

An Atelier's Tale

Hand and Lock Samantha Packer

Hand & Lock is an embroidery atelier situated in the heart of London's West End. The name is perhaps better-known since their sponsorship of the Opus Anglicanum exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum, which celebrated English Medieval Embroidery, but there is much more to the company once you start to delve deeper.



HAND & LOCK were formed in 2001 on the merger of M. Hand & Co, military badge embroiderer and S. Lock and Co., fashion and couture embroiderers. Their collective history goes back 250 years when Huguenot refugee, M Hand, came to England from France. From manufacturing and selling lace to military tailors he became a respected military badge designer and manufacturer used by Savile Row and military tailors. S. Lock and Co started when Stanley Lock took over embroidery house, C.E. Phipps, and expanded its business as a couture house with clients such as Christian Dior, Norman Hartnell and Hardy Amies. The work of both companies established a link with the Royal Family which still exists today. The banner from the Queen's 2012 Diamond Jubilee barge, shown below, was embroidered by Hand & Lock.



In their current incarnation, Hand & Lock are a figurehead of Military, Ecclesiastical and Ceremonial embroidery whilst simultaneously exploring and developing the potential of embroidery in a modern world.



On their 250th anniversary, we were fortunate to be given a behind-the-scenes tour of the atelier and learn more about the celebrations of the past and their position in contemporary textiles.

The military connection is evident as soon as you enter the building. Examples of military badges (see right for the Royal Order of the Garter) and sashes can be seen on the walls. In the workroom, rolls of 'gold lace' lie alongside boxes of badges and the raw materials for Goldwork for which the company is famous for producing.

Although there are signs of modernisation creeping in (vintage boxes are being replaced by filing cabinets and barcodes), it is a treasure trove of threads, beads and ribbons that still remain stacked up and tantalisingly hidden from view.





The company's connection with the Military and Armed Forces comes predominantly through the production of badges and ceremonial accoutrements.

The Head of Design, Scott Gordon Heron, is an expert in the design and execution of these. Production of badges is governed, as expected, by strict rules and guidelines. Designs are to be followed exactly and there is no artistic freedom to make changes. Above is the Royal Coat of Arms produced by Gordon Heron.

The badges of the British Military are often the most ceremonial and give the company the opportunity to keep the traditional embroidery techniques alive.



When other work is commissioned, such as family crests or Coats of Arms, precise drawings are made and calculations about the scale, height and exact sizing will be prepared at the design stage, so there is no possibility of mistakes when the embroidery begins. It is an incredibly detailed process that cannot be rushed. A new piece of work might have 50 hours of design work attached to it before a single stitch is started.



Since their merger, Hand & Lock have excelled in creating a place for themselves in the modern textiles world. The client base that S. Lock and Co. developed has paved the way for a company that is not shackled by the constraints of its military associations. A young, dynamic and highly experienced team has allowed them to develop and grow many branches of business in tandem with the demands of modern society and trends. These branches encompass their strong ties with fashion, collaborations on a wide range of high profile events, education, the encouragement of new designers from around the world and the celebration of their own achievements, particularly at such a milestone anniversary. The military influences their work in fashion as well as an innovative approach to stitch.

Hand & Lock are not a fashion brand in their own right but for many years, have had a hand in some of the most iconic garments in modern fashion history. The dresses worn by Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell in 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' were embroidered by S. Lock and Co.

Michael Jackson's Gieves & Hawkes military jacket from his 'Bad' Tour was heavily embroidered in Goldwork by M. Hand and Co (right).



Kate Moss's Swarovski Flapper dress for the launch of her 2007 clothing line at Topshop and Brian May's digitally embroidered Coat worn at the London Olympics Closing Ceremony in 2012 (detail below) were both embroidered, in-house, by Hand & Lock.

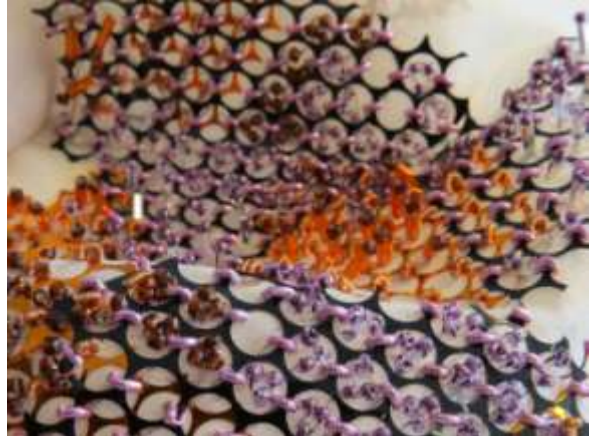


These are just a few of the pieces that you might not have realised were the result of the company's work. Films such as 'Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them', 'Anna Karenina' and 'Dracula Untold' have all featured costumes or embellishments that Hand & Lock have worked on.

In high-end fashion, their work might range from being a supplier to Burberry of Goldwork trimmings and gold embroidered letters for the Spring/Summer 2016 collection (right) to developing designs with a fashion designer to create beautifully embroidered detail for garments. The work on Mary Katrantzou's Autumn Winter 2014 collection culminated in heavily beaded embroideries (below left). They have also worked with artist, Samantha Roddick, creating borders for her artwork (below right).



Part of the success of working with fashion designers comes from creating samples for industry clients. Their creation comes from a good understanding of current trends, cutting edge techniques and developments, unusual materials and traditional techniques in contemporary applications. Samples reflect forward thinking whilst designing a Hand & Lock aesthetic (below left and right). Even if the work is not advertised as belonging to the company by the designer, the company is, in most cases, able to recognise and declare its provenance.



An innovative string to the bow of their fashion presence has been the opening of a permanent concession in Topshop in Oxford Circus, London. The company has developed a range of brightly coloured and bold fashion patches to be sewn onto clothes bought in-store. Custom ripping, monogramming or motifs can also be added. This service is performed on a hand-guided Irish sewing machine in-store so a younger generation is exposed to choosing embroidery as a way of customising High Street fashion and expressing their individuality through stitch.



It is a more accessible version of the hand-embroidered monogramming service provided in the Hand & Lock atelier which attracts more discerning clientele. These customers are more aware of the process and craftsmanship of the bespoke services offered (as seen at the top of page 7 with the Desmond and Dempsey pyjamas). It is indicative of how the company refuses to be pigeonholed into a 'traditional' mould but keeps looking for new ways to be seen and promote embroidery as a going concern to a wider audience.



Photo © Desmond and Dempsey

While the potential for embroidery commissioned by costume and fashion designers may go publicly unacknowledged, the Hand & Lock team have, for the past few years, produced an in-house fashion collection. Both in 2015 and 2016, a design brief was agreed and then opened to aspiring designers to produce designs to be made by the team. Designs of Steven Sheldon in 2015 and Kristine Artemjeva in 2016 have been developed for these collections. Some of these pieces are on display in the Hand & Lock atelier and you can see detail from some of the 2016 gowns below. It has been a project instrumental to Hand & Lock's development of couture embroidery sample collections for their industry clients.



More details of these collections can be found in the Hand & Lock in-house magazines which explore recent work in finer detail and examines the archives, with articles about treasures found, catalogues techniques and services the company offers, and interviews with textiles artists. A more in-depth look at their work on collaborative projects can also be found there.

These collaborations, such as The Magna Carta – An Embroidery, provide a chance for the staff to add their expertise to outside projects and join forces with organisations such as the Royal School of Needlework, Fine Cell Work and the Embroiderers’ Guild.

Hand & Lock was involved with the embroidery of the Wikipedia logo on The Magna Carta piece (right) and for the Hardhome Embroidery, the team created the designs of the 36 roundels that framed the main scene and represented many of the Houses featured in Game of Thrones. Anthea Godfrey talks about this and the Hardhome Embroidery more extensively in her Celebrity Interview in this issue.

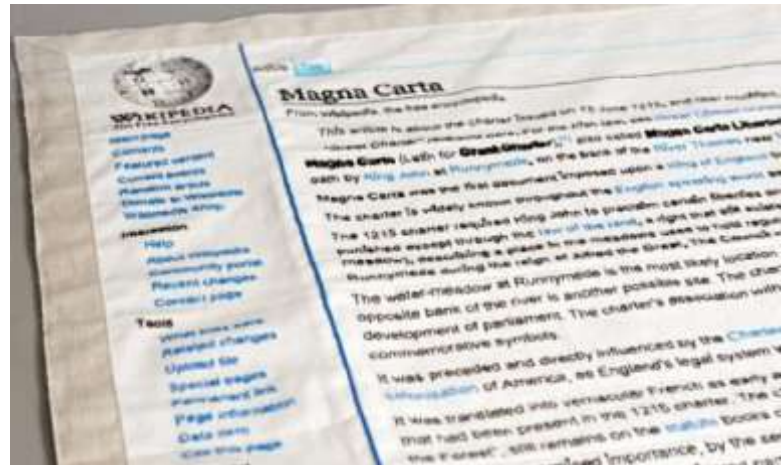


Photo © Anthea Godfrey

This is also reflected in their educational programme, developed by Production Director, Jessica Pile. Workshops are held internationally on a year-round timetable. Skills that can be learned include Tambour Beading, Goldwork, Monogramming and Silk Shading, as well as an Introduction to Embroidery to learn the basics. Linked to their sponsorship of Opus Anglicanum, a series of sell-out workshops and talks were organised in conjunction with the V&A. The company has found a new audience has been brought to their door through their association with Opus Anglicanum, and the interest in traditional techniques is undergoing a revival.



As well as looking to the past, Hand & Lock continues to support new emerging talent in embroidery through the 'Hand & Lock Prize for Embroidery' which was set up in 2000 and allows new designers the opportunity to showcase their talents and gain experience and exposure. With thousands of applications each year worldwide, the categories have been expanded to include both Fashion and Textile Art, with Student and Open entries available for Hand Embroidery and Student-only entries for the Wilcom Digital Embroidery Prize. This year's event looks set to be the biggest yet, with its theme of 'Celebration' fitting in perfectly with the company's anniversary. You can see Myra Cheung's winning entry from 2014 (below left), Sally Wilson's 1st prize in the Textile Open Category (middle) and William Lathrop's 3rd prize from 2016 in the Fashion Category (below right).



Photos above left and right © Jutta Klee and centre © Elena Molina

This year has much to offer with the 250th anniversary celebrations. A series of events have been organised in Sydney, Chicago and London. The main focus is the conference discussion of the place of embroidery in today's world – 'Heritage' discusses the religious and secular uses of embroidery and how little the techniques have changed. 'Now' looks at how contemporary embroidery and its designers have been shaped by change in the world around them. 'Future' explores how globalisation and technology will influence the industry. In Sydney and Chicago, a small exhibition will be open to attendees of the conferences. In London, there is more of a sense of celebration. In addition to the conference, a special exhibition is being organised in July which is open to the public and will feature items from the Hand & Lock archive, including sketches and tools used in the business over the past 250 years. It will include some pieces of work (currently being curated by the London School of Fashion) that are too delicate to travel, so looks set to be an experience not to be missed.

Hand & Lock will be participating in London Craft Week in May and most recently developed the concept of The Embellished Handbag, which was launched at a Private View at the V&A. It is a charitable project in aid of the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust and the Hand & Lock Prize for Embroidery, and the company collaborated with thirteen fashion brands to create one-of-a-kind embellished bags. The bag designers were agnès b., Asपाल of London, Aspree, Lulu Guinness, Jill Haber of New York City, Patrick Cox, Alfie Douglas, BVS Designs, Globe-Trotter, House of Holland, Lost Property of London, The Cambridge Satchel Company and Vivienne Westwood. These bags are embarking on a world tour before coming back to the UK and being auctioned by Sotheby's in December.

The pieces include bags from Aspinal (below). Asprey (bottom left) and Lulu Guinness (bottom right). You can see photos of all the bags on the Hand & Lock website.



Photos © Jutta Klee

It is an exciting time for Hand & Lock, particularly with such a milestone celebration this year. For a company steeped in tradition, it refuses to be weighed down by the responsibility of maintaining the techniques for ongoing work but is fiercely protective of preserving them. It embraces them and opens the doors to willing learners through their education programme. It celebrates these techniques through the encouragement of new designers and applications with their own fashion collection and the auspicious Hand & Lock Prize for Embroidery. It reaches out to the younger generation on the High Street, teaching it the power of embroidery for individuality and expression whilst still offering the luxury services of a more discerning clientele with monogramming and private commissions. Hand & Lock is allied with organisations such as the Royal School of Needlework and the Embroiderers' Guild and shares their expertise on major projects with a contemporary outlook.

You cannot help but be overawed by all that the organisation achieves. Remaining true to their roots whilst being relevant in the present is an enviable achievement. Balancing these two is building a legacy for future generations to always be able to see traditional embroidery in a thoroughly modern setting.