Shirt

Place of origin: England (made)
Date: ca. 1540 (made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown
Materials and Techniques: Linen, linen thread, silk thread; hand-woven, hand-embroidered, hand-sewn
Museum number: T.112-1972
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

Until the mid 20th century a man's shirt was an item of underwear. However, those parts of it exposed when the wearer was fully dressed were often embellished. In this example, the collar and cuffs are embroidered in a pattern of stylised columbine and leaves in cross stitch. The embroidery continues on the seams of the sleeves and shirt body, even though these would not be seen. Collars and cuffs decorated in a similar way can be seen in portraits of men by Hans Holbein between 1535 and 1555.

Descriptive line
Shirt of embroidered linen with silk, made in England, ca. 1540

Physical description
Shirt of embroidered linen with silk. Made of white fine lawn and embroidered with blue silk. At the neck and cuffs are cross stitches and the edges of the neck and cuff frills are whipped in overcast stitches. The side, shoulder and arm seams are worked in interlaced buttonhole stitches with additional ornamentation in cross and back stitches.

The deep, two inch, neck piece and the cuff frills are decorated with an angular, interlaced stem bearing columbine flowers and leaves. Around the wrists are lines of rope in an interlace pattern and the narrow neck frill is patterned with isolated leaf motifs. The seams are decorated with tiny Renaissance motifs.

The main body of the shirt is made from two flat panels cut across the width of the fabric with the selvedges forming the hem. A section, nine inches deep and four inches wide, is cut from the top of each side to take the sleeves, which are set-in square. A gusset is formed by a piece of the main shirt cut out on the diagonal to form an triangle under the arm. The top edges of the two main panels are seamed for about two inches and the remainder is slightly gathered and whipped onto the straight neck band. The front panel is slit open for about ten inches and is secured by three pairs of plaited tie-strings attached to the neck band. The lower 13.5 inches of the side seams are left open. The straight, full sleeves are tightly gathered onto narrow wrist bands.

Dimensions
Length: 35.25 in centre back, Length: 89.8 cm centre back, Width: in 27.75, Width: 70.5 cm, Length: 22 in sleeve, Length: 60 cm sleeve

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URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O115767/shirt-unknown/