

A NATION CELEBRATES THE MARRIAGE OF  
HRH PRINCESS ELIZABETH  
AND LT PHILIP MOUNTBATTEN RN

20 NOVEMBER 1947

HELLO!  
COMMEMORATES THE ROYAL  
GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY



## TEN THOUSAND PEARLS FOR THE FAIRYTALE WEDDING DRESS

**A**s the day of the wedding drew closer, speculation about Princess Elizabeth's choice of dress reached fever pitch, with nearly every newspaper and magazine carrying sketches of what they thought would be the chosen design.

This was not just any wedding dress – it had to be suitable for an attractive and fashion-conscious 21-year-old *and* befit a future queen. It needed to be symbolic as well as flattering and make a dazzling impact as the Princess walked through Westminster Abbey, watched not only by the guests, but by the film cameras that were allowed to record some of the royal wedding for the first time.

Lastly, given the terrible state of the economy after the war, the Palace had to be careful not to upset public opinion.

The choice of Norman Hartnell as dress designer was more or less taken for granted. The wedding had to reflect British craftsmanship at its best, and Hartnell was one of the leading designers of his day. More importantly, he was credited with transforming the image of Queen Elizabeth (who is now our Queen Mother) with a whole series of stunning dresses made for her tour of France in 1938. Sifting through pictures in the royal archives, Hartnell came across the paintings of a youthful Queen Victoria dressed in crinolines. Using these as his inspiration, the designer created the Queen's feminine and very flattering look that stunned Paris on this pre-war tour.

It is said that Hartnell's design for the Princess' ivory Duchesse satin wedding dress was inspired by the paintings of Botticelli. The fitted bodice, long, tight sleeves and full falling skirt were all cut on classic lines. The heart-shaped neckline was elaborately embroidered with a floral design made from seed pearls and crystals.

The hand-embroidered designs were lavish, and Hartnell used to delight in telling the story of one of his staff who, on the way home from America, when asked by Customs whether he had anything to declare replied, "Yes, 10,000 pearls for the wedding dress of Princess Elizabeth."

Elizabeth was born Princess Elizabeth of York, and the House of York's white roses were embroidered on the skirt using the pearls and surrounded by ears of corn made out of



Princess Elizabeth chose the above sketch for her wedding dress from a dozen designs sent to the Palace. The intricate embroidery makes the dress seem elaborate, however the design was actually very simple: a tight-fitting bodice, long sleeves, sweetheart neckline and full skirt. Norman Hartnell (right) had designed Elizabeth's bridesmaid's dress for the wedding of the Duke of Gloucester in 1935 and then went on to design her Coronation gown in 1953





**'Ordinary men and women send in their own clothing coupons to help the bride'**

Palace was nervous that in the disastrous economic climate of 1947, there would be criticism of the amount of money spent on the dress – £1,200, some £23,000 in today's prices (The *Daily Express* had, after all, carried the headline "Austerity Wedding for Elizabeth".) To offset criticism, royal advisers announced that the Princess had been granted a few extra clothing coupons to help, and it is touching to note the number of ordinary men and women who sent in their coupons to assist the bride. It was also announced that material stored away by Elizabeth's mother and grandmother Queen Mary had been used on the dress.

An even more sensitive issue in those days of "Buy British" was where the material for the dress had come from. Questions were raised in Parliament and the Prime Minister Clement Attlee was obliged to get involved. Writing to the King's Private Secretary Alan Lascelles, Mr Attlee asked if there was any truth in the rumour that foreign silk had been used in the wedding dress. An exasperated Lascelles wrote back: "The wedding dress contains silk from Chinese silk worms but woven in Scotland and Kent. The wedding train contains silk produced by Kentish silk worms and woven in London. The going-away dress contains four or five yards of Lyons silk which was not specially imported but was part of the stock specially held by the dressmaker (Norman Hartnell) under permit."

Looking on from a distance of 50 years it hardly seems important whether the silk worms came from Kent, China, Lyons or Timbuktu, but to a country that was still recovering from the horrors of war, it was vital that recent enemies were not benefiting in even the slightest way. Norman

crystals and oat-shaped pearls. Finally, garlands of roses and wheat above a border of orange blossom and star flowers were embroidered around the hem.

To create an impact on the long walk through Westminster Abbey, Hartnell designed a 15ft full court train made of transparent ivory silk tulle. This was attached at the shoulders and was edged with satin flowers. It echoed the roses, wheat and star flowers design of the dress and it also featured the same pearl and crystal embroidery.

The whole outfit took a team of

women seven weeks to sew the different patterns together. They worked in a studio shuttered away from prying eyes behind blackout curtains. As a special thank you Elizabeth invited a group of them to Westminster Abbey as her personal guests on the wedding day. It was probably also to thank them for their discretion since, despite constant attempts by the press to sneak a preview of the dress, the actual design was kept secret until the big day.

In common with other royal brides, Elizabeth did not wear her veil – made of crisp white tulle – down on the

journey to the Abbey since it would obscure her from the thousands of people who desperately wanted to catch a glimpse of the radiant-looking bride.

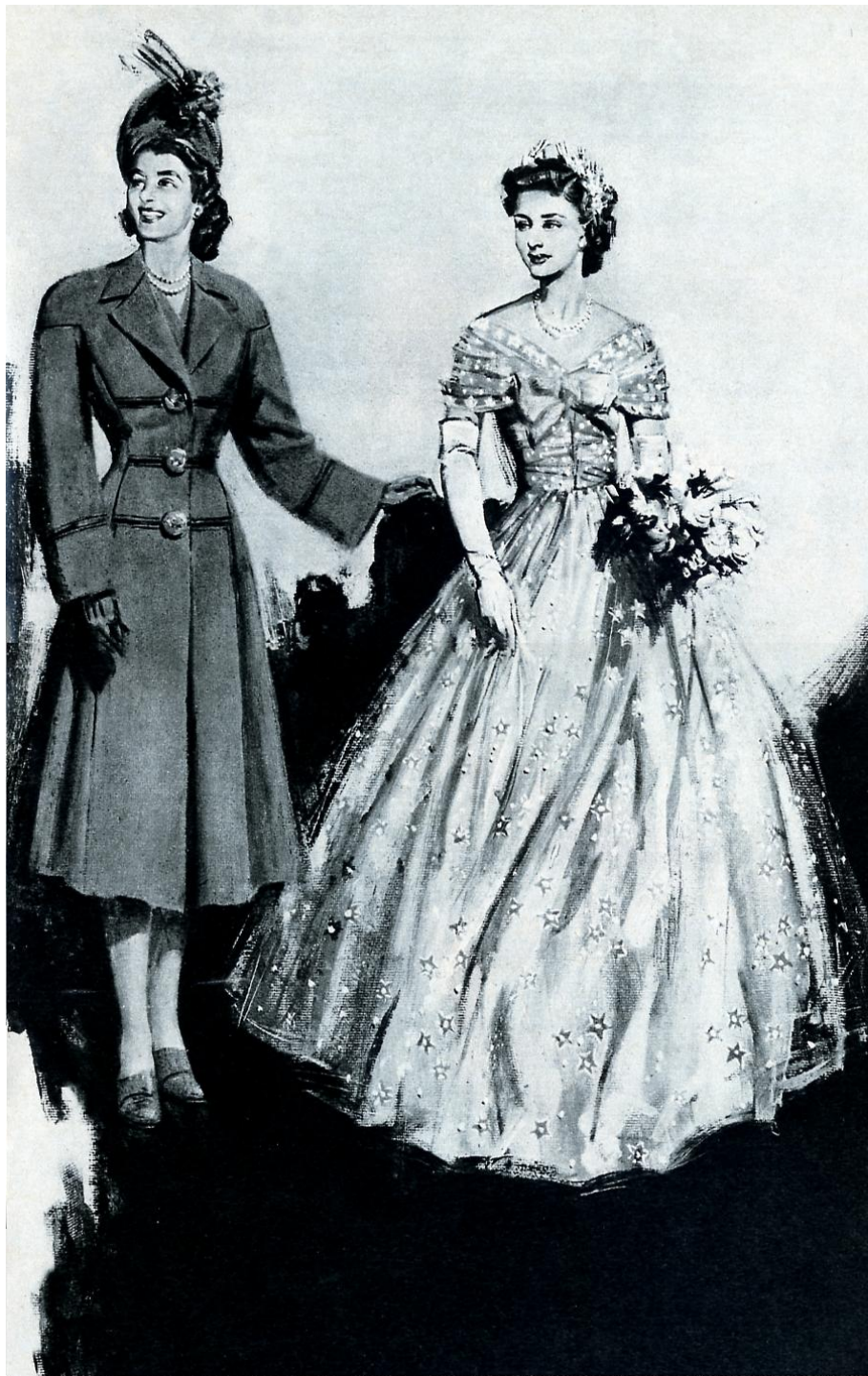
To complete the ensemble, the Princess wore ivory Duchesse satin shoes designed by H & M Rayne. At the time they were officially described as "one piece, embracing the waist of the foot, with reverse folds on the high instep strap and across the front". They were finished off with a silver buckle studded with small pearls.

The effect of the whole ensemble was stunning but, nevertheless, the



Elaborate measures were taken in order to keep the dress design a secret; Hartnell's studio manager even slept on a camp bed by the dress. Fabric for the bride's and bridesmaids' dresses (left). The bride's shoes were made specially by H & M Rayne (right) in ivory Duchesse satin to match the dress. They were finished with silver buckles which were studded with small pearls





Hartnell went one step further than the Palace and denied that Italian and Japanese worms were used, choosing instead only material that had been spun from politically friendly worms from Nationalist controlled China.

Hartnell went back to the Royal Archives to gain inspiration for the eight bridesmaids' dresses. Their ivory silk tulle outfits, which one of the girls declared "felt marvellous to wear", were based on pictures at Buckingham Palace by Winterhalter, Tuxen and Sir George Hayter. Each dress had a tight fitting bodice that was gathered down the front and covered with a large bow. Tulle was used around the shoulders and also in the dresses that were embroidered to match the Princess' train. The bridesmaids wore ivory satin ankle-strap sandals. They also had elbow-length white gloves, which looked very effective in the photographs of them helping Elizabeth to arrange her dress.

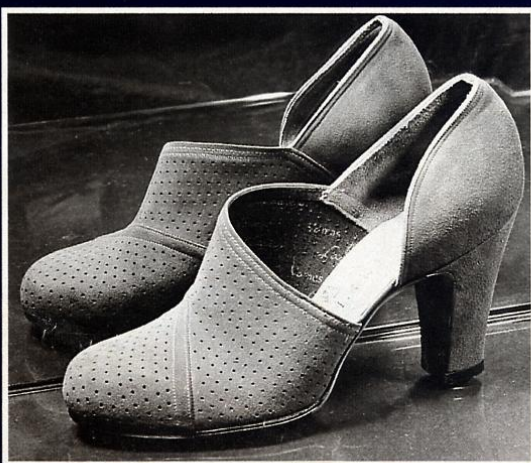
Instead of tiaras, the bridesmaids wore wreaths of miniature wheat-sheaves, lilies and London Pride moulded in white satin and lamé. These were made by Jac Ltd of London.

Besides designing the outfits for Westminster Abbey, Hartnell was also busy designing the Princess' going-away outfit – a simple dress with crossover bodice and panelled skirt, made appropriately enough in love-in-the-mist blue crepe. The matching coat was buttoned to the waist with a flattering flared skirt. A high bonnet beret was also made to match and was decorated with a natty ostrich-feather pompon.

The Princess' going-away outfit was complemented by mushroom-beige suede shoes which had a fashionable perforated pattern, and also by her gloves which were of the same colour.

Far from criticising the Princess for her lavish dresses, the public heaped praise on her for her style and sophistication.

The newspapers of the day reproduced the designs of the wedding dress and going-away outfit and before long they were being faithfully copied throughout the country.



**'The Princess is praised for her style and sophistication'**

Paintings hanging in Buckingham Palace inspired Hartnell's design for the bridesmaids' dresses (above on right). A romantic touch: he made up the bride's going-away outfit in love-in-the-mist blue crepe (above on left and right). Her mushroom suede shoes were made in a petite size four (left). Leaving for her honeymoon (right), Elizabeth wears a high bonnet-style hat which was made by the Danish milliner Aage Thaarup