'POWDERED WITH ARMES YMAGES AND ANGELS': AN EARLY TUDOR CONTRACT FOR EMBROIDERED VESTMENTS

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There are many extant examples of late medieval vestments in private and public collections in Europe and North America. Little is known, however, about the people who created them and the production methods used. A copy of a formal agreement between Sir Robert Clere and William Morton, included in the Townshend family papers, offers a rare insight into the making of a set of late fifteenth-century vestments. The document specifies the materials and the motifs to be used in making the vestments and the delivery deadline. This paper investigates the individuals mentioned in the agreement, the significance of the symbols and images chosen, and the possible motives behind the contract phraseology. Although these particular vestments no longer exist, parallels for the designs and techniques among extant examples have been used to re-create their possible appearance. Also considered is the relationship between embroiderer and mercer and the ways in which they collaborated to produce garments for royalty, the nobility and an increasing number of wealthy citizens.

In the early fifteenth century, after the end of the great period of English ecclesiastical embroidery now referred to as *opus Anglicanum*,¹ the market for custom-made church vestments appears to have expanded rapidly.² The nobility, the gentry and an increasing number of wealthy merchants and, to a lesser degree, yeomen and husbandmen bequeathed vestments or money for their purchase to the church of their choice.³ Between 1437 and 1483, Holy Trinity in Hull was the recipient of £130 in donations towards the liturgical needs of the church. More than £100 of this amount was bequeathed by parishioners specifically for the acquisition of new vestments.⁴ Museums around the world hold a wealth of these late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century English ecclesiastical embroideries in various states of repair and reuse. Until recently, there has been little published research into how the garments were commissioned and produced; even more elusive are the individuals who created them.⁵

In part this may be due to the commonly held and often-published view that the workmanship in these later embroidered garments is inferior in comparison to the

- 1. Fitch 1976, 288. According to Fitch, 'the great period' is arguably confined to the years 1250 to 1350; English embroiderers continued to produce work for the Church through to the middle of the 16th century.
- 2. King 1963, 8; Staniland 1991, 65; Tonkin 2012, 88; Harper-Bill 1996, 7, 73; Heath 1984, 216.
- 3. Hayward 2009, tables C.1 and C.2, 337-9.
- 4. Heath 1984, 216.
- 5. Monnas 1989, 348; Hayward 2007, 325-7; Levey 2012, 160.

earlier opus.⁶ This perception came under new scrutiny at a symposium on English ecclesiastical embroidery held in 2013 at which historian Kate Heard argued, on the basis of her research into the documentary sources for the purchase and production of English ecclesiastical embroidery, that there is 'a grave disjunction between the profiles and recorded actions of those buying late medieval English embroidery and our perceived decline in the quality of that work'.⁷ The present paper seeks to supplement this recent scholarship through the examination of a contract for the production and purchase of a single set of vestments. A copy of this indenture (transcribed in the appendix to this paper) was included in 'The Boke off Certeyn Bargeyns Tempore domine Alianore Touneshend vidue', now in the British Library.⁸ It offers an opportunity to examine a rare late fifteenth-century formal contract and expand current knowledge regarding the practice of the professional embroiderer at the beginning of a period of great transition in technique, design and demand.

During the later Middle Ages it was the responsibility of the congregation to provide the items needed to secure the successful operation of the parish church. The extensive list included such necessary and varied items as a psalter, a lesson book, church bells, candlesticks, a processional cross and at least one set of vestments. It was also the congregation's responsibility to maintain and replace these items when required. Depending on the economic circumstances of the individual parish, and the personal wealth of the parishioners, there was also an opportunity to add to these necessary items when desired. In making a gift to the fabric of the church the donor's name would be added to the bede-roll, the list of parish benefactors, which was occasionally read aloud by the priest in full or in part during the service. In the village of Morebath, in Devon, Christina Timewell's name was added to the list when she left the parish her best gown, which, at her request, was to be sold and the proceeds put towards the purchase of a new image of the Virgin. It

At the opposite end of the social spectrum, Henry VII bequeathed a 'whole suit of vestments and coopes of cloth of gold tissue' to Westminster Abbey. ¹² He had commissioned these expensive vestments earlier in his reign from Italian merchants who had them made in Florence with the unique Tudor rose and portcullis design woven into the cloth of gold. Probably intended to create a 'glorious show' at the coronation of his son Arthur, ¹³ they were left to the abbey to form 'a perpetual memory there to remain while the whole world shall endure'. ¹⁴

As well as bequeathing vestments to a specific church, valuable garments were sometimes offered for reworking into vestments. Sir William Compton, after requesting that his executors provide forty pairs of vestments to be given to forty churches, left 'to the

- 6. See Nevinson 1950, xii ('moribund ... dark and unproductive'); Staniland 1991, 50 ('degenerating into crude clumsiness'), 53 ('lacking any imaginative concept'); Levey 2012, 158 ('steady decline in quality'); Tonkin 2012, 83 ('long been noted that there was a decline in the standards').
- 7. Heard forthcoming. The symposium was held as part of an exhibition of English ecclesiastical embroidery planned for autumn 2016 at the V&A; the papers have yet to be published.
- 8. BL, Add MS 41305, fols 35v, 36.
- 9. Mayo 1984, 48; French 2001, 20-43; Duffy 2005, 133.
- 10. French 2001, 103.
- 11. Binney 1891, 129.
- 12. Nicolas 1826, 33.
- 13. Monnas 1989, 349.
- 14. Nicolas 1826, 33 (quoted in Monnas 1989, 346). The remaining pieces a cope, a chasuble and a chalice veil are now at Stonyhurst College.

Abbey Church of Winchcombe ... my wedding gown of tinsel satin to make a vestment to the intent that they pray for my soul'. Is Alternatively, a sum of money might be left with the intention that it should be used for having vestments made. In his will dated 12 January 1519, Sir John Thurston, an alderman and former Sheriff of London, left money for a total of fourteen vestments to be made for ten different parish churches in London, Norfolk and Suffolk, specifying the colours, materials and cost. He also left instructions for the inclusion of a Latin dedication on each one to remind the wearer to pray for his soul and those of his three wives and all their parents. To the parish church in Erlesowne in Suffolk (perhaps St Mary's, Earl Soham, possibly where his parents were buried) he also bequeathed 'a sewte of double velvet blue or green with one cope of the value of xx li [£20] and a roll to be set upon every garment viz "pray ye for the souls of Edward Thurston and Mawde his wife and for all their childrens souls"'. Dame Elizabeth Thurston, Sir John's third wife, died the following year. In her will she specified 'a vestment of cloth of gold and the armes of the said Sir John Thurston and myn to be embrowdred and sett on the same vestment'. Is

Occasionally, the preferred iconography was also indicated, and sometimes instructions were left setting out who was to wear the vestments and on what occasions. Such instructions could become quite detailed, as in the will of Sir Walter Hungerford, Baron of Hungerford and Member of Parliament (d. 1449):

one whole suit of vestments, with all things appertaining thereto, for a Priest, Deacon, and Subdeacon, likewise a cope of black and red velvet, embroidered like waves, two copes of damask with gold of the same colour and work, to be used by the said prior and Monks every year on the day of my obit, to the honour of God and in memory of me and my parents, and I desire that in the said vestments for greater notice my arms be wrought.¹⁹

Vestments could be both made and repaired by skilled parishioners or, as in the case of the parish of Morebath, a neighbouring priest;²⁰ but to fulfil such highly specific requirements as those of Sir Walter might require the executor to commission the vestments from an embroiderer, in some cases by means of a formal contract. One such contract was made between Walter Devereux, Lord Ferrers and embroiderer William Acton on 20 October 1468.²¹ The indenture specifies that two images should be embroidered, one of the Virgin and one of St John. They were to be of the same materials and workmanship as an embroidered image of the Crucifixion that Acton had previously provided. Unfortunately, there is no corresponding contract for the latter; consequently, little information can be discovered from the document apart from the cost and time-frame – approximately £7 payable upon delivery a month later.

- 15. Nicolas 1826, 592. Sir William Compton, a close personal friend of Henry VIII, also requested that 'all my apparel be disposed of for making vestments'.
- 16. TNA, PRO PROB 11/20/20.
- 17. Walters 1939, 292. St Gregory-by-St Paul's inventory lists 'a vestement of Mr Thurstons gyfte'.
- 18. TNA, PRO PROB 11/20/149.
- 19. Nicolas 1826, 258.
- 20. Duffy 2001, 7, 115, 154; French 2001, 145.
- 21. LH, DP Box 1, fol 21. Walter Devereux, 7th Baron Ferrers of Chartley, died at Bosworth in 1485. William Acton was a London embroiderer.

A contract for a set of vestments might require more specific detail, as in the case of the agreement that is the main subject of this paper between Sir Robert Clere and William Morton, citizen and broderer of London, dated 20 November 1495. The Cleres were a long-established and wealthy Norfolk family. Robert was born in 1453 and was admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1467. He was by all accounts a good lawyer, and a friend to many East Anglian gentry. Margaret Paston described him as 'a man of substaunce and worchyp'. ²² In his long and distinguished career, he served as a Member of Parliament, Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, and Justice of the Peace in Norfolk; he became a Knight of the Order of the Bath in 1494. ²³ His first wife was Dame Anne Hopton. ²⁴ He and his second wife, Alice Boleyn, aunt to the ill-fated Queen Anne, attended Queen Catherine at the meeting of Henry VIII and Francis I of France at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in June 1520. ²⁵

One of Sir Robert Clere's associates was Sir Roger Townshend, who served as Justice of the Peace in Norfolk and Justice of the Court of Common Pleas until his death in 1493.²⁶ Sir Roger was a religious man and his will serves to illustrate his piety: the lengthy preamble, worthy of a successful lawyer, is followed by requests for a multitude of masses and cash bequests to children, the poor and to priests and clerks. However, his bequests did not include any specific objects, such as plate or vestments.²⁷

His widow, Dame Alianore Townshend, in whose book of business matters the Clere–Morton contract is found, wrote her will in 1499, naming Sir Robert Clere as her executor. She left instructions for the erection of the extant Easter Sepulchre in the chancel of the parish church of St Mary, East Raynham, Norfolk, in memory of her late husband. An extract from her will in a memorandum-book of her son states:

Also I wyll that the masse boke and chalys and a vestment of black velvet and another of black worsted wth all the apparell that longeth therto to the altar in the chapel remain in the saide place to the behaf of my sonne Townshend after my decease and to the heyrs desending of hym lawfully begotyn.²⁹

It is clear that, as executor of Dame Alianore's will, Sir Robert Clere held a position of trust within the Townshend family. It may not have been practical for her to travel to London to arrange for the commissioning of the vestments herself and it would be reasonable to suggest that she trusted Sir Robert to execute the contract on her behalf, and then had copy of the document made to include in her 'Boke off Certayne Bargeyns'.

William Morton was a member of the Mercers' Company. He began his apprenticeship with William Myles in 1446 and was later transferred to Thomas Muschamp, who had served as Sheriff of London in 1464.³⁰ Thomas Muschamp's wife, Maude, was an embroiderer and vestment-maker with a shop in Milk Street. As an apprentice in the

- 22. Quoted in Richmond 1981, 251. Margaret Paston, the wife of John Paston senior, was a member of the Norfolk gentry and wrote several of the extant collection of family letters. See also ibid, 251 n 358. Robert's son, William, would marry her granddaughter Elizabeth.
- 23. Moreton 1992, 204.
- 24. Richmond 1981, 100–1. Anne Hopton's grandfather, John Hopton, was married to Alianore Townshend's mother, Thomasin Lunsford.
- 25. Blomefield 1810.
- 26. Moreton 1992, 13.
- 27. TNA, PRO PROB 11/10/6.
- 28. Blomefield 1807; Moreton 1992, 24.
- 29. BL, Add MS 41139, fol 3v.
- 30. Email correspondence from the Mercers' Company, 30 May 2014.

Muschamp household, Morton may thus have had access to training as an embroiderer,³¹ and as a vestment-maker, specialising in religious garments including the tailoring and embroidery.³² Morton was admitted to the Freedom of the City as a Mercer in 1460 and he became embroiderer to Henry VII upon his accession to the throne in 1485.³³

Sir Robert requested a 'sute', of vestments, which included a cope, a chasuble and two tunicles.³⁴ All were to have a ground fabric of black velvet with crimson velvet orphreys, a choice similar to that of Sir Walter Hungerford.³⁵ Black was traditionally used to celebrate the requiem mass or obit, an annual service marking the anniversary of someone's death. Very few black vestments survive because the iron used to obtain a rich black colouring results in the premature decay of the fabric.³⁶ The mourning vestment of Abbot Robert Thornton of Jervaulx Abbey, dated as early as 1510 and now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum,³⁷ is a rare extant example of a chasuble in the same combination of black and crimson velvet, with appliquéd images and angels.

The Clere–Morton contract specifies that these articles were to be 'complete in lengthe and brede accordyng to the Statuts of London'. Difficulties regulating the quality of the vestments produced in the City had resulted in the need for laws regulating the trade. These specified the quality of the fabrics, the embroidery silks and the metal threads to be used; they also specified the dimensions of each of the three types of embroidered vestment that Sir Robert required. The cope was 'to holde in leyngth vij quarters of a yerde kepyng his compas rounde about' (ie the semicircular garment was to have a radius of 63in. / 1600mm). The chasuble was 'to holde in leingth a yerde and half and in brede a yerde and a quarter' (54in. / 1370mm in length and 45in. / 1140mm in width). The tunicle was 9 inches shorter in length than a chasuble, so 45in. / 1140mm.³⁸

The total cost to Sir Robert Clere would be £23. At the making of the indenture Sir Robert paid £5 to William Morton for the purchase of materials. The contract stipulated that Morton was to provide all the laces, fringes and fabric needed to compete the set of vestments at his own cost. All the embroidery was to be carried out by 'workmen of the sayd occupacion' of embroiderer. A very significant detail in the contract is the stipulated delivery date. Having executed the contract on 20 November 1495, Morton agreed to the delivery of the 'full completely finished' set of vestments 'within a month after the date of the making of this indenture'. This time-frame would appear to be challenging in comparison to the Devereux contract, in which the embroiderer was given a whole month to complete just two figures.

The black velvet was to be embroidered with designs of Sir Robert's choosing. He provided a pattern for the 140 gold fleur-de-lis and silver scallop shells that were to be 'powdered' across the ground and 'garnyshed abowte with fyne golde of venyss and

- 31. TNA, PRO C1/429/24. Maude is identified as a broderer. The document has been dated to 1515, though John Sturmyn was apprenticed to Maude's husband, Thomas, prior to 1447 and Maude died in 1498: TNA, PRO PROB 11/11/372.
- 32. MC, Ordinance 94, 18 and 20 Dec 1497; Parker 1980, 313.
- 33. Campbell 1873, 198. For an explanation of the office of the king's embroiderer, see Hayward 2007, 325–7, and Levey 2012, 160–1.
- 34. The development of ecclesiastical vestments and detailed descriptions of each can be found in Mayo 1984, 47–61, and Johnstone 2002, 5–19.
- 35. An orphrey is a decorative band of contrasting textile, usually featuring embroidered figures. For a complete description, see Mayo 1984, 55.
- 36. http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/all_current_projects/ collaborative_doctoral_awards/black-dyed_organic_materials.aspx> (accessed 10 Feb 2015).
- 37. Carter 2010, 147 (V&A, 697-1902).
- 38. Sharpe 1912, fol 315v.



Fig 1. Fragments of embroidered scallop shells from a chasuble orphrey in Worcester Cathedral Library, discovered in the tomb of William de Blois, Bishop of Worcester 1218–36. *Photograph*: Christopher Guy, Worcester Cathedral Archaeologist; reproduced by permission of the Chapter of Worcester Cathedral

spangyllys of sylv[er] and gylt'. The fleur-de-lis appears on many of the extant ecclesiastical textiles of the period, symbolising the Holy Trinity and being associated with the lily, a symbol of the Virgin Mary.³⁹ The scallop – associated with St James and the Compostela pilgrimage – was much less common as a vestment device. Worcester Cathedral Library has the fragments of a thirteenth-century embroidered scallop border, discovered in the tomb of Bishop William de Blois (fig 1).⁴⁰ The Duke of Bedford also had a set of vestments embroidered with scallops.⁴¹ It was the device of the Chivalric Order of St Michael, whose members included Edward VI, and a cope with scallops identified as belonging to him is listed in an Elizabethan inventory of 1600.⁴² In terms of the Clere–Morton contract, the silver scallop is the main device on the arms of the Townshend family, supporting the hypothesis that Sir Robert Clere executed the contract on behalf of Dame Alianore Townshend rather than on his own behalf.

All the orphreys were to have a ground of crimson velvet. They were to be embellished with twenty-nine 'armes ymages and angels' in Venice gold and coloured silks. The chasuble

^{39.} As well as being a popular heraldic device associated with the monarchy of France and hence used by the English monarchy to represent its own rule in France: Johnstone 2002, 50; Cornwell and Cornwell 2009, 8.

^{40.} Christie 1938, 54, and pl vII. Several small scallops survive, worked in underside couching with additional coloured silk thread worked in stem and satin stitch.

^{41.} Stratford 1993, 269.

^{42.} Arnold 1988, 252, 371.

orphrey was to depict a crucifix and images of the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist. The orphrey on the cope was to be similar to the chasuble, depicting 'ymages and angels', and the hood on the back of the cope would depict the Assumption. The orphreys were to be bordered with Venice gold⁴³ and spangles 'lyke unto an howsyng'. Traditionally, the religious figures on finely embroidered orphreys were enclosed within an architectural canopy (fig 2). However, as the contract specifies crimson velvet for the orphreys, the embroidery perhaps included more of the same flourishes that were used around the fleur-de-lis and scallop motifs on the black velvet. An extant example of the use of couched Venice gold to contain or surround the figures with tendrils and sprays is illustrated on the green velvet orphreys of the Huddleston Chasuble in the Fitzwilliam Museum (fig 3).

The arms 'accordyng to a patron wrought in clothe the wiche the sayde sir Robert delyv[ere]d to the sayd Willim for an exampyll' would have been embroidered on the chasuble under the crucifix and on the morse, the clasp used to draw the two sides of the cope together at the front of the garment (figs 4 and 5). The orphreys of the two tunicles were to include the arms and were also to be further 'gar[n]yshed w^t ymages & angels accordyng to the sayd chesabyll & coope'. Visually acknowledging the donor in this way was an important element in a bequest, as noted by Hungerford in his will. Praying for the soul of the deceased was the customary means to ensure a swift passage through purgatory. The arms visually identified the donor and reminded the clergy and congregation of the person for whom prayers were being said. 45

The advance preparation of arms as individual motifs embroidered in coloured silks and gold thread on a plain linen ground was already an established practice in the first quarter of the fifteenth century: Thomas Brydon, an English embroiderer working in Rouen, embroidered 918 badges with the Duke of Bedford's personal device of gold roots for a total payment of £433.⁴⁶ An inventory of goods from Westminster Abbey taken in 1539 includes a cache of twenty-seven new morses with the arms of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, presumably made before his death in anticipation of the purchase of new copes.⁴⁷

Sir Robert stipulated 'that in no wyse [should] the glosse & bryghtnss of the sayde gold & sylkys be defaced'. Some years earlier, William Morton had personally encountered the problem of inferior goods. He had been 'bound by an indenture to our sovereign lord the king' to deliver a set of twelve copes and the gold was to be of the highest calibre. ⁴⁸ He had ordered a large quantity of gold thread based on the quality of a sample provided by a supplier. Unfortunately, when the goods were delivered they were not of the same quality as the sample provided and Morton found himself without the means to complete the commission for the king in a timely fashion. ⁴⁹ As a result of this continuing problem, Parliament passed an act in 1489 against the deceptive weight and working of gold and against:

those who bring the said gold into this realm so deceitfully and falsely pack it so that the thread and colour under the first layer is thicker and coarser than is that which is

- 43. Levey 2012, 154. 'Gold of venyce' is a composite thread made by wrapping fine strips of metal, usually of silver-gilt, around a core of silk thread.
- 44. Duffy 2005, 134; French 2001, 102.
- 45. Hayward 2009, 12.
- 46. Stratford 1993, 280.
- 47. TNA, PRO LR 2/111, fol 27v; Watcott 1871, 349.
- 48. TNA, PRO C1/64/244.
- 49. From the range of dates provided for the document (1475–85) it is unclear whether the copes were for Edward IV or Richard III.



Fig 2. An orphrey, c 1425, of linen embroidered in coloured silk and silver-gilt thread (ROM, 971.397). The crucifix is surmounted by a dove under an architectural canopy, representing the Holy Ghost, and flanked by angels with censors, with the Virgin Mary on the left and St John on the right. The surface of the linen ground is completely covered by finely embroidered images, mainly in split stitch, and the background is filled using the traditional method of underside couching to fix the metal thread in a diaper pattern. Photograph: reproduced by permission of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; © ROM



Fig 3. The Huddleston Chasuble, c 1500 (FM, T9-1986). Note the decorative treatment of couched Venice gold in the area around the figures on the orphrey and the use of embroidered arms. *Photograph*: author; © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Fig 4. Detail of the bottom panel of an orphrey from a cope of *c* 1460–90 (V&A, T.46-1914). The panel is 11in. (280mm) wide by 6in. (152mm) tall and is of linen embroidered in coloured silk and silver-gilt thread; the arms are possibly those of John Sante, Abbot of Abingdon (1469–95). They depict trees eradicated and fructed, quartered with silver fleurs-de-lis. *Photograph*: author; courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

visible, and not matching its outward appearance, to the complete impoverishment of the said embroiderers, and also to the great costs and disadvantage of the buyers of embroidered work.⁵⁰

Concern over the quality of the materials used in embroidered goods worked and sold in London was not entirely addressed by the act of 1489. Quality continued to be an issue, not only for the gold thread, but also for silk, textiles and workmanship. Sir Robert felt compelled to address this by twice referring to the quality of the embroidery and stipulating that it was to be done by 'workmen of the sayd occupacon'.⁵¹

The seemingly impossible time-frame of one month for the completion of the contract may have involved the use of ready-made embroideries, a manufacturing method that was

Given-Wilson 2005: http://www.sd-editions.com/AnaServer?PROME+o+start.anv+id=HENRYVII (accessed 3 Oct 2014).

^{51.} The quality of work appears to have been an ongoing concern: the same phrase was used in the previously cited contract between Devereux and Acton (see n 21 above).



Fig 5. Morse of linen measuring 6.5×2 in. (165×5 omm), on a cope of c 1500 (V&A, 1376–1901), embroidered in coloured silk and silver-gilt thread, heavily worn with unidentifiable arms held aloft by angels. *Photograph*: author; courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

being employed as early as 1400. The traditional orphrey consisted of a long narrow strip constructed by sewing together a series of panels depicting saints set in an architectural framework. Santina Levey suggests that these were produced by a specialist group of craftsmen and that their work, of solidly embroidered figures on a linen ground, was obtained ready for use in completing the vestments.⁵² This is borne out by Lisa Monnas's investigations into the production of the Stonyhurst vestments, although there is little evidence of where or how the work was carried out and by whom.⁵³ Leanne Tonkin has investigated the similarities of the embroidered figures on orphreys dated around 1400.⁵⁴ Her findings suggest that the reuse of similar outlines and repetitive stencilling, employing minor variations in design and colour to indicate different persona, points to mass production and that such techniques were developed to 'to meet the requirements and expectations of the London mercery trade'.⁵⁵

- 52. Levey 2012, 170. Levey also notes that in many cases the orphrey is supplied as a finished product, ready to be attached to the vestment.
- 53. Monnas 1989, 348. William More and Robynet are named as embroiderers of the orphreys, along with 19 unidentified 'orpherers'.
- 54. Tonkin 2012, 85.
- 55. Ibid, 88.

By the middle of the fifteenth century, another time-saving method developed whereby the figures of the saints were worked separately from the architectural canopy. The completed saint was then cut from the linen ground and appliquéd into a void left for the figure under the canopy on the background panel. The figure was outlined using heavier silk thread to conceal the raw edge of the linen (figs 6 and 7).⁵⁶

By the end of the fifteenth century, such was the demand for embroidered vestments by the nobility, gentry and merchant classes that an even greater change occurred to design and production methods. At the time of the Clere–Morton agreement, 'powdering', or scattering images over the surface of the ground fabric, had become an established alternative to the all-over embroidery that had been the trademark of the earlier period of *opus Anglicanum*.⁵⁷ This also presented clients with a less expensive substitute for the imported figured silk velvets and woven cloth of gold preferred by royalty.⁵⁸

The pile on the velvet made it difficult to stitch images directly onto the fabric. Instead, individual slips or appliqués were stitched onto a linen ground using a variety of techniques and materials, including cutwork cloth of gold,⁵⁹ detail-stitching and shading in coloured silks and couched Venice gold (fig 8). Morton may have provided Sir Robert in the first instance with a selection of drawings, patterns or, more likely, such ready-made slips as he had at his disposal. ⁶⁰ Sir Robert could choose from these and they could be sewn down and then quickly outlined and embellished with gold thread and spangles, keeping any necessary embroidery work to a minimum. Sir Robert also wanted specific arms to be placed on each garment 'accordyng to a patron wrought in clothe ... for an exampyll'. He may have had access to a supply of previously embroidered badges similar to the ones Thomas Brydon had made for the Duke of Bedford and provided one 'wrouthe w^t fine gold sylver & sylkys' as a pattern for Morton to copy. ⁶¹

The contract is for a fixed price and does not break down the costs for materials or labour. These can be estimated, however, by extrapolating the quantities and costs required for each item in the contract based on data from a variety of other documents. The king's warrant book of 1498–9, for example, records a number of different prices for black and crimson velvet yardage, indicating there were a variety of qualities available. The cost of black velvet suitable for a jacket for a servant cost 10s a yard whereas velvet fit to make a riding gown for the king cost 18s per yard. Crimson velvet ranged from 13s 4d to 30s per yard. The width of the velvet from selvage to selvage was approximately 600mm. To make Sir Robert's set of vestments would have required approximately 17 yards based on the sizes given in the statute and the number of seams found in extant vestments. The cost for black and crimson velvet would thus have been approximately £13, even at the low end of the quality scale – in other words, a substantial portion of the contracted amount.

- 56. By comparison, figures worked within the architectural canopies on traditional ophreys were lightly outlined with a fine silk thread in a darker colour: see fig 2.
- 57. Christie 1938, 28; King 1963, 7; Staniland 1991, 53.
- 58. Monnas 1989, 346; Staniland 1991, 65. The *broccato riccio sopra riccio* fabric, woven in Italy for Henry VII's cloth of estate, was purchased at £11 per yard in comparison to 13s to 18s for basic silk velvet: see n 68 below.
- 59. Levey 2012, 169, pl 87, has an example of cutwork cloth of gold.
- 60. Stratford 1993, 119; Hayward 2007, 325.
- 61. Levey 2012, 165, 183 n 67.
- 62. Hayward 2012, 28, 32.
- 63. Ibid, 16, 139.
- 64. Monnas 1995, 10.



Fig 6. Panel from an orphrey of *c* 1500 (OC 558), showing an unidentified figure embroidered on linen in silk and silver-gilt threads, cut from linen ground and appliquéd onto a previously embroidered orphrey, and outlined with heavy black thread using surface couching to conceal the raw edges of the linen. *Photograph*: author; reproduced by kind permission of St Mary's College, Oscott

We can estimate the cost of the 140 fleur-de-lis and scallop shell motifs by comparison with an itemised list for the supply of textile furnishings for the king's chapel at Westminster in a warrant of 4 January 1499. ⁶⁵ Forty-eight portcullises at 4s each were provided for three

65. Hayward 2012, 28-9.

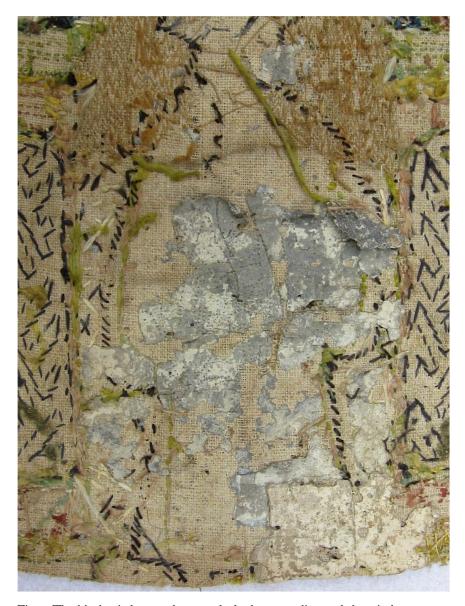


Fig 7. The black stitches used to couch the heavy outline and the window pattern are easily distinguished on the reverse of the orphrey shown in fig 6 (OC 558). This image also clearly indicates that the architectural framework behind the figure was completed prior to the figure being appliquéd in place. *Photograph*: author; reproduced by kind permission of St Mary's College, Oscott

chasubles; separate embroidered images of St Francis, St Edward and Our Lady of Pity cost 40s each. In each case, the motifs and embroideries were probably much larger than those required for the Clere vestments, thus making it difficult to determine a cost for the individual embroidered items in the Clere–Morton contract, but the Westminster warrant does give us a sense of the scale.



Fig 8. Detail of a damaged fleur-de-lis on a cope of c 1500–25 (V&A, 617-1898), illustrating the use of cutwork appliqué, surface couching to conceal the raw edges and the use of spangles. *Photograph*: author; courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

A fairly accurate cost for the remaining items can be determined from a vestment set bequeathed by Agnes Cely in her will of 1483.⁶⁶ Cely was the widow of Richard Cely, a well-established wool merchant in the City of London and a 'man of substance'.⁶⁷ The costs

^{66.} TNA, PRO PROB 11/7/135.

^{67.} Hanham 1985, 3.

paid to the suppliers of the vestment materials are given in detail in the family accounts. Enough buckram to line all four garments in the Clere–Morton contract would have cost 10s; ribbons and fringes 17s $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. The vestment-maker charged 10s to make up Agnes's vestments. Additional Holland cloth for the albs cost 2s plus 12d to make them up. The cost for the velvet plus these items comes to approximately £16 10s, leaving just £6 10s for the embroidery, the Venice gold, the gold and silver spangles and the 'sylkys of dyv[er]s colours' required to complete the contract. Figures 9 and 10 show what the finished cope and chasuble might have looked like, based on a detailed examination of several extant embroideries dating from c 1460 to c 1520.

The close relationship of mercers, vestment-makers and embroiderers at the end of the fifteenth century is illustrated by the use of the terms used to describe William Morton's occupation. He and William More are described as embroiderers to Henry VII in a grant given under privy seal in November 1485, which says: 'Grant in survivorship to William More and William Morton the office of embroiderer to the king with wages &c. out of the issues, of the county of Kent, a livery from the wardrobe in the winter.'⁶⁹ Morton has also been identified as a major supplier of goods to Edward IV,⁷⁰ and in a complaint brought against him in that capacity in the early 1480s he is named as a vestment-maker.⁷¹ Apart from some references early in the reign of Henry VII,⁷² little evidence has been discovered to link him directly with any embroidery done in the Great Wardrobe. On the other hand, his partner, William More,⁷³ appears often in connection with payments from the Great Wardrobe for embroidery work.⁷⁴ A 'William More brotherer' appears in the Mercers' Court Books in 1518; the Wardens of the Mercers granted him a lease of premises in Knightrider Street for a term of twenty years.⁷⁵ His specific designation as 'brotherer' suggests he may not have been a mercer.

Anne Sutton's exhaustive study of the extant records of the Mercers' Company indicates that some smaller guilds, including vestment-makers and embroiderers, came under their control.⁷⁶ According to Sutton, 'Mercers who were only vestment-makers were regulated as "mere artisans" and were not considered to be full members.⁷⁷ Embroiderers also appear to have been supervised to some extent by the Mercers, even though the Arte or

- 68. TNA, PRO C47/37/10/17. The total cost of the blue cloth of gold was 23li 6s 8d and the 'orffreys of nedle werk' 13li 6s 8d.
- 69. Campbell 1873, 198. That Morton and More worked together prior to becoming the king's embroiderers is confirmed by a document naming them as co-debtors in a suit brought by Pagane de Blassia, a merchant of Genoa: TNA, PRO CI/63/178.
- 70. Hairsine and Hairsine 1988, 4; Sutton 2005, 204. Sutton does not indicate specific references; it may be, however, that she refers to the obligation to the king mentioned in her note 53.
- 71. TNA, PRO C 1/63/178, dated 1480-3.
- 72. Campbell 1877, 169, 492.
- 73. Monnas 1989, 348 n 23. Monnas establishes that William More's name was also spelt 'Mouse' and 'Moure' in contemporary documents.
- 74. Hayward 2012, 28, 43, 64, 123, 131.
- 75. Watney 1936, 594.
- 76. Sutton 2001, 42. Other artisan groups mentioned were shepsters and silkwomen. Sutton also makes a distinction between an artisan-embroiderer, who is a mercer-vestment-maker belonging to the Mercers' Company, and an entrepreneur-embroiderer, who belongs to the Broderers, both groups apparently being supervised by the Mercers. Sutton's investigation provides a solid accounting from the Mercers' perspective, but it also raises several questions with respect to details of the relationship and interactions between the three crafts.
- 77. Sutton 2005, 204. The enrolment fee for an apprentice vestment-maker was 6s 8d, compared to £1 for an apprentice mercer.



Fig 9. The cope of the Clere-Morton contract reconstructed. Watercolour: author

Mistery of the Broderers had been recognised as an organised body electing representatives and sitting on the Common Council of the City of London as early as 1376,⁷⁸ and they are known to have admitted apprentices to the Freedom of the City as early as 1509.⁷⁹ However, little is known about its governance prior to the granting of a charter in 1561, and the Broderers' Hall was destroyed by the Great Fire of London in 1666, resulting in the loss of a majority of the Company's records prior to that date.⁸⁰

From the Mercers' records, we know that the Wardens of the Broderers petitioned the Mercers' Company as early as July 1494 regarding the appointment of two mercers to accompany them in searching the premises of all vestment-makers who 'do occupie that occupation of browdere'. The two mercers were to have an 'understondyng and knowing the feat' of embroidery and vestment-making; the Broderers specifically requested William Morton or John Thurkleton, the latter having produced the Cely vestments. At this time the Mercers' Company was not prepared to act on the petition and requested further information from the Broderers so 'that no prejudice or hurt therby might growe therby unto oure felishippe'. Sa

The Broderers refined their petition and presented it to the City in September 1495 so that all 'thynges made in the said Crafte myght be truely wrought' and to allow the Wardens of the Broderers to work with 'ij mercers expert in the said Crafte the same mercers to be assigned by the Wardeyns of the Crafte of the mercery' in order to seek out and fine offenders, with the oversight of a representative of the Mayor. ⁸⁴ The petition granted them

- 78. Sharpe 1907, fol xlvii; Fitch 1976, 294.
- 79. LMA, MS 31369: the Freedom of Steven Humble.
- 80. Holford 1910, 9.
- 81. Watney 1936, 236.
- 82. TNA, PRO C47/37/10/17; Hanham 1985, 269.
- 83. Watney 1936, 237.
- 84. Sharpe 1912, fol 315v.



Fig 10. The chasuble of the Clere-Morton contract reconstructed. Watercolour: author

jurisdiction over craftsmen working not only in London but in the suburbs as well. A fine of 40s could be levied, with half of the funds going to the City and the other half to be divided equally between the Mercers and the Broderers. The offending work was to be either given to poor parishes or burnt. The dimensions of the vestments were also established at this time and the amount of the fine was set at 20s for those found to be in contravention, the proceeds being split in the same manner. The petition also gave the Wardens of the

Broderers the right to approve the employment of foreign embroiderers and for ensuring they were sufficiently skilled. 85

Ordinance 94 of the Mercers, governing apprenticeships and made in 1497, ⁸⁶ draws a distinction between those mercers taking apprentices who sell their merchandise, and those who only make vestments, altar cloths, embroidering and setting (the fixing of gemstones to textiles). ⁸⁷ The articles for the latter provide for a younger start, at the age of twelve, a longer apprenticeship, of fourteen years, and a lesser fee for enrolment. It also specifies that if the mercer-vestment-maker should begin to trade in merchandise, either wholesale or retail, he must then pay the full fee and possibly a fine as well. There is no mention of the previously acknowledged articles governing the quality of embroidered goods produced and sold by mercer-vestment-makers.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of the contract between Sir Robert Clere and William Morton has examined many aspects of embroidered vestments and their role in the daily practice of religion in pre-Reformation England, including the spiritual value to the purchaser and economic value to the producer. It has also clarified many aspects specific to the occupation of professional embroiderer in the latter years of the production of English ecclesiastical embroidery. Several factors led to the alleged decline in the quality of the goods produced: the growth in demand for embroidered items had put pressure on the producers to increase the rate of production by engaging new and faster methods of production; the inconsistent supply of high-quality imported materials contributed to finished goods of substandard quality; and, most importantly, the disparate nature of the persons producing embroidered goods, and lack of an overarching body of governance, led to a fractured labour force.

During the latter half of the fifteenth century, in an effort to maintain the integrity of the craft, a number of governing bodies were recruited to devise regulations to ensure the quality of materials and workmanship. Parliament had put in place regulations to control the quality of imported materials with the implementation of an act against the deceptive weight and working of gold. The presence of vestment-makers as artisan-embroiderers of the Mercers' Company, operating with few guiding principles in place, had compelled the Broderers to initiate measures of quality control through a petition to the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London and enjoining the assistance of the Mercers. This resulted in the issuing of new statutes to ensure the high-quality production of embroidered goods. To what degree these measures were successful remains unclear. However, as demonstrated by the outstanding documentary and material evidence, those who purchased embroidered vestments and used them for generations certainly considered them to be of great value. 88

That the Mercers and the Broderers were intricately linked through the production and sale of ecclesiastical embroidery is apparent. Exactly how the relationship worked is difficult to determine given the lack of documentation for the Broderers. Nonetheless, a review of the evidence available with respect to the king's embroiderers – Morton and More – suggests that they may have worked as a team, Morton's role being more that of a procurer of

^{85.} A written record of the articles does not appear in the acts of the Mercers until March of the following year, however: Watney 1936, 594; Sutton 2001, 42.

^{86.} MC, Ordinance 94, 18 and 20 Dec 1497; Parker 1980, 316.

^{87.} Fitch 1976, 289.

^{88.} Heard forthcoming.

embroidered goods, and More's role mainly that of producer. The contract in question identifies Morton as an embroiderer but it is possible that his role was more that of an administrator, assembling the team and materials and supervising the work. The same may have been true of William More, although the presence of numerous payments to him in the warrants of the King's Wardrobe for embroidery completed, and his absence from the Mercers' apprenticeship or membership rolls, would argue that he was first and foremost an embroiderer and therefore very probably a member of the Broderers' fellowship.

Further targeted research into the records of the Mercers' Company, in concert with the documents of other guilds⁸⁹ and those in public and private archives, is required to shed light on the elusive embroiderer and his working relationships. It is significant to note that the historical capacity of the embroiderer to develop new production techniques and the ability to adapt to a changing and more demanding environment would prove to be essential skills in the challenging years of the sixteenth-century Reformation, when it became clear their principal source of income would no longer be available.

The Reformation resulted in the loss of a huge amount of ecclesiastical embroidery, though vestments were not completely banned from use in parish churches until 1552 when Edward VI's reforms included the stipulation that the priest was to celebrate mass at a table rather than an altar and only to wear a surplice. ⁹⁰ The inventories from Ormesby St Margaret and St Mary's, East Raynham (both in Norfolk), are extant. There are no black velvet vestments among the items found in St Margaret's, ⁹¹ but among the vestments listed in the inventory of St Mary's on 3 September 1552 there is 'one cope and one vestment blak worsted' and 'one cope and vestment of blak velvet'. ⁹² It would appear that the suits of vestments mentioned in Dame Alianore Townshend's will – perhaps one of which was that made to the specifications in the Clere–Morton contract – remained in use as she had wished until they were eventually confiscated by the king's commissioners.

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APPENDIX

Transcription notes

The contract is included in BL, Add MS 41305, fols 35v and 36 (figs 11 and 12), and is a copy of an original indenture that is no longer extant. The copy was made by an unknown person, ostensibly at the request of Dame Alinore Towneshend. The spelling of words is not

^{89.} For example, Levey (2012, 160) states that the Broderers were 'part of a loose association of textile crafts usually headed by the Drapers'.

^{90.} Duffy 2005, 474: Mayo 1984, 49.

^{91.} TNA, E315/502, fol 85.

^{92.} TNA, E315/505, fol 25.

his moderation made the xx Day of honomen to the your Borgins of & the of your bottom & couling Moston creofind and tigat some pty and fee Bobert Alors mitte som of Warff English on that all that the Parto horting Gatty concentral and fell to the Brook find Bobert of blatto both that wito fay cond cope cons of fabytt y timak le famous complete m lengtes and by se amos of londow tops mother \$ lake onto perates for and policery of he follows before pende to the on of by decesying pt the Papel he koloot to God Tom In the fapto Aller of thann phatte garmy the a conto both Effen and spet do sout madify commy sty by pacon and att pops of them the orfe ons Apongot deor Ing m the Payso ownplow mo Dolong Savedpros p to to toto and that in no happy the gloff p by after for the parso gold popular toget 16 to pay with of pale to post of no magos and angold fens gold, p frangels a quality and pmage of one las, and In proage of Pout doing the singolife and sond armor toutpet of Dyna wasnite to fono soily felind p felipo m than compacen dasa Sprig to a my angle m dates the ways the link for sobot solomes to the Repor hulling In egouppet Ind to frethe the orfar of the lapor of the lapor the polosopet to made and angeto a for fays, gampleded a bonto to fone gold p frangy to a forfays , ho bolo all futto goods of the land coops to affin poor of ond lady and a for m the lythe of the lapse coope the lapse some

Fig 11. BL, Add MS 41305, fol 35v. Photograph: © The British Library Board

consistent throughout and there are several words, phrases and lines of script through which lines have been drawn; these have been shown struck through in the following transcription. If the meaning of the word is quite clear from either the context or the spelling, it has been left as written. For more obscure spellings, the meaning has been clarified by the insertion of letters within square brackets. The use of contractions has not been changed

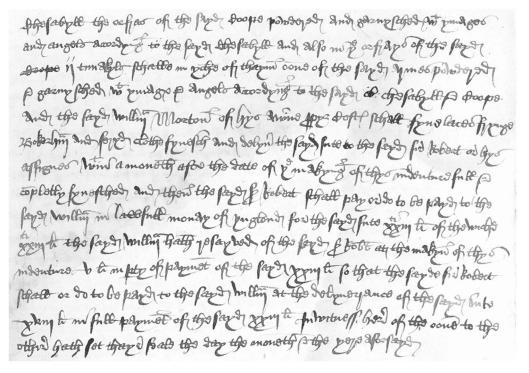


Fig 12. BL, Add MS 41305, fol 36. Photograph: © The British Library Board

(as in the use of 'w'in' for 'within' and 'ye' for 'the'). The copy was written with no recognisable punctuation and none has been added.

This indenture made the xxth day of Novembr the yere & Reigne of Kyng Henry the vii the x yere betwyx William Morton Citesyn and Browderer of London on that oone p[ar]ty and Syr Robert Clere in the com[ty] of Norff[olk] knyght on that other p[ar]ty wittnessth that the sayde William hath co[ve]nanted and sold to the sayde sir Robert a sute of Vestments of blakke velwet that is to say oone coope oone chesabyll ij tunakyls wt aulbes parers stoles and ffanons complete in lengthe and brede accordyng to the Statuts of London the wiche Blake sute schalbe set and powdered with flowrdelices of gold and skalope schelles of sylver to the s[u]m of vii xx accordyng to a patron of oone fflowrdelice and oone skalope tha^t the sayde sir Robert delyv[ere]d hym and the sayde fflowrdelices all and yche of thaym schalbe garnyshed abowte with fyne golde of venyss and spangyllys of sylv[er] and gylt as workma[n] chipp requireth by the sytht of workmen of the sayd occupacon and all and yche of the orfrays of the sayd sute & albe of cremysyn velwet the wiche orfrays schalbe sett and powdered w^t armes ymages and angels wrought according in the sayde occupacon w^t fine gold of venyss and sylkys of dyv[er]s colours according[l]y to the s[u]m of xxix and that in no wyse the glosse & bryghtnss of the sayde gold &sylkys be defaced that is to say in the chesabyll garnyshed aboute w^t fyne gold & spangyls a crucifix an ymage of our lady and an ymage of sent John the Ev^angelist and oone armes undyr y^e crucifyxe wroutht w^t fine gold sylver & sylkys in their occupacon accordyng to a patron wrought in clothe the wiche the sayde sir Robert delyv[ere]d to the sayd

Willi^am for an exampyll and so furthe[r] the orfray of the sayde chesabyll powdered w^t ymages and angels aforsayd garnyshed aboute w^t fyne gold & spangyls aforsayd lyke unto an howsyng and also in the hoode of the sayd coope the assumpcon of our lady and a for in the bryste of the sayde coope the sayde armys that ys in the chesabyll the orfra[y]s of the sayd coope powdered and garnyshed wt ymages and angels according to the sayd chesabyll and also in y^e orfrays of the sayde tunakyls schalbe in yche of theym oone of the sayd armes powdered & gar[n]yshed w^t ymages & angels accordyng to the sayd chesabyll &coope and the sayd William Morton of hys awone p[ro]pyr cost schall fynd laces fringe Bokerh^am and seryd clothe fynesch and delyv[er] the sayd sute to the sayd sir Robert or hys assignes w^tin a moneth after the date of y^e making of thys indenture full & Co[m]pletly fynesched and then the sayd S[ir] Robert schall pay or do to be payd to the sayd William in lawfull monay of yngland for the sayd sute xxiij li of the wiche xxiij li the sayd Willim hath resey[r]ved of the sayd S[ir] Robt at the makyn of thys indenture v li in p[ar]ty of payme[n]t of the sayd xxiij li so that the syde sir Robert schall or do to be payd to the sayd Willim at the delyverance of the sayd sute xviij li in full payme[n]t of the sayd xxiij li in witness her[e] of the oone to the other hath set thayr seale the day the moneth & the yere aforsayd

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbreviations

BL. British Library, London FM Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge LH Longleat House, Wiltshire LMA London Metropolitan Archives MC Mercers' Company, London OCOscott College, Birmingham ROM Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto TNA The National Archives, Kew V&A Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Unpublished sources

BL, Add MS 41139, fol 3V TNA, PRO C1/64/244 BL, Add MS 41305, fols 35v, 36 TNA, PRO C1/429/24 LH, DP Box 1, fol 21 TNA, PRO C47/37/10/17 LMA, MS 31369 TNA, PRO LR 2/111, fol 27v MC, Ordinance 94, 18 and 20 Dec 1497 TNA, PRO PROB 11/7/135 ROM, 971.397 TNA, PRO PROB 11/10/6 TNA, E315/502, fol 85 TNA, PRO PROB 11/11/372 TNA, E315/505, fol 25 TNA, PRO PROB 11/20/20 TNA, PRO C1/63/178 TNA, PRO PROB 11/20/149

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