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No. 208

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# Stitches

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elegant blackwork in delicate lace stitches

### INSIDE

London's finest hand embroidery

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Picture postcard views of Britain

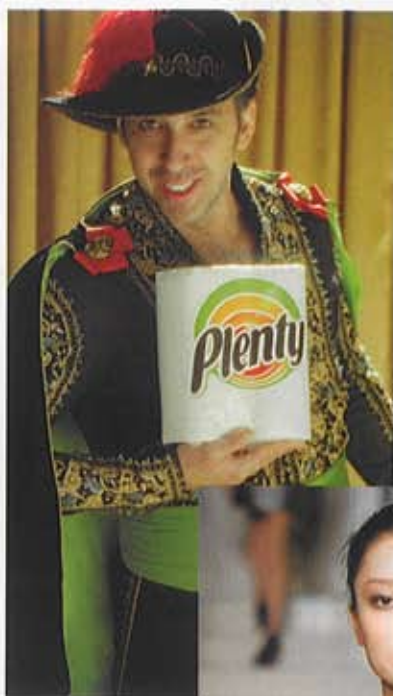


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# Golden Past... Glittering Future

Discover the London company with centuries of embroidery expertise

Few may have heard of embroidery company extraordinaire Hand & Lock but I bet everyone has seen its work. Watched the Royal Wedding in 1981? Admired a serviceman in full uniform? Seen the silly TV ad for kitchen roll where only one sheet is required? Attended the King of Tonga's coronation? Reply in the affirmative to just one of these questions, (very well done indeed if you can say yes to all four!), and you have observed some of the world's finest embroidery from the Hand and Lock studio.



Hand and Lock is the modern incarnation of two very old and very different embroidery companies. M. Hand & Co was a company of 'goldlacers' which produced braids and cords for military and ceremonial uses. In 1767 it added embroidery to its repertoire and its reputation as a producer of ornate and high status embroidery was set. Over a century later, C. E. Phipps began an embroidery studio for the couture market. The studio survived the wars and on the retirement of its founder, a talented and

young designer there, Stanley Lock, took over in 1956. From this point on the business thrived with the newly named company, S. Lock, working with fashion designers such as Christian Dior. The company was awarded a royal warrant when it began embroidering for the Queen's couturiers Norman Hartnell and Hardy Amies.



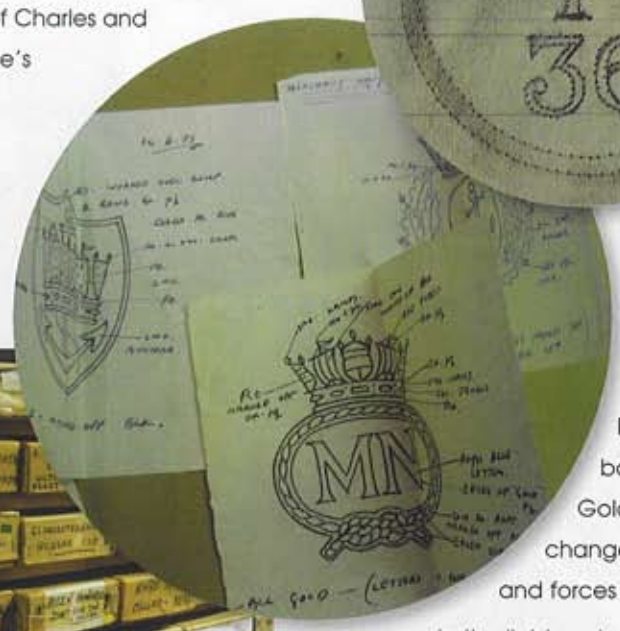
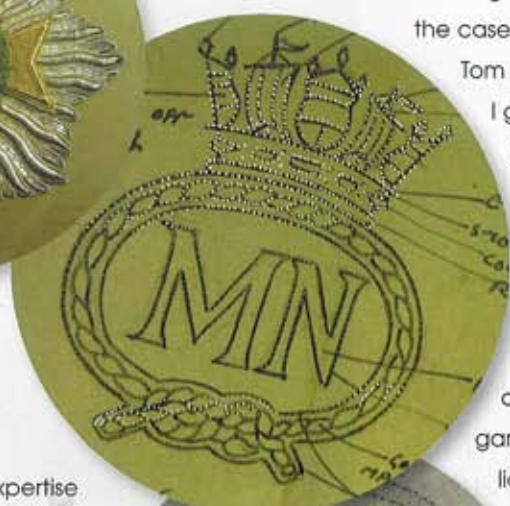
**MARGARET  
STREET W1**

CITY OF WESTMINSTER



In 1998 the Rudin Macleod family, tailors for generations, acquired M. Hand & Co, which began their passion for embroidery. A few years later, S Lock was looking to sell and in 2001 the family bought this company too and today's Hand and Lock came into being. With the acquisition of MBA Costumes, Hand and Lock has become a unique, multi-faceted company with expertise in a wide range of embroidery disciplines encompassing military, fashion and theatre. Although separate entities at the time, a precursor the companies' futures was the work of M. Hand and S. Lock going down the aisle together at the wedding of Charles and Diana; Hand's on the Prince's uniform and Lock's on the bride's dress.

At the corner of Margaret Street and Wells Street in Fitzrovia, the Hand and Lock studio is to be



found. With light pouring in through the tall windows, the door opens onto a bright, buzzing area with the workroom to the left. Just a few steps further in and down, one feels definitely in 'Hand' territory with every space piled high with boxes containing over 350 badges for British regiments. Lynn (custodian of this patch) knows her boxes and is possibly a human index for the contents and location of each one. Amongst them is some work for the Sultanate of Oman which has its own exclusive gold lace design woven that cannot be used for anyone or anything else.

In the next room Head Designer Claire Barrett and her assistant Alba Moreno-Gutierrez put together the designs to be stitched in Goldwork. Rather the technique is Goldwork as the metal threads, although mainly gold, can be silver or, in the case of the uniforms produced for the Tom Cruise film 'Valkyrie', aluminium.

I got a tantalising glimpse of a photograph of a pair of trousers Claire produced for designer J. W. Anderson. From mid-thigh to ankle, the trousers were covered in silver Goldwork with lion head knees that looked a cross between a medieval gargoyle and a suit of armour. The lions' faces were astounding in the detail of the silver wire 'fur', the taxidermy eyes and the three-dimensional effect achieved by many layers of raised padding.

In this design room were drawers stacked from floor to ceiling that contained small slips of paper of designs for over 10000 cap badges and patches produced over the years. Drawn in ink, when held up to the light the tiny pinholes could be seen where these original slips had been used to prick and pounce the designs onto the fabric.

Despite the numerous moves and being bombed three times during WWII, the Hand Goldwork archive is extensive and tracks the changes to the various regiments, services, brigades and forces that have come and gone over the years.

In the light and airy workroom, the company's stitchers work on a variety of commissions. Whether it is applying several kilos of Swarovski pearls to a catwalk piece, customising a jacket for Tinchy Stryder (London's hip-hop rising star) or creating a

bride's dream dress, anything and everything passes through the hands of these embroiderers. One of the more common assignments is to monogram shirts, apparently much beloved by the City's bankers. It is telling that before the credit crunch, orders came in by the hundreds every day and in the economy's darkest hour, this dwindled to the same number but per week. We should perhaps be assured that things are not as bad as once thought as requests for shirt monograms are now back up to the pre-crunch days!

Hand and Lock's embroiderers come from a variety of needlework hothouses such as the Royal School of Needlework, and others around the world. With its illustrious history, Hand and Lock does have an eye on the past but its sights are set very much in the future. To promote the use of hand embroidery and embellishment within fashion and textiles, the company established the Hand and Lock Prize for Embroidery. Previously it was only open to students in the field of fashion and textiles but since 2009 there has been an open category for embroiderers from



all backgrounds. The prize attracts entrants from all over the world and sees astounding talent and innovation in stitched form. The judging for this year's submissions takes place in September and the prize-giving will follow in November 2010.

Hand and Lock offers tours of its premises so you can see behind the scenes as well as work in progress. The company also runs an extensive programme of embroidery courses in key embroidery techniques such as Goldwork, Crewelwork, Silk shading and more. If you cannot decide which technique to try, you can opt for a one day trial at the company's School of Embroidery which gives a taster of the many types worked there.

So plan ahead for your next trip to London and get away from the bustle of Oxford Street and discover one of the city's hidden gems.

Janice Broadstock

## FACTFILE

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[www.handembroidery.com](http://www.handembroidery.com)

Tours must be booked in advance and cost £13 (maximum 10 people).

Embroidery day classes run from 10.00am-4.30pm and start at £65 plus materials (a Hand and Lock kit).

For more details contact Nathalie M'Bemba  
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 or visit [www.handembroidery.com](http://www.handembroidery.com)