

Highlights Release

Opus Anglicanum: Masterpieces of English Medieval Embroidery

Support generously provided by The Ruddock Foundation for the Arts

1 October 2016 – 5 February 2017

vam.ac.uk/opus | [#OpusAnglicanum](https://twitter.com/OpusAnglicanum)

The Syon Cope, 1310-20



One of the treasures from the V&A's collection, the Syon Cope (a semi-circular cloak worn during church ceremonies) depicts scenes including The Virgin's Death, Funeral, Assumption and Coronation. It is unique within surviving opus anglicanum, as its background is not

worked in metal thread, but in green and red silks, perhaps to imitate a costly woven textile. However, gilded silver thread has been used extensively for garments and other details, while the body of the crucified Christ stands out in contrasting silver thread. A kneeling figure, possibly the donor, appears on the front.

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Jesse Cope (detail), ca. 1310-25



This cope depicts the popular subject of the Tree of Jesse. It shows the sleeping prophet Jesse, from whom grows a golden vine. Within the scrolls of the vine are the ancestors of Christ, including King David playing his harp. The protective vine leaves and grapes refer to Christ's claim in the gospels to be the 'True Vine'.

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Steeple Aston Cope (detail), 1310-40



The gold and silk embroidery of this cope survives today as it was cut up and reassembled as altar furnishings. Its precious materials and skilled workmanship suggest that the cope was created for a wealthy patron, and was later passed on to the small parish church of Steeple Aston, where it was recorded in 1844 as ‘a very valuable relic of the olden time’. The detail here depicts a winged angel on horseback playing a lute – it is considered to be the earliest depiction of a lute in medieval art.

© The Rector and Churchwardens of St Peter, Steeple Aston (Oxfordshire), on loan to the V&A

The De Lisle Psalter (detail), ca. 1320



This depiction of the Virgin and Child within an architectural framework has close links to paintings on panel and in stained glass of the period. The artist, who is known as the ‘Madonna Master’, has been linked to paintings on the bishop’s throne at Westminster Abbey. He may also have designed embroideries.

© The British Library Board, Arundel 83

The Toledo Cope, 1320-30



This cope is a particularly rich example of opus anglicanum, produced at a time when the artform had reached its zenith in medieval Europe. The cope is populated with foliage, grotesques, masks and birds, while its iconography focuses on the Virgin Mary, as well as apostles and saints, many of whom were particularly venerated in England. Most of the saints are shown trampling on their tormentors, except for St John, who is shown with his symbol, the eagle.

© Toledo, Tesoro de la Catedral, Museo de Tapices y Textiles de la Catedral

Part of a horse trapper probably made for Edward III's Court (detail), 1330-40

© Paris, Musée de Cluny



This is one of the largest surviving fragments of what was once a magnificent heraldic covering for a horse. It shows the English royal arms, and was probably made for King Edward III. It is possible that it was made for his appearance at the Imperial Diet (general assembly) of the Holy Roman Emperor Louis IV at Coblenz in 1338.

The Chichester-Constable Chasuble, ca. 1335-45

© Metropolitan Museum of Art



This rich red silk velvet chasuble was made during the period when England produced its most ambitious and complex embroideries. It was once lavishly decorated with seed pearls and is intricately embroidered with saints and scenes depicting the life of the Virgin Mary, including The Annunciation.

The Dunstable Swan Jewel, ca. 1400

© British Museum



This small jewel was excavated on the site of the Dominican friary at Dunstable in Bedfordshire. It is a livery badge, and would have been attached to clothing using the hinged pin at the rear. The chained swan was a device used by a number of Lancastrians who married daughters of the Bohun family, which traced its lineage back to the mythical Swan Knight.

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- The exhibition *Opus Anglicanum: Masterpieces of English Medieval Embroidery* runs from 1 October 2016 - 5 February 2017. Tickets will go on sale in July 2016. Admission £12 (concessions available). V&A Members go free. Advance booking is advised – this can be done in person at the V&A; online at vam.ac.uk/opus; or by calling 0800 912 6961 (booking fee applies).
- It is curated by Clare Browne and Glyn Davies with consultant curator Prof. M.A. Michael, Academic Director, Christie's Education, London and Research Fellow, School of Culture and Creative Arts, University of Glasgow.

- The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication co-published by the V&A and Yale University Press. The book is a complete introduction to the design, production and use of luxury embroideries in medieval England.
- There will be a number of embroidery-focused events, short courses and practical workshops to complement the exhibition during its run.
- The V&A holds the world's largest collection of medieval English embroidery, both on display in the Museum's Medieval and Renaissance Galleries and available for study by appointment at the Clothworkers' Centre housed in Kensington Olympia.

For further PRESS information about *Opus Anglicanum: Masterpieces of English Medieval Embroidery* please contact Laura Mitchell in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2503 or email l.mitchell@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of press images are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk



victoriaandalbertmuseum



@V_and_A



@vamuseum