



FIG. 33 Workshop associated with 'Master John', portrait of Edward VI, c.1547, oil on panel. The young king is shown standing beneath a cloth of estate, bordered with pearls, on a richly coloured Eastern carpet; behind him is a chair with lions' feet, with a fringe of silk and tasselled cushions. National Portrait Gallery, London.

FIG. 34 Hans Eworth (d. 1574), double portrait of Philip II of Spain and Mary I, 1558, oil on panel. Philip stands beside an embroidered chair of estate, while Mary is seated on an identical chair, on a large cushion; over each of them hangs a cloth of estate of cloth of gold. A bulky cushion fills the window sill. Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire.



had been embroidered, the excess canvas of such slips would have been cut away, allowing the motif to be applied to various types of furnishing. This was a manageable way for domestic embroiderers to create attractive interior textiles, allowing them to work, a piece at a time, on a small embroidery frame. It was also a forgiving and cost-effective technique, allowing for easy correction and repurposing. The group of slips in the V&A were not cut out, but survive as wonderful material evidence of the type of embroidery undertaken by the noblewomen of the court. They survive with two notes, relating to their original commission by Anne Fitzwilliam (née Sidney; 1528–1602), the wife of Sir William Fitzwilliam (1526–1599), who, as governor of Fotheringhay Castle, presided over the execution of Mary Queen of Scots.¹⁶⁴ Anne was also the aunt of our Mary, Le Moyne's 'Madame de Sidney'.¹⁶⁵

Le Moyne's motifs may well have inspired or served as patterns for slips worked by Bess of Hardwick, which survive on cushions, hangings and chairs at Hardwick Hall (fig. 47). Those on the chairs and canopy of the High Great Chamber have been reapplied to much later textiles, but the motifs themselves date from Bess's time.¹⁶⁶ They are embroidered slips, much like Anne Fitzwilliam's, but have been taken to the next step – cut out, and applied to rich furnishing velvets.¹⁶⁷ A similar aesthetic can be seen on the canopy depicted in a painting of Elizabeth I being carried in procession (fig. 48).

The same motifs can be found on the Bacton Altar Cloth.¹⁶⁸ Dating from around 1600, this embroidered textile served as an altar cloth for the small church of St Faith in Bacton, Herefordshire. The T-shaped cloth shows evidence of pattern cutting, and is pieced together in a way that suggests it was formerly an item of dress. It is made of an Italian white ribbed silk, with an additional weft of silver strip – a cloth known as 'silver chamblet' at the time it was made. The presence of silver marks it out as a court textile, as silver was reserved for the rank of lord or lady and above.¹⁶⁹ It features professionally embroidered botanical motifs in gold, silver and coloured silk, whose closest known patterns are to be found in the pages of Le Moyne's *La clef des champs* – pea-pods, roses, foxgloves, strawberries, cornflowers, acorns, honeysuckle, thistles, borage, heartsease and others. The motifs are wrought in an incredibly uniform seed-stitch, with plied

FIG. 47 (BELOW) Cushion cover, late 16th century, needlework slips on velvet, probably worked (or at least commissioned) by Bess of Hardwick. Hardwick Hall (National Trust), inv. no. T/192.

FIG. 48 (OPPOSITE) Unknown Anglo-Netherlandish artist (attrib. Robert Peake the elder (1551–1619)), the so-called 'Procession Portrait' of Elizabeth I, c.1600–03, oil on canvas. The painting has variously been seen as a procession of the Knights of the Garter and as the procession to the wedding of Anne Russell in 1600. The canopy over the queen's chair is decorated with embroidered slips. Sherborne Castle, Dorset.





textiles were of high status is confirmed by a similar example that survives in the Louvre, with the monogram of the French king, Henri II (1519–1559).

As queen, Elizabeth conspicuously displayed her father's possessions, and highlighted her lineage and history. When Francis, Duke of Anjou and Alençon (1555–1584), arrived on his last visit to England to court Elizabeth in late October 1581, she supervised the décor and furnishings of his chamber at Richmond herself. She had a 'crimson bed' placed within the chamber and suggested that the duke might recognise it.⁵⁰ It has been suggested that this was the so-called 'Alençon bed', referred to in the 1547 Inventory as the 'bedde of allaunson' and described as having a celure, tester and counterpoint 'richely embrowdered upon Crimsen vellat'.⁵¹ This bed was in Anne Boleyn's chamber for Elizabeth's birth in September 1533, when it was already more than a hundred years old, for it had been seized by John of Lancaster, in part payment of the ransom for the second Duke of Alençon in 1424.⁵² Thus the bed was a reference to Elizabeth's own past and to the history of the Duchy of Alençon, but its use for Francis's visit may have hinted at a more intimate connection, and a form of delicate flirtation on Elizabeth's part. Another contender for identification with the 'crimson bed' might be the bed given by the duke's grandfather King Francis I

to Elizabeth's father, Henry, during his visit to France in 1532. On that occasion, Francis I 'gave the English King a suite of bed furniture, wrought throughout with pearls on crimson velvet, which he purchased lately in Paris of an Italian merchant for 10,000 golden crowns'.⁵³

Elizabeth's own bed was apparently markedly different from those of her forebears, as witnessed by a visitor to Windsor Castle. A chamber there contained 'the Royal beds of Henry VII and his Queen, of Edward VI, of Henry VIII, and of Anne Bullen, all of them eleven feet square and covered with quilts shining with gold and silver; Queen Elizabeth's bed', on the other hand, featured a 'curious covering of embroidery, but not quite so long or large as the others'. The same visitor also noted a 'cushion most curiously wrought by Queen Elizabeth's own hands'.⁵⁴ One wonders if the 'curious' embroidery that attracted his interest was the result of the fashion for emblems and symbols that captivated the late Elizabethan court, or even the kinds of botanical motif that are so distinctive of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (fig. 70), such as those seen on the Bacton Altar Cloth. It certainly suggests that the embroidery of Elizabeth's court was unlike any her visitor had seen before, and that – in some aspects, at least – personal taste or fashion was allowed to encroach upon her bedchamber.

FIG. 67 (OPPOSITE) Detail of arabesque decoration on a valance, mid-16th century London, dark red velvet with cutwork of cloth of gold and gold embroidery (see fig. 119). Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 4513-1858.

FIG. 68 Tester, c.1550, school of Fontainebleau, France, satin cutwork on silk satin embroidered in silk thread. The strapwork design frames musical, floral and animal motifs in the grotesque style. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.405-1980.





FIG. 86 Beating and combing wool. Isaac Claesz van Swanenburg (1537–1614), *Het ploten en kammen*, 1594–6, oil on panel. In the foreground the shearers are cutting the wool from sheepskin (though fleece was often shorn from live flocks, too); behind, the fleeces are being beaten, and to the left the men are using carders to comb the fibres. Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden.

stages, many of which became specialised professions. *The young man's looking-glass*, a mid-seventeenth-century poem by Richard Watts, lists some of them: the parter (who 'culled' the finer from the coarser wool), dyer, oiler, mixer, carder (who combed the fleece to separate the fibres), spinster (who spun the yarn), weaver, brayer (who scoured the cloth to remove dirt), burler (who picked out knots), fuller (who trampled or beat the cloth to knit the weave more tightly together), rower (who raised the nap of the cloth), shearman (who cut the nap for a smooth finish), and drawer (who mended the holes in the cloth).³

The Tudor spinster (or 'spinner' if a man, though traditionally spinning was a woman's preserve) spun by hand, using a spindle, weighted by a 'whorl', and a distaff; an alternative, mechanised method involved a great wheel, known as a 'walking wheel', at which she might walk 30 miles a day.⁴ Hand-spinning produced the finest yarn. The distaff, a straight stick with prongs at the top, held the carded but unspun wool (fig. 85). The spinster teased out the wool and, using her fingers and the turning spindle (which was weighted down and given impetus in its revolutions by the whorl), she spun a thread of yarn, which she periodically wrapped around the spindle to keep it in order.⁵ Spinning too fast created a weak yarn; if the spinning was too slow or irregular, the result was lumpy, thick yarn. The quality of the yarn was defined by its fineness, which was measured by the length of yarn spun from a pound weight of wool.⁶ In the year 1550, over 11 million pounds of English wool were spun into yarn, for which there was a demand at home and abroad.⁷

A series of paintings from the mid-1590s, by Isaac Claesz van Swanenburg (1537–1614), illustrates the industrialised process of woollen-cloth production. The paintings are in the collection of the Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden in the Netherlands, a city to which many Flemish refugees fled to escape the religious persecution of Spanish Habsburg rule. Van Swanenburg was mayor of Leiden and clearly felt pride in the industry of his city – the paintings were commissioned to hang in the meeting room of the cloth guild.⁸ They show the raw fleece being beaten or 'broken' to remove any remaining dirt and matting (fig. 86). In England the process was called 'willeying', as willow branches were often used to beat the fleece, which was then carded or combed to untangle the fibres. The fleece was spun into yarn, then woven into cloth (fig. 87). The next process,



FIG. 128 Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues (c.1533–1588), studies of insects and shells, 1585, watercolour, from an album on which Le Moyne based stylised woodcuts published in *La clef des champs* (1586). British Museum, London, 1962,0714.1.2.

FIG. 129 Embroidery pattern, 1600–25, England, linen canvas with drawings of animal motifs; the butterfly is taken from Le Moyne's watercolour drawing (see fig. 128). Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.88-1925.

