

The Ceremonial Dress and Accoutrements of the Most Noble Order of the Garter

Part 2 - by Noel Cox, LLM(Hons)

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Today, a normal uniform or suit is worn beneath the mantle. The Officers of the Order all wore service or 3rd class Household uniform.

The surcoat was once a close-fitting tunic of wool, lined with fur and decorated with embroidered garters depending upon rank. The colour changed annually. In the sixteenth century the fabric became crimson velvet, lined with white silk. The embroidered garters were discontinued, and the surcoat was quite plain. In the seventeenth century the surcoat was simply cut, widening from the shoulders to the hem, with plain square fronts and hanging sleeves slit at the shoulder and down the front seam. The length varied from knee to mid-calf, and it was unfastened, secured at the waist by a girdle or sword belt. The surcoat (also called the gown or kirtle) died out towards the end of the nineteenth century and it is no longer worn.

The surcoat is now represented by a broad sash of crimson velvet lined and edged with white taffeta, and worn attached to the hood on the right shoulder over the mantle, and passing under it on the left side.

The white knee breeches of white satin are no longer worn. Introduced by King Charles II as trunk hose, they were of cloth of silver. These were a sort of short skirt with no division between the legs, and were worn over white silk drawers with white silk stockings sewn to them.

A doublet or vest of white satin was still worn at the beginning of the twentieth century. As with the surcoat, since the Second World War this is now no longer worn.

This was introduced by King Charles II, of cloth of silver, heavily trimmed with silver-gilt and silver bobbin-lace and silver buttons. It was short and skimpy, open in front from chest downwards and with elbow length sleeves slit down the front seam. It survived at least into the eighteenth century.

The white chamois leather shoes with red heels and white knots and rosettes were introduced by King Charles II, but are no longer worn.

The white kid gloves were introduced by King Charles II, but are no longer worn.

The plain cross-hilted sword in a crimson velvet scabbard, and similar girdle and hanger was introduced by King Charles II. These are no longer worn, and in the twentieth century a service sword is worn with uniform..

Every knight is required to display a Banner of his armorial bearings in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, together with a helmet and sword, a carved, painted and gilt crest, and an enamelled stall plate. The Banner is 5' (152 cm) square, and is made of silk or similar material, emblazoned in oil, and gold leaf.

The Chancellor wore a badge from at least the time of King Charles I, consisting of a rose surmounted by the garter. He also carried a Purse (for the Seal). The Prelate has a badge of St George and the dragon, surmounted by a mitre. Garter Principal King of Arms has a badge with royal and St George's arms within a garter surmounted by a crown, introduced by Queen Elizabeth I. This is worn from a gold chain. Black Rod has a badge comprising a garter knot within a garter. The Secretary has as his badge two gold pens in saltire surmounted by a red rose encircled by the Garter and ensigned by a royal crown. The Registrar has a badge of two crossed pens, the royal cypher, and crown.

A Black Rod is carried by the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod.

The Seal of the Order is carried by the Chancellor in a Purse.

The Kings of Arms have worn crowns from early times. From the time of King Charles I onwards this was of conventional leaves set on an engrailed rim. After 1720 the rim ceased to be engrailed. The Crown of Garter King of Arms, the herald of the Order, has been gold since before 1636, those of Clarenceaux and Norroy and Ulster are silver-gilt. Each bear the neck-verse (psalm 51, i): *miserere mei deus secundum magnam misericordiam tuam* ("After thy loving-kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me").

Kings of Arms also wear the collar of SS. This comprises the letter "S" in gold, linked by Tudor roses, with a joining clasp in the form of a portcullis. This collar was revived by King Henry VII to replace the Yorkist "Roses and the Sun" collar, and is believed to symbolise the House of Lancaster. It is believed the "S" may stand for "Seneschallus" (steward, after that office held by the Lancastrian Kings). However, it may stand for "Sanctus Spiritus".

By Tudor times at the latest the Kings of Arms bore long white staffs or staves, as did the Great Officers of State. Garter apparently had two. One (after 1522) was white, silver or gilded, and bearing a small banner of St George impaling the royal arms. This staff symbolised joy. The second was black, and had its own Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod. This staff symbolised punishment. By the end of the sixteenth century they were silver-gilded at both ends, and by the eighteenth century were of gold, as now. Other Kings of Arms bore white rods silvered, with a badge of a martinet.

In 1906 all Officers of Arms were granted a short ebony black baton, gilt mounted, surmounted by a badge emblematic of the particular office. In 1953 for the Coronation white staves with gilt metal handles and at the top a gilt coroneted blue dove were introduced. These are now used.

The Military Knights of Windsor have been attached to the Most Noble Order for many centuries. There were originally 26 Poor Knights, though the number sank to 13, and was raised to 18 after the Restoration. From the fifteenth century not necessarily knights. They were renamed in 1833.

The Military Knights wore a red mantle with the arms of St George, without a garter. Under Queen Elizabeth I the mantle was of blue or purple cloth, embroidered with the arms of St George on the left sleeve. Underneath was worn a gown or surcoat was of

red cloth. King Charles I reverted to red gowns in 1637. The old mantle was abolished 1833.

The old mantle and gown was replaced by a blue-faced scarlet coat with blue trousers with three 1¾" red stripes. This was worn with a black cocked hat with 8½" red and white swan's plume; epaulettes with St George's shield and badge of rank; garter buttons; blue cloak, lined scarlet, with cape but no sleeves.

The modern undress uniform of a military knight is a single-breasted dark blue frock coat, gilt buttons, embroidered St George's arms and badges of rank on shoulders, a blue forage cap with a scarlet band and trousers as above (blue, with three 1¾" red stripes).

A cross hilt, gilt mounted sword is worn with a black leather scabbard. A white patent leather shoulder belt 3" wide, with sword frog of the same material, is worn. The belt is fastened with a breast plate of gilt metal 4" by 3", with silver cut Garter Star and Crown mount. In the centre of the Star there is a St George's Cross within the Garter.

The Knights and Dames Companions of the Garter, and the Military Knights of Windsor, add greatly to pageantry in the United Kingdom. As a personal honour of the Queen, Australians and New Zealanders continue to receive the award, and it has always been greatly prized by its recipients. Current members include the Rt Hon Sir Ninian Stephen, KG AK GCMG GCVO KBE QC KStJ, Sir Edmund Hillary, KG ONZ KBE, and past members have included five Governors-General of Australia: the Rt Hon Sir Paul Hasluck, KG GCMG GCVO, Lord Casey, KG GCMG CH DSO MC PC, Viscount de L'Isle, VC KG GCMG GCVO PC, Field Marshal Viscount Slim, KG GCB GCMG GCVO GBE DSO MC, and HRH the Duke of Gloucester, KG KT KP GCMG GCVO PC. Only one New Zealand Governor-General has yet been appointed to the Order, the Rt Hon Sir Keith Holyoake, KG GCMG CH.