

Factsheet

The Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection: Royal Dress

The Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection at Kensington Palace comprises dress worn by members of the Royal Family, dress worn by officials and dignitaries undertaking ceremonial roles, such as heralds or members of the Orders of Knighthood and court dress. The collection dates from the 18th to the late 20th century.

Royal dress provides both tangible evidence of the splendour of court events and, at the same time, truly memorable mementos of its wearers. The collection at Kensington Palace is added to with each generation and remains a unique archive of British royal fashion.

- Particular items of dress have been preserved by the Royal Family because they are associated with significant moments in the life of the wearer.
- The most impressive items are the coronations robes, each a skilful blend of splendid decoration, formality, fossilisation and fashion.
- Royal ladies have used dress as opportunities to promote the best of British craft, whether it be in the production of special textiles, fine lace or commissioning designs from a leading couturier or even aspiring students at art school.
- Each monarch has had favourite designers who would produce dress to suit their taste and which was practical and suitable for the occasion.
- Bright colours might be used so that the wearer would stand out in a crowd and could be easily seen.
- Great care would have to be taken to ensure that the clothes remained practical. Shapes would have to be kept simple – nothing could be too long or too short.
- With a number of dresses worn on State visits abroad, HM Queen Elizabeth II and her dressmakers have been careful to introduce a tribute to the host country. For example, the design of a dress worn to India incorporates a pattern of lotus

flowers: the lotus is the national flower of India. Similarly, the bodice of a dress worn in the United States of America at a dinner with President Ronald Reagan, who had previously been Governor of California, is embroidered with Californian poppies.