The ceremonial dress and accoutrements of the Most Noble Order of the Garter - part 1

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The most distinctive of the various accoutrements of the Knights of the Garter is the Collar. This is worn on Collar days with the *George* since the time of King Henry VII. This is composed of alternate gold knots and 26 enamelled blue garters enclosing red roses. In King Henry VIII's decree the roses were double roses, red and white, and roses alternated with gold knots, though this apparently did not survive him. However, a similar design was worn by Queen Victoria. The combined weight is 30 oz troy in pure gold, though King Charles II's collar weighed 35½ oz.

The emblem of the Order, the Garter, is a blue ribbon, worn around the calf by men. Queen Anne wore the Garter on her left arm, setting the style for ladies. Later ladies have worn the garter nearer the elbow than the shoulder.

This garter, bearing the famous legend HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE ("Shame on him who thinks evil of this") was, by tradition, inspired by a garter dropped by Joan, Countess of Salisbury, at a ball in Calais, which the King retrieved and bound around his own leg.

The Garter is made of deep blue velvet about 1" wide, edged with gold, and letters of pure sheet gold.

The Garters were originally light blue, possibly of silk, and embroidered in gold with the motto. Those presented to foreign rulers, and to princes, were often jewel-encrusted and heavily gold mounted. King Charles II's garter contained 250 diamonds. No private insignia has been made since before the Second World War.

As late as the sixteenth century garters were not always returned to the Sovereign. Today the garter, collar and George are returned to the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood. The badge and star are returned to the Sovereign personally by the nearest male relative of the dead knight. In rare cases the Sovereign has permitted the family to retain some insignia.

The George, which is worn suspended from the Collar, is an enamelled and gold model of St George on horseback, spearing the Dragon, which is lying underneath the horse's forefeet. The majority of representations show St George as a conventional Roman soldier.

A smaller badge, known as the Lesser George, is worn attached to a 4" blue riband or sash, which is worn over the left shoulder. The figure was often richly jewelled at the owner's expense, though not the figure worn on the collar. It is worn suspended from a chain or riband, generally of plain gold, often embellished with jewels or actually cut out of precious or semi-precious stones. The garter surrounding the figure is often similarly treated. Most are of the same design as the George, with St George despatching the dragon with his spear, in plain gold.

The riband was introduced by King Charles II, to take the place of a narrow blue ribbon hung round the neck and from which was suspended the Lesser George in earlier days, and as a substitute for the garter used from King Henry V to King Henry VIII. There is some evidence that the first riband was black, though it is certain that it has been blue since 1622. It was once narrower, broadening under the Stuarts.

The colour of the riband has varied over the years, the Stuarts having a light blue, the Hanoverians a dark blue. The colour was last altered in 1950 to kingfisher blue.

The riband passes across the body but not over the shoulder. It is buttoned to the waistcoat at the left armhole and at the right hip, where the Lesser George conceals the button.

White silk satin[1] ribbon knots are attached to each shoulder of the mantle. These are to support the collar, and were introduced in the seventeenth century. They are now in the form of a flat bow of wide (1½") white satin ribbon with vandyked ends.

A breast star, which is worn on full dress uniforms, court dress, morning coat, full evening dress coat, or dinner jacket, was introduced by King Charles I in 1629.

The Star comprised clusters of rays at the four cardinal points, larger than the intermediate clusters. The vertical axis was longer than the horizontal. At first, the star was embroidered, but fairly soon it was made of silver and enamel, and in some cases acquired diamonds and rubies. The Hanovarian style was squarer. In 1946 the original Stuart shape was re-introduced, though the Georgian pattern is still worn by Her Majesty on her mantle.

At Garter Ceremonies, the Knights and Ladies Companions of the Most Noble Order of the Garter wear mantles of the finest quality deep-blue silk velvet[2], with a lining of white taffeta[3]. These date from the time of King Henry VII, knights originally wearing fine blue woollen stuff[4], powdered with garters embroidered in silk and gold, and lined with miniver fur[5]. By the sixteenth century they were of velvet, lined with white silk- a "taffaty" by the seventeenth century. Some modern mantles are of nylon, which is considerably less weighty than the older pure silk velvet examples. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the mantle was slit down the right hand side.

Ladies of the Garter wore robes decorated with embroidered garters and fur lined.

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[1]Satin, with a glossy surface and dull back, is a closely-woven silk fabric showing much of the warp. Satinette, or satinet, is of a cotton warp, and woollen weft.

[2]Velvet, the most elaborate of the plain weaves traditionally made from silk, has a short plush pile surface, and is used for the gowns of some office-holders, and for the hats of some doctors. Velveteen is a cotton or mixed cotton and silk imitation.

[3]Also called tabby, taffeta weave, linen weave, cloth weave, checker weave and so on. There is no clearly discernible right or wrong side. It includes batiste, billiard cloth, calico, cambric, canvas, chintz, gauze, grosgrain, handkerchief linen, hessian, holland, lawn, muslin, panama, poplin, and most shirting, taffeta. Some 80% of all fabrics made are plain weave. It is strong and durable, but soils most readily of the principal weaves.

[4]Stuff is a material which does not contain silk or silk-like fibres in its composition.

[5]Ermine for the Sovereign.

From King Edward VI to King Charles I the mantle was purple, but a "rich celestial blue" was adopted c.1637. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the colour varied, from ultramarine, pale greenish-blue, royal blue, sky-colour, dark blue, and (at least in a written description) violet.

The Sovereign's mantle (and those of princes) have had a train since at least as early as King Charles II, whose train was two yards long. His mantle contained some 20 yards of velvet, compared with 15 yards for a Knight Companion (and another 15 yards of white lining taffeta).

On the left breast of the mantle is a badge comprising a white shield of St George Cross, surrounded by a garter with the motto, all embroidered in gold, silver and silk. In the past this was often embellished with gold plate, jewels and pearls. Her Majesty does not wear the badge, but a Georgian pattern star, as did King George V and King George VI.

The Officers of the Order, Garter King of Arms, Registrar, Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, and the Secretary all wear crimson mantles, lined with white taffeta adorned on the left shoulder with the shield of St George (like the knights). The Prelate and Chancellor each wear blue velvet mantles.

After the Restoration officials wore murrey velvet mantles, lined with white sarcenet. In 1673 these were changed to purple, lined with white taffeta. The garter was embroidered on the right rather than the left breast, except for the Chancellor, who had the style of the knights. The Officers' mantles were of scarlet after King Charles II. The Secretary, only relatively recently created, has a similar robe, with a St George's shield of arms without the surrounding garetr embroidered on the left side. The Chancellor's mantle is not now worn.

The mantle is fastened by two long and imposing blue and gold cords, which are attached to the front of the neck. These end in massive tassels. These are variously described as cordons, robe-strings, or laces, and date from the Restoration at the latest. A gold hook and eye at the neck can reinforce the cords.

Originally a blue woollen stuff hood with liripipe was worn, powdered with garters embroidered in silk and gold. A new design was introduced by King Henry VIII, based on the fifteenth century chaperon. This was a circular roll around the head with a flopping crown and a liripipe either twisted around the head or left hanging down.

By the late sixteenth century the hat was worn over the right shoulder, the liripipe in the form of a flat streamer coming down the front of the body and passing underneath the girdle.

In the seventeenth century the padded ring became smaller, the liripipe streamer narrower, and either passing behind or looped around the girdle or sword belt. This was crimson velvet, and lined with white silk, matching the surcoat.

This residual crimson or red velvet casting hood, lined with white taffeta, is worn by Knights and Ladies, attached to the right shoulder of the mantle. The Officers wore no hoods.

The hat began as a fairly low soft crowned cap of black velvet decorated with white feathers set not to come above the top of the crown. Under King Henry VII it was a blue

velvet hat. The present design dates from 1556, and by the time of King Charles II a narrow brimmed hat with a stiff pleated crown, and of black velvet, and a towerign plume of white ostrich and black heron's feathers was worn. The King's hat was 6" high, with a plume about twice that height. Jewelled bands and brooches were often added. By the early nineteenth century the present hat was in use, with only three plumes.

The Companions now wear a flat black velvet cap, lined with white. The modern hat has a wide brim, and is lined with white taffeta, and bears a plume consisting of a white ostrich feather and a tuft of black heron's feathers in the centre. The plume was formerly fastened with a diamond buckle, now a badge.