

Project to Recreate Two Civil War Standards at the Commandery Museum, Worcester

Introduction

In February 2017, the Worcester Embroiderers' Guild was approached by Kerry Whitehouse, a member of staff at the Commandery, to see if members of the Guild would help to reproduce two standards from the opposing sides in the Civil War, as exhibits for the museum.

The original cavalry standards are housed in St. Mary's Church, Bromsberrow, in the Mortuary Chapel. They are in a fragile state and have had some conservation work carried out on them by the Royal School of Needlework.

The Royalist standard is of white silk and bears the words "Religio Protestantium, Leges Angliae, Libertates Parliamentorum". They are part of a Declaration made by Charles I in 1642, when he was anxious that it should be known, in order to gain support, that he stood for the Protestant religion, the laws of England and the liberty of Parliament.

The Parliament standard is of red flowered silk, with a painting showing an arm in armour, thrust from a cloud and a hand holding a sword. On the flag are the words "Ora et Pugna" (Pray and Fight) and "Juvit et Juvabit Jehovah" (Jehovah has helped and will help). The words start from the bottom on one side and from the top on the other. In the former, the sword is held in the left hand and, in the latter, in the right.

Several members of the Guild visited St. Mary's and agreed to take part in the project. It was realised, however, that work would not really involve embroidery as such, but other skills such as dyeing and stencilling.

Making the Red Parliamentarian Standard

1. Preparing the Main Fabric - Satin

a. Scouring

Purpose - to remove dirt and grease that accumulates in the fibres during manufacturing.

However, this was not required, as the cotton satin furnishing fabric had already been treated under tension with a caustic alkali.

b. Mordanting

Purpose - this process enables dyes to attach to the fabric.

The fabric was soaked for 24 hours to aid absorption, by immersing it in a bowl of hot tap water, added to which was a drop of washing up liquid.

Ingredients:

123g satin fabric

12½g aluminium acetate (face mask required when working with this)

6l water

Method:

The aluminium acetate was placed into a small, heat proof container. Boiling water was poured onto it and it was stirred well until the chemical had dissolved.

A 10l dye pan was filled with 6l of hot tap water. The dissolved aluminium acetate was stirred into it.

The pre-soaked fabric was then added and gently worked into the mordant with rubber-gloved hands, for a few minutes.

The satin was left in the dye pan for 24 hours without adding any heat and was occasionally stirred.

After 24 hours, the fabric was taken out of the dye pan, wrung out and left to dry for 3 days until the vinegar smell had disappeared.

c. Dyeing

Ingredients:

127g satin fabric

6¼g madder extract

2½g calcium carbonate (chalk)

7l water

Method:

The mordanted fabric was soaked overnight.

The madder extract was mixed into a paste with a small amount of hot water.

A dye pan was filled with the water and the madder extract paste added.

The chalk was mixed in a container with a small amount of boiling water and added to the dye pan.

The pre-wetted, mordanted fabric was added.

The dye pan was heated to 60°C and kept at that temperature for 45-60 minutes, being stirred gently from time to time.

The dye pan was left overnight to cool and then the fabric was dried.

2. Preparing the Backing Fabric - Calico

a. Scouring

Purpose - to remove dirt and grease that accumulates in the fibres during manufacturing.

Ingredients:

105g calico

35g soda ash

5l water

Method:

The calico was washed in a washing machine using a long, very hot programme and non-bleach washing powder (Important - no fabric softener).

A stainless steel pan was half filled with water and the soda ash added slowly. When the bubbles subsided, the wet calico was added to the water and gently stirred, using a long, stainless steel spoon.

The pan and spoon were then covered with aluminium foil; the spoon handle propped the foil lid open slightly, thus helping to prevent the liquid from boiling over.

The water was brought to the boil and then the heat turned down to enable the contents to simmer; the fabric was stirred every 15 minutes to ensure it was being thoroughly scoured.

After two hours, the pan was removed from the heat.

Once cool, the fabric was rinsed and dried.

b. Mordanting

Ingredients:

99g calico

10g aluminium acetate (face mask required when working with this)

5l water

Method:

The aluminium acetate was placed into a small, heat proof container. Boiling water was poured onto it and it was stirred well until the chemical had dissolved.

A 10l dye pan was filled with 5l of hot tap water. The dissolved aluminium acetate was stirred into it.

The pre-soaked fabric was then added and gently worked into the mordant with rubber-gloved hands, for a few minutes.

The calico was left in the dye pan for 24 hours without adding any heat and was occasionally stirred.

After 24 hours, the fabric was taken out of the dye pan, wrung out and left to dry for 3 days until the vinegar smell had disappeared.

c. Dyeing

Ingredients:

110g calico

5g madder extract

2¼g calcium carbonate (chalk)

7l water

Method:

The mordanted fabric was soaked overnight.

The madder extract was mixed into a paste with a small amount of warm water.

A dye pan was filled with the water and the madder extract paste added.

The chalk was mixed in a container with a small amount of boiling water and added to the dye pan.

The pre-wetted, mordanted fabric was added.

The dye pan was heated to 60°C and kept at that temperature for 45-60 minutes, being stirred gently from time to time.

The dye pan was left overnight to cool and then the fabric was dried.

3. Recreating the Design

- a. The colour of the background was enriched, using Markal sticks (oil paint in stick form), applied using a toothbrush.
- b. Two tracings were made of an enlarged photograph of the original standard.
- c. In order to recreate the colours of the main design, many test samples were made, using a variety of colours of Markal stick.
- d. In turn, the tracings were transferred to freezer paper (paper plastic coated on one side only so that it can lightly adhere to fabric when ironed over, and then can be removed without leaving a trace). The stencils created from the tracings enabled the production of the standard's design.
- e. The recreation of the design was complex and involved many applications of different coloured Markal sticks to achieve the correct colours. Between each application, time had to be allowed for the Markal paint to fix.
- f. Having completed the process, the shapes and letters were outlined with a black Fabrico fabric pen.

Making the White Royalist Standard

1. Colouring the Main Fabric - Satin

A metallic silver Markal stick was lightly applied to the satin using a finger i.e. just sufficient to slightly colour the white surface.

2. Preparing the Backing Fabric - Calico

No preparation required other than scouring the fabric (see above).

3. Recreating the Design

- a. A tracing was made of an enlarged photograph of the original standard i.e. the foliage and lettering.
- b. The tracing was transferred to freezer paper in order to produce a stencil which was heat applied to the main fabric, in order to produce the standard's design.
- c. Using the end of the metallic silver Markal stick, the stencil was filled in. The satin was then left for several days as time had to be allowed to enable the Markal paint to fix.
- d. Having removed the stencil, the foliage and lettering were outlined with a black Fabrico fabric pen.

Tassels and Fringes

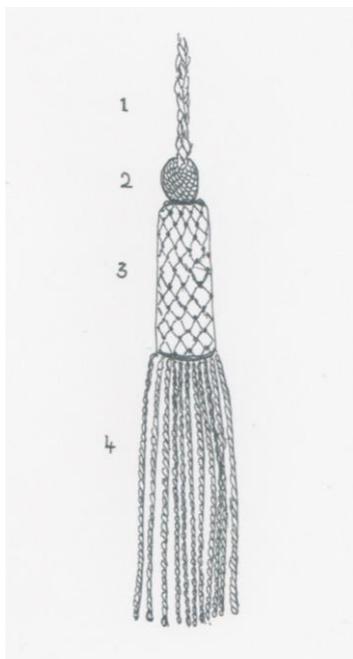
Each of the historic standards was trimmed with fringe on three sides and with a pair of tassels, one at each end of a cord which was looped around the carrying pole.

Both fringes and tassels were very worn, the colours faded and difficult to identify, the yarn thin, frayed and absent in places. Tassels in that era were mainly made in France or Italy and available fibres would have been wool, silk or linen, silk being the favoured choice. It is remarkable that any natural fibre has survived the passage of time. Construction methods seemed quite different from modern techniques and we had to experiment quite a bit to achieve a similar look.

Following a lot of research into various modern yarn sources and practising with vegetable dyes like indigo (blue) and madder (red) on several types of natural fibres, a combination of silk and wool in various thicknesses, used singly, or in warps of up to 16 strands, were used in different parts of the work. Most of the silk used was dyed either with vegetable dyes (mainly the blue) or chemical dyes (mainly the red but some blue). Some wool yarns were purchased already dyed.

The wooden moulds forming the foundation of both sets of tassels were hand-turned in Dorset, to our specification, based on measurements from the originals.

1. Structure of Tassel



1. Cord
2. Top button
3. Body
4. Skirt

All four tassels and the Parliamentary fringe incorporated bullion twist elements. Bullion is the name given to the technique of twisting up yarn so tightly that it spins back on itself to form loops as skirts or fringes are being made. It is very difficult to make evenly and 6 metres of twisted yarn only makes about 5cms of 3.5cm deep fringe. A battery powered electric drill was used to twist the many metres needed.

2. Tassels

a. Parliamentary

(i) **Cord** Formed of a four strand round plait, with 2 warps red and 2 warps blue, each warp of 16 mixed wool and silk strands. Finished length approx. 1 metre.

(ii) **Top button** Wrapped with 2 strands of red 2 ply wool with needle lace blue silk netting over.

(iii) **Body** 4.5cm deep wooden mould covered with vertically striped fine bullion twists in red and blue. Each bullion made of twisted warps, each with up to 16 mixed silk and wool strands. Needle lace blue silk netting over.

(iv) **Skirt** Alternate stripes of red and blue fine bullion twists as on body. Skirt 6cm long.

b. Royalist

(i) **Cord** Formed of a four strand round plait with 2 warps red, 1 warp white and 1 warp blue, each warp of 16 mixed silk and wool strands. Finished length approx. 1 metre.

(ii) **Top domed mould** Clock wrapped with stripes of red, blue and white wool and silk.

(iii) **Body** 6.5cm deep wooden mould covered with red and white vertically striped bullion twists of medium weight, each with up to 18 mixed wool and silk strands. Macrame style knotted net of blue linen over.

(iv) **Skirt** Alternate stripes of red and white medium bullion twists as on body. Skirt 8cm long.

3. Fringes

Both fringes were made in sections on a narrow wire frame, free machine stitched at the top edges before being bound in bias tape and hand stitched onto the sides of the painted banners.

a. Parliamentary

Alternate bands of red and blue fine bullion twists, each made of up to 16 mixed silk and wool strands. Fringe is 4cm deep and approx. 1.5 metres long.

b. Royalist

This fringe was plain wrapped rather than bullion twisted. The colour was mainly red but with quite a lot of white strands. The warp was made of about 20 strands of mixed wool and silk, and was cut along the bottom, looped edge after being stitched onto the banner. Fringe is 4cm deep and approx. 1.5 metres long.

Construction of the Standards

1. The main fabric was interlined with domette to give support to and soften the look of the standard.
2. Three sides of the main fabric were hemmed to the bias tape holding the fringing.
3. Three sides of the backing fabric were hemmed to the bias tape holding the fringing.
4. Three loops were made from the main fabric and the backing fabric (with the addition of some extra Markal stick paint). These were attached to the free, fringeless side, to enable the standard to be hung.

Suppliers

Whaleys of Bradford

Main fabric - white furnishing satin
Backing - heavy calico
Interlining - domette, cotton, natural

Texere

Cream 1 ply silk schappe
Cream 1 ply silk tussah
Cream 4 ply silk tussah
Natural slub 4 ply silk tussah

Yeoman Yarns Ltd.

Bourette, colour 9 Natural, 4 ply silk thread
Polo, colour 1 Bordo, 1 ply merino thread
Polo, colour 4 Jeans, 1 ply merino thread
Polo, colour 27 Cream, 1 ply merino thread

Kemtex

Kenanthrol dyes (acid milling)

Wild Fibres

Dyes - madder extract
Chemicals - aluminium acetate, calcium carbonate (chalk),
soda ash

Art Van Go

Indigo starter pack
Markal paintstiks
Freezer paper

Colour Craft

Fabrico fabric pens

Project Members

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