

# Church Embroidery, Linens and Hangings



## The Present Regulations

Under the present Faculty Measure, introduced in 1992, all items of embroidery, such as altar frontals, banners, falls, kneelers, etc that are to be in Church for a period exceeding six months require Faculty permission.

The Chancellor exempts items deemed 'de minimis' (eg purificators). In doubt reference should be made to the Secretary of the DAC.

There are a number of possible ways to 'obtain' such an item:

- Purchase a catalogue item as advertised by one of a number of ecclesiastical furnishers: these can be expensive and not specifically related to the particular parish church in question.

The advantage is that members of the PCC etc are able to see exactly what they are purchasing. (There are firms who produce kneeler kits to a high standard of design).

Also consider that this may not necessarily be the cheapest option!

- Commission such an item from a professional firm, be it an individual with due training, or an ecclesiastical furnishers.
- Commission a properly trained person to create the design and supervise a parish group to undertake the actual process of manufacture; the Church's architect could be a useful 'starting point'. Remember it is no more expensive to 'work' a good design than a poor and inadequate one.
- A totally DIY project - this should only be considered if there are people with the necessary skills and competence in design and embroidery within the congregation. A warning: sadly many totally 'amateur' attempts leave the possible patron, the workers and worshippers dissatisfied with the final product.

### The Materials To Be Used:

Hand-embroidery is very fine and slow to work; machine embroidery quicker but still fine; applique work (eg for banners) is much bolder but holds the danger for an unwary worker using incompatible fabrics.

## Making a Faculty Application

Before commissioning an item or purchasing any materials consult the DAC.

A visit to the church may be necessary to ascertain the suitability of an item in a particular location. (eg a highly coloured banner adjacent to a Victorian stained glass window could be a disaster).

Consider how the item is to be mounted; a banner on a damp wall will soon deteriorate, a problem unlikely to be faced by an altar frontal.

Any embroidery will quickly collect dust and will not last beyond about 50 years unless shielded; glass framing is expensive, heavy and, unless non-reflective glass is used, reflections will hide the work.

If agreement in principle has been reached then proceed to prepare the design. In the first instance this should be a sketch scheme intimating the materials and colours of the finished article. The DAC may suggest changes to the design or question the use of certain emblems that can easily be incorporated at this stage.

The DAC will require, to be included in the Faculty application, photographs of the church and, in the case of banners, photographs of its proposed location. These need not be professional photographs as many people today own a digital camera that will provide adequate pictures.

Finally the 'artist' will have to prepare a full-size 'pattern' from which to work. The DAC visitor(s) will wish to see this before major expenditure in time and/or money is made and, maybe, have further consultation with the parish and artist.

Time spent on the design stage is time well spent as once the work has begun it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reverse any decision.

## The Vocabulary of Symbolism



Over the centuries the Christian Church has developed a 'vocabulary of symbolism' eg the four Evangelists.

<b>Matthew</b>	a winged man holding a book or scroll
<b>Mark</b>	a winged lion holding a book or scroll
<b>Luke</b>	a winged ox holding a book or scroll
<b>John</b>	an eagle holding a book or scroll

Any book on ecclesiastical embroidery will have a chapter devoted to this. An inexpensive valuable and authoritative booklet is "Saints, Signs and Symbols" by W Ellwood Post, previously published by SPCK.

The Church of England allows an artist total flexibility within that 'vocabulary' unlike the Orthodox Church for example, which lays down every detail of shape and colour.

For example an illustration of a mitre can take on a recognisable shape and the colour of the jewels is at the discretion of the artist.