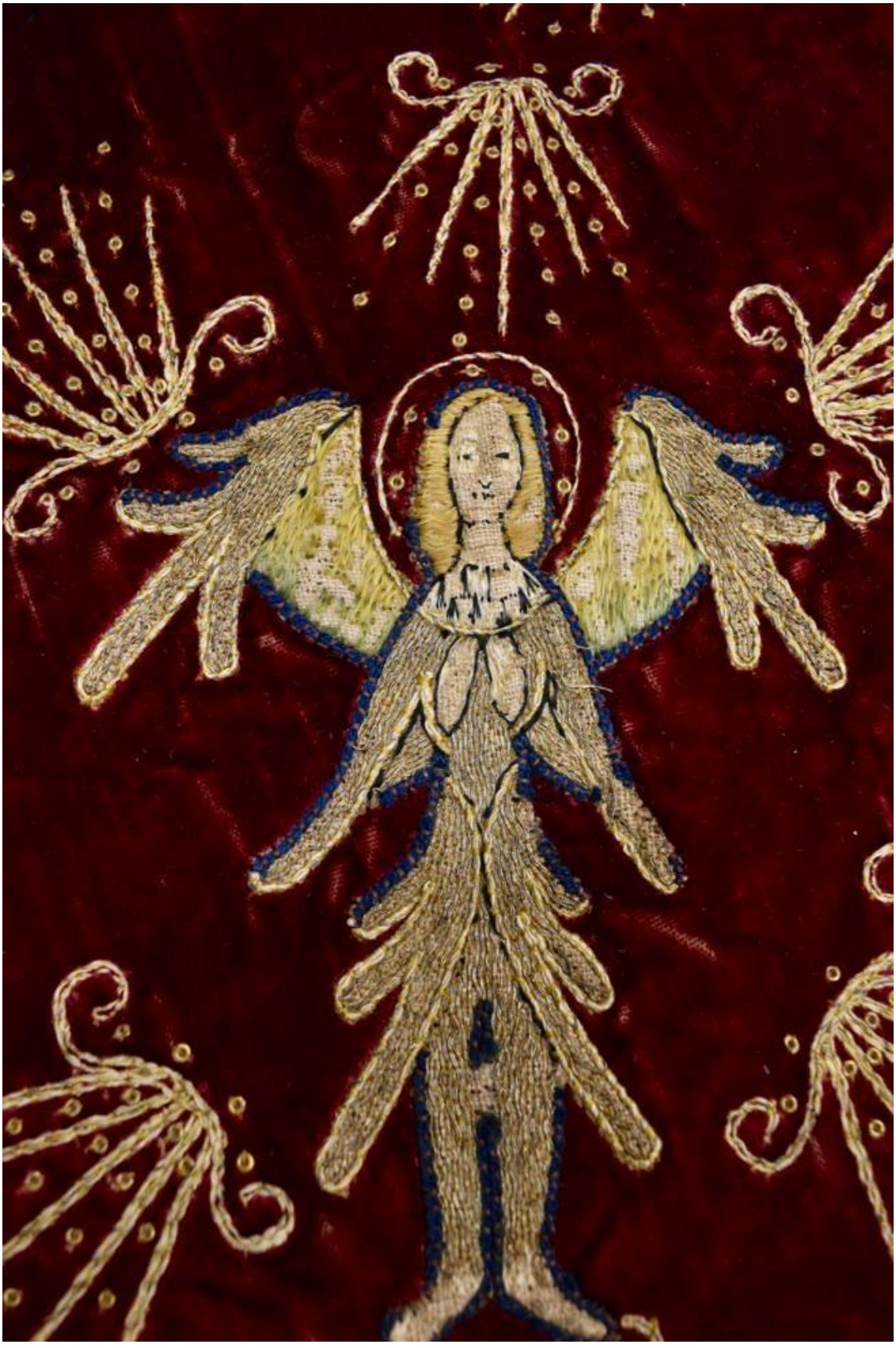

Figure 9. Detail of above cope.

The Erpingham Chasuble (Figure 10) dated 1400-1428 is another example of the difference in style after the middle of the fourteenth century. It is made with a silk brocade lampas ground and an embroidered orphrey.

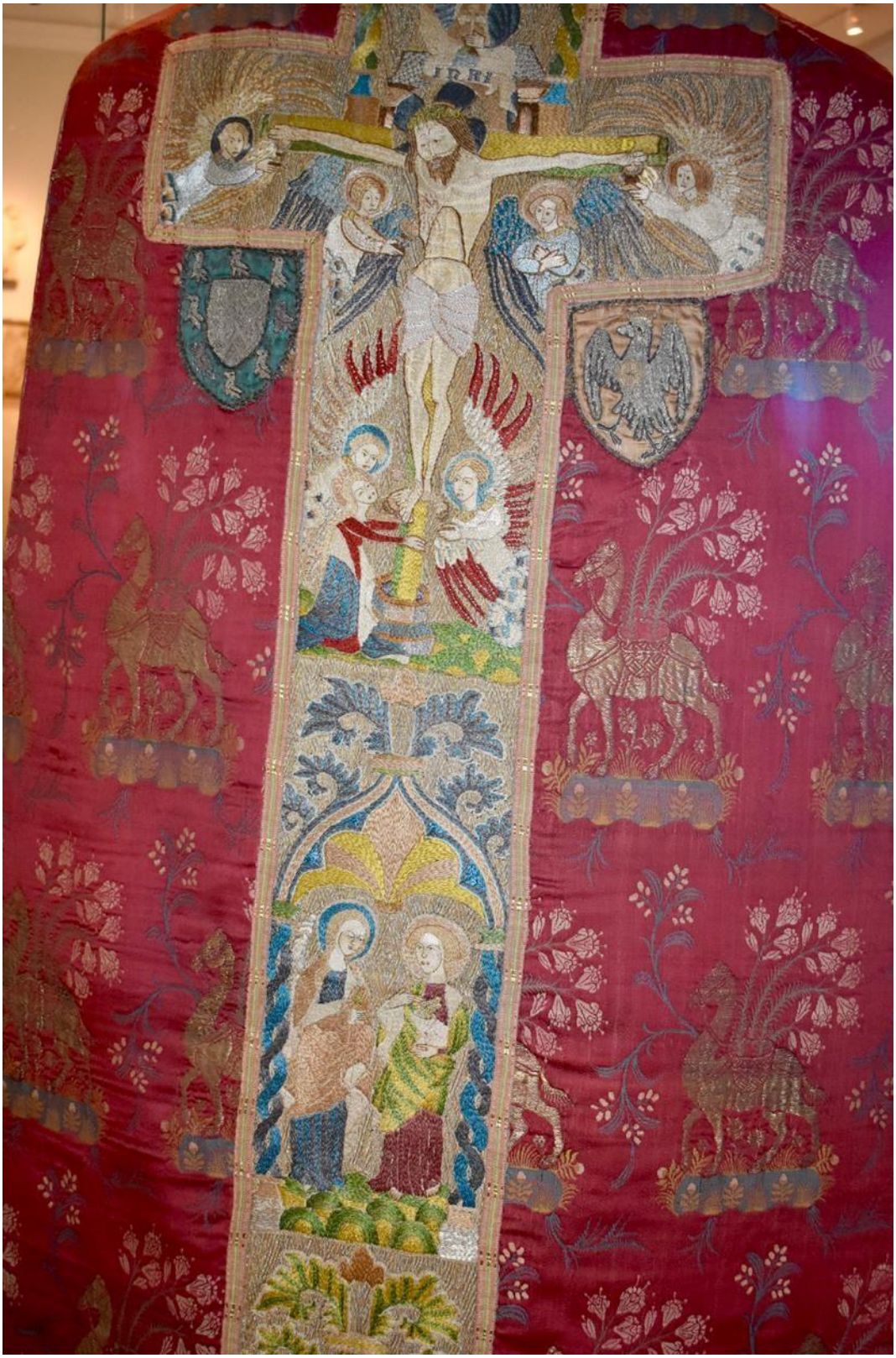

Figure 10. The Erpingham Chasuble dated showing different ground fabric after 1400.

Any opinion formed today about the significance of English medieval embroidery could be argued as conjecture if only because much documentation has been lost or destroyed in the intervening years. It could, however, also be argued that there is enough surviving evidence to inform a well-educated opinion. Official evidence found in inventories and pipe rolls and the extant pieces together with research undertaken in modern times has, at the very least, provided modern scholars with enough facts to put into some context the significance of English medieval embroidery.

An example of well documented secular patronage is Henry III who paid Mabel of Bury St Edmunds for a number of vestments. Mabel's name appears at least 24 times in the household accounts of Henry III between the years 1239 and 1245 (Staniland, 1991, p.10). The king commanded that expert embroiderers advise him on Mabel's fee so as not to offend her and also so that he would not be condemned for underpaying her (Staniland, 1991 p.10). This possibly illustrates just how much the king wanted to retain Mabel's services due to the value of the embroideries and also so that he could continue to donate such magnificent embroideries to the Church. Some years after Mabel appears to have ceased to work for the King, he went specifically to Bury St. Edmunds and instructed that Mabel be given six ells of cloth (1 ell = 45 inches/114.3cm) and some rabbit fur to show his gratitude. (Staniland, 1991, p.10). This signifies how highly the King valued Mabel's embroidery or indeed the embroidery that came from a workshop that she ran. Given that each vestment would have taken a significant amount of time to make, this would suggest that Mabel ran a workroom of embroiderers rather than undertaking the embroidery herself. Henry's patronage also evidences his devotion to God in so much as he could continue to donate such highly prized embroideries to the Church.

When discussing the medieval clergy, Miller (2014, p.246) concludes

> Their culture of clothing provided a rich and expressive visual language, deeply meaningful in its own time and with important resonances ever since.

The ecclesiastical medieval patrons of English embroidery were displaying the wealth of the Church as well as devotion to God. That Opus Anglicanum was used for these purposes illustrates how valuable and significant it was considered at that time.

That these beautiful embroideries depicted stories of Christ and The Virgin indicates that embroidery was a significant art form in medieval times and comparable to painting and sculpture in this regard. The high prices paid for these embroideries also demonstrates their equal place amongst the arts and was not seen as a craft.

That some extant pieces of Opus Anglicanum survived the Reformation could be partly due to the nuns who secreted them away at that time. Ecclesiastical vestments were used for important religious ceremonies so they were cared for reverently. Copes, for example, were so meaningful and valuable to the clergy that they had their own ornate and high-quality oak chests in which to store them. During the Reformation, as vestments began to be destroyed, drastic action would have been necessary in order to preserve these precious religious textiles and it is to the people who took this action that thanks can be given for their survival.

Conversely, barely any secular embroidery has stood the test of time because it was either used as clothing or in the home of the wealthy and therefore became worn out during use. Christie (1938, p.6) asserts that no secular Opus Anglicanum survives because of the 'hazards of wear and tear' and disposal due to changes in fashion, whereas ecclesiastical work was 'closely guarded by the sanctity of the church' and therefore there are more surviving pieces of religious English embroideries. Jones, (2013) contends that a considerable amount of medieval English embroidery was destroyed to extract the valuable jewels and gold threads during the iconoclastic purges during and after the Reformation.

The Guild of Broderers received its royal charter in the sixteenth century (Davies, 2016, pp.4647). The receiving of a royal charter not only suggests greater regulation of the practice but also illustrates how important the art of embroidery was considered and even though it changed in style after the golden years, it was still very much in demand.

During the years between the Middle Ages and the twenty first century, embroidery was downgraded to a craft. In recent years, this has changed and there has been a resurgence and although the embroidery used within fashion today is not usually as intricate as it was during the Middle Ages, it has clearly been influenced by it.

Technology has, of course, improved production times and therefore made embroidery more commercially viable but this has not replaced the need for hand embroidery. Both methods are used within fashion today and whilst the catwalk collections by haute couture designers are mostly only available to the wealthy, as in medieval times, the elements of embroidery and embellishment are diluted and reinterpreted and used within the high street with the production of embroidered patches and machine embroidered elements on clothing. Haute couture embroidery employed by contemporary designers could be interpreted as the modern-day version of English medieval embroidery and there is no doubt that the splendours of Opus Anglicanum still influences fashion designers today.

European medieval ecclesiastical embroidery was collected by members the Rothschild family in the nineteenth century and was used for soft furnishings, upholstery and decoration at Waddesdon Manor and, arguably, used to display conspicuous consumption to signify their wealth and power just as Opus Anglicanum was used in medieval times. As collectors, the family would have recognised the value in the heritage of these sumptuous textiles and known how highly they had been revered and this was part of the appeal. This was recycling as happened in the Middle Ages when vestments were disassembled and repurposed for altar frontals and other ecclesiastical purposes. The Butler-Bowdon Cope mentioned previously (Figure 4) is a classic example. This demonstrates the intrinsic value of this vestment and, ironically, in this particular case, it is likely that this repurposing ultimately preserved the cope longer than it might otherwise have been.

The surviving pieces of Opus Anglicanum are today scattered around the world. They are now preserved for future generations to study and enjoy. The interest that is evident today through new publications and exhibitions demonstrates how significant it was in the Middle Ages and how significant it still is to the Church and to secular society today.

Opus Anglicanum has been influencing designers and artists ever since the Middle Ages. For example, May Morris, a significant figure in the Arts & Crafts Movement in Britain and daughter of William Morris, studied Opus Anglicanum as part of her specialist embroidery training at the Royal College of Art (Marsh, J. 2017; A Well-Crafted Life *in* Marsh, J. et al, *May Morris, Arts & Crafts Designer,* London: Thames &

Hudson. p.14. Hulse (Hulse, L. 2017; Foreward *in* Marsh, J. et al, *May Morris, Arts & Crafts Designer,* London: Thames & Hudson. p.7) reveals May Morris as saying:

> Invention lay in the selection and arrangement of colours, the choice of suitable materials and, above all, good design based on an appreciation of the intellectual quality of English medieval embroidery, the apogee of needle art.

The Pre-Raphaelites, the Gothic Revival, indeed the whole of Victoriana and notably William Morris, all looked back to medieval art for inspiration: for centuries it has been influencing artists and designers. The colour palette, for example, used in Pre-Raphaelite paintings is very similar to and obviously inspired by the golds, reds, purples and blues used extensively in Opus Anglicanum.

Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination, a major exhibition held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in September 2018, evidences the interest in medieval art and the Catholic Church and how it has inspired designers and artists many hundreds of years later. The art that was exhibited has inspired whole collections of fashion by contemporary designers and it is the Catholic faith that brought the work of these artists together for this monumental exhibition. The Museum (2018) states that this exhibition 'features a dialogue between fashion and medieval art from The Met collection to examine fashion's ongoing engagement with the devotional practices and traditions of Catholicism'. These subjects are clearly still significant in modern times and this evidences the enduring appeal of medieval art with the magnificent art of English medieval embroidery very much included in that.

A specific and very obvious example of where English medieval embroidery and the vestments used within the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages has directly inspired a contemporary designer is the dress designed by John Galliano for the House of Dior (Figure 11). This was one of many examples exhibited at the Heavenly Bodies exhibition. The crucifix embroidered down the back of the dress (Figure 12) emulates the way in which it was shown on a cope in medieval times. The use of the mitre with attached lappets (Figure 13) worn with this contemporary dress directly copies the way in which it was worn for ecclesiastical purposes and the cape refers to the opulently embroidered copes worn before the Reformation.

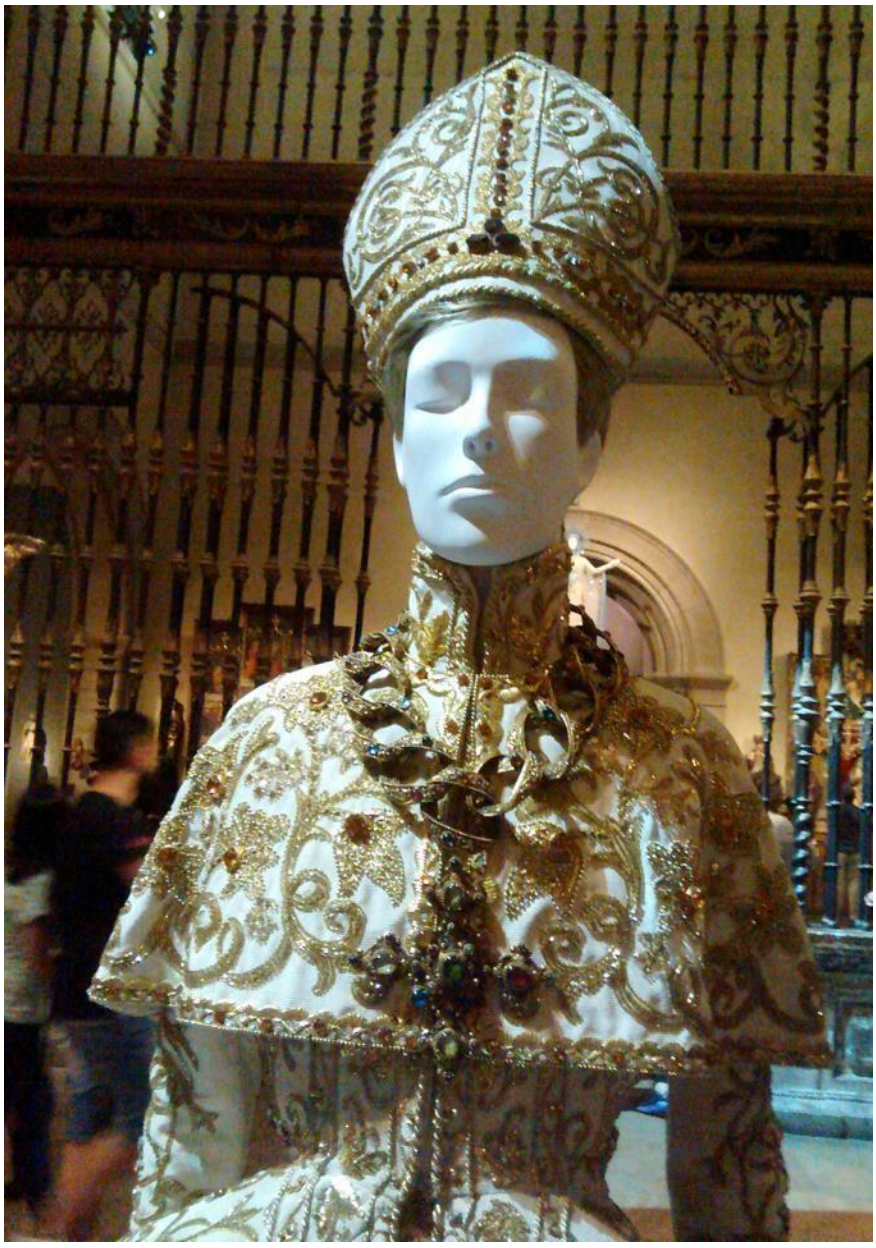

Figure 11. Evening ensemble by John Galliano for the A/W 2000-2001 collection for the House of Dior.

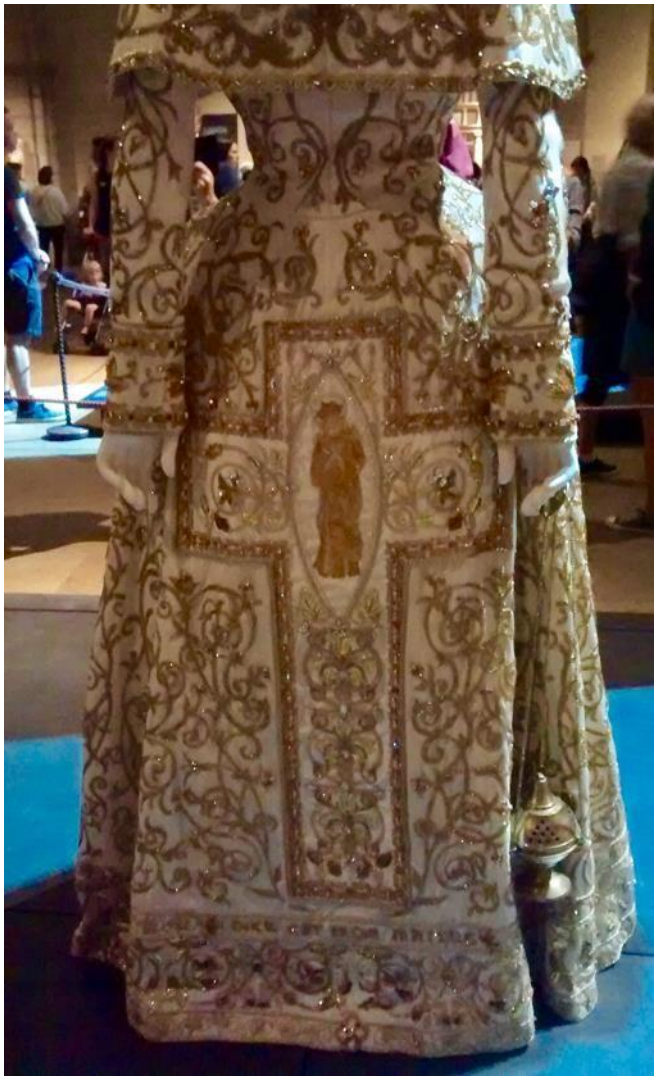

Figure 12. Crucifix on the back of the dress designed by John Galliano.

Figure 13. Mitre and lappets on the John Galliano dress.

The Age of Opus Anglicanum, edited by M. A. Michael, a key scholar and writer of the subject, is the first of three books to be published and indicates that in the twenty first century there is still interest in the subject. This further insight could potentially lead to more revelations about medieval life therefore demonstrating its significance at that time. That a book was published in 2016 perhaps signifies the resurgence of interest and with two more volumes to follow, further indicates the work that is going into the subject and the significance of English medieval embroidery today.

The Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A, 2018) states that the exhibition they held in 2016-2017 entitled Opus Anglicanum: Masterpieces of English Medieval Embroidery, which displayed pieces from around the world, looked at how the changing religious practice and growth of interest in medieval art during the nineteenth century eventually led to the rediscovery of Opus Anglicanum. The exhibition was the first in over 50 years, the previous one having been held in 1963. Opus Anglicanum is still the subject of newly published material, and is still the subject of major exhibitions in Britain and the United States of America, two very powerful countries. The Museum is also championing a movement to research further this particular aspect of history, illustrating how

important it is to Britain's cultural history. In 1976, the Royal Mail produced stamps depicting Opus Anglicanum: this is another example of where English medieval embroidery was used to demonstrate British cultural heritage in everyday life and signifies interest in the subject in modern times.

Conclusion

At the heart of this movement was a community of English craftspeople who were supplying the demand for this art across Europe with both ecclesiastical and secular embroidery using their consummate skills and for well over 100 years Opus Anglicanum had a lot of power as an art form.

It is hoped that this paper goes some way to demonstrating that Opus Anglicanum was indeed very significant socially, politically and religiously. Research for this purpose has illustrated the significance and value of these textiles in the Middle Ages and their restoration, conservation, preservation and safe keeping in the present day surely evidences the same. Museums all over the world curate and display artefacts from history and they are conserved for our enjoyment and education and these pieces form part of our cultural heritage. History informs the present in all genres and fashions change and can often re-emerge in a contemporary way. The recent interest and further research in Opus Anglicanum could shed further light on how the human race lived as a society in the Middle Ages and this in turn could inform future generations

The mystery of the origins of the Bayeaux Tapestry may never be solved. Nevertheless, the facts that are known about the piece provides much detail about a period of history that still fascinates today. If it was made in England then Britain can claim it as a revealing historical document. If it was made in France, the French can claim the same. At the time of writing, there is evidence to suggest the Bayeaux Tapestry was made in England but there is also some evidence to the contrary. Debate about its origins will continue until conclusive evidence is discovered and until that point, Britain is at liberty to claim it as its own, just as the French can.

The changes in style of English medieval embroidery after 1350 were likely to be as a result of a combination of some of the theories put forward in this paper. Evidence to show that the change in style cannot be attributed to the devastation caused by the Plague has been presented and, assuming that historical records are correct, this evidence conclusively proves that the Black Death did not contribute to the changes that occurred. It would certainly have had an effect on the production of Opus Anglicanum after 1350 due to the diminished population but evidence provided by extant pieces clearly illustrates that it was not the cause.

The work carried out by scholars such as Grace Christie and Donald King and more recently, Elizabeth Coatsworth, M A Michael, Gale Owen-Crocker and Glyn Davies, amongst others of note, evidenced that Opus Anglicanum was a highly significant commodity in the Middle Ages. It took its place amongst religious artefacts, played a part in religious ceremonies as well as providing a vehicle for demonstrating wealth, status and power in secular society and also within the Church. To be part of diplomatic transactions between kings and popes signifies the value of Opus Anglicanum, not only monetarily but also symbolically.

Arguably, there is still much to learn about English medieval embroidery and it is certainly possible that new technology in the twenty first century could play a part in ascertaining further and more detailed information about the extant pieces in particular which, in turn, could shed light on other aspects of medieval society in Britain.

That the Victoria & Albert Museum, one of the leading textiles museums and a world-renowned institution of high repute, has showcased this art form twice in recent history and has its own Medieval and Renaissance galleries demonstrates the significance of Opus
Anglicanum and that it is important to our cultural history. Millions of people visit each year and use it as a source of inspiration, this paper being one such example following the exhibition held in 2016-17.

The Heavenly Bodies exhibition held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in September 2018 is a prime and most up-to-date example of how medieval art and

English medieval embroidery has had a direct influence on contemporary designers and illustrates, yet again, its significance and relevance in modern times.

Opus Anglicanum demanded the loyalty of kings, popes and senior Church officials and its significance should not be underestimated in terms of its value when used as diplomatic gifts and as a signifier of wealth and devotion to God. It has stood the test of time and it is still inspiring artists and designers today. English medieval embroidery was something of force and, albeit for different reasons, 'Made in England' stood for something in the Middle Ages, just as it does today. It was employed to showcase the wealth and power of the Catholic Church. Designers today are doing the same thing and using it to allow the upper echelons of the fashion world to sell their designs. Embroidery is much more commercial than the art that is sold in galleries, which, due to the high prices of some forms of art, is not accessible to everyone. Today, as in medieval times, there is a whole industry built around embroidery but unlike during the Middle Ages, today's embroidery is accessible to anyone. This demonstrates the legacy and huge significance that Opus Anglicanum has in the present day.

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