

A Life in the Archive: the Dress, Design  
and Identity of the London Couturier  
Norman Hartnell, 1921-1979.

[Redacted Copy]

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the University of  
Brighton for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

October 2011

Volume I

The University of Brighton

AHRC Funded

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## Abstract

The London couturier, Sir Norman Bishop Hartnell (1901-1979) is famous today for dressing Their Majesties Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother (1900-2002) and the current British Monarch, Elizabeth II (1926) from 1937 until his death in 1979. His legacy is understood to lie in the establishment of the fixed British royal style devised for Queen Elizabeth in 1937, still worn by Her Majesty the Queen today. Hartnell was, however, far more than a provider of dress to British royalty. Evidence in the form of bound volumes of international press cuttings extant in a private archive indicates that he commanded great respect as a couture fashion designer between 1923-1953. He was also the first British fashion designer to attempt to develop as an international fashion brand in the immediate post war period.

Neither Hartnell's production of two couture collections per year between 1923-1979 and ready-to-wear from 1963 nor his signature looks or house style, have been examined in-depth to date in terms of his legacy. This thesis unpicks Hartnell's work, closely analysing his sketched designs, fabric swatches, embroideries, couture and ready-to-wear garments extant in a vast, privately owned and relatively unknown archive. I suggest that the roots of this signature house style lies in the identity of the man, which is also scrutinised here, in particular, his sexuality and life-long cross-dressing. Hartnell's taste in overtly feminine styles is evident in his use of colour, fabric and embellishment and is present in his all his fashion work. This is rooted in his personal taste and the use of these signature elements in garments designed and made at his couture house for his own personal use. The major business decisions taken at his couture house between 1946-1979 will also be discussed in the context of his complex gendered identity and reputation as the royal couturier.

The research on the life and work of the London couturier Norman Hartnell undertaken for this PhD, probes through his vast, privately owned archive and collection of possessions, hidden from public view since 1985. This interdisciplinary investigation will track the relationship between Hartnell's identity, both the public professional 'face' of Hartnell and the impact of his private life, in the design work of Britain's most prominent couturier. Theoretical approaches to Hartnell's life and work include material culture approaches to

analysing these specific objects of couture and decorative art objects collected by him. Issues of self-presentation, performance and memory are addressed in order to unpick his personal choice in interior design as well as his wardrobe of normative masculine styles and his coded style of dressing, and his queer identity, using studio photographic portraits taken between 1928 and 1970. Oral histories recorded between 2006-2011 with those that worked with him and were close to him in life, offer unique insight into the working regime at the House of Hartnell and a further understanding of Hartnell's personality and character.

This research re-evaluates Hartnell's contribution to British couture in order to position him, and the design and production of couture at the House of Hartnell, at the centre of the finally emerging, growing body of research on London couture recently established by Breward, de la Haye and Erhman. This thesis addressed how the identity of a person can be read through what they leave behind and, in particular, what can be read of the celebrity couturier Norman Hartnell's identity through the residue of his life and work.

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## Acknowledgements

This doctoral thesis would not have been possible without generous funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council, for which I am very grateful. I also owe a debt of thanks for financial support to Dr. Paddy Maguire, Head of the School of Humanities, and to the Centre for Research & Development at the Faculty of Arts, who have also supported my research.

Most important thanks go to Claire Williams for her very generous access to her Godfather's Archive and personal effects, and for her constant hospitality, clean sheets, meals and good company, whilst I turned her parents' house, subsequently her home, over to my research project.

I would also like to thank my first supervisor, Professor Lou Taylor, for her unfailing support and wisdom throughout the past two decades as her student. Without her encouragement, enthusiasm and tutoring I would have never have undertaken yet alone achieved the academic record that I have to date. This doctoral thesis reflects, I hope, her passion for object based dress history study and everything she has taught me over the years. Thanks too to Dr. Louise Purbrick, my second supervisor, who is ever the straightforwardly clever and grounding voice of reason, and whose intellect and constant attention to detail has been immeasurably important to this thesis.

To Alice Hattrick, who as my paid research assistant in the 'field' helped me to trawl through the piles of 'stuff' in the attic and wardrobes of the Hartnell Archive house from which she helped create the catalogue of the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. She has lived through my PhD experience both as my daughter, sharing a home with me, but also as a fellow academic offering so much in terms of intellectual support and sensible suggestions. Norman Hartnell has been a feature of our family life since 2003, and my son, Tim Hattrick, lived through both my undergraduate and masters degrees with his eternal wit and gentle patience. Thank you both.

Thanks also to the staff at the V&A National Art Library, the V&A Archive of Art & Design, and Print & Drawings, and also to the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection at Kensington Palace.

With thanks to Nicola Keith at Pavilion Parade for technical support with my oral history project, and to (the soon to be Dr) Nicola Ashmore for invaluable help with formatting this thesis. And to all of my dear friends and colleagues who have supported me throughout in too many ways to list here, and who I love dearly and thank profusely, in no particular order: Dr Charlotte Nicklas, Dr Marie McGlouglin, Dr Yunah Lee, Dr Annebella Pollen, Anna Kett and Torunn Kjollberg. Thanks also to Chirstina Lindholm and Denise Gonyo, who began their PhD experience alongside me in 2007, and also to Dr Verity Clarkson for her wise words. Thank you to librarian Dr Monica Brewis for her continuing support and suggestions of useful texts and to the every cheerful administration staff in the office at the School of Humanities. Thanks must also go to Jill Seddon, Head of B (Hons) Decorative Arts & Craft, who supported me through a decade of illness to finally achieve my undergraduate degree in 2003. Thanks lastly to my new colleagues on the Hand Embroidery Degree at the Royal School of Needlework for their patience and support.

And to my dear parents – I know I was a ‘late starter’ in terms of my education, but hopefully I have made up for this now. Thank you for your continued support and for your pride in everything I do. And to my little Jack Russell, Harry, who has been my constant companion throughout the last months.

## Author's Declaration:

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, however, as this thesis builds upon dissertation research already undertaken for both my BA (Hons) Decorative Arts and Craft at the University of Brighton and dissertation research for her MA History of Design & Material Culture at the University of Brighton, on the couturier Norman Hartnell, several examples have been reproduced, however, these have been utilised differently within the context of this thesis.

Signed:

Dated:

# Chapter One

## The Identity of 'Britain's Most Famous Fashion Designer':<sup>1</sup> Historiography and Methodology.

### 1.1 Introduction

This research into the life and work of the London couturier Norman Hartnell (1901-1979) undertaken for this PhD, probes his vast, privately owned archive and collection of possessions, which have been hidden from public view since 1985.<sup>2</sup> This body of material, discovered in October 2005, contains the majority of what is left of the record of Hartnell's lost company and his personal effects. This has revealed itself as a dense, complex 'time-capsule', containing elements of every aspect of his private and working life. To date this archive has remained outside of the public domain and forms the basis of this thesis.

The enormity of the archive and collection as it was discovered was initially overwhelming and research was hindered by its almost total disorder (Figures 1.1 & 1.2). Detritus from old light fittings and air travel menus was found thrown together with original sketches or important personal and business paperwork. The collection includes over 200 objects of dress,<sup>3</sup> hundreds of watercolour fashion drawings of varying sizes, embroidery samples, photographs, bound volumes of press cuttings and paperwork relating to the business between the early 1920s and the 1980s. (Figures 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5). There are also many letters written to Hartnell from the British Royal women, for whom he designed social, State and private wardrobes from the late 1930s until his death in 1979. (Figure 1.6). Hartnell's private life and identity are reflected in everything from copies of his birth certificate to his death certificate, letters, photographs and his clothing, personal effects and decorative objects and furniture. (Figure 1.7).

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<sup>1</sup> Amy de la Haye described Norman Hartnell as 'Britain's most famous fashion designer', explaining that she believes that this reputation was established only after he had received acclaim in Paris for his collection of couture shown there in 1927. Amy de la Haye. Ed. Introduction. *The Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion 1947-1997*. (London: V&A Publications, 1997): 14.

<sup>2</sup> Further archive material pertaining to the House of Hartnell, including watercolour and pencil sketched designs, business paperwork and correspondence is held at Kensington Palace, Court Dress Collection, and the V&A Print and Drawings Study Room, London.

<sup>3</sup> The Hartnell-Mitchison Dress Collection has been photographed and catalogued by the author and forms part of Appendix 2 of this thesis.

This work, combined with my examination of archival material pertaining to other British couturiers, active alongside Hartnell, and now in national institutions such as the V&A Archive of Art and Design, has been incorporated into my teaching as I have undertaken doctoral research.<sup>4</sup> I have continued to be surprised at how undergraduates studying both fashion design and the history of fashion, know little or nothing about British fashion designers active before the 1980s. Only one of the twenty-five, third year students I taught on January 26<sup>th</sup> 2011 had heard of Norman Hartnell, and a student asked me at the end of the lecture why I thought this was.

This study will go some way to answering this student's question. It will argue for a reassessment of Hartnell's reputation, within the field of Fashion and Dress History studies. How did a fashion designer, world famous in his day for being at the centre of the internationally celebrated world of London couture, disappear from the history of fashion after his death in 1979, only to be brought back in part into public consciousness more recently in the event of exhibitions of royal dress held since 2005?<sup>5</sup> What has Hartnell been most remembered for in the field of Fashion History? Was his contribution to couture of lasting impact and value? The identity of the man and his work, about which little has been published as this research began, is under scrutiny here, and how this identity impacted his couture designing is of particular interest.

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<sup>4</sup> V&A Archive of Art and Design. Lachasse Ltd, Ladies Tailors. Dressmakers and Milliners: Business Records. AA 6-1989 Two stock books listing the collections season by season. Listed by stock number (which can be traced in the sales ledgers), description and name of model, cost of making, name of client and docket number. Some models annotated 'RO': returned order. AAD 6/1-1989 c1940-1962 20cms x 32cms. 1940 – 1962. AAD 6/2-1989 c1962-1973 20cms x 32cms from Autumn Collection 1962 to Autumns/Winter collection 1973. Ronald Paterson. Fashion Designer. (AAD/2001/4). Papers, ca. 1940s-1980 - 41 files. Michael Sherard. AAD/2000/6. Press-cutting albums, 1947-1983. Victor Stiebel. Fashion Designer. Press-cutting albums. AAD/1994/1. The V&A also holds the archive of John Cavanagh, which was unavailable to view at the Archive of Art and Design during my period of research. The archive pertaining to Hardy Amies is held at Hardy Amies, 14 Savile Row, and is displayed through exhibition and viewed by appointment only.

<sup>5</sup> Since 2005, examples of Norman Hartnell's royal couture designed for Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, the late Queen Mother, and our current monarch Her Majesty Elizabeth II has been included in dress exhibitions at Buckingham Palace including: *Queen Elizabeth's White Wardrobe, Paris 1938*, 2005, *Dress for the Occasion, An exhibition of Her Majesty The Queen's evening dresses and jewellery at the Summer Opening of Buckingham Palace*, 2006, *Buckingham Palace: A Royal Wedding*, 2007, *Queen and Commonwealth: The Royal Tour*, 2009, *The Queen's Year: Exhibition for the summer opening of Buckingham Palace*, 2010. The V&A 2007 exhibition, *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris London 1947-1957* chose only to display three examples of Hartnell's royal couture for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Her Majesty Princess Margaret.

Hartnell was far more than a provider of dress to British royalty and the upper echelons of society. He was an English fashion designer who attempted to create an international fashion brand in the immediate post war period in London. This thesis intends to place Hartnell back into a properly deserved place in British fashion history and public and specialist view. I intend to reclaim Hartnell from his lost past and reevaluate his contribution to couture, in order to position him (and the design and production of couture at the House of Hartnell) at the centre of the finally emerging, growing body of research on twentieth century London couture which has recently been undertaken.<sup>6</sup> This retrieval and reclamation of Hartnell is built upon a specific feminist strategy as part of historiography of design, employed to retrieve part of Hartnell's past, his queer gender and sexual identity, which has been hitherto disregarded and avoided.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a monograph of the work of the designer and dressmaker Lucile (Lady Duff Gordon) see work by Caroline Evans, "The Enchanted Spectacle." *Fashion Theory*. 5. 3. Sept. (2001). Oxford: Berg, 2001, and Valerie D. Mendes and Amy de la Haye. *Lucile Ltd: London, Paris, New York and Chicago, 1980s-1930s*. (London: V&A Publications, 2009). For memories of the working practices at the London couture house of Stella Mary Newton and the design and production of couture collections see the essay by the designer and dress historian Stella Mary Newton, "London Haute couture in the 1930s." *Costume* 39 (2005) and Bruce Oldfield and Georgina Howell. *Bruce Oldfield's Season*, (London and Sydney: Pan Books, 1987). For the role of London couture in the chronological history of British fashion see Elizabeth Ewing. (1974) *History of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fashion*. (London: Batsford Ltd, 2001), Prudence Glynn, *In Fashion: Dress in the Twentieth Century*. (London and Boston and Sydney: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1978), Lou Taylor and Elizabeth Wilson, *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present Day*, (London: BBC Books, 1989), Amy de la Haye and Valerie Mendes. *Twentieth Century Fashion*. (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999) and Christopher Breward, *Fashion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). For a cultural history of twentieth century fashion including the role of London couture houses in the story of global fashion see Bonnie English, *A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: From Catwalk to Sidewalk*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007) and Christopher Breward. *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004). For the specific history of couture that includes twentieth century British designers see Caroline R. Millbank, *Couture*. (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 1985) and Diana de Marly, *The History of Haute Couture 1850-1950*, (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 1980). For critical themed accounts of couture within the context of fashion and modernity see Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1985) and for specific critical accounts of London couture houses (not including that of Norman Hartnell) seen through the lens of Englishness, see Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin and Caroline Cox. Eds. *The Englishness of English Dress*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002). For publications corresponding to major exhibitions of London couture see Amy de la Haye. Ed. *The Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion*, (London: V&A Publications, 1996), Christopher Breward, Edwina Ehrman and Caroline Evans. Eds. *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) and Claire Wilcox. Ed. *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London, 1947-57*, (London: V&A Publications, 2007). For an account of the role of London couture in the transatlantic fashion trade during the 1950s see Alexandra Palmer. *Couture and Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*. (Canada: UBC Press, Royal Ontario Museum, 2001). For a critical theoretical approach to British contemporary fashion in the 1990s see Caroline Evans. *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> For further feminist, interdisciplinary studies into the lives and work of queer designers see Laura Doan and Jane Garrity. Eds. *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Jasmine Rault. *Eileen Gray and the Design of Sapphic*

This thesis will therefore develop and assess a range of new understandings about the personal and private identity of Hartnell, as well as the impact of the personal and political on this once famous man's public life and work, through engagement with the traces of material in his archive uncovered in 2005. Ultimately the key question is how the identity of a person can be read through what they leave behind and in particular what can be read of the celebrity couturier Norman Hartnell's identity through the material culture residue of his life and work?

### 1.1.a. Norman Hartnell

Norman Hartnell (1901-1979) was Britain's most celebrated couturier working in London's high-end clothing district of Mayfair between 1923 and 1979.<sup>8</sup> (Figure 1.8). Hartnell was first based first at 10 Bruton Street, between 1923 and 1934, when the couture house moved to the much larger premises at number 26 Bruton Street. By the mid 1930s, the House of Hartnell had grown to become financially, extremely profitable and by the 1950s it was the largest and most celebrated couture house in London.<sup>9</sup> Hartnell designed two fashion collections a year from March 1924 until his death in June 1979.

As this study will clarify, the House of Hartnell was the largest couture business in Britain from 1935, employing 500 staff and producing thousands of garments each year.<sup>10</sup> Hartnell dressed many of the women of the British aristocracy and

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*Modernity: Staying In.* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), Joel Sanders. *Writings and Projects.* (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2004) for a study of the queer interior designer, and Alla Myzelev and John Potvin. Eds. *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity.* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). This volume includes the following chapters: Jasmine Rault. "Designing Sapphic Modernity: Fashioning Spaces and Subjects," on the designers Eileen Gray, Evelyn Wild and her designing partner Elizabeth Eyre de Lanux, textile designers Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher, and interior designer Elsie de Wolfe and the florist Constance Spry, Peter McNeil. "Crafting Queer Spaces: Privacy and Posturing," in which Mc Neil examines the interior design of Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, (1748-76) and William Beckford's Fonthill (1796) in the context of the construction of these men's queer subjectivity. Also included in this volume is John Potvin's "Cross-dressing Fashion and Furniture: Giorgio Armani, Orientalism and Nostalgia." See also John Potvin. *Material and Visual Cultures Beyond Male Bonding, 1870-1914.* (Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> The House of Hartnell remained operational after Hartnell's death until 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Manny Silverman. Personal Interview. 27.05.2010. NHOH/2010/14/Digital Recording

<sup>10</sup> The term couture is generally taken to mean the production of made to measure garments designed and made up by skilled seamstresses in a premises with an exclusive address and reputation for a particular service and style. Alexandra Palmer explains that: 'The strictest definition of "haute couture" refers only to designs produced by accredited Paris haute couture houses that meet standards set out by The Chambre de la Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne'. In her 2001 publication she uses the term couture more informally to define what she describes as 'high-end European dressmaking' that took place in couture houses based on the working business model that has its origins in Paris. For the purposes of this thesis, her definition will be followed.

their debutante daughters for court presentations, weddings and events in London's social season from 1923 and actresses for London's West End stage from the mid 1920s. He provided couture in fashionable styles for feature films from 1930 and in the 1960s for television series such as *The Saint* (May 1967).

As a young man in the 1920s, Hartnell was considered a cutting-edge fashion designer.<sup>11</sup> Despite this reputation however, the post-war period is considered the peak of his career because of the success of his high profile, royal dressing. His reputation is based on his creation of a formal British royal style, that is, for conventional, traditional formal clothing, which became established from the mid nineteen thirties when he dressed Queen Elizabeth, for overseas state visits to Paris (1938) North America & Canada (1939), South African tour (1947), Princess Elizabeth for her wedding to Prince Philip (1947) and the entire cast of British royal women for the coronation of the British monarch Elizabeth II (1953).<sup>12</sup> (Figure 1.9). What is less well known is that Hartnell was also a prolific designer of costume for the stage in the interwar period and during the Second World War, dressing many well-known British actresses for West End productions, such as Cicely Courtneidge, and Anna Neagle. (Figure 1.10).

Not yet highlighted in previous studies is Hartnell's talent for costume design for the stage and his understanding of how clothing contributes to the construction of celebrity, identity and persona, and how colours work under lights and in large crowds, all of which, whilst not publically noted, made him the perfect choice to dress Queen Elizabeth for her first overseas state visit to Paris, the fashion capital

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Alexandra Palmer. *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*. (Ontario: UBC Press/Royal Ontario Museum, 2001): 4.

<sup>11</sup> The earliest bound volume of press cuttings in the archive dates from 1922 and includes press reports from his first collection in March 1924 to September 1928. The fashion press described Hartnell's early collections (the first being in March 1924 at 10, Bruton Street, Mayfair, London) as 'very modern', (*The Daily News*, Monday, October 27, 1924): N.pag. He was also described as 'one of the dress dictators of London' in 1926 and 'one of the youngest and most successful' dress designers in an article from an unknown newspaper entitled "The Gentle Woman", 24.3.1926. N. pag. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 2/Album of Press cuttings from 1922-1928.

<sup>12</sup> Popular albums and small gift books about the British royal family were published throughout the 1930s-1950s to celebrate special events, such as coronations (1937 and 1953), royal weddings (1947), silver wedding (King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, 1948), royal children (Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose, Prince Charles and Princess Anne), and royal tours, including Neil Ferrier. *The Royal Tour*. (London: L.T.A. Robinson Ltd., 1954), L.A Nickolls. *The Queen's World Tour*. (London: Macdonald & Co. Ltd., 1954), and *The Queen's Tour of Nigeria*. (London: Pitkin Pictorials, 1956). These books contain numerous colour photographs of the royal family 'in action', wearing Hartnell designed clothes. These albums provide evidence of the Queen (for example) wearing particular Hartnell ensembles on particular occasions and therefore have proved a useful resource in identifying the garments and occasions on which they were worn.

of the world, in 1938. From this starting point, Hartnell was responsible for the creation of the contemporary royal ‘look’: the blocks of plain colour, the matching dress, coat and hat; pastels for the Queen Mother, stronger colours for our present Queen. This look is still worn by the Queen today, typified by her ensemble by Angela Kelly for her grandson William Wales’s wedding to Katherine Middleton in April 2011. (Figures 1.11 & 1.12).

A far less well known fact is that by 1955 Hartnell had international business interests in the Commonwealth countries of South Africa, Canada and Australia, following royal tours to these countries for which Hartnell provided the majority of couture clothing, and also in South America, Japan, Germany and Switzerland. In 1973 there were at least sixty-six known trademarks in the name of Norman Hartnell in fifteen countries worldwide.<sup>13</sup> The fortunes of the House of Hartnell declined during the nineteen sixties with the number of private clientele dwindling to just 100 in 1983.<sup>14</sup> Despite the early innovative introduction of franchised and licensed products in the immediate post-war period, which included “In Love”, the first Hartnell perfume to be launched in Britain in 1953, Hartnell’s company continued to plunge into debt. Paperwork within the Hartnell archive from the early 1970s, a decade of severe financial difficulties for the couture house, demonstrates that Hartnell’s role as the royal dressmaker was something that continued to be cited and promoted as the key to Hartnell’s propping up his business.<sup>15</sup>

After Hartnell’s death in 1979 the company went into receivership in June 1987, and was declared ‘seriously insolvent’. At the time, it was believed to have debts of nearly one million pounds.<sup>16</sup>

### ***1.1.b. The Private Hartnell Archive and Collection***

The material, used here as primary research source, considered and interpreted as an Archive, is currently kept in the home of Hartnell’s goddaughter, Claire Williams, daughter of Hartnell’s business partner and life-long friend, George

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<sup>13</sup> These countries included England, Eire, Argentina, Canada, France, Kenya, New Zealand, Tanzania, Benelux, Spain, West Germans, United States of America, Taiwan, Australia and South Africa. See Appendix 3.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Young McClelland Moores & Co. Chartered Accounts London, *A Report on the Norman Hartnell Organisation*, February 1, 1983: 5.

<sup>15</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 6/File 2/International Business/1971-1978.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Gledhill, “Couture House of Hartnell is Rescued”, *The Times Saturday*, August 1 1987: 2

Mitchison (1916-1994) and his wife Doris (1915-2005). They lived at this house in Cornwall from 1985 until their deaths. The house is now occupied by Mrs Williams along the remains of Hartnell's objects and archive.<sup>17</sup>

The extensive quantities of business paperwork, material that Claire Williams has named the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive (from here on referred to as the Hartnell Archive, or the Archive), reflects aspects of Hartnell's pioneering expansion by a British couture house into the modern model of a fashion brand, as it is understood today, and reveals the extent of his business acumen. Whilst on a far smaller and less successful scale, this was in line with the expansion into the licensing business by Christian Dior in Paris.<sup>18</sup>

This chapter will continue by outlining the main aims of this thesis. A review of all published sources and exhibitions to date relating to London couture in the twentieth century, specifically Norman Hartnell, will be provided and methodological approaches including material culture and the use of oral testimony set out. Specific critical issues including taste, gender and sexuality, theories of collecting and identity, self-presentation and performance of sexual, gendered and personal and public identity, have emerged from a close reading of material culture in the Hartnell Archive and are debated here.

## 1.2 Aims of thesis

The question this thesis asks, how identity is revealed through an archive, will be approached by interpreting practice, objects and images. This thesis is not an analysis of Hartnell's business, nor is it a chronological, critical history of the House of Hartnell, nor is it my thesis to map the success or failure of his business. However, samples of business correspondence and publicity ephemera dating between 1924 and 1985 have been used to discuss the extent to which Hartnell's personal identity and character are present in his couture styles and product packaging, and how his professional identity as royal couturier, was used to market ready-to-wear lines and products using the Hartnell trademark, such as perfume and toiletries through the decades that followed the Second World War.

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<sup>17</sup> July 16<sup>th</sup> 2011 at the time of writing.

<sup>18</sup> Tomoko Okawa. "Licensing Practices at Maison Christian Dior." Regina Lee Blaszczyk. Ed. *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture and Consumers*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 82-107.

What has interested me most was the means by which this untouched archive allowed for an in-depth exploration of the identity of the man himself as it is present amongst what was left behind of him after his death, either deliberately chosen or randomly dispersed amongst his possessions and paperwork. The Archive contains many of his personal effects (for example his wallet inscribed with his signature, his monogrammed hairbrush, his dinner shirt with his initials embroidered in purple stitches and his diamond stick pins set in floral designs), and objects once chosen and displayed by him. It also contains photographs of Hartnell posing both outside and within the interiors of his personal homes. These objects and photographs demonstrate Hartnell's personal taste, and the ways in which he constructed and performed his subjective self-identity. Ultimately, the interior of the very house in which the paper archive pertaining to Hartnell is kept, and within whose walls the collections of objects and furniture that once belonged to Hartnell are still displayed, is considered the Archive here.<sup>19</sup> This thesis also contributes to work already done on reading queer identities through the study of interior spaces.<sup>20</sup>

My approach to Hartnell's Archive is to consider it firstly in terms of what Laura Doan has described as 'a site of queer exploration and interest'<sup>21</sup> in which to 'probe and construct an unknowable sexual past.'<sup>22</sup> Hartnell's identity, for example, is visually represented in the many studio portrait photographs of him taken throughout his career from 1922 to 1979, images that will be considered both collectively and unpicked individually in Chapters Two and Three in order to read that identity through the clothes he wore and his taste in interior decoration. It can also be read through the decorative objects and furniture that had been collected and displayed by him during his lifetime, which are also analysed in

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<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). Carolyn Steedman. *Dust*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Aaron Betsky. *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1997), Peter McNeil. "Crafting Queer Spaces: Privacy and Posturing." Alla Myzelev and John Potvin. Eds. *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity*. (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010), John Potvin. "Collecting Intimacy One Object at a Time: Material Culture, Perception, and the Spaces of Aesthetic Companionship." John Potvin and Alla Myzelev. Eds. *Material Cultures, 1740-1920: The Meanings and Pleasures of Collecting*. (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2008). Christopher Reed. "Imminent Domain: Queer Space in the Built Environment." *Art Journal*. 55 Winter 1996: 64-70.

<sup>21</sup> Laura Doan. *Sexuality and the Archive: A Colloquium on Method*. 18 February 2011. King's College London.

<sup>22</sup> Laura Doan. *Sexuality and the Archive: A Colloquium on Method*. 18 February 2011. King's College London.

Chapter Three. It can be unpacked through a close reading of the working fashion drawings and embroidery samples that demonstrate his choices in textile, colour and embellishment, and the development of his seasonal couture fashion and royal designs, and through the women's clothes made up for him in his couture workshops, all of which are discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. Above all, and discussed throughout, is the impact of his life-long cross-dressing plays a major role in Hartnell's designing and in the creation of his signature styles.

Of primary importance to this study are the long lost Hartnell designed garments extant in the Hartnell Archive (see Chapters Four and Five), including some that were made up in the workrooms for his personal wear. Ultimately the identity of the Hartnell brand, present in the colour and design of every type of product of the House or as licensed goods under the Hartnell name, reflects his personal taste and identity, from the pink and gold talcum powder bottle to the names chosen by him for perfumes and stockings. These will be discussed in Chapter Six. The legacy of his celebrated and still instantly recognizable house style (albeit only to fashion and dress historians) lives on however, in the clothes worn by the British monarch today and also in the signature beaded embroidered evening ensembles kept and displayed in museums.<sup>23</sup>

In adopting an interdisciplinary approach, one that combines queer theory, design history, dress history and material culture, to this overlooked figure, this thesis will interpret material extant in Hartnell's archive in order to develop an understanding of Hartnell's personal gendered and sexual, public celebrity and professional identity and the impact of this on his design work and the brand identity of the Hartnell trademark. It aims therefore to focus on specific elements of this archive and collection, including over two hundred objects of dress never before seen in public view and catalogued for the first time, designed by Hartnell.<sup>24</sup> (Figures 1.12, 1.13, 1.14 and 1.15).

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<sup>23</sup> Norman Hartnell couture and ready-to-wear garments are held in museums nationally and internationally. These include (in the United Kingdom) The V&A Museum, London, The Museum of London, The Historic Royal & Ceremonial Dress Collection, Kensington Palace, Her Majesty the Queen's private collection at Buckingham Palace, The Gallery of Costume at Platt Hall, Manchester City Galleries, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter, Devon, Killerton, Broadclyst, Exeter, Devon, The Fashion Museum, Assembly Rooms, Bath, Somerset, Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, East Sussex, Steyning Museum, West Sussex, The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County Durham. International museums include: Costume Museum of Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix 1: *Audit and Catalogue of The Hartnell-Mitchison Archive*.

Examples of couture garments designed and produced at the fashion house extant in national museum collections were not examined for the purposes of this thesis, as the specific focus was the archive and what was contained within it as representative of the designer's identity. The garments within the archive date mostly from the 1960s onwards and are not considered here the best examples of design and production. A future project to undertake an examination of examples of Hartnell couture extant in museum collections will be undertaken to expand upon my aim to revive Hartnell's reputation as a key British fashion designer of the twentieth century.

Case studies of clutches of material, most useful to an analysis of different aspects of Hartnell's design work, drive the thesis, and reflect the impact of his personal and political life on the clothes that he produced. These objects and images are thus indicative of how his design practice reflected closely his personal, business and professional life. This interpretation of archive draws upon studies of material culture that focus on the significance of objects.

Of major importance here will be opportunity to identify Norman Hartnell's creative design process through the dresses in the Archive and through related oral testimony with surviving Hartnell staff members. This probing aims not just to discuss his response to a piece of fabric (for example), but to examine the construction and development of Hartnell as a designer couturier within the wider processes and in the context of his entire working life. All of this will be discussed in Chapter Four. This research will also be led by the interpretation of the use of the material culture objects of all kinds found within the Archive, for example, photographs of Hartnell dressed in women's garments he designed for Cambridge Footlights productions in the early twenties, the wearing of which would have given him a clear physical, tactile understanding of the feel and movement of cloth on the body from his own personal experience and perspective (Chapter Two). Other artefacts present in the Archive include embroidery samples and sketched designs relating to the clothes designed by Hartnell for key royal events and for everyday wear by women in the British royal family and for Hartnell's twice yearly fashion collections between 1924 and 1979. What is argued here, is that Hartnell's own dressing developed his signature look and that his house style was a direct representation of the man, demonstrated through a very clear

relationship between his personal taste in women's clothes and his own private wearing practice and in the collecting and display of decorative art objects.

This study contributes to an already established Design History approach towards dispelling the myth of the designer as the sole creator of the fashionable couture garments, and reveals the important contribution made towards the design and production of Hartnell's designs by his workroom staff.<sup>25</sup> It analyses the impact their input had on the finished garments, and examines how they translated his ideas both on paper in the form of sketches then copied by cutters and dressmakers and through the ways in which he articulated what he wanted through verbal communication and demonstration, using personal interviews with surviving members of Hartnell's staff. Chapters Four and Five will demonstrate that the finished objects of dress were the product of the couture house team and will confirm that Hartnell was what would be called today the 'creative director', with the final say on what was produced.

### *1.2.1. Summing up of aims*

#### **Aim One: Analysis of the archive**

To establish in Chapters One and Three that the interiors of the house in which the archive and collection pertaining to the London couturier Norman Hartnell are considered The Hartnell Archive. Also, to select clutches of the material in this archive and interpret this material as a method of assessing Hartnell's professional identity and success through the things he left behind, using recent theoretical approaches to the different readings and meanings of archives and how to work with an archive as a resource.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Adrian Forty. "Design, Designers and the Literature of Design." *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750*. (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 1986): 239-245, John Walker. "Designers and Designed Goods – the Proper Objects of Study?" *Design History and the History of Design*. (London: Pluto Press, 1989): 45-67. Alexandra Palmer. 'Inside Paris Haute Couture.' Claire Wilcox. Ed. *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-57*. (London: V&A Publications, 2007): 63-83. Palmer outlines the workroom hierarchies and the processes of the design and production of couture garments in Paris using the oral testimony of couture house workroom staff.

<sup>26</sup> Caroline Steedman. *Dust*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), Louise Craven. Ed. *What are Archives? Cultural And Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader*. (Aldershot, England and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2008).

### **Aim Two: Hartnell's personal life, his gendered and sexual identity**

To investigate in Chapter Three Hartnell's personal life and sexuality through analysis of the objects he personally selected, lived and worked with, designed and bequeathed. The intent of this aim is to prove that his queer, personal identity was key to the articulation of his professional identity and creative style as a successful couturier and that this same identity, present in the clothes he designed, was also present in his personal 'things' and collections. Also, this study aims to examine the tensions created by the need to hide his homosexuality, private sexual behaviour, relationships and cross-dressing from public view.

### **Aim Three: Hartnell's personal creative taste**

To assess his personal creative taste and style as another route to analysing his identity and in this context to examine the tensions caused by his personal preference for romantic evening wear in extreme feminine styles and colours, and his couture wardrobes for clients including royalty. This taste proved a lastingly and significantly successful tool in dressing royalty and creating eveningwear and will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

### **Aim Four: Hartnell's professional identity (Chapter Six)**

To examine Hartnell's specific creative and professional development as a top London couturier and businessman in the context of the competitive international world of couture between 1927 and 1979.

### **Aim Five: Hartnell's public celebrity identity (Chapter Two)**

To examine the development of Hartnell's public performance as celebrity/royal couturier and the consequences of the resulting fame in terms of financial success and lasting legacy, and to unpack his reputation as a collector of decorative art objects and furniture and his taste in interior decoration as part of this performance.

### **Aim Six:**

An assessment of the reasons why his name has become 'lost', including an assessment of any published secondary sources on Hartnell in Chapter One.

### 1.3. Published work and exhibitions on Norman Hartnell and related London couturiers 1980-2009.

This section will outline work published on Hartnell and related couturiers active between 1900 and 1979. Publications on the history of twentieth century fashion include discussions on London couture and its influence on ready-to-wear (for example), although without critical exploration and no garment analysis.<sup>27</sup> These popular books on twentieth century fashion design are comprised mostly of images and use no primary source material in terms of objects of dress and text. Despite an increased interest in the London couture houses since 1997, the shift towards the use of material culture approaches to the study of couture clothing and the discovery and use of archives pertaining to twentieth century fashion designers,<sup>28</sup> there is to date no published critical history of London couture 1860-1970, or couturier Norman Hartnell.<sup>29</sup>

#### ***1.3.1. Collection and display of British couture in national museum exhibitions and accompanying publications***

Most of the important publications on London couture published since 1997 have been published to accompany major exhibitions. Fashion has been a latecomer to the museum, as Lou Taylor explains in her 2004 publication, *Establishing Dress History*. Taylor reveals that historically male collecting policies were determined not to include contemporary fashions.<sup>30</sup> Although the V&A did not collect examples of contemporary fashionable dress until the early 1970s, Keeper James Laver<sup>31</sup> accepted Hartnell's donation of 37 watercolour and pencil dress designs in 1943 as works of art into the Prints and Drawings Study Collection, mostly

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Ewing. *History of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fashion*. (New York and Hollywood: Costume & Fashion Press, 1974), Prudence Glynn and Madeleine Ginsburg. *In Fashion: Fashion in the Twentieth Century*. (London, Boston and Sydney: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1978), Valerie Mendes and Amy de la Haye. *20<sup>th</sup> Century Fashion*. (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999),

<sup>28</sup> What exists of the archives pertaining to London couture houses other than the House of Hartnell is listed in a footnote on page 2 of this thesis.

<sup>29</sup> Publications on Paris couture far outnumber the books on London couture and British fashion designers. For a socio-cultural historical analysis of Paris fashion and haute couture, see: Valerie Steele. *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Lou Taylor. *Establishing Dress History*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004): 116.

<sup>31</sup> James Laver (1899-1975) was keeper for 37 years in the Department of Engraving, Illustration and Design at the V&A. He was interested in dress and costume through dating paintings according to the styles of costume depicted in the painting and published on the fashion cycle, and the evolution of taste according to social factors. Kim K.P. Johnson, Susan J. Torntore and Joanne B. Eicher. Eds. *Fashion Foundations: Early Writings on Fashion and Dress*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003): 117-118.

designs for the then Queen Elizabeth (the Queen Mother) and Princess Elizabeth, Duchess of York.<sup>32</sup>

According to Amy de la Haye, curator of twentieth century dress at the V&A in the mid 1990s, Cecil Beaton's 1971 exhibition *Fashion: An Anthology* that was the first major and lastingly significant exhibition of fashion staged at the V&A.<sup>33</sup> Beaton's catalogue essay reveals his collection process and choices made when collating the exhibition, commenting on his finds and disappointments. He explained in 1971:

Soon my choice of a dress was influenced by history and origin: by its maker, its owner, or by the circumstances in which it was worn... Perhaps an exhibition of these clothes might be particularly interesting at a time when it is said that 'high fashion' is a dying concern ... Today the great variety of clothes shows that the answer to taste is not to be found in what three or four fashion-houses try to impose. The snobbery of the label inside the coat is out.<sup>34</sup>

Beaton's exhibition (and comments) came at the point in time when the London couture no longer dictated fashion from the top.<sup>35</sup> It also, however, marked the moment when twentieth century couture began to be collected in museum collections, with Beaton's *Anthology* contributing to the V&A costume collection. Hartnell couture garments were amongst those collected and displayed in the 1971 exhibition, including Nancy Beaton's silver tissue coming-out dress from 1928, a 1957 crinoline gown for Queen Elizabeth and Her Majesty the Queen's *Flowers of the Fields of France* dress made for the 1957 state visit to Paris. (Figures 1.16 and 1.17). Of the three garments chosen, two are bead-embroidered state gowns for royal wear and one is a court presentation gown in silver tissue and tulle embroidered in sequins. Already therefore in 1971, Hartnell couture was being chosen and displayed for its links to British royalty and court life rather than fashion forwardness and cutting edge design.

Nearly thirty years later, an exhibition celebrating the V&A's collection of twentieth century fashion, was held at the V&A in March 1997. It was displayed and discussed through the idea of Britishness. Valerie Mendes described *The*

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<sup>32</sup> The Prints & Drawings Study Room, V&A Museum, London. Original watercolour and pencil sketched dress designs by Norman Hartnell. E1-1943/E37-1943.

<sup>33</sup> Amy de la Haye. "Vogue and the V&A Vitrine." *Fashion Theory*. 10. 1 & 2. March/June 2006: 129.

<sup>34</sup> Cecil Beaton. *Fashion: An Anthology*. (London: V&A Publications, 1971): 8-9.

<sup>35</sup> Beaton, *Fashion: An Anthology*, 9.

*Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion 1947-1997*, as ‘the first extensive exploration of British designer-level fashion and its identifying traits’. This exhibition was curated by the most prolific researcher and published author on British couture to date, Amy de la Haye. <sup>36</sup> de la Haye wrote in 1997, ‘The Britishness of British fashion determines its inspirational role, sets it apart and establishes its identity. British fashion is peculiar to itself.’<sup>37</sup>

In the publication that accompanied this exhibition, *The Cutting Edge*, Hartnell’s post-war designing was discussed by Lou Taylor in her chapter, “Romantic”. She positioned Hartnell’s couture within the context of the work of the ‘top ten’ London couture houses and the social season, in particular the sartorially coded styles of eveningwear that were worn by the debutantes, their mothers and the younger married women for the coming-out parties and balls during the London Season in June and July.<sup>38</sup> Taylor carefully unpicks the debutante dress of the late thirties and post-war period, stating that:

Formal codes of etiquette required that designs had to be reasonably modest and simple...Bodices were always neatly fitted and skirts full, gathered into layer upon layer of frothy tulle, organdie or fine silk. Coded colours were ‘young’ sugared almond tones. Dresses were trimmed with delicate *ingénue* embroidery or pale, artificial flowers.<sup>39</sup>

Taylor credits Hartnell with the revival of the Victorian crinoline style of evening dress, worn by Queen Elizabeth.<sup>40</sup> Both the *ingénue* tulle gowns trimmed with artificial flowers and mature, plain silk satin crinolines decorated with beaded embroidery are accredited to Hartnell by Taylor, who suggests that these styles ‘deserve to be examined carefully’, because they are ‘internationally recognized British fashion classics’.<sup>41</sup> These styles were also represented in the dresses chosen by Beaton for his *Anthology* exhibition.

In 1985 Brighton Museum and Art Gallery held an exhibition celebrating Hartnell’s work entitled, *Norman Hartnell: 1901-1979*. Curator Stella Beddoe

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<sup>36</sup> De la Haye is currently a reader in Material Culture and Fashion Curation at the London College of Fashion, and updated the entry on Norman Hartnell in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, in 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Amy de la Haye. Ed. “Introduction.” *The Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion 1947-1997*. (London: V&A Publications, 1997): 11.

<sup>38</sup> Lou Taylor. “Romantic.” Amy de la Haye and Valerie Mendes. Eds. *The Cutting Edge: 50 years of British Fashion, 1947-1997*. (London: V&A Publications, 1997): 68.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, “Romantic”, 69.

<sup>40</sup> To be discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, “Romantic”, 71.

used much of the material found in the Hartnell Archive, whilst it was still housed at 26 Bruton Street, and a great many garments from other collections were loaned to the museum for the event. The catalogue for this exhibition includes several essays, including Frances Kennett's chronological overview of Hartnell's career within the context of the work of other London couturiers,<sup>42</sup> and Beddoe's biographical essay, which discussed his family background, and the workings of his house, naming many of Hartnell's loyal staff and outlining their duties within the showroom and workroom hierarchy.<sup>43</sup> Essays on his royal dressing and stage clothes, plus Stephen Calloway's essay on Hartnell's interior design,<sup>44</sup> combined make for the most useful, if straightforwardly descriptive, overview of Hartnell's life and work to date.

In 1985 the exhibition *Hartnell: Clothes by the Royal Couturier 1930s-1960s*, was installed at the Fashion Museum in Bath to coincide with the exhibition in Brighton.<sup>45</sup> Bath's Hartnell collection comprises mostly eveningwear and Royal clothes, and thirty ensembles were chosen for display including many once owned by Hartnell client the Hon. Lady Ward, and an evening dress and jacket worn by the actress Margaret Leighton from 1960. (Figure 1.18).<sup>46</sup> Byrde's essay was included in the Brighton catalogue. She approached Bath's entire Hartnell collection through an analysis of his signature house style, admitting that despite fact that the collection comprises mostly eveningwear:

...the collection represents a good cross-section of Hartnell's work from the 1930-s to the 1960s and commissions for quite a range of customers. As might be expected, about two thirds of the pieces preserved by donors are evening dresses, most of them hand-beaded. There are enough beaded garments to trace a development in Hartnell's work, from the lively and sometimes experimental designs of the 1930s to the lavish style in the 1950s, and finally the more mechanical and less original decorations of the 1960s (for example,

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<sup>42</sup> Frances Kennett. "Hartnell and the World of Couture." Stella Beddoe. Ed. *Norman Hartnell, 1901-1979*. (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1985): 27-44.

<sup>43</sup> Stella Beddoe. "The Making of a British Couturier." Stella Beddoe. Ed. *Norman Hartnell, 1901-1979*. (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1985): 45-60.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Calloway. "Hartnell's Interior Designs." Stella Beddoe. Ed. *Norman Hartnell, 1901-1979*. (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1985): 79-82.

<sup>45</sup> Curator, Penelope Byrde.

<sup>46</sup> This style of slim-line beaded evening gown and fur-trimmed jacket will be discussed in terms of Hartnell's signature styles and embellishments in Chapter Four.

when the entire surface of a garment has been beaded by tambour machine).<sup>4748</sup>

Hartnell garments featured at another exhibition at Bath when in December 2001, garments by designed by the royal designers Hartnell and Hardy Amies were loaned by the Queen and displayed ‘in order to turn the spotlight on the complex world of costuming the Head of State’.<sup>49</sup> Entitled *Jubilee!*, the exhibition marked 50 years of The Queen’s reign.<sup>50</sup>

In May 2000, two exhibitions, held at the London College of Fashion and the Judith Clark costume Gallery, displayed a collection of garments that once belonged to one woman – Mrs Cecil Korner, a middle-class banker’s wife. The Korner Collection comprises couture garments made at Hartnell’s, Hardy Amies and Victor Stiebel along with department store, high-end ready-to-wear and the exhibition’s theme was middle-class taste and style in England in the post-war period. Also in May, the associated conference included speakers on several of the major London couturiers of the day, including Amies<sup>51</sup> and Stiebel.<sup>52</sup> No paper on Hartnell was included. Several of these papers were published in *The Englishness of English Dress* in 2001. Both Ehrman and de la Haye used what archive material and oral histories were available at the time to offer preliminary investigations into the history of each house and some insight into their design and business practices.

In 2005, The Museum of London was the venue for the exhibition, *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk, 29 October 2004 – 8 May 2005*. This exhibition celebrated London as a fashion city, and in particular, ‘the idea that London is a world centre for the production and retailing of traditional fashion

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<sup>47</sup> Penelope Byrde. “The Collection of Norman Hartnell Clothes at the Museum of Costume, Bath.” Stella Beddoe. Ed. Norman Hartnell, 1901-1979. (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1985): 132.

<sup>48</sup> In a personal interview with Hartnell embroideress, Maureen Markham, in 2010, Markham stated that no machine embroidery was ever undertaken at the House of Hartnell. Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12. Cassette Tapes 1 and 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Jubilee! Dresses from the collection of Her Majesty the Queen*. The Museum of Costume, Assembly Rooms, Bath. 12 December 2001 – 3 November 2002.

<sup>50</sup> Ian Wilson. “Jubilee – Dresses from the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen.” *Fashion Theory*. Volume 7. Number 1. March 2003: 109-114.

<sup>51</sup> Edwina Ehrman. “The Spirit of English Style: Hardy Amies, Royal Dressmaker and International Businessman.” Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin and Caroline Cox. Eds. *The Englishness of English Dress*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001): 133-145.

<sup>52</sup> Amy de la Haye. “Gilded Brocade Gowns and Impeccable Tailored Tweeds: Victor Stiebel (1907-76) a Quintessentially English Designer.” Christopher Breward, Edwina Ehrman and Caroline Evans. Eds. *The Englishness of English Dress*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001): 147-157.

goods.’<sup>53</sup> Hartnell garments from the 1920s were included in the display. In the accompanying publication, Edwina Ehrman addressed Hartnell’s career in the chapter “Glamorous Modernity: 1914-30”. She discussed London couture fashion in relation to Paris and significantly compared Hartnell with the house of Isobel, ‘now largely forgotten.’<sup>54</sup> In this chapter, Ehrman relies heavily on Hartnell’s autobiography as evidence without establishing that this form of self-promotion should be used with caution.

Since 2005, many examples of Norman Hartnell’s royal couture designed for Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, the late Queen Mother, and Her Majesty the Queen have been included in the annual summer exhibitions at Buckingham Palace.<sup>55</sup> Original sketched designs for many of the Hartnell dresses displayed were loaned to Royal Collections from the Hartnell Archive in 2006, 2007 and 2009, giving a small insight into the design process, but generally these exhibitions were simply designed as spectacle to entertain a vast international audience. The curator named the designer and described each garment, and the event at which the garment was worn. ‘Souvenir Albums’ were published to accompany both *The Royal Tour* (2009) and *The Queen’s Year* (2010) and these include many colour photographs of Norman Hartnell’s gowns made for specific royal state events.<sup>56</sup>

In the V&A 2007 exhibition, *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris London 1947-1957*, curator Claire Wilcox chose to display three examples of Hartnell’s royal couture designed for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Her Majesty Princess Margaret as representative of royal clothes rather than examples of couture fashion. Once again, Hartnell was left out of the story of London couture in terms of fashion forwardness and British tailoring. In the accompanying publication, however, de la Haye does situate Hartnell along with Hardy Amies as ‘the leading

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<sup>53</sup> Christopher Breward. “Introduction.” Christopher Breward, Edwina Ehrman and Caroline Evans. Eds. *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk*. (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 6.

<sup>54</sup> Edwina Ehrman. “Glamorous Modernity: 1914-30.” Christopher Breward, Edwina Ehrman and Caroline Evans. *The London Look: From Street to Catwalk*. (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 79.

<sup>55</sup> These exhibitions include: *Queen Elizabeth’s White Wardrobe, Paris 1938*, 2005, *Dress for the Occasion, An exhibition of Her Majesty The Queen’s evening dresses and jewellery at the Summer Opening of Buckingham Palace*, 2006, *Buckingham Palace: A Royal Wedding*, 2007, *Queen and Commonwealth: The Royal Tour*, 2009, *The Queen’s Year: Exhibition for the summer opening of Buckingham Palace*, 2010.

<sup>56</sup> *The Royal Tour: A Souvenir Album*. (London: Royal Collection Publications, 2009), *The Queen’s Year: A Souvenir Album*. (London: Royal Collection Publications, 2010).

London couturiers’, positioning him amongst the top ten couturiers.<sup>57</sup> de la Haye’s chapter offers up a very informative overview of London couture and the ancillary workshops providing accessories to the couturiers in the post-war period. She introduces us to The Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers (INCSOC) and the couturier’s relationships with the textile organisations such as the Cotton Board, and also discusses wages for workroom staff, and the type of garments the London couturier provided for his society clientele. She examines several couture ensembles in the V&A collections, including a Hartnell evening ensemble c.1948.<sup>58</sup> Contrary to Alexandra Palmer’s findings (discussed below),<sup>59</sup> as the V&A garments are in good condition, de la Haye states that ‘the couture client often possesses an extensive wardrobe of little-worn clothing’.<sup>60</sup> Like Ehrman, however, she uses Hartnell’s autobiography, directly quoting him without criticism, as if this type of memoir gives direct access to the person’s life.

### ***1.3.2. Published work on Norman Hartnell and twentieth century British couturiers***

In Diana de Marly’s *History of Haute Couture*, published in 1980, she wrote that ‘the first couture house of international importance to make London its main base was that of Lucile.’ Before 1900, British design talent had ‘gravitated’ to Paris.<sup>61</sup> In 1906, Reville and Rossiter had been founded in Hanover Square. Described as court dressmakers, they dressed Queen Mary for the coronation of George V in 1911. In the 1920s, however, de Marly remarks on: ‘the foundation of a new English house which was to take over much of Reville’s trade’, and that this was the House of Hartnell.<sup>62</sup>

Caroline Milbank’s *Couture: The Great Fashion Designers* was published in 1985.<sup>63</sup> Milbank divides her book on twentieth century designers into themed

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<sup>57</sup> Amy de la Haye. “Material Evidence: London Couture 1947-57.” Claire Wilcox. Ed. *The Golden Age of Couture, Paris and London 1947-57*. (London: V&A Publications, 2007): 92.

<sup>58</sup> Another copy of this model is held at The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Dated ca.1943. 1981.302a,b.

<sup>59</sup> Alexandra Palmer. *Couture and Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*. (Ontario: Royal Ontario Museum/UBC Press, 2001). Palmer found that couture garments housed in Royal Ontario Museum were well worn, mended and altered.

<sup>60</sup> Amy de la Haye. “Material Evidence: London Couture 1947-57.” Claire Wilcox. Ed. *The Golden Age of Couture, Paris and London 1947-57*. (London: V&A Publications, 2007): 94.

<sup>61</sup> Diana de Marly. *The History of Haute Couture, 1850-1950*. (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1980): 173.

<sup>62</sup> De Marly, *The History of Haute Couture*, 174.

<sup>63</sup> Caroline Rennolds Milbank. *Couture: The Great Fashion Designers*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

sections listing each designer under the descriptive title she believed most fitted their work. For example ‘the founders’ include Worth and Lucile, ‘the artists’ include Fortuny and Liberty & Co., and Norman Hartnell is listed under ‘the extravagants’ along with Dior and Valentino. Interestingly, Hardy Amies (Hartnell’s closest rival) is listed under ‘the realists.’ It is clear from her essay on Hartnell and her acknowledgments, that Milbank too had access to the Hartnell Archive whilst the fashion house was still operational. Milbank writes: ‘not surprisingly, some of the best photographs, documents, and concrete information came from the houses of the designers themselves. I am thus indebted to: Peter Hope Lumley for Hardy Amies ... and Mrs. Price at Norman Hartnell.’<sup>64</sup> It is also clear that she closely worked from his 1955 autobiography (as both de la Haye and Ehrman did after her). She does, however, make some observations about his designs, which she describes as ‘sometimes outside fashion and more akin to costume’, and his conservative yet creative personality. She also stated that:

Although it is argued that Hartnell was ultimately shackled by his work for royalty, his personality was the kind that was happiest working within restrictions imposed by protocol and one that also required such a highly visible arena for his extensive creativity to keep from being stifled. He was at his best when creating to promote and protect the image of the royal family and, as a result, can take much credit for actually designing an image that is no less venerable today than it was when he first began.<sup>65</sup>

de Marly’s understanding of the effects that Hartnell’s royal dressing had on his fashion design career will be considered throughout this thesis. Whether his ‘personality’ really was ‘the kind that was happiest working within restrictions imposed by protocol’ can be disputed, as Hartnell himself explained in conversation with Professor Lou Taylor in 1979. When asked whether he had felt restricted creatively by his royal designing and his providing yearly collections specifically aimed at his aging, Society clientele, he had replied that ‘yes’ he absolutely did.<sup>66</sup> However, there is a case for the idea that his creativity could find a freedom of expression, particularly in the design of state evening gowns for important public events all over the world. The choice of images used from Hartnell’s archive by de Marly is surprising, considering the extent of the material

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<sup>64</sup> Milbank, *Couture*, 431.

<sup>65</sup> De Marly, *The History of Haute Couture*, 278.

<sup>66</sup> Professor of Dress History, Lou Taylor explained to the author during a tutorial in September 2011 that she had spoken to Norman Hartnell just before his death in 1979 at a fund raising event in aid of the fashion gallery at Brighton Museum and asked him whether he had felt restricted in his creative designing.

she must have encountered. She includes a photograph of Claire Williams (Hartnell's goddaughter, and the current owner of Hartnell's archive) on her wedding day in 1973, wearing a dress designed by her 'Uncle Norman.' (Figure 1.19).

In Charlotte Seeling's *Fashion: The Century of the Designer, 1900-1999*, published in 1999, Seeling mentions Hartnell's work in her chapter "1940-1949: Fashion is Indestructible" in terms of the design of military uniforms and Utility during the war,<sup>67</sup> and includes only images of the wedding dresses of Her Majesty the Queen (1947) and Princess Margaret (1960) rather than text. Seeling includes half a page of prose on Hartnell's career with a full page of an image of the Queen in her coronation dress in 1953.<sup>68</sup> She also writes of Marc Bohan that he took over at Hartnell's as creative director in 1990, stating that 'he ended his career, which had been dedicated entirely to the classical trade, in London, where he tried to breathe life into the honourable house of Norman Hartnell.'<sup>69</sup>

In 2007 Michael Pick published *Be Dazzled! Norman Hartnell, Sixty Years of Glamour and Fashion*,<sup>70</sup> drawing upon his private collection of Hartnell archive material, which includes press books, fashion photographs and original sketched fashion designs signed by the designer. The book comprises a history of Hartnell's career through twelve themed chapters lead by the material in Pick's collection. Pick contextualises this material throughout the book through reference to Hartnell's autobiography published in 1955. The chapters include Hartnell's dress designs in the 1920s, his private homes and interiors, 1930s styles and weddings, his role as Queen Elizabeth's dressmaker, the Second World War, the transformation of Princess Elizabeth to our current Queen, Princess Margaret, post-war fashion and royal styles and' ready-to-wear and lines in cosmetics and perfumes. The heavily illustrated chapters are mostly comprised of original fashion photographs and facsimiles of magazine articles and newspaper cuttings, many of which Hartnell saved throughout his career. Pick also adds detailed picture captions of his own composition, adding comments such as 'the small, jaunty hat provides an extra touch of Hartnell fun' (for example), when describing

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<sup>67</sup> Charlotte Seeling. *Fashion: the Century of the Designer, 1900-1999*. (Cologne and Madrid: Könemann, 1999): 200.

<sup>68</sup> Seeling, *Fashion: The Century of the Designer*, 293.

<sup>69</sup> Seeling. *Fashion the Century of the Designer*, 385.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Pick. *Be Dazzled! Norman Hartnell, Sixty Years of Glamour and Fashion*. (New York: Pointed Leaf Press, 2007).

a pyjama suit made for the actress Elsie Randolph.<sup>71</sup> It is in the picture captions that Pick contributes his own observations with regards to Hartnell's signature designs for the Queen, and how these differed from those for Queen Elizabeth and Princess Margaret. Pick includes a comprehensive bibliography, but as this publication is aimed at a general audience, no referencing or footnotes.<sup>72</sup>

In the fifth edition of Fairchild's *Who's Who in Fashion*, Hartnell's 'profile' is included, with a very brief biography of his life and career taken from his autobiography. Both the text and picture captions include some mistakes.<sup>73</sup> The authors explain that 'Hartnell is most identified with elaborate evening gowns, lavishly embroidered and sprinkled with sequins, particularly the bouffant designed for the Queen Mother and for Queen Elizabeth II. He also made well-tailored suits and coats in British and French woollens and tweeds. By the 1970s ...he was making clothes in leather, designing furs and men's fashions.'<sup>74</sup>

In Brenda Polan and Roger Tredre's *The Great Fashion Designers*, published by Berg in 2009, Hartnell is not even among the designers listed. Revealingly, no British designers feature in the lists of designers between the 1910s and the 1980s, except Charles James (1906-1978), who worked largely in New York, and Mary Quant (1934-).<sup>75</sup> This most recently overview of celebrated fashion designers, published by the publishing house that focuses on fashion and dress, Berg, completely writes out the London couture trade of twentieth century from Western dress and fashion history.

The surviving archives of London couture houses, however, are beginning to be considered as worthy of publication. This includes the archive of Lucile, Lady Duff Gordon, whose 'fashion enterprise' opened in the early 1890s and became a limited company in 1904. Lucile Ltd had branches in London, Paris and New York, and was the first British fashion house with international concerns.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Pick, *Be Dazzled!*, 40.

<sup>72</sup> Pick, *Be Dazzled!*, 265.

<sup>73</sup> Hartnell did not sell Lucile his sketches in 1922, she asked him to leave them on her desk for her perusal and then published them in her name, resulting in a court case, which Hartnell won.

<sup>74</sup> Holly Price Alford and Anne Stegemeyer, *Who's Who in Fashion*. (New York: Fairchild, 2010):174

<sup>75</sup> Brenda Polan and Roger Tredre. *The Great Fashion Designers*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009).

<sup>76</sup> Amy de la Haye. "The Making, Meaning and Biography of the Album." Amy de la Haye and Valerie D. Mendes. *Lucile Ltd., London, Paris, New York and Chicago, 1890s-1930s*. (London: V&A Publications, 2009): 10-11.

‘Highlighting artefacts from the Victoria and Albert Museum’s collection of her work’, de La Haye and Valerie Mendes produced a monograph of the work of the designer and dressmaker Lucile in 2009. The monograph includes a facsimile of a bound album of sketched designs (not executed by the designer, but an anonymous fashion artist) dated Autumn 1905, and de la Haye undertakes a close study of drawings, photographs and press cuttings and the Lucile logo, in order to unpick ‘The Making, Meaning and Biography’ of the album that ‘serves as an interface between creator and consumer’, and also makes links between the creative taste of Lucile through her interest in 18<sup>th</sup> century decorative arts and her interiors.<sup>77</sup> The drawings in the album were used to sell the model to the customer, much like the fashion drawings in the Hartnell Archive, discussed in Chapter Four. de la Haye and Mendes also address the physicality and materiality of the album and offer an example of dress history writing that employs a close study of objects considered as archive material. A similar methodology is developed in this thesis. Hartnell is discussed in this publication in relation to the sketches he took to show Lucile when searching for an apprenticeship in 1922. Hartnell left sketches on her desk at her request and discovered them published in her weekly column ‘My Dear Dorothy’ in *The Sketch* under her name. He sued her and won damages of £50 in court.<sup>78</sup> (Figures 1.20 and 1.21).

Alexandra Palmer’s 1997 essay in *Fashion Theory* discusses the developments in fashion studies in higher education, advocating a more ‘critical and theoretical approach’ to the work of fashion historians. Taking three couture garments as case study examples, she examined these garments in detail taking note of wear, alterations and analysing what can be read from the couture house labels stitched inside. The amount of wear and alterations demonstrated to her the importance of these couture garments to their wearers. Palmer notes that, ‘material culture led me into unforeseen directions such as Toronto’s second-hand couture trade’, a factor she discusses in her 2001 publication. This work on the consumption of Paris and London couture by Canadian women in the 1950s, began with ‘the

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<sup>77</sup> Amy de la Haye. “The Making, Meaning and Biography of the Album.” Amy de la Haye and Valerie D. Mendes. *Lucile Ltd., London, Paris, New York and Chicago, 1890s-1930s*. (London: V&A Publications, 2009): 32.

<sup>78</sup> De La Haye. “...the raiment of allurements...’ 1906-1935” Amy de la Haye and Valerie D. Mendes. *Lucile Ltd., London, Paris, New York and Chicago, 1890s-1930s*. (London: V&A Publications, 2009): 200.

clothes themselves',<sup>79</sup> held in the collection of costume at the royal Ontario Museum. Palmer approached these worn garments through the memories of the women that wore them using oral history methods, dispelling the myth that couture clothing was treated as disposable fashion, easily replaced by the new season's model, and exploring the meanings of the garments to their owners through personal interview.<sup>80</sup>

The journal of the Costume Society, *Costume*, is the longest running journal dedicated to the study of dress and fashion in Britain, appealing to academics, museum professionals and involving members with an wealth of expertise both in the making and study of clothing. Published articles on British couture in *Costume* have included Susan North's history of John Redfern and Sons (1847-1940). She equates the importance of the house of Redfern with that of Charles Worth, arguing for a reassessment of his work, and explains that the history of Redfern has been lost due to the lack of primary documentation.<sup>81</sup> Unlike de la Haye and Mendes' publication on Lucile, North does not have the benefits of business records, as they do not survive, and North notes that Redfern's clothes did not appear in *Vogue* during the 1920s and early 1930s when it closed in London, so little is known about the company in London during that period.<sup>82</sup>

*Costume* also published the couture house memories of the day-to-day running of the business of the London couturier and dress historian, Stella Mary Newton. Newton carefully set out the workings of a couture house in London in the 1930s and discussed every aspect of the functioning of a house, from the interior architecture and furnishing of the showrooms, where model-girls paraded the latest collections for clients, to the way in which the textile representatives from the (usually) French textile companies visited the designer every season. She also gave an explanation of every role in the hierarchy of the house from the 'matching-girls' to the showroom staff and a breakdown of the workroom staff hierarchy from the fitter to the junior hand.<sup>83</sup> She explained in detail the relationship between the designer and the fitter, who could interpret his designs,

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<sup>79</sup> Alexandra Palmer. *Couture and Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*. (Ontario: Royal Ontario Museum/UBC Press, 2001): 4.

<sup>80</sup> Alexandra Palmer. *Couture and Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s*. (Ontario: Royal Ontario Museum/UBC Press, 2001).

<sup>81</sup> Susan North. "John Redfern and Sons, 1847 to 1892." *Costume*. Vol. 42. 2008: 146-148.

<sup>82</sup> Susan North. "Redfern Limited, 1892 to 1940." *Costume*. Vol. 43. 2009.

<sup>83</sup> See Glossary of Terms.

and the ways in which fabrics were manipulated at the time with regards to their weave, and how different cutting techniques were used to fit clothing to the body. Her account of the fitting process and the making up of the couture garment, and the costing of garments, although anecdotal, are the only accounts of workroom culture in London couture houses published to date.

### 1.3.2.a. London Couture and the Fashion Phenomenon: Published Historical, Critical theoretical debate

In-depth, garment focussed, historical debate on British couture was initiated in the 1997 exhibition *The Cutting Edge* at the V&A and corresponding publication, for which the curator and contributors drew on the V&A's costume collection for examples to display and discuss.<sup>84</sup> According to Lou Taylor, it is the more recent marriage of museum approaches to the object based study of artefacts, with academic, dress history studies since the mid-1980s that have, in her words, 'burst across old boundaries and flourishes now in a far more open-minded multi-disciplinary atmosphere.'<sup>85</sup> This multi-disciplinary atmosphere adopted cultural studies approaches, and the new art historical approaches, which, as Christopher Breward has noted, 'drew on ideas from Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis and structuralism or semiotics, encouraged a fresh prominence for debates incorporating problems of social identity, the body, gender and appearance or representation.'<sup>86</sup>

Elizabeth Wilson discusses the role that the cultural phenomenon of fashion played in the construction of the modern self, through critical issues such as gender, city life, oppositional dress and feminism. Wilson's 1985 seminal text, *Adorned in Dreams*, marked the moment when the wearing of fashionable dress began to be considered as playing a crucial role in the making of meanings.<sup>87</sup> Wilson introduced the reader to the history of fashion, the historiography of fashion studies, and the fashion industry (and the rise and fall of couture from Charles Worth through to the 1960s-70s and fashion in the art school).

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<sup>84</sup> Amy de la Haye. Ed. *The Cutting Edge 50 Years of British Fashion 1947-1997*. (London: V&A Publications, 1997).

<sup>85</sup> Lou Taylor. *Establishing Dress History*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004): 279.

<sup>86</sup> Christopher Breward, "Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress", *Fashion Theory*. 2. 4 May 1998: 302.

<sup>87</sup> Elizabeth Wilson. *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. 1985. (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

### 1.2.3.b. Some conclusions

An overview of the different types of literature that has been written about Hartnell and the world of London couture as it operated between 1901-1979 has been revealing, and flags up three issues. Firstly, that the ‘coffee table’ type of volume on the popular history of fashion designers, operational during in the twentieth century, (books published between the late 1970s and late 1990s), include Norman Hartnell amongst the designers discussed. Sources are not referenced in the volumes considered here, and the authors seem not to use primary material. Sections on Hartnell rely heavily on his autobiography (not always quoting correctly). More recently published overviews of twentieth century fashion, however, overlook London couture. In 2009, Berg’s *The Great Fashion Designers* omits any reference to the ‘top ten’ London couturiers operational between 1920-1960, including Hartnell. Thus, Hartnell and his fellow couturiers have been written out of the current, international fashion history narrative.

Secondly, exhibitions of British couture fashion since Beaton’s *Anthology* (1971), and *The Golden Age of Couture* at the V&A (2007), have chosen to display and discuss only examples of Hartnell’s royal couture, leaving him out of the wider story of British couture fashion design. The exhibitions at both Buckingham Palace and Kensington Palace also, but more understandably, feature Hartnell’s royal dress, as he was the most prolific royal dressmaker in London between 1937-1979.

Thirdly, more recent work on London (and Paris) couturier by academics and curators such as Taylor, Palmer and de la Haye has used material culture approaches to designer’s archives and garments, with the occasional references to theoretical texts (on collecting, for example). Additional oral history methodology has been used, however, and this recontextualises the objects of dress, and in Palmer’s words, demonstrates the benefits of ‘researching costume from multiple areas, and the importance of including material culture as a methodology’.<sup>88</sup>

This work follows on from this trail of dress history, and will apply interdisciplinary methods developed within the discipline to this neglected area. It

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<sup>88</sup> Palmer, “New Directions”, 309.

will also address issues of gender and sexual identity in relation to the design and production of couture. This thesis follows these latter examples in choosing object-based, material culture approaches to Hartnell designed and made couture and ready-to-wear garments and objects in the Hartnell Archive. As curator of costume at Platt Hall, Manchester, Dr. Miles Lambert has written: ‘Surviving garments “make real” the most unknown consumers of the past. They allow researchers to address issues of utility and ornament, but also the meaning and sentiment embodied by clothing and its role in defining personal and social identity.’<sup>89</sup> I argue here that the surviving garments designed by Hartnell also ‘make real’ the man whose taste, identity and creative practise combined to produce the garments made at his house.

Also, the questions applied to the discussion of fashion and modernity by Wilson, Taylor, Breward<sup>90</sup> and Palmer, including dress, the body, self-presentation and performance, gender and sexual identity, applied to a reading of Hartnell’s identity through the range of archive material, including garments, take current debates on couture fashion beyond these material cultural analyses. Although this thesis examines the work of a couturier, it does so using a multi-disciplinary approach through the lenses of material culture and, what Lou Taylor has described as the ‘critical stories’.<sup>91</sup>

## 1.4. Research Sources: Introduction to The Hartnell Archive

As a result of research undertaken in MA work, in October 2005, I made the discovery of the lost company and personal archive pertaining to the British couturier. This private archive has been made exclusively and generously accessible to me since October 2005 and initial findings were the subject of my

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<sup>89</sup> Miles Lambert. “Fashion in the Museum: The Material Culture of Artefacts.” Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil. Eds. *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010): 191-193.

<sup>90</sup> Christopher Breward. *The Culture of Fashion: A new history of fashionable dress*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin and Caroline Cox. Eds. *The Englishness of English Dress*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), Christopher Breward. *Fashion*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Christopher Breward, Edwina Ehrman and Caroline Evans. *The London Look: Fashion from street to catwalk*. (London: Yale University Press, The Museum of London, 2004).

<sup>91</sup> Lou Taylor. *Establishing Dress History*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004): 281.

Masters dissertation in June 2006.<sup>92</sup> The Archive is kept in the house of Hartnell's business manager, friend and primary companion in life and work, George Mitchison. Mitchison became executive director of Norman Hartnell & Co. and Norman Hartnell International, and also Norman Hartnell Jewellery (c1955) and was a major shareholder in all of these companies at the time of Hartnell's death. He was sole inheritor of Hartnell's entire estate in 1979. The house and the Archive and what is left of Hartnell's estate passed into the sole possession of Mitchison's daughter Claire Williams.

### *1.4.1. History of my access to the archive*

Mitchison and his wife had moved into to their daughter's house in Cornwall in the mid 1980s and for over twenty years the Hartnell Archive was stored in the attic and cellar of this house. After the death of the couple, the house remained empty of people, with everything in it left exactly as it had been during the couple's lifetime. I was given generous access to the house and its contents between October 2005 and November 2009, at which time their daughter, Claire Williams, returned to occupy the house.

After the death of her parents, Claire Williams had left the house unoccupied for four years. Apart from myself, nobody came to the house other than the cleaner, who came in once a week to dust, and the gardener. When I first encountered the house, I discovered that it had been left exactly as it had been at the time of Doris Mitchison's death one year before, with her outdoor shoes by the back door, and coats and hats on the hat stand. All the beds in the house were made-up with clean sheets and clothes hung in the wardrobes and lay in the drawers. The living rooms and dining room were arranged as they had been during the couple's lifetime, down to the last packet of cigarettes that Doris had been smoking, which had been left on the occasional table next to the armchair in which she sat to watch television. I was allowed free access to the material whilst the house was empty, an unusual and privileged situation. Eventually I was allowed a key, and in the spring of 2007, I was invited to stay in the house for longer periods, allowing more time with the material enabling the development of a basic cataloguing system. Gradually, I began to see how issues emerged from the objects,

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<sup>92</sup> Jane Hatrick. 'From 'Glamour-drag' to Royal Dress: Performance and Spectacle, the Work of the London couturier, Norman Hartnell: 1934-1947.' MA thesis. University of Brighton, 2006. Print.

paperwork and photographs, which became the framework for debate on identity, self, design and its relation to life.

It was within this frozen and disintegrating domestic scene, that my research took place over a period of three years. During this finite window of time, I had to learn as much of what the Archive contained as possible, whilst choosing and engaging with specific samples of the material found amongst the enormous amounts of randomly dispersed ‘stuff’, that could best contribute to the writing of this doctoral thesis. What became apparent as I worked through the photographs in the Archive was that most of the decorative objects and furniture in the house had once belonged to Hartnell. It also became clear that the very decorative colour schemes of the interiors and the display of these objects within were direct reproductions of the rooms and displays within Hartnell’s personal residences between 1935 and 1979. This revealed the entire house as Hartnell’s Archive not just the paperwork and collections within it.

The years that followed Doris Mitchison’s death in 2005 were a moment of at first grief and loss and then indecision on behalf of the Mitchison’s daughter. The house in Cornwall was put on the market, but when the house was left unsold, Claire and her husband moved into the house themselves in November 2008. Since August 2008 therefore, parallel to the development of my PhD research, the Archive has almost literally slipped through my fingers, as the once empty house was prepared for reoccupation. Many decorative objects and pieces of furniture once owned by Hartnell were sold. Opportunities for close analysis of material took place as I hurriedly packed the material into conservation boxes, to be stored back in the attic of the house at the end of October 2008.

Following the catalogue system used in the Alison Settle Archive at the Design Archives, held at the University of Brighton,<sup>93</sup> a basic numbered box system was created according to subject matter (for example Hartnell’s work for the theatre), material (original Hartnell sketched designs) and according to chronology, in order to reference and relocate material.<sup>94</sup> The organisation of the material in this

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<sup>93</sup> With thanks to Leslie Whitworth, curator at the Design Archives, for her help with this and for her introduction to Filemaker cataloguing software, also used by the Design Archives at the University of Brighton, and which was used to compile the catalogue of the Hartnell archive for this research project.

<sup>94</sup> This numbered box system shifted and changed from its original order in 2008 when Claire Mitchison and her husband decided to move back into the house and I was required to re-box the

way gave shape to both the story of Hartnell's biography, his life at Cambridge, his contribution to the Footlights theatrical productions, for example, and also examples of the type of design work produced by him and his team throughout his career, represented through hundreds of sketches and photographs. Material pertaining to his royal dressing, which comprises at least half of all sketched designs in the archive, demonstrated the importance to Hartnell's career both in terms of volume of production, but also the percentage of material saved. A basic catalogue of the paper archive and photographs was compiled. The dress collection was catalogued and boxed according to minimum standards; the only boxes and acid free tissue paper made available to me however were not of conservation standard. (Figure 1.22).

#### ***1.4.2. Research Environment and Ontological Process: definitions and taxonomy of the Archive***

Over time a relationship of trust has developed between Claire Williams and myself, and given her permission, I was allowed to search the house. In the course of the last three years, more and more paperwork and artefacts have been found squirreled away in drawers and cupboards in the house, from scraps of lists hidden between the pages of a book, to a box of dusty plaster moulds for Hartnell perfume bottles, and even Hartnell's personal hair brush set. (Figure 1.23).

Some of the material was originally found in the cellar of the house, and was irretrievably damaged, and wrapping objects in plastic food wrap from the kitchen drawer at least provided a measure against the spread of mould throughout the rest of the collection at that time.<sup>95</sup> Identification and photographing objects took place at the kitchen table, and items were labelled with jam-pot stickers in a very domesticated setting. (Figure 1.24 and 1.25).

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entire archive in smaller boxes in order for them to fit back into the attic from where the material had originally come in 2005. All best efforts were made by me to make a note of the new box system as this process was completed at great speed, however some material used here is uncatalogued and the original attempt to add a letter that would indicate the type of material and the date of the material was abandoned in place of a basic box number, file number and possibly individually numbered documents or sketches plus a description.

<sup>95</sup> As an emergency measure, I was advised to wrap mouldy objects and documents in plastic food wrap by members of staff at the V&A Archive of Art and Design, who I telephoned on the discovery of the damp and damaged material in the cellar in October 2005. Nearly five years later, this material is still wrapped in food wrap, and much of what was left untreated or not removed at the time of discovery in the cellar of the house has deteriorated further and is now infested with bugs, putting the entire Archive at risk.

Papers and artefacts have been basically systemised by me and boxed in terms of theme, such as business franchises and licensing agreements, autobiographical writing, and special events such as the coronation, 1953, the royal wedding, 1947, the royal tours overseas, and type of material, such as photographs, pencil and watercolour sketched designs, objects such as briefcases, embroidery samples, Hartnell designed/made garments and the remnants of Hartnell's personal library. A broad-brush chronological approach has been taken within these themes led by the examples of the different types of material found in the Archive, which includes forty boxes of paperwork, sketches and business paperwork and twenty-two boxes of garments.

Susan Grigg states that: 'Archival practice rests on the principles of provenance and original order: that materials should be acquired in whatever groupings reflect their initial use and maintained in their present structure and sequence within those groupings.'<sup>96</sup> As much care as possible has been taken to keep the Hartnell correspondence in the Archive in its original order as it was found, in particular the files of business documentation that have been clearly lifted directly from filing cabinets at 26 Bruton Street, despite their often muddled content in terms of date. This 'muddle' perhaps demonstrates either the chaotic administration at Hartnell's or the rush to remove the material from the couture house in 1987 by Mitchison. This business correspondence is perhaps the only material of 'official character', historically considered archive material proper, and the ontological order of the paperwork is therefore important.<sup>97</sup> Grigg writes however (in 1991) that provenance is now more important than functional order.<sup>98</sup> The Hartnell Archive today is very far removed from its original home, function and order, as its location reflects the intersection of his public and private life.

The ontology and taxonomy of the rest of the collection (embroidery samples, sketches, personal effects, ephemera) has been part of a more invasive process on

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<sup>96</sup> Susan Grigg, "Archival Practice and the Foundations of Historical Method." *The Journal of American History*. 78. 1 (Jun., 1991): 232.

<sup>97</sup> Andrew Prescott. "The Textuality of the Archive." Louise Craven. Ed. *What are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader*. (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2008): 31-51, Caroline Williams. "Personal Papers: Perceptions and Practices." Louise Craven. Ed. *What are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives: A Reader*. (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2008): 53-67. Both Prescott and Williams refer to Hilary Jenkinson's *A Manual of Archive Administration* (1966) who defined the archive as paperwork generated to support official organisations and businesses. Personal paperwork and effects were not considered archive material by Jenkinson.

<sup>98</sup> Grigg, "Archival Practice and the Foundations of Historical Method," 232.

my part, in order to preserve the objects and to make them easier to find (sketches from same period boxed together, for example).<sup>99</sup> Much of this material was found in old suitcases, but is now wrapped in layers of acid free tissue and boxed.

## 1.5. The Social Life of The Archive

This chapter introduces the idea that the interior spaces of the house in Cornwall containing Hartnell's archive, his possessions, and the detritus left behind as evidence of a private and public life lived, *is* the Archive. The paperwork, sketches and photographs that make up part of the Archive had been originally kept in the archive room at the Hartnell Salon at 26, Bruton Street, Mayfair, London W1, where the House of Hartnell had been based since 1935. In 1987 when the company was sold to chief executive and managing director of Moss Bros., Manny Silverman and Associates, the contents of the building at 26 Bruton Street, including the archive room, were removed by George Mitchison, then Executive Director at Hartnell's, to his family home in Ticehurst, Kent.<sup>100</sup> As Silverman and his associates were buying the couture house and all the rights to its trademark, including the Hartnell signature and all the archive material pertaining to this house style and design identity would normally have stayed at the house at the time of the sale. It is unusual for this type of material to no longer be held at a couture house, even when such a fashion brand changes hands, because subsequent designers refer to the original designer's sketches and photographs in order to sustain the original signature style of the couture house.

Leora Auslander writes that 'objects, like the people who use them are embodied' and also that 'humans expect things to outlive us, embodying and carrying a trace of our physical selves into the future in which we are no longer present. After the death of their owner...in the long term they offer a sensory experience of continued contact'.<sup>101</sup> In Janelle Wilson's study of nostalgia, in particular "Objects in the Home", she writes that:

Material objects trigger memories, emotions, and connections to people and places in our lives. The objects that people collect thus often say something about who they are – their identity. Indeed, when someone close to us dies, our own self-identity is altered – we had

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<sup>99</sup> See Appendix 2, *Audit and Catalogue of the Contents of the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive*.

<sup>100</sup> Ruth Gledhill, "Couture House of Hartnell is Rescued" *The Times*, Saturday August 1, 1987: 2

<sup>101</sup> Auslander, "Beyond Words", 1020.

defined our self in relation to this person ...Certainly, having objects which bring to mind important people in our lives will trigger memories of those people. <sup>102</sup>

This could offer up an explanation as to the Archive's current situation in the house, which once belonged to the Mitchisons, a family that had been closest to Hartnell in life. Perhaps George Mitchison surrounded himself with the objects that once belonged to Hartnell, because he wanted to experience 'continued contact' with the man he had loved?

The Archive material was removed from 26 Bruton Street in Hartnell bags, with swing tags labelling each bag according to the contents, hand written by Mitchison. Filing cabinets were removed with their contents intact, and suitcases were filled with sketches and embroidery samples. Several hundred of Hartnell's books, and his decorative objects and furniture, incorporated into the Mitchison's private homes since Hartnell's death in 1979, were also removed to the house in Cornwall. Once the Mitchisons moved to Cornwall the bags and suitcases still containing the archive material exactly as it had been originally taken from the fashion House, were stored in the cellar and the attic in the private house along with what was left of Hartnell's library. All of this material remained exactly where Mitchison had originally stored it until my arrival at the house in October 2005. Other books, paintings, sketches, photographs, decorative objects and furniture that had once belonged to Hartnell had been inherited by Claire Williams (Mitchison) and were extant in her private home in Devon in 2005. Various other bags of paperwork, including the business accounts, were found in wardrobes and cupboards in the Cornwall house.

Over time the Archive of this designer's personal and working life has been scattered across the country into pockets of material, and may never be reunited. Mitchison did not remove the contents of the Hartnell Archive room in order to deposit it into the safekeeping of for example, the V&A Museum, but moved it from the couture house in Mayfair, London to his private residences, storing it in damp outbuildings, and even damper cellars. However, the fact that this very large selection of Hartnell's Archive was kept by the Mitchison family, so close to Hartnell in his lifetime, has meant that this material is now safe and has been

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<sup>102</sup> Janelle L. Wilson. *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*. (Lowisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005): 112-113.

accessible to myself for research and publication purposes and to others such as the curator of exhibitions at Buckingham Palace, which bring this material into public view.

Also, as explained earlier in this chapter,<sup>103</sup> Michael Pick's book, *Bedazzled!* was published by the American publishing house Pointed Leaf Press, in 2007. Images throughout this book reproduce much of Pick's private collection of Hartnell archival material and the publication of this book has usefully put some parts of this separated archive into the public domain.

Mitchison moved most of the archive material from 26 Bruton Street to his home in Ticehurst, where royal sketched designs were stored in outbuildings in trunks. When finally moving to Cornwall, these trunks were left behind when the removal company did not provide enough removal vans and although the new owner of the property had agreed for the Mitchisons to return and collect this at a later date, he reneged on this verbal agreement. A legal case was taken on by Mitchison's solicitors who attempted to get the objects back without success.

Other material from the Hartnell Archive is now placed in the Royal Court Dress Collection at Kensington Palace, having been purchased from Kerry Taylor Auctions in association with Southeby's on 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2003 and 25<sup>th</sup> May 2005 respectively. This material is instantly recognisable as having come from the same archive room at Hartnell's salon, as it fits with files of paperwork relating to the royal wedding of 1947 and the Coronation in 1953 extant in the Archive in Cornwall. The watercolour and pencil designs for the royal women are also recognisable as being by Hartnell and are signed by him. Some of these Hartnell sketches appeared in Kerry Taylor auctions (in association with Sothebys) 'A Passion for Fashion' on 27 November 2003 at Olympia in London. Royal designs from this part of the Archive were purchased by The Royal Court Dress Collection at Kensington Palace and accession paperwork at Kensington Palace explained that 'prior to sale, these items were property of Captain George Mitchison, who managed public relations for Norman Hartnell.'<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> See section 1.3.2.

<sup>104</sup> Kensington Palace, Court Dress Collection, Samples of Archive Material. 2005.025/1-9. Norman Hartnell, Dress designs, Ladies. H.M. Queen Elizabeth. Coronation of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II, 1953. 2005.027/1-48. Royal Dress, Circa 1940-1960. Norman Hartnell, Documents: Photographs and other documents. 2003.187-195. Norman Hartnell, Dress Design, Ladies. 1940-1949.

### *1.5.1. The Hartnell archive 'under house arrest'*

As already stated earlier in this chapter, the material found within this archive has directed my project. I have been left alone to research completely freely to read everything I find and to interpret it. There is now, however, an ethical tension over the fact of the personal Hartnell/Mitchison relationships revealed through the Archive, and acknowledgement of this by Claire Williams. The revealed relationship between Hartnell and Mitchison has presented me with an ethical problem. The owner, who shares no such knowledge, and who has shown such generosity, would prefer their relationship to remain private. This has caused, on my part, difficulties over the material and with my personal relationship with the owner of the papers and objects, Mitchison's daughter, and also between my personal relationship with the material and the owner, who has shown me extraordinary personal kindness and generosity. As Derrida has stated:

It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret. With such a status, the documents, which are not always discursive writings, are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged *topology*.<sup>105</sup>

Thus this archive only survives as such because of its topological situation, 'under house arrest', kept privately in Cornwall, respectively by Mitchinson's daughter, who has no plans for its secure future. My role as the unofficial archivist, and the only person who knows what the Archive contains, sits alongside this situation rather uneasily.

The house, built in the second part of the nineteenth century, has a large attic, a three-roomed cellar, two very large reception rooms, four bedrooms and two bathrooms along with a kitchen and breakfast room. Within this internal space, the Archive has been discovered over time scattered everywhere, retrieved, moved from room to room as it was sorted, and then finally, when the house was re-occupied, and returned once more to the attic in November 2008. (Figures 1.26 & 1.27). Between October 2005 and November 2008 many of Hartnell's possessions were discarded by Claire Williams and her husband, including many of Hartnell's

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<sup>105</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 3.

books. I was given two days to sort through them compiling a broad-brush inventory of the type of books he had owned. I took the initiative to box up those I felt were the most important examples. (Figure 1.28 & 1.29).

Always treating the private house and its contents with respect, over time it was always clear to me that my responsibility was to the subject of my study rather to the now absent residents of the house, and I became braver about opening drawers and cupboards, as it became obvious that they had a clear lack of interest in its details and that the Archive was not limited to the bags of material removed from the attic. Over the three years more and more paperwork and artefacts pertaining to the couturier were found randomly stored in drawers and cupboards in the house, from scraps of paper revealing fascinating lists found hidden between the pages of a book, saved as the majority of his library was lost to a book dealer, to a monogrammed dinner shirt still in its packaging as it has been returned from the laundry, embroidered with Hartnell's initials, but cast out by the family for the skip. It was also clear that since so few of these discarded items were closely looked at, that family members did not share my understanding about what much of the material actually was or were less concerned with its historical significance.

Working within the many layers of the Archive became like working within an archaeological dig, as the layers of fragments of material were revealed through a careful sifting process. The house itself has acted as what Derrida has described as the 'substrate', or the underlying layer on which the archive has been deposited, not always immediately obvious as such, but over time discovered to be as much a part of Hartnell's Archive as his personal letters or his autobiography. From the colours painted onto the interior walls of the rooms to the light fittings, in imitation of Hartnell's private homes Lovel Dene and Rose Place, Hartnell's archive incorporates so much more than just the originally discovered bags of paperwork and sketched designs.

As a result of Mitchison inheriting, living with and guarding all of Hartnell's possessions in the manner explained here, the material culture pertaining to Hartnell's life and work through this research has become conflated with lives and home of the Mitchisons since Hartnell's death in 1979, and even more so since 1985, when Mitchison acquired the paper archive from the salon. The Archive is therefore bound up with the paperwork and possessions of Mitchison, much in the

same way as the personal and working lives of these two men were too between 1938 when they met and 1979 when Hartnell died. Hidden amongst the Archive were boxes of handwritten poetry and prose by Hartnell, pencilled ‘traces’ of the man evident in his handwriting. There, as, Auslander writes, ‘the individuality of the scribe is present in every letter’,<sup>106</sup> and here too was his red, leather, wallet. Tucked inside are several well-worn, early black and white snap-shots of Mitchison dating back to 1938, revealing the particular attachment Hartnell developed for him just before the War, when Mitchison was a young Guardsman. (Figures 1.30 & 1.31).

### ***1.5.2. New Critical Theoretical Approaches to the Use of Archives: Scraps, traces, fragments***

Archives are no longer simply considered at face value; boxes of historical documents held in some government office to be consulted for historical facts. New critical theoretical approaches to the use of archives began with Michel Foucault’s ‘questioning of the *document*’ in the 1960s, and continued with Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever* in the early 1990s, in which he discussed the archive in terms of memory and psychoanalysis – the making of marks on his computer, creating the ‘substrates’ or layers of text with archives as their source.<sup>107</sup> The cultural historian Carolyn Steedman’s work on the archive responds to Derrida’s *Archive Fever* with regard to history and memory (as a metaphor for the archive - archives like the human memory distort history according to what is remembered and forgotten and what is discarded and kept), and also considers the impact of archives on the writing of history and novels in the nineteenth century. She brings the use of archives up to date and has paved the way for their use in cultural studies with her lively descriptions of the longing and ‘fever’ experienced by those that research in archives with never enough time.<sup>108</sup>

The archives considered by archival theory however are usually government or organizational archives that hold paperwork and records generated through transactions. Personal archives are often a mixture of both transactional material

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<sup>106</sup> Auslander, “Beyond Words”, 1018.

<sup>107</sup> Michel Foucault. 1969. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010): 6, Jacques Derrida. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>108</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 18-19.

and also ‘the flotsam of the individual life’.<sup>109</sup> Catherine Hobbs writes that personal records can be studied as documentation of individual character, ‘there are glimpses of the inner soul as well as its outer manifestation in public activities.’<sup>110</sup>

According to Steedman, the archive is the place where the ‘past ... has deposited some traces and fragments, usually in written form’, which might perhaps include ‘selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there’.<sup>111</sup> The Hartnell Archive reflects this statement perfectly – to quote Steedman again, as a historian my ‘craft is to conjure a social system from a nutmeg grater’ or in this case, the life and work of a man from his monogrammed dinner shirt and his handwritten lists, treating all of these objects pertaining to Hartnell as the ‘the object, (the event, the happening, the story from the past)’.<sup>112</sup>

I have made myself ‘at home in his scraps of writing’ working amongst the decorative objects and furniture which he collected and the garments which he designed and which were made in his couture house workrooms. What I consider the top layer of the Archive, takes the form of random scraps of paper, often handwritten notes or lists by Hartnell himself, which have become detached from the main body of the paper archive. These include lists with headings such as ‘Famous Dresses’, ‘Christmas Cards’ or ‘Perfumes to be Sold on Carnaby Street’, have proved key to understanding the importance of particular parts of the collection. (Figure 1.32). The ‘Famous Dresses’ list, discovered by chance between the pages of Cecil Beaton’s book *Royal Portraits*, cast significant light on the model gowns that make up part of the dress collection. Each dress in this part of the Hartnell dress collection is named, described in terms of colour, and linked to the original customer for whom it was made. This collection is now understood to have been used for publicity events at the house, and a further scrap of paper lists these same dresses, explaining that it is to be kept under lock and key. This demonstrates the value and importance placed on this collection to the

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<sup>109</sup> Catherine Hobbs. ‘The Character of Personal Archives: Reflections on the Value of Records of Individuals.’ *Archivaria*. 52 (Fall) 2001: 128.

<sup>110</sup> Hobbs, “The Character of Personal Archives,” 126.

<sup>111</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001): 69

<sup>112</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 77.

couture house and explains why it was saved and remains extant in the Archive house today. (Figure 1.33).

Anja Tollenaar, from the Central Register of Archives of Design at the Netherlands Institute for Art History, sources and rescues the archives of designers in The Netherlands. She states that managing and preserving archives is a difficult task – and confirms that many are lost or hidden, and that ‘we need to study these materials compiled through the work and life of designers in order to study the authentic context and to be able to reconstruct the design process’.<sup>113</sup>

When writing about how visual artists use archives as the origins of their work, Hal Foster states that archival artists ‘seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present.’<sup>114</sup> I would go further and suggest that as a researcher investigating the life and work of a designer through his archive, I am also seeking to make Hartnell himself present in his paperwork and original designs. I seek, in Tollenaar’s words ‘to study the authentic context’ for his work and to ‘reconstruct his design processes,’ which is possible, among other things, through close analysis of his annotated sketched designs. Ilya Kabokov believes that ‘archives promise us, a sense of (and in) time’.<sup>115</sup> This story is not a biography of Hartnell, but will analyse his life story understood within its ‘sense of (and in) time’ is the context for his work.

### 1.5.2.a. Queering the Archive

This chapter also brings into focus the fact that this thesis ultimately searches for what has hitherto been side-stepped in the writing of Hartnell’s life and work: this includes his queer identity. The intention is to foster a new understanding of his couture design work and the Hartnell trademark and fashion brand through an analysis of his personal identity. Although this thesis did not originally set out to do this, the importance of Hartnell’s sexuality emerged after the first two years of archive research. Hobbs writes that research in a personal archive ‘uncovers much about the evolving personality and character traits of the author’ and that

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<sup>113</sup> Anja Tollenaar, The Central Register of Design Archives as a Central Network of Artefacts, metadata and cultural heritage institutions, Conference Paper, The Design History Society Annual Conference, *Networks of Design*, September, 2008.

<sup>114</sup> Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse”, *October* 110 Fall 2004:4.

<sup>115</sup> Ilya Kabokov. “Sixteen Ropes.” in Sven Spieker. Ed. *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2008): ix.

‘personal archives reflect not only what a person does or thinks, but who they are, how they envision and experience their lives.’<sup>116</sup> My experience in Hartnell’s archive reflects Hobbs’ theory.

As Laura Doan has explained, the word ‘queer’ is a highly contested term, lacking in scholarly consensus. Treated as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgendered histories and pastimes by some historians, others consider it to mean the disruption of stable sexual identities. Difficult to define, it can be a verb, noun and adjective, and indeed ‘revels in the open-endedness’s’ of its definitions.<sup>117</sup> Peter McNeil uses David Halperin’s ‘much cited notion of ‘queer’:

...where ‘queer’ creates a horizon to think through the past and the present. In an attempt to detach the term from simply a libidinal connotation, Halperin’s use of the term ‘queer’ is defined as a positionality ‘at odds with the normal, the legitimate and the dominant.’<sup>118</sup>

Queer craft practitioner and curator, Matt Smith, describes the term queer as ‘differing from the normal or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange’<sup>119</sup> and also as ‘an unsafe and dangerous place’ adding that ‘ambiguity is one of queer’s biggest allures.’<sup>120</sup> Hartnell’s performs a somewhat ambiguous gendered identity through dress, which is discussed in Chapters Three and Four. This aspect of his identity is understood here as a way of negotiating his queerness within the normal, legitimate and dominant behaviour according to the appropriated norms of gender and sexuality in his lifetime.

To approach an archive with the intention of deliberately looking for hidden or purposefully overlooked queer histories amongst the material is to go against convention. In her essay on the textile designers, and same-sex couple Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher, Bridget Elliott notes that design historian Peter McNeil has remarked that ‘issues of the designer’s sexuality has been suppressed

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<sup>116</sup> Hobbs, “The Character of Personal Archives”, 128.

<sup>117</sup> Laura Doan. Welcome and Keynote Presentation.’ Sexuality and the Archive: A Colloquium on Method. February 18<sup>th</sup>, ‘2011. King’s College London.

<sup>118</sup> Peter McNeil. “Crafting queer spaces: privacy and posturing.” in Alla Myzelev and John Potvin. Eds. *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity*. Farnham, Eng.: Ashgate, 2010): 21

<sup>119</sup> Matt Smith. “Queering the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.” *The View From Here: New Research in Design History and Material Culture*. The Sixth Annual Symposium of the University of Brighton’s Postgraduate Design History Society. 17 July 2011. Faculty of Arts, University of Brighton.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, “Queering the Museum”, 2011.

in most of the design literature'.<sup>121</sup> And, as curator Andy Horn has pointed out, 'the lives of artists [are] suppressed in preference to the art historical value of the work', and this is as absolutely true in the curation of Hartnell's garments in museum exhibitions and also in literature about him discussed earlier in this chapter.

This thesis argues that Hartnell couture was not solely the product of the designer, but part of a collective team, although he was certainly the creative director, whose taste and signature styles permeated the fashionable clothing produced at his house. It also argues for a biographical approach to his life, and therefore to focus on the subject's personal, queer life, something that has not been seen as relevant or legitimate in the context of Western heterocentric society.<sup>122</sup> To explain this vacuum in enquiry, Judith Halberstam has looked to Foucault's 'subjugated knowledge', which she describes as:

a form of thinking that has been suppressed. It is a set of topics that have become unimaginable as scholarly topics. Queer is often part of subjugated knowledge simply because it has a hard time presenting itself as relevant knowledge ... There are all these legitimating strategies we have to use to make things seem like a sensible object of knowledge.<sup>123</sup>

To deliberately search for such 'subjugated knowledge', material that could lend itself to a reading of Hartnell's queer identity is to approach an archive with the intention of reading the material through a different lens. Hartnell's sexuality is argued here as relevant to his creative output. Self-reflexivity is crucial and we have to understand how past sexualities were experienced and organised. These issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Two and Three.

### 1.5.2.b. Auto/biography and the materiality of archives

Traditionally archives are used to put together the story of a person's life or as Hermione Lee describes it 'biography is a process of making up, or making

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<sup>121</sup> Bridget Elliott. "Art Deco Hybridity, Interior Design, and Sexuality between the Wars: Two Double Acts: Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher/Eyre de Lanux and Evelyn Wyld." in Laura Doan. *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*. (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 6.

<sup>122</sup> Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Queering the Museum, 4th November 2010 until the end of January 2011, an Arts Council Funded exhibition, in conjunction with ShOUT! Festival.

<sup>123</sup> Mathias Danbolt. "The Eccentric Archive: An Interview with Judith Halberstam." *Trickster-Nordic Queer Journal*. [n.d]. Web. 21 April 2011. <http://www.trikster.net/1/halberstam/1.html>

over'.<sup>124</sup> Biographers select material, as Lee notes, in order 'to make a shape of the life'.<sup>125</sup> Rather than simply shaping a life, this thesis considers whether such a project is possible. How can a life be revealed through its material remains?

### 1.5.2.c. Material Culture Approaches to Objects in the Archive – objects as 'historical evidence' and as 'sites of meaning acquisition.'

Social historian Auslander puts forward the case for the study of material culture by historians as an alternative to text as a source. She writes that:

Objects not only are the product of history, they are also active agents in history. In their communicative, performative, emotive, and expressive capacities, they act, have effects in the world. Without the crown, orb, and sceptre, for example, a monarch is not a monarch.<sup>126</sup>

This premise forms the framework within which to investigate the remains of the possessions of Norman Hartnell in order to understand more about his identity.

Auslander also writes that:

consumers choose the furnishings of everyday life – clothing, furniture, jewellery, cutlery, dishware – both to reflect back to themselves and to convey to others the person they think they are (or hope to be). Goods were not, then, merely the expression of a pre-existing self, but one of the means by which the self was constituted.

<sup>127</sup>

As Janelle Wilson has noted, 'One's home can itself be a sacred place'. She quotes Graham Rowles and Hege Ravdal, who have described home as the 'living museum' where 'identity-defining personal possessions are stored and displayed.'<sup>128</sup> The furnishings of everyday life chosen by Hartnell will be shown to comprise many different types of material culture with which Hartnell constructed his identity, and for the purposes of this thesis all are considered part of his archive. As Erving Goffman has written, the subject's 'performance' or 'front' takes place in a 'setting' (furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props) surrounded by 'sign

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<sup>124</sup> Lee, *Body Parts*, 28

<sup>125</sup> Hermione Lee, *Interview with Ramona Koval*, Sunday 25/09/2005, Presenter Romona Koval, Producer Amanda Smith. Last update: 16 January 2011, Hermione Lee Website Copyright © 2006-present

<sup>126</sup> Leora Auslander. 'Beyond Words.' *The American Historical Review*. American Historical Association. 110. 4. October 2005: 1017.

<sup>127</sup> Auslander, "Beyond Words", 1043-1044.

<sup>128</sup> Graham D. Royles and Hege Ravdal. "Aging, Place and Meaning in the Face of Changing Circumstances." in Robert S. Weiss and Scott A. Bass. Eds. *Challenges of the Third Age: Meaning and Purpose in Later Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002: In Janelle L. Wilson. *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005): 111.

vehicles', or the objects that the subject chooses to aid his performance.<sup>129</sup>

Photographs of Hartnell posing within his interiors (discussed in Chapter Three) fit within Goffman's theories.

Jules Prown has stated that 'the study of material culture is the study of material to understand culture.'<sup>130</sup> Viewing Hartnell's things through Prown's methods, we can consider these artefacts, as we can the rest of his paper archive, as historical evidence. Prown considers artefacts as 'the only class of historical events that occurred in the past but survive into the present. They can be reexperienced; they are authentic, primary historical material available for firsthand study.'<sup>131</sup> The understanding of the term 'art' in 'artefact' can be applied to both the decorative objects that Hartnell collected, good examples of particular types of porcelain, glassware and furniture from particular historical periods, but also to the garments he designed and had made in the workrooms at his couture house.

Alternatively, within the framework for the study of material culture suggested by Prown, 'artefacts materialise belief' and when read as fictions, they also 'express culture metaphorically'.<sup>132</sup> The 'prevailing attitudes and beliefs' of both Hartnell (as a collector of decorative art) and of Hartnell and his staff (as producers of highly skilled decorative/craft objects) within the world in which the couturier, his workforce and his customers operated, are reflected both in the residue of objects collected by Hartnell during the height of his success, and the garments produced at the couture house extant in the archive. This will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

In 1999, Judy Attfield reviewed the 'relationship between Material Culture and Design History'.<sup>133</sup> Most useful as a framework within which to study Hartnell's objects is Attfield's statement that: 'material culture studies concentrates on the process of meaning acquisition and locates the site of such transactions in the object itself and therefore where object/subject relations should be

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<sup>129</sup> Erving Goffman. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (London) Penguin Books, 1990): 32-33.

<sup>130</sup> Jules David Prown. "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" S. Lubar and W.D. Kingery. Eds. *History From Things: Essays on Material Culture*. London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993: 1.

<sup>131</sup> Prown. "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?", 3.

<sup>132</sup> Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture", 11-13.

<sup>133</sup> Judy Attfield. 'Beyond the Pale: Reviewing the Relationship between Material Culture and Design History.' *Journal of Design History* Vol. 12 No. 4 1999: 373.

investigated.’<sup>134</sup> Material culture is therefore about the relationship between people and things.

Auslander’s writes that ‘historians are, by profession, suspicious of things. Words are our stock-in-trade.’ She makes the argument for ‘the utility and importance of material culture’ as ‘limiting ourselves to written sources ... archives and libraries ... renders us unable to grasp important dimensions of human experience, and our explanations of major historical problems are thereby impoverished.’<sup>135</sup> Thus the use of Hartnell’s paper archive, much of which is comprised of ‘words’ but a great deal of which comprises drawn designs for his couture garments, and objects such as embroidery samples, can be brought to life by studying the objects of dress made from the drawn designs (for example). His decorative art objects and collections provide the vital tools with which to understand his taste in colour and embellishment and the perfect backdrop as a context for his design work. These collections also provide the tools with which to piece together a sense of his identity.

Auslander writes that in its broadest sense, material culture embraces the class of all human-made objects, however she limits herself to two categories of object, to goods ‘of style’ or objects whose design involves aesthetic considerations and to three-dimensional objects with which people are in bodily contact. In her opinion, ‘objects that are not just seen, but also felt and touched’ are of primary importance as ‘these goods – whether jewellery or clothes that are worn, linen that is slept upon ... carry special weight in essentially all societies.’<sup>136</sup> This approach to objects is of key importance to this project, because both Hartnell’s couture garments and his collections of decorative art objects are ‘goods of style’ but also because many of his possessions extant in the Archive house such as Hartnell’s personal clothing, jewellery and personal effects have been in bodily contact with him, and are therefore the types of objects Auslander considers ‘rich sources for grasping the affective, communicative, symbolic, and expressive aspects of human life that are central to the historical project.’<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Attfield, *Wild Things*, 376.

<sup>135</sup> Leora Auslander. “Beyond Words.” *The American Historical Review*. Volume 110. Number 4. October 2005: 1015.

<sup>136</sup> Auslander, “Beyond Words”, 1015

<sup>137</sup> Auslander, “Beyond Words”, 1015

#### 1.5.2.d. Biography of objects in the archive

A second key methodology applied to the history of this archive that works in conjunction with Auslander's theories, is that in order to understand the reasons for why the Archive was found by me in the time and place that I found it, and why it was in the chaotic and damaged in which I found it, is to develop an understanding of how 'things' or this 'stuff' or material culture can be considered to have a specific social life or biography. Arjun Appadurai writes that:

Even if our own approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with, the anthropological problem is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulations of things. For that we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a *theoretical* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.<sup>138</sup>

The Archive and possessions of Norman Hartnell have also had just such a social life beyond the one they shared with him, since his death in 1979. To understand the histories and relationships hidden within these things we need to 'follow the things themselves'<sup>139</sup> asking questions about their cultural context, ownership and trajectory along the way. In considering 'things' as part of his Archive, I will also discuss the life story or biography of the archive since Hartnell's death to assess the changing meanings imbued in the material and objects by their subsequent owners. This analysis casts light on Hartnell's personal relationships and reveals aspects of his identity hitherto un-discussed.

#### *1.6. Oral Testimony: methodology*

Key to a contextualisation of the material culture present in the Hartnell Archive is the set of oral histories undertaken with as many people who worked for the House of Hartnell as could be traced. Comments made by interviewees have cast light on Hartnell's personality, his working practices and the respect and fondness many felt for Hartnell as their employer and as a man. To unlock these hidden

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<sup>138</sup> Arjun Appadurai, Ed. 'Introduction', (1986) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 5

<sup>139</sup> Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 5.

histories oral testimony has proved extremely useful, and I have recorded interviews with twenty staff members who worked at the fashion house between 1923 and 1979, along with Hartnell's goddaughter, Claire Williams, and Manny Silverman, who bought Norman Hartnell's in 1985, in order represent the people who actually drew the designs, source the fabrics, made up the designs, embroidered the garments and promoted and sold the couture at the House. (Figures 1.34 & 1.35).

I have found that the voices of the workroom staff are absent in the Archive, although visual representations of these people feature in the rare photographs taken in the workrooms at the house, we can only guess about their working lives. Photographs were taken of the workrooms only on occasions related to publicity and workroom staff would have presented themselves accordingly. Oral histories taken with the women reveal their work practice memories, and not only cast light on the working conditions but also on the true extent to which they contributed to the production of the couture garments at the fashion house – couture signed with the label of the house – Norman Hartnell, and attributed to his 'genius' – his authorship.

Interviewees were selected as a result of personal introductions by one ex-member of staff to others, and now represents those who worked for Hartnell at all levels. Work produced by these subjects was found to be extant in the Archive, including many fashion drawings and sketched designs, and embroidered garments. The inclusion of personal interviews as further contextual evidence is therefore justified in order to represent those who worked for Hartnell and unlike those senior men, George Mitchison and Norman Hartnell, they did not own the means of production, the garments produced, or take a share in any profits made by the couture house.

As Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson have written:

The most distinctive contribution of oral history has been to include within the historical record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been 'hidden from history' ... Through oral history interviews working-class men and women, ... have inscribed their experiences on the historical record and offered their own interpretations of history. Interviews have also documented aspects of historical experience, which tend to be missing from other

sources ... and they have resonated with the subjective or personal meanings of lived experience.<sup>140</sup>

I would add that it is not just about working-class histories (although this was the particular focus of socialist social historians in the post war period), but everyday experiences of people from all walks of life, particularly in terms of dress and clothing memories, that are interesting to us. Up until the last ten years, dress has already existed 'on the margins' in terms of disciplinary hierarchies. As the emphasis has shifted from the importance of production to that of consumption, a place for dress memories – how people consumed and used clothes - has opened up. I would also argue that the voices of those that produced the garments at a major fashion house like Hartnell's have been equally marginalised and are therefore valid subjects for study. Indeed the majority of these people were women and also working-class.

### 1.6.1. Memory and History

The key points to remember is that in oral testimony the narrator or interviewee is allowed to recall the past (or indeed the more recent past or present) on her or his own terms, but that also that it is the relationship between the researcher/interviewer and the narrator/interviewee that produces this history. Also, It is not about recalling facts about an event but more about the interviewee's subjective view of the event, how she or he felt about the event. For example, Anne Wright, head of a dressmaking workroom at Hartnell's in the 1950s, remembered how cold the workrooms were, and how uncomfortable the chairs were.<sup>141</sup>

It is the subjective (that is, the interpretation of experience) that oral historians use to construct a particular kind of history that has challenged the traditional historians, who believe that individual or collective memories are too unreliable a source from which to construct historical fact. Alessandro Portelli believes however that 'oral sources are credible but with a *different* credibility.' He states that: 'the importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but

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<sup>140</sup> Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson. "Introduction to the Second Edition." *The Oral History Reader* 2nd ed. Eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson. (London/New York: 2006): viv.

<sup>141</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5<sup>th</sup> July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording.

rather in its departure from is, as imagination, symbolism and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no 'false' oral sources.'<sup>142</sup>

Raphael Samuel wrote that:

Memory is historically conditioned, changing colour and shape according to the emergencies of the moment; that so far from being handed down in the timeless form of 'tradition' it is progressively altered from generation. It bears the impress of experience, in however mediated a way. It is stamped with the ruling passions of its time. Like history, memory is inherently revisionist and never more chameleon than when it appears to stay the same.<sup>143</sup>

Oral history is essentially peoples' memories, however, as Samuel points out, shifts in the historical context and opinions of the person remembering over time means that memories are also altered accordingly. Memory is also very selective when looking back in time. This must be respected, particularly in older narrators, and allowed to happen. Memory is useful to look at the areas that are not usually focused on by historians, the everyday events, and the ordinary things.

Portelli notes that oral sources are considered distant from events, and therefore undergo the distortion of faulty memory.<sup>144</sup> Many written texts are similarly written sometime after the event, however these are trusted more implicitly. In my experience many stories are told over and over again, or 'packaged' which on the one hand means that they are reinforced in the memory of the narrator, but on the downside, these become changed over time, refined and we should be wary of this sort of material, as it is not spontaneous. These stories can become anecdotes, which are still considered useful although we must always approach this material critically. The well-rehearsed 'memories' retold by Miss Louie, (Hartnell's stockkeeper between 1923-1960),<sup>145</sup> over the years were the only things she could recount in my interview with her, when she was aged 98.<sup>146</sup> That these stories had been retold over time became evident when I read a newspaper interview with her from 1969.

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<sup>142</sup> Alessandro Portelli. "What makes Oral History Different." Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson. Eds. *The Oral History Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London/New York: 2006): 68.

<sup>143</sup> Raphael Samuel. *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London/New York: Verso, 1994): x

<sup>144</sup> Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?", 68

<sup>145</sup> See Appendix 1. Norman Hartnell Oral Histories.

<sup>146</sup> Louise Richardson. Personal Interview. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2007. NHOH/2007/3/Cassette Tapes x 2.

Portelli writes, ‘what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings.’ The stories remembered by Miss Louie were the events that were meaningful for her. What Patricia Reid Hartnell showroom assistant in the late 1940s<sup>147</sup> remembered about the tailor, Monsieur John (John Driscoll), was that he ‘he pinched the girls’ bottoms’, not anything about the quality of his tailoring.<sup>148</sup> (Figure 1.36). Thus the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies no so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators’ effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context.’<sup>149</sup> It is this subjectivity that, in the words of Portelli again, ‘unique and precious element which oral sources force upon the historian.’ This does mean that facts revealed in interviews, such as dates, must be verified via other sources after the interview where possible.<sup>150</sup>

Using oral testimony this study dispels the myth of the designer as the sole creator of couture fashions, and reveals the important contribution made towards the design and production of Hartnell’s designs by his workroom staff. It analyses the impact their input had on the finished garments and examines how they translated his ideas both on paper in the form of sketches and through the ways in which he articulated what he wanted through verbal communication and demonstration. It is understood here that the finished garments were the product of the couture house and that Hartnell was indeed what would be called today the ‘creative director’ with the final say on what was produced.

## 1.7 Theoretical interpretation

### *1.7.1. Identity*

#### **1.7.1.a. Personhood and Self-Identity**

Rather than use contemporary theories of identity, Caroline Evans has examined the identity of the Paris fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli within the model of the

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<sup>147</sup> See Appendix 2. Norman Hartnell Oral Histories.

<sup>148</sup> Patricia Reid. Personal Interview. 8<sup>th</sup> May 2007. NHOH/2007/7/Cassette Tape 1.

<sup>149</sup> Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?”, 69

<sup>150</sup> Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?”, 67

“decentered subject”, which she notes was developing in the inter-war period.<sup>151</sup> What Evans describes as ‘changing models of the self’, in particular theories of masquerade by Joan Rivière (1929) and Jacques Lacan’s lecture on the Mirror Stage (1936),<sup>152</sup> were also being developed at the same time that Hartnell was alive and working in fashion. Evans writes that, ‘Schiaparelli’s theatrical designs may be argued to be predicated on the notion of a subject in process.’<sup>153</sup> Hartnell too is considered here ‘a subject in process’, however it is to contemporary sociological theories of identity that this thesis turns to understand Hartnell’s identity.

The ways in which human beings and construct their subjectivity and sense of self involves negotiating characteristics that, as Gen Doy<sup>154</sup> writes, are ‘involved in the construction of subjectivity, such as gender, class, race and sexuality.’<sup>155</sup> Sociologists such as Steph Lawler and Anthony Elliott question the idea that there is an unchanging core to each individual’s identity that never changes, and believe that identity is constructed through difference – through what we are not. We share commonalities with others, yet also retain a uniqueness.<sup>156</sup>

The dominant model of identity is understood in terms of the ‘subject-as-language’, as central to the post-modern human condition, multifaceted. One’s personal identity is understood to be a cultural construction and a performance, which cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall has called ‘the endlessly performative self.’<sup>157</sup> We negotiate many identities throughout our lives, experimenting with different definitions of self and making choices about who we want to be (or who we think we are) through active, creative ways in which a sense of self is shaped and reshaped, influenced by other people and the world around us. The term ‘identity’ may intersect with various categories such as ‘nation’ or ‘race’, ‘man’ or ‘woman’, ‘feminist’ or ‘gay’. Along with these

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<sup>151</sup> Caroline Evans. “Masks, Mirrors and Mannequins: Elsa Schiaparelli and the Decentered Subject.” *Fashion Theory*. Volume 3 Issue 1 March 1999: 4.

<sup>152</sup> Evans, “Masks, Mirrors and Mannequins”, 4.

<sup>153</sup> Evans, “Masks, Mirrors and Mannequins”, 4.

<sup>154</sup> Gen Doy is Emeritus Professor of History and Theory of Visual Culture at De Montfort University, Leicester.

<sup>155</sup> Gen Doy. *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture*. (London/New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005): 6.

<sup>156</sup> Steph Lawler. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. (Cambridge/Malden MA: Polity Press, 2008) 5. Anthony Elliott. *Concepts of the Self*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

<sup>157</sup> Stuart Hall. ‘Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?’ *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. Eds. London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996: 1.

political identities, family background, class and education influence our interests and tastes and together form lenses, through which we view the world in a particular way. We identify with these various identities throughout life, and as Hall states, this process is ongoing: ‘the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always ‘in process.’ Gen Doy neatly sums up the discourse thus:

When we speak of the self and/or the subject ... it usually implies an awareness of what constitutes an individual self, how that self relates to society and the various characteristics that are involved in the construction of subjectivity, such as gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and so on. Ideas of the self are linked to concepts of being, knowledge and the process of relating to material...<sup>158</sup>

Lawler discusses identity through the ‘apparently paradoxical combination of sameness and difference’. We share common identities with others, however she states that ‘at the same time, there is another aspect of identity, which suggests people’s uniqueness, their difference from others.’<sup>159</sup> People construct their identities, for example gender identity, through adopting the accepted norms expected of gender in the society in which they live. She quotes Gayle Rubin, who has written: ‘exclusive gender identity ... requires repression, in men, of whatever is the local version of ‘feminine’ traits; in women of the local version of ‘masculine’ traits.’<sup>160</sup> This will be discussed below in relation to Hartnell’s self-presentation and dress.

### 1.7.1.b. Self-presentation and self-fashioning

Erving Goffman considers individuals as theatrical performers.<sup>161</sup> Goffman applied this theory to everyday life, and to the ways in which, ‘the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them.’<sup>162</sup> According to Goffman’s theory of ‘signs given off’, how Hartnell

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<sup>158</sup> Gen Doy. *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture*. (London/New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005): 6-7.

<sup>159</sup> Steph Lawler. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. (Cambridge/Malden MA: Polity Press, 2008): 2.

<sup>160</sup> Gayle Rubin. “The Traffic in women: notes on the ‘political economy’ of sex.” In R. Reiter. Ed. *Towards an Anthropology of Women*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975) 179-80. In Lawler. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. 4.

<sup>161</sup> Erving Goffman. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (London: Penguin Books, 1990) Preface.

<sup>162</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, Preface.

unintentionally expressed himself in the company of others or how he ‘communicated in a broad sense’ before an ‘audience’,<sup>163</sup> can be also be understood through a close material culture analysis of the clothes that he wore and the objects he collected. Judith Butler writes however, that ‘performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance’, because this performance always takes place within the constraints or norms of society.<sup>164</sup> Thus Butler’s concept of identity suits Hartnell’s performance as queer in the decades before homosexuality was legalised in 1968. At this time his ‘performed’ queer identity would have been performed differently according to the ‘setting’, in order to avoid detection and possible prosecution.<sup>165</sup>

Despite Butler’s qualification of the term performance, the dramaturgical principles outlined by Goffman seem the perfect tool for an analysis of the self-presentation of Hartnell, as his life and work meet on the stage both in the ‘make-believe’<sup>166</sup> sense in his own theatrical performances on stage in the Cambridge Footlights productions that will be discussed early on in this chapter, and also in his couture work, in which he could be seen to be dressing his clients for their own ‘performances’ in everyday life. This will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis within an understanding that these performances took place within Butler’s ‘constraints’ and norms – the set of rules understood by Society at the time.

Hartnell’s self-presentation will be unpicked here within dress history approaches to clothing and gender, theories of cross-dressing and female impersonation as ‘the Debutante’, critical approaches to ‘the Dandy’ by Christopher Breward<sup>167</sup> and queer theoretical approaches to ‘Camp’ and ‘passing’ by Richard Dyer and Andy Medhurst. Work by Matt Houlbrook, who discusses ‘the historical organization of male sexual practices and identities’ in London between 1918 and 1957 in his 2005 publication, and Hugh David’s social history of British homosexuality will

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<sup>163</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 14

<sup>164</sup> Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): 95.

<sup>165</sup> Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, 31-32.

<sup>166</sup> Goffman, *Presentation of Self*, Preface.

<sup>167</sup> Christopher Breward. ”Style and Modernity.” *Fashion*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 161-164.

be used to establish socio-cultural historical context for Hartnell's lifestyle in the period.<sup>168</sup>

### ***1.7.2. Gender and Sexual Identity***

There are differences between biological sex and socio-cultural gender. Sex indicates a person's anatomical and physiological characteristics, which signify biological maleness or femaleness, whereas gender is socially and culturally constructed ideas of ideal masculinity and femininity. As Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott write: 'Gender is social rather than natural. In order to be a subject one has to have a sexuality.'<sup>169</sup> As Jackson and Scott state: 'Gender as [we] define it denotes a hierarchical distinction between women and men embedded in both social institutions and social practices ... Gender is also embodied and lived by men and women, in local, specific, biographical contexts and is experienced as central to identity.'<sup>170</sup> Gender encompasses characteristics commonly associated with femininity and masculinity – gender norms, and these are considered natural. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949) famously wrote: 'one is not born a woman but becomes one.'<sup>171</sup> This would suggest that becoming or adopting any identity over time is an ongoing process.

In Butler's work, she has claimed that gender is performed according to a set of socio-cultural norms including dress, gestures and postures. To become a girl, you have to 'act' like a girl. She uses the example of male to female drag to expose the constructedness of gender and '(hetero)sexuality.'<sup>172</sup> Sexuality is more complex than the idea that it is either constructed (a free choice) or determined (somehow fixed). As Butler states, 'the "performative" dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms.'<sup>173</sup> Evidence in the Archive in the form of photographs, personal letters and also through personal interview suggests that Hartnell's queer identity was performed according to normative sexual roles

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<sup>168</sup> Matt Houlbrook. *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*. (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Hugh David. *On Queer Street: A social history of British homosexuality, 1895-1995*. (London: Harper Collins, 1997).

<sup>169</sup> Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott. *Gender: A Sociological Reader*. (London: Routledge, 2002): 10.

<sup>170</sup> Jackson and Scott, *Gender: A Sociological Reader*, 1.

<sup>171</sup> Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972): 295.

<sup>172</sup> Judith Butler. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (London/New York: Routledge, 2006). Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>173</sup> Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex."* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London and new York: Routledge, 1993): 94.

(male=active, female=passive), as was his gender performance as female when he cross dressed, according to the constraints of the time in which he lived before gay liberation. According to Shaun Cole's research, effeminate gay men identified with the feminine, and up until the 1960s, 'the effeminate queen was the dominant public image of male homosexuals.'<sup>174</sup> Writing in 1979, Esther Newton's ethnographic research into the culture of gay male drag queens in America, notes that 'in the last ten years there has been an enormous struggle within the gay male community to come to terms with the stigma of effeminacy. The most striking result has been a shift from effeminate to masculine styles.'<sup>175</sup> Masculinity was not available to Hartnell: he was effeminate.

The social and cultural historical context for Hartnell's queer life discussed in Chapter Two will be set out using work by Matt Houlbrook, who discusses 'the historical organization of male sexual practices and identities' in London between 1918 and 1957 in his 2005 publication. Hugh David's social history of British homosexuality will be used to establish socio-cultural historical context for Hartnell's lifestyle in the period.<sup>176 177</sup>

Lawler discusses the Western idea that the authentic self is somehow hidden behind the mask of the identity that is put on, as if wearing a mask. Thus the performance or mask hides who we really are inside. She explains that there are problems with the concept that what can be seen on the outside, does not represent what is to be found on the inside, and that is considered inauthentic. 'There is a belief that the outer form ought to express the 'inner self'.<sup>178</sup> If the outer form expresses the inner self, then Hartnell's wearing of women's clothing and make-up throughout his life is revealing. Lawler writes that: 'both Goffman and Butler see individual actions and responses as part of a wider social order that permits some actions and disallows others.'<sup>179</sup> Thus identity is not really about who we really are, but who it is possible for us to be in the context in which we construct

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<sup>174</sup> Shaun Cole. *"Don We Now Our Gay Apparel": Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century.* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000): 59.

<sup>175</sup> Esther Newton. (1972). *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America.* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979): xiii.

<sup>176</sup> Matt Houlbrook. *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957.* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Hugh David. *On Queer Street: A social history of British homosexuality, 1895-1995.* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).

<sup>177</sup> Matt Houlbrook. *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957.* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>178</sup> Lawler, *Identity*, 102.

<sup>179</sup> Lawler, *Identity*, 104.

our identities, for example the period in time in which we live out our lives, and the constraints this puts upon us, for example the fact that to be homosexual was illegal until 1968.

Cole quotes Peter Burton's list of things that 'male inverts' in England were advised not to do in 1948, in order to avoid detection:

Don't masquerade ... in women's clothes, take female parts in the theatrical performances or use make-up; don't be too meticulous in the matter of your own clothes, or affect any extremes in colour or cut; don't wear conspicuous rings, watches, cuff-links, or other jewellery;

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As Chapter Two will discuss, Hartnell *did* all of these things. As Chapter Two will also reveal, his original draft autobiography included paragraphs in which he describes the difficulties he experienced as a result of his effeminacy.

### 1.7.2.a. Performing gender and sexuality through dress

Ruth Barnes and Joanne Eicher examine dress as a cultural phenomenon, and a way of identifying an individual geographically and historically. They state that 'dress serves as a sign that the individual belongs to a certain group, but simultaneously differentiates the same individual from all others. It includes and excludes.'<sup>181</sup> Dress can also act as an emblem of power, revealing an individual's class, taste and social and economic position. Thus a person's social position is affected by their gender identity, particularly as the binary oppositions between being identified as either male or female is part of the fabric of society, and as Jackson and Scott have noted, gender 'was adopted in order to emphasise the social construction of masculinity and femininity and the social ordering of relations between women and men.'<sup>182</sup> Barnes and Eicher write that, 'Each society, or subgroup of a society has its own rules regarding which body modifications or supplements should declare gender roles; These roles, when linked with roles of others, represent part of social structure.'<sup>183</sup>

Chapter Two analyses how Hartnell managed his gender queer life 'socially' through dress, shifting genders, from his double-breasted tailored suit or tweeds,

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<sup>180</sup> Peter Burton. "The Way We Wore", in Idem, *Amongst the Aliens: Some Aspects of Gay Life*. (Brighton: 1995): 167 in Cole, *Don We Now*, 59.

<sup>181</sup> Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher. *Dress and Gender: Making Meaning in Cultural Context*. (Oxford/New York: Berg, 1992): 1.

<sup>182</sup> Jackson and Scott, *Gender: A Sociological Reader*, 1.

<sup>183</sup> Barnes and Eicher, *Dress and Gender*, 19.

and coded suede shoes and button-hole carnation, to his sequined lace pyjama suits and crinoline gowns. He wore women's clothes made by workroom staff for his personal use. He did this 'after hours' from the mid-1920s. Hartnell could be defined as transgender using Richard Ekins and Dave King's definition: 'The term 'transgender' includes transvestites, drag queens, gender benders and all gender blenders, whether straight or gay, who in their cross-dressing and all sex-changing 'transgress' the binary divide between the sexes.'<sup>184</sup>

In Claudine Grigg's work on 'shifting genders' and managing queer gendered identity in private and public life, she notes that: 'for the observer, the image of gender defines gender; that's the story of the mirror. The reflection is an accessory of self.'<sup>185</sup> (Figure 1.37). Hartnell surrounded himself with mirrors, and his showroom at Bruton Street was famous for the floor to ceiling mirrors still in situ in this listed interior. He performed his queer identity in private and thus lived a dual life.

Hartnell could be included in the group of men that Andy Medhurst has named, 'Oscar's offspring.'<sup>186</sup> Medhurst discusses the effeminate queen as 'a vital component of English popular comedy.' He argues that this sexual stereotype was well understood by audiences as early as 1934, and cites a scene from the George Formby film *Boots Boots*, with Formby starring as 'a lowly employee of a swanky hotel' as an example of this:

One of these guests flounces in wearing Oxford bags (the excessive baggy trousers favoured by the wealthy young gentlemen of the era), spats, an elaborate pocket handkerchief, a lavish flower in his lapel buttonhole, and speaking in an exaggerated parody of an upper-class accent. 'I must have a pink room', he tells Formby.<sup>187</sup>

In 2005, Hartnell's spats were found displayed in a glass-fronted cabinet (that also housed both George Mitchison's boots and Hartnell's shoes) in Mitchison's bedroom at the house in Cornwall. (Figure 1.38). Chapters Two and Three will discuss photographs of Hartnell, complete with 'lavish flower in his lapel buttonhole' and his taste in interior decoration and objects, that often involved the colour pink.

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<sup>184</sup> Richard Ekins & Dave King. Eds. *Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-dressing and Sex-changing*. (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>185</sup> Griggs, *S/He*, 4.

<sup>186</sup> Andy Medhurst. *National joke: popular comedy and English cultural identity*. (London: Routledge, 2007): 88.

<sup>187</sup> Medhurst, *National joke*, 88.

## 1.8. Interior Design, Theories of collecting, Gender and Sexuality

### 1.8.1. Interior design, taste, gender and sexuality

The character in the 1934 film that asked for ‘a pink room’ associated pink with effeminacy and homosexuality. Barbara Nimitz has called pink ‘the exposed colour’. She writes that the qualities associated with pink include ‘sensitive, tender, youthful, artificial’ and states that it is at home in both high and low culture, and is associated with the idea of beauty.<sup>188</sup> Pink is also associated with blushing, ‘a submissive gesture that has a pacifying effect.’ Along with the pink rose and cherry blossom, the colour pink also connotes female sexuality, innocence and youth.<sup>189</sup> Pink was a key colour used by Hartnell over time, both for royal dressing and in his fashion collections as Chapters Four and Five will show. Hartnell used pink artificial flowers as decorative embellishments, the rosebud to decorate the debutante’s gown, cherry blossom as national emblem of Japan for the Queen’s clothes. He also favoured the pink rose to decorate the women’s clothes he wore. (Figures 1.39 & 1.40).

In Penny Sparke’s book on the sexual politics of taste entitled *As Long as It’s Pink*, Sparke argues that feminine taste and culture has been historically associated with bad taste. The ‘gilt and glitter, soft pastel colours, rich textures, ‘frilly’ decorative effects, and a general sense of ‘cosiness’ – feminine taste enjoyed by many women, are all listed by Sparke as ‘outside the “true” canon of aesthetic values of the dominant culture.’<sup>190</sup> The stereotypical definitions of masculinity and femininity impact our daily lives in terms of style and taste of decoration in the home. Both Sparke and Joel Sanders argue that ornamented surfaces and interior decoration are viewed as feminine in contrast to the architecture, which is seen as masculine.<sup>191</sup> Hartnell’s personal taste in floral print curtains and pelmets, and the colours used in his interior decorative schemes and

<sup>188</sup> Barbara Nimitz. Eds. *Pink: The Exposed Colour in Contemporary Art and Culture*. (Ostfildern: Hatje, Cantz, c2006):

<sup>189</sup> Karl Schawelka. “Showing Pink: Biological Aspects of the Colour Pink.” In Barbara Nimitz. Ed. *Pink: The Exposed Colour in Contemporary Art and Culture*. (Ostfildern: Hatje, Cantz, c2006).

<sup>190</sup> Penny Sparke. *As Long as it’s Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*. (London: Harper-collins, 1995): 2-3.

<sup>191</sup> Joel Sanders. *Writings and Projects*. (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2004): 90-93.

also the objects displayed within these interiors can be identified as feminine according to these norms.

Aaron Betsky writes about *Queer Spaces* and the Western culture of middle-class gay men ‘putting on a show’ through the display of objects with which they create ‘mirrors of the unseen self’.<sup>192</sup> Christopher Reed discusses what was described in British *Vogue* in the early 1920s as ‘the amusing style’ of the interior of ‘modern’ gay men in the early twentieth century.<sup>193</sup> In his work on ‘the spaces of aesthetic companionship’ in the late nineteenth early twentieth century, John Potvin discusses the lives of the painter Charles Shannon and his partner, the illustrator Charles Ricketts, who collected and displayed objects as ‘staged events’, and creating themed rooms.<sup>194</sup> These approaches to the interiors and collecting practices of gay men will be applied to this investigation of Hartnell’s identity in Chapter Three.

### 1.8.2. Camp sensibility, taste and the homosexual interior

### 1.8.3. Susan Pearce – collecting practices

In Susan Pearce’s work on the social phenomenon of collecting, she writes that objects exist independently of human beings. She defines a collection as: ‘a group of objects, brought together with intention and sharing a common identity of some kind, which is regarded by its owner as, in some sense, special or set apart’, and writes that: ‘Individuals do not live in isolation: they are part of society, and that society comes from its past ... But individuals also have particular ways of relating to their society and its past, in order to construct their own personalities.’<sup>195</sup> Collecting, she believes, is a way of relating to this personal or historical past. Thus Pearce believes that Europeans collect as a particular way of relating to the society in which they live, and to construct their identities as part of

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<sup>192</sup> Aaron Betsky. *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997): 5-6.

<sup>193</sup> Christopher Reed, “Design for (Queer) Living: Sexual Identity, Performance, and Décor in British *Vogue*, 1922-1926.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. Vol 12. 2006: 390

<sup>194</sup> Potvin, “Collecting Intimacy”, 192

<sup>195</sup> Susan Pearce. *On Collecting: An investigation into collecting in the European tradition*. (London: Routledge, 1995), Susan M. Pearce. Ed. *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 1994), Susan Pearce. *Museums, Objects and Collections*. London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1992).

that society, and in her work, she explores the relationships between people and the material world. Pearce's theories will be applied to Hartnell's collecting practices in Chapter Three.

### 1.8.3. Russell Belk – collecting practices

Russell Belk defines collecting as 'a special type of consuming' that involves strong attachments, and defines consuming as 'individual individuals or groups acquiring, possessing, using and disposing of valued things.'<sup>196</sup> He looks at the benefits of collecting, believing in particular that collecting objects contributes to the sense enlarging the collector's sense of self.<sup>197</sup> 'Collecting also constitutes a 'drive to self completion' through the act of completing a collection.'<sup>198</sup> Through personal interviews with collectors, Belk concludes that:

To say that collectors like these are attached to the objects in their collections is like saying they are attached to their arms and legs. However, unlike arms and legs, the choice and assembly of objects to form a collection is ostensibly a self-expressive creative act that tells us something about the collector.<sup>199</sup>

Belk sees objects as extensions of the self in various different ways according to the gender of the collecting subject, the need for security and 'feelings of warmth and comfort' that surrounding oneself with valued collections gives, and also the collection of objects related to the family and working/travelling history of the subject. Thematic collections could be the result of the latter.<sup>200</sup>

Men who collect have typically been seen to be more focussed in their collecting practices, collecting series of objects to completion, what Belk has described as 'the masculine metaphor of extended self'. Women are more likely to incorporate the objects collected, diffusing them into their domestic realm. Belk states that: 'In each case both possessive attachment and concentrated focus on the object are involved in order for it to become a part of extended self. Such attachment and focus are very characteristic of collecting.'<sup>201</sup> Hartnell seems to have collected in

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<sup>196</sup> Russell W. Belk. *Collecting in a Consumer Society*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): 65.

<sup>197</sup> Belk. *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 89.

<sup>198</sup> Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 90.

<sup>199</sup> Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 89.

<sup>200</sup> Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 90.

<sup>201</sup> Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 90.

the feminine way, according to Belk. This issue will be discussed in Chapter Three.

### *1.9. Conclusion*

This chapter has outlined the aims of this thesis and the methodology undertaken in order to explore these aims. This chapter has outlined the history of published work to date on London couture and in particular on Norman Hartnell, and has also to considered all exhibitions of Hartnell's couture. London (and Paris) couture has begun to be researched through surviving archive material in the late twentieth century, and a critical theoretical approach to Hartnell's life and work has not yet been published.

Methodology used throughout the rest of this thesis will include theories of the archive, material culture approaches to the study of objects and collecting, and oral testimony techniques. Hartnell's life and work will be approached through the critical themes of identity, self-presentation and performativity, gender and sexuality. The following chapter will unpick the self-presentation and the personal, gender and sexual identity of Norman Hartnell through photographs, autobiographical writing and garments found in the Hartnell Archive.

## Chapter Two

### 'An Unexpected Pearl'<sup>202</sup>: Self-presentation and the Personal, Gender and Sexual Identity of Norman Hartnell, 1921-1979.

#### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter will be an analysis of the various ways in which Hartnell constructed and presented his personal and professional identity as couturier and royal dressmaker, through text, image and object. Hartnell's self-presentation will be read through what Erving Goffman has described as the 'documentary evidence he provides as to who and what he is.'<sup>203</sup>

It soon became clear that there is a very strong emphasis on Hartnell's identity and self-presentation in the Archive through material such as autobiographical writing, portrait photographs and personal letters. Therefore this chapter uses this material to investigate the identity (through narrative) and self-presentation of Hartnell as a man and a designer (through image) with a view to examining in Chapter Four, whether the identity and character of this man can be read through the garments he designed. What will also be considered throughout is how Hartnell represented himself and his work, and how the man and his work was represented in the public domain, and how this differed from the hidden realities of his personal life and work. Hartnell's work as a designer of dress sits perfectly within this issue of self-presentation. He provided a particular kind of wardrobe for his clients in order that they might perform their identities much as he carefully dressed himself and performed his.

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<sup>202</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3. File 12 Norman Hartnell, bound full draft of Hartnell's autobiography, 'Possible alternative titles, 'Living by Design' or 'Living for Design', c1954/55: pp. 1-2. Hartnell's headmaster at Mill Hill School suggested to Hartnell's father that he should consider himself 'an ordinary oyster that has produced an unexpected pearl'.

<sup>203</sup> Erving Goffman. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (London: Penguin Books, 1990): Preface.

### ***2.1.2. Gender, identity, consumption and surviving objects of dress***

Barnes and Eicher state that ‘gendered dress encourages each individual to internalize as gendered roles a complex set of social expectations for behaviour.’<sup>204</sup> Thus, as a businessman in a position of power, Hartnell’s dress comprised of a suit and tie, and it is in this expected gendered role that he was most often photographed. (Figures 2.1 & 2.2). This research into Hartnell’s self-presentation through dress has benefitted from the more recent discovery of actual objects of dress worn by Hartnell in March 2010. (Figures 2.3 & 2.4). As Barnes and Eicher have also pointed out, ‘dress is not only visual; it may also include touch, smell and sound. It has an impact on the viewer, but also on the wearer.’<sup>205</sup> And as Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson have noted, ‘dress is a fleshy practice involving the body’.<sup>206</sup> Encountering the materiality of Hartnell’s worn clothing, and a sensory engagement with these objects (the wear and tear, the stains and the smells), enables a closer understanding of how Hartnell consumed his favourite silk ties and beaded pyjama suit and the extent to which he wore these garments.<sup>207</sup> Although no examples of Hartnell’s suits survive, the collection of navy and white spotted ties and cravats, and pale blue silk ties and brown suede shoes reinforce the elements of style adopted by Hartnell in this period – styles from which he never waived until his death in 1979, as figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.5 demonstrate. (Figure 2.5).

### ***2.1.3. ‘Life’ and ‘Story’,<sup>208</sup> Narrative and Self-Identity***

The identities and careers of fashion designers have been the subject of many monographs and biographies that celebrate their achievements.<sup>209</sup> Fashion designers have also written about their own lives and work in autobiographies or memoirs, usually written as public relation exercises to promote their latest

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<sup>204</sup> Barnes and Eicher, *Dress and Gender*, 3.

<sup>205</sup> Barnes and Eicher, *Dress and Gender*, 3.

<sup>206</sup> Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson. Eds. *Body Dressing*. (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2001): 4.

<sup>207</sup> Jules Prown. “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method.” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 17 Issue 1 Spring 1982. Auslander, Leora. ‘Beyond Words.’ *The American Historical Review*. Volume 110. Number 4. October 2005. Attfield, Judy. *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*. Oxford/New York: Berg, 2000.

<sup>208</sup> Steph Lawler. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. (Cambridge/Malden MA: Polity Press, 2008)

<sup>209</sup> Palmer White. *Elsa Schiaparelli: Empress of Paris Fashion*. (London: Aurum, c1986), Amy de la Haye and Shelley Tobin. *Chanel: The Couturier at Work*. (London: V&A Publications, 1994).

exhibition, giving rise to the myth of the genius designer.<sup>210</sup> As Adrian Forty has noted, ‘the activity of design has been treated as existing in the relationship between the mind of the designer and the form of the object designed’<sup>211</sup> rather than understood as socially produced. However, identity is constructed and performed according to social and cultural norms, therefore the relationship, if any, is there between a practitioner’s personal identity and the work that they make, and this relationship can be deconstructed.

The principal character in this story is Norman Hartnell and this particular story of Hartnell’s life and work concerns the ongoing production of his multi-faceted identity, including his autobiographical narrative. Stories were (and continue to be) continuously told and re-told about Hartnell’s life overtime, gradually producing his identity according to selective memory and histories. As Lawler writes, ‘we endlessly tell stories about our lives, both to ourselves and to others; and it is through such stories that we make sense of the world, of our relationship to that world and of the relationship between ourselves and other selves.’<sup>212</sup>

Hartnell’s narrative of the self, his self-exploration within his autobiographical writing, within a debate about whether a study of the designer contributes meaningfully to the writing of a dress history, will be considered here using work by John Walker, Adrian Forty and Christopher Breward. The writing of a history of the designer in this case acknowledges the impact of Hartnell as an individual, the development of his character and personality and of his personal tastes and the formation of his identity on his couture work and business acumen. It also offers the opportunity to research and debate the development of his constructed persona and carefully crafted reputation as a royal couturier as it is revealed through the hitherto unseen material extant in the Hartnell Archive, and the importance of this to the success of his couture business.

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<sup>210</sup> Paul Poiret. 1930. *King of Fashion: The Autobiography of Paul Poiret*. (London: V&A Publications, 2009), Elsa Schiaparelli. *Shocking Life*. (London: Dent, 1954), Christian Dior. *Dior by Dior*. Trans. Antonia Fraser. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1957), Hardy Amies. *Just So Far*. (London: Collins, 1954), Charles Creed. *Maid to Measure*. (London: Jarrolds, 1961).

<sup>211</sup> Adrian Forty. “Design, Designers and the Literature of Design.” *Objects of Designer: Design and Society Since 1750*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986): 241.

<sup>212</sup> Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*, 12.

### 2.1.3.a. 'Designers and Designs Goods – the Proper Objects of Study?'

Constructing a narrative around a famous designer is a conventional, traditional approach to the History of Design.<sup>213</sup> As John Walker has written, 'the assumption was that the proper object of study of the discipline was either designers or designed objects (or a combination of the two).<sup>214</sup> Designers' work can either be discussed in the contents of monographs, or their lives can be addressed through biography. This thesis writes a life and work. Walker states that:

...the relationship between the two is problematical: the incidents and traumas of a designer's private life do not necessarily map neatly on to the development of his or her professional career ... Many designers lead routine lives; the excitement is in their creative and intellectual life which the biographer often finds difficult to convey.<sup>215</sup>

It is not the life in terms of routine that interests me here but the identity of that life and whether this can be visibly transferred onto the work produced.<sup>216</sup>

## 2.2. Hartnell's professional identity

The development of Hartnell's self-presentation and the promotion of his constructed image and celebrity identity, ran parallel to his development as a couturier and his fashion design work and the unfolding of his career, ultimately, as this thesis will show, contributing to the success (and possibly the ultimate failure) of the Hartnell fashion business.<sup>217</sup> Hartnell understood the value attached to celebrity in the same way that Chanel, for example, had done, although he did not achieve the same level of glamour and 'mystique' associated with Chanel in the period when his couture house was operational, as Chapter Six of this thesis will discuss. The issue of whether he achieved the 'creative mystique of the couture designer' that Breward flags up will be discussed later in terms of the success of his business and the use of his identity, and therefore his 'brand', to promote franchised and licensed Hartnell products

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<sup>213</sup> For a chronological design history narrative through a discussion of iconic (male) designers and design movements between 1850 and 1914 see: Nikolaus Pevsner. Rev. ed., *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*. (London: Penguin Books, 1960).

<sup>214</sup> John Walker. *Design History and the History of Design*. (London: Pluto Press, 1989) 45.

<sup>215</sup> Walker, *Design History*, 46.

<sup>216</sup> See also Adrian Forty, 'Design, Designers and the Literature of Design.' *Objects of Designer: Design and Society Since 1750*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) pp 239-245.

<sup>217</sup> For examples of fashion designers understand and make use of celebrity status, see Breward on Chanel. Christopher Breward, "The Rise of the Designer." *Fashion*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 47

worldwide. Thus, this chapter on his self-presentation and identity is key to understanding the impact these further issues had on the success of his business.

There is a specific history to the self-presentation and promotion of the designer and ‘the rise of the fashion designer’, from the birth of modern couture in Paris in the mid nineteenth century.<sup>218</sup> Hartnell’s fashion designing career has revealed a similar pattern to that of Charles Worth, with the fabrication of Hartnell as ‘dress artist’ during the early 1920s. Material in the archive including press reports and magazine articles on the burgeoning designer, demonstrate that the development of his status as a celebrity, a person of fame, and the construction of his identity and fashionability as a person, began even before he opened his couture business in 1923. This publicity enabled him to attract patrons<sup>219</sup> to set up his firm at the outset and thus contributed to the success of his first collection and ‘mannequin parade’ or the showing of this collection, in March 1924. It was also important to publicise the name of his clients and patrons as a way of linking his name with the aristocratic and celebrity women he dressed, thus in turn publicising his house. Indeed, the most important person that Hartnell involved in his new couture house was the publicist Richard Fletcher, who stayed with Hartnell until he died in 1945.<sup>220</sup> Fletcher wrote articles about Hartnell’s interiors, promoting his image as a connoisseur of antiques and man of cutting edge taste in interior design styles in the 1930s.<sup>221</sup> It may be that Hartnell was influenced by Worth’s example in terms of his self-presentation and promotion. It is clear from the presence of several couturiers’ autobiographies in what is left of Hartnell’s library that Hartnell was aware of the lives and work of couturiers operating both before him and during his own lifetime.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Breward, *Fashion*, 28.

<sup>219</sup> In *Woman*, Sept, 1924, Hartnell mentions by name his clients Lady Fairfax, Baroness Furnivall, and Miss Selby-Lowndes.

<sup>220</sup> A handwritten note, believed to have been written at the time of the Latin American Costume Exhibition tour of 1944, provides the only biographical information on Richard Fletcher, who was described as ‘public relations officer for the great English designer, an old N.Y. (New York) Times man born in Cincinnati, Ohio, brought up in Colorado Springs... art critic and publicist.’

<sup>221</sup> This aspect of Hartnell’s identity will be discussed in the following chapter, Chapter Three.

<sup>222</sup> Autobiographies extant in the Hartnell archive include, Paul Poiret, *My first Fifty Years*, London: Victor Gollanz, 1931, Hartnell-Mitchison Archive, Box 36, HB.1931.8, Pierre Balmain, *My Years and Seasons*, (Trans. Edward Lanchbery, Gordon Young) London: Cassells, 1964, Hartnell-Mitchison Archive/ Box 36/HB/1964/8. For an overview of the contents of the remainder of Hartnell’s library, see Appendix 2.

Breward states of Worth, ‘his later expertise was identified as an ability to choose and manipulate fabrics to suit the character and complexion of the client, with an almost operatic control of historical sources which injected drama into new styles.’<sup>223</sup> In early, published interviews with Hartnell, he articulates his similar approach to designing dress for individual clients, aiming to publicise his skill as a couturier. Hartnell wrote in 1924:

Dress is so essentially and absolutely a matter of varying individuality ... What greater incentive could an artist have than the striking beauty and elegance of Lady Fairfax, for whose wonderful colouring my gowns have been but a background, or the lithe grace of the Baroness Furnivall, whose rare vivacity has made my gowns live? And who could do justice to the exquisite charm and gentle loveliness of Miss Selby-Lowndes? ... Whether is be a court dress, an Ascot dress, a frock for a garden party, or a tailleur for the street, the dress should always be subservient to the personality of the wearer.<sup>224</sup>

Indeed, Hartnell’s royal style, the crinoline gown, was first devised for Her Majesty Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 1937, was based on Worth’s Second Empire designs for the Empress Eugenie as they were painted by Franz Xavier Winterhalter, paintings which hung in Buckingham Palace. A copy of Winterhalter’s *The Empress Eugénie Surrounded by Her ladies-in –Waiting* (1855), hung in Hartnell’s Empire Room (office) at 26 Bruton Street, and now hangs on the walls of the Archive house. (Figures 2.6, 2.7 & 2.8). In an unpublished ‘follow up’ to his 1955 autobiography, Hartnell makes it clear that he was also influenced in the early twenties by Poiret’s work.<sup>225</sup> He was therefore deliberately situating his persona as couturier within a historiography of couture, fashion design and court dressmaking, which he understood well.

This thesis argues that the history and biography of a designer of dress can be read through the clothes he/she designed and the products linked to the couture, which disseminated his/her ‘mystique’ attached to his/her name and identity, carefully constructed over time. However, as shown here, this can only be done after close analysis of the more traditional autobiographical material extant in the Hartnell archive, listed above, is undertaken. Therefore, this chapter will debate the self-presentation of Hartnell and the identity and character of the man using these sources in the Hartnell Archive.

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<sup>223</sup> Christopher Breward, *Fashion*. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 29.

<sup>224</sup> Norman Hartnell, ‘Why I am A dressmaker.’ *Woman*. September, 1924: 499-500.

<sup>225</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 3/MS/unpublished manuscript c1972.

### 2.3. A Couturier's Autobiography: 'the Great Unspoken in Fashion'<sup>226</sup>

At the 2007 V&A conference, Unravelling Couture Culture, timetabled to coincide with the museum's major exhibition, *The Golden Age of Couture*, Paris-London, 1947-1957, Breward confirmed that reading the autobiographies of designers could reveal the couturiers' voice.<sup>227</sup> This form of self-presentation also reveals what Annette Khun has described as the 'private motivational drives.' She suggests ways of unpacking the particular version of a life that autobiography offers, and writes:

...if autobiography is a specific writing strategy, one through which a certain self, a particular identity, is constructed and made public, both writing and identity can equally well be deconstructed: not only through criticism but also through other practices – most notably through stories and different lives, told differently.<sup>228</sup>

This chapter will illustrate that Hartnell's autobiography was put together using both writing and photographs and that through these he constructed his 'certain self', which he 'constructed and made public'.<sup>229</sup> This 'certain self' however also had a different life and identity, which Hartnell fought to keep private – a different 'story', 'told differently'<sup>230</sup> through aspects of his queer life such as his female impersonation, and his antique collecting, which will be unpacked here. Breward notes that there is 'something in these self-conscious attempts that takes us closer to our understanding about a man who found success in a profession that seemed perverted by some.' Referred to as 'life long bachelors', 'certain tropes of desire' present in the period in gay male couturiers such as Dior and Hartnell were operating, 'influenced their descriptions of themselves and their world.'<sup>231</sup>

Breward's paper tentatively suggested that a designer's private life, which he argued can be read 'between the lines' of the designer's autobiography, might be 'as important an indication of his standing as the quality of his cutting and

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<sup>226</sup> This heading references Christopher Breward's 2007 conference paper, 'Couture as Biography: The Romance of Design in the 'Golden Age'', Unravelling Couture Culture, 16-17 November, 2007, V&A Museum.

<sup>227</sup> Breward, *Couture as Biography*, 2007.

<sup>228</sup> Annette Kuhn. 1995. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London/New York: Verso, 2002): 149.

<sup>229</sup> Khun, *Family Secrets*, 149.

<sup>230</sup> Khun, *Family Secrets*, 149.

<sup>231</sup> Breward, *Couture as Autobiography*, 2007.

draping.’<sup>232</sup> He acknowledged that his use of couturiers’ autobiographies and his focus on the ways that couturiers represented themselves, and were also represented by others, was a ‘tricky’ subject, calling it ‘a great unspoken in fashion.’<sup>233</sup> My research into Hartnell’s self-presentation supports Breward’s theory that a designer’s presentation of the self, or what Liz Stanley has called ‘the auto/biographical I’,<sup>234</sup> reveals much between the lines about their private lives and their identity.

Hartnell’s autobiographical writing will be considered critically here.<sup>235</sup> The question as to how much of this work was actually written by Hartnell, and how much of his work was ghost written and heavily edited, is also fundamentally important. Because of the survival of edited autobiographical drafts, this assessment is possible. The question ‘what was he like’ or even ‘what did he like’ is, I believe is a valid one, and this study will within the context of other supporting evidence already introduced of a couturier’s autobiographical writing in order to reveal the couturier’s voice.

#### ***2.4. Autobiographical writing – a life/work in progress***

Just six months after his first fashion collection, which was shown at his new premises at 10 Bruton Street, Mayfair in March 1924, *Woman* magazine published an article by Hartnell entitled ‘Why I am a Dressmaker’. In this article Hartnell, aged just twenty-three years old,<sup>236</sup> outlined his own ideas about his chosen profession and his place within it in a rather self-conscious and gauche fashion. This is the first published article written about Hartnell apparently written by Hartnell himself found in the Archive, though there had already been articles written about Hartnell by others as early as December 1922.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Christopher Breward, ‘Couture as Autobiography: The Romance of Design in the ‘Golden Age’, *Abstracts*, Unravelling Couture Culture, 16-17 November, 2007, V&A Museum.

<sup>233</sup> Breward, *Couture as Autobiography*, 2007.

<sup>234</sup> Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: the theory and practice of feminist auto/biography*, (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1992)

<sup>235</sup> Hermione Lee. *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing*. (London: Pimlico, 2008), Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: the theory and practice of feminist auto/biography*, (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1992).

<sup>236</sup> Hartnell was born in 1901 on June 12.

<sup>237</sup> Author unknown, “Hearty Congratulations. Mr. N.B. Hartnell’s Success”, *The New Cambridge*, Saturday, December 2, 1922: 209.

Hartnell's narrative style, as all of his writings extant in the Archive reveal, is rather 'flowery', romantic prose, very much in the style of the short stories and romantic fiction also present in September issue of *Woman* magazine. He also wrote poetry and prose, including two pieces of prose entitled *Spring* and *Summer* dated 1921. (Figures 2.9 & 2.10). This creative writing, in which, for example, Hartnell 'would like to be a raindrop' or 'a sunbeam', underlines this highly popular style.

His experience of writing up to 1924 lay in songs and sketches for the Marlow Dramatic Society and the Footlights Dramatic Club whilst he was at Cambridge University between 1920-1922. An article celebrating 'Mr. N.B. Hartnell's Success', on Hartnell's new post at the court dressmaker Mme. Desirée, noted that 'he has been commissioned to design the entire dress production of 'Battling Butler,' Jack Buchanan's forthcoming show at the New Oxford Theatre'. *The New Cambridge* explained in 1922 that Hartnell also designed the programmes, posters and costumes for the Footlights productions in which, as this chapter will go on to discuss, he also performed leading female roles. He was also described as 'part author of *The Bedder's Opera*'.<sup>238</sup> (Figure 2.11). This production was performed at Daly's Theatre in London where his dress designs were viewed and reviewed by the fashion journalist Minnie Hogg.

Hartnell's 1924 article published in *Woman* demonstrates his burgeoning sense of self and his understanding of how shared taste might define him as a man:

Champagne and Pêche-Melba! How I had looked forward to them, as a schoolboy, with an odd mixture of excitement and reverence, as something symbolical that would bring me into touch with all the marvellous, manly, grown-up, worldly things that must eventually be mine as a matter of course. They would at once, I told myself, put me on a footing with other men; and I knew that, when I had tasted them, and could eat and drink them calmly as though they were no longer surrounded by a mysterious glamour, I could never feel myself to be a mere child any more. And I shall never forget my first and instant sense of disappointment and humiliation when I discovered that I frankly disliked both these accepted delicacies.

At first the discovery shocked me.

Did it mean that I was different from everybody else? For a long time I was uncertain. But gradually I came to realize that it meant merely that I was *myself* and *not* everybody else.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Author unknown. "Hearty Congratulations. Mr. N.B. Hartnell's Success", *The New Cambridge*, Saturday, December 2, 1922: 209.

<sup>239</sup> Norman Hartnell, 'Why I am a Dressmaker', *Woman* September, 1924, Vol. 1, No. 6: 499.

This tranche of writing reveals Hartnell's concern with how he sees himself 'fitting' into the world, which was a feature of his autobiographical work (including personal letters) throughout his life, as the following examples of Hartnell's writing will illustrate. His belief that 'champagne and Peach Melba' embody 'manly' tastes is revealing, and his realisation that he is not like other men, that he is 'different from everybody else', marks a key moment in his understanding of his own difference, possibly an unwitting disclosure of his effeminate, gay identity.

In a letter from Hartnell to his sister Phyllis written between 1949-1951, Hartnell refers to the 'difficult' role he has had as a man who earns a living as a 'Dressmaker', underlining, his awareness of how this draws attention to what he perceives as his difference. Hartnell wrote to Phyllis: 'It was the force of circumstances that turned me into being a Dressmaker, and it has been a difficult role to carry out in the face of social criticism. But that I have not minded – although it would have been easier in a foreign or more civilised country.'<sup>240</sup>

This awareness of difference was also originally written into Hartnell's autobiography, but left out of the final published version. In an early draft chapter of Hartnell's autobiography he described his emotional reaction to the success of his first spring collection, shown at 3.15pm on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1924. In this unpublished typescript, Hartnell described how he left London the morning after the collection was shown to visit Clayton in Sussex, which is where his family home had been and where his mother, Emma Hartnell, was buried. 'You see, I wanted to go home. I wanted to see the wet lanes of the country again and wander up on to the Downs of Sussex. I wanted to look up at the window of my old home, where I had worked and wondered what would become of me.'<sup>241</sup>

On the train from Victoria, Hartnell sees a man reading the *Daily Express* sitting in front of him and Hartnell's collection is reported on page five. Hartnell sits forward and reads this review, turned towards him from the man's paper. He

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<sup>240</sup> Norman Hartnell, letter to sister Phyllis Stewart, c1949-1951. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 2/File 10.

<sup>241</sup> Norman Hartnell, 'The following Day', draft chapter of Hartnell's autobiography, *Silver & Gold*, c1954. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File/ pp. 2-3.

described the feelings he had on reading about himself on the train. ‘The man opposite was reading the other page. Didn’t he know that on the back of his paper, and I, on the other side of the compartment, was Norman Hartnell? Didn’t he realise who he was with? I read it through rapidly and sat back dazed. My heart was beating and I thought I was going to be sick’.<sup>242</sup> Hartnell describes how he subsequently bought all the papers he could to read all the other reviews of this, his first collection. In brackets within the typescript a note reads ‘(Insert actual newspaper wording from various cuttings in N.H’s possession).’<sup>243 244</sup>

Hartnell’s typed notes continue thus:

In a mannerly way and with matter of fact deliberation I read through all these accounts from capital start to the final full stop. Most of them were serious, some a little flippant, but whatever the tenor of each piece of writing I wanted to imbibe the opinions of these intelligent women journalists – whose pointed pens could establish or destroy the reputation of any newcomer to the dangerous quicksand world of fashion – as I was to discover as the oncoming years unfolded.

After all, not many young men with one initial accomplishment became famous within a few hours, and see their home made name printed in large and resounding type and usurping much space in the coveted and limited pages of every daily newspaper.

Anyway, I was convinced my sister would now be proud of me when she knew. But my father – what would he say? He had warned me that in return for the work I had chosen to do I would be called effete, to put it politely, by the rest of the world. I was doing an unusual thing and as most usual people are usually unused to the unusual I was baring my bosom...as a target to the acid darts of criticism and calumny, ....was this suddenly acquired success, I wondered, fame to be enjoyed henceforth without falter, or was it merely a transient and unwelcome notoriety.<sup>245</sup>

This passage illustrates Hartnell’s first taste of the fame and the celebrity status he would bring upon himself in terms of his abilities as a designer and as a self-publicist. It also reveals what Breward has described as ‘tensions between the individual and creative’ found within couturier’s autobiographical writing and

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<sup>242</sup> Norman Hartnell, ‘The following Day’, draft chapter of Hartnell’s autobiography, *Silver & Gold*, c1954. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File / p. 5.

<sup>243</sup> Hartnell, ‘The Following Day’, p.6.

<sup>244</sup> This suggestion was not taken up, and this chapter was eventually left out of the final published book, however, Hartnell’s press-cutting books from this period, containing reports of his very early collections, through to 1977, containing reports on his Knighthood, are extant in the archive.

<sup>245</sup> Norman Hartnell, ‘The Following Day’, draft chapter of Hartnell’s autobiography, *Silver & Gold*, c1954. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/ File 1/p. 11.

what he calls ‘a discourse of anxiety’ about publically linking himself to the couture and opening himself up to public scrutiny.<sup>246</sup>

In a subsequent draft of the complete autobiography, called at this stage *Living for Design* or *Living by Design*, which is an example of what Laura Marcus has described as the ‘Great Men’ tradition,<sup>247</sup> Hartnell begins his first chapter with a description of a conversation between his father and his headmaster, John McClure at Mill Hill School’s Foundation Day. He was fourteen years old. The two men were discussing a future career for the young Hartnell. Hartnell wrote:

It was a ticklish question and after a time I heard my father say: You know, Sir John, I feel sometimes that I am like a hen that has laid a duck’s egg.’ Sir John McClure seemed momentarily taken aback. He paused for a minute, adjusted his large spectacles and gazing straight at my father, said: may I suggest, Mr. Hartnell, that you might feel rather more like an ordinary oyster that has produced an unexpected pearl!<sup>248</sup>

These examples of Hartnell’s self-writing between 1924 and 1955 indicate that anxiety about his perceived effeminacy and sexuality continued to be problematic for a life lived under the spotlight. They reveal that these tensions began with his relationship with his father, who apparently found Hartnell’s effeminacy difficult, however it is interesting that Hartnell tried to acknowledge these tensions, but that they were considered un-publishable by editors.

Hartnell was part of an established history and culture of gay men working in women’s fashion – what Breward has described as ‘the great unspoken in fashion’. In support of this *The Wolfenden Report* stated that: ‘It is not unnatural that those who feel themselves to be “misfits” in society should gravitate towards occupations offering an atmosphere of tolerance or understanding, with the result that some occupations may appear to attract more homosexuals than do others.’<sup>249</sup> And in his 2002 essay on ‘Camp’, Richard Dyer writes that:

...gay men have always played a leading role in the male (as well as, of course, the female) fashion industry. There are various possible explanations for this. In practice fashion was a form of

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<sup>246</sup> Breward *Couture as Autobiography* 2007.

<sup>247</sup> Laura Marcus. *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*. (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1994): 1.

<sup>248</sup> Norman Hartnell, bound full draft of Hartnell’s autobiography, ‘Possible alternative titles, ‘Living by Design’ or ‘Living for Design’, c1954/55. Box 3. File 12. pp. 1-2.

<sup>249</sup> *The Wolfenden Report: Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*. Authorised American Edition. (New York: Stein and Day, 1963) 36

employment that was relatively relaxed about us (though also one of the first places that blackmailers, police and yellow journalism would look for queer material).<sup>250</sup>

Despite this ‘discourse of anxiety’ being edited from his published autobiography, as Khun states: ‘both writing and identity can equally well be deconstructed: not only through criticism but also through other practices – most notably through stories and different lives, told differently.’<sup>251</sup> Hartnell’s selfhood can be read through other material in his archive including photographs, both for public and private consumption as well as what ended up on the editor’s ‘cutting room floor’.

#### ***2.4.1. A Published Life: Silver & Gold***

Hartnell’s life writing is very much in the style of the conventional autobiographical canon, similar to that of other couturiers writing about their lives and their careers in a typically self-conscious style.<sup>252</sup> Liz Stanley, writes that ‘most auto/biography is also concerned with ‘great lives, and these are almost invariably those of white middle and upper class men who have achieved success according to conventional – and thus highly political – standards.’<sup>253</sup> The structure of Hartnell’s memoir, *Silver & Gold* demonstrates exactly this genre perfectly as does Annette Khun’s reading of the form:

The time of the narration has ready-made shape in the chronology of the writer’s life: the story typically opens with his birth or early childhood, proceeds through various life stages, and ends at or near the time of writing. This sort of life story is characteristically presented or read, as evoking a *Bildung*, an account of the development of the central character (the writer) over time. The present, the time of writing, is set up from the outset as the goal towards which the story will inexorably direct itself.<sup>254</sup>

The Hartnell Archive contains not only a copy of Hartnell’s published autobiography, *Silver & Gold*, published by Evans Brothers in 1955, but initial

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<sup>250</sup> Richard Dyer. *Queer Cultures*. (London/New York: Routledge, 2002): 63.

<sup>251</sup> Khun, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, 149.

<sup>252</sup> Paul Poiret. 1930. *King of Fashion: The Autobiography of Paul Poiret*. (London: V&A Publications, 2009), Elsa Schiaparelli. *Shocking Life*. (London: Dent, 1954), Christian Dior. *Dior by Dior*. Trans. Antonia Fraser. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1957), Hardy Amies. *Just So Far*. (London: Collins, 1954), Charles Creed. *Maid to Measure*. (London: Jarrolds, 1961).

<sup>253</sup> Liz Stanley. *The Auto/biographical I: the theory and practice of feminist auto/biography*. (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1992): 4

<sup>254</sup> Annette Khun. *Family Secrets: Acts of memory and imagination*. (London/New York: Verso, 2002) 148.

draft chapters, manuscripts at various stages in Hartnell's own handwriting, and bound transcripts at various stages of the editing process including a first full unbound version annotated by editor Stanley Jackson, annotated in pencil.<sup>255</sup> There is also a file of correspondence between Hartnell and Jackson at Evans Brothers Ltd.<sup>256</sup> The editing process exposes that much of what Hartnell chose to include regarding his own personal and emotional development as a young man was left out of the final published book.

In a letter dated December 12<sup>th</sup> 1953, Stanley Jackson wrote to George Mitchison, Hartnell's, as Business Manager from 1946, thanking him for their 'preliminary talk on Norman's semi-autobiographical book.' He continued:

I agree with you that this should not be written as a conventional full-length Life Story but as an interim account taking this brilliant career up to and including the wedding of the Queen.

My suggestion is that the text should run to about 40,000 words in which Norman recalls his background, undergraduate days, early struggles, distinguished clients and so forth. Much of the book should, I think, be reserved for reproduction of his sketches, designs etc., together with good photographs of himself and Staff, his beautiful home, his clients.<sup>257</sup>

This letter illustrates that the structure and content of Hartnell's memoir was pre-determined by his publisher and business manager, keen to promote a particular view of Hartnell's identity as celebrity dresser of the elite classes and of the Queen. It also reveals that there was a third party or 'ghost writer' involved in the production of Hartnell's autobiography, removing Hartnell himself further from the publication of his own life story. In the latter part of 1953 and throughout 1954, correspondence indicates that Gordon Beckles Wilson was assisting Hartnell with his memoir.

#### ***2.4.2. Hartnell, the self-publicist***

Hartnell stressed in his 1924 article that he was educated and well read making particular cultural references. For example, displaying his knowledge of Pepys, he wrote that:

...it was the typical habit of Samuel Pepys in his private diary to wax eloquent over some grave national crisis in one breath and in

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<sup>255</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 1.

<sup>256</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 5.

<sup>257</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/file 5/ Letter from Stanley Jackson to George Mitchison, December 12<sup>th</sup> 1953.

the next with incredibly human pathos, to gloat over a “mighty daring waistcoat of the most surprising plum coloured velvet” (at that moment in the hands of his tailor) that would bring the ladies flocking to his side.<sup>258</sup>

Hartnell was also even then astutely commercially aware that he needed to advertise his services carefully, indicating that he could dress women of all ages, catering for their ‘individuality’. ‘All dressmakers’ clients are as different and varied as the clients of a psycho-analyst. They cannot be treated, as it were, *before* they arrive at the studio or consulting-room, nor can they by any means be treated in the same way, when they *have* arrived.’ He continued by explaining that: ‘for one of the recent charity matinees I had the pleasure of designing a set of dresses for a chorus of young society girls.’ He continued:

But although I experience tremendous artistic pleasure in designing for youth and beauty, the real feeling of achievement is found in dressing those with whom the passing years have not dealt kindly. The essentials in these cases are line and adroit adaptation to the loveliest stuffs, and in restrained embroidery, and the avoidance of meaningless decoration. To devise elegant and suitable clothes, and know that they are appreciated, combined with the realization of the individualities of their wearers, is the goal I have set myself, and is the reason why I am a dressmaker.<sup>259</sup>

He clearly set out his flexible approach to couture and presents himself as a designer with expertise who is willing and able to dress clients of all ages, establishing his profile as a ‘jobbing couturier’ rather than creating cutting edge fashion design. The article also features photographs of his first model, his cousin Constance, wearing examples of his dress designs and a page of sketches for ‘race or garden party frocks’, a ‘bridesmaids frock’, and a ‘model for a debutante’. (Figures 2.12 & 2.13). The article conveys his already well-developed knowledge of fabrics, and the current fashion for the ‘Egyptian influence’.<sup>260</sup>

Also included in the magazine was a quarter page advertisement for his newly created Mayfair firm, announcing simply his name, ‘Norman Hartnell’, and the words ‘Dress Artist’. The advertisement does not mention of the words ‘couture’ or Paris, nor does he describe himself as a ‘designer’.

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<sup>258</sup> Norman Hartnell, ‘Why I am a Dressmaker’, *Woman* September, 1924, Vol. 1, No. 6: 499

<sup>259</sup> Norman Hartnell, ‘Why I am a Dressmaker’, *Woman* September, 1924, Vol. 1, No. 6: 574

<sup>260</sup> Hartnell, “Why I am a Dressmaker”, 500-501.

The publishers Hutchinson & Co., stated on the contents page that: ‘All photographs, drawings, stories and MSS. submitted must be accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable.’<sup>261</sup> It is possible therefore that Hartnell submitted this article on the recommendation of Richard Fletcher, his publicist, who had helped Hartnell set up his own business in 1923. A photograph of Hartnell was included in the article. (Figures 2.14 & 2.15). The original photograph used survives in the Archive and marks the beginning of Hartnell’s style of self-presentation in material form.

### ***2.5. Personal Identity: Letters in the archive:***

There are many personal letters in the Archive, often randomly interleaved between the pages and pages of business correspondence. These cast a quite different light on the personal and working relationships that make up the staff and shareholders at the top levels of the couture house. These also present me with ethical dilemmas. In her work on what historians do in the archive, Steedman writes that:

The Historian who goes to the Archive must always be the unintended reader, will always read that which was never intended for his or her eyes. The historian always reads the fragmented written traces of something else, and in the long, whispering gallery must forever be a reader unimagined by ... those who more-or-less legible registers, and lists and observations. The Historian always reads an unintended, purloined letter.<sup>262</sup>

In a personal letter to George Mitchison written on the evening of Hartnell’s 55<sup>th</sup> birthday, Hartnell recounts meeting Mitchison, describing this as ‘the most fortunate moment in my life, when at about 9.20 p.m. I met you at the corner of Cheltenham Terrace.’ Hartnell goes on to write that ‘you will always be the person I shall love most in the world because of all the unexpectedly wonderful things you have done for me and the wonderful love you have shown me. So, good night, my dearest friend, ever, your Normie.’<sup>263</sup>

Mitchison was a twenty-two year old Guardsman at the Chelsea Barracks in 1938 when Hartnell, then aged thirty-nine, met him on the street corner. In this the two men would appear to be part of what Houlbrook has described as ‘the

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<sup>261</sup> Hartnell. *Woman*, September, 1924, vo. 1. No. 6: 483.

<sup>262</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 75

<sup>263</sup> Found in the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive and now in the personal possession of Claire Williams.

predatory queer narrative’, which was ‘reinforced by the public prominence of the encounters between middle-class men and soldiers from the Brigade of Guards’ in the 1930s.<sup>264</sup> (See Chapter One figures 1.30 & 1.31). The personal is woven tightly in amongst the public within the aptly named Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. As Steedman notes, ‘the constraints are made by the documents themselves: What they forbid you to write, the permissions they offer.’<sup>265</sup>

## ***2.6. Studio portraits and the self-presentation of Norman Hartnell: From Debutante to Dandy***

Photographs have possible multiple meanings that can be decoded.<sup>266</sup> This chapter turns to an analysis of a collection of portrait photographs of Norman Hartnell, put together from the Archive for the first time, taken between 1921 and 1979, with a view to decoding Hartnell’s dress and posture. Cynthia Freeland lists three key things needed for portraits: (1) a recognizable physical body along with (2) an inner life (i.e. some sort of character and/or psychological or mental states), and (3) the ability to pose or to present oneself to be depicted in a representation.’ She also argues that portraits can fulfil four important functions. ‘They provide likenesses, psychological characterizations, proofs of presence or ‘contact’, and manifestations of a person’s ‘essence’ or ‘air’.<sup>267</sup>

The earliest studio portraits of Hartnell were taken in an unidentified Cambridge studio taken in 1921. Hartnell is dressed in women’s clothing executed from his own designs, made to wear on stage for three Cambridge Footlights productions in the early 1920s. These images will be discussed in the following section of this chapter, as the gestures and poses Hartnell adopts for the purposes of being photographed demand a particular theoretical approach.

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<sup>264</sup> Matt Houlbrook. *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006): 228.

<sup>265</sup> Carolyn Steedman. *Dust*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001): xi

<sup>266</sup> Annette Kuhn, 1995. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London/New York: Verso, 2002)153. Susan Sontag. *On Photography*. (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1977): 23. Graham Clarke. Ed. *The Portrait in Photography*. (London: Reaktion Books, 1992). Cynthia Freeland. *Portraits and Persons*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 74, Gen Doy. *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture*. (London/New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005).

<sup>267</sup> Cynthia Freeland. *Portraits and Persons*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 74.

The premise that these images of Hartnell, to quote Freeland further, ‘hover problematically between exterior and interior identities’<sup>268</sup> is useful, particularly in the case of Norman Hartnell as a gay subject. They demonstrate what Richard Dyer calls treading ‘the thin line between passing and flaunting’ as a gay man, that is either passing as heterosexual or visibly flaunting his queer sexuality.<sup>269</sup> Two photographs by Paul Tanqueray make useful examples of this. (Figures 2.16 & 2.17). According to Barthes, it can be the combination of text and image that make the message.<sup>270</sup> Found damaged in the damp cellar at Geven House, figure 2.16 is dedicated ‘To George from Norman’ in 1938, the same year that the two men first met when Mitchison was a young Guardsman. Hartnell perhaps chose this photograph from a selection already taken, or had this photograph taken specifically. An undamaged version reveals Hartnell’s longing and romantic expression, and that the lighting accentuates the wave of his hair, the shape of his lips and the inside of his exposed, pale wrist from hand to cufflink. Figure 2.17 is less subtle. Hartnell stares directly at the camera wearing a white shirt with the sleeves forcibly rolled up high to reveal as much of his pale arms as possible. His dewy eyes express desire and his lips are moist, the wave of his hair again carefully lit.

Sontag notes that, ‘to photograph is to confer importance ... in the mansions of pre-democratic culture, someone who gets photographed is a celebrity.’<sup>271</sup> Most of the portraits of Hartnell dating from the twenties onwards, clearly cast him as a celebrity, and were used to project a particular image of him to the wider public via the mass media, for example two photographs by Lenare dating from around 1928. (Figures 2.18 & 2.19). Hartnell was photographed by all the well-known, Society photographers operating between the early twenties and the late seventies including Harlip of New Bond Street (Figures 2.20, 2.21, 2.22), and Dorothy Wilding of Old Bond Street, (Figures 2.23, 2.24 and 2.25), who according to photographer and pupil, Tom Hustler, ‘had a strong view on lighting a face and the posing of hands’, which is evident in figure 2.23.<sup>272</sup> Terence Pepper noted in 1977 that Wilding and her fellow studio photographers

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<sup>268</sup> Clarke, *The Portrait in Photography*, 3

<sup>269</sup> Richard Dyer. *The Culture of Queers*. (London/New York: Routledge, 2002): 64.

<sup>270</sup> Roland Barthes. *The Fashion System*. Trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard. (London: Cape, 1985).

<sup>271</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 28.

<sup>272</sup> Tom Hustler. *Tom Hustler on Photography*. (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1963): 15.

in the interwar period were influenced by the ‘strikingly lit’ German Expressionist films of the period by directors such as Fritz Lang, evident in the portraits of Hartnell by Wilding and Harlip.<sup>273</sup> Madame Yevonde of Berkley Square, (Figures 2.26 & 2.27), also photographed Hartnell during the mid 1930s in colour, a portrait that offers useful examples of the colours of his clothing and buttonhole in that period. (Figure 2.28). The largest number of portraits in the Archive are by Paul Tanqueray dating between 1943 and the late 1960s. (Figures 2.29, 2.30 & 2.31). Hartnell’s poses (head in hands, looking directly at the camera or away to the right) and the way in which his face, hand and hair is lit seem never to have changed over time.

Hartnell’s favourite portrait was taken by Society photographer Tom Hustler in the early 1950s.<sup>274</sup> (Figure 2.32). Hustler wrote in 1963 that ‘men like flattery as much as women’, and ‘most people have some characteristics in their faces, personality or expression which can be caught by the operator.’ Revealing his approach to portraiture, particularly of men, he noted: ‘I don’t like many pictures of myself except that rather over-retouched one smoking a cigarette ...or character studies which show me as a nice character! I reckon I am a pretty normal, average sort of a chap so I base my male portraiture on them.’<sup>275</sup> The self-portrait of Hustler smoking is strikingly similar in pose, and the expressions of the two men reveal Hustler’s approach ‘in action’. (Figure 2.33). Hustler also noted that ‘a sitting by any reputable name would cost a minimum of 20 or 30 guineas’ before the war.<sup>276</sup> The number of portraits in the Archive demonstrates that Hartnell spent a great deal of money on this form of self-promotion, and perhaps enjoyed sitting for photographers, developing working relationships with photographers over time.

Viewed alongside one another, this collection of portraits reveals a complex set of meanings, mirroring the development of Hartnell’s personal identity through, for example, dress, and his growing confidence as a ‘personality’ or royal fashion designer celebrity, yet also reflecting the social and cultural ‘codes of meaning’ of the day.<sup>277</sup> These photographs were used over time by various

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<sup>273</sup> Terence Pepper. *Monday’s Children: Portrait Photography in the 1920s and 1930s*. (London: Impressions Gallery, 1977): 22.

<sup>274</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. 18 March 2010/NHOH/2010/11/Cassette tape x 1.

<sup>275</sup> Hustler, *Tom Hustler on Photography*, 94.

<sup>276</sup> Hustler, *Tom Hustler on Photography*, 15.

<sup>277</sup> Clarke, *The Portrait in Photography*, 3.

newspapers and magazines to illustrate an article on Hartnell, as the example of Hartnell's portrait by Foulsham & Banfield Ltd. included in Hartnell's article in *Woman* in 1924 demonstrates. (Figure 2.15).

Roland Barthes has suggested that the 'message' in a photograph, is either controlled by the photographer and the sitter, or, if the image is used to illustrate an article (for example), by the journalists who produce the text.<sup>278</sup> Here the studio portraits of Hartnell are read for messages without reference to any possible corresponding text (with the exception of figure 2.16). This message is continuous – the portraits of Hartnell will forever be images of the man as the analogical content of the photograph.<sup>279</sup>

In the remaining majority of studio portraits of Hartnell in the Archive, the postures adopted for the purposes of being photographed between the late 1920s and the late 1960s are surprisingly similar, regardless of which photographer is taking the photograph. Hartnell often puts his chin in his hand, either looking directly into the camera or away into the distance. Another preferred position is in profile, lit differently dependent on the particular style of individual photographers. This factor indicates that these may be positions preferred by Hartnell himself, hence the lack of change in position over time, but it also reveals what Anthony Haden-Guest has described in his essay on the portrait photographers Lenare, as 'the world of the society photograph', where 'everything seems fixed, and unalterable, immune from real change.'<sup>280</sup> Hartnell had his portrait taken by the society photographer Lenare in the mid 1920s. Lenare was founded in 1924 by Leonard Green and was based just off Bond Street, which as Haden-Guest has written, 'was to society portrait studios then what Fleet Street is to newspapers.'<sup>281</sup>

Hartnell wrote that at the beginning of his career he knew nothing of Mayfair, and the society world he was to live and work within, (although not become a part of). He subsequently made it his business to understand exactly the role his customers played in London Society, and created designs to 'fit' this lifestyle

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<sup>278</sup> Roland Barthes. *Image – Music – Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. (London: Fontana Press, 1977): 15.

<sup>279</sup> Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, 17.

<sup>280</sup> Anthony Haden-Guest, 'The Society Photograph', Nicholas de Ville & Anthony Haden-Guest, *Lenare: The Art of Society Photography*, (London: Allen Lane, 1981) 11.

<sup>281</sup> Haden-Guest *The Art of Society Photography* 11.

and formal etiquette requirements. He also had to carve out a niche for himself within this society. Having his photograph taken by Lenare, the new society photographers, was a clever step towards fitting in. Figure 2.9 by Lenare c1925, is the first image in which Hartnell appears with the fabrics he used to inspire and make up his designs. The fabrics in the picture also reflect his taste for glitter. Compared with figure 2.15, circa 1922, in which Hartnell still appears like a gauche schoolboy, figure 2.9 presents Hartnell as already the young, confident, celebrity designer. Haden-Guest quotes the Society photographer Lord Lichfield in his 1981 essay on Lenare who stated that ‘Lenare are like haircuts at Trumbers, clothes by Norman Hartnell, lunch at Simpsons in the Strand ... they stand for something absolutely safe.’<sup>282</sup> Thus Hartnell and his couture designs were represented in this photograph as embedded in London Society culture.

Hartnell worked hard to embed himself in the world of his clients by holding parties, and involving himself in charity events organised by his titled clients. As early on as 1924 he created fashionable costumes for charity theatricals such as *The Silver Crusade Matinée*, a performance that involved The Hon. Ruthven Twins, The Marchioness of Queensberry and Barbara Cartland.<sup>283</sup> <sup>284</sup>As part of this ‘fitting in’ to this lifestyle as a provider of dress, he also offered his Society clients entertainment in the form of, for example, his ‘circus party’ of 1929 held at 17 Bruton Street,<sup>285</sup> and his annual cocktail party at Ascot races.<sup>286</sup> Part of this ‘fitting in’ process was related to what Linda Haverty Rugg has discussed in her essay on Mark Twain. She writes that Twain ‘painstakingly moulded a self-image as product, forged in part from the proliferation of his photographic image.’ And that he ‘created a self-image that would also serve as a self-

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<sup>282</sup> Haden-Guest *The Art of Society Photography* 12.

<sup>283</sup> “Rehearsals: A Pictorial View of Society.” *The Sketch*. June 25 1924: 19. Hartnell-Mitchinson Archive. Box 7/File 2/Album of press cuttings dating from 1920s.

<sup>284</sup> Various dress show programmes demonstrate that Hartnell was involved in fashion shows for charity. Model Mara Levy explained that Hartnell’s regularly took part in fashion shows in aid of charities. Mara Levy. Personal Interview. 7 May 2010. NHOH/2101/13/Digital Recording.

<sup>285</sup> A transcript for a possible chapter on Hartnell’s 1928 ‘Circus Party’ is in the archive, but it was not included in the final publication of Hartnell’s autobiography, *Silver & Gold*. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 1/ Four early draft chapters for Hartnell’s autobiography.

Typescripts.

<sup>286</sup> A collection of letters in the Archive dating from 1961 and annotated by Hartnell, were written to Hartnell either accepting or making apologies in response to invitations to his 1961 Ascot cocktail party. Respondents include the actresses Margaret Leighton and Evelyn Laye. Hartnell has underlined in red pencil references to his home Lovel Dene and how lovely it looked etc. Most of the respondents are making their apologies. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 12.

ironizing mask, working through photographs and an experimental, endless autobiography.’<sup>287</sup>Hartnell used studio portraits in exactly this way, ‘moulding a self-image as product’. His fellow couturiers and other male celebrities of the day such as Hardy Amies, Victor Stiebel and Binkie Beaumont the theatrical impresario, had similar portraits of themselves taken in their double-breasted, tailored suits – cigarette in hand. (Figures 2.34, 2.35 & 2.36).

Not only did Hartnell have photographs taken in formal studios, he also had photographs taken of him posing within his home environment, both in the interiors of his homes and also in the grounds of his various homes over time. These images tell another specific manufactured story, mapping out the narrative of his life and identity for the public gaze, (discussed in detail in Chapter Three). Hartnell had himself photographed as the young ‘dress artist’ posing with pencil, the tool of his trade (Figure 2.37)<sup>288</sup>, and as Hartnell the musician and ‘servant’ to the British royal family (Figure 2.38), and finally as Hartnell the country gentleman in his jodhpurs and boots, feeding his doves (Figure 2.39). Those images which, as Sontag has noted: ‘lay claim to another reality’ and which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy.’<sup>289</sup> By contrast, snapshot photographs in the Archive also secretly include images taken of Hartnell dressed in woman’s clothing and make-up, wearing his own dress designs, and also figure 2.40 in which Hartnell leans against a tree, with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, nonchalantly fishing, displaying a kind of masculinity not necessarily associated with him.

Certain objects appear in studio portraits of Hartnell repeatedly over time. These include his favoured navy blue and white spotted tie worn from c1927 onwards, and red carnation worn from c1930 onwards, and the cufflinks given to him by Queen Elizabeth in 1939 after his creation of successful wardrobes for Her Majesty worn to Paris in 1938 and on the royal tour of North America and Canada in 1939. All of this presents us with Hartnell adorned with all these accoutrements, and an additional object – a gold signet ring with an engraved

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<sup>287</sup> Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography & Autobiography*, (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997): 29.

<sup>288</sup> There are many photographs of Hartnell taken at work showing him with his pencil, usually either in his mouth, thoughtfully, or pointing at a sketch, extant in the Hartnell archive.

<sup>289</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 23.

inscription. The inclusion of objects, or ‘the posing of objects’ in these photographs is of interest as, according to Barthes, ‘objects are accepted induces of associations of ideas (book-case = intellectual), or in a more obscure way, are veritable symbols’.<sup>290</sup> Two specific photographs of Hartnell posed with personal objects of dress and accessory are of particular interest here.

In figure 2.42 Hartnell appears to look straight at the camera, although his right eye meets the viewer head-on, the left eye does not quite meet that of the viewing subject. Barthes explained that ‘it is the very pose of the subject which prepares the reading of the signifieds of connotation.’ The viewer reads the different gestures according to their ‘traditional stock of signs’ or ‘stock metaphors’. Frontality, as Sontag writes, offers-up ‘the disclosure of the subject’s essence’. Hartnell has chosen a very deliberate pose, resting his right hand against his chin and his left arm across his body, holding his little finger straight out to display his signet ring with its inscription. According to Barthes, the connotation ‘somehow “emerges” from all these signifying units’, however Hartnell is very deliberately constructing a message that could only be read by a particular audience. Shaun Cole has suggested that the carnation was a hidden code and a sign of homosexuality in the pre-liberation period.<sup>291</sup> Hartnell’s sharp, double-breasted, tailored lounge-suit with its extended revers, fashionable in the late 1930s and throughout the war, his slight, knowing smile and the carefully lit studio contributes to the ‘air’ he gives off.

A selection of blue and white spotted ties once belonging to Hartnell, (Figures 2.3 & 2.4), the royal cufflinks and the signet ring have been kept close by Claire Williams in her personal jewellery box rather than in the possession of her parents, the Mitchisons, in the Archive. These were shown to the author for the first time in March 2010. (Figures 2.43 & 2.44). Over sixty years after the de Groot photograph was taken, the engraving on the ring is very worn. In a handwritten letter to ‘N.D.’ (Normie dearest or darling) from an unnamed male lover, a line reads: ‘Darling, I have bought you a ring in memory of 23. We must have a repetition the first time I am back dear.’<sup>292</sup> Two possible meanings

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<sup>290</sup> Barthes *Image – Music – Text* 22.

<sup>291</sup> Shaun Cole. *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel’: Gay Men’s Dress in the Twentieth Century*. (Oxford: Berg, 2000): 4.

<sup>292</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 16. An anonymous letter found amongst Hartnell’s creative writing and personal letters, handwritten and typed.

of the inscription on the ring, which is in Arabic, could be either Mohsin, which is a man's first name, or Muhaddeen, which means “lovers” .<sup>293</sup> Several other portrait photographs show Hartnell deliberately posing so as to display the ring. (Figures 2.30 & 2.32). The significance of the ring means that this portrait was possibly meant for one particular recipient (George Mitchison), but Barthes’ ‘reading of the signifieds of connotation’ would have been hidden to others. The messages are produced and disseminated through these ‘sign-vehicles’ to different audiences, some of whom consume them and some who do not, as they have not the language and understanding needed. <sup>294</sup>

In figure 2.45 (also figure 2.5), taken towards the end of his life in the late 1970s, Hartnell is a much older man. His wry smile has given way to pursed lips. Looking disappointed and worn out, having suffered health problems from the late 1950s, he still sports the blue and white spotted tie, although on a larger scale in 1970s fashion, with the addition of the patterned shirt with plain collar, that he took to wearing during this decade. (Figure 2.46). The location lacks the mystery evoked by studio lighting, suggesting the end of an era of glamour and celebrity for the designer. His signet ring draws attention to his over-long nails.<sup>295</sup> and the addition of a gold seal from a watch chain, clipped to his breast pocket is the Dandy’s accessory. Figure 2.47, an early nineteenth century print, entitled *A Dandy*, was found in the cellar at Geven House. Once belonging to Hartnell, illustrates that perhaps the Beau Brummell style of dress had been the inspiration for this accessory.

### ***2.6.1. Negotiating multiple Queer identities through dress and photography***

In Christian Dior’s autobiography, published in 1957, Dior began with a two-page prologue, in which he introduced himself as a small boy aged nine. According to Stanley and Khun, this is very much in the vein of conventional life-writing. ‘The time of the narration has ready-made shape in the chronology of the writer’s life: the story typically opens with his birth or early childhood,

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<sup>293</sup> Megha Rajguru to Jane Hattrick. Email. Monday May 31 2010. Web.

<sup>294</sup> Stuart Hall. “Encoding/Decoding.” *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies. 1972-79*. (London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1980) : 107.

<sup>295</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5<sup>th</sup> July 2010. NHOH/ 16/Digitl Recording.

proceeds through various life stages, and ends at or near the time of writing.’<sup>296</sup>

Dior introduces himself as:

... the two Christian Diors – Christian Dior the public figure, and Christian Dior the private individual. The former, whom you will principally read about in this book, is the famous couturier. Ensnared in a magnificent house in the avenue Montaigne, he is a compound of people, dresses, stockings, perfumes, publicity handouts, press photographs ... Perhaps I should have concentrated entirely on him, and let nothing of myself peep through. For I present a very different sort of picture ... I like all the simple things of life, such as small parties of old friends; I detest the noise and bustle of the world, and sudden, violent changes.<sup>297</sup>

Dior declares that he would defend this second Dior, the quiet man who enjoyed ‘the simple things in life’ as the true Dior, ‘for whether I like the thought or not, my inmost hopes and dreams are expressed in *his* creations.’<sup>298</sup> Dior is stating that it is the ‘true’ Dior, the quiet man, who was responsible for his designs.

As already introduced in Chapter One,<sup>299</sup> the self is understood today by sociologists and those that study visual culture as multifaceted, and culturally and socially constructed over time; there is no such thing as the one true self or core-identity.<sup>300</sup> Dior’s autobiographical writing reflects the positioning of the public self versus the private self, and is a useful way to understand the ways in which famous homosexual men, living under the spotlight, negotiated their lives out of necessity, projecting multiple identities according to the context in which they found themselves.

H. Montgomery Hyde<sup>301</sup> stated in his 1970 publication *The Other Love* that ‘during a period of some fifteen years covered by the Second World War and its

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<sup>296</sup> Annette Khun. *Family Secrets: Acts of memory and imagination*. (London/New York: Verso, 2002) 148.

<sup>297</sup> Christian Dior. 1957. *Dior by Dior: The autobiography of Christian Dior*. (London: V&A Publications, 2007) viii.

<sup>298</sup> Christian Dior. 1957. *Dior by Dior: The autobiography of Christian Dior*. (London: V&A Publications, 2007) viii.

<sup>299</sup> See Chapter One section 3.1.1.

<sup>300</sup> Stuart Hall. ‘Who Needs Identity?’ Stuart Hall and Paul de Gay. Eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996). Steph Lawler. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. (Cambridge/Malden MA: Polity Press, 2008) 5. Anthony Elliott. *Concepts of the Self*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010). Gen Doy. *Picturing the Self: Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture*. (London/New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005)

<sup>301</sup> Montgomery Hyde was an MP during the fifties who supported the implementation of the Wolfenden Report on homosexual offences in Britain that led to the Sexual Offences Act of 1967. This act made homosexual acts between consenting adult males in private no longer illegal.

immediate aftermath, homosexual offences of an indictable character increased between fourfold and fivefold' in Britain. Hyde writes that it was thought that the War was responsible for this increase in homosexual behaviour, and after the international incident of the defection to Russia of the British diplomats Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean in March 1951, who were both homosexual, the campaign to 'weed out all known homosexuals from Government service' led to a campaign in Britain against all homosexual activity, which reached its height in 1953.<sup>302</sup> 1953 was of course the Queen's coronation year, the height of Hartnell's career, and therefore the management of Hartnell's identity as a gay man within his public role as internationally famous royal dressmaker in this context, was vital to maintaining his reputation and position.

In his study of gay culture and city life *Queer London*, Matt Houlbrook describes the story of one of his subjects, read through a selection of personal letters, as a series of oppositions, pivoting 'upon an implicit opposition between silence and speaking out, repressions and fulfilment, nonbeing and being.'<sup>303</sup> This understanding of what it was like to live as a gay man (and I use the modern term gay here as opposed to the term queer used to describe same sex practices in the first half of the twentieth century) reflects the duality of men's lives within the fear of criminality and persecution. As Houlbrook explains, after the war, 'formal legislation implied a mode of surveillance that was draconian, pervasive, and repressive', but he also notes that:

... rather than being constant and universal, the extent and intensity of surveillance varied according to an individual's location within the city, the time of day, his appearance, and his demeanour ... the risk of encountering the law was greater ... in the urinal rather than the furnished room ... if wearing makeup rather than conventionally masculine in appearance ... Those who ... rejected the disreputable public realm could remain officially invisible.<sup>304</sup>

As far as can be understood through personal interviews and discussions with those who knew him, and also conversations with men who were part of London's queer social scene during the 1950s and 1960s, Hartnell lived a quiet, family life with the Mitchisons, preferring to entertain close friends at his country house in Windsor. Despite this 'invisibility' Hartnell's position and

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<sup>302</sup> H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love: An historical and contemporary survey of homosexuality in Britain*, London: Heinemann, 1970) 213-214.

<sup>303</sup> Matt Houlbrook. *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis 1918-1957*. (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 3.

<sup>304</sup> Houlbrook *Queer London* 37.

wealth meant that he could have been a prime target for blackmail. Reflective of Houlbrook's 'draconian surveillance', in the published 'report of the committee on homosexual offences and prostitution' known as the Wolfenden Report of 1958, the 'tragedies of homosexuality' also described as an 'evil' and 'open secret', published statistics relating to homosexual offenses illustrate the impact of these policing strategies.<sup>305</sup> Between 1935 and the year ending 1955, the height of Hartnell's success as Britain's largest and most successful couture house, the number of homosexual offences known to the police increased from 840 in 1935 to 6,644 in 1955, which was also the year Hartnell's autobiography was published.

### ***2.7. From Debutante to Dandy: The public versus private in the self-presentation of Hartnell through dress***

Hartnell was educated at Cambridge, a fact that was later important in his introduction to a Society clientele. His first clients were the fiancés, sisters and mothers of his fellow students. Wedding invitations in the Archive dating from the 1920s include two inviting Hartnell and his sister to the marriages of Thelma Schofield in 1927 and Joy Schofield in 1929. A.H.B. Schofield was at Cambridge with Hartnell, and played 'Marcelle' in *Folly*, the Footlights production of 1923, in which Hartnell played 'Gwen'. Both men designed their own dresses for this production.<sup>306</sup> Hartnell's career at University was more celebrated for his contribution to the Footlights theatrical productions than his achievements as a student of modern languages, and he left without completing his degree to pursue a career in fashion design in the summer of 1922. Of particular interest here is that Hartnell played the female lead in three Footlights productions between 1921 and 1923 (returning as an ex-undergraduate), designing all of his own costumes.

In amongst the damp materials and documents in the cellar was a collection of five studio portraits of what, at first glance, appeared to be a young actress dressed according to fashionable styles of the early 1920s. On closer study, these were identified as Norman Hartnell, cross-dressed. (Figures 2.49, 2.50,

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<sup>305</sup> The Wolfenden Report. *Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*. (New York: Stein and Day, 1963) 5. Wolfenden's recommendations from this report were consolidated in the Sexual Offences Act of 1956, and passed into law in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. Houlbrook: 12)

<sup>306</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Wedding invitations dating from the 1920s. Unboxed.

2.51, 2.52 & 2.53).<sup>307</sup> Figure 2.52 juxtaposed alongside figure 2.53 reveals that his wig is waved, mirroring his natural hair growth. Here the burgeoning dandy, not yet comfortably posed – his hands tucked into his armpits – can be viewed alongside Hartnell as debutante, seemingly at more at ease in his feminine guise. Snapshots of Hartnell in fancy dress and school magazine cuttings demonstrate that Hartnell had enjoyed dressing-up in this way from an early age, and had played the female lead in several school productions. (Figures 2.54, 2.55 & 2.56). Further material found included programmes, university magazines and various pieces of university ephemera all pertaining to ADC and Footlights productions at Cambridge between 1921-1923.<sup>308</sup> The significance of the impact that his cross-dressing played as the hitherto unrecognised catalyst, in this very famous couturier's career will be considered here, and expanded on in Chapters Four and Five.

Initially these images appear to be studio photographs taken to promote the Footlights production of 1921, *What a Picnic!* However, on closer investigation, and by situating these images within the context of the French fashion magazine of the period, *Les Modes*, it became clear that Hartnell's had an alternative agenda. In these photographs, Hartnell is not presenting himself as a male actor, dressed in 'glamour-drag' for the sake of a theatrical performance and parody, but as a model girl, wearing the fashionable styles of 1921. As the Judith Butler has explained, 'there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion'.<sup>309</sup> Hartnell's performance is not, in the words of Butler, 'an imitation based in ridicule and degradation',<sup>310</sup> but an example of Butler's 'realness', 'the artifice works, the approximation of realness appears to be achieved, the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable'.<sup>311</sup> In these portraits, Hartnell strives to deceive but not to parody.

What became clear when analysing studio photographs of Hartnell wearing dresses he designed for himself to wear in 1921 as 'Kitty Fenton' for the

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<sup>307</sup> This collection of photographs formed the basis of a chapter on Norman Hartnell's female impersonation in my Masters dissertation of 2003.

<sup>308</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 9. Programmes and ephemera pertaining to Hartnell's Cambridge theatricals.

<sup>309</sup> Judith Butler. *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of 'Sex'*. (London/New York: Routledge, 1993): 125.

<sup>310</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 126.

<sup>311</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 129.

Footlights production of *What a Picnic!*, and other images and ephemera pertaining to his roles as ‘Sylvia Somers’ in 1922 and ‘Gwendoline’ in 1923, was that his female-impersonation had served as what could be considered his couture apprenticeship. He designed dresses for himself to wear on stage that were made up by Myra Salter, a court dressmaker in London. In the absence of a successful apprenticeship to an established couturier after he left University, he taught himself the creative and practical aspects of couture using himself as ‘muse’ and ‘model girl’ and his body as ‘mannequin’, designing clothes to his personal taste and style. Whether these ensembles, designed as ‘costume’ for the stage made any reference to the character he played is not discernable.

The ensembles Hartnell is wearing reveal his burgeoning skills in dress design, along with his understanding of fabric weights and textures, complex garment construction and knowledge of how material may be cut in order to obtain the desired effect. It also, as Chapter Four will discuss in more depth, exposed Hartnell to the feel of luxury dress fabrics, defining his taste in both the types of fabrics he preferred to work with, and those he chose for his personal use. As Barnes and Eicher have written that ‘the sensual effect of certain textures on the skin may be experienced as either positive or negative. Certain textile designs may delight or displease the person wearing them.’<sup>312</sup> An understanding of this is central to the work of the fashion designer. He also displays an aptitude for recognizing which styles suited him, and these pictures reveal an emphasis on feminine sparkle and decorative effects as early as 1921, elements of his designs for clients as well as for himself to wear throughout his career as this thesis will demonstrate.

Comparisons with images in the Paris fashion magazine *Les Modes* from 1920/21 illustrate the fashionability of Hartnell’s designs, and also reveal his possible inspiration for his full-length posed studio photographs. The photographs of Hartnell dressed as ‘Kitty’ would have looked perfectly at home in *Les Modes*, one of the elite Paris fashion magazines published between 1901 and 1937 by *Manzi, Joyant & Cie*. Similarities between the photograph of Miss Alice Granville in a *Robe du Soir par Charlotte*, and Hartnell’s stiff, silk dress with side frills and rose at the waist indicate that Hartnell could easily have been influenced by Paris fashions for the designs for the costumes he designed for

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<sup>312</sup> Barnes and Eicher, *Dress and Gender*, 3.

*What a Picnic!* of 1921. (Figures 2.57 & 2.58). His 'picture hat' is trimmed with a large ostrich feather. These were two types of decorative accessories that Chapter Four will demonstrate were employed throughout his fashion collections between 1922 and 1929. He is photographed wearing a different pair of high-heeled shoes in fashionable styles with each of the three ensembles, which must have been made to measure, as his shoe size was size 9.

In figure 2.51, Hartnell poses with his 'leading man' Mr. C.N. Hulbert, and is wearing a dress of silver or gold lamé or silk tissue and chiffon/tulle decorated with small flowers at the waist. A second photograph of Hartnell in the same dress viewed alongside an image of Madame de Chauveron, de la Comédie-Française, in *Les Modes*, Décembre, 1920, also wearing a dress in draped in chiffon with a rose at the waist reveals marked similarities between both the garment and the model's pose. (Figures 2.59 & 2.60). The short sleeves are also trimmed with flowers. The silk tissue forms a front panel though the bodice to the hem, seen in more detail in figure 2.52, a head and shoulders shot of Hartnell in which he is photographed wearing an additional, white fur wrap and headdress of silver or gold leaves with a spray of lilac over his right ear. His wig is carefully coiffed in the fashionable styles of the day, and his make-up is applied with expertise.

In a third ensemble seen in figure 2.62, Hartnell is wearing a silk, pleated skirt, and a silk tunic top incorporating a woven oriental design. The neckline and sleeves are trimmed with a darker silk and this colour is picked up in his parasol. He wears a 'picture hat' with a long ribbon as a hatband and poses with a parasol. Again, juxtaposed with a fashion photograph of a similar model, a 'toilette de plage' (beach ensemble) seen in figure 2.61, the styles of each ensemble are strikingly similar. Hartnell was not a man of small stature, yet his dresses were complemented by his dainty poses and equally feminine gestures. Evidence in the form of dresses worn in these photographs reveal his knowledge of how various weights of fabric worked together, how to drape and cut fabric to fit the figure, and how fabric functioned.

The programme from this production shows that these garments were made up by the court-dressmaker, Myra Salter, in Hanover Square, therefore Hartnell must have experienced being a couture client first hand, having fittings and possibly making alterations during the making-up. This would also have

contributed towards his understanding of the creative process. Hartnell continued to have such personal fittings throughout his life undertaken by workroom staff in his private apartment at 26 Bruton Street who made women's couture garments for him.<sup>313</sup>

### ***2.7.1. The Debutante***

In the twentieth century, the subject has learned that to be photographed is to have one's performance of one's identity captured. As Goffman has noted, 'the individual offers his performance and puts on his show 'for the benefit of other people'.<sup>314</sup> Hartnell, was certainly aware that different identities could be projected through photographs of himself and that these could have different meanings attributed to them according to whoever encountered them. Overtime, as these portrait photographs (and other photographic images) reveal, Hartnell changes his performance in front of the camera as he learns to perform different identities. Two main identities can be read through these images and given weight using other material in the archive. These identities include the 'debutante' or Hartnell's female impersonation of young, society women, and the Dandy or 'Regency Buck'.

Hartnell could not be seen in public wearing his own designs after 1923 and his performances in the Footlights theatrical productions ceased. Instead he had to dissimulate his 'debutante' persona, and adopt what appear at first glance to have been the sartorial codes appropriate to gender norms of the day.

When compared with the studio portraits of Hartnell as 'Kitty', his early sketches reproduced in *Woman* magazine in 1924 (figure 2.13) could, I would argue, be seen as self-representational, in that the poses and indeed the faces of the female figures drawn by Hartnell, bare a strong resemblance to Hartnell himself. Also, when compared with photographs of his cousin Constance Barnett, modelling his first collection in 1924, as also seen in the article for *Woman* magazine, (figure 1.12), the family resemblance is strong; she has Hartnell's nose. It is also clear that he had reproduced a version of the dress designed and worn by himself to wear in the production *The Bedder's Opera* for the Footlights in 1922, seen in figure 2.63, in the 'debutante dress', which is

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<sup>313</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5<sup>th</sup> July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/digital recording. Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Casette Tapes x 2.

<sup>314</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 28.

almost identical to the dress worn by Constance. Bridesmaid's dresses made for the wedding of Lady Davina Lytton to the Earl of Erne in July 1931, seen in figure 2.64, also bare a strong resemblance to the dress Hartnell designed for himself to wear a decade earlier for the Footlights production *Battling Butler* (1922). This illustrates the attachment Hartnell had to this style of tulle dress with floral decoration. Hartnell continued to design tulle dresses decorated with artificial flowers throughout his career, as Chapter Four will discuss.

Photographs of Hartnell taken at school reveal that his interest in impersonating women and with the design and the wearing of women's clothing began early in his life and that this performance was encouraged in his educational environments. Combined with his love of Edwardian glamour and theatre,<sup>315</sup> his understanding of how clothing functioned on stage to denote character and signposted an audience through the narrative learned in both school and university productions, later informed the character of his couture designs. Chapter Four will include an analysis of exactly how his self-fashioning, designing women's couture clothing for himself, contributed to and was reflected in his design work for a wide range of clients, including actresses both on and of stage and more famously for the women of the Royal family including Queen Elizabeth and our present Queen.

### ***2.7.2. The Dandy***

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* in January, 1964, the fashion journalist, Alison Settle disclosed her ideas on the reasons for Hartnell's failure to succeed in Paris, explaining that she found Hartnell's failure in Paris difficult to understand within the context of Capt. Edward Molyneux's (Irishman) established success. She wrote:

It may be that the name Molyneux sounded suitably French while Norman Hartnell, in name, looks and ways was so essentially English, then slimly so, now almost Pickwickian in looks and Puckish in humour. He would not fit easily into the world of La France Eternelle.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 16-17.

<sup>316</sup> Design Archives. Box 2: BN. 20. 440 words on Norman Hartnell by Alison Settle. Biographical notes by A.S. on N.H. written for Selina Sinclair of the *Daily Telegraph*, January 1964. Two pages.

The 'Pickwickian' and 'Puckish' Hartnell was also identified as a 'Regency Buck' in middle age. In an article for *Woman's Illustrated* in 1949, the writer Godfrey Winn stated that:

Hartnell's office, like his country home near Windsor, where he does most of his actual designing, is full of delightful Regency furniture. And now that I come to think of it, there is quite something of the Regency buck about this most famous of British couturiers, in his high colouring and his sporting air – he rides every week-end without fail, whatever the weather – his Georgian figure, and instinctive good manners ...<sup>317</sup>

Winn was part of the 1920s queer London (post Wilde), one of the 'new-Aesthetes' described by Hugh David that included Beaton, Edward Molyneux, Oliver Messel and Rex Whistler, and Godfrey Winn but not Hartnell, as Hugh David has pointed out.<sup>318 319</sup>

At the root of this sartorial presentation sits a performative function that can best be summarized through a description of the evolving character and image of the dandy, originating with the socialite George Bryan 'Beau' Brummell (1778-1840). Brummell patronised the Savile Row tailors, who as Breward has noted, offered:

...a sartorial signature style suited to the demands of English aristocrats who required practical items for the equestrian pursuits of the rural landowner alongside a form of dress appropriate for the rounds of court, ceremonial, commercial transactions, and leisured display expected of the gentleman in town.<sup>320</sup>

Breward outlines his understating of the term thus:

... for whilst the historical reality of the dandy might well be confined to the experiences of just a few metropolitan men made famous by their collective tendency to promote their celebrity through the singular arrangement of their costumes and manners, such actions also stand as a universal code of fashionable behaviour. The idea of dandyism reveals the ways in which human bodies are never natural, but instead constitute a system of meaning through which modern culture, indeed 'fashion', is constructed and widely understood.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Godfrey Winn, 'Norman Hartnell: A Profile', *Woman's Illustrated*, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1949, Vol. XXVI, No. 638: N. pag.

<sup>318</sup> Hugh David. *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality 1895-1995*. (London: Harper-Collins1997): 76.

<sup>319</sup> Although he worked professionally alongside all of these men, Hartnell's family life with George Mitchison and his wife Doris replaced a social life with these 'new-Aesthetes'. Claire Williams remembered that her 'Uncle Norman' always spent Christmas and Easter with her, her brother Norman and their parents. Hartnell had a room in the Mitchison's house especially for his use, known as 'the camellia suite'.

<sup>320</sup> Breward, *Fashion*, 161-164.

<sup>321</sup> Breward, *Fashion*, 164.

As the set of portrait photographs taken of Hartnell over time and reproduced here has shown, Hartnell adopted a particular look appropriate to his country house life-style (lived at Lovel Dene, his house in Windsor Forest) and his town life (lived at The Tower House in Regents Park and in the flat above the workrooms at 26 Bruton Street). He assembled a particular set of accessories within which to complement either his dark, three piece double-breasted, fitted tailored suit worn in 'town' with a navy and white spotted tie, cufflinks<sup>322</sup> and signet ring worn on his little finger; a red carnation always in his buttonhole, his wavy hair parted to the left. (Figure 2.2). Examples of Hartnell's shoes, ties, jewellery and cufflinks that survive in the archive house correspond exactly with items that he wore to be photographed in over time. It would seem that once Hartnell was content with this look he never waived from it. He did also adopt a chequered tie in red, navy or mauve and white during the 1970s, worn with a patterned shirt with white collar. (Figures 2.65 & 2.66). A collection of his shoes reveal his taste for black patent Gucci loafers, and navy suede loafers from Crocket and Jones of Harrow, worn by him in the 1970s.

The other side of the Dandy look adopted by Hartnell was that of a rural landowner, country gentleman. Hartnell was often photographed at his country home in Windsor, with his horses and dogs, usually wearing a tweed jacket and tie. (Figure 2.67). A collection of his blue and white striped ties are in the Archive along with his suede shoes and boots for leisure wear. (Figures 2.68 & 2.69). Photographs of him at work also show him wearing this look on occasions, often accompanied by a carnation worn in his buttonhole. (Figure 2.70).

As the series of photographic portraits in the Archive indicate, Hartnell adopted the carnation as his favoured 'buttonhole' from the mid thirties.<sup>323</sup> The fashion journalist Anne Scott-James, who had worked for both *Vogue* from 1934 and was Editor at *Harpers Bazaar* after the war, published a comedic fictitious account of life at a fashion magazine in 1952, that she named *Venus*. Although she states in the Forward that 'I have taken the greatest care not to "put in"

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<sup>322</sup> In particular the cufflinks monogrammed with 'ER' that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother gave him in 1938 after his White Wardrobe designs for the State visit to Paris was such a success. He wears these 'to camera' in figure 30, 32 and 35.

<sup>323</sup> Shaun Cole, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel: Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000): 32.

anyone I really knew',<sup>324</sup> she describes the various character types that worked at the fictitious magazine, and appears to have been particularly disparaging of the queer men she worked with. Her description does, however, offer a stereotype that Goffman would agree could be applied to Hartnell's self-presentation in the same period.<sup>325</sup>

Apart from Directors ... the men on *Venus* were nearly all effeminate. Even those who came in from the outside world with normal instincts usually fell into the swing of things and would get carried away by the band of golden youths who worked, played and lived together in a crowd ... They copied each other's clothes, voices, houses, mannerisms, photographs, coiffeurs, slavishly picking up any new fashions set by one more adventurous than the rest ... At that time their clothes were already markedly Edwardian, and tight trousers, waisted, skirted jackets, velvet collars and carnations were universal for the fraternity. Their hair was wavy, and perfumed with tonic or Cologne; their nails were manicured; but only the most advanced cases wore make-up. Their voices were usually high and drawly and their conversation was marked with many stresses.<sup>326</sup>

In the Archive there are also around ten pale blue silk ties, similar to the tie worn in Madame Yvonde's portrait of Hartnell from the mid 1930s, made by Harvie & Hudson, Jermyn Street, SW1, and New & Lingwood (also the makers of several navy and white spotted ties in the collection). Shaun Cole cites the findings of a 1949 Mass Observation survey on sexual attitudes, that found that 'amongst its study group 'pale blue was a queer's "trade colour" –the group studied favoured pale blue for short socks, ties and pullovers.'<sup>327</sup> (Figure 2.28).

In a collection of copies of letters from Hartnell to various makers and suppliers of men's clothing, written in 1945, typed up on the back of blank workroom dockets (order forms), Hartnell placed orders for suits from Messrs. Lesley & Roberts, Hanover Square, and shirts from Messrs. Coles Limited, Knightsbridge. He enquired about having a coat and suits made at Messrs. Benson & Clegg, and wrote to J.A. Murdoch at Messrs. Kilgour, French and Stanbury, Dover Street to the same end, although he understood 'the difficulties

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<sup>324</sup> Anne Scott-James. *In the Mink*. (London: Michael Joseph, 1952): Foreward. With thanks to Dr. Monica Brewis for suggesting that this publication might be useful.

<sup>325</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, Introduction.

<sup>326</sup> Scott-James, *In the Mink*, 60-61.

<sup>327</sup> Mass-Observation Sex Survey, Sexual Behaviour, Box 4, File E, Appendix 1, Abnormality. 6.7.49. qtd in Cole, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*, 63.

of materials and labour. And I hear you are booked up for a year or so!'.<sup>328</sup> To G.F. Curtis Esq., of Messrs. Hawes & Curtis Ltd., Piccadilly, in a letter dated May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1945, he wrote:

My dear Mr. Curtis,

I would like to call you an old devil, but as I want to ask a few favours of you, perhaps I had better not.

I know that I am the worst dressed man in London, as you yourself said, and I would like to be considered well dressed – by Hawes & Curtis, of course!

I daren't accept smart week-end parties, because I have no shirts to wear. My London and country suits are frayed and faded, and when I visit Buckingham Palace once or twice a week, my neck is so raw after having worn your splendid collars which are now torn and frayed, that discomfort is added to my embarrassment.

I have had three cream taffeta shirts on order for some time. Is there any chance of having them within the next month or two? Mr. Sandford also has some materials for pyjamas, but they don't matter. But I would like some cream shirts and a few stiff collars...

Sincerely yours,<sup>329</sup>

These letters reveal the type of tailors and gentlemen's clothing suppliers Hartnell frequented for his 'London and country suits', taffeta shirts and men's pyjamas. Edwina Ehrman writes that 'Kilgour & French in Dover Street made 'Ultra-modern clothes for the most dashing type of young man'. Lesley & Roberts in George Street catered for the 'man-about-town' and film stars Clark Gable and Gary Cooper' and Hawes & Curtis in Jermyn Street, were patronised by the Prince of Wales.<sup>330</sup> It is from Lesley & Roberts in 1945 that Hartnell ordered suits 'on behalf of your client Captain Mitchison',<sup>331</sup> who was to be demobbed in December 1945 from Bombay. Photographs of Mitchison, taken in 1938 by an infatuated Hartnell reveal his film star good looks – a fitting client for the firm that dressed Hollywood's Gable and Cooper. (Figure 2.71).

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<sup>328</sup> Hartnell Mitchison Archive. Box 2/1945/File 19/letter from Norman Hartnell to J.A. Murdoch Esq., Messrs. Kilgour, French and Stanbury, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1945. The letter has a pencilled annotation that reads 'No' written across the top.

<sup>329</sup> Hartnell Mitchison Archive. Box 2/1945/File 19/Letter from Norman Hartnell to G.F. Curtis Esq., Messrs. Hawes & Curtis Ltd., 60, Piccadilly, W.1.

<sup>330</sup> Edwina Ehrman. 'Broken Traditions; 1930-55.' Christopher Breward, Edwina Ehrman and Caroline Evans. Eds. *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk*. (London: Museum of London, 2004): 99.

<sup>331</sup> Hartnell Mitchison Archive. Box 2/1945/File 19/ Letter from Norman Hartnell to Lesley Roberts.,

## 2.8. Conclusion

From debutante to dandy, Hartnell performed a series of identities made real through photographs and clothing. I return here to Herminone Lee's 'body parts', and her conjuring up of 'the young Dickens coming quickly into a room, sprightly, long-haired, bright-eyed, dandyish, in a crimson velvet waistcoat or tartan trousers.'<sup>332</sup> Hartnell's red beaded waistcoat is decorated with the carnation – the flower that he always wore in his buttonhole. (Figure 2.72). Above all, his particular signature style of beaded eveningwear, executed in Hartnell's favourite pastel shades of chiffon, which were developed from his dress designs for the stage in the 1930s, and the Hartnell plain silk beaded crinoline with its roots in those he designed for Queen Elizabeth from 1937, hold the key to one important aspect of his private life in terms of his identity as it is present in his design work.

Of the Hartnell garments in the Archive, one particular pale turquoise blue beaded, lace pyjama suit and matching beaded sandals found in the attic, separate from the rest of the dress collections, seemed incongruous. The ensemble is very well worn, not very clean and rather smelly. The fastenings at the trouser waist has been mended repeatedly; cobbled together with a large tacking stitch and the measurements of the jacket and trousers were larger and of a different shape to that of the model gowns in the collection and the garments in the two private collections of Doris Mitchison and her daughter. The aqua satin sandals with beaded embroidery were also rather wide and larger than the women's shoes in the collection. (Figure 2.73).

Subsequent to a personal interview with Maureen Markham who embroidered this ensemble,<sup>333</sup> this pyjama suit can now be identified as having been owned and worn by Hartnell himself. Further garments in the collection, including a black velvet crinoline with pink beading, a gold crinoline gown and turquoise chiffon evening dress made to the same measurements, may well have also belonged to the designer. Hartnell's personal struggle with his 'effete' persona, included in several early chapters of his book was, as already noted, never included as part of his narrative and no reference to his female impersonation, celebrated in early articles about him in 1922, was included in his

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<sup>332</sup> Herminone Lee. *Body Parts*. 3.

<sup>333</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/digital Recording.

autobiography. This aspect of his private world, is only present within the few, well-worn women's garments that were made for him by discrete members of his loyal staff, in his workrooms at 26 Bruton Street. This element of his private life has remained locked away, embedded in these silent clothes now empty of his 'body parts' until their importance for this study became clear.

On a summer's day in 1953, possibly June, the month of Elizabeth II's coronation, Hartnell, the 'confirmed bachelor', dressed as the country gentlemen, was photographed in his drawing room at his country house, Lovel Dene, by De Groot of Amsterdam. (Figure 2.74). Later that same day, a friend takes two snaps of Hartnell upstairs in his bedroom, one posing at the door to the balcony, wearing the exact same clothes and accessories as he is wearing in figure 2.74, and the other of Hartnell lying on the bed wearing a pale silk polka dot pyjama suit with rose corsage. Hartnell - the country gentleman, the dandy, the 'Regency buck' - is replaced by Hartnell the gay, cross-dressing couturier, performing his queer, feminine identity in the private interior world of his bedroom. These two small snapshots reveal today very clearly a private moment between himself and the photographer in the secret world of the Queen's couturier. (Figures 2.76 & 2.77)

### ***2.8.1. Personal Interview with Maureen Markham***

In April 2010, Maureen Markham, embroideress at Hartnell's from 1955, quietly and without prompting, began to reveal something of Hartnell's life long cross-dressing, and the fact that his couture gowns and ensembles were made by his workroom staff for his personal use in the workrooms at 26 Bruton Street. In the course of my interview with her, Markham quite spontaneously changed the subject of the conversation:

Maureen: ...because you know we used to make dresses for Hartnell – crinolines and Louie told you all about that?

Jane: For him to wear?

Maureen: mm

Jane: Well, she didn't really – someone else hinted - who was it ? - hinted at it (pause) somebody was very upset one day because she had to make one of the couture models for a man in a larger size and she got quite

upset – I can't remember who told me that story. So did he just wear the crinolines on his own?

Maureen: I think so...and - we were never – he didn't like anyone there after six o'clock so the mind boggles.

Jane: So he wore them then?

Maureen: Yes, 'cause Louie used to have to go out and buy wands and all sorts – yeah...

Maureen: I don't know – Anne Wright she used to make some pyjamas for him...apparently we worked on...they were sequinned all over.

Jane: I think I might have found them ...I've got ...

are they in a sort of aqua blue...(Maureen: yeah) and they had a pink flower (Maureen: yeah)...and they are his? I knew it. I thought these are much too big for one of the model girls. And do you know what Maureen? They are really smelly ...they are very smelly like BO - like they've been worn to death – but they've got some matching sandals with them too –

Maureen: Yeah, Anne Wright made those (pyjamas), yeah she makes us laugh over those...

Jane: .....So you actually beaded those pyjamas Maureen?

Maureen: Yeah!

Jane: You know I found one photograph in the Archive ...

Maureen: Sailor suits they used to do

Jane: Really?

Maureen: Yes.

Jane: Where have they gone now?

Maureen: Don't know.

Jane: He had sailor suits? With a skirt or trousers?

Maureen: trousers I think – yeah...you see we didn't know who they were for, they had to go under the name of Mrs Freeman – they used to go in the workbook...

Jane: Yes. So Mrs Freeman was Mr Hartnell

Maureen: Yes <sup>334</sup>

As Hartnell wrote in 1924, he knew he 'was not like other men'. The samples of autobiographical writing, photographic portraits and dress and accessories read through photographs and object analysis, has offered up readings of this difference. Norman Hartnell related to society between 1921 and 1979 from the perspective of a white, aspirational middle-class, homosexual, cross-dressing man who displayed 'feminine traits'. His identity was forged on the margins, as Stuart Hall has written, the 'frontier',<sup>335</sup> in the spaces and outside the boundaries between the upper echelons of Society and his class origins. Between the acceptable face of 'the confirmed bachelor' in a world where homosexuality was pathologised, illegal and demonised, and the private world of a gay man who liked to blur gender boundaries through dress and make-up, Hartnell's identity therefore lies within Stuart Hall's concept of identity.

Above all, it is the objects once owned by Hartnell that 'matter'. As Anne Smart Martin has written.<sup>336</sup> The blown rose corsage, attached to the white satin collar of Hartnell's beaded pyjama suit and his blue and white spotted tie, represent Hartnell's life lived between genders. The public Hartnell, the dandy, the horse-riding country gentleman, and the private Hartnell, at first the debutante in tulle and rosebuds, and later adopting his own way of wearing pastel lace, satin, sequins and beaded embroidery close to the skin in a pyjama suit. Chapter Four will unpick these ways of being and dressing and how they impacted on Hartnell's fashion collections and royal dressing.

Two different versions of Hartnell's private life can be read through the Archive reflecting Houlbrooks' opposition 'between silence and speaking out.'<sup>337</sup> The

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<sup>334</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

<sup>335</sup> Stuart Hall. 1996. "Who Needs 'Identity?'" Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman. Eds. *Identity: A Reader*. (Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC: Sage, 2000): 17.

<sup>336</sup> Anne Smart Martin. 'Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework. *Winterthur Portfolio*. 28. 2/3. 1993: 141.

<sup>337</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 3.

first view of Hartnell as the dandy, the ‘Regency Buck’, the ‘confirmed bachelor’, the connoisseur and lover of antiques,<sup>338</sup> was lived out in the public domain through self-promotional, auto/biographical articles accompanied by photographs of him taken at his private residences.

The second reading can be read and reconstructed from the pages of personal letters, and in what was edited from his autobiographical writing (discussed already in this chapter), in garments once worn by him, objects once owned by him, and within personal and studio photographs, some of this lost for 60 years in the Archive. Hartnell thought that he was different from everybody else, but he was like other gay men of his period. As he stated, ‘...for a long time I was uncertain. But gradually I came to realize that it meant merely that I was *myself* and *not* everybody else.’<sup>339</sup> According to his headmaster at school, Hartnell was the ‘unexpected pearl.’<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> To be discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>339</sup> Norman Hartnell, . Box 3. File 12. ‘Why I am a Dressmaker’, *Woman* September, 1924, Vol. 1, No. 6: 499.

<sup>340</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Norman Hartnell, bound full draft of Hartnell’s autobiography, ‘Possible alternative titles, ‘Living by Design’ or ‘Living for Design’, c1954/55: 1-2.

## Chapter Three

# Collecting and Displaying Identity, Intimacy and Memory in the Staged Interiors of the Royal Couturier Norman Hartnell.

### 3.1. Introduction

Individuals also have particular ways of relating to their society and its past, in order to construct their own personalities ... European individuals will have European hearts and minds, shaped by social and family practice and the mechanisms of inheritance, and will construct themselves and their relationships in European ways. Collecting objects is one of these ways, and a very important one.<sup>341</sup>

As this quote from Susan Pearce's work *On Collecting* underlines, collecting objects is a key factor in the construction of the personalities of many European individuals. Norman Hartnell was one such individual, and the objects collected over time and displayed in his various homes and premises 'set the scene' in which he lived his private life and performed a public version of his private identity. Walter Benjamin has described the domestic interior as 'the phantasmagorias of the interiors –which, for the private man, represents the universe'. This section from Benjamin's posthumously published *Arcades Project* continues: 'In the interior, he brings together the far away and the long ago. His living room is a box in the theater of the world.'<sup>342</sup> The metaphor

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As this chapter reveals, the Mitchison's house in Cornwall, in which Hartnell never lived, (although he did stay there), reveals traces of Hartnell's 'theater of the world', as his objects and furniture were inherited by those closest to him on his death.

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<sup>341</sup> Susan Pearce. "Collecting Ourselves." Pearce. *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): 159.

<sup>342</sup> Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1999): 8-9.

According to Benjamin, ‘To dwell means to leave traces.’<sup>343</sup> As a collector, Hartnell made himself, in Benjamin’s words:

...the true resident of the interior ... divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them ... The collector dreams his way not only into a distant or bygone world but also into a better one – one in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need than in the everyday world, but in which things are freed from the drudgery of just being useful.<sup>344</sup>

As this chapter will show, Hartnell collected objects from the Regency and Victorian periods in particular colours and decorative styles.

The issue of materiality in the form of the accumulation of material commodities, is, in Daniel Miller’s words, ‘concerned with what it is to be human.’<sup>345</sup> As Miller also notes, materiality is ‘central to the way we understand ourselves’.<sup>346</sup> Accordingly, the objects in the Archive are treated here not purely as artefacts to be ‘read’ and understood in terms of their meanings to those that consumed them, but as mini histories that have agency, and through which Hartnell (in this case) constructed his identity and made sense of his world.<sup>347</sup>

Hartnell owned a London house, the *Tower House*, during the 1930s. (Figures 3.1 & 3.2). He also owned a country house in Windsor, *Lovel Dene*, which he bought in the autumn of 1935 just after moving the business to 26 Bruton Street, Mayfair, in 1934. (Figures 3.3 & 3.4). The Bruton Street showroom was designed by the architect Gerald Lacoste, who also remodelled the interiors of *Lovel Dene*. (Figures 3.5 & 3.6). The interior designer on both the showroom and the country house project was Norris Wakefield. In both Bruton Street and *Lovel Dene* the use of chandeliers and cut glass lighting was lavish, and modern flower arrangements in the style of Constance Spry were used to great effect. Hartnell furnished *Lovel Dene* and the *Tower House* using a mixture of Queen Anne and Regency furniture, Victoriana, and much coloured Bristol glass; ruby for the dining room, pink and blue for the bedrooms. Venetian glass mirrors and painted blackamoor (*sic*) figures appeared throughout the house.

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<sup>343</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 9.

<sup>344</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 9.

<sup>345</sup> Daniel Miller. “Materiality: An introduction.” Daniel Miller. Ed. *Materiality*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005): 2.

<sup>346</sup> Miller, *Materiality*, 2.

<sup>347</sup> Miller, *Materiality*, 3.

Through a close examination of photographs taken of Hartnell's homes found in the Archive, it became clear that the house I was working in was full of decorative objects and furniture that had once belonged to Hartnell. These objects had been used to furnish and decorate various rooms both at the Hartnell premises at 26 Bruton Street, Mayfair, and also his private homes including his London house in Regents Park, the Tower House of the 1930s, his country house in Windsor Forest, Lovel Dene, and his last home, Rose Place near Ascot.

Throughout his career, a public narrative was constructed by Hartnell's public relations that portrayed him in the press as the celebrated royal dressmaker. This was done through an association with his private interiors and the collection and display of decorative art objects and furniture. These collections also played a key role in the performance of his identity and were a reflection of his queer taste and collecting practices. This chapter investigates and reinterprets the staging of Hartnell's private life for public consumption in relation to his performance of a complex self, that he constructed using decorative objects and interior schemes. It also traces the more recent biography of these objects as they appear in the interior spaces of those he was close to in life, within current material culture debates on the 'cultural biography of things',<sup>348</sup> theoretical approaches to the culture of collecting objects that both act as 'extensions of the self',<sup>349</sup> and 'our other selves',<sup>350</sup> and the construction of queer identity through objects and interiors. This analysis also considers Hartnell's collections and displays

The subject of Hartnell's collecting practices, within the context of the construction and self-presentation of his public persona as the most celebrated royal couturier between 1935 and 1953, is an aspect of his life not discussed to date through critical interpretation.<sup>351</sup> I also examine how he used the collection and display of objects and particular decorative styles within his private domestic interiors as an expression of his identity, and to perform his

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<sup>348</sup> Igro Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things." Arjun Appadurai. Ed. *The Social Life of Things*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 64-91.

<sup>349</sup> Russell Belk. *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>350</sup> Susan Pearce. *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*. (London and new Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998).

<sup>351</sup> Hartnell's private and business interiors were discussed in Stephen Calloway. "Hartnell's Interior Designs: Stella Beddoe. Ed. Norman Hartnell, 1901-1979. (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1985): 79-82, and also in Michael Pick, Michael Pick. *Be Dazzled! Norman Hartnell, Sixty Years of Glamour and Fashion*. (New York: Pointed Leaf Press, 2007).

subjectivity and sexual selfhood, a similarly un-discussed, yet fundamentally important issue in terms of Hartnell's life and work.

This chapter also examines these same objects and pieces of furniture in the present day, inherited as part of Hartnell's estate by Mitchison. These objects have travelled through time gaining new layers of meaning, and an analysis of how they are displayed in Mitchison's home within similarly decorated interiors, over 70 years after they first appeared in descriptions and photographs of Hartnell's homes, throws up issues of embodiment, self-hood, taste and identity politics.

### ***3.2. A queer reading of Hartnell's interiors and collections***

Décor and objects collected and displayed within a domestic interior can reveal sexual selfhood.<sup>352</sup> As Aaron Betsky has written, within twentieth century Western middle-classes, queer men 'put on a show'. For Betsky, the queer interior space is all about 'stagecraft, the creation of artificial, inward-turned worlds for same-sex groups, ... the urge to collect objects and then assemble them into highly personal maps or mirrors of an unseen or unrepresentable self'.

Joel Sanders examines the Western architectural tradition as masculine and its understanding of the ornamented surface as an expression of femininity. Modernists argued against 'window dressing' because of its association with dressing the body or fashionable dress and female masquerade.<sup>353</sup> Based on stereotypes and the previous experience of the viewing subject, the consumption of particular things can communicate information about us as individuals to the outside world according to class and habitus,<sup>354</sup> and also sexuality. Christopher Reed discusses what he defines as 'the relationship between identity and 'Amusing interior design', citing the *Vogue* article on the house of Osbert and Sacherverell Sitwell, which 'offered a manifesto for the Amusing style as the

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<sup>352</sup> Aaron Betsky. *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), Penny Sparke. *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*. (London and San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), Joel Sanders. *Writings and Projects*. (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2004), Christopher Reed, "Design for (Queer) Living: Sexual Identity, Performance, and Décor in British *Vogue*, 1922-1926." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. Vol 12. 2006: 377-403.

<sup>353</sup> Joel Sanders. *Writings and Projects*. (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2004): 90-93.

<sup>354</sup> Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. 1959. (London: Penguin Books, 1990), Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), Grant McCracken. *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumption*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1988).

look of the modern ... In contrast to the grim work of re-creating authoritatively sanctioned period styles, the truly modern interior plays with history.<sup>355</sup> Thus Hartnell's interiors of the 1930s through to the 1970s, with their heavily curtained windows in floral fabrics and decorative contents in the Regency and Victorian styles, 'play with history'. Hartnell's interiors are also typically feminine in terms of taste and clearly link him to his profession and the stereotypical 'cultural cliché' of the gay dress/interior designer in the interwar period. Photographs of Hartnell's bedroom at *Lovel Dene* captures this feminine style, and the addition of cherubs to the design of the bed frame and chair makes for a very theatrical, queer space. (Figures 3.7 & 3.8).

Penny Sparke describes the fashion for 'French taste, linked with gilding and pastel colours' as favoured by Victorian women in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>356</sup> From the pink lustres to the hunting prints on the dining room walls, Hartnell's interior schemes and the objects displayed within, recreated in the Mitchison's home, follow these Victorian fashions for the gendered interior.

As Sanders states, 'it is hardly coincidental that interior design, much like fashion and theatre, is a discipline invested in the notion of self-fashioning through artifice.'<sup>357</sup> Goffman argues that we all perform specific identities, however, historically, homosexual men (and Lesbians) have been more aware of the importance of managing their identities in terms of self-presentation, dress and gesture.<sup>358</sup> They learned the strategies of interior design in order to present an acceptable or normative self, at the same time as a sexually dissident one. Before 1968 and the decriminalization of homosexuality, to stay safe whilst at the same time convey one's sexual preference to other gay men meant using clothing codes that were understood by the wider queer community. During the interwar period the use of feminine gestures and make-up to define oneself as homosexual was common practice. As Shaun Cole explains,

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<sup>355</sup> Christopher Reed, "Design for (Queer) Living: Sexual Identity, Performance, and Décor in British *Vogue*, 1922-1926." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. Vol 12. 2006: 390.

<sup>356</sup> Penny Sparke. *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*. (London and San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995): 46.

<sup>357</sup> Sanders, *Curtain Wars*, 90-93.

<sup>358</sup> Shaun Cole. *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel: Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century*. (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2000), Richard Dyer. *Culture of Queers*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), Sally Gray. (2008) "'I'm Here Girlfriend What's New?'" Art, Dress and the Queer Performative Subject: The Case of David McDiarmid', *Fashion Theory*. Volume 12, Issue 3, pp. 293-312.

...many gay men accepted the equation of homosexuality with effeminacy, and thus viewed feminine presentation strategies as a means of expressing their identity as gay men: hence they feminised their presentational imagery by adopting womanly mannerisms and interests.<sup>359</sup>

I would argue that Shaun Cole's analysis can be extended, and that a queer identity can also be performed through the effeminate interior.

John Potvin's essay on the collecting practices of the painter Charles Shannon and his life-partner, the illustrator Charles Ricketts, discusses same-sex collecting practices and domestic interiors as 'the spaces of aesthetic companionship' in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Potvin states that 'photographs and recollections used to contextualize the lives of these men are purposefully staged 'events' and thus limit the reading to mere shadows of the life and identity in/of the space.' Like Shannon and Ricketts, Hartnell purposefully created themed rooms for a private and public performance of his identity and had photographs taken of these 'staged' interiors. Potvin notes that despite their artificiality, 'photographs of interiors reveal the residue of a curatorial intent on the part of the collectors'<sup>360</sup> Similarly, photographs of Hartnell's interiors reveal the possessions of Hartnell in their contemporary setting and demonstrate Hartnell's original curatorial intent. Hartnell's photographs offer up additional evidence that the rooms acted as 'staged events'. In figure 3.9, the Ivy Room at the *Tower House*, Hartnell's London home during the 1930s-1940s, the room is arranged so that the alignment of the furniture draws the viewing subject towards the open window in the centre of the picture, where Hartnell poses on the balcony for the photographer. In figure 3.10, however, the settee has been moved across the corner of the room and a small occasional table has been placed in front of it. On this table a photograph of Hartnell's mother has been placed. Hartnell himself is absent. Two chandeliers on pedestals have also been installed in front of the bay window. Thus we can see that the 'things' in Hartnell's room have been moved to create a different effect for each photograph, demonstrating Potvin's 'staged events'. The artificial staging of Hartnell's interiors for the purpose of photographic representation is demonstrated in the ways that various objects seen in a series

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<sup>359</sup> Cole, "Don We Now Our Gay Apparel", 31.

<sup>360</sup> Potvin, "Collecting Intimacy", 192.

of images taken of the same rooms on the same occasion seemed to have been moved about in the space before each photograph was taken.

A comparison made between Hartnell's photographed interiors and rooms in the Mitchisons' house today shows how this curatorial 'intent' and artificially staged interior was adopted and translated by Mitchison after Hartnell's death and also reveals the similarity of the overall decorative style of the two men's homes.

The various ways in which Hartnell constructed and presented his identity can be understood within Goffman's theoretical approach to the presentation of the self. Goffman likened the everyday presentation of individuals to one another to a cast of actors creating and portraying a particular character on stage in a theatrical performance. Each 'actor' 'guides and controls the impression' that others form of him.<sup>361</sup> Hartnell's gender and sexual identity can also be viewed as a performance. Judith Butler's theory is that one's gender is socially 'manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body'; observed and then performed according to culturally constructed gender norms operating in the world around us.<sup>362</sup> Hartnell can be considered as 'the leading man' in this staging of his private life for public consumption. His interiors and his objects and furniture visible in these photographs can be read as supporting actors and props in the performance and construction of his identity. The photographs of Hartnell taken within the interiors of his various private homes over 70 years after they were taken, discussed here, will be read through the contemporary lenses of performance, gender and sexual identity.

Hartnell's feminine taste in colour and interior decoration can also be linked to his signature house style and taste in dress designing. His skill in designing fashionable clothing for women, dressing them to perform their social roles in society underlines his awareness of what Sanders describes as 'the performative nature of human subjectivity', also evident in his self-fashioning and personal dress. Hartnell 'fashioned' his personality, which can be read through the dresses he designed and also through photographs of his interiors and collections of decorative art objects. The 'world of things' in which Hartnell

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<sup>361</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self*, Preface.

<sup>362</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv.

located himself included ‘knick-knacks’ such as Bohemian pink glass lustres and dome encased wax flower and shell artistic productions, more closely associated with the consumption and display of objects by the middle-class Victorian housewife, conscious of the importance of fashion and novelty to her family’s status.<sup>363</sup> (Figure 3.11). Also, his use of a mixture of this Victoriana with genuine Regency and Second Empire furniture, statues of Greek mythological figures, Wedgwood china, faux Regency columns and Chinoiserie, combined to produce what Reed has described as an ‘Amusing style’.<sup>364</sup> This bricolage of styles was also appropriated by the Sitwell brothers, described by Reed as ‘transcends boundaries that defined gender and nationality in a manner analogous to ... undergraduate cross-dressing.’<sup>365</sup> Also, as already outlined here, identifying with queer culture in the interwar period meant the adoption of feminine presentation strategies. And as Chapter Two discussed, Hartnell cross-dressed as an undergraduate.<sup>366</sup>

The decorative objects discussed in this chapter have outlived both Hartnell and Mitchison, but the two men shared a public working life and a private personal life for over 40 years, and this relationship can be unpacked through the layers of meaning present in the objects collected and displayed by them over time. Potvin has recently written that, ‘Rarely has sexual identity and domesticity factored into a discussion of male artistic creativity, intimacy, collecting, and their effects on interior design.’<sup>367</sup> This chapter addresses this dearth of research into the relevance of a subject’s sexual identity in relations to collecting practices, by looking into the collecting practices and taste in decorative objects and interior design on the part of Hartnell. Also of importance here is the transference and translation of this taste and these objects onto the life of Mitchison and his wife as both the embodiment of Hartnell as celebrated royal dressmaker and also as an expression of their shared private world.

### ***3.2.1 The Archive House***

The room in which I encountered the Archive for the first time had been Mitchison’s bedroom, and photographs of Hartnell stood on the bedside table.

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<sup>363</sup> Sparke, *As Long as it’s Pink*, 16.

<sup>364</sup> Reed, “Design for (Queer) Living”, 390.

<sup>365</sup> Reed, “Design for (Queer) Living”, 389.

<sup>366</sup> Cole, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*, 31.

<sup>367</sup> Potvin, “Collecting Intimacy”, 192.

Later I learned that the Regency dressing-room furniture, marble columns, Napoleonic eagle fixed above the window and military prints displayed on the walls of the room had once belonged to Hartnell. (Figures 3.12 & 3.13). His monogrammed hairbrush set was laid out on the dressing table, and a cabinet in which Hartnell's and Mitchison's riding boots and spats were displayed together stood in the corner of the room.

After Hartnell had met Mitchison in January 1938, Mitchison subsequently moved into Hartnell's London home the Tower House in Regents Park. (Figure 3.14). In an inventory and valuation of the contents of Tower House made in August 1939 by Maple & Co. Ltd., he was described as Hartnell's 'secretary' and his 'wearing apparel and personal effects' were valued at £200 (the housekeeper's clothing and belongings were valued at £25). The same value of £200 was placed on Hartnell's clothing and personal effects in this inventory, revealing Hartnell's esteem and affection for the man and the speed with which Mitchison had become an integral part of Hartnell's personal and working life.<sup>368</sup> Mitchison married Doris late in 1939 and left Tower House to begin family life. (Figure 3.15). During the war he served as an officer in India in the Somerset Regiment. Once he was demobbed, Hartnell employed Mitchison as Business Manager with immediate effect, and he gained and maintained power at the fashion house from 1946 until it was sold in 1988. Hartnell, who never married and had no children or siblings alive at the time of his death in June 1979, left Mitchison the residue of his entire estate.<sup>369</sup>

Photographs taken of the interiors of both Hartnell's and Mitchison's homes between 1935 and 1985 disclose the time travelling nature of both the decorative schemes of the interiors of their properties, and also the objects displayed within them. The interior decoration of the Mitchison's house reveals itself in a surprising way today. Similar colour schemes used by Hartnell in his own homes have been reproduced by the Mitchisons as a backdrop for Hartnell's collections in both the formal drawing room and the dining room, which contain objects, pictures and furniture once owned by Hartnell, arranged and displayed much as he displayed them in his lifetime. (Figures 3.16 & 3.17). Hartnell's own fabricated identity appears to have been adopted and

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<sup>368</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Inventory. Maple & Co. Ltd 1939: 40.

<sup>369</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Last Will and Testament of Norman Bishop Hartnell. M.V.O of Rose Place, London Road, Sunninghill, Berkshire. 8 March 1979.

reinterpreted by the Mitchisons. The dining room in the house has the exact same dark green painted walls and deep red carpet as the dining room at Hartnell's last home Rose Place, and houses Hartnell's mahogany sideboards, Venetian glass mirrors, chandeliers and glass lustres with prismatic cut spear point drops that were present in all his homes from the Tower house in the 1930s onwards. (Figures 3.18 & 3.19). Hartnell's ruby glass decanters and cornucopia vases are displayed on the sideboards. (Figure 3.20 & 3.21). The drawing room is painted in a bright yellow colour and houses Hartnell's yellow velvet sofas, his painted iron swan jardinière stands, blackamoor (*sic*) figures, cherub lamp bases and French bisque figures of cupids on gilt neoclassical griffin and scroll decorated bases, and photographs of Hartnell's royal clients on the walls. The same chandeliers and standard lamps light the room as were used in Hartnell's drawing rooms at Lovel Dene and Rose Place.

Viewing these rooms and the objects displayed within them in 2008, years after Hartnell's death and despite the transfer of ownership to Mitchison and then his daughter, these interiors continue to make visible Hartnell's queer identity.<sup>370</sup> They also cast light on the relationships with the people to whom he was closest. Objects are embodied – they exist independently of humans.<sup>371</sup> Like human beings objects occupy space and can only be in one place at any one time.<sup>372</sup> They carry meanings, 'but their meaning is produced by arranging them in sets, both mentally and physically.'<sup>373</sup> They hold social meanings and therefore can also be read as signs that transmit messages.<sup>374</sup> Also, the type of objects collected can fit gendered patterns of collecting,<sup>375</sup> and thus the sexuality of the collector.<sup>376</sup> As this chapter will go on to discuss, Hartnell became associated with a certain style of interior design and decorative art

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<sup>370</sup> J. Clifford. "Collecting Ourselves." Susan M. Pearce. Ed. *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994): 258-259, Russell Belk. "Individual Collectors." Belk. *Collecting in a Consumer Society*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): 65-101.

<sup>371</sup> Susan Pearce. *On Collecting: An investigation into collecting in the European tradition*. (London: Routledge, 1995): 14.

<sup>372</sup> Auslander, "Beyond Words", 1017.

<sup>373</sup> Pearce, *On Collecting*, 14.

<sup>374</sup> Pearce, *On Collecting*, 15.

<sup>375</sup> Susan Pearce. "Women and Men." Pearce. *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*. (London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998): 125-151.

<sup>376</sup> See Peter McNeil on the collection and display of objects in queer spaces (private interiors), using the case study examples of Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill, William Beckford at Fonthill Abbey and Henry Francis du Pont at Winterthur: Peter McNeil. "Crafting Queer Spaces: Privace and Posturing." Alla Myselev and John Potvin. *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity*. (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010): 19-41.

objects such as his Venetian glass chandeliers and his Regency furniture. His association with these objects helped define his persona as fashion designer and royal dressmaker. It is firstly this representation of Hartnell's celebrity status as the royal dressmaker through the collection and display of decorative objects and furniture that the Mitchison's adopted. Secondly, and equally important, is the display of Hartnell's objects that acted as memory cues for both Doris and George Mitchison.

### ***3.3. Hartnell the man, the collector and his interiors***

In order to understand the contemporary context for Hartnell's acquisition and display of decorative art objects and furniture, this chapter includes some examples of how his collecting and taste in interiors was discussed in the press as a promotional tool. Biographical articles about Hartnell as a young fashion designer appeared in contemporary newspapers and women's magazines from 1924. (Figure 3.22). Examples of these in the Archive reveal that Hartnell used his collection of decorative objects to project his public persona as the royal couturier to the public. Hartnell's memoir, *Silver & Gold*, published in 1955, also contains references to his homes and interiors accompanied by visual representations.

Russell Belk writes that objects can be used to complete the self or as extensions of the self.<sup>377</sup> Hartnell does not fit Belk's profile of a typical male collector, collecting series of objects to completion. His collecting practices appear more feminine, as he incorporates his objects into his 'domestic realm'. The photographs of objects appearing again and again in Hartnell's various interiors, and the presence of them today in the Mitchison's house, demonstrate a clear possessive attachment to them that Belk writes is part of their becoming part of the extended self.<sup>378</sup>

Also, as Pearce has stated, 'objects are our other selves'.<sup>379</sup> Hartnell can be seen to have used his taste in decorative objects and his particular style of interior design to promote himself as a collector and a man of a certain taste. This taste in objects and their mode of display also mirrors his 'unseen self'.<sup>380</sup>The

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<sup>377</sup> Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 89.

<sup>378</sup> Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 90.

<sup>379</sup> Pearce, *On Collecting*, vii.

<sup>380</sup> Betsky, *Queer Space*, 6.

particular ‘other self’ he projected was embodied in his porcelain cherubs, his blackamoor (*sic*) figures and his use of colour, fabric (in curtains and upholstery) and interior architectural embellishments such as the use of columns. With this selection of objects he created a theatrical ‘set’ in which to perform his role as creator of the royal image through dress. Understanding that ‘objects may be viewed as an act of communication’ Pearce notes that ‘objects, like all other social constructs ... are fundamentally symbolic and serve not a given need but a social requirement’.<sup>381</sup> Hartnell’s objects were both of value financially but also socially. For Hartnell their value laid not only in their historical provenance as, for example, his original Regency dining table and chairs and Venetian mirrors, but also in the impact made in their display.

The inventory of the *Tower House* from 1939 demonstrates that Hartnell’s rooms were themed and arranged as theatrical sets or backdrops in which Hartnell could enact both his private life for public consumption and his private and social life. The decorative schemes and objects in each room reflected a particular style or maker, such as the ivy patterned wallpaper in ‘the Ivy Room’, already seen in figures 3.9 and 3.10, blue and white Wedgwood Jasper ware for the ‘the Bow Room’ and Chinese porcelain pieces and jade figures in ‘the Oak Room’ at the Tower House.<sup>382</sup> The themed interior was also a feature of Hartnell’s business premises in Mayfair. The 1965 valuation description of the ‘Empire Room’ or Director’s Office at 26, Bruton Street, lists 39 French Empire and Georgian objects and furniture including a French Empire mahogany framed music stool and a French Empire mahogany bureau.<sup>383</sup> (Figures 3.23 & 3.24).

A comparison between Shannon and Ricketts and Hartnell and Mitchison is pertinent. According to Potvin, they collected together in order to construct aesthetic interiors with ‘an overall sensation and visual impact ... for their visitors’. He writes that, ‘the cataloguing of specific objects is not the concern here, nor are connoisseurial interests in provenance and authenticity’.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, 8

<sup>382</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Inventory. Maple & Co., 1939: 1-6 and 26-29.

<sup>383</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Inventory of the fixtures and fittings at 26 Bruton Street, and Bruton Mews. L.S. Harris & Co. Ltd, 1965: 17-19.

<sup>384</sup> Potvin, “Collecting Intimacy”, 192.

Photographs of Hartnell's interiors reveal the carefully positioned objects and furniture displayed for their 'visual impact'.

Hartnell's interiors were examples of Reed's 'Amusing style' – the interiors that 'play with history' and assemble exotic objects with a reworking of 'authoritatively sanctioned period styles'<sup>385</sup> and Betsky's 'queer spaces': 'useless, amoral, and sensual', that is spaces of spectacle, consumption and artifice.<sup>386</sup> Both the interiors of his homes and his showroom at Bruton Street can be compared to theatre designer, Oliver Messell's suite at the Dorchester Hotel in London, in what Betsky has described as 'the dominant tone in high-style interior decoration' carried out by generations of 'predominantly queer' interior decorators:

A mixture of rococo and neoclassical forms that emphasized the deformation of form over the statement of form itself. Instead of stressing structure, columns, door, window or cornice, it blended all these elements together into overlapping curves or hid them with a continuous flow of fabric or fabric like coverings ... Furniture was generally composed, but not all of one piece, and great care was taken to let the artifacts of everyday life, such as small pictures, combs, or books, come into the environment and have their place there. Mirrors often abounded, as did grand gestures such as overscaled chandeliers or sconces. All objects were placed in the middle of the room, so that one did not notice the walls, and the chairs, sofas, and daybeds became actors in this little theatre. Textures were sensuous, but again light and often tightly drawn, so that one did not feel as if one was drowning in layers of heavy cloth. It was an interior, in other words, of paradox and wit: a sensible grandeur, a deformed order, a modern familiarity, a grand intimacy.<sup>387</sup>

Hartnell's day beds do indeed feature in many images of Hartnell's interiors over time as can be seen in figures 3.4, 3.5 & 3.8. In March 2010 one of Hartnell's day beds serves as a vehicle on which to display a collection of teddy bears, under a painted portrait of Hartnell at Lovel Dene c1935 and one of his Venetian mirrors and blackamoor (*sic*) figures. (Figures 3.25, 3.26 & 3.27). Figure 3.7 of Hartnell's bedroom with its rococo inspired bed decorated with cherubs and acres of floral fabric, demonstrates what Betsky has described as 'grand intimacy' and wit perfectly.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Reed, "Design for (Queer) Living", 390.

<sup>386</sup> Betsky, *Queer Space*, 5.

<sup>387</sup> Betsky, *Queer Spaces*, 112.

<sup>388</sup> Betsky, *Queer Spaces*, 112

### *3.4. Reading the interior through photographs*

The earliest photograph of Hartnell situating him within his collections of objects was taken for the *Bystander* in 1928 and shows Hartnell at home in his rooms at Clarges Street, Mayfair. Hartnell sketches on the sofa, surrounded by the objects with which he wants to be identified. (Figure 3.28). Hannah Arendt stated in 1958 that: ‘The things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivities lies in the fact that men ... can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table.’<sup>389</sup> In this image, one can see three particular types of decorative object that research has shown became the key objects of his desire, and the embryos of his future extensive collections, objects that Hartnell would come to be identified with over time that became extensions of himself. As Belk has written, ‘the self-extending aspect of collections is also seen in the feelings of warmth and comfort ...’ produced by the collection and display of objects.<sup>390</sup> On the left of the picture on the shelf is a small pair of glass candlesticks with cut glass drops or lustres. Between them is a racing print. Hartnell had a lifetime interest in owning and riding his own horses, attended the races at Ascot, and the House of Hartnell owned several racehorses over the years. To the right of the picture is a half-chandelier on the wall, which incorporates a Wedgwood type frieze. This Jasper ware chandelier with allegorical reliefs was later on the wall of the Bow Room at Tower House. Along with the Wedgwood themed Bow Room at the Tower House, Hartnell had a Wedgwood Jasper ware bedroom at Lovel Dene, and a blue and white Wedgwood hall at his subsequent home, Rose Place. (Figure 3.29). On the low table beneath this sit several coloured, etched glass decanters, many of which can be seen in photographs of Lovel Dene interiors, and are also in the Archive house today. Thus, Hartnell can be seen to be ‘retrieving his sameness’ using these decorative objects over time.

In a column torn from an unknown newspaper publication dated 1937 entitled ‘Letter from London’, an article on the preparations for the Coronation of George VI mentions Hartnell, ‘who is thirty three, and handsome, newly employed to dress Queen Elizabeth’ and reportedly making ‘about three dozen

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<sup>389</sup> Hannah Arendt. 1958. *The Human Condition*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998): 137.

<sup>390</sup> Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 90.

of her spring and summer costumes'. The column also mentions Hartnell's collections, and notes that: 'Near the forest of Windsor he owns an exquisitely restored Regency country house – Lovel Dene – with swan-motifed drawing room, superb old crystals, and a fine collection of faience, his Rockingham-ware mauve cottages being especially precious.'<sup>391</sup> The swan motif carries through to the Mitchison's house and what is left of Hartnell's Rockingham-ware mauve cottage collection stood on the hall in 2007. (Figure 3.30).

Hartnell can be identified as a collector of antiques in what Pearce has called the European tradition, and, as she notes: 'The capacity to accumulate goods and to access the traditions of the past tends to rest with the same restricted class of people, for whom the past as they perceive it is of importance because it provides the legitimisation for their present position.'<sup>392</sup> Hartnell chose a particular past with which to be associated and his collections of objects from the Second French Empire and Regency period seem to have been used in exactly this legitimizing manner: although, as the son of a publican in South London, his taste was not a reflection of his own family background. In one of Benjamin's essays published retrospectively in *The Arcades Project*, he noted that:

... the private individual makes his entrance on the stage of history ... For the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions ... From this arise the phantasmagorias of the interior – which, for the private man, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together the far away and the long ago.<sup>393</sup>

Hartnell certainly brought together 'the far away and the long ago' in his 'phantasmagoric' interior schemes. Combining Regency furniture and Victorian coloured glass, together with Corinthian columns and chintz fabric, draped in 'swags' around windows and across openings, he adopted what was defined as the *Vogue Regency* style in the inter-war period, a Regency revival style of interiors that perfectly linked fashion in dress with interior design and theatre. Emily Evans Eerdmans describes *Vogue Regency* as 'a contemporary idiom

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<sup>391</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Genêt, "Letter from London." Unknown Publication. 1937. n.p n.pag. Unboxed to date.

<sup>392</sup> Pearce, *On Collecting*, 2001, iv.

<sup>393</sup> Benjamin *The Arcades Project* 8.9.

built on the traditions of the Regency instead of merely replicating them.’ She continues:

In the teens, a coterie of collectors who had influence in fashionable circles made it their pet style, and it gradually gained enough currency to become a leading trend in interior decoration. By the 1920s there was enough buzz around the Regency for decorating magazines like *House and Garden* to profile the style, and fashion editorial spreads were more often than not styled with a lovely draped over a Regency chaise longue, inspiring the moniker “Vogue Regency”.<sup>394</sup>

Hartnell was one of these ‘coterie of collectors’ that Eerdmans describes, and reflecting this connection between fashion and interior in this period, model gowns from Hartnell’s fashion collections during the thirties were regularly photographed on Eerdman’s ‘lovelies’ - mannequins posed within a staged set, often within the showroom at Bruton Street, which would include neo-classical props and backdrops. (Figures 3.31 & 3.32).

Hartnell’s publicist Richard Fletcher described *Vogue Regency* as a style which was ‘a past period which is returning to popularity’. Fletcher seems to have been according Hartnell the honour of instigating the revivalist style, stating in *Decoration* that ‘It has remained for Norman Hartnell to lead the fashions in home decoration, just as he does professionally as a designer of adornment for modern women’.<sup>395</sup>

In his 1939 publication *Homes Sweet Homes*, the illustrator and social commentator Osbert Lancaster included an illustration of a typical *Vogue Regency* room, ‘complete with urn-filled niches and rope festooned draperies’ mirroring Hartnell’s drawing room interior at Lovel Dene almost exactly down to the lampshades covered with stars and the blackamoor (*sic*) figures in the ‘niches’. Interior designer Syrie Maugham and Noel Wakefield, associate designer at Dolly Mann, were also advocates of the style. The *Vogue Regency* style was the perfect vehicle for Hartnell’s flamboyant and eclectic, theatrical taste, and the theatre designers Rex Whistler and Oliver Messel created backdrops in the style for West End productions in the thirties.<sup>396</sup> (Figure 3.33).

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<sup>394</sup> Emily Eerdmans Evans. *Regency Redux: High Style Interiors: Napoleonic, Classical Moderne, and Hollywood Regency*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc, 2007): 122.

<sup>395</sup> Richard Fletcher. (1936) ‘Regency Revival’. *Decoration* No. 18, October: 11 – 14.

<sup>396</sup> Evans Eerdman, *Regency Redux*, 152.

Hartnell continued to ‘dress’ his interiors in this style long past the 1930s. Photographs of him taken at *Lovel Dene* in 1953 to celebrate his success in designing the Queen’s Coronation gown and dressing all the women of the British royal family for the event, show his swans, star-printed lampshades and glass lustres still in place, although the chairs have been recovered in floral chintz. (Figure 3.6).

Photographs of the dining room at Lovel Dene taken between 1936 and 1961 illustrate that it changed very little, and that Hartnell’s Regency sabre legged table and x-form chairs were in continuous use, a particularly pertinent reminder that he ‘retrieved his sameness, his identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table’.<sup>397</sup> Sadly for Hartnell, because the business suffered a financial crisis in the mid 1960s and there was a mortgage on *Lovel Dene*, he had to sell up.

### ***3.5. The display of Hartnell’s objects as ‘memory cues’***

After Hartnell’s death in 1979 Mitchison inherited all of his collections. He furnished his own large house in Kent with Hartnell’s objects and furniture. As photographs of the interior of this property taken in the mid-1980s illustrate, the same decorative schemes were used for both the drawing room and the dining room as had been used at Hartnell’s homes and the objects simply moved from one house to another of similar proportions. Walking into the Archive house in 2008, the similarity between the hall and the hall at *Lovel Dene*, reproduced on the cover of *Ideal Home* magazine in 1947. (Figures 3.34 & 3.35). It is clear the same Venetian glass mirrors are on the wall to the right, the same marble-topped table; the same sweep of the staircase to the left. Familiar Hartnell objects are displayed on the hall table, in a clear demonstration of recreations or as memory cues or both.

As already discussed, as Pearce states, objects ‘have a brutally physical existence’ – yet they occupy physical space separate from humans. But also, ‘they retain an intrinsic link with the original context from which they came – they can be repeatedly reinterpreted.’<sup>398</sup> And as Auslander has written, ‘Objects,

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<sup>397</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 137.

<sup>398</sup> Pearce, *On Collecting*, 14.

like the people who use them are embodied ... they are mortal, although their life spans may be much longer or shorter than those of the people using them.’<sup>399</sup>

The positioning of the Venetian glass mirror over the marble topped half-table to the right of the front door and the curvature of the banister and the stairway to the left (an alteration to the hall in the 1980s by Mitchison’s daughter) mirrors the picture of the hall at Lovel Dene in 1947. The visitor who has an awareness of the history and reuse of this collection steps back in time through Mitchison’s life into that of Hartnell and their life together.

Until September 2008 Hartnell’s dining room furniture stood in the dining room of the Mitchisons’ house, still decorated with his coloured glass and cut glass candlesticks, as if one of his dinner parties was about to take place, or a popular magazine was about to take another photograph. This scene remained the embodiment of Hartnell, over seventy years after the first image of this dining room furniture *in situ* was taken.

### ***3.6. Conclusion***

Hartnell’s objects have moved through time and space to occupy first Hartnell’s homes, helping him to construct his identity as royal couturier. He appeared to collect them as a connoisseur, with what Russell Belk would call ‘specialized knowledge about an area of collecting and to ... possess and exercise taste and judgement, and to assess authenticity and value’.<sup>400</sup> However, as Potvin has identified, he also collected to create an impact in the ways in which the objects were displayed throughout his homes in rooms as sites of private and public performance and ‘queer spaces’.<sup>401</sup> As McNeil has written of Walpole’s Strawberry Hill and Beckford’s Fonthill, ‘the management of these interiors frequently went in hand with other cultural activities, such as writing, ... designing and publishing’.<sup>402</sup> Similarly, Hartnell’s private homes were both where he worked (designing new collections), entertained, and also where he posed for the cameras in acts of self-promotion. Hartnell the gay couturier can be seen to have passed on his cultural capital as the royal dressmaker and

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<sup>399</sup> Auslander, “Beyond Words”, 1027.

<sup>400</sup> Belk, *Collecting in a consumer Society*, 45.

<sup>401</sup> Betsky, *Queer Space*.

<sup>402</sup> McNeil, “Crafting Queer Spaces”, 21.

his theatrical and queer taste to Mitchison and subsequently to his goddaughter Claire Williams, who now lives in the Archive house.

For Mitchison, perhaps this collection of objects embodied Hartnell and acted as reminders of the life he shared with the designer between 1938 and 1979. Although the men only apparently lived together for a very short time at *The Tower House* in 1939, they shared a close personal, social and working relationship for the rest of Hartnell's life. A deeply personal letter in the Archive from Mitchison to Hartnell during the war clearly confirms the intimacy they shared at 'T.H' (*Tower House*). 'N.D.' (Normie Darling) is, in Mitchison's words, is 'too pretty'. He writes that Hartnell has been 'too good to him', and that 'it will take years and years to repay you – if I ever can.' Hartnell is writing daily to Mitchison at this time. Mitchison writes to Hartnell:

Oh for those old days again. We will be able to enjoy and appreciate our nights at home when the damn war is over ... Soon this wretched war will be over, then we will be together and once again face all our troubles and pleasures together ... when you are fifty, you will not be old and faded, but you will have me beside you ... I would rather be with you N.D. than with anyone else in the world ... Life seems absolutely futile and empty now I am really away from you and home, darling ... as you know, brothers could not be closer than us.<sup>403</sup>

As demonstrated by the description of Mitchison's bedroom at the beginning of this chapter, Mitchison kept Hartnell's possessions close by him after the designer's death, including his monogrammed hairbrush set, displayed on Hartnell's dressing table in Mitchison's bedroom, which was also filled with furniture that had once stood in Hartnell's bedroom at *Lovel Dene*. Mitchison's wife dressed her bedroom using Hartnell's more feminine objects, including mirrors decorated with glass flowers, first seen in photographs of Hartnell's drawing room at the Tower House in 1935. The Mitchisons recreated the interior spaces in which to house Hartnell's objects, displaying his things as what Auslander has described as 'memory cues'. She writes, 'people never really outgrow their need to incarnate in objects those they love'.<sup>404</sup>In the case of the objects in the Mitchison's house, they very literally embody the identity

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<sup>403</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 16/Creative writing by Norman Hartnell including poetry, prose, and personal letters. c1940-1945. Handwritten and typed.

<sup>404</sup> Auslander, "Beyond Words", 1019.

of the absent Hartnell both in terms of his status and identity as Britain's most celebrated royal couturier but also as a man much loved.

This issue of Hartnell's decorative objects collected and displayed by the couturier during the 1930s, more recently discovered displayed in the house once lived in by Mitchison, produces layers of meaning, underlining the Archive house as what Auslander would describe as the 'imbrication of objects, space and place'.<sup>405</sup>The objects collected by Hartnell became active agents in the construction of his identity and history as a celebrity couturier. The importance of these objects to Hartnell, underlined by their re-appearance in visual reproductions of his interiors over many years underlines his attachment to them. The memories of him that those who loved, admires and sought an attachment to him perhaps attached to these objects, adds another layer of interpretation to my investigation. The interiors of Hartnell's and Mitchison's homes, their choice of furniture and decorative objects, and the placement of these things within their homes between 1936 and 2008 reveal several important issues for debate.

Firstly there is the matter of Hartnell's own taste in interiors and decorative objects through which he legitimised his career as a royal couturier. Secondly, some consideration should be made of the particular decorative objects he collected as examples of his taste and identity. Thirdly, how these same objects once owned by Hartnell became incorporated into the life of Mitchison, indicating the relationship between the two men. Educated at private school and then at Cambridge University, with a passion for the theatre, Hartnell could be seen to have passed on his cultural capital and taste to Mitchison, a young guardsman aged only 22 in 1938 when the two men first met. What is left of Hartnell's collections today, displayed so carefully in Mitchison's house, displays a continued relationship through the objects he collected and nostalgia for the decades they shared, but also Mitchison's appropriation of Hartnell's his taste in interiors, decorative objects and furniture once used by Hartnell to construct and project his identity to the world.

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<sup>405</sup> Auslander, "Beyond Words", 1027.

## Chapter Four

House Style and Signature Looks: An analysis of the development of Hartnell's design work and the presence of his taste and identity in the clothes he designed, 1922-1979.

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three unpicked the performance of Hartnell's public identity as celebrity couturier through a reading of his interiors and collecting practices, and an analysis of the objects he collected and the spaces in which they were displayed as 'mirrors of his unseen or unrepresentable (queer) self'.<sup>406</sup> This offered a different understanding of his celebrity identity, and cast light on his queer taste in colour, decorative objects and interior design. This will be linked here to his signature house style and taste incorporated into his fashion designing, and an examination of whether the identity and character of the man can be read through the garments he designed.

This chapter also analyses Hartnell's design process through to the production of the finished garments. Using oral history with Hartnell's workroom staff, their contribution to this process through their interpretation of his fashion drawings and the making-up and embellishment of his designs in the dressmaking and embroidery workrooms, is revealed. This research provides a realistic, close account of the running of a London couture house adding to a literature that so far only consists of the couture house memories of the couturiere Stella Mary Newton.<sup>407</sup>

#### ***4.1.1. The impact of Hartnell's gender identity on the clothes he designed***

As discussed in Chapter Two, Hartnell's life long cross-dressing in overstated feminine taste and the presence of his own women's couture garments in the Archive, is key to an understanding of his design work. He designed these

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<sup>406</sup> Betsky, *Queer Space*, 6.

<sup>407</sup> See Chapter One section 1.3.2.

garments especially for his own use, and they were made-up at the house for by loyal staff. They give us a clear picture of his personal taste in style, colour, fabric and embellishment, and cast light on his design sensibilities. (Figure 4.1). The examples of Hartnell's pale blue lace pyjamas re-embroidered with sequins first discussed in Chapter Two, exactly reflects the designs, fabrics and embellishments that made up his designs for the stage in the 1920s and 1930s. A typical example of this can be seen in the design for Binnie Hale '1<sup>st</sup> Finale' c1931 (Figure 4.2). It also mirrors his signature styles from his fashion collections over time to his last dress *Peach Melba* designed in 1979. (Figure 4.3). He also designed many garments for Queen Elizabeth and the present British Queen using re-embroidered lace and sequins in pastel colours.

Not only did Hartnell apparently battle with the fear of public shame of his queer identity,<sup>408</sup> an issue discussed in Chapter Two, but he also fought tensions in his design practice between the production of extreme feminine taste that he favoured, and the production of 'bread and butter numbers'<sup>409</sup> that his conventional female clientele would purchase. The sketched designs and garments in the Archive indicate that these extreme feminine styles can be defined by the soft fabrics, cut and colours used by Hartnell that included the crinoline style gown, with fitted bodice and full skirt, accentuating the woman's waistline, the delicate tulle and chiffon fabrics and the tendency to favour shades of mauve, pink and blue from pastels to hot pinks. This signature or 'character' subsequently becomes the brand of the house and is present in the clothes designed and made under the Hartnell trademark.

## 4.2. House style and signature looks

Three particular 'looks' or ensembles were produced by Hartnell throughout his career; the tailored or soft-tailored coat and dress ensemble for day wear, the full-length, 'mermaid line' or sheath style evening dress and jacket/coat ensemble, epitomized by his theatrical designs in the nineteen thirties and forties, and the full-length crinoline in either plain silk or tulle, decorated with beaded embroidery, associated with his royal dressing. Evidence for his love of

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<sup>408</sup> Sally Munt. *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame*. (Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007).

<sup>409</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

these styles comes here from a case study approach to Hartnell's collections, stage work and royal dressing following his house style between 1922 and 1979 in the following chapter.

This chapter will examine each stage of the development of a Hartnell couture design from his choice of textiles and textures in fabric to the sketching of each model, both to sell the ensemble to the client and as a working drawing for the workroom staff. His use of colour and embellishment, particularly the beaded embroidery for which he was so famous, and his use of fur and feathers and flowers as signature trims, will be discussed in terms of his own taste and identity and his designers 'eye'. The role of his skilled staff that enabled Hartnell to realise his two-dimensional designs into the fashion collections and British royal clothes for which he was internationally celebrated will be incorporated into this story of the development of his signature designs.

Annotated sketches and fashion drawings for a collection from the late 1940s, found in the Archive, illustrate the three signature styles of ensembles perfectly. (Figures 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 & 4.7). Further examples taken from the Hartnell spring and autumn collections for 1963, underline that by the late 1940s, these ensembles were established models that featured in each collection. However, as fashions changed seasonally, these models shifted in terms of shape, length, and fabrics used. (Figures 4.8 4.9, 4.10 & 4.11), but the colours, ornament and embellishment used remained fixed over the years. This can be clarified, for example, by examining the sketch for a tailored wool coat with a lynx fur lining from 1949, figure 4.5 and figure 4.9 *Cape Town*, a dark mustard coloured wool dress and cape trimmed with leopard skin with its cone-shaped hat made of leopard skin from 1963. Both sets of garments work together to form the model ensemble, the slim-line dress or skirt and blouse, the over coat or cape and the small 'conversation piece' hat. This look reappears over time in Hartnell's collections. These couture styles will be discussed in detail in this chapter and in Chapter Five to clarify Hartnell's couture fashion style.

Five key decorative elements and embellishments have also been identified as being particularly associated with Hartnell's dress design work: his use of feathers, his use of fur, particularly in collars, cuffs and hems, his use of artificial flowers to accentuate the waistline or décolletage, the incorporation of fringing as both embellishment and as part of the construction of a garment and

most importantly, his use of beaded embroidery. This is evident in repeated sketched and photographed designs illustrating these decorative elements. For example, the black wool coat from the late 1940s could either be lined with lynx fur, costing fifty guineas, (as in figure 4.5), or without, and black wool dress with beige bolero both fastened with decorative jet buttons. The white crêpe dinner dress (Figure 4.7), was ‘bordered’ with white fox fur, the contrasting pleated silk satin underskirt was in contrasting ‘nigger brown’ (*sic*). Notes on the sketch indicate that this dress could also be ordered without the fur. The white satin crinoline gown, (figure 4.4), with a band of green velvet around the skirt and corresponding green velvet coat with white ermine cuff were both embroidered with emerald, white and silver beads and paillettes. This use of different textures of fabric over-laid with embroidery was a typical Hartnell device, as this chapter will discuss further. Additional pencil notes on these sketches reveal that these were very costly ensembles in the context of late 1940s, post-war Austerity, with the coat in figure 4.4 costing 156 guineas and the dress 140 guineas. The black pleated tulle crinoline with green lame was embroidered with lime and black paillettes, (figure 4.6), and cost 155 guineas. A photograph of ‘model girl’ Dolores wearing the finished dress show some changes to the original design, with the embroidery moving to the top tier of the tulle skirt. (Figure 4.12).

Also considered here will be the types of fabrics Hartnell preferred to use to make up a particular type or style of ensemble, and a consideration of the type of ‘job’ that the clothes were made to perform. The colours Hartnell favoured for particular types of ensemble, client and event to which the clothes were to be worn and also the types of cloth and textiles with which he chose to make up these particular designs, will also be discussed here as an essential element of his house style.

These ‘looks’ each have a particular character that is representative of his taste and personality and are thus representative of his identity – an identity that this thesis argues is present in his Archive and which can be read through a study of Hartnell garments and sketched designs. The development and character of Hartnell’s fashion design work can be read from the extensive Archive through rough sketches and coloured fashion drawings or croquis, fashion photographs, embroidery samples and most importantly of all, in Hartnell garments.

As already underlined here, Hartnell got the least enjoyment out of designing what he described as ‘workaday’ clothes, but it was these staples that were commercially necessary in a collection, as he learned early on. Revealing the tensions between his feminine personae, his taste in extreme feminine styles, and the commercial designs he had to produce, Hartnell told a story in his memoir about his sister’s business sense triumphing over his own taste in clothes. She reportedly said to him of his ‘idiotic dresses’, ‘Norman, dear, I know that a band of magenta coq feathers stitched across the stomach of an apple green satin dress is very original, but wouldn’t a simple little dress of black wool or brown tweed, or even a great flannel suit be ...nice?’ Hartnell’s often quoted response – ‘No, it would not! I despise simplicity. It is the negation of all that is beautiful.’ He continued by stating:

I want to give colour and beauty to life, not grey flannel or dun coloured tweed. You women are so stupid! You foolishly deny yourself and your men-folk the privilege of lovely dressing. It is about time – and almost too late- - that you retained this opportunity of exercising your most appropriate metier.<sup>410</sup>

Here Hartnell also reveals his own personal taste in women’s fashion and also the importance of his sister’s balancing influence on his early designing.

#### ***4.2.1. ‘Selling a surface’ – pre-design stage and Hartnell’s feeling for clothes***

Hartnell totally understood the manner in which clothes ‘help us to “be ourselves”, and how much they help us to be someone else’.<sup>411</sup> Fashion designer Tom Ford stated in a recent television interview that ‘fashion, by its very nature, is about selling a surface.’<sup>412</sup> Hartnell’s couture must be considered as ‘fashion’ in what Jennifer Craik has described as ‘European high (elite designer) fashion’ that sold ‘surfaces’ to wealthy women. However, in her cultural study of fashion she calls for a ‘revised idea of fashion systems’ in the Eurocentric, western sense. In her words, this broader approach to the study of fashion:

... entails systematic and changing styles of dress, adornment and conduct; ‘grammars’ of fashion (bodies of rules and forms) that underpin codes of dress behaviour; consensual denotations of

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<sup>410</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/1955/File 2/Hartnell *Silver & Gold* (annotated, edited copy): 57.

<sup>411</sup> John Harvey. *Clothes*. (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008): 35.

<sup>412</sup> Tom Ford. Interview by Mark Kermode. *The Culture Show*. Episode 24. BBC 2. Thursday 11 February 2010. Television.

power, status and social location; and recognised codes of self-formation through the clothes and bodily adornment.<sup>413</sup>

Hartnell was very much aware of these ‘recognised codes of self-formation through clothes’, both for himself and also for each one of his private clients.

As outlined in his memoir and evident in the clothes archived by him as ‘Famous Dresses’, (see figure 1.33), Hartnell also made no secret of his preference for designing glamorous evening wear as opposed to tailored, everyday clothing.

The clothes that he designed and that were made at his dress house for his couture and high end ready-to-wear client, constructed identities or ‘surfaces’ for women using a combination of his own ‘aesthetic decisions’ and ‘point of view’ – his ‘eye’, his feminine taste, but also using what he professionally understood as key elements of a woman’s etiquette correct working wardrobe in the form of tailored and evening clothes. He thus transferred his identity, captured within the character of his work and his personal taste, onto the bodies of his clients, as he dressed each woman who came to him for their particular role, from society wife to West End actress.<sup>414</sup> Craik ‘distinguishes elite fashion from everyday fashion’ stating that, ‘elite fashion is appropriately related to the cultural impulses of the era within economic and political conditions.’<sup>415</sup> This chapter will look at Hartnell’s styles, within the context of their ‘conventions and dress codes’ providing what Palmer’s has called their ‘social uniform’,<sup>416</sup> but also a form of theatrical costume or dress for the performance of women’s roles for everyday life.

#### ***4.2.2. Couture clients and key house styles - Theatre and fancy dress, debutantes, the ultra-sophisticated designer for the everyday, the actress as client***

On a page of the annotated draft transcript of Hartnell’s autobiography, which has been completely crossed through with pencil by the editor at Evans

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<sup>413</sup> Jennifer Craik. *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*. (London/New York: Routledge, 1993): xi.

<sup>414</sup> Tom Ford. Interview by Mark Kermode. *The Culture Show*. Episode 24. BBC 2. Thursday 11 February 2010. Television.

<sup>415</sup> Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, xi.

<sup>416</sup> Alexandra Palmer. “The Myth and Reality of Haute Couture: Consumption, Social Function and Taste in Toronto, 1945-1963.” Diss. U of Brighton, 1996.

Brothers, Stanley Jackson, Hartnell outlined the early stages of his career in dress design, stating that:

... I have had three separate reputations in my career as a dress designer. My first period was as a designer for debutantes; the second period was as the ultra-sophisticated designer, sometimes for women who were a little dangerously too chic; the third period still lay ahead of me as the Thirties dawned. The first period's doom came one day when on reviewing my style in the tulle and rosebud business, I suddenly decided to change it and therefore dismissed all my very young mannequins.<sup>417</sup>

What he refers to as his 'third period' began in the mid 1930s when he began to dress key women of the British royal family. Hartnell's signature house styles were thus made for three main client groups, including the titled, and older wealthy women for whom he had the innate ability to create both the perfect etiquette-coded evening and day wear tailored to perform specific functions of the British, social calendar. Others were actresses, both on and off stage, and Hartnell had a long career in designing spectacular, beaded evening dress for the stage.<sup>418</sup>

Hartnell played the leading man in the performance that was his life, and his understanding of how the use of dress contributed to the playing of a part on stage through his female impersonation both on and off stage was what contributed to his success as a dress designer and a provider of a carefully managed identity for women. As already discussed, according to Goffman's theory on the presentation of the self, 'the principles derived are dramaturgical ones'<sup>419</sup> however, as Butler has explained, this performance if not 'free' as it always takes place within the constraints or norms of society.<sup>420</sup> The combination of these skills made him the perfect couturier to dress his third main client group, the key women of the British royal family. Hartnell dressed

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<sup>417</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/1955/19/draft copy of *Silver & Gold* annotated by Hartnell's editor at Evans Brothers: 109

<sup>418</sup> Research has shown that Hartnell's introduction to Society's young debutantes in the very early 1920s was his designing and making of costumes for their charity revue performances and fancy-dress parties.

<sup>419</sup> Erving Goffman. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (London: Penguin Books, 1990): Preface.

<sup>420</sup> Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): 95.

Queen Elizabeth from 1937, creating both her personal wardrobe and clothes for public state occasions.<sup>421</sup>

#### ***4.2.3. 1924 – Norman Hartnell's first couture collection***

Hartnell's first fashion collection, which was shown in March 1924 at 10 Bruton Street, Mayfair, was described in quite some detail in his 1955 memoir, thirty years after it was designed and produced. In the absence of sketches or photographs of day clothes from this 1924 collection, it is this 'written' representation of the tailored daywear in this collection that I turn.

From the outset, Hartnell had experienced women to assist him with designing a collection. These included Miss Doherty, his first directrice,<sup>422</sup> who had come direct from Molyneux in Paris, and had, in Hartnell's words, heard that he was 'the new genius'. She introduced herself to him one day at the salon and, apparently expecting no salary to begin with, began to organise the business. She took on a French fitter, Madame Germaine Davide, known as 'Mam'selle', (who went on to make the wedding dress of Elizabeth II in 1947 before she retired) and put the 'books' in order.<sup>423</sup> A first 'collection' was planned and between them Miss Doherty and as Hartnell admitted in 1955, 'Mam'selle' began to teach him how the creative process of dress design in the form of his sketches, became wearable garments that women would buy. He wrote:

Of necessity I began to learn more about the cost of materials and their distinctive qualities; and I observed at close quarters the incredibly complicated process of measuring, cutting and repeated fitting which is the essential prelude to the completed construction of just one dress.<sup>424</sup>

His friends Richard Fletcher, who had attempted to introduce him to the Paris couturier Paquin, and Minnie Hogg, the London fashion journalist who had first reported on his dress designs for *The Bedder's Opera* in 1922, helped to organise the first press show and drum up some clientele. Despite being torn between his financial anxieties (his stock keeper had recently left, pocketing

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<sup>421</sup> These client groups were first identified and discussed in terms of Hartnell's couture designs in my Masters dissertation of 2003.

<sup>422</sup>The role of directrice is defined by Madge Garland thus: 'the *directrice*, who oversees the *vendeuses*, looks after the showrooms, and forms a link between them, the workrooms, and the management. Each workroom is in the charge of a *première* who has at least two first hands, and several seconds'. In: Madge Garland. *Fashion*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962: 36.40.

<sup>423</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 36.

<sup>424</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 37.

cash the naïve Hartnell had given her to pay the fabric suppliers) and the designing of this first collection,<sup>425</sup> Hartnell described producing ‘some forty-seven’ models, recounting that:

Excitement ran high as little black dresses for the day vied with peacock-jewelled glory for the evening. Golf suits, flannel suits and coat frocks lay on hangers side by side with tea gowns of pink satin and pearls or lilac lace. A foaming feather hem of shaded blue-grey was stitched on to the hem of periwinkle blue velvet, rose ostrich fronds to pale pink lace ... The colour beige was everywhere – in wool, georgette, marocain and *guipure*. Silver tissues were hung with cascades of crystal fringe that fell from a girdle of diamonds and sapphires. Some were frightful, some beautiful.<sup>426</sup>

Hartnell began to produce clothes suitable for all social occasions from the outset providing a working wardrobe to dress the society client. The collection seemed to be a mixture of Hartnell’s taste in pastel colours, such as pale pink and lilac, and his favourite fabrics such as velvet, satin and lace. It also reveals the influence of cutting edge French fashion, with the inclusion of neutral colours, which Lou Taylor and Elizabeth Wilson explain, ‘were the height of chic’ in Paris in the mid 1920s.<sup>427</sup>

His taste in accessories and embellishment first established in his Cambridge designs, reappeared in 1924 in this first collection and Hartnell reportedly used ‘a tiny muff of leopard fur’ with a suit. To decorate an evening gown he chose ‘an enormous blue enamel buckle at the hip, a smaller one of the shoulder and two tiny ones on the cuffs.’<sup>428</sup> For his following Autumn/Winter collection, Hartnell advocated the use of particularly expensive and rare materials, indicating his taste in luxury fabrics from the outset. An editorial in the *Bystander* from October 1924 noted his use of new dyes (from Paris) and ‘the new cut glass ornaments which complete many of the models shown by Mr. Hartnell’. Also revealing his approach to design with regards to being led by the fabrics rather than having a particular silhouette in mind, Hartnell was quoted as saying: ‘The beauty of modern dress lies not in design or line, but in the blending of exquisite materials’.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 37.

<sup>426</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 38.

<sup>427</sup> Lou Taylor and Elizabeth Wilson. *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present Day*. (London: BBC Books, 1989): 86.

<sup>428</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 2. ‘Frocks and Fancies’. *Bystander*. March 12, 1924.

<sup>429</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 2. *Daily Express*. 14 October, 1924.

The private view of Hartnell's first collection was announced in the *Daily Mirror* on 14 February 1924, followed by three dress shows announced in a very small classified advertisement in the *Observer*, on March 2, 1924. Piecing together written descriptions of the collection by Hartnell and press-cuttings from the private archive, along with images from the same editorials, theatre ephemera and original pencil and watercolour sketches, some idea of the mixture of styles and influences Hartnell was experimenting with are revealed. The theatrical nature of his first dress-parade becomes evident, particularly the fact that Hartnell had employed a 'black page boy in resplendent uniform with tall peacock feathers in a golden turban'<sup>430</sup> as part of his 'cast'.<sup>431</sup> As his star mannequin for this dress show, Hartnell had used the Modernist sculptor Jacob Epstein's model Dolores, to model some of the collection, in particular the mermaid-line sheath dress that Hartnell had established in 1922 as a key part of his *Battling Butler* collection.

When interviewed by the *Westminster Gazette* on February 24<sup>th</sup> about Dolores, Hartnell explained that 'a negro page in eighteenth century costume will lift from her shoulders a silver, black and scarlet cloak, beneath will be revealed a simply draped gown of white velvet with touches of green.'<sup>432</sup> Dolores was photographed in the *Daily Sketch* wearing this ensemble. In figure 4.13 Hartnell's cousin Constance is pictured wearing the same outfit, with a small cluster of peacock feathers at the waist. Hartnell had already designed something similar for the actress Sylvia Leslie to wear in *Battling Butler* in 1922. A further example of a 'mermaid-line' dress from this period can be seen in a dress 'designed for Mrs Grenell' dated 1923,<sup>433</sup> illustrative of the 'peacock jewelled glory' Hartnell described as being present in his 1924 collection.<sup>434</sup> (Figure 4.14).

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<sup>430</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 2. 'Dolores as a Mannequin. Famous Model Wears Her First Train'. *Daily Mail*. February 28, 1924.

<sup>431</sup> This use of a black child 'wearing eighteenth century dress' as a form of display and decoration was repeated in his interior decoration schemes of the 1930s with several pairs of venetian blackamoor [SIC] figures collected and displayed in his Vogue Regency interior, described in chapter three. These were displayed alongside figures of cherubs that decorated lamp bases and vases, which were also collected by Hartnell

<sup>432</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 2. 'Famous Model as Mannequin'. *Westminster Gazette*. February 25, 1924.

<sup>433</sup> The Prints and Drawings Study Room. V&A Museum. E28-1943. Hartnell sketched design for Mrs Grenell. 1923.

<sup>434</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 38.

The sheath style, mermaid line was also the style chosen by Hartnell for court presentation gowns during the 1930s. Sketches in the Archive for Lady Forrest,<sup>435</sup> Mrs Darling,<sup>436</sup> The Countess of Erroll,<sup>437</sup> and a photograph taken at a dress show from the late 1930s, demonstrate that different fabrics and embellishments were used to make up the same style. (Figures 4.15, 4.16 & 4.17). The Countess wears the additional peeress robe according to her status, and Mrs Darling's dress has the fashionable 'puffed' sleeves of the late 1930s, whilst the titled women adhere to the more traditional sleeveless styles. The titled women's gowns are also liberally decorated with beaded embroidery, making their dresses more costly. The style also lent itself to wedding dress design, as the example from the mid 1930s in figure 4.18 demonstrates.<sup>438</sup>

#### ***4.2.4. Theatre, Fancy dress and Fashion: 'Dressing Up' the Debutantes***

As Hartnell emphasised, his first clients in the very early twenties were young debutantes for whom he designed and made the costumes for their charity revue performances and fancy-dress parties. As Hartnell himself commented in an early draft chapter of his memoir in 1954, 'the essence of a party in the Twenties was that you must dress up. Either that or undress-up!'<sup>439</sup> He also underlined that the themed party such as 'Wild West parties, swimming-bath parties, Treasure Hunt parties, Harvest Moon parties' were not just 'the fantasies of the younger generation' or the Bright Young Things, stating that:

... the movement ran through ~~all the~~ every (annotated correction) strata of society. Big Mayfair mansions vied with their sons and daughters in trying to be original. I did a dress for my favourite Lady Lettice Lygon to wear at a Carlton House Terrace party to which the guests had to come as 16<sup>th</sup> century characters. The hostess was Mrs Benjamin Guinness, who came as one of her ancestors, and all her servants were in period character.<sup>440</sup>

<sup>435</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 5/File 7/15. Sketch for Lady Forest.

<sup>436</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 5/File 7/14. Sketch for Mrs Darling.

<sup>437</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 5/File 7/16. Sketch for Lady Erroll c1930s. Josslyn Hay, 22d Earl of Erroll married Edith Maud Ramsay-Hill (Lady Erroll) in 1930. Part of the hedonistic 'Happy Valley set' in Kenya, she died in 1939 after consuming alcohol, morphine and heroine. Lord Erroll was murdered in 1941.

<sup>438</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 12/8/Scainoi's Studios, 20 Dean Street, London W1.

<sup>439</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 4/'Party Chapter' (not included in Hartnell's final published memoir *Silver & Gold*), 1955: 1.

<sup>440</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 4/'Party chapter' (not included in Hartnell's final published memoir *Silver & Gold*), 1955: 1.

Early press coverage points towards his success with the debutantes as they involved him in their amateur productions and balls for charity. These connections served to introduce his designs to an even wider group of young women and his Cambridge connection and reputation for glamorous stage dress, albeit for himself to wear, aligned him to the stage-struck debutantes who performed in revues such as *The Silver Crusade Matinee* in June 1924 with a cast including the ‘Hon. Ruthven twins, Lady Queensberry and Miss Barbara Cartland’.<sup>441</sup> The Ruthven twins subsequently wore Hartnell gowns to court in May 1925. The Honourable Mrs John Leighton Barran and The Honourable Margaret Hore-Ruthven were, in the words of Cecil Beaton, ‘a most striking pair, always identically dressed;’ he continued: ‘They are byzantine goddesses, dressed like fairies in a circus design by Picasso, with their dark locks tied with little tinsel bows, their spangled ballet-skirts, and low-heeled shoes.’<sup>442</sup> (Figure 4.19). Hartnell also designed Nancy Beaton (Cecil’s sister) a debutante dress in 1928, very much in this ‘ballet-skirt’ style that Beaton described. Her brother’s photographs of her in this dress illustrate what Hartnell had described as his ‘tulle and rosebud’ look.<sup>443</sup> (Figure 4.20). The style that Hartnell described as the ‘tulle and rosebud business’ was very much the one in which he dressed himself between 1921 and 1923 when he was in his very early twenties. He was indeed just a little older than his debutante customers during this period. Hartnell had designed this look originally for his personal use in a stage production. He reproduced this same look in his first fashion collection in 1924 and also for the Daphne Guinness bridesmaids in 1931.

Hartnell also dressed the debutante performers for *The Mayfair Revue* of July 1925 at the Chester Club, written by Barbara Cartland, with a cast list including Lord and Lady Northesk. During this production three bridesmaids who ‘wore black lace over flesh pink slips and carried large flower muffs of pink roses and black tulle’ attended the ‘stage bride’.<sup>444</sup> Hartnell also designed a court dress for Lady Northesk in 1926, described as ‘embroidered in diamonds, crystals, pearls and silver sequins, over a foundation of ciré silver tissue with a train of silver,

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<sup>441</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 2. ‘Rehearsals: A Pictorial View of Society’. *The Sketch*. June 25, 1924. p. 619.

<sup>442</sup> Cecil Beaton. *The Book of Beauty*. (London: Duckworth, 1930): 56. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive.

<sup>443</sup> This look was discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

<sup>444</sup> ‘Rehearsals: A Pictorial View of Society’. *The Sketch*. June 25, 1924: 619. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 2.

edged with heavy embroidery, and lined with pale rose chiffon.’<sup>445</sup> Once he had dressed the young client as debutante, or for their amateur theatricals or fancy dress parties, he often went on to make their wedding dress. As an example of this, he made Cartland’s gown for presentation at court in May 1925 and her wedding dress in 1927. The descriptions of these elaborate ensembles and the contexts in which they were worn underline the theatrical nature of Hartnell’s couture and links to royal court life from the onset of his career.

He went on to design dress for the stage, albeit not for himself to wear, but for well known actresses of the day such as Alice Deylisia and Gertrude Lawrence in particular for the London West End spectacular revue and musical comedies. In an earlier draft transcript of his 1955 autobiography, Hartnell briefly aired his feelings on the possible detrimental effect his designing stage dress for musical comedies during the twenties and thirties might have had on his everyday business in the interwar period, stating that:

To make dresses for the coquette, the soubrette, the high kicking stars of musical comedy or the exotic comedy revue may be an enjoyable exercise for the designer’s talent and imagination, but it is of no advantage to his renown or to his bank manager, for it merely deters the average English woman, riveted to good style, from ordering her dresses from a dress house that has earned too theatrical a reputation.<sup>446</sup>

However, although he suggested that this connection to the stage might have possibly been problematic for some of his high society clients he nevertheless admitted to continuing to dress actresses throughout the period, ‘I must admit that in the immediate years that followed I revelled in making outrageously stagey clothes for many brilliant artistes in revue and musical comedy’, and in reality the practice seemed to have little effect on his reputation and ability to attract wealthy, titled clientele.<sup>447</sup> Hartnell dressed the chorus girls for the Cochran revues of the 1920s and the debutantes for their court presentations seemingly without conflict. His most prolific period designing for the West End stage was between 1935-1945 – the tranche of his career during which he also

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<sup>445</sup> *Daily Chronicle*. 31 May, 1926. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 2.

<sup>446</sup> Early transcript of Hartnell’s 1955 memoir *Silver & Gold*, called at this stage *Living for Design* or *Living by Design*: 123. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 10.

<sup>447</sup> Early transcript of Hartnell’s 1955 memoir *Silver & Gold*, called at this stage *Living for Design* or *Living by Design*: 123. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 10.

became London's foremost royal couturier having moved to a larger premises in 1934 to accommodate his increase in output.

#### *4.2.5. 'The ultra-sophisticated designer' for the 'everyday clientele'*

Partly handwritten and partly typed, fifty pages of what seems evidently to be the unfinished, unpublished follow up to his 1955 autobiography, written in the early 1970s, Hartnell outlined his feelings towards the wealthy, titled women who made up the core of his clientele. Taking up his story after the coronation in June 1953, Hartnell wrote:

I knew that soon I would have to start preparing the new Winter Collection – it was now flaming June – but after the soaking wet weather of yesterday when I had created the Queen's Coronation gown and dresses for the many other Royal ladies and the attendant Maids of Honour, it seemed a somewhat hum-drum job to get down to designing an all embracing mixture of workaday clothes for the very nice, but not exactly so highly inspiring a coterie of the very average but yet very nice women who constituted my everyday clientele.<sup>448</sup>

In a personal interview with Patricia Reid, assistant vendeuse from 1944 she described Hartnell's typical clientele as 'some aristocracy, some country ladies'. She added 'quite a lot of things would have been sent out by post. People perhaps couldn't come in, but they wanted a new coat or a new suit or something, there were dummies in the workroom. All these dummies were padded up for measurements for regular clients, regular dummies, all bound up'.<sup>449</sup>

Showroom sketch artist and Hartnell's design assistant, Brenda Naylor, supports this description of wartime restrictions in terms of Hartnell's clients travelling to the couture house. She explained in an interview, 'because transport was so difficult during the war, clients would choose from a selection of my sketches, chosen by their vendeuse, only coming to London for their fittings.'<sup>450</sup> Figure 4.21 of the dressmaking workroom in 1953 includes some of these 'dummies', illustrating that perhaps the regular clientele were quite different in shape and age to the tall and slender house model girls, and the glamorous actresses that Hartnell had in mind when designing a collection. The 'Dummies' in this

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<sup>448</sup> Norman Hartnell, ts. c.1971: 20. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/File 9.

<sup>449</sup> Patricia Reid. Personal Interview. May 8, 2007. NHOH/2007/7/Cassette Tape 1.

<sup>450</sup> Brenda Naylor. 26<sup>th</sup> February 2007. NHOH/2007/2/Tape 1.

photograph were padded out to the measurements of regular clients as the workroom staff work on the Spring/Summer Collection, 1953. (Figure 4.22.).

A selection of one-off sketches for individually named clients in the Archive dating from between the 1930s to the 1970s, indicate who Hartnell's loyal clients were over a forty-year period. These included Lady Leverhulme (1920s-1930s),<sup>451</sup> Madame Romero (late 1930s), Mrs Philip Carr (late 1930s),<sup>452</sup> Lady Eugenie Wavell (1940s)<sup>453</sup>, Barbara Cartland (1960s), Madame Alghanim of Kuwait (1970s). (Figures 4.23, 4.24, 4.25 & 4.26). One off sketched designs for Hartnell's royal clients, including the Duchess of Gloucester, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Princess Margaret and our present monarch, Elizabeth II, form the largest part of this collection.

Barbara Wimbush, a Hartnell 'model-girl' for three years from 1957, stated in an interview that 'Hartnell knew his customers and designed with a particular customer in mind. Hartnell was very clever; it was never hit or miss. He designed what he knew would sell to his particular loyal clients'.<sup>454</sup> Sketch artist during the 1960s-1970s, Rusty Lewis, outlined the workload at Hartnell's in terms of designing, explaining that 'it was the collections you see, twice a year you've got the Spring and Autumn collection and then of course you've got all the clients that want special things like Barbara Cartland and of course like the Royals.'<sup>455</sup>

Thus, the women of the upper-echelons of society in Britain, Hartnell's 'bread & butter' clientele, can also be viewed in terms of their use of dress to perform their social position as debutante, or prospective wife, to that of wife and hostess, displaying their husbands' wealth and position via the wearing of couture clothes. In his day, Hartnell was deeply knowledgeable about the sartorial needs of the society client and the social Season, which began in May

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<sup>451</sup> Elizabeth Hulme was married to William Lever, (the First Lord Leverhulme), until his death in 1925. Sketches for Lady Leverhulme in the Archive can be dated between 1925-1935. Lord Leverhulme was a soap manufacturer.

<sup>452</sup> Mrs Philip Carr, married to the owner of Golden Miller (race horse), Philip Carr, and mother of Arthur William Carr the Cricketer.

<sup>453</sup> Eugenie Marie Quirk was married to Archibald Wavell in 1915. Lord Wavell was Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in India, and organised the Burma Campaign in 1941-42. In June 1943 he was appointed Viceroy of India until it gained its independence in 1947. Antill, P. (7 March 2005), *General Sir Archibald Wavell 1883 – 1950*, [http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/people\\_wavell.html](http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/people_wavell.html)

<sup>454</sup> Barbara Wimbush. Personal Interview. 24th April, 2007. NHOH/2007/4/Tape 1.

<sup>455</sup> Rusty Lewis. Personal Interview. 20<sup>th</sup> June 2010. NHOH/2010/15/Digital Recording/File 3.

with the court presentations and balls and progressed through the summer with the various events such as Ascot races and Henley Regatta. His entire collections would be tailored to fit these societal performances. His dress shows were performed at the launch of each new season in front of the world's press, department store buyers and private clients, and each day at three o'clock in the salon by his house 'model-girls' during the season.

#### ***4.2.6. The Actress as Client***

What is little known about Hartnell's career is that his roots in dress design were absolutely embedded in theatre and performance, and that this influence can be traced back to his involvement in school and university dramatic productions. Hartnell's original aspirations were for a career in theatre design. Indicative of this, in a bound typescript of a draft version of Hartnell's 1955 autobiography, he included a long chapter, extensively edited for the published version, entitled 'Designing for the Stage'.<sup>456</sup> His opening statement reads:

The influence of the stage was another strong factor in the evolution of my dress designing metamorphosis. I had always yearned to undertake the designing of both costumes and décor for a great stage production – where I imagined one had a free hand to do exactly as one liked in creating a magnificent galaxy of colour and design with no expense spared and with no interruptions from any extraneous quarter.<sup>457</sup>

As one of Hartnell's couture clients, the actress would have worn her fashionable clothing both as part of her public image off stage and to portray a character on stage to 'superimpose disguised identities through costume'.<sup>458</sup> Hartnell's mutually beneficial working relationship with the famous actresses of his day such as Gertrude Lawrence, and the copying of his fashionable styles seen on stage, is straightforward and has its own specific history. Through an analysis of Hartnell's designs worn by actresses both on and off stage, his expertise in the use of context and the background to which the garments were to be worn, colour, light, particular styles and the visibility of actresses on stage, was applied directly to the wardrobes of the main royal woman.

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<sup>456</sup> Norman Hartnell, *Silver & Gold* (London: Evans Brothers, 1955). In the early stages of the book's development it was called 'Living by Design' or 'Living for Design'.

<sup>457</sup> Norman Hartnell, *Living by Design – Living for Design*: 119. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive, Box 3/BT/c1955/11.

<sup>458</sup> Annette B. Weiner & Jane Schneider. *Cloth and the Human Experience* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 1989): 3.

From the court presentation of the debutante, to the variety show on the West End stage and the ultimate royal dresses, Hartnell couture played an important part in the public presentation, performance and visual identity of all of his clients. As Fred Davis believes, clothing can be understood as a system of codes and meanings can be read from particular design elements such as colour and form. This code is also ‘context-dependent’, so that these meanings are dependent on the identity of the wearer, ‘the occasion, the place, the company’.<sup>459</sup> This chapter will illustrate that Hartnell carefully considered the context in which his couture was to be worn.

The earliest theatre sketches in the Hartnell archive are from his first paid employment as a designer for the court dressmaker Desirée of Hanover Square in 1922, for who he designed 200 costumes for the production *The Battling Butler* at the New Oxford Theatre. The original sketches and photographs from the production have revealed he designed a very varied and extensive collection of fashionable dresses for the cast. Underlining the fashionable nature of these costumes, an article about the production remarked that, ‘the chorus, instead of being dressed alike, all appear in different costumes, particularly during the third act, when the dresses are especially worthy of note, as they foreshadow the modes of the coming season’.<sup>460</sup>

Noel Coward’s ‘leading ladies’ included Gertrude Lawrence, who was famously dressed by the couturier Edward Molyneux in Paris, and was also dressed by Hartnell from about 1930. Hartnell worked with Coward in 1927, designing dresses for Isabel Jeans to wear in his production of *Sirocco* in 1927. In 1931, Hartnell dressed Lawrence for the production of *Can the Leopard*, which ran for six months at the Haymarket Theatre in London. The scarlet chiffon dress made by Hartnell for this production was, according to a 1949 manuscript by Hartnell, copied and worn by ‘nearly every Society woman in London’.<sup>461</sup>

It is important to recognise the mutually beneficial use of couture to both the actress and the couturier. During the 1930s couture in contemporary,

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<sup>459</sup> Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992): 8.

<sup>460</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Unboxed. “Woman’s Ways”, *The Sketch* December 20 1922.

<sup>461</sup> Typed Manuscript for an article dated 21 June, 1949. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 2/A/1949/1.1.

fashionable styles was used to situate his characters within stories of high society and who also created couture wardrobes for actresses as part of their public self-presentation and identity.<sup>462</sup> As a perfect example of this relationship, Lawrence was dressed by Hartnell for the Coward production, *Tonight at 8.30*, between 1936 and 1937, for which he designed an entire collection that was worn on stage during the nine, very different one act plays. This collection featured tea-gowns, tulle crinolines, sequinned evening gowns and tailored daywear. Once this production was taken to New York in 1937, the collection seen worn on stage by Lawrence, was shown at a dress parade at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in front of the press and fashion buyers of New York. (Figure 4.27). Copies of the ensembles were then available to various department stores of America, and reported in the press all over America, cleverly introducing Hartnell's latest fashionable styles to the transatlantic consumer.<sup>463</sup>

By September 1939 Noel Coward's type of society play, for which the wearing of couture by the leading actresses of the 1920s and 30s had been essential, seemed no longer appropriate and these productions began to be replaced by the spectacular revue of the 1940s. Basil Dene set up the Entertainment National Service Association or ENSA, which took over Drury Lane Theatre as its base, and thousands of artists, including Noel Coward and Gertrude Lawrence, were paid £10 a week, and deployed all over the world to entertain the troops. The wartime shows had very different costume requirements and were about keeping up the morale of the nation and the allies with glamour and sparkle rather than the disseminating of fashionable couture to an elite audience. (Figure 2.48). On the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1939, the *Daily Express* noted that Norman Hartnell had 'accepted the post of Honorary Dress Designer to provide special designs for the costumes used in the NAAFI shows'.<sup>464</sup>

An article found in the Archive dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 1949 describing how Hartnell approached the designing stage dress reads:

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<sup>462</sup> For theoretical approaches to self-presentation, dress and identity see: Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975), Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (London/New York: Routledge, 1993), Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>463</sup> Bound albums of press cuttings pertaining to the production *Tonight at 8.30*. 1936-1937. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 21.

<sup>464</sup> "Royal designer to dress shows for troops." *Daily Express* (8 Nov. 1939): 11.

When Norman Hartnell is commissioned to design dresses for a play, he first of all reads the script to get the feeling of the characters. He then discusses with the leading ladies the colours they prefer, in contrast to one another. These colours are then submitted to the designer of the stage décor, with whom Mr. Hartnell works with the closest co-operation. Mr. Hartnell then makes his sketches, studying the lines of the particular artiste's line of figure. These are then submitted to the producer for approval, with lengths of the chosen materials, which are tried under the stage lighting.<sup>465</sup>

These notes underline that it was important for designers of couture garments for stage wear to be aware of which colours worked best under lighting, and how to dress a cast of women who would appear on stage together. For Hartnell, these skills would be transferred onto his royal dress designing, and were to become particularly important for events such as the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953. Filmed in colour, Hartnell's 'cast' of gowns designed for all of the key female members of the British royal family, was broadcast globally.<sup>466</sup> (Figure 1.9).

## 4.3. Taste and Identity: House Style and Signature Looks

### 4.3.1. *The Fashion Designer's Eye*

The issue under assessment here is a definition of a designer's 'eye' – usefully discussed by Tom Ford, who explained to Mark Kermode in a television interview that:

I think that one's eye defines everything. I think that whatever you do, whether you're a film director, whether you're a fashion designer, whether you're a painter, your eye is all you have. You have to be true to yourself, you have to say "does this look right to me? – yes," "does this look right to me? – no," "does that look right to me? – yes," "does that look right to me? – no," and that is what, over time, or even in one work, will give you a point of view, will give whatever you create a personality, a character, and so it's very hard to divorce or to rationalise, or at least it was for me, why I was making certain aesthetic decisions, they just felt right, that was what

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<sup>465</sup> "Mr. Norman Hartnell, as everybody knows, is a creative artists and a lover of line and colour": 3.

Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 2/A/1949/1.5.

<sup>466</sup> Roy Strong. *Coronation: A History of Kingship and the British Monarchy*. (London: Harper Collins, 2005): 434-435.

felt right, to me, was the way I framed this or the way that was done.<sup>467</sup>

Ford's offers insight into the way in which a fashion designer instils a particular 'personality or character' specific to them into what has been created, whether it be one individual dress design or an entire back catalogue of work. The designer's eye - his taste, his favourite colour or texture, his preferred forms and embellishment – is thus transferred onto the object he is creating. Something of the designer's character becomes recognisable in the 'character or personality' of his/her work through the 'aesthetic decisions' made. Thus, the work develops a familiar character or look specific to the designer over time, and is imbued with what s/he likes, what s/he thinks looks right. In the case of a couture fashion designer, it is vital that rapidly this character or personality in the work becomes recognisable as what in fashion journalist terms might be described as the designer's 'signature' look, which over time becomes the house style. It is this house style, and the clients that choose to wear it, that forms the basis of the reputation of the brand. This brand can be traced back to the 'point of view' or 'aesthetic decisions' made by the designer – decisions repeated and reinforced over time as one collection spills over into another, and so on. In Norman Hartnell's case, this lasted for nearly fifty years in a career designing dress. A close study of examples of Hartnell's couture designs from his fashion collections, designs for theatrical productions and designs for his British royal clients created by him throughout his working life from 1922 to 1979 is undertaken here, in order to analyse Hartnell signature looks and house style.<sup>468</sup>

Also under consideration here is how much the assistant designers, who worked with Hartnell from 1953,<sup>469</sup> and who later after his death took over the designing at the house, were encouraged to perpetuate this house style and Hartnell's signature looks. The couturier's identity and house style, was maintained via the sketch artists and assistant designers that worked alongside Hartnell during his

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<sup>467</sup> Tom Ford. Interview by Mark Kermode. *The Culture Show*. Episode 24. BBC 2. Thursday 11 February 2010. Television.

<sup>468</sup> As already stated in Chapter One, Norman Hartnell is most famously remembered for his beaded embroidery designs, exemplars of which include the wedding dress of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II from 1947, and her Coronation gown of 1953. What will be investigated here is whether there are other particular elements to Hartnell's designs currently overlooked in published literature about Hartnell's work that could be considered part of Hartnell's house style.

<sup>469</sup> Ian Thomas was the first assistant designer at Hartnell's. He came to the house in 1953, which was Coronation year. He left after seventeen years to set up on his own in Motcomb Street, Belgravia.

lifetime and perpetuated by the designers in the years following his death in 1979 until the arrival of Marc Bohan from Dior in 1987.

#### ***4.3.2. The Designer's Hand - The couturier's handwriting in terms of both written word and signature looks.***

As might be expected, Hartnell's handwriting is evident throughout his archive.<sup>470</sup> At its most direct it is particularly present in the form of his signature, which appears over and over again handwritten particularly on sketches, documents and letters, and is also reproduced in printed and woven form. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six. Hartnell's signature is considered here firstly as a representation of his identity as couturier, and secondly as the brand identity of the couture house.<sup>471</sup> (Figure 4.29). The term 'handwriting' is part of the professional vocabulary of fashion used to refer to particular design elements or shapes present in a designer's clothes, here, for example Hartnell's beaded embroidery designs could be described as his 'handwriting'. These elements, constantly present in designs overtime, were central to Hartnell's signature looks or house style in his lifetime and after. (Figure 4.30).

#### ***4.3.3. Evidence of his 'eye' in the archive: his 'Famous Dresses'***

Key elements of Hartnell's house style are clearly evidenced in his 'Famous Dresses' particularly in terms of colour, beadwork and style. (Figures 1.33 & 4.31). This list and several others like it, indicate that he reproduced gowns, made originally for a particular client. The lists entitled 'Famous Dresses' and the list of models for 'publicity and parades', include examples of his work made between the 1930s and the 1970s, providing a potted history of his dress designing, with a sharp focus on his extreme feminine taste. These dresses were saved for use in promotional shows and charity events. 'Model-girl' in the 1960s Myrtle McGuire explained in an interview the function of this 'Famous Dresses' collection. She stated that it was used at charity fashion shows and included dresses taken from collections and held specifically for these charity events, thus not current fashion, but more representations of Hartnell's signature

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<sup>470</sup> Hartnell's handwritten signature (and identity) will be discussed in Chapter Six in terms of the Hartnell trademark.

<sup>471</sup> These issues will be explored in Chapter Six in terms of the promotion of couture at the house of Hartnell, and of Hartnell licensed and franchised products and the internationalisation of the business.

beading, luxury and glamour – his taste – his eye, his favourite designs. (Figures 4.32 to 4.43).

It is important to note that very deliberately, it would seem, no tailored ensembles were chosen for this ‘Famous Dress’ collection by Hartnell, only full-length gowns in strong pinks, blues and mauves, and pastel coloured, plain silks and chiffons decorated in Hartnell’s ubiquitous beaded embroideries were saved, revealing Hartnell’s preferred taste - his ‘eye’, as already discussed.<sup>472</sup> It is clear from Hartnell’s memoir that he preferred the task of choosing fabrics and designing evening dress. Hartnell wrote about the seasonal visits from the textile agents with their suitcases full of fabrics to choose from for each new collection: ‘I see the woollens first, because I enjoy them least. They will be made up into perfect tailor-made suits, I hope, but I always feel a trifle frustrated by the classic limitations of tailored clothes.’<sup>473</sup> As already stated, he also chose to save models copied from those made famous by the actress or aristocratic client, illustrating his use of celebrity clientele to promote his house. Analysis of the model gowns present in the Archive today supported, by sketches and photographs of his collections, would however offer up a representation of the preferred key elements of his house style, his use of colour, the particular fabrics he preferred to work with, and his key or favoured clients. Above all, as he made his choices in the collation of this collection, his personal taste is revealed through this collection.

Examples of his tailor made ensembles and his day dresses found in Doris Mitchison and Claire Williams’s collections,<sup>474</sup> and also held in collections at The Museum of London, The Fashion Museum at Bath and Platt Hall, in Manchester, redress the balance and give us a broader view of his work.

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<sup>472</sup> The Hartnell-Mitchison Dress Collection is fully photographed and catalogued in Appendix 2.

<sup>473</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 78.

<sup>474</sup> See Appendix 2.

## 4.4. Design Development: Approaches to the design and production of the Hartnell Fashion Collection

### 4.4.1. *The Hartnell Collection*

Hartnell's twice yearly collections did not form a series of changing silhouettes, but rather an eclectic mix of styles each designed with a particular client or event in the British social calendar in mind. This process revealed his business acumen as a 'jobbing' couturier. Hartnell's immense work load in the post-war period involved many important royal tours abroad, especially in Commonwealth countries, as well as his twice yearly fashion collections, for in Hartnell's words, it is the 'all embracing' element of Hartnell's design work that was necessary to keep his clientele happy, and therefore keep his business financially viable. 'Workroom girl' Betty Foster has confirmed that Hartnell even continued to produce fashion collections during the war, albeit smaller but similar collections than during peacetime. The models<sup>475</sup> would include afternoon or cocktail dresses, eveningwear, tailor-mades including dresses or suits and a couple of coats.<sup>476</sup>

A Hartnell collection always included a selection of spectacular evening dresses for impact, including, for example, *Marzipan*, from c1969, the original model seen in figure 4.44 worn by Mara Levy. 'Model-girl' Myrtle Maguire, who also wore this dress, described it as 'totally embroidered, looking like...um... I'd say a Battenberg cake. It was all colours, all mosaic, but looking equally of marzipan. It was a wonderful, wonderful dress, just a sheath.'<sup>477</sup> This dress was 'pulled out' of the seasonal collection for which it was designed and used in charity shows over and over. Couture models were also sold at a slightly reduced price to smaller clients who might fit into the original, although as Maguire explained of *Marzipan*:

That dress, a stunning dress, it would have been pulled out, you know, for us, and kept for that sort of show, because they hadn't sold because you remember, they were all pretty small, you know, the model girls, and a lot of his older clients, you know, weren't that slim.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, a 'model' refers to the ensemble designed by Hartnell as part of a couture fashion collection.

<sup>476</sup> Betty Foster, Telephone Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2009. NHOH/2009/10/ Telephone Interview.

<sup>477</sup> Myrtle Maguire. Personal Interview. 11 May 2007. NHOH./2007/8/Tape 1.

<sup>478</sup> Maguire 2007.

Edna Woolman Chase wrote in 1954: ‘there are two ways of looking at a new collection: first, through the line, which is often not really very different, and through detail; second, through handling, which can make news’. Hartnell’s collections can certainly be viewed in terms of ‘detail’. The ‘handling’ refers to the expertise that the couturier had in ‘handling’ the material.<sup>479</sup> Hartnell’s approach to material was built on his use of colour and texture in cloth and how these could be combined for effect and used as a background for his embroideries, rather than in the cut and construction of the model. His collections were about visual impact they made; as if every model dressed a member of a theatrical cast and needed to make a particular entrance or statement about that character or persona. This was where his roots in theatre and stage dress, and in his own cross-dressing and blurred gendered identity reveal themselves most visibly. Artifice and performance were part of Hartnell’s everyday life. He translated these elements onto the bodies of his ‘model girls’ and from them onto the bodies of his clients. Although, as can clearly be seen in the sizes of the padded mannequins (Figure 4.21) and as revealed in interviews with staff and as Hartnell himself bemoaned in 1977, designing his collection with his average client in mind, particularly towards the end of his career, was about ‘putting big busts and bigger bottoms into manure-brown coats and skirts,’<sup>480</sup> clearly not representative of his ideal of femininity, or his favourite styles.

#### ***4.4.2. Fashion Drawing and Initial Education*** <sup>481</sup>

In a press report in 1977, late in his career, Hartnell described in detail how he approached the task of designing a collection stating that: ‘There are some designers who, with the chosen stuffs at hand, begin to drape almost directly on to their mannequins. This has never been my method for half the pleasure and pride of my craft is the drawing of each model before it is ever seen in the workrooms.’<sup>482</sup> (Figure 4.45). It is clear that there was no difference between a Hartnell fashion drawing used to sell the design to a prospective client and one of his commercial sketched designs executed in preparation for a collection.

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<sup>479</sup> Edna Woolman Chase, *Always in Vogue*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1954): 323.

<sup>480</sup> Norman Hartnell. Newspaper interview with Robin Laurance. ‘Guardian Fashion’, *The Guardian*. Wednesday March 2 1977: 9. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Unboxed.

<sup>481</sup> This analysis of Hartnell’s approach to design using watercolour and pencil sketches expands upon work already discussed in the author’s Masters 2006 dissertation, although in a different context.

<sup>482</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 81.

The final watercolour sketch was made to sell the drawing to the prospective client but these coloured drawings were also used to show the fitter what the final garment should look like, although with no back views (hardly ever) executed, she understood clearly what Hartnell meant or needed from a design – a skill developed through their working relationship over time. (Figures 4.46 & 4.47).

Hartnell's royal designs offer a useful example of how a watercolour and pencil sketch was utilised. A selection of sketches would be taken to the Palace in order that the Queen might choose which designs she wanted executed. The sketches chosen then returned to the workrooms and were then used by the fitters and hands to cut out the pattern pieces and make up the dress. These sketches would go back and forth to the Palace for each fitting, and would be annotated on each occasion – a change in colour or fabric, an alteration in length – over the course of three fittings.<sup>483</sup> Once the dress was finished and delivered to the Palace, the words 'gone home' would be written at the top of each sketch. Examples of this process can be seen in figures 4.48 to 4.50, a sketched design for a navy silk coat and red dress for the Queen c1961.

Despite the key role that sketching played in the development and manufacture of his designs, Hartnell was not an art school trained fashion designer or illustrator.<sup>484</sup> This fact was underlined by Brenda Naylor who trained at St Martins and was taught by Muriel Pemberton.<sup>485</sup> She was employed as a showroom sketcher at Hartnell's between Easter 1944 and the summer of 1953. She described Hartnell's fashion sketches as 'rather inaccurate' and explained: 'he was not art school trained you see. He did think of having art lessons from the art master at Eton he told me. I used to go down to his house a lot you see, and he told me he was going to have art lessons but I don't think it ever came to anything.'<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> Rusty Lewes. Personal Interview. 20 June 2010. Claire Williams. Personal Interview. 18 March 2010. Mara Levy. Personal Interview. 7 May 2010. Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010.

<sup>484</sup> Along with a collection of educational books teaching languages such as Spanish, French and German, and Latin and dictionaries corresponding to these languages, the Archive also holds publications on how to draw amongst what was left of Hartnell's library at Geven House in October 2008.

<sup>485</sup> Muriel Pemberton is credited with 'inventing' art-school training in fashion in Britain and was awarded the first Diploma in Fashion by the Royal College of Art in 1931 – a course developed by herself with the cooperation of Ernest Tristram, the Professor of Design.

<sup>486</sup> Brenda Naylor. Personal Interview. 26<sup>th</sup> February 2007. NHOH/2007/2/tape 1.

This lack of art school training was not unusual for male couturiers at this time. Leslie Ellis Miller notes of Cristobal Balenciaga ‘it was unlikely that he had any formal tuition in art or art appreciation.’<sup>487</sup> Palmer’s publication on Dior explains that he had begun his career in fashion as a freelance sketch artist, although his art training seems only to have been at the level of his Lycée education, and although he had wanted to study architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts, his family had objected.<sup>488</sup> Hartnell too had only his art lessons at school and his personal interest in drawing and watercolour as the basis for his sketching. The designers referred to here, including Hartnell, were thus all commercial sketchers producing working fashion drawings; they were not fashion illustrators, as, for example, Helen Dryden, whose *Vogue* covers from the 1910s Hartnell had so admired at school.<sup>489</sup>

The university educated, upwardly mobile middle-class young British men, such as Hartnell, Victor Stiebel and Cecil Beaton, who went on to become key protagonists in the world of fashion, royal dress design and the construction of the public image and identity of British royal women from the mid thirties, approached fashion design via the designing of theatrical and fancy dress and the designing of fashionable dress for their own performances of female impersonation, rather than through art school training.

Theatre designer and photographer of society, royalty and fashion, Beaton, had ‘prospered in the art school’ at Harrow and had read history and architecture at St John’s College, Cambridge between 1923 and 1925. Like Hartnell he had focussed his energies on designing sets and costumes for the Footlights productions between 1923-1925, dressing himself as the female lead in *All the Vogue* in 1925, and he came down, like Hartnell, without a degree.<sup>490</sup> Victor Stiebel, who studied architecture Jesus College, Cambridge, also designed the costumes for the Footlights’ female leads, including himself, for the productions

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<sup>487</sup> Ellis Miller. *Balenciaga: The Couturier’s Couturier*. (London: V&A Publications, 2007): 22.

<sup>488</sup> Alexandra Palmer. *Dior: A New Look, A New Enterprise (1947-57)*. (London: V&A Publications, 2009): 10.

<sup>489</sup> Norman Hartnell. Unpublished autobiographical part manuscript/part typescript, considered by the author to be the follow up to his 1955 autobiography, *Silver & Gold*, c1972. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/ MS/ c1972/ 3.

<sup>490</sup> Hugo Vickers. Ed. *The Unexpurgated Beaton: The Cecil Beaton Diaries as he Wrote Them, 1970-1980*. (New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 2003): 4

*May Fever* in 1926 and *Please Tell the Others* in 1927.<sup>491</sup> A photograph of Stiebel as a 'Vamp' taken in 1927 can be compared with the earliest Stiebel sketched design at the V&A, dated 1928 revealing that this is the design for his costume from the 1927 production, and also that like Hartnell, Stiebel's cross-dressing on stage directly influenced his fashion designs for his female clients. (Figures 4.51 & 4.52).

This indicates that the skill needed to produce working fashion drawings and commercial sketched designs was simply the ability to reproduce ideas quickly, giving enough visual information to the fitter for her to be able to interpret the sketch, transferring the two dimensional representation into a three dimensional toile rather than a specific talent for drawing. Hartnell's sketches were interpreted by a team of highly skilled women who were key to the success of the couturiers. Betty Foster, workroom girl at Hartnell's from 1944, explained the role of the fitter and her hands: 'Mam'selle did the cutting from the sketch and the hand, or second, Mam'selle's assistant, had to make it work. The hand made the pattern. Those around him (Hartnell) made him. Mam'selle could make anything from a picture'.<sup>492</sup>

What can be read from one of Hartnell's pencil and watercolour sketches is, however, above all, his signature look – his 'designer's eye'. Although he was not a highly talented or skilful artist in terms of producing a visual representation of his dress designs, along with the basic shape of the garments, his sketches conveyed his eye for colour and texture. Although he could not drape accurately to create the pattern, he did so to get a sense of how the weight of fabrics and textiles and also to see how the colours of the fabric chosen worked together.

#### ***4.4.3. Male couturiers and fashion design education***

At this time the only specific education available to those wanting to work in the dressmaking and tailoring industry were the needle-trade schools, which were for girls who wanted to learn 'fine needle skills'. Girls joined these trade schools after completing their elementary education aged fourteen. In her publication on the early days Barrett Street Trade School, now the London

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<sup>491</sup> Robert Hewison. *Footlights! A Hundred Years of Cambridge Comedy*. (London: Methuen, 1983): 60-61.

<sup>492</sup> Betty Foster. Telephone Interview. 16<sup>th</sup> October 2009. NHOH/2009/10/Telephone interview.

College of Fashion, Helen Reynolds notes of the trade schools that ‘the schools’ curricula were set up in consultation with local industry to meet its requirements.’<sup>493</sup> Barrett Street School, which was situated in the centre of the West End dress trade district, began to take older girls from 1926 and many would go on to join the staff mostly of London ready-to-wear companies based around Great Portland Street or couture salons, becoming ‘fitters, cutters, designer cutters, and designers.’<sup>494</sup> Several of Hartnell’s staff interviewed for this study had been trained at Barrett Street, including Maureen Markham (embroideress) and Rusty Lewis (fashion artist and sketcher), illustrating the links between the school and the couture in London between 1920s and 1950s.

Marie McLoughlin’s research shows that in the 1920s one route into fashion design was as a fashion artist, though classes in high quality fashion drawing did not exist until Muriel Pemberton’s fashion drawing classes began 1931 at Saint Martins School of Art. Pemberton went to the RCA in 1927 and wrote her own fashion curriculum, becoming their first fashion graduate in 1931.<sup>495</sup> McLoughlin also notes that the lot of the jobbing fashion artist was not an easy one, quoting Eliot Hodgkin, whose 1932 publication on fashion drawing outlined the difficulties encountered:

There is in England, so far as I know, no scope whatsoever for the girl who designs fashion by drawing them. Dressmaking houses that do not confine themselves to copying French dresses have their own designer who is either a cutter or the head of the firm; someone, at any rate, so identified with the policy and reputation of the house that no beginner with a portfolio of designs could hope to be allowed to compete.<sup>496</sup>

Fashion drawing and dressmaking skills were considered female occupations in the interwar period, a fact that had troubled Hartnell throughout his life, as the previous chapter outlined. Also, as Hodgkin had explained, Hartnell could not hope to join a house as a sketcher that already had an established designer. As

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<sup>493</sup> Helen Reynolds. *Couture or Trade: An Early Pictorial Record of the London College of Fashion*. (Chichester, West Sussex: Phillimore, 1997): xiv..

<sup>494</sup> Reynolds, *Couture or Trade*, xvii.

<sup>495</sup> Dr Marie McLoughlin. “Fashion, the Art School and the role of Muriel Pemberton in the development of degree level fashion education in the UK.” Diss. University of Brighton, 2011. Print.

<sup>496</sup> Elliot Hodgkin. *Fashion Illustration*. Chapman & Hall, 1932: Np. in Marie McLoughlin “Drawing Dreams: Fashion Illustration.” Sylvia Backemeyer. Ed. *Picture This: The Artist as Illustrator*. (London: Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design in association with the Herbert Press, 2005): 55.

his experiences outlined in his 1955 autobiography illustrated, he had found obtaining an apprenticeship to a London designer impossible. After leaving Cambridge in 1922, his only employment had been three months with Madame Désirée. The sketches he executed for the production *The Battling Butler* whilst in her employ, are the earliest examples of his fashion drawings known to exist. Figures 4.53 to 4.58 provide an understanding of the look devised by Hartnell for this production, which included daywear and full-length evening gowns with fur trim – illustrative of his signature looks carried through to his future collections.

Earlier pencil and watercolour sketches of women in fashionable dress also exist in the archive, although not drawn for a specific collection and not wearing designs by him. At school, as Hartnell noted in his autobiography, he had drawn portraits of his favourite actresses of the day (c1916), and several of his early watercolour and pencil drawings, executed from when Hartnell was around fifteen years old, survive in the Archive. These are illustrative of his early compositions and the way he painted and drew the female figure onto paper, and also the way he executed the look of fabric and clothing on the body.<sup>497</sup> (Figures 4.61 & 4.62).

His early drawings were influenced by the fashion drawings in the fashion press of the day. In the unpublished later memoir of the early 1970s, he remembered that in contrast to the headmaster Sir John McClure, ‘announcing the names of my recently departed schoolboy comrades killed in action abroad’:

I was enthralled...when there appeared included amongst the journals of the school library the first editions of *Vogue*. The magic magazine covers thereof, by Helen Dryden, depicting artistic ladies, pink gloved and holding spindle silver scissors, cutting rows of holly hocks with sweet precision ... Then *Vanity Fair* joined the library with ravishing covers of Erté’s exotic ladies, and sometimes the carnival characters of Brunelleschi, all in a burst of confetti and fireworks.<sup>498</sup>

His sketches for *The Battling Butler* illustrate these influences clearly.

Hartnell’s early sketches also reflect the composition of fashion photography in the twenties. As noted in Chapter Two, the early photographs of Hartnell posing

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<sup>497</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 15.

<sup>498</sup> Norman Hartnell. Unpublished autobiography considered by the author to be the follow up to his 1955 autobiography, *Silver & Gold*, c1972. MS. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/ MS/ c1972/ 3.

as ‘Kitty Fenton’ in 1921 also indicate that he had access to the French fashion press, in particular *Les Modes*, as his poses mirror those of the actresses and mannequins modelling the clothes in this publication.<sup>499</sup> The composition also appears to have mirrored the working fashion drawings/illustrations that both preceded and came after them. The working fashion drawing and this genre of fashion photograph presented the dress design to the consumer as the designer intended it to be worn.

In the full draft of Hartnell’s memoir, which has been annotated in pencil by Stanley Jackson, Editor at Evans Brothers in 1954-55, Hartnell admitted to being ‘very innocent about the techniques of dressmaking’ – a line crossed out in pencil by Jackson. Jackson also crossed out Hartnell’s paragraph in which he described ‘the testing time of explaining my sketches to the dressmaker, suggesting how they should be cut, choosing the right materials, of colours that would not fade under stage lighting and supervising the fittings of all the “choosey” stage beauties.’ According to Hartnell, ‘that was my apprenticeship. It was my first experience of the difficult, intricate and technical side of the dressmaker’s craft’.<sup>500</sup> All of this was pencilled through by Jackson, indicating the editor’s desire to keep any personal struggles or weaknesses on the part of the designer from the reader, thereby perpetuating the myth of the designer as genius. Hartnell also described designing for a client called Suzan Tilney some ‘very ordinary tweed ensembles for race meetings and extraordinary tea gowns for friends of her horsey circle in Leicestershire’ whilst at Désirée, but reference to this named client was also pencilled through.<sup>501</sup> This illustrates that early on Hartnell learned that the ‘ordinary tweed ensembles’ were a necessary staple to be included in his collections along with the chiffon evening gowns and velvet tea gowns.

It was Hartnell’s creative involvement with the Footlights Dramatic Club between 1921 and 1923 that provided him with the skills most useful for his future career as a dress designer. Hartnell designed fashionable dress for himself as the leading lady in three musical comedies.<sup>502</sup> He also referred to ‘a portfolio

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<sup>499</sup> Cover Illustration. *Les Modes*. No. 202. March 1921.

<sup>500</sup> Norman Hartnell. *Silver & Gold*: 24. Hartnell Mitchison Archive. Box 42/1955/File 1.

<sup>501</sup> Norman Hartnell *Silver & Gold* (annotated, edited copy): 25. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/1955/File 2.

<sup>502</sup> As already discussed in Chapter Two, Hartnell played ‘Kitty Fenton’ in *What a Picnic*, 1921, ‘Sylvia Somers’ in *The Bedder’s Opera*, 1922 and ‘Gwendolyn’ in *Folly*, 1923.

of Cambridge designs' in his autobiography, but these drawings were not identified in his Archive.<sup>503</sup> Revealing the tensions between his sex and his creative leanings, Hartnell stated in his autobiography that: 'Sir John McClure, our Headmaster, encouraged me to concentrate on my sketching and my mother, with her great feeling for beauty, was an unfailing source of inspiration; but I never felt that Father really approved of my interest in art.'<sup>504</sup>

#### ***4.4.4. The Personalised Fashion Sketch: issues of representation, artifice, royal deference and propriety.***

Hartnell had particular difficulty capturing the royal likeness, which perhaps persuaded him to pass on of the task of drawing Queen Elizabeth and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret to others. In a draft of his autobiography, Hartnell described a wartime audience with the King and Queen illustrating this problem in his usual anecdotal fashion:

My sketches again were lying there on a table as usual. I had drawn them some time before, sitting askew, working on the steel top of the Morrison shelter in the kitchen of my Regent's Park home on a particularly bomb-bothered night.

They were designs for woollen dinner gowns.

In drawing sketches for the Palace, one is not expected to paint a representation in miniature of the actual face of the wearer. On the other hand, it would be inappropriate if it were too dissimilar.

The King went through the sketches, and pointing to the face of one unfortunately hurried sketch, he asked,

"Is this really supposed to be the Queen?"

I could not answer yes, or no, for the Queen again looked over the King's shoulder and said,

"Indeed I only wish I were as beautiful as that!"

My relief was great.<sup>505</sup>

During the 1940s Brenda Naylor drew the royal likenesses and figures on which Hartnell drew his dress designs.<sup>506</sup> From 1953, Hartnell's assistant designer Ian Thomas produced most of the designs for Hartnell's royal clients until he left

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<sup>503</sup> Hartnell *Silver & Gold*, 20.

<sup>504</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 16.

<sup>505</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/1955/19/draft copy of *Silver & Gold* annotated by Hartnell's editor at Evans Brothers: 229-230

<sup>506</sup> Brenda Naylor. Personal Interview. 26<sup>th</sup> February 2007. NHOH/2007/2/tape 1.

Hartnell's to set up on his own in 1969. Although these may be considered better executed, they lack Hartnell's charm, as the juxtaposition of figures 4.63 and 4.66 of Princess Elizabeth by Hartnell and figure of the Princess by Thomas illustrates. It was also Thomas who provided most of the illustrations for Hartnell's 1955 autobiography.

Hartnell's fashion figures and actresses were always painted with long vermillion nails and matching lips even as early as 1922. In their 2001 publication, *Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian History* Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon write that 'Hartnell's illustrative style was remarkably camp, rendering 1940s actresses as mannish mannequins and the Royal family as toothy starlets,' and that 'the dust jacket he designed for his autobiography, *Silver & Gold* (1955) featured swags of fringed drapery, pearls and gems more suitable for the wardrobe of a drag queen than a Princess'.<sup>507</sup> Figures 4.67 and 4.68, drawings of Princess Elizabeth and the comedic actress Jessie Matthews, demonstrate Aldrich and Wotherspoon's point, that there are similarities. I would argue that the dust jacket it is more representative of a design for a theatrical programme, something that he did for the Footlights in the 1920s. Hartnell's sketches for the Princesses Elizabeth from the early 1940s do depict her with long painted nails, but usually Queen Elizabeth and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret were always depicted either wearing gloves or with unpainted nails, although vermillion lips were obviously deemed appropriate, as most of the sketches in the archive for the royal client have painted lips suggesting the application of lipstick.

Makeup was linked to the 'modern girl' via the cinema, and lipstick, as Carol Dyhouse explains, was linked with desirability and modernity during the 1930s. During the war it was also adopted as a means of defiance and boosting morale.<sup>508</sup> In Britain however, to paint one's nails was judged more harshly. Dyhouse notes that among the men of the British royal family painted nails were likened to 'soviet Russia' and 'women who smoked in public',<sup>509</sup> and Dyhouse quotes Mass Observation respondents from 1939 who described

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<sup>507</sup> Aldrich, R., & Gary Wotherspoon, Eds. *Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian History: From Antiquity to World War II*. (London/New York: Routledge, 2001): 204 – 205.

<sup>508</sup> Carol Dyhouse. *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism*. London/New York: Zed books, 2010: 67.

<sup>509</sup> Windsor, HRH Edward, Duke of, *A King's Story*, (London: Prion, 1951), pp. 187-8 in Dyhouse: 68.

painted fingernails as 'wicked', like 'blood stained talons' and the fingernails of 'Egyptian whores'.<sup>510</sup> One way of recognising an original Hartnell sketch is through his drawing of long, pointed fingernails, a signature not copied by Thomas. Understandably then, painted nails were understood by Hartnell to be unacceptable in representations of his royal clients, especially Queen Elizabeth. (Figure 4.69).

#### ***4.5. The Hartnell Fashion Drawing***

Just as Hartnell's written signature was unique to himself, so Hartnell's sketched designs can be identified as his, quite clearly differentiated from those of his sketch artists and assistant designers. Fashion drawings that are recognisably by Hartnell in the Archive were mostly produced before the Second World War. However, rough pencil and biro sketches by Hartnell exist beyond that period. Hartnell employed sketchers to assist him and the line between what he drew and what his sketcher contributed to the drawing becomes blurred when undertaking a close analysis of sketches from this period.<sup>511</sup> Showroom sketch artist and personal assistant Brenda Naylor explained his working practices at this time and her role in the execution of his sketched designs:

I used to do these faces with vague royal likenesses and Mr Hartnell did his designs on the top of them – I did the faces of the model girls too. It was such a minor part, but I used to do these and he found it easy to do a quick design on top of my figures.

What happened was he got into the way of my doing sketches like this of the model girl, standing elegantly, usually with the left hip towards there and the drapery went round to the left but he liked them that way and I would do these sort of model girly poses with the sort of likenesses and hair colour of his models girls and he would design his collections on them. I never saw him doing that; that would be done at Windsor when he was on his own. He would do the designs. When he was doing a royal collection, the same thing; I did the sort of faces and things as you saw and bodies and then sometimes he would say 'oh, would you do...' and he would describe to me the lines and what he wanted and I would draw it on the figures. There was so much to do and we would be in the little studio painting and he would say, 'no dear, a little bit more brown, a little bit of pink, a spot of blue' and I would be mixing the colours

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<sup>510</sup> MO Report, July 1939, Personal appearance: Hands, Face and Hair (A21) in Dyer: 68.

<sup>511</sup> Hartnell employed Brenda Naylor as a showroom sketch artist and design assistant from 'the week before Easter 1944'.

and he would say ‘yes, that’s right’ and then I would paint his designs.<sup>512</sup>

Hartnell described his working practice in terms of sketching a new collection at his house in Windsor, staging this act of designing within the interiors of his country home:

It would be tedious to describe the plotting of each of the imagined hundred models. My house in Windsor Forest becomes a studio and I wander from room to room. At eleven o’clock I am in the morning room, furnished mostly in carved pinewood with coral velvet hangings, and there I picture the morning suits. Promptly I sit down at the large wooden desk, place in front of me the samples of materials, and draw them as I imagine them to be worn. Woollen morning suits, pleated or plain, with flared or belted topcoats, appear on my sketch block, many of the leather belts I ordered being used up in the process.

In the afternoon I go upstairs to the small white-washed studio and paint the sketches in the allotted colours. The accessories of hats, gloves, shoes and handbags are drawn unconsciously, harmonizing with each design.<sup>513</sup>

The majority of the watercolour sketched designs were executed on ‘Monckton Paper, Quires 72-lb, Hotpressed 30 x 22, Cut to 14 x 10’, as an order for paper, cut to a particular size especially for Hartnell, indicates. Receipts for artists’ materials list other purchases made by Hartnell for ‘Venus Pencils’ of various types, sable brushes of varying sizes, and ‘Process White’ paint.<sup>514</sup>

Preliminary sketches survive that predate the finished coloured fashion drawing from which the fitter worked, illustrating Hartnell’s creative process. Some are executed in biro, and many are very quickly produced one after the other in series form, revealing the development of a collection – the shapes and styles evolving on the page. (Figures 4.71, 4.72 & 4.73). From 1953 Hartnell passed over the job of finished coloured drawing to his assistant designer, and sketcher although the rough sketch that precedes these drawings show that particular garment was designed by Hartnell and not his assistant. Figure 4.74 for the model, *Waterfall* was first sketched by Hartnell, then the finished coloured drawing was executed by Rusty Lewis. (Figure 4.75). These sketches plus the

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<sup>512</sup> Brenda Naylor. Personal Interview. 26<sup>th</sup> February 2007. NHOH/2007/2/Tape 1.

<sup>513</sup> Hartnell. *Silver & Gold*, 81.

<sup>514</sup> Receipts for artists’ materials. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 2/File 10

finished gown are in the Archive and the dress is listed on Hartnell's special dresses archived by Hartnell himself for promotional events. (Figure 4.76).

Fashion sketcher and commercial artist Rusty Lewis was employed by Hartnell as assistant to Ian Thomas between 1963 and 1968, returning in the early seventies as a freelance sketcher and designer for Hartnell's, working from home. There are many sketches for royal clothes and fashion collections at Hartnell's extant in the Archive, which I have identified as having been executed by her. Lewis's account in interview of her experience of Hartnell's working processes and her appreciation of his sensibility as a designer, are of significant value to this study. When asked about her role at Hartnell's and how she had worked with Ian Thomas, who during the 1960s was chief designer at Hartnell's, Lewis explained:

Well Ian, (thoughtful pause) he really did the designing and he liked to do the sketches for the Queen himself, but I did a lot of work for other clients, and he would give me the pencil sketches, or sometimes it would be doing a painting of something in the collection or stuff for the press or whatever, and we sat in the studio, it was about the size of this room, and we sat with wooden tables put together facing each other so he would be sitting - I suppose - the tables were about the width of this one and he would be sitting about six feet away and we sat facing each other and we would sit there and chat away he had horses and dogs so we had a lot in common, we were friends (voice rising up to make the point), you know, he was my boss and I worked directly for him, and Mr Hartnell always asked permission when he wanted to borrow me to do things, which I thought was nice.<sup>515</sup>

Lewis had been employed to assist Ian Thomas in 1963, when, as she explained, Hartnell had not been well.

#### 4.6. Raw Materials: Hartnell's choice of textiles and colour and his use of embroidery as embellishment.

This section examines Hartnell's professional understanding of the weight and texture of each textile as it was woven into the types of fabric that he considered most suitable for each style of garment for a particular season. As well as the aesthetic considerations, which included colour, weave and print, the weight of fabrics used were also key to the functionality of the garment. Also, his

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<sup>515</sup> Rusty Lewis. Personal Interview. 20<sup>th</sup> June 2010. NHOH/2010/15/digital recording.

personal taste and delight in particular types of material such as silk satin and silk chiffon – fabrics that he enjoyed wearing - brought his designer's 'eye' and personal taste and identity to his collections, particularly his designs for evening wear. As this chapter has already discussed, Hartnell became associated with luxurious fabrics early on in his career.<sup>516</sup>

A studio photograph of Hartnell taken in the mid 1920s shows him surrounded by draped lengths of fabric, picturing him with the types of cloth he wished to be associated with. (Figure 2.19). These glamorous, glittering lengths of cloth of visibly different weights and textures represented the materials he worked with when designing for the stars of the stage such as Mistenguette during the early 1930s, and visually represents Hartnell as an artist who works with cloth as his inspiration. (Figures 4.78, 4.79 & 4.80). A later photograph taken of Hartnell in 1953 shows him in the stockroom considering the travellers' textile samples.<sup>517</sup> This image represents Hartnell as 'the couturier at work' rather than the 'celebrity couturier' in figure 81.

"Rough Notes" by Hartnell for an article in February 1949 on his Spring Collection, underlines the importance of the fabrics as a starting point for his designs. He explained that 'I enjoy much more the plain material because I can then build up my own design, drapery, embroidery, etc. Woollen materials lend themselves to check overcoats and plain woollen dresses underneath.' The article continues:

When the materials arrive, Mr. Hartnell has them all in his studio, with pieces of fur, accessories, buttons and belts etc. A model will perhaps be cut to fit a particularly lovely set of buttons and belt. One plain white satin dress, one with jewelled belt – printed afternoon dresses, some for everyday wear – then a more dressy variety for Ascot, more brilliant colours, - suggesting large hats – roses at the waist etc.<sup>518</sup>

Various sketches for collections from the late 1930s illustrate his signature Ascot look, with printed slim-line dresses accessorised with the 'large hats and roses at the waist' Hartnell had described. (Figures 4.82, 4.83, 4.84 & 4.85).

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<sup>516</sup> See Chapter Four section 4.4.1.

<sup>517</sup> Please see Glossary of Terms.

<sup>518</sup> Norman Hartnell, t.s. *Rough Notes: Spring Collection*, 9 December 1949. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 2/File 1.

#### ***4.6.1. 'Mouth Watering Materials'<sup>519</sup> Hartnell's choice of colour and textiles***

Rusty Lewis articulated perfectly the luxuriousness of the fabrics and colours used by Hartnell in the 1960s for his collections. Whilst speaking, she spread out a length of green, floral print, silk chiffon, as an illustration of the beautiful fabrics she was remembering:

To me those materials are more mouth watering than food – and I've looked at materials and my mouth has actually watered. In fact even talking about it now, there is something about colour, and Mr Hartnell had the best eye for colour than anybody I have ever met. I've got a pretty good eye for colour but he was fantastic, and his ability to combine unusual colours was second to none. Absolutely – I mean some of those dresses, they were absolutely beautiful, I mean cocktail dresses and of course the clothes were glamorous then, and even to go to something like Royal Ascot you had a beautiful silk dress with a Staron silk coat over the top. Things were just fabulous, and sometimes they had slits up here so that the printed silk that was underneath showed through, and you had that on your hat. I mean the things were just beautiful. And the embroideries!<sup>520</sup>

The best visual representations of the style of printed silk dress and plain silk coat, both couture dressmaker made, to which Lewis referred are found in the collection of sketches for Her Majesty the Queen which date to the late fifties/early sixties. (Figures 4.86 & 4.87). This type of ensemble was made at Hartnell's for her royal overseas tours, and followed on from Hartnell's tailored coat and day dresses for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth made for the 1938 state visit to Paris and the 1939 North American Tour. The wardrobes created for these tours were closely followed by the press, and influenced fashionable styles for women at the time. An example of a silk print coat and matching silk chiffon dress from the mid sixties in the Archive, also illustrates this type of ensemble whilst a sketch for a strikingly similar dress and coat in the collection shows a plain coat with the silk chiffon dress in similar fabric. (Figures 4.88 & 4.89).

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<sup>519</sup> Rusty Lewis. Personal Interview. 20 June 2010. MHOH/2010/15/Digital Recording.

<sup>520</sup> Rusty Lewis. Personal Interview. 20 June 2010. MHOH/2010/15/Digital Recording.

#### *4.6.2. Hartnell's Use of Luxury Fabrics and Choice of Fabricants*

Unlike Dior, for whom, as Ellis Miller has explained, ‘textiles were the finishing touch rather than the starting-point of the clothes that he designed’,<sup>521</sup> Hartnell’s design process began with a careful choice of fashion fabrics, taken from the highest quality of fashion textiles available to him. Hartnell described the ‘exacting and most important task of designing a collection’ in his autobiography. This began with the visit of the textile agents employed by the various manufacturers or fabricants to visit the couture houses with examples of their new fabrics, although his memoir gives no mention of the names of these fabricants that supplied him. As Miller has noted in her work on the relationship between the Paris couture and the French textile manufacturers during the post-war period:

... while couturiers of the 1950s were anxious to publish their memoirs, textile manufacturers were less forthcoming... Without accounts from both couturiers and textile manufacturers or documentation of firsthand examination of the textiles and how they functioned in the garments it is difficult to assess how – or whether – couturiers achieved ‘perfect harmony’ in the marriage of their design with manufacturers’ materials.<sup>522</sup>

Interviews with staff involved in the design and making-up of Hartnell couture contributes in some way to an assessment of this ‘marriage’, and close examination of the garments and sketched designs, in which the fabric to be used in the making-up of a model is represented using various painting techniques, fabric samples (usually, in the case of Hartnell, embroidered), and finished garments, presents the material for this analysis.

The omission of useful facts from Hartnell’s autobiography so as not to bore the reader, and the ways in which oral history with those who worked for him touches on the meanings or emotions experienced, rather than hard facts about an event due to the passing of time, has already been discussed in Chapter One in terms of methodological problems. However, this is not their strength as sources. Illustrative of this, Hartnell’s stock-keeper Miss Louie, who at the time I interviewed her was aged ninety-eight, could not remember the names of any

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<sup>521</sup> Lesley Ellis Miller. “Perfect Harmony: Textile Manufacturers and Haute Couture 1947-57.” Claire Wilcox. Ed. *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-57*. (London: V&A Publications, 2007): 114.

<sup>522</sup> Ellis Miller, “Perfect Harmony”, 116.

of the textile manufacturers she had worked with for over forty years, and, as already stated here, Hartnell's memoir omits the detailed information about his suppliers. Indeed, apart from the occasional name printed on the card pinned to the fabric swatch, attached to sketches dating from the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as Staron (silk) and in Moreau (fine wool) illustrated in figures 4.90 to 4.93, the names of the various textile houses that supplied Hartnell's were only clarified by the discovery of a further rough draft of Hartnell's autobiography.

This shows that Hartnell had originally included the names of the various textile suppliers, but these details had been crossed out in pencil during the editing process.<sup>523</sup> Editor Stanley Jackson explained his reason for this in a letter to Hartnell dated February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1955, writing:

Another point; in your fascinating chapter on designing a Collection there is a long catalogue of names of travellers, agents etc. dealing with you on textiles, lace etc. I have kept this in but it reads dullishly. If, of course, you are keen for personal reasons to include all these names we can leave them in.<sup>524</sup>

What this information reveals is that Hartnell was supplied by the very best names in British, French and Swiss cloth manufacture. British companies such as the Scottish tweed mill Heather Mills provided Hartnell with 'lovely products',<sup>525</sup> and he also used tweeds from H. & S. Simons, Glender Fabrics and D. Rankine Hamilton,<sup>526</sup> and John G. Hardy of Yorkshire, who had received the royal warrant from the mid 1930s for the supply of Balmoral Tweed fabric to the royal household.<sup>527</sup>

Hartnell was supplied with the most elite manufacturers of 'haute nouveaute' couture silks based in Lyon including silks and satins from Lyon firms of Ducharne, Chatillon-Mouilly, and Renel, Soieries Nouveaute's and Jean Page, 'from whom I always select many fascinating silks both plain and

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<sup>523</sup> Norman Hartnell. Draft Autobiography. Trans/Mans: 256-262. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 1.

<sup>524</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 5/9

<sup>525</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 1/257

<sup>526</sup> Draft Autobiography. Trans/Mans: 257. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 1.

<sup>527</sup> Huddersfield Fine Worsteds Cloth Merchant and Textile Manufacturer of Distinction © 2009, 2010 Huddersfield Fine Worsteds Ltd. <http://www.hfwltd.com/a-jgh.php> Web. April 5 2010

patterned' and also with silk tissues from Bianchini.<sup>528</sup> These names represent the most famous silk fashion textile manufacturers in Lyon used by all the top couturiers. He was also supplied with woollens from Dormeuil Freres and Rodier's of France. Other textile manufacturers included Sweetenburgh Fabrics, and Rodier, whose textile agent, Mr Stone 'presents huge cases full of brilliant coloured woollen beauties from France.'<sup>529</sup> Lighter woollens for coats and jackets came from Wain and Shiell & Son of Savile Row, London and the Paris/London based Dormeuil Frères.

Describing the process of choosing fabrics for a new collection, Hartnell wrote in 1955 that his male staff members, the furrier Signor Belloni, and tailors Signor Rossi and Monsieur Francois helped him select various fabrics including the 'velvets for winter wearing.'<sup>530</sup> Hartnell noted that 'the quality they will choose, and I the colouring' underlining the key role that his 'eye' and personal and professional taste played in the decision-making. 'A nutbrown partnership of thick wool and thin wool dyed to exactly matching colour may be chosen here, and there, possibly, a heavy velour of prune colour to go over, a dress of strawberry pink crêpe which we shall have to find later amongst the silks.'<sup>531</sup> Velours and duvetyns were chosen 'for the dressy coats to be worn, perhaps, over dresses of dark satin or cocktail frocks of chestnut and gold brocade.'<sup>532</sup>

Photographs from September 1955, show models Cynthia and Dolores presenting typical woollen tailored dress and coat ensembles to Princess Margaret at a charity show for the Scottish Association of Girls Clubs, 'by kind permission of the Marquis & Marchioness of Linlithgow'.<sup>533</sup> Cynthia wears a fine wool dress and tweed coat, possibly the model *Black Forest*, 'black and green tweed overcoat and dress', or *Heather*, 'purple-flecked tweed dress and coat', or *Ratcatcher*, Mustard tweed dress and overcoat', and Dolores wears a dark suit and matching overcoat, possibly *Ned* 'Donkey brown duvetyn suit and

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<sup>528</sup> Draft Autobiography. Trans/Mans: 261. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 1.

<sup>529</sup> Draft Autobiography. Trans/Mans: 258. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 1.

<sup>530</sup> Norman Hartnell. Draft Autobiography. Trans/Mans:259. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive Box 42/File 1.

<sup>531</sup> Hartnell *Silver & Gold* 79.

<sup>532</sup> Draft Autobiography. Trans/Mans: 258. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 1.

<sup>533</sup> Programme from the fashion show in aid of the Scottish Association of Girls Clubs 1955. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 2/1955/File.5.

overcoat', or *Winter Travel*, 'Brown and blue suit and overcoat'. (Figures 4.94 & 4.95). No colour photographs of Hartnell's fashion collections exist in the Archive, which makes identifying particular models difficult.

The type of gown archived by Hartnell as 'Famous Dresses' underlines his preference for what he described as, 'the pastel shades of velvet that are almost irresistible in palest turquoise, lilac and candy pink' and 'the rainbow-hued taffetas and organzas'. Velvet was used by Hartnell extensively in the nineteen thirties in his full-length, slim line tea-gowns and evening coats as these Scaioni's Studio photographs of mannequins wearing model gowns from Hartnell's thirties collections illustrates. (Figures 4.96 & 4.97). Velvet was a Hartnell staple throughout the lifetime of the house, as Maureen Markham underlined when describing her twenty-six year career in the embroidery room at Hartnell's, 'we used to do a lot of velvet work'.<sup>534</sup> This sample of beaded embroidery worked over the seam between a piece of black velvet and yellow silk, stitched together, is typical of the way in which Hartnell married different fabric weights in bold colours together using beading. (Figures 4.98 & 4.99).

Underlining his penchant for silks, and professional leanings towards working with silk as opposed to woollen fabric Hartnell continued to describe the visit from the silk travellers and the restraint he had to adopt when choosing fabrics thus, the tension between his personal taste and work-a-day saleable couture ever present:

Some exquisite silks and satins are rippled out at our feet and the temptation is to buy the whole lot, but common sense enters to resist the rustling flower-strewn taffetas and metal-threaded brocades, often too rich in beauty for women to wear. I have to remember reluctantly that at my dress collections a woman may refuse the most beautiful dress in preference for a little workaday number. Recklessly, however, I do order one or two of these glorious products, to be included in the collection merely for the sake of decoration and personal satisfaction.<sup>535</sup>

An embroidered full-length dress and coat in the collection in yellow Staron silk named *Sirikit*, features in a list of models for the Silver Jubilee from 1977, and is a good example of this stiff, wild silk fabric with a slight sheen 'in action'.<sup>536</sup> This model was named after Queen Sirikit of Thailand, and the embroidered

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<sup>534</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2001/12/Digital Recording.

<sup>535</sup> Hartnell *Silver & Gold*, 80.

<sup>536</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 2/ Dress List/c1977/File 5.22-2.

design reflects this Thai inspiration. (Figure 4.100). He often chose particular fabrics, such as velvet, chiffon, and wild silk, with a view to how these could be used together both in terms of weight and colour, for example, ‘a beautiful silk dress with a Staron silk coat over the top’,<sup>537</sup> for an event such as Ascot races, or a dark velvet embroidered dress with a pale wild silk coat lined with the dark velvet. These examples from the Hartnell dress collection are typical of the hundreds of similar garments from his couture collections visually represented in the form of coloured sketches and photographs in the Archive. (Figure 4.101).

The fashion textiles used to make-up Hartnell’s royal designs were carefully chosen to represent British manufacturers and suppliers where possible, especially for a public event such as a royal wedding or coronation. For example, despite the ‘exquisite materials’ sent over to the Palace in September 1947 by Messrs. Combier of Paris for possible use in the making of Princess Elizabeth’s wedding dress, his silks were not used in the final dress. The bridal gown was made in satin from Winterthur Silks, Dunfermline, supplied by Charles I. Davis & Co, 12A, St. George Street, Hanover Square. The Princesses’ going away dress, however, was made-up in material from Courdurier Fructus & Descher Ltd., of Lyon, via their agent based at 15, 16 & 17 Princess Street, Hanover Square, and her coat material was from Dumas & Maury Ltd., (France) via their agent based at 27, Kingly Street, W.1. For the Bridesmaids Hartnell chose net from F. Playle & Co., 22, Princes Street, and satin from David Evans, Silks Limited, 9, Princes Street, Hanover Square. The tulle and net for the bride’s train came from W.B. Smithers.<sup>538</sup>

#### ***4.7. Hartnell’s use of beaded embroidery: ‘the Hartnell touch’.***<sup>539</sup>

Hartnell was famous above all for his beaded embroidery. Along with his eye for colour his understanding of the impact his choice of colours had on a collection or at (for example) a royal event, and his understanding of the effect

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<sup>537</sup> Rusty Lewis. Personal Interview. 20<sup>th</sup> June 2010. NHOH/2010/15/digital recording/File 4

<sup>538</sup> Correspondence between Buckingham Palace and Hartnell’s regarding Princess Elizabeth’s wedding in 1947. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 15/File 16.

<sup>539</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

combining textures in textiles had on each model, what really represented the Hartnell signature look was the beadwork. This was applied onto the hundreds of models from Hartnell's twice yearly collections throughout his career and beyond, and used constantly and continuously to enhance both stage-wear from the mid 1920s and his royal clothes from the mid 1930s. Hartnell's had the only in-house embroidery atelier in London, and the Archive holds hundreds of small fabric samples of various sizes embroidered with different designs designed for individual models in fashion collections, and also larger samples of embroidery designed for important royal dresses, which were produced with an eye for framing.<sup>540</sup>

#### ***4.8. Signature Trims: Fur, Feathers, Flowers and Fringing***

These first examples of Hartnell's dress and coat (Discussed further in Chapter Five) designs illustrate that the establishment of his use of fur, artificial flowers, egret and ostrich feathers to embellish and trim his designs, were first used in the stage clothes in fashionable women's styles for his Footlights performance in 1921. (Figures 2.50 & 2.60). *The Battling Butler* sketches (and production photographs) also reveal that Hartnell used fur, feathers and flowers to trim several ensembles. (Figures 4.102, 4.103 & 4.104). All of these embellishments continued to be used throughout his designing career. Above all, what these early designs reveal is that Hartnell's first designs for his female couture clientele mirrored early ensembles designed for his own use and thus these clothes encapsulated his own personal taste and identity, and the colours, fabrics and his favoured decorative embellishments.

Fashion drawings, photographs and garments in the Archive dating between 1922 and 1979 demonstrate clearly that Hartnell had signature trims and decorative embellishments. The egret feather and ostrich feather could trim the edges of a full-length cape in the 1920s, an evening gown in the 1940s and sleeves between 1922 and the late 1970s. (Figures 4.105, 4.106, 4.107 & 4.108). Fringing was another favourite trim that was incorporated into complicated evening gowns during the 1930s for Gertrude Lawrence and the 1940s for Lady Eugenie Wavell and shorter daywear for the actress Cicely Courtneidge during the War, and even for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. (Figures 4.109 & 4.110). A

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<sup>540</sup> Hartnell's use of embroidery will be discussed later in this chapter.

fashion photo taken in Berkley Square in the early 1970s shows Hartnell reworking the fringed evening gown for his Spring/Summer collection of 1971. As already established, the embellishment chosen for his personal wear was the artificial flower, particularly a rose. (Figure 2.73). Flowers were often set at the shoulder, for example in this sketch for the actress Heather Thatcher c1938, (figure 4.111), or at the waist, as seen in the sketched design for Cecily Courtneidge from 1943. (Figure 4.112).

The use of deep fox fur collar and cuffs was another design element used prolifically by Hartnell during the 1930s, particularly well illustrated by his daywear designs for Queen Elizabeth in the late thirties. She had a great fondness for fox fur, dyed all colours, and for the wardrobe for her tour of North America and Canada in 1939, he used fox fur in many of her tailored day ensembles, as figures 4.113 and figure 4.114 illustrate. These sketches for Her Majesty also give a clear impression of Hartnell's choice of colours for her, which he established early on. Pastel grey, blue, mauve and pink, are repeated throughout this 1939 wardrobe, and which he continued to use throughout the war and beyond.

## 4.9. The Interpretation and Making-up of Hartnell's Designs by Workroom Staff

Chapter Two has established that the history of a couture house cannot be read purely through that of the figure head designer as 'genius', and interviews with staff have illustrated that their role in the realisation of his designs and the translation of his eye into the finished garment is of key importance to the Hartnell story. Hartnell had a skilled eye for colour and texture, which was reflected in his choices of textile, colour and embellishment. He also established early on which styles and embellishments 'worked' best in terms of their useability and saleability, as is evident in his house style. It has also been established in this chapter that Hartnell was aided by assistant designers and sketch artists, and that these men and women remained for the most part anonymous.

However, it was not only the designers and sketchers that were important members of the Hartnell team, those involved in the making-up of Hartnell

garments were also vital rings in the chain of design and production. Although these staff members were acknowledged in many magazine and newspaper articles about the house, the creative hierarchy was always maintained by differentiating between the artist (Hartnell) and the workroom staff. Typed notes on the back of a photograph of Hartnell's 'model girls' preparing for a dress show in 1947 reflect the perpetuation of the myth of the genius designer and the head over the hand, stating that: 'On the rack are the new season's collection of gowns. Five hundred dresses, worth anything up to a quarter of a million pounds, they represent six months brain work for Hartnell, six months finger work for his staff.'<sup>541</sup> An examination of the development of a Hartnell design has shown that far from just being 'finger work', the interpretation of his ideas and two dimensional designs involved staff input at all levels and that the contribution of these (mostly) women was key to the realisation of each model.

Hartnell's staff, although the hidden, unrecognised force behind the Hartnell brand, were key to his success. Therefore any analysis of the development of Hartnell's designs would not be complete without an overview of the staff hierarchy and a consideration and appraisal of the work done by his loyal workroom staff and the part they played in the design decisions and making-up of each couture model and royal dress at the house.

#### ***4.9.1. Hartnell Workrooms, Working Conditions and Contribution of Key Staff***

An overview of the internal workings of the premises, the number of workrooms and the way these rooms were equipped and furnished, provides the setting and context for the production of Hartnell's designs. Coupled with oral testimonies from the staff that occupied these rooms, a clearer sense of the conditions for the development of his designs from croquis to finished garment can be developed. Little is known about his first premises at 10, Bruton Street other than what was written in his 1955 memoir. There are no visual representations of the premises inside or out in the Archive. The building was bombed during the war and no longer exists. Norman Hartnell's second premises, 26 Bruton Street, Mayfair, occupied from 1934 to 1992 by the fashion house, comprised six floors including a basement, which housed the staff

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<sup>541</sup> 'More like a theatre dressing room, the models room is purely utility.' Zanton Photographs © Mirror Features. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 13/29.

canteen and kitchen, various offices, workrooms, fitting rooms and showrooms and also Hartnell's personal flat and Director's office, known as the *Empire Room*. (Figure 4.115). The house also extended into Bruton Mews behind, where further workrooms including the embroidery workroom were housed. (Figure 4.116). Photographs of the building both inside and out taken between 1934 and the present day provide an idea of both the working conditions in which the impeccably made garments were made-up and the opposing glamour of the environment in which they were promoted and purchased, discussed in the following chapter.

A valuation and inventory of the contents of the Hartnell premises was undertaken in 1965. This provides a clear picture of the internal space describing the contents and purpose of each room in the house at that time. On the top floor, the attic rooms of the premises seen in the 1953 photograph, was situated the furrier's workroom, the top floor office, the alteration room for the Petit Salon (the ready-to-wear line introduced in 1963 sold in the ground floor boutique), the drying room and passage and the telephone room. One treadle sewing machine and two overlocking fur machines and a selection of deal tables, workbenches and stick back chairs underneath fluorescent strip lighting were provided for the furrier's workroom staff.<sup>542</sup> The flooring comprised of either brown or green lino, and a selection of dressmakers dummies, electric irons and hanging rails, shelves and cupboards and 'sundry cleaning equipment' is listed. The office had a 'single element electric fire', and the furrier's workroom 'a 9-burner gas fire in modern metal case.' There was no heating in the alteration room or the drying passage.<sup>543</sup>

The watercolour painting of the outside of the eighteenth century town house in figure 4.115 was executed some time before 1963 when Hartnell had opened his ready-to-wear boutique, Le Petit Salon, on the ground floor of the building, but sometime after 1953 when the exterior of the building was still unpainted.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>542</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Unboxed. Valuation of Furniture, Fittings, Fixtures, Chandeliers, Mirrors and Decorations, The Property of Norman Hartnell limited, Bruton Street, London, W.1. and other addresses. L.S. Harris & Co. Ltd. Valuers. 83-86 Crawford Street. London W.1. 21/06/1965: 1.

<sup>543</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Unboxed. Valuation of Furniture, Fittings, Fixtures, Chandeliers, Mirrors and Decorations, The Property of Norman Hartnell limited, Bruton Street, London, W.1. and other addresses. L.S. Harris & Co. Ltd. Valuers. 83-86 Crawford Street. London W.1. 21/06/1965: 1-6.

<sup>544</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 11/S/Original Watercolour Painting of the façade of 26 Bruton Street, Mayfair, London W.1. 26cms x 9cms.

(Figure 4.117). Behind this façade at the peak of Hartnell's success in the early 1950s all six floors were given over to Hartnell's couture business. The actual position of the various workrooms and the fitters in charge at any one time has been difficult to establish. The very few surviving photographs of the workrooms are often at odds with the oral testimonies of those that worked in them, and workrooms move about within the interior architecture of the building depending on the period of time during the history of the house.

Seemingly fixed over time however, the third floor housed a large dressmaking workroom, which was situated next to Hartnell's private apartment. The fitter assigned to this workroom between the mid 1930s and 1950 was Mademoiselle Germaine Davide (known as Mam'selle), who had joined Hartnell's whilst the business was based at 10 Bruton Street during the 1920s. She can be seen in figure 4.118 standing beside 'model girl' Avril in 1944. Doris was her second. Miss Alice took over Mam'selle's workroom in the early fifties before the Coronation in 1953 and Anne Wright joined the workroom under Mam'selle in 1947 and later in the early 1950s she became Miss Alice's second.<sup>545</sup>

Another important fitter was Madame Isabelle who was responsible for daywear during the period Mam'selle was at Hartnell's. Mam'selle's workroom was responsible for the big evening gowns including Her Majesty the Queen's wedding dress in 1947. Madame Isabelle's workroom was on the second floor. After Mam'selle left, Madame Emillienne took over the making of big evening dresses and ran the third dressmaking workroom on the ground floor at the rear of the building. The contents of the second floor rear workroom, revealed also in figure 4.119, are listed in the 1965 inventory that reads as follows:

14 fluorescent strip lights, chokes and starters, canopy suspended shades, 38 stickback chairs, 6 deal worktables, 3 deal work tables fitted drawers, 2 electric convector fire in gilt metal case, a singers electric treadle sewing machine, 45 dummies, 3 ironing boards, 3 sleeve boards, 3 electric irons, 15 flat irons, gas iron heating plate, 3 burner gas heater for irons, 9 hat blocks and 24 chrome and wood hat stands.<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording

<sup>546</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Unboxed. Valuation of Furniture, Fittings, Fixtures, Chandeliers, Mirrors and Decorations, The Property of Norman Hartnell limited, Bruton Street, London, W.1. and other addresses. L.S. Harris & Co. Ltd. Valuers. 83-86 Crawford Street. London W.1. 21/06/1965: 28.

This list underlines the utilitarian nature of the workrooms and photographs indicate that the contents of these rooms did not change between the 1930s and 1960s. Kirstie Buckland worked as a junior in this workroom under fitter Madame Emilienne between 1948 and 1949<sup>547</sup> remembered her brief time at Hartnell's writing that:

I was allocated to Mme. Emilienne's dressmaking room as the lowest junior, and I had much more fun than anyone else in that workroom. While they sat rooted to hard chairs at trestle tables under strip lights in an almost unconverted garage, sewing day after day for nearly nine hours with a half-hour lunch break and a ten minute breather morning and afternoon – I ran errands up and down stairs.<sup>548</sup>

Along with her description of the stark working conditions, she describes being responsible for Mme Emelienne's appointment book, and moving between the workrooms and the 'sumptuous sales areas' as she collected fabrics and sewing materials from the stock room. She also helped the model girls prepare for the regular 3 o'clock dress shows, which were held for invited clients in order that they might chose from the current collection. Buckland outlines the workroom hierarchy, as she understood it as the most junior occupant:

Two cutters, Doris and Flo, had their tables at one end of the room, hands and their assistants sat in two rows of trestle tables down the middle and Mme's personal lair was a walled off area at the far end. When she was with us total silence reigned, no chatting allowed. For a room of almost forty workers, there was one electric sewing machine and one electric iron for finishing – while most was hand sewn, everything else was done using treadle machines and flat irons heated on gas rings.<sup>549</sup>

Anne Wright supports Buckland's account of the strictness of the workroom regime and the uncomfortable working conditions in which Hartnell couture was produced, stating that:

I know I used to sag by the end of the day, because it was a long day and the chairs were quite hard. The second of the workroom – Doris – she used to come round and tap me on the back with a ruler and told me to hold my back up, but not only me, well we had to learn to over-sew and keep it regular, you know, you couldn't go one up and one down one long and one short, you see? And it was a long day and the workrooms were quite cold. Started at eight in the morning and we finished at five. And if we were three minutes late clocking

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<sup>547</sup> Letter to Mrs Price (Secretary) from Kirstie Buckland 9<sup>th</sup> November 1983. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive.

<sup>548</sup> Kirstie Buckland. *Norman Hartnell's Couture House From the Bottom 1948-1949*. Unpublished essay received via email 19 September 2008: 1.

<sup>549</sup> Kirstie Buckland. *Norman Hartnell's Couture House From the Bottom 1948-1949*. Unpublished essay received via email 19 September 2008: 1.

in we got stopped a quarter of an hour's money. And we did not get much – I think I got thirty shillings.<sup>550</sup>

Wright's description of Mam'selle draws parallels with Buckland's description of Madam Emelienne. Both women reportedly controlled their workrooms through their strong personalities and using their own rules, seemingly operating in separate spheres away from the front of house and the gaze of 'Bossy' Hartnell and 'the gaffer' Mitchison.<sup>551</sup> According to Wright, Mam'selle 'had her own ideas' stating that:

She didn't work to a proper regime, you know, she would cut up her vegetables and get the dinner ready in the workroom amongst all the beautiful expensive cloth – yes, and yet if anything went wrong you were to blame! It had to go to the cleaners and have the part cleaned. And she wasn't very – the pins were any old how – they were almost dropped out before she handed it to you, so you had to sort of use your own imagination to a certain degree.<sup>552</sup>

Betty Foster, who worked in Mam'selle's workroom from 1944, explained the role of the fitter and her hands, stating that 'Mam'selle did the cutting from the sketch and the hand, or second, Mam'selle's assistant had to make it work'.<sup>553</sup> Wright explained that Mam'selle would take the sketched design from Hartnell and often would then pass it on to her second, Doris, to cut the toile. The toile would be used to create the paper pattern pieces. Wright also described how a model would be made up for a specific client, explaining that there was more to the job than just being 'a seamstress':

First of all you would build the stand up to the clients figure – you see people don't realise – that's a work of art again – that's a work of art – that had to be done. And then people turn round and call you a seamstress! So it wasn't as quick as that, and in fact some of the things could be boring that you had to do.<sup>554</sup>

Lengths of fabric often also had to be manipulated for a particular design before the pattern pieces were cut, for example wool had to be pre-shrunk, which involved:

four girls holding it while the fifth girl was underneath with the iron putting it into shape. And you had to have a damp cloth if it was

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<sup>550</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording.

<sup>551</sup> Mara Levy. Personal Interview. 7 May 2010. NHOH/2010/13/Digital Recording. Levy referred to George Mitchison as 'the gaffer' and to Norman Hartnell as her 'dear Bossy' throughout her interview, stating that it was Mitchison who ultimately controlled Hartnell and was in charge of all business affairs at the house.

<sup>552</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording.

<sup>553</sup> Betty Foster, Telephone Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

<sup>554</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording.

wool – and then we had gas irons, they were not electric. I remember because I’m left handed, they wouldn’t turn the ironing board round for me. I had to learn to do it with the right hand. And then the gas irons – sometimes if you left them too long and then they cooled and you had to put them on the gas ring – they were horrible, but that’s how we worked.<sup>555</sup>

Also, Wright explained: ‘if you worked on an item that was chiffon – we had a lady, Miss Eynham, if it was a tucked chiffon dress or evening gown she would machine tuck it before it was cut.’ (Figure 4.120).

Wright and Foster reveal the high level of skill and ingenuity needed by workroom staff in order to translate Hartnell’s sketches and ideas into three-dimensional, wearable garments that ‘worked’. A further example from Wright underlines this, when she explained that:

I can remember making a dress for a tour that Princess Margaret and the Queen and Queen Mother was going to go on. And it was organza and it had those cotton daisies, and they’re quite heavy, we had to put those on in the design onto the skirt and of course it kept dropping – yes, it dropped at all angles – so it took a long time.<sup>556</sup>

The technical difficulties that lay behind Hartnell’s designs and ideas had to be overcome by his workroom staff through their own ingenuity, illustrating their impact on the design process. As Wright summed up: ‘he did the drawing and his ideas, but we had to make them work - it was how you cut the cloth, you see?’ Embroideress Maureen Markham, present during my interview with Wright agreed, remarking: ‘they call it ‘designer license’ don’t they?’ What has become clear when interviewing workroom staff is that these women who made Hartnell’s designs ‘work’, are well aware of the highly skilled contribution they made towards the development of his designs and feel underappreciated, whilst still remaining loyal to Hartnell and respecting his expertise as a designer. As Wright summed up: ‘ it fidgets me when people say you were a seamstress because seamstress just run up – like curtain making.’<sup>557</sup>

Hartnell’s had a separate tailoring workroom where the women’s two-piece suits and coats were made. Hartnell’s tailor during the Second World War and into the early 1950s was John Driscoll, known as Monsieur John. (Figure 1.36). In Hartnell’s 1955 memoir he also notes the names of his ‘famous tailors,

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<sup>555</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording.

<sup>556</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording.

<sup>557</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording.

Signor Rossi and Monsieur François' who were apparently working at Hartnell's by the mid 1950s.<sup>558</sup>

#### ***4.9.2. Translation of Hartnell's Designs by Workroom Staff: A Case Study of the Embroidery Workroom***

Of all the workrooms at the house the embroidery workroom reflected Hartnell's signature look and house style more than any other. His was the only in-house embroidery atelier in the history of British couture. As stated, Hartnell's eye for colour and textiles is best examined via his embroidery designing in action. As an example of how the ideas for an embroidery design came to him inspired by his chosen fabric and colour, and of staff loyalty and appreciation of his talent as a designer, sketch artist Rusty Lewis remembered the development of one particular model during the ten years that she worked as a sketch artist for Hartnell. She explained that:

He would say sometimes to Ian, can I just take Miss Rusty up to Edie, and we would go up to the embroidery, and Maureen was quite high up, I think she was second to Edie, and I can remember him, and I've never forgotten this, this has stayed in my mind. He got a roll of chiffon under his arm - where's that bag? It was a chiffon (she gets a piece of green floral print chiffon out of the bag), he gave me this and I've never done anything with it. Imagine a piece of chiffon like this and instead of having pink flowers on it had mauve and white lilac on a pale, limey green background, it was absolutely beautiful, and he put it down like this, like this, and he said, 'Edie, get me some (the names of the different types of beads and sequin) in the colours that would go on this, and she shook some out into a little bowl ...the tiny like little lids of the different colours and he threw some down on the material and he just pushed them onto the flowers and he said 'Edie, can you see what I'm getting at?' and when the dress was made, I never actually wore it, but one of the other girls was wearing it at the time I was doing some modelling, and it was a long dress, no waist just clingy, but the skirt just fluted out. It was encrusted in the embroidery, on the lilac, these lovely heads of lilac, with the different colours of mauve and kind of pearly and whatever and gradually got less and less and as it got down to about here (indicating) it just was material just fluting out, but the way he put these with his fingers, I've never forgotten that.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 80.

<sup>559</sup> Rusty Lewis. Personal Interview. 11 June 2010.NHOH/2010/15/Digital Recording.

Lewis's explanation illustrates that designing and making-up were inseparable as the embroidery staff were called upon to interpret Hartnell's ideas, although he would have final approval.

In Bruton Mews the embroidery workroom was on the first floor and the tailoring workroom was above this on the second. Edie Duley (Miss Edie) was head of the embroidery workroom and worked on both the Queen's wedding dress of 1947 and the Coronation dress of 1953. Embroideress Maureen Markham also remembered the pattern hands, the 'girls' who would work on the samples of embroidery before they were incorporated into the finished garments. Elsie Hart was one of 'eight older girls' who had been at Hartnell's since before the war and she and Markham worked together across a frame for a decade from 1955. Figure 4.121 of the embroidery room taken in the latter part of the 1930s shows Edie Duley (standing) and Elsie Hart (floral overalls) discussing a design over a frame to the right of the picture. Later in 1944, Duley poses for the camera to the left of the picture with her team of 'eight older girls' described by Markham. Pictures of the royal family including Queen Elizabeth, for whom the embroideresses worked on hundreds of garments, decorate the workroom walls along with a map of the world. (Figure 4.116).

The women in Miss Edie's workroom worked on the dolls' dresses for the Latin American Costume Exhibition in 1943, which offer up examples of Hartnell's wartime colours and embroidery patterns. (Figures 4.122 & 4.123). The surviving doll, Bolivia, found in the attic of Mitchison's house shows the type of goods Hartnell already had in his stockroom at the outbreak of war. Pictures of Bolivia's dolls dress being made-up from the press cutting book pertaining to the exhibition show the pieces of each dress cut out by Mam'selle stitched to the frame with beading taking place as examples of couture in miniature during times of austerity. (Figures 4.124 & 4.125). The original sketch of Bolivia by Hartnell stands in the background. The programme for the exhibition included sound bites taken from international press reports. *The Manchester Guardian* 18<sup>th</sup> January 1944 wrote of the exhibition:

This exhibition of twenty figurines, corresponding to and according with the characters of the twenty Latin-American countries, serves art and industry, diplomacy, education and charity – for its beneficiary is the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families' Association – at one and the same time. Mr. Hartnell has given the

better part of a year to the creation of these lovely miniature figures and their superb costuming.<sup>560</sup>

And *The San Francisco Examiner* 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1943 “Norman Hartnell devoted eight months of research to the color [sic], symbols, embroideries and details of every costume”.<sup>561</sup>

In 1955, Maureen Markham joined the house direct from London’s Barrett Street Trade School. At that time she remembered that there were, ‘three dressmaking rooms, two tailoring rooms and a large embroidery room – we had about twenty five girls in those days – yes...and a furriers, and of course there was the model room.’<sup>562</sup> Markham continued to describe the layout of the house locating herself within the interior architecture and the house hierarchy within the context of the shifting fortunes of the fashion house thus:

There was one workroom on the ground floor and our embroidery room was down the mews, opposite the Guinea Pub, dead opposite there. We were on the first floor and the tailoring room was upstairs. There was Miss Alice’s workroom (originally Mam’selle’s), she was up near Hartnell’s flat right at the top and Madame Isabelle’s room was on the – about the first floor up above the stockroom. The stockroom was on the ground floor. It was a huge room in those days and it ended up smaller and smaller because all of a sudden they couldn’t afford to keep the rooms down in the mews it got too expensive so we had to move back into the main building and we went in with Madame Emelienne’s workroom. Didn’t work out very well, it was too cramped. The thing is we always had to have large frames.<sup>563</sup>

Rusty Lewis’s example of Hartnell pushing beads around on a piece of printed chiffon was the kind of beadwork that did not need a sketched design. A more formal design however would be designed and painted onto paper by Miss May or Miss Edie, often in black and white, for the ‘pattern hands’ to follow. The embroidery design was then sketched out onto tracing paper, and the ‘goods’ chosen. The design would be ‘pounced’ or pricked through paper onto the fabric for the embroideresses to work in beads or other ‘goods’. This did not always

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<sup>560</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 1/LAC/1943/2. Press book with cuttings taken from British newspapers reporting the Latin American Costume Exhibition tour of the country between 1943 and 1945 and Anglo-Latin American Costume Exhibition Programme. Box 1/LAC.3 Anglo Latin American Exhibition Programme.

<sup>561</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 1/LAC/1943/2. Press book with cuttings taken from British newspapers reporting the Latin American Costume Exhibition tour of the country between 1943 and 1945 and Anglo-Latin American Costume Exhibition Programme. Box 1/LAC.3 Anglo Latin American Exhibition Programme.

<sup>562</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording

<sup>563</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

happen, as re-embroidering onto lace was more freely done and techniques such as vermicelli were executed by eye.

The pattern hands would make up the sample as seen in figure 4.126, which shows a design worked over the seam of contrasting colours – a signature device of Hartnell’s and as the crinoline in figure 4.4 at the start of this chapter illustrates. Markham explained the working relationship between Hartnell and the embroidery workroom:

He gave the idea and then we had our own embroidery designer, one that drew the drawings was a Miss May and Edie the head of the workroom and Miss May – they used to do the drawing. They helped design the Queen’s Coronation dress. He gave the rough idea – he knew roughly what goods he wanted on them and then they would start to draw something and then it would be given to the eight older girls in the workroom – they were pattern hands really – they would do the embroidery sample.<sup>564</sup>

According to Markham the embroidery was carried out first onto the pieces of the garment after they had been cut out and these pieces were stretched on a frame. After the embroidery had been executed onto these pieces then they were tacked together to make-up the garment for the second fitting of the dress. Subsequent to the third and final fitting, the garment was stitched together seams were then embroidered over where necessary. As Markham confirmed:

The dresses were always fitted before we’d bead. They had the first fitting of the actual dress, and then they would take it to bits again, because it was only tacked together, and then we put it into the frame, so it always had to go flat. After the second fitting, the seams would be embroidered over to complete the design, usually by hand, or if it is very big you can try and balance it on the frame as much as possible and then hopefully it ‘goes home’ – always had three fittings.<sup>565</sup>

### ***4.9.3. Signature Motifs, Techniques and Colours in Embroidery***

Over one hundred small embroidery samples linked to fashion collections and royal dresses between the 1940s and 1979 survive in the Archive. These reflect the colours, patterns and techniques repeated over time at the house. During an interview, images of several samples were discussed with Markham, casting

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<sup>564</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

<sup>565</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

light on the styles favoured by Hartnell and providing insight into the skill needed to execute the different techniques used.

Possibly the earliest example is a sample worked in glass bugle beads executed as early as the late 1930s in raised-work in green leaf shapes. Markham explained that they did a lot of this type of work throughout the decades: ‘We padded it and then you do the beads over the top – bugled round the edge.’ (Figure 4.127). Evidence in the form of embroidery samples, garments in the Hartnell-Mitchison dress collections and sketched designs also indicate that Hartnell enjoyed white beaded embroidery designs, particularly onto blue fabric. (Figure 4.128). Markham confirmed this, stating that ‘we used to do an awful lot of white beading – Mr Hartnell loved the white beading. He used to say they made “good bread and butter numbers” you know – not everybody wants the big flamboyant ones but you can always wear just a little bit of beading.’<sup>566</sup> (Figures 4.129 & 4.130). Blue was a colour he considered ‘lady like.’

There are a great deal of samples embroidered in geometrical shapes worked in goods, sequins and clamped jewels<sup>567</sup> in the collection, and Markham explained that ‘We used to do a lot of these triangle diamond shapes on the cocktail and evening gowns.’ (Figures 4.131 & 4.132). All types of fabrics were embroidered onto, from wool to chiffon, including wild silk and velvets. (Figures 4.133 & 4.134). These different weights of textile used required different techniques, for example, when embroidering chiffon, the material had to be backed with net which ‘reinforces it and sort of holds it you know otherwise just beading on chiffon would just go yuk, you know, but with that net on the back it helps hold it and gives it more body to bead.’ (Figure 4.135).

Markham used a particular language or terminology to describe various types of motifs and goods that were commonly used, and also the technological difficulties encountered in their making-up, for example: ‘We used to do an awful lot of ‘brick work’ – you would start off alright, but when you get to the bends you used to really lose it’ and ‘I used to love the beetle wing beads and

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<sup>566</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

<sup>567</sup> A ‘clamped jewel’ is usually a solid glass ‘jewel’ that is fixed to a claw that is pushed through from the reverse side of the fabric and the jewel is then ‘clamped’ in place and the claws are fixed over the jewel. This technique either replaces stitching beads onto the fabric or can be worked alongside stitched beads to create a design.

sequins...that's a ribbon lace, very nice because you haven't got to wait for that to be 'designed out', you just work on it.' (Figures 4.136 & 4.137).<sup>568</sup> Sequins were worked in chevron shapes, and sequins could be stitched on upside down to catch the light differently. Jewels were clamped, particularly on royal crinolines and stage-wear and small bugle beads stitched on in random, 'wiggly' lines, called 'vermicelli', to produce an all over embroidered effect. (Figures 4.138, 4.139 & 4.140). Throughout the interview, Markham referred to many of these samples as 'a typical Hartnell'.<sup>569</sup>

A popular model in a collection might be reproduced several times over for various clients, and this applied to embroidered garments too. Markham explained that 'we didn't only do one model you know, once it went into the collection. There was a dress once, it was called *Arachne* we did twenty-one orders on it.'<sup>570 571</sup> Hartnell's 'signature trims' (discussed in section 4.9) were also executed by his embroidery staff as Markham recalled: 'we used to do an awful lot of those draped fringing dresses, they were very complicated. Now, Elsie I worked with, she was very, very good at the fringing one with the cord in – brilliant at it. I could do this straight bit, but I wasn't very good on the – where it goes all round.'<sup>572</sup> Plain coloured silks were often combined and overworked with contrasting embroidery, for example black velvet with pink silk c1960s. Hartnell also mixed textures together for effect such as silk velvet and wild silk. (Figures 4.141 & 4.142).

Maureen explained that by 1979 she was the only embroideress at Hartnell's, therefore the last dress, *Peach Melba* was embroidered by her using the vermicelli technique, which involved tamboured sequins stitched on in a wiggly pattern like long, curly pasta. She explained 'you just go round and round - you can do it close or you can spread it out.' (Figure 4.143).

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<sup>568</sup> This 'ribbon was 'couched', or stitched onto the fabric.

<sup>569</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

<sup>570</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

<sup>571</sup> Hartnell studied Greek mythology and many of the names for his models came from these stories -Arachne was the weaver who was turned into a spider by Athene.

<sup>572</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

#### ***4.9.4. Royal Embroideries***

Royal embroidery designs were created using the traditional colours and symbolic patterns representative of the national identity of the country where the clothes were to be worn. The coronation dress for Elizabeth II is the most celebrated example of this. Paper pattern pieces for the dress survive in the Archive, with the embroidery designs pounced through the paper pieces, leaving chalked holes pricked all over the pieces where the designs were pricked through onto the silk satin. The original embroidery hoops with each individual motif representing each country in the Commonwealth embroidered onto small pieces of the satin also survive. (Figure 4.144).

Other techniques were used to manipulate the fabric decoratively which were particularly favoured by Hartnell's royal clients such as the examples seen in figure 4.145. As Markham explained, 'the Queen Mother used to have an awful lot of this. You put two bits of material and you do blanket stitch in lines – button hole stitch in a strip, two bits of material and then we used to mount it onto a bit of cardboard...the Queen Mother used to love that sort of thing'. A Hartnell designed, plain day dress and coat ensemble for Queen Elizabeth during the 1930s and 1940s was often made luxurious by manipulating the material used, such as silk crêpe or fine wool by tucking or embellishing with ribbon work in various techniques, as swatches of fabric and sketched designs for the 1939 royal tour of North America and Canada illustrate. (Figures 4.146 & 4.147).

Hartnell also associated particular motifs and goods with individual royal clients such as the floral motifs often used on gowns for Princess Margaret including the gown made by Hartnell for her sister's coronation in 1953 (figures 4.148 & 4.149), and the pink sample given to Rusty Lewis by Hartnell. The fern was often embroidered onto gowns for the Queen Mother. (Figure 4.150). The Queen herself wore many gowns embroidered with motifs associated with the countries visited such as the cherry blossom gown made for her state visit to Japan in 1975, and the maple leaf gown for her state visit to Canada in 1957 and the bee for the state visit to Paris in 1957 in the 'Flowers of the Fields of France' dress. (Figure 4.151).

## 4.10. Conclusion

What has become clear from this account of the running of a London couture house is that his skilled staff enabled Hartnell to realise his couture designs and British royal clothes, for which he was internationally celebrated. Interviews with the ‘workroom girls’, who interpreted his designs and reproduced them in three-dimensional form, fitting to the bodies of his customers, reveal a deep respect and affection for the designer, but also an understanding that they too played a major role in dressing his royal clients and creating his fashion collections. It is now clear that his loyal staff also made garments (either with or without their knowledge) for the Norman Hartnell, referred to rather tellingly, as ‘Mrs Freeman’ in the workbooks.<sup>573</sup>

Also, by carefully unpacking each stage of the development of a Hartnell couture design from fabric to fashion drawing, a clear idea of the fixed, three signature looks, and five signature decorative embellishment have emerged. The colours he preferred, the ways in which he used colours together, his favoured types of embellishment, particularly the beaded embroidery for which he was so famous, and his use of fur and feathers and flowers as signature trims, have been discussed in terms of his own taste and identity and his designers ‘eye’, confirming that he transferred his taste onto the bodies of his clients, especially Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. As discussed in Chapter Two, Hartnell’s cross-dressing in pastel colours and delicate embroidery reveals his feminine taste.

Close study of his memoir has revealed that he also fought tensions in his design practice between the production of extreme feminine taste that he favoured, and the production of ‘bread and butter numbers’<sup>574</sup> that his conventional female clientele would purchase. The sketched designs and garments in the Archive indicate that these extreme feminine styles can be defined by the soft fabrics, cut and colours used by Hartnell that included the crinoline style, with the fitted bodice and full skirt, eventuating the woman’s waistline, the delicate tulle and chiffon fabrics and the tendency to favour shades of mauve, pink and blue from pastels to hot pinks. This signature or ‘character’ subsequently became the brand of the house and is present in the

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<sup>573</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording. Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording.

<sup>574</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Digital Recording.

clothes designed and made under the brand name. In particular, his taste in colour and embellishment was transferred into styles for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth who apparently shared his taste. The soft fabrics and pastel colours became the hallmark of Queen Elizabeth's style - a look that remains what she is remembered for today.

Close study of Hartnell's three key designs through sketches and photographs has found that these stock styles, originally designed for his first collection in 1924,<sup>575</sup> were fixed by the late 1940s, and the couture made soft tailored coat and dress ensemble, the full-length sheath dress and jacket/coat and the crinoline gown were reworked and reproduced as key models in every collection until his death. Hartnell had settled into reproducing collections in this house style, and these looks had clear roots. His dress and coat ensembles were rooted in his designs for Queen Elizabeth in the late 1930s, his beaded sheath dresses or 'mermaid line' gowns were rooted in his designs for London's West End spectacular Wartime shows, and his crinoline gowns were rooted in his Winterhalter designs for Queen Elizabeth, made in Mam'selle David's workroom. Therefore the key role that his designing for Queen Elizabeth had on his fashion designing cannot be underestimated.

Figure 1.37 of Hartnell with his house model girl Cynthia Holberhozer, the man in the mirror looks at Holberhozer as she looks out at her own reflection. She wears his signature design – a beaded sheath dress and fur trimmed coat. It is my thesis that Hartnell dressed his clients, in particular his British royal clients, in couture garments in which he would like to have dressed himself.

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<sup>575</sup> See section 4.2.3.

## Chapter Five

### House style and signature looks: Hartnell's signature looks over time represented in couture collections and royal dressing, 1921 – 1979.

#### 5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter investigated the development of a Hartnell design from his first pencil sketch through to his choice of fashion textile, colour and embellishment establishing that these elements of his work together made up what can be recognised as his house style. Amongst the staple 'bread and butter' signature ensembles designed by Hartnell, three key styles have been identified. Firstly the tailored dress/suit and coat ensemble for day wear, secondly the full-length, 'mermaid line' or sheath style evening dress and jacket/coat ensemble, epitomized by his theatrical designs in the nineteen thirties and forties, and thirdly the full-length crinoline in either plain silk, velvet or tulle, decorated with beaded embroidery, associated with his royal dressing.

The aim of this chapter is to examine closely examples of these styles across the seasons and decades using a selective approach to Hartnell's collections, stage work and royal dressing. Evidence that Hartnell developed a clearly recognisable house style will be established through examples of these particular signature garments and ensembles. This chapter will also debate the presence of his identity in these clothes and analyse the tension between Hartnell's preference for delicacy and feminine taste in colour, textile and decoration and the economic necessity to produce plain, smart wearable tailored clothes for this conservative clientele.

A reading of Hartnell's biography, his 'designer's statements',<sup>576</sup> within the context of interviews with staff, has dismantled the myth of the Hartnell, the designer as genius. Therefore this house style needs to be understood as being produced at the house of Hartnell, but not the work and responsibility entirely of the designer but produced, as already discussed through the collaboration of his

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<sup>576</sup> Adrian Forty. "Design, Designers and the Literature of Design." *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986): 239.

team of skilled staff including assistant designers, fitters and seconds, a process familiar in other trades as Adrian Forty notes.<sup>577</sup> These people enabled the realisation of Hartnell's ideas, some of which were sketched in pencil and some of which were relayed verbally and through demonstration. Chapter Four addressed the issue of how his taste and his ideas were translated by his staff (particularly assistant designers), however the colours, textiles, embellishments used and the original idea for the garment were Hartnell's, and once the garment had been made up, he had the final approval. In this way the couture produced was 'signed off' by him, and therefore handed back to him to present as his fashion design work, which carried his sign both in terms of the signature, house style and the Hartnell label stitched inside.<sup>578</sup>

Hartnell's feminine persona is understood here through photographic portraits of him dressed as a woman in 1921, his use of make-up and his wearing of women's clothing in styles specific to him made up in the workrooms of his couture house. The colours, textiles and embellishment, chosen for his own use, represented his taste and his 'designer's eye'. It is a key argument of this research that his persona and taste was reflected in or impacted on his royal dressing and his fashion designs. Oral testimony undertaken for this thesis has illustrated that this aspect of Hartnell's identity was well understood by staff at all levels. The ways in which he performed this identity and his feminine taste, associated with his male to female blurred gendered subjectivity, can be subsequently read through the clothes he designed.

### ***5.1.1. Signature Clothes for Couture Customers***

My previous research (2006) assessed Hartnell's couture work between 1939 and 1947, comparing original sketched designs in the Hartnell, for what I had identified as his three main client groups in the Archive. I established that Hartnell dressed all three client groups in the same three key signature ensembles discussed here. The dress and coat, the full-length mermaid-line, sheath dress and the crinoline were styles that he adapted according to the

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<sup>577</sup> Forty, *Objects of Desire*, 239.

<sup>578</sup> The significance of Hartnell's signature as trademark and the woven label will be discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis.

context in which they were worn and the client who wore them using different colours, accessories and slight variations in length.<sup>579</sup>

The designs for the production *The Battling Butler* in 1922, referred to in the previous chapter, demonstrate that Hartnell's signature looks and house style were fixed from the before his fashion house was established. Despite the slow shifting fashions in hemlines and silhouettes, this house style based on Hartnell's three signature ensembles never wavered. For the purposes of this thesis the definition of a collection here includes dress designed by Hartnell in series, designed at the same moment in time for one specific event, such as a theatrical production, a British royal tour overseas or one of Hartnell's twice yearly, seasonal fashion collections. In all of these collections, garments are inspired and imagined by Hartnell with a selection of issues and 'jobs' in mind. They might be for a particular client for a particular public event and were never designed in a void of unreality as the group of models from Hartnell's Spring/Summer collection 1953 seen in figure 5.1 shows. Hartnell's favourite model girl Jane Chorley wears a full-length crinoline in organza with sequinned decoration, Dolores (seated left) wears a tailored silk print day dress and Thelma (seated right) a light, wool tailored suit.

When developing couture collections Hartnell considered the women's colouring, the context in which the garments were to be worn and what others around her would be wearing (for royal public appearances in terms of colour, such as military uniforms, foreign flags etc. or for theatrical productions, stage lighting, backdrop, what the rest of the cast are wearing). He would also be aware of what role or job the women would be performing whilst wearing the garment. When choosing the fabrics from which to make the garments, he had to take account of what the weather might be like when the garments were to be worn. When Queen Elizabeth visited North America and Canada in 1939, the "Draft Itinerary of Their Majesties' Tour in Canada and U.S.A." Buckingham Palace provided Hartnell with the temperatures and weather conditions possible in each city and region visited in Canada so that he could design an ensemble suitable for the Queen to wear. For example, on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, a visit to Toronto

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<sup>579</sup> Jane Hattrick. "From Glamour Drag to Royal Dress: Performance and Spectacle in the Work of the London Couturier, Norman Hartnell: 1934-1947." MA Diss. University of Brighton, 2006:108.

might be ‘not as warm as Ottawa, but it ought to be like a warm May day in London’, and in Winnipeg on May 24<sup>th</sup> ‘anything from melting snow to hot day.’<sup>580</sup> As already discussed in Chapter Four, when designing fashionable couture to be worn on stage, Hartnell would pay close attention to what part the actress was playing and how her costume assisted the narrative of the play. He designed to fit couture ensembles into the setting of an ambassador’s ball, lunch in town, the races at Ascot, and presentation at court for example, and was always aware of the background colour and lighting with regards to public appearances by royal women as for stage productions.

The three signature styles that will be now traced for the first time are the soft tailored dress and coat ensemble, the slim sheath evening dress and jacket and the crinoline gown.

## 5.2. The Soft Tailored Coat and Dress Ensemble

The first signature style identified in Chapter Four was the dress and coat ensemble. These garments would have been made in different workrooms using different techniques. The workroom in which the garments were made depended to some extent, on the season, for example, heavy woollens and tweeds were used to make tailored coats and suits for the autumn and winter collections, light wool and plain silks were used for spring/summer ensembles. Both types of daywear are discussed here. The tailored suits and coats for autumn/winter were made-up in the tailoring workroom run by a male tailor, and the soft-tailored dress and coat ensembles were made-up in the second floor, rear dressmaking workshop run by, for example Madame Isabelle, who was the head of this workroom between 1947-1957, however the coats for these ensembles were often made-up in the tailoring workroom.<sup>581</sup> In some cases, the coat might have been made-up in the tailoring workroom and the dress in the dressmaking workroom. From the mid-1950s Hartnell’s produced mostly soft-tailored garments, and these were made-up in the tailoring workroom.<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> Hartnell-Mitichison Archive. Box 15/File 3/Paperwork pertaining to the royal tour of North America and Canada by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, May-June 1939.

<sup>581</sup> See Chapter Four, section 4.10.1.

<sup>582</sup> Conversation with Maureen Markham, September 5 2011.

### 5.2.1. *Tailor-mades at Hartnell's*

The House of Hartnell is not famous for its woollen tailoring tailored suits but overcoats in woollens and tweeds were a staple of Hartnell collections throughout his career, and Hartnell's had its own in-house tailoring workroom. Hartnell's tailor during the Second World War and into the early 1950s was John Driscoll, known as Monsieur John. Figure 5.2 shows Driscoll in the tailoring workroom in 1944 with a staff of 12 women working at the same 'deal tables' and sitting on the 'stick back' chairs that furnished the dressmaking workrooms. Suiting fabrics and linings are laid out in the foreground of the photograph, and dressmaking dummies display the fitted, 1940s, square-shouldered shape of the jackets and the four buttons allowed within the government's Austerity regulations. In his 1955 memoir Hartnell remembered the names of his 'famous tailors, Signor Rossi and Monsieur François', (Mr. Francis), who helped him choose the suiting fabrics and velvets; 'The quality they will choose; and I, the colouring.'<sup>583</sup>

The London house that was famous for tailoring was Lachasse, and those couturiers that trained with the firm of Lachasse during the 1930s such as Digby Morton and Hardy Amies went on to open their own couture houses and continued the Lachasse tradition for tailored suits. According to fashion journalist Judy Fallon writing in *The Sketch* magazine in 1955, Morton was 'the first to feminise the hitherto too mannish, man-tailored, with intricate cut and detailed workmanship.'<sup>584</sup> Edwina Ehrman notes that 'Amies took over from Digby Morton' at Lachasse in 1934 'who he credits with transforming the classic tweed suit 'from its hairy, Harris tweed rigidity into an intricately cut and carefully designed garment'. Amies followed Morton's lead and concentrated on designing fashionable feminine tailored suits appropriate for both town and country.'<sup>585</sup> Reflecting his house's focus on the tailored suit Amies wrote in his memoir of 1954 that: 'The feminine tailored suit is a phenomenon, for it has remained the most important part of a woman's

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<sup>583</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 80.

<sup>584</sup> Judy Fallon. 'Who's Who in the "Haughty Couture": Biographies in brief of the "Top Twelve" London fashion designers whose Autumn Collections begin on July 25.' *The Sketch*. July 13 1955: 33.

<sup>585</sup> Edwina Ehrman. 'Hardy Amies, Royal Dressmaker.' *The Englishness of English Dress*. Ed. Christopher Beward, Becky Conekin and Caroline Cox. (Oxford: Berg, 2002): 135.

wardrobe for at least thirty years ... This is the livery for living.’<sup>586</sup> Unlike Hartnell, Amies wrote that he employed more workers in the tailoring rooms than in the dressmaking workrooms.<sup>587</sup>

Amies’ memoir confirms that Hartnell was not alone in devising collections to suit the needs of his average couture client and that that tailored daywear was a key component of each collection. Stella Mary Newton, who ran a small couture house in London during the 1930s wrote that:

...smaller houses generally offered dressmaking and ‘soft’ tailoring only. Tailoring, which demanded different skills, was almost always carried out in a separate room. Very small firms employing no male tailor on a regular basis sometimes had an arrangement with a nearby tailor.<sup>588</sup>

Figure 5.3 shows Thelma Brown modeling a Hartnell tailored suit in Grosvenor Square c1950/51. Reinforcing Hartnell’s current reputation with regards to tailoring, she stated in an interview that, ‘some people didn’t think he was very smart, but I think that is the loveliest line.’<sup>589</sup>

### ***5.2.2. The soft-tailored coat/jacket and dressmaker made dress: a biography, 1921-1979***

What Newton has described as ‘soft’ tailoring was a feature of Hartnell’s design work for couture collections and royal clients. The following sections offer a biography of this style according to his taste in fabrics, colour and embellishments, from its origins in 1921.

#### **5.2.2.a. The Dress**

The earliest examples of a day-dress by Hartnell in the Archive are representations of garments in the form of photographs and sketched designs or croquis, including studio photographs of Hartnell dressed as ‘Kitty Fenton’ for the Footlights production of *What a Picnic* in 1921, discussed in chapter three. In figure 2.49, Hartnell wears a pale coloured silk shift blouse with woven lily design, edged with dark silk satin and a pleated silk skirt; his organza picture

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<sup>586</sup> Hardy Amies. *Just So Far*. (London: Collins, 1954): 172.

<sup>587</sup> Amies, *Just so Far*, 176.

<sup>588</sup> Stella Mary Newton. “London Haute Couture in the 1930s.” *Costume*. Number 39. 2005: 14.

<sup>589</sup> Thelma Brown. Personal Interview. July 3 2007.

hat is edged with lace and he leans on a dark coloured parasol. He designed the dress, but it is not known who made it up. (Anne Wright explained in an interview that pleating was not done in-house at Hartnell's in her day, but sent away to be carried out).<sup>590</sup> The programme from the 1922 Footlights production *The Bedder's Opera* however states that 'Messrs. Hartnell's and Brown's dresses in the last act by Myrah Salter, Hanover Square...Mr. Hartnell's dresses executed from original designs by himself' indicating that his 1921 designs were probably made up in a similar fashion.<sup>591</sup> This is the first example of a Hartnell designed silk day-dress found in the Archive and the slim-fitting style and use of silk textile can be compared with the print silk day dress modelled by Dolores in 1953 and (for the style) in figure 5.1 and figure 4.21 shows the same print silk dress under construction in the dressmaking workshop on the second floor at Bruton Street.

#### 5.2.2.b. The Dress and Jacket, early biography, 1922-1939

In his 1955 memoir, Hartnell referred to his 'portfolio of Cambridge designs', which he produced at his successful interview with Mrs. Hughes in late 1922, 'who was known as 'Madame Désirée'.<sup>592</sup> One annotated pencil and watercolour sketch could possibly be from Hartnell's Cambridge days. The figure of the young woman was drawn facing sideways on rather than squarely posed to display the dress design clearly, quite unlike a fashion croquis and is probably a sketch for a theatrical costume, possibly for himself to wear in the production *The Bedder's Opera* in June 1922.<sup>593</sup>

This design is for a powder blue and white print day dress with corresponding blue jacket and picture hat, trimmed with crimson pink roses, and is of particular interest as it reveals Hartnell's early taste in and use of colour and also in particular fashionable styles, decoration and accessories, that this chapter will show were used by him over and over again until 1979. The figure also holds a parasol trimmed with a rose and flowing blue ribbons and the hem of

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<sup>590</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording

<sup>591</sup> Programme. The Footlights Dramatic Club, *The Bedder's Opera*, New Theatre Cambridge, June 1922. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive & Collection. Box 7.

<sup>592</sup> It was on the strength of these sketches that she gave Hartnell a job designing costumes for the Oxford Theatre production *The Battling Butler*, his first professional job for which he designed over two hundred costumes for the court dressmaker.

<sup>593</sup> Pencil and watercolour croquis by Norman Hartnell c1921, possibly a sketched dress design for a possible costume for a Footlights theatrical production. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 17,

the short jacket is trimmed with fringing, pre-empting his similar designs for Queen Elizabeth from the late thirties by fifteen years. (Figure 5.4). This sketch is also represents a very similar ensemble to the sketches of dresses in his first collection of March 1924 seen in *Woman* magazine. (Figure 2.13).

### ***5.2.3. Examples of the coat and dress ensemble made during the 1930s for fashion collections and royal clients***

In the Archive there are a small but significant number of photographs of models from Hartnell collections taken in the mid thirties demonstrating Hartnell's couture soft-tailored, dressmaker-made and tailor-made day-wear. These photographs were sorted into to possible collections according to numbers written on the back, and the setting or background in which the model was photographed.

#### **5.2.3.a. The soft-tailored coat and dress ensemble**

Figure 5.5 shows Fritzi wearing a slim fitting, light weight wool day dress with a cross-over, button through bodice, belt, and a large floral corsage (possibly lily of the valley), accompanied by a matching coat with deep fur cuffs and collar, c1934.<sup>594</sup> A corresponding hat, trimmed with fur completes the ensemble.<sup>595</sup> A second ensemble in silk satin accessorised with a fur wrap, photographed on the same occasion shows that both 'model-girls' are wearing the same satin court shoes and posing similarly with her right hand on hip, left hip forward. (Figure 5.6).

Later in the 1930s, what was described on the reverse of the photograph as 'a serious spring morning suit in black crêpe with white stitching and a white gilet'<sup>596</sup> demonstrates Hartnell's eye catching use of fabric, and his fitter's careful cutting in order to marry up each line of white stitching with its corresponding line across seams and darts. (Figure 5.7). Another dress and jacket reverses the sash at the waist to reveal a pale silk lining, mirrored at the dresses neckline, and the jagged edging at the hem of the jacket and sash create

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<sup>594</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 12/87 and 78. Keystone Press c1935.

<sup>595</sup> This photograph was probably taken just after the house moved to 26 Bruton Street, as the bevelled glass frame to the doorway, designed by Gerald Lacoste in 1934 for the model girls to enter the showroom during a dress show, is just visible at the edge of the frame. This dates the ensemble to after 1934.

<sup>596</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 12.113. Scaioni's Studios c1935-1938 'Serious spring morning suit in black crêpe with white stitching and a white gilet.'

geometric lines, softened by the artificial hydrangeas at the shoulder and hat-band. Again, the cleverness of the cutting by the fitter is demonstrated. (Figure 5.8). This may have been the work of the French fitter Mam'selle, Madame Germaine Davide, who had been engaged by Hartnell in 1924 and had worked with him from his first collection until the mid 1950s.<sup>597</sup> From another collection in the same period, what appears at first to be a simple, floral printed silk day-dress is cleverly tucked at the neckline, cut-away cuffs and hem.<sup>598</sup> A full length, slim fitting dress and matching jacket was executed in the same floral print in another colour-way and accessorised with a hat with artificial flowers around the hat-band. This ensemble is typical of a suitable outfit for Ascot Races in the 1930s.<sup>599</sup> (Figures 4.84 & 4.85).

### 5.2.3.b. The tailor-made suit and coat in the 1930s

Scaioni's Studio also photographed an Autumn/Winter collection from the mid 1930s that included tailor-made woollen suits and overcoats. Figure 5.9 is of a calf-length, narrow-fitting tweed skirt and short jacket, tied at the neck with silk crêpe, with a matching, fitted overcoat with three large buttons, worn with a felt hat.<sup>600</sup> In the same collection, a calf-length, fitted tailored coat in dark wool has wide revers and fastens with two very large buttons – four further buttons embellish the coat and the detail of a silk-satin blouse falls across the *décolletage* between the deep revers.<sup>601</sup> (Figure 5.10). These examples of tailored clothes demonstrate Hartnell's ability to create stylish, witty and innovative styles in tailor-made costumes before the war.

In 1938, Hartnell's tailor-made, fur-trimmed coats and corresponding dressmaker made dresses modelled by Fritzi show that all three of Hartnell's workrooms would have been needed to create one ensemble – dressmaking, tailoring and furrier. In figure 5.11, the slim-fitting wool day dress has a crossover neckline and wool sash tied at the waist. The three-quarter length open jacket has deep fur cuffs and edging to the jacket opening. The high felt hat fits to the head with a silk bandeau.<sup>602</sup> Figure 5.12 is typical of Hartnell's

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<sup>597</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 36.

<sup>598</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 12.91. Scaioni's Studio c1935.

<sup>599</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 12.87. Scaioni's Studio c1935.

<sup>600</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 12. 107. Scaioni's Studios c1935-38.

<sup>601</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 12. 60. Scaioni's Studios c1935-38.

<sup>602</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 12. 77. Frank Heathcote, 157 New Bond Street c1938.

couture dressmaker made, day-dress with crossover bodice detail and matching coat with draped fox fur trim from the late 1930s.<sup>603</sup> It is this style of dress and coat that Hartnell designed for Queen Elizabeth to wear firstly on her state visit to Paris in 1938 in black and white, and subsequently for the royal tour of North America and Canada in 1939. (Figures 5.13 7 5.14). This indicates that styles from Hartnell's fashion collections were possibly taken up by Queen Elizabeth during the late 1930s.

### 5.2.3.c. Wool tailoring for The Duchess of Gloucester

In lieu of coloured photographs of Hartnell's 1930s fashion collections, twenty-one coloured croquis dating from the mid 1930s 'Specially designed for Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Gloucester', (Lady Alice Douglas-Scott), were found in the Archive.<sup>604</sup> The colours used in these sketches could indicate the types of colours Hartnell was using in his fashion collections at the time.<sup>605</sup> Two sketches for tailored coat and dress ensembles reveal various elements of Hartnell's style devised for The Duchess of Gloucester including colour and detail. The first annotated sketch seen in figure 5.15 shows that the jaunty tartan tam-o'-shanter with corresponding three-quarter length wool coat were rejected by her in favour of just the plain skirt, indicating that perhaps the colour and style of this ensemble was not to her taste. Figure 5.16, a sketch for a dress in moss green wool with a 'Robin Hood' style hat has a sample of the tucked fabric tucked pocket pinned to the corner. This tucked pocket, collar and bodice detail is an example of the ways in which cloth was manipulated by skilled staff as discussed in Chapter Four.

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<sup>603</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 12. 76. Frank Heathcote, 157 New Bond Street c1938.

<sup>604</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 5/File 8/S/1930s/1-21. Watercolour and pencil sketched designs for the Duchess of Gloucester.

<sup>605</sup> Hartnell had designed both her wedding dress and bridesmaids' dresses for her marriage to the Duke in November 1935. Hartnell's three staple signature ensembles are represented in this collection of sketches. These sketches also mirror the composition and pose of the photographs of Fritzi discussed above, underlining again the parallel trajectory of these two forms of visual representations. The future Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret were young bridesmaids at this wedding and it is through this connection that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth (whilst still the Duchess of York) visited Hartnell's salon and subsequently asked Hartnell to produce designs for herself.

#### 5.2.3.d. Couture made, silk day-dress and coat for The Duchess of Gloucester

A similar sketch for a sky blue coatdress with powder blue silk tucked blouse and with corresponding hat, gloves, shoes and clutch is much like the tailored daywear Hartnell produced for Queen Elizabeth from 1937. The hat set back from the face of the Duchess typical of the style of millinery favoured by his royal client so that their faces were visible in a large crowd. (Figure 5.17). Again, the detail in this slim-line look is in the tucked silk blouse and visible rows of decorative stitching on the pockets and cuffs of the coat.

#### 5.2.3.e. Colour, technique, decorative motif and trim the dress and coat ensemble

Hartnell produced this style of mono-coloured tailored day-ensemble for all his key client groups between the mid 1930s and the mid 1940s (and throughout the rest of his career) throughout the seasons in either woollens (tailored) or silks and lightweight wool/silk mix fabrics (couture, dressmaking) with adjustments in terms of colour and detail according to the needs and personality of the client.<sup>606</sup> Examples of this look in the Archive includes designs for General Lord Wavell's wife, Viscountess Lady Eugenie Wavell (between 1939-45),<sup>607</sup> the comedy actress Cicely Courtneidge (for theatrical performances between 1942-1947),<sup>608</sup> and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth (from 1937 until 1979).<sup>609</sup> (Figures 5.18 & 5.19).

Figure 5.20, a sketch for a tailored short box jacket, blouse and fitted box pleat skirt with corresponding shoes, gloves and clutch in mustard yellow for Courtneidge, sees the addition of a floral corsage of violets added to the waist (a favoured position for this type of embellishment by Courtneidge) and corresponding halo-hat. This ensemble was made and worn for the theatrical production *Something in the Air* at the Palace Theatre, London in 1943. The

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<sup>606</sup> Jane Hattrick. "From 'Glamour-Drag' to Royal Dress: Performance and Spectacle, the Work of the London Couturier, Norman Hartnell: 1934-1947." MS Thesis. University of Brighton, 2006. Print.

<sup>607</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 5/File 7/S/1939-47/4-13. Watercolour and pencil designs for Lady Wavell c1939-1945.

<sup>608</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 16/S/1930-1945/3-9. Watercolour and pencil designs for Cecily Courtneidge c1939-1947.

<sup>609</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 15/File 18/1936-1939. Selection of loose watercolour and pencil designs and bound volumes of sketched designs for particular royal events such as Hartnell's 'White Wardrobe', for the royal State visit to Paris 1938 and Hartnell's wardrobe for the Queen for the royal tour of North America and Canada 1939.

outfit was worn during a scene set on a train amongst a crowd of other actors. The mustard yellow colour is one that Hartnell and his client obviously agreed suited her blond hair and colouring. It is also a colour that stands out in a crowd and on the stage. Using photographic evidence from the production, Courtneidge can be seen wearing this ensemble whilst situated in a crowded train carriage, and the colour would have made her visible amongst the other members of the cast.<sup>610</sup>

#### ***5.2.4. The royal dress and coat ensemble for Queen Elizabeth 1939-1979***

The final example of a plain ensemble from the same period is a sketch for Queen Elizabeth. This was part of a wardrobe of some thirty ensembles designed by Hartnell for the royal tour of North America and Canada in May 1939 and was worn for the Queen's departure from Portsmouth. Many sketches for this tour have already featured here in Chapter Four.<sup>611</sup> Described in Hartnell's paperwork pertaining to this tour as 'Lovely lavender blue ensemble the dress is entirely hand tucked in criss-cross design. Worn with simple coat of lavender wool edged with fine open hand-work to match the dress. Large beret hat in gross grain ribbon.'<sup>612</sup> A photograph of the Queen shows that she added a blue fox fur wrap to complete this ensemble, displaying all of Hartnell's signature elements that made-up this royal day-wear look. (Figures 5.21). Another sketch from the period for Her Majesty is for a brown wool dress (a colour worn rarely by Queen Elizabeth), which shows the addition of copper beads on the pockets and bodice; another touch of luxury and a signature touch by Hartnell as an addition to the royal look.

If the Duchess of Gloucester rejected the addition of fur, the bright peach colour and the quirky tartan hat, Lady Wavell's tailored look in navy blue included the additional expense of tucked wool but no corsage or fur, and actress Cecily Courtneidge adopted the bright colour for stage wear with the addition of a floral corsage, then Queen Elizabeth's tailored look included all of Hartnell's

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<sup>610</sup> Jane Hattrick. "From 'Glamour-Drag' to Royal Dress: Performance and Spectacle, the Work of the London Couturier, Norman Hartnell: 1934-1947." MA Dis. University of Brighton, 2006: 72.

<sup>611</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 15/Album of sketched designs made for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth for the royal tour of North America and Canada, 1939.

<sup>612</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 15. *Descriptions of Gowns to be Worn by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on the occasion of Their Majesties' Tour of Canada and the United States of America.*

signature elements. The dress-maker made tucked silk dress and ‘open work’ detail on the tailor-made coat, the addition of fur and a corsage, together set apart her deceptively plain and simple tailored look from Hartnell’s other clients and identified her as royal.

Only one example of daywear from Hartnell’s 1939 wardrobe for Queen Elizabeth shows a design for a couture made, lilac print dress with short jacket, floral corsages, corresponding hat and parasol. This pre-empted the fixed style of Hartnell dress and coat in printed chiffon and pastel colours that became a staple for Her Majesty from the early 1960s until her death in 2002. A similar ensemble was designed by Hartnell for Barbara Cartland during the 1970s. (Figure 5.22 & 5.23).<sup>613</sup>

Examination of the construction of these tailored and dressmaker made coats and day dresses for Queen Elizabeth shows that the bodice of these garments were often tucked and styled in a crossover effect to complement her figure, disguise her bust and enhance her waist. This ‘device’, once introduced by Hartnell for Her Majesty in the 1930s, continued to be a standard feature of her clothes throughout the war and beyond along with the tucking of fabric and the addition of a fur trim and beaded detail. Robert Lacy writes however that:

By 1939 Hartnell still had not got the daywear right. Not realizing, perhaps, that the royal costume for visiting a factory or hospital required, in its way, the same theatrical unreality as a grand evening gown, he had designed contemporary daytime outfits for Queen Elizabeth in the late 1930s that were really no different from those he was preparing for his other wealthy clients. You could see them every teatime by the dozen at the Ritz. Looking for glamour in the wrong direction, he had also tried to camouflage the shape of his royal subject, vainly seeking to squeeze her into the sleek, angular wedge of an Evelyn Laye.<sup>614</sup>

As already indicated in section 5.2.3.b., Hartnell *had* dressed Queen Elizabeth in his couture styles of daywear from his late 1930s collections, as Lacey suggests. Contrary to Lacey’s analysis however, Hartnell’s device for ‘camouflaging’ Queen Elizabeth’s figure remained in place, as countless

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<sup>613</sup> Rusty Lewis, Hartnell sketch artist during the 1960s and beyond revealed in a personal interview that she and Miss Evelyn, the Queen Mother’s vendeuse, also used to meet in a café after the house of Hartnell had closed in 1992 to rework old Hartnell designs from the 1970s for Her Majesty.

<sup>614</sup> Robert Lacy. *God Bless Her! Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother*. (London: Guild Publishing, 1987): 108.

sketches and photographs of her wearing Hartnell couture throughout her life has shown. The similarity to sketches for Queen Elizabeth's visit to Canada in 1939 in terms of both style, trim and accessories is clear indicating that Hartnell was either dressing his clients in royal style devised by him or that the Queen was wearing designs similar to those in Hartnell's fashion collections. Lacey believes it to be the latter. This underlines my earlier point that Hartnell dressed his clientele alike but with subtle yet instantly recognizable differences in terms of luxury such as the addition of fur, beading and the manipulation of fabric. Hartnell dressed 'model girl' Fritzi in Brown (possibly the colour used in figure 5.12) whereas we know from the coloured croquis for Queen Elizabeth that he made up these styles in pale blues, pinks and mauves demonstrating that he dressed the Queen in colours preferred by himself and her, whilst understanding that his average work-a-day client needed more usable, practical colours. Also, the couture ensembles chosen by average clients would be worn over and over again therefore needed more practical colours, whereas Queen Elizabeth may have worn a particular outfit twice at the most, particularly on a royal tour when the international mass media in terms of the press and filmed newsreels broadcast her outfits across the world in days, which meant that she had to wear new ensembles in each new town she visited so as not to offend whilst maintaining a recognisable style or image as instantly recognisable as the Queen in a crowd.

Further sketches for Queen Elizabeth from the sixties and beyond demonstrate Hartnell's continuity of day-wear styles and colours for Her Majesty, with a mixture of plain coats in pastel coats and print silk and chiffon dresses with the crossover construction established in 1939, and her favourite petal hats to accompany this style of daywear in the 1960s were designed by milliner Simone Mirman who made hats for Hartnell's clothes for both Queen Elizabeth and our current monarch, Elizabeth II. The styles for her designed even after Hartnell's death in 1979 continued to provide the Hartnell 'look' in terms of dress and coat ensembles. (Figure 5.24).

### ***5.2.5. Signature daywear for Elizabeth II, Her Majesty the Queen 1948-1979:***

Hartnell's daywear for Britain's current monarch, Elizabeth II, repeated the dress and coat ensemble from 1948 through to 1979. In May 1948 Princess

Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh visited Paris. At first, *The Daily Mirror* reported that she had decided to wear the clothes designed for her to wear on the South African Tour, in the summer of 1947, but had changed her mind shortly before leaving. Instead, for her first visit to Paris as part of her Royal duty only six months after her wedding, the Princess wore a Hartnell designed wardrobe very obviously influenced by Dior's 'New Look'. Presumably he couldn't possibly be seen to be still dressing his key fashion icon of the day in the old, wartime styles. *The Daily Mail* noted that: 'her skirts were a trifle longer, at 12 inches from the ground, than the "London Look", but a shade shorter than Parisiennes are wearing'.<sup>615</sup> *The Daily Mail* reported that the Princess 'had confessed to her dress designer, Norman Hartnell, that she was nervous about what to wear in the lion's den of fashion', however, she felt that it was correct for her to wear up to the minute fashions when abroad'. This was the first time that she had been seen in public wearing what the newspaper described as the 'fashionable ankle-strap slippers with "mudguard Soles"'.<sup>616</sup>

This image taken from a private collection of royal scrapbooks illustrates the influence of the New Look on Hartnell's designs for Princess Elizabeth for this visit to Paris in 1948, and young women's interest in Britain's royal family at the time.<sup>617</sup> The slate blue Ottoman silk 'coat frock', with ankle-strap shoes and a cartwheel straw hat decorated with blue voile and trimmed with lily of the valley was just one of six outfits worn over a period of three days and was worn by the Princess to open the Eight Centuries of British Life in Paris exhibition at the Galliera Museum. (Figure 5.25).

#### **5.2.5.a. The dissemination of Hartnell's identity and his British couture styles throughout the Commonwealth**

This new style established at this point in May 1948 was to become a Hartnell staple throughout the 1950s and examples of dress and coat ensembles made for Princess Elizabeth, particularly for royal tours overseas to Commonwealth countries in the early 1950s, provided the new signature shape in which Hartnell continued to produce tailored dress and coat ensembles using his favoured colours, embellishments and accessories. Once again, the plain coat with

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<sup>615</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Press book Number 8. *Daily Mail*, 15 May 1948.

<sup>616</sup> Joya Begg, 'Princess in the Lion's Den', *The Daily Mail*, 19 May 1948.

<sup>617</sup> Mrs Anne Medd. Collection of royal scrapbooks dating from between 1945-1951, private archive.

silk/cotton print dress with corresponding hat, shoes and gloves was reproduced in hundreds of outfits worn on Her Majesty's tours of the Commonwealth during Hartnell's lifetime and beyond to 2011, and her tour of Australia as Head of the Commonwealth.<sup>618</sup> (Figures 5.26, 5.27 & 5.28).

The Commonwealth of Nations was formed in April 1949 and included the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Ceylon. Queen Elizabeth declared in a Christmas day speech from Government House, Auckland New Zealand in 1953 that:

The Commonwealth bears no resemblance to the empires of the past. It is an entirely new conception built on the highest qualities of the spirit of man: friendship, loyalty, and the desire for freedom and peace. To that new conception of an equal partnership of nations and races I shall give myself heart and soul every day of my life.<sup>619</sup>

It is important to explain the context in which Hartnell's royal styles were worn from 1951 as this sets the scene for the dissemination of his identity and his signature styles and looks internationally and the subsequent licensing and franchised products that will be discussed in the following Chapter, Chapter Six. Princess Elizabeth wore Hartnell's styles on the Tour of Canada in October 1951 and in Kenya, on the first stage of the Commonwealth tour of Australia and New Zealand in January 1952, which was cut short when the King suddenly died on 5 January. Elizabeth resumed the tour after her Coronation in 1953. It was also at this point that Hartnell lost his position as the sole British couturier charged with the responsibility of designing and producing royal clothes, although it is certainly Hartnell whose signature style for his royal clientele set the standard and look for both Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Britain's current monarch (at the time of writing), Elizabeth II, which this thesis suggests had its roots in his clothes for Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe for the royal tour of North America and Canada in 1939.

In 1951, Hartnell met direct competition in royal dressing from Hardy Amies. In a personal letter to Hartnell from the Princess Elizabeth written after a fitting at the Palace for her clothes for Canada in 1951, Her Royal Highness wrote:

I completely forgot to mention to you today that I have also asked Mr Hardy Amies to make a few clothes for the Canadian visit ... I

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<sup>618</sup> Caroline de Guitaut. *The Royal Tour: A Souvenir Album*. (Royal Collection Enterprises Ltd., 2009): 5.

<sup>619</sup> Excerpt from Her Majesty the Queen Christmas day broadcast 1953, De Guitaut, *The Royal Tour*, 7.

would rather you heard the news from me, rather than by rumour or other means. I was simply delighted with the clothes that I chose today and I shall greatly look forward to wearing them, yours sincerely, Elizabeth.<sup>620</sup>

The tension and competitive atmosphere between royal couturiers Amies and Hartnell is palpable within the pages of paperwork kept from the Queen's tour of Canada in June 1959. With the assistance of Margaret (Bobo) Macdonald, the Queen's personal dresser who had also been her nanny, telegrams were sent to Hartnell's throughout the tour reporting on exactly which ensemble Her Majesty had chosen to wear for which public event. An example dated June 30 1959 through Western Union Cables reads: 'Day dress number twentyone worn Monday stop Nbr 42 worn Toronto Tuesday morning stop Nbr twentyeight worn to Queen's plate races Tuesday afternoon stop Wednesday all day Ottawa including dinner Amies.'<sup>621</sup>

#### 5.2.5.b. Preferred colours

For the Queen's tour of 1959, the house of Hartnell provided sixty models for day and evening wear and Ian Thomas's sketches for these combined with numbered descriptions and swatches for each (although these numbers do not tally with the sketches or the lists of models) demonstrate that the dress and corresponding coat ensemble was a staple of the Queen's wardrobe for this tour. Maureen Markham explained the ways in which the Queen's clothes were designed for a royal tour. Firstly Hartnell would send a suitcase of fabric samples for Her Majesty to choose from. Once the Queen had indicated which samples and colours she preferred, Hartnell would then sketch the designs. The Queen would then approve these and fittings would take place at the Palace until the finished or final 'fitter' would be delivered to the Palace.<sup>622</sup>

The dark blue colour worn by the Princess Elizabeth to Paris in 1948 is not considered one of the signature colours put forward in the argument for this theses and is apparently not a favoured colour of the Queen. Maureen Markham, who dressed the Queen for over 26 years and met her often, revealed in

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<sup>620</sup> Personal letter from Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth to Norman Hartnell, 1951. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/CR/File 1.

<sup>621</sup> A selection of telegrams were sent from Canada in the summer of 1959 from J.M. Inwood, Norman Hartnell (Canada) Ltd., 214 Main Street, Toronto. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959

<sup>622</sup> Conversation with Maureen Markham, 5 September, 2011.

conversation that the Queen did not like navy blue and used to say that it made her look like a District Nurse, but that she did like yellow. The Duke of Edinburgh likes the Queen in blue.<sup>623</sup> Examples of dress and coat ensembles for the 1959 tour of Canada reveal the brighter colours preferred by Her Majesty, including sketch No. 15 (No. 21 in descriptions): ‘coat of sun-tan pink tussore lined with white spotted pink organza. Worn over a spotted pink organza full skirted dress.’ (Figure 5.29). Sketch No. 9 (No. 28 in descriptions) ‘Cerise pink silk coat lined with print. Dress of cerise and white printed silk – Hat – Claude St. Cyr. Toque of white organza petals, pink tulle veiling.’ (Figure 5.30). And sketch No. 1 (No. 27 in descriptions) ‘Jade green woolen top-coat lined with print. Jade and white printed dress with pleated skirt. Hat – Claude St. Cyr – Jade green straw hat trimmed white velvet.’<sup>624</sup> (Figure 5.31).

North American publication, *Women’s Wear Daily*, reported the Queen’s wardrobe on their front page on June Friday June 19<sup>th</sup> 1959, noting that she wore this jade green ensemble with ‘black calf shoes match square pouched handbag; maple leaf diamond brooch pays homage to Canada’ on her arrival at Torbay Airport, Newfoundland.<sup>625</sup> (Figure 5.32). In a subsequent report on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, Harold Wilson noted that:

Colors ranging from jade green to tangerine, mustard and cherry have dominated Queen Elizabeth’s costumes on the opening days of her six-week tour of Canada. To date, it appears Her Majesty has favored Hartnell designs and printed silks ... The Queen’s second-day ensemble drew only modest enthusiasm from fashion reporters on the spot at Cornerbrook, Newfoundland. Her Hartnell tangerine and white silk dress had short, belted print jacket. As on Thursday, the printed silk skirt was pleated... The collared jacket with squared-off neckline was filled in with triple strand of white pearls ... And, said some critics, the result was almost dull... the costume was topped later, on Friday, with a white full-collared coat. She carried a white pouch-type bag and wore open toed white shoes. Observers noted here dresses and coats seemed somewhat shorter than last year, though not revealing the kneecap.<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>623</sup> Conversation with Maureen Markham, 5 September, 2011.

<sup>624</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. Descriptions of Dresses.

<sup>625</sup> ‘Arrival in Canada: The Queen Wears Green.’ *Women’s Wear Daily*. Vol. 98. No. 120. Friday June 19 1959: 1. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. Press cuttings.

<sup>626</sup> Harold Wilson. ‘Queen Wears Bright Prints in Canada.’ *Women’s Wear* Vol. 98. No. 123. Tuesday, June 23, 1959: 5. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. Press cuttings.

The sketches and descriptions for this tour support this description of colours worn and the Queen's use of either black shoes and handbag or white shoes and handbag rather than Hartnell's preferred matching shoes always suggested in each sketched design. This also reveals one of Hartnell's on going disappointments in the presentation of his royal couture.<sup>627</sup> Shorter skirt lengths were perhaps an element of British fashion at this time.

A royal estimate book in the Archive reveals that Princess Margaret had the hems of twelve garments shortened at Hartnell's in November 1958, indicating the burgeoning fashion for shorter hemlines.<sup>628</sup> As Lotta Dempsey noted in her article 'Hartnell Tells "Why" of Queen's Clothes' in the *Toronto Daily Star* in June 1959, Princess Margaret, who tends to effect more extreme fashions than either her mother or her sister, has just brought her custom back to the Bruton St, salon after patronizing various designers at home and abroad.<sup>629</sup>

### 5.2.5.c. Preferred styles: plain coats and print dresses

On June 24 *Women's Wear Daily* reported on President (United States of America) Dwight D Eisenhower's wife Maimie's wardrobe for her meeting with the Queen during the British royal tour noting that:

Ensembles of slim coat and print dress are proving to be the favorite costumes of the two of the worlds' first ladies who are helping focus attention on the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway. For the luncheon party aboard the royal yacht Britannia on Friday, Mrs. Eisenhower, accompanying the President, has chosen this costume in black and white, designed by Mollie Parkin.<sup>630</sup>

This report demonstrates the almost identical styles worn by the Queen and Mrs. Eisenhower and a photograph of the Queen greeting the President and his wife on 26 June at the opening ceremony of the St. Lawrence Seaway shows the Queen in Hartnell's signature royal look, dressed in an ensemble of hat and coat in the same pale colour, marking her out as royal amongst the crowds and distinguishing her from the President's wife, who appears to be wearing the black ensemble illustrated in the *Women's Wear* report. British royal women

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<sup>627</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. 18<sup>th</sup> March 2010. NHOH/2010/11/Cassette Tape 1.

<sup>628</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 17/Royal Estimate Book.

<sup>629</sup> Lotta Dempsey. 'Hartnell Tells 'Why' of Queen's Clothes.' *Toronto Daily Star*. Saturday June 27 1959: 56. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. Press cuttings.

<sup>630</sup> 'First Lady's Ensembles for Royal Yacht Luncheon.' *Women's Wear Daily*. Vol. 98. No. 123. Wednesday June 24 1959: 1. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. Press cuttings.

however, only dress in black when in mourning or when visiting the Pope.<sup>631</sup> Neither the Queen's wardrobe nor Maimie Eisenhower's clothes can be seen as fashionable within the context of the 'fall collections' described by *Women's Wear*, as an article on 'Important Fall Dress Silhouette: The Tunic, for Day or Evening' illustrates.<sup>632</sup> (Figure 5.33). When asked in a newspaper interview about the negative reception of some of his daywear for the Queen in Canada, including 'the fingertip length of a tweed suit jacket' and 'that full, unshaped coat Her Majesty wore in Newfoundland' that were described as a little 'old hat' Hartnell responded: 'to the contrary, both lines very probably will find their way into my new fall collection, which I am beginning to create this week.'<sup>633</sup> Hartnell's statement reflects the way in which his royal dressing influenced his couture collections, but also his conservative approach to fashionable styles at the time.

#### 5.2.5.c Preferred textiles, colours and decorative elements

Hartnell's typical dress and cost ensembles for this tour of Canada demonstrated his signature use of different textiles and fabrics, for example lining a plain woolen or silk coat with the same printed silk as the printed silk corresponding dress and also his eye and taste for using particular colours together. A further sketch for dress No. 5 and coat No. 5B (sketch No. 17 in descriptions) for a 'tulip shaped dress of rose pink and green printed taffeta demonstrates not only Hartnell's love of the rose as a motif but that his designs could be clever in their construction and shape, underlining that it he was not just using a basic dress shape as a 'canvas' for his eye for colour. The rose as a motif had its roots in his personal use of the rose as a signature decorative embellishment in his personal dress. Figure 5.34, sketch No. 18 for a 'mimosa yellow wool coat lined with grey and yellow print,<sup>634</sup> is an example of Hartnell using the colour yellow for the Queen – a colour he returned to for her daywear again and again over the

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<sup>631</sup> Conversation with Maureen Markham, 5 September, 2011.

<sup>632</sup> 'Important Fall Dress Silhouette: The Tunic, for Day or Evening.' *Women's Wear Daily*. Vol. 98. No. 123. Wednesday June 24 1959: 1. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. Press cuttings.

<sup>633</sup> Lotta Dempsey. "Hartnell Tells 'Why' of Queen's Clothes." *Toronto Daily Star*. Saturday June 27 1959: 56. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. Press cuttings.

<sup>634</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. *Descriptions of Dresses*.

years. Hartnell used yellow for the Queen in much the same way as he used yellow for the actress Cicely Courtneidge on stage in order that she might stand out in a crowd, although he uses ‘mimosa’ yellow for the Queen and ‘Mustard’ yellow for Courtneidge. Figure 5.35 (& 5.36), sketch No. 22, is a ‘dress and coat of mimosa yellow tulle both dress and coat with horizontal lines of graduated tucking – hat of yellow tulle and white camellias.’ This ensemble was for a ‘garden party in Adelaide’ (royal tour of Australia 1963) and is a further example of Hartnell’s manipulation of plain fabric with tucking to add an element of luxury to the royal garments as he did in 1939 for Queen Elizabeth’s wardrobe for North America and Canada in 1939. These sketches for Queen Elizabeth (1939) and Elizabeth II (1963) demonstrate that once Hartnell established his signature royal daywear look in terms of colour, fabric, embellishment and manipulation of material he held fast to this look for his royal clients.

#### ***5.2.6. Signature daywear: royal styles for average clients***

As already underlined, the royal styles discussed here were mirrored in Hartnell’s daywear for his average client and some of these models are extant in the Archive in the collection of Doris Mitchison. The model *Wedding Bell*, a dress and coat in pale green Staron silk, is similar in style to the pale yellow silk dress and coat for the Queen designed by Hartnell for the investiture of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales at Caernavon Castle in July 1969. (Figure 5.37 & 5.38).<sup>635</sup> In 1967 the spring/summer collection at Hartnell’s included *Alexandra Day* a ‘Pink and green silk and chiffon dress and coat’ most likely designed to wear at race meetings such as Ascot. An ensemble recognisable as *Alexandra Day* from the description in the dress show list is extant in the wardrobe of Doris Mitchison along with a corresponding petal hat by Simone Mirman. (Figures 5.39, 5.40 & 5.41).<sup>636</sup> The dress is also similar in style and length to a model called *Roulette* from the spring/summer collection of 1966, which was described as a ‘Silver beige organza dress entirely embroidered with silver beige sequins and paillettes worn over a sheath of beige organza’<sup>637</sup> and had a large bow stitched centre front of the dress, illustrating that Hartnell took one

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<sup>635</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>636</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>637</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 14a. PF/1966/70. ‘Fashions. The Hartnell Spring/Summer 1966 collection at Bruton Street © Sport & General 18/66 SR.

dress design from a particular year and used it again the following season albeit making up the design in different colours and using different embellishments. The 1966 model *Roulette* appears to be more for evening wear rather than Ascot races. (Figure 5.42).

Demonstrating the considerable number of dress and coat ensembles in any one collection, also from this 1967 collection, models included *Chesham Place*, ‘Navy silk coat worn over red-navy printed silk dress’, *Good Morning*, ‘Royal blue silk dress and coat’, *Spot the Winner*, ‘Navy and white spotted cloqué dress and coat’, *Rose Geranium*, ‘Geranium wool dress and coat’, *Almond Tree*, ‘Pink grosgrain dress and coat’, ‘Week-end’ ‘Turquoise wool coat and turquoise brown printed silk dress’ and *The Sky’s the Limit* Eau-de-nil silk coat and dress’. These models represent eight out of the eighty-nine models included in this Hartnell fashion show in aid of the Royal College of Nursing, and also demonstrates the sometimes quirky names he gave the model ensembles in a collection.<sup>638</sup>

Rusty Lewis’s statements about Hartnell’s ‘mouthwatering materials’, and his ‘fantastic’ eye for colour quoted in Chapter Four,<sup>639</sup> are perfectly demonstrated in this signature style, the ‘beautiful silk dress with a Staron silk coat over the top’,<sup>640</sup> that was a Hartnell staple from 1938-1979. This useful style of daywear ‘worked’ for the actress, both on stage and off, British royalty and Hartnell’s work-a-day clients.

### 5.3. The Slim Sheath and ‘Mermaid Line’ Dress and Jacket Ensemble

The slim-line sheath style of evening dress was also a Hartnell staple during the 1930s and 1940s. This style could be executed in full-length either as a tea gown or as an evening ensemble, using more luxurious fabrics such as silk satin, silk chiffon and velvet, with beaded decoration. The addition of a jacket or coat with optional deep fur cuffs for those clients who could afford it was also a part of this signature ‘look’.

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<sup>638</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 2/Prog. F/1967/5/10

<sup>639</sup> Chapter Four section 4.6.1.

<sup>640</sup> See section 4.6.1. Rusty Lewis. Personal Interview. NHOH/2010/15/Digital Recording.

### 5.3.1. The 'Mermaid Line' dress and jacket

This style of sheath dress often had the addition of a 'fish tail', or small train at the hemline. This fishtail gown or what loyal client Daphne Fielding described in 1985 as 'the long mermaid line that he liked',<sup>641</sup> had its roots in his design work from early 1920s. Examples of this signature style from his first collections include sketched designs for *The Battling Butler* in 1922, (figures 4.53-4.60), a peacock-blue gown with embroidered peacock feathers for Mrs Grenell from 1923, (figure 4.14), and a photograph of his first model Constance Barnett, modelling a full-length, white gown with 'fish-tail' and feather decoration at the waist circa 1924. As already discussed in Chapter Four, these gowns were also designed using Hartnell's signature colours and flower and feather trim.<sup>642</sup>

Photographs taken by Scaioni's Studios from this period reveal multiple models in this style of dress. With its complex construction and pattern pieces cut on the cross to fit the what is also apparent here is Hartnell's use of surface texture during this period either using velvet, woven patterned silk or subtle beaded embroidery designed to catch the light rather than overstated beaded embroidery he became famous for in the post war period. Studio photographs by Frank Davis from 1930 of models wearing mermaid-line gowns include models such as *Circus Cissie* worn by The Hon. Daphne Vivian, the Viscountess Weymouth, in 1930, photographed for *Vogue* by Cecil Beaton.<sup>643</sup> (Figure 5.43). These gowns were also designed for presentation at the British royal court and sketches and photographs in the Archive provide examples of these gowns that were easily worn under peeress robes, decorative beadwork executed down the centre front of the dress where it would be seen.<sup>644</sup> (Figures 5.44 & 5.45).

This style of slim-fitting, sheath dress and jacket was also worn by Queen Elizabeth as daywear and for state occasions during the 1930s. For her tour of North America and Canada in 1939 the Queen wore such ensembles in Hartnell's new colour palette of pale blues, pastel mauves and pinks. (Figures

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<sup>641</sup> Daphne Fielding. *Norman Hartnell 1901-1979*. (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1985): 105.

<sup>642</sup> See section 4.9.

<sup>643</sup> Norman Hartnell 1901-1979. Brighton: The royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1985: 13.

<sup>644</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 5/File 7/Sketched designs for court presentation gowns c1930s x 3.

5.46 & 5.47). As these examples for Queen Elizabeth illustrate, this type of ensemble was also designed in plain colours during the latter part of the 1930s and into the 1940s with the addition of beaded embroidery or fur trim to the jacket for eveningwear. (Figure 5.48). These more embellished models were designed for wearing as ‘dinner dresses’, and became a feature of his collections.

### ***5.3.2. The Hartnell dinner dress***

Examples of sketched designs for dinner dresses in tucked chiffon with corresponding jackets from this period reveal that black was a favourite ‘dinner dress’ colour – a fact corroborated by Claire Williams in a personal interview about her personal Hartnell collection, as Hartnell continued to design dinner dresses in black in the 1970s for his goddaughter.<sup>645</sup>

Sketched designs in the Archive indicate that in the early 1940s dark greys or reds were also a Hartnell dinner dress colour – colours not associated with his taste (according to the argument presented here), but perhaps colours demanded by his clientele for this type of engagement according to society’s norms of the day and wartime Austerity.<sup>646</sup> (Figures 5.49 & 5.50). In lieu of beading and floral trim Hartnell had the fabric tucked before cutting for an extra touch of couture luxury and decoration.<sup>647</sup> An advertisement for a black tucked chiffon dinner dress in *Ambassador Magazine (International Textiles)* from July-August 1940 helps to date these sketches to the same period. Also in the late 1930s-1940s, Hartnell uses pale green tucked chiffon to make up a slim fitting dinner dress costing 29 guineas. (Figures 5.51 & 5.52). Sketches for the Viscountess Wavell, one of Hartnell’s loyal, titled clients, show designs for full-length dinner dresses from this period in green (notes made by Hartnell read “Corbeau” blue stain dinner dress (not green),<sup>648</sup> and pale mauve. The latter designed to be worn in India during the Viscount Wavell’s period in office as Viceroy between 1943-1947. (Figure 5.53).

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<sup>645</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. 18th March 2010. NHON/2010/11/Cassette Tape 1. See Appendix 2.

<sup>646</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 5/File 9/Fashion Sketches c1935-1945.

<sup>647</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 5/File 9/Fashion Sketches c1939-1945.

<sup>648</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 5/File 7/c1938-45.5. Watercolour and pencil sketched design for Viscountess Wavell.

### 5.3.3. *The Mermaid Line on stage, 1939-1945*

Hartnell's full-length, 'mermaid line' sheath dress also became a staple style for stage-wear, in particular for E.N.S.A. performances in front of Allied troops at home and overseas, and the spectacular musical revues on the London stage during the 1930s and 1940s. Three pencil and watercolour sketches in the Archive were dress designs for the George Black variety show, *Black Vanities* at the Victoria Palace, in 1941, which ran for 435 performances. (Figures 5.54, 5.55 & 5.56). Hartnell's gowns were worn in the musical number 'Floodlit Racing at Longchamps, 1936'. The gowns were designed in black and white with red as an accent colour with embroidery sparingly used. Interestingly, in an earlier number in the show entitled 'Brighton on an August Bank Holiday, 1921' - the 'dresses and décor' were by Cecil Beaton. Perhaps it is safe to say that Beaton's celebrated costumes for the scene at the races in the film production of *My Fair Lady* (1964), owe a considerable debt to Hartnell's original 'Longchamps' designs from 1941. The full-length evening mermaid-gown in figure 5.57 with its sequined and feather trim is annotated with rare costings, including an 'art tax' of '4.14.6'. Possibly a gown for 'The Lady in Black', another musical number from the *Black Vanities* of 1941, at 45 guineas Hartnell's design was a costly dress in the context of wartime Austerity.<sup>649</sup>

A collection of Hartnell couture designed for the variety and radio stars, Elsie & Doris Waters is held at Brighton Museum, and includes a pair of full-length, fuchsia pink silk crepe beaded evening gowns with matching jackets c.1942-43, made by Hartnell's for the sisters to wear on stage with ENSA, entertaining troops on the Burma Front in India in 1943.<sup>650</sup> (Figure 5.58). A photograph of the sisters taken in India after a performance shows them in similar dresses with gathered and tucked bodices, and beaded embroidery across the neck and shoulders.<sup>651</sup>(Figure 5.59). There are also three further sketched designs for gowns for the sisters in the Archive from this period, including a pair of turquoise evening dresses with bold, gold 'jewel' decoration, (figure 4.28), and two further designs for pink beaded gowns for "Gert & Dais", 'Mesdames Elsie & Doris Waters' in the collection. All these gowns have similar, localised

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<sup>649</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 7/File 15.

<sup>650</sup> Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. The Waters Collection, C003461 and C003462. Norman Hartnell, raspberry pink full-length pink crêpe evening gowns and jackets c1943.

<sup>651</sup> Photograph of Elsie and Doris Waters entertaining the troops for ENSA in India c1942-43. Courtesy the trustees Steyning Museum.

beaded embroidery, typical of Hartnell's Wartime work. (Figures 5.60 & 5.61). Once again, Hartnell dresses his clients in his favoured colours, both a strong and paler pink and turquoise blue.

#### ***5.3.4. The Hartnell 'speciality' – a sequinned dress.***

This style of gown could also be embroidered all over with sequins or bugle beads in a vermicelli pattern, as a pencil and watercolour sketch signed by Hartnell for the actress Binnie Hale from the early 1930s demonstrates. (Figure 4.2). In 1931, Hartnell designed a first, full-length mermaid line dress completely covered in sequins for the actress Alice Delysia to wear in the production, *Mother of Pearl*, at The Gaiety Theatre in London's West End.<sup>652</sup> In the Archive a black and white drawing for an all-over sequinned dress and cape is annotated by Hartnell with the words 'a Hartnell speciality – a sequinned dress'. (Figure 5.62). Demonstrating the importance of this style to Hartnell's reputation further, a copy of the dress made for Alice Delysia in 1931 was made at Hartnell's in 1977 for publicity and charity events.<sup>653</sup> (Figure 5.63).

#### ***5.3.5. The beaded sheath dress and coat in the 1960s fashion collection.***

'Model girl' in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Cynthia Oberholzer was photographed in the showroom at Bruton Street wearing full-length, slim fitting beaded dress and coat ensembles. These demonstrate his signature styles on the body, and bring together Hartnell's signature beadwork and fur trim. (Figures 5.64 & 5.65).

### **5.4. The Hartnell Crinoline**

As already discussed in Chapter Four, Hartnell began to produce full-length, full-skirted tulle gowns in pastel colours for his younger clients in the late 1920s. The use of pale colours, delicate 'frou-frou' fabrics such as chiffon, and artificial flowers in evening wear and tea-gowns was advocated by the women's fashion journals for women during the 1900s, and it was these Edwardian

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<sup>652</sup> The sets for this production were designed by Oliver Messel, brother of Anne Messel, one of Hartnell's loyal clients.

<sup>653</sup> See Appendix 2. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Dress Collection. Box 17/DM/c1970s/66.1 & 66.2. Full length midnight blue sequinned 'fishtail' gown (plus cape) bias cut, slimline, shoulder straps, train to the back

fashions of Hartnell's childhood that influenced his taste in women's clothes. A portrait of Hartnell's mother in the Archive shows her wearing a pink rose corsage at the neckline of her pale pink and white lace dress and as Hartnell had written: 'my mother, with her great feeling for beauty, was an unfailing source of inspiration.' (Figure 5.66). In "London and Paris Fashions" Mrs. Eric Pritchard of evening fashions in 1903 wrote that:

Chiffon embroideries and chiffon roses are being used for the *débutante's* frock as well as some pretty *appliqués* in lace. These airy-fairy toilettes, notwithstanding the intricacies of frills and furlows, which are essential to a good effect, to be really successful must retain the suggestion of simplicity, which is the keynote of success in the best frocks of the hour.<sup>654</sup>

Hartnell's debutante's 'tulle and rosebud' dresses developed into Hartnell's first crinolines for the new Queen, Queen Elizabeth, in 1937. According to Hartnell's memoir, he was shown the portraits of the Empress Eugenie of France and Empress Elizabeth of Austria, wearing Charles Worth couture gowns, painted in the 1860s by Franz Xavier Winterhalter by King George VI in Buckingham Palace. Hartnell credits the King with the suggestion that the Worth crinoline gowns would suit Her Majesty the Queen.<sup>655</sup> He was asked to design a dress for the Queen to wear for the state visit of King Carol of Rumania. 'I provided a dress of pearl grey satin, *bouffant* and trailing, embroidered with grey pearls, silver and amethyst.'<sup>656</sup> The dress was not actually worn, as details of it leaked to the press. Hartnell's original sketched design for this dress, however, is in the Archive, revealing a pale mauve-pink neckline with mauve flower corsage – the sheen of the silk satin reproduced in watercolour paints. (Figure 5.67). Better remembered is the tulle crinoline decorated with gold sequins that she wore for the Cecil Beaton portraits in 1939 on the eve of World War II. (Figures 5.68 & 5.69).

These dresses were designed to be worn over a mid-nineteenth century style, cage crinoline underskirt, which would have been made up in the dressmaking workrooms out of steel hoops and calico.<sup>657</sup> A dress in the Archive, is labeled 'to

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<sup>654</sup> Mrs. Eric Pritchard. "London and Paris Fashions." *The Lady's Realm*. Vol. XIII. November 1902 to April 1903. (London: Hutchinson and Co): 648.

<sup>655</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 94.

<sup>656</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 94.

<sup>657</sup> Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5<sup>th</sup> July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording. Anne Wright explained that she had only recently (2010) thrown away the measurements and pattern pieces needed to make up the crinoline underskirts.

be worn with medium crinoline', indicating that different sizes were available depending on the volume of the skirt.<sup>658</sup> (Figure 5.70). Not a model gown (due to its size), or one belonging to Doris or Claire Mitchison, this may have been a dress made for Hartnell's personal use, as the sizing corresponds to the sequined lace pajama suit also in the Archive that was worn by him. According to Hartnell's embroideress Maureen Markham, he wore crinoline gowns that had been made-up especially for him in the workrooms at Bruton Street.<sup>659</sup>

Many sketched and photographed examples in the Archive demonstrate that the crinoline could be executed either in tulle, often with a floral corsage at the waist or neckline from the late 1920s, or in plain silk, often in two colour ways, which acted as the perfect palette for Hartnell's typical embroideries, typical of Hartnell's post war styles. The most celebrated crinoline gown by Hartnell is the Coronation dress designed for the Queen in 1953. This fragile dress is rarely displayed and Maureen Markham explained that Her Majesty feels especially attached to it. As the embroidered motifs that are still held taught by the wooden hoops in which they were executed demonstrate, the colour of the threads used were bright pinks and greens, and the crystals stitched over the Welsh leek twinkle like the drops of water they are designed to represent. (Figure 4.144, 5.71, 5.72 & 5.73).

#### ***5.4.1. Royal tour of Canada June-August 1959***

Both the tulle and the plain silk crinoline were stock styles for the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret from the late 1940s, and many of these sketched designs survive in the Archive, many of these are in pinks and mauves and decorated with artificial flowers and sequined lace. (Figures 5.74 & 5.75). By the mid 1950s, Hartnell's crinolines were a staple of the wardrobes he created for Her Majesty the Queen's royal overseas tours, worn for formal evening engagements, and her six-week tour of Canada in the summer of 1959 was no exception. Hartnell's signature use of silk satin, re-embroidered lace and beaded embroidery was a feature of the crinolines included in this collection.

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<sup>658</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Dress Collection. Box 13/DM/c1950/57.1. Full length, sleeveless, shall collar, fitted bodice, full skirt, ruched at hips, inserted panel from left hip to hem. See Appendix 2.

<sup>659</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010. JHOH/12/Cassette Tapes x 2.

Hartnell's 'bouffant dress of pink lace sparkling with green and pink embroideries' included a design element with 'the back of the skirt ... formed from three tiers of lace' and 'Shoulder straps and belt of pale green satin.'<sup>660</sup> (Figures 5.76 & 5.77). According to a telegram sent on June 30<sup>th</sup> from Toronto, this crinoline gown (No. 5) was worn to a dinner in Ontario.<sup>661</sup> The pale pink lace re-embroidered with pink sequins and goods is typical of Hartnell's taste both in terms of colour and decoration and therefore recognisable as his house style. It is also reminiscent of the pyjama suit made for his personal use. Two further crinolines for this tour, 'a white satin evening dress with bodice and hem appliquéd with rose coloured lace re-embroidered with pink crystals' and 'evening dress of lavender and rose pink printed taffeta ... swathed bodice and fringed side panels' seen in figures 5.78 and 5.79 are absolutely typical of Hartnell's signature colours, textile and embroidery.<sup>662</sup> (Figure 5.80).

#### ***5.4.2. The crinoline for Hartnell's personal use***

As already explained, Maureen Markham, embroideress at Hartnell's from 1957, revealed in an interview that Hartnell had crinoline gowns made up in his workrooms for his personal use.<sup>663</sup> Three examples of gowns in the Archive, the measurements of which correspond to the measurements of Hartnell's beaded lace pyjama suit, were probably owned and worn by him. Claire Williams confirmed that these dresses were not part of Doris Mitchison's Hartnell wardrobe.<sup>664</sup> These three dresses represent three styles of crinoline, a black velvet gown with pink beaded embroidery c1955, a cream and gold silk gown with gold sequined embroidery c1955 and a turquoise chiffon gown with turquoise embroidery and appliquéd flowers c1970. (Figures 5.81, 5.82, 5.83, 5.84 & 5.85). What is interesting about these gowns is that they mirror Hartnell's styles designed for Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Britain's current Queen, between the 1930s and 1970s.

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<sup>660</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. *Descriptions of Dresses*.

<sup>661</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/Royal Tour of Canada 1959. Telegram. June 30<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>662</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. *Descriptions of Dresses*.

<sup>663</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/2010/12/Tapes x 2.

<sup>664</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. 13 March 2009. NHOH/2010/11/Tapes x 1.

## 5.5. Conclusion

### *5.5.1. Signature styles in the Archive, 1960s and 1970s*

Hartnell's signature ensembles continued to be produced at the house throughout his career. This demonstrated a conservative approach to the dressing of his core clientele with his jobbing approach to clothes, designed and produced as having specific functions according to the time of day, season and event the client attended whilst wearing them. These stock styles are represented over and over in dress show programmes, photographs and sketches and also in the collections of Doris Mitchison and Claire Williams. Williams' Hartnell designed wardrobe, outlined in the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive Audit and Catalogue,<sup>665</sup> indicates that even during the 1970s, specific garments such as the tailored dress and coat, the cocktail dress, the full-length black dinner dress and the full-length ball beaded, ball gown, were worn by couture clients to particular events. This demonstrates that little had changed in terms of the wardrobes of the typical Hartnell client, even though clients had aged and client numbers had dwindled down to fifty by 1977.<sup>666</sup>

Some of Hartnell's styles had, however, kept up with the fashions of the day. Claire's wedding dress was a typical Hartnell tulle crinoline, but her going-away outfit was a maxi-dress and blouse. (Figures 5.89 & 5.90). These were designed and made especially for her by her 'Uncle Norman', reflecting the type of earlier work he undertook in the 1920s and 1930s for his debutante clients, although it is understood that Claire Williams was not a typical client, but considered family by Hartnell, and therefore was dressed with special attention.

Perfect examples of Hartnell's signature full-length slim-line dresses and corresponding coats are in the Archive dating from the late 1960s. These model gowns were kept, as already discussed in Chapter Four, as 'Favourite Dresses', used for charity and publicity shows and are linked to the client who ordered them, for example for Viscountess Mounbatten, a full-length black velvet gown decorated with pink beading and corresponding pink silk coat lined with black velvet. Other examples include *The Nicaraguan Stamp Dress* a dress in deep purple silk with corresponding deep pink sleeveless coat decorated with purple

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<sup>665</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>666</sup> Robin Laurance. 'But Will Sir Norman arise?' *Guardian Fashion, The Guardian*. Wednesday March 2 1977: 9.

beads and sequins, and for Madam Alghanim of Kuwait, a yellow silk dress and coat decorated with yellow beading. (Figures 4.32, 4.36 & 4.40).

### ***5.5.2 'The Maestro's Swan-Song'<sup>667</sup> – Autumn/Winter Collection 1979***

To draw together the threads of debate raised in Chapters Four and Five, it is useful to conclude by referring to the House of Hartnell's last ever couture fashion collection before Norman Hartnell's death, for which a handful of the gowns were designed personally by him. The fashion press celebrated Sir Norman Hartnell's<sup>668</sup> life and couture career, with what they described as his 'last creation'<sup>669</sup>. Hartnell died on the eighth of June 1979 in King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor.<sup>670</sup> In July 1978, Hartnell had employed designer John Tullis to assist him as his health deteriorated. Tullis was a cousin of couturier Captain Edward Molyneux and had been resident designer at the house of Molyneux in Paris between 1965 until the closure of the house in 1977.

Serena Sinclair described Hartnell's September Autumn/Winter dress show – the first collection to be launched after Hartnell's death in June – in *The Daily Telegraph* on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. 'The atmosphere was tender with nostalgia and expectation at the house of Hartnell as we all gathered to see the very last clothes the Queen's couturier had designed before his death in June.' She quoted John Tullis who stated that: "It's as if Sir Norman were here himself," and her article continued:

The fabrics had been chosen by Sir Norman, the final four full-glamour evening outfits designed by him, and the rest of the couture designed by the aide he had engaged a year ago: Tullis, nephew of the late Captain Molyneux, the English couturier, whose Paris couture house was closed down last year. Tullis, troubled and conscientious, had queried Sir Norman about the appointment. "You do realise that most of these clothes I have designed for you look like Molyneux?" "I could" replied the Queen's couturier, "do a great deal worse."<sup>671</sup>

The House of Hartnell aimed to retain the Hartnell signature style after the introduction of assistant designers during Hartnell's lifetime, and the new

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<sup>667</sup> Serena Sinclair, 'The Maestro's Swan-song, Living Up to Expectations', *The Daily Telegraph*, Saturday, September 22, 1979: 16. Print.

<sup>668</sup> Hartnell was knighted in 1977.

<sup>669</sup> Liz Smith. "Hartnell's Last Creation." *Evening Standard*. N.d., N.pag.

<sup>670</sup> 12 June 1901 – 08 June 1979.

<sup>671</sup> Serena Sinclair. "The Maestro's Swan-song, Living Up to Expectations." *The Daily Telegraph*, Saturday, September 22, 1979: 16.

designers brought in order to keep the house open after his death. Newspaper articles reporting Hartnell collections and new designers after his death sported headlines such as ‘Wearing Hartnell’s Mantle’<sup>672</sup> and ‘Following the death of Sir Norman, the Hartnell tradition is being carried on by other designers.’<sup>673</sup>

After Hartnell’s death John Tullis replaced him as design director in June 1979. Annette Harvey, employed at Hartnell’s to design the ready-to-wear collection in 1978, and subsequently took over the designing of couture collections from Tullis in 1982. John Anderson was design director in 1985-86, Yuki (Gnyuki Torimaru) was at Hartnell’s for one year in the early 1970s and finally Marc Bohan, who left Dior in 1989 and was design director at Hartnell’s between 1990 and 1992, when the house finally closed for good.

In her article, Sinclair singles out one dress and coat named *Pêche Melba*, and included a photograph of the ensemble, to represent the entire final collection. (Figure 5.86). She describes the design as:

The maestro’s final gesture: Norman Hartnell designed this typically Hartnell outfit just before his death in June – it’s called *Pêche Melba* and the all-sequin sheath dress has a band of darker peach round the hipline. The full coat is of peach velvet, cuffs bristling with fur; a real star ensemble.<sup>674</sup>

This same ensemble was also photographed for the *Evening Standard* as the example of Hartnell’s last couture design. This style of full-length, slim fitting, silk chiffon beaded dress with corresponding velvet jacket or coat with fur-trimmed sleeves has been tracked back through Hartnell’s collections over time already here to 1922 and demonstrated not only one of Hartnell’s signature looks but the history (or story) of Hartnell’s career as a designer – his influences, his preferences for working with particular materials such as chiffon and velvet. Sinclair describes this ensemble as a ‘typically Hartnell outfit’. This statement is confirmed through research for Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

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<sup>672</sup> “Wearing Hartnell’s Mantle.” Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Press Cutting Book 1. New Year’s Honours List (from 31<sup>st</sup> December 1976 -1983).

<sup>673</sup> *The Courier & Advertiser*. Dundee, Angus. 19 September 1979. N.pag. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Press cutting book 1. New Year’s Honours List (from 31<sup>st</sup> Dec.1976-1983).

<sup>674</sup> Serena Sinclair. “The Maestro’s Swan-song, Living Up to Expectations.” *The Daily Telegraph*, Saturday, September 22, 1979: 16.

### 5.5.3. *'Character and personality'*<sup>675</sup> - *Identity and biography in a dress design*

It is significant for this research that the original model gown *Pêche Melba* survives in the Archive<sup>676</sup> (Figure 5.87).<sup>677</sup> This full-length, slim fitting peach coloured sequinned gown has three quarter length bell sleeves, a slash neck, and a split seam to the left side, with a metal zip centre back, and a handwritten label in ball point pen naming the dress as *Pêche Melba*. The dress is of peach silk chiffon on peach silk net and is decorated with sequins that have been hand-sewn in vermicelli trails all over the dress. The same sequins have been applied in a classical motif at sleeve edge and waistband. The full-length peach coloured velvet coat with long sleeves and white fox fur cuffs pictured in newspaper reports used here does not however survive in the collection. The use of the name, *Pêche Melba*, references Hartnell's opinion first voiced in 1924 that this dessert was the height of sophistication. The fact that he chose to name his last dress - albeit unaware that this was to be his last design – illustrates that his colour choices and name preferences had not changed over a lifetime of designing.<sup>678</sup> Other classic Hartnell elements used here in *Pêche Melba* recognisable as the designer's unmistakable handwriting (as discussed in-depth in Chapter Four), include the fur cuffs, the use of velvet, the beaded embroidery, and the slim-line full-length style of gown with voluminous full-length coat. Hartnell's history as a royal designer and also as theatrical costumier is embedded in this one dress. This history has been unpicked here through a close reading of sketches, photographs, and where possible other similar garments by Hartnell. This ensemble represents his identity in name, materials used, colour and style.

Hartnell's house style was built upon his identity and this had to be sustained. The success of his style was intrinsically linked to the financial survival of the house and enhanced by the linked-in beauty products and internationally licensed goods, sold in Hartnell's name globally, which will be discussed in the

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<sup>675</sup> Tom Ford. Interview by Mark Kermode. *The Culture Show*. Episode 24. BBC 2. Thursday 11 February 2010. Television.

<sup>676</sup> As already outlined in Chapter One, the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive and Collection can be split into sections including a dress collection, which comprises the private collections of Doris and Claire Mitchison and the Model dress collection from the salon.

<sup>677</sup> HMA&C/DM/1979/21.10.2008/JH/Geven House.

<sup>678</sup> Peach Melba was introduced in 1892 in honour of the opera singer Dame Nelly Melba, who was dressed by the couturier Charles Worth.

next chapter. This chapter has shown that the success and stability of the salon relied on a series of endlessly repeated standard garments – day dress and jacket/coat, tailored woollen suits and full length embellished eveningwear.

## Chapter Six

### Personal, Celebrity and Professional Identity and the Hartnell trademark signature and the Promotion of Business at 'Home' in the post-war period.

#### 6.1. Introduction

Chapters Four and Five established that aspects of Hartnell's personal identity were present in his signature look. This house style was established and promoted through reference to his celebrity clientele, in particular his royal dressing. Chapter Five offered examples of fashion and royal garments imbued with this signature look or 'house style' as representative of his professional identity, and established that the Hartnell fashion trademark looks and brand identity world-wide via the royal and celebrity body.

This chapter will examine clutches of material in the Archive relating to the manufacture, promotion and sale of Hartnell licensed goods, in order to offer evidence of his commercial exploitation of this reputation. From 1945, Hartnell's business sold a range of periphery goods, including perfume and toiletries, jewellery, stockings, lingerie and make-up, all of which were marketed using Hartnell's signature as a key device. The particular focus here is Hartnell's signature, *Norman Hartnell*, as the trademark, which is traceable throughout the Archive in paperwork, photographs, woven labels and packaging.

Hartnell's personal taste and identity, present in his signature 'look' and house style, was located in every element of presentation of the Norman Hartnell brand.<sup>679</sup> This was embedded in every product from the colours of the packaging, to the names of the licensed and franchised products including perfume and stockings. As this thesis has posited, these aspects of the signature

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<sup>679</sup> The term 'brand' is a modern term not really used between 1923-1979 when the House of Hartnell was operational. Marc Gobé. *Emotional Branding: the new Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People*. (New York: Allworth Press, 2001), Liz Moor. *The Rise of Brands*. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), Mark Tungate, *Fashion Brands: Branding Style from Armani to Zara*. (London/Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2004).

house style had much to do with his feminine taste and his queer identity, but were also representational of a more historically established idea of traditional British royal style. As Chapters Four and Five revealed, however, along with his ‘romantic’<sup>680</sup> styles of royal dress and eveningwear, representational of this personal taste, Hartnell also designed smart, tailored lines, despite the absence of examples of these in his privately owned, archived collection. His reputation today is based on his pastel coloured beaded eveningwear made during the 1950s. However, at that time, he was not only highly regarded for these styles. As an example of this, in her newspaper article on Hartnell’s royal clothes worn in Canada in 1959, Canadian fashion journalist Lotta Dempsey commented that:

I remember the first time I saw some of Hartnell’s models showing cocktail clothes at his salon, one gray and foggy November afternoon in London. Having, at that time, seen only the dresses he had made for royalty, I was stunned at the smart, sleek and ultra-sophisticated styles, and the vivid shades and combinations.<sup>681</sup>

Despite the design and production of more saleable couture styles between 1923 and 1979 however, as already verified in this research, Hartnell’s own taste and identity is most clearly present in his evening wear in shades of pink and mauve (for example) decorated with fur, feathers and beaded embroidery, and it is this style of dress with which he is most easily associated. This ‘look’ is clearly observable through what remains of his work in the Hartnell-Mitchison Dress Collection and Archive.<sup>682</sup> It is this romantic ‘look’ which as shown here Hartnell himself preferred, rather than the ‘sleek and ultra-sophisticated styles’ described by Dempsey that surfaces in the graphics, packaging, and publicity for his licensed products such as perfume, in the 1950s.

## 6.2. Hartnell’s signature in the archive and his name and identity as the sign of the house: Licensed products 1952-1979

Hartnell’s signature above all was used as the key marketing device for the company. When I first encountered the Archive in October 2005, the majority

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<sup>680</sup> Taylor, “Romantic”, 65-91. “Romantic” is the title of Lou Taylor’s chapter on London couturier’s post-war evening styles in *The Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion 1947-1997*. (London: V&A Publications, 1996).

<sup>681</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 6/File 2/8/1959/Lotta Dempsey. ‘Hartnell Tells “Why” of Queen’s Clothes.’ *Toronto Daily Star*. Saturday June 27 1959:56.

<sup>682</sup> See Appendix 2.

of the material was stored in paper carrier bags from the salon clearly printed with the words *Norman Hartnell*. These bags, dating from the 1980s, instantly presented me with Hartnell's signature, repeated over and over again in magnified form. (Figure 6.1). Much of the paperwork inside these bags was still in its original folders, lifted directly from a filing cabinet at 26 Bruton Street by Mitchison, business correspondence and documents pinned together with dressmaking pins by Anne Price, secretary and personal assistant to Hartnell and Mitchison from 1943. The collection is in this way instantly recognisable as the archive of a (the) dress designer. (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). The lettering on the bags is in green, a colour associated with Hartnell from 1934 when his new salon at 26 Bruton Street was decorated in 'Hartnell green' which he described himself as 'a subtle tone of green resembling lichen, celedon green or that elusive shade that gleams on the back of the leaves of the silver willow when softly stirred by the breeze.'<sup>683</sup>

Hartnell's handwriting is present throughout his Archive. This is not unexpected. Much of what was produced as a result of day-to-day operations at the house, including original fashion designs, business correspondence, licensing agreements, and the use of the Hartnell trademark, involved legal transactions and copyright issues. Therefore Hartnell's handwriting is particularly evident in the form of his signature, which appears constantly in handwritten form, and is also in printed and woven form, stitched into Hartnell couture garments.

### ***6.2.1. Handwritten signatures***

Handwritten examples are considered firstly here as a representation of his personal and professional identity and secondly as the trademark of the couture house, translating Hartnell's personal identity into intellectual property, and placing it upon his company's luxury goods. Garments designed and made at the house of Hartnell carried woven labels from the 1920s, when the salon was at 10 Bruton Street, reproducing Hartnell's signature, both by way of signing his work in the form of, each individual hand made garment, much like an artist or

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<sup>683</sup> Hartnell, *Silver & Gold*, 49.

sculptor. These were originally white with ‘Hartnell’ in gold taken directly from his handwriting <sup>684</sup> and used as the trademark. <sup>685</sup> (Figure 6.2).

These labels, as with the trademark of all couture houses, carried within them the status so carefully constructed by Hartnell over time, combining his personal and professional identity as a man and as a designer as discussed in the previous chapters. Every item produced in the name of Hartnell was packaged, wrapped and displayed using colours, images, graphics and his signature script associated with Hartnell’s identity. From the beaded and tailored couture and ready-to-wear garments to coat hangers, garment bags, perfume bottles to Hartnell sheets, these different types of material culture pepper the surfaces, and fill the drawers and wardrobes at the Archive house, both in the personal spaces and in the now boxed part of the Archive stored in the attic.

As discussed in detail in Chapter Four, whether executed by his own hand or that of his assistant designers and sketchers, each of the original sketched designs was signed by Hartnell. Hartnell’s sketched designs reveal his design process, but not just as a working drawing for the benefit of both customer and workroom staff, but also as a legally patented, registered design, subject to copyright laws. <sup>686</sup> ‘The Registered Designs Act 1949 (as amended) provides for registration of new designs having individual character with the Patent Office. Registration confers upon the registered proprietor the exclusive right to the design and any design which does not produce on an informed user a different impression for up to 25 years.’ <sup>687</sup> Thus the drawn design belongs legally to the fashion house and Hartnell’s signature was a necessary legal addition. <sup>688</sup>

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<sup>684</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 6/File 2/4. List of Trade Marks in the name of Norman Hartnell Ltd. See Appendix 3.

<sup>685</sup> The material was sorted and bagged in this way by Mitchison, as the handwriting on the labels is recognisable as his. Mitchison’s handwriting is very similar to Hartnell’s, perhaps emulating the other man’s hand overtime.

<sup>686</sup> Gerald Dworkin. *Blackstone's guide to the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988: The law of copyright and related rights*. (London : Blackstone, 1989), Johnston, Dan. *Design Protection: A practical guide to the law on plagiarism for manufacturers and designers*. 4th ed. (Aldershot: Gower, Design Council, c1995), Torremans, Paul. *Holyoak and Torremans intellectual property law*. 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>687</sup> Design Registration. Intellectual Property and Information Technology Update. <http://www.ipit-update.com/regdes.htm> Web. 5 September 2011.

<sup>688</sup> At the time of the sale of the House of Hartnell in 1985, the material used here, including sketched designs and business paperwork was legally to be signed over to the buyer, Mani Silverman, and a contract signed to the effect that all material linked to the design process should be included in the sale exists in the archive. This did not happen, and the Hartnell Archive material was taken by Mitchison. NHOH/Manny Silverman/2010/14/Digital Recording.

### *6.2.2. From schoolboy 'hand' to world famous trademark: the development of an identity and a signature*

The artefacts in the Archive enable an analysis of the development of his signature. Hartnell's written signature developed over time to become the slanted hand recognizable today as the sign of the house. Early examples can be found on objects in the Archive, for example inside his red, leather wallet dating to his school days. (Figure 6.3). It is also present on the inside of the cover of his books, where the signature begins to slant to the right from about 1920. In his copy of *The Duke of Gandia*, the first play he played a female lead in for the Marlowe Dramatic Society at the University of Cambridge in 1920, the letters of his signature are formed in much the same way as in later signatures. (Figure 6.4). The writing is however more upright in 1920 than it appears in 1947. Inside the cover of Hartnell's copy of *A Distant Summer* by Edith Saunders he has written 'Norman Hartnell, Paris, Feb/March 1947.' (Figure 6.5).<sup>689</sup>

The similarity between Hartnell's 1920 pencil signature and his couture label, used at the house of Hartnell is clear. Keri Kettle and Gerald Häuble write:

We propose that signing one's name acts as a general self-identity prime. Here the term self-identity refers to the totality of all selves, identities and schemas that form one's sense of self ... individuals strongly associate their signature with their identity. Although there are numerous ways in which people may present their identity to others, signing one's name has distinct legal, social and economic implications.<sup>690</sup>

Thus, as Kettle and Häuble suggest, the meanings behind Hartnell's signature changed from being an indication of ownership of a school-book or wallet, representing the developing identity of a teenage boy, to a signifier of intellectual property – a commodity worth thousands of pounds in the post-war period, and is still a registered trademark today.

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<sup>689</sup> Dior launched his 'New Look' collection on 12 February 1947 so we know that Hartnell was in Paris during February and March 1947 because he had a habit of writing where he was when he was reading a particular book and the date he was reading it. I Interviews with staff members suggest that he would never have been seen at the couture show of a Paris house but perhaps he was in Paris at the time the collection was shown.

<sup>690</sup> Keri L. Kettle and Gerald Häubl. "The Signature Effect: Signing Influence Consumption Related Behaviour by Priming Self-Identity." *Journal of Consumer Research*. Vol 38 October 2011. N.pag. Web. March 2011.

Hartnell's handwritten signature, described in terms of trademark as 'script style',<sup>691</sup> was reproduced in his couture labels from the 1920s onwards and in his ready-to-wear labels in the 1970s. (Figure 6.6). Thus his name and his signature, which he had developed over time from schoolboy to couturier, became the trademark and identity of his couture house stitched into every garment designed by Hartnell, and from 1953 into all garments designed by his assistant designers, and those who took on later designer roles after his death in 1979. Regardless of who sketched the design for the house, the drawing was always signed by Hartnell or by someone else copying Hartnell's signature.<sup>692</sup> Evidence for this was found in a sketchpad in the Archive, which survives as an example of an unknown assistant practicing the Hartnell signature over and over again, probably in order to reproduce it on each sketched design.<sup>693</sup>

### **6.2.3. 'Trade Marks'<sup>694</sup> – 'the meaning of trademark'<sup>695</sup>**

A framed certificate dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 1971 in the archive states that 'Norman Hartnell was incorporated under the Companies Act 1908-1917 as a limited company on the 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1929, 'No. 243083'.<sup>696</sup> Norman Hartnell Ltd., the 'patent company' (also Hartnell International, Norman Hartnell Jewellery Ltd.,) used Hartnell's name and reproductions of his handwritten signature as the registered trademark of the various Hartnell companies and franchises. *The Businessman's Pocket Book*, published in 1955, found amongst Hartnell and Mitchison's books, states that:

A Trade Mark may be said to be a mark with which manufacturers and traders brand their goods for the purposes of identification and distinction. A trade mark is registerable at the Patent Office only if it contains one or more of the following essential features: The name of a company, firm or individual represented in a special or particular manner, the signature of the applicant or of a predecessor

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<sup>691</sup>Box 6/file 2/4. List of Trade Marks in the name of Norman Hartnell Ltd.

<sup>692</sup> Cally Blackman's 2007 publication *100 Years of Fashion Illustration*. Laurence King, 2007, included a drawing of Queen Elizabeth II in her Coronation gown, signed by Hartnell, which she accredits to Hartnell, but was in fact drawn by Ian Thomas, Hartnell's assistant from 1953. This drawing is held at the Royal Court Dress Collection at Kensington Palace as part of the Ian Thomas Archive. Two reproductions of Ian Thomas's Coronation drawing were executed by Rusty Lewis for George Mitchison. One hangs on the wall of the drawing room at the house in Cornwall, apparently signed by Hartnell, although it is not known whether this signature is genuine.

<sup>693</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 3/ File 19.

<sup>694</sup> Carlton Wallace. *The Business Man's Pocket Book*. (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1954): 69.

<sup>695</sup> Liz Moor. *The Rise of Brands*. (Oxford/New York: 2007): 1-6.

<sup>696</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 20/1971.

in his business, a word or words not having direct reference to the character or quality of the goods, and not being according to its ordinary signification, a geographical name or a surname, any other distinctive mark.<sup>697</sup>

The Hartnell trademark not only appeared on all garments designed and produced at the house, but on the packaging for all licensed products from stockings to costume jewellery, sheets, silk ties, and rolls of suiting fabric. (Figures 6.7, 6.8 & 6.9).

#### ***6.2.4. A signature as emblem or trademark***

Linguistics professor Roy Harris writes that a signature (and also a trademark) acts as an emblem, which are ‘signs based on one-many correlations, in virtue of which the ‘many’ are regarded as forming a single class ... Emblems obey the logic of replication: ideally, a given emblem always takes the same form.’ This is an apt way of considering Hartnell’s signature and subsequent use of it as trademark. As Harris explains, ‘the common semiological factor in these cases is the identification of one particular X - and no other – across the range of instances in which the emblem occurs.’<sup>698</sup>

Harris writes that it is the integration of the act of writing the signature, the ‘specific individual in question’, the context in which it is written and the equipment with which the signature is ‘signed’, that make signatures ‘macrosocial’ not simply the written word as a substitute for speech.<sup>699</sup> The signing can involve, ‘a rubber stamp or any other piece of equipment’, as indeed many of the differently executed signatures by Hartnell do. (Figures 6.10, 6.11 & 6.12).

As the progressive development of Hartnell’s signatures demonstrates, and Harris states, ‘the signature cannot be explained by reference to any writing system ... in the signing of cheques, letters, wills etc ... there is no question of being taught to sign one’s name.’<sup>700</sup> Hartnell’s signature developed over time similarly alongside his technologies of self-presentation. The analysis of a series of studio photographic portraits of Hartnell in chapter three demonstrated his growing confidence and establishment of his character, and in the same way,

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<sup>697</sup> Wallace, *The Business Man’s Pocket Book*, 69.

<sup>698</sup> Roy Harris. *Signs of Writing*. (London: Routledge, 1995): 71-72.

<sup>699</sup> Harris, *Signs of Writing*, 80.

<sup>700</sup> Harris, *Signs of Writing*, 81.

signatures can be paralleled to these photographs from the same moment in time, in order to begin to identify the burgeoning personal and professional identity of the couturier. From a practical and legal perspective, the use of a trademark as ‘emblem’ is firstly to adopt some means of control over a product, especially a luxury product such as Hartnell couture. In terms of profit and inherent value in a trademark the tight control over marketing and sales is what produces the desirability for the product.<sup>701</sup> The values and symbolic properties embodied in the Hartnell, luxury brand in the post-war period built upon Hartnell’s royal patronage, and also Hartnell’s romantic persona and his personal identity and taste, already analysed in Chapters Two and Three. The trademark Hartnell name and signature used on licensed lines such as perfume and stockings was accordingly designed to offer the value added factor of glamour, luxury and royal connection to the buying consumer.

The Hartnell signature as trademark thus appears on many types of packaging for Hartnell licensed products linked to his couture house, imbuing this packaging with his identity. Barbara Vinken writes that the *griffe* or ‘the sign of the house ... guarantees original authorial authenticity.’ She states that:

It stands as the signature of the uniqueness, the inspiration and the ability of particular individuals. Traditionally, the *griffe* is hidden inside of the dress; it seals the contract between the couturier and the buyers. In *haute couture*, the *griffe* is the guarantee of a limited edition, and signifies the hands-on involvement of the master-designer. Through it, the fashion-creation approaches the artwork; it becomes a collector’s object.<sup>702</sup>

Hartnell’s signature was also clearly constructed as part of his self-fashioning and identity. As outlined above, early on in his life, his signature came to represent his identity and his relationship to his objects, the ownership of a copy of a play or book, a wallet.

### ***6.2.5. The Hartnell Woven Label***

The Archive house has surrendered very few ‘virgin’ woven labels, yet to be stitched into the garments they were produced to ‘sign’. As the house was slowly unpacked, drawers opened and bags sifted through, some labels did

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<sup>701</sup> Liz Moor. *The Rise of Brands*. (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2007): 106-107.

<sup>702</sup> Barbara Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist: Trends and Cycles in the Fashion System*. (Oxford: Berg, 2005): 81.

appear, later identified as relating to the various types of garment designed (not necessarily produced)<sup>703</sup> at 26 Bruton Street. The earliest woven labels stitched into Hartnell's couture garments from the late 1920s were exact representations of Hartnell's script signature. (Figure 6.2). One roll of narrow, white labels with Hartnell's name woven in yellow – an exact copy of his personal signature, indicate that Hartnell's business interests were to be found in 'Paris – London – New York', which was only true during the 1930s – Hartnell had no premises in Paris after the war. (Figure 6.13). The roll of labels is not from that era in the biography of Norman Hartnell Ltd., and might possibly be for stitching into Hartnell knitwear, which was produced in the late 1950s/early 1960s.

The labels seen in the collection of Hartnell garments belonging to the variety performers Elsie and Doris Waters in Brighton Museum and their matching black & white dog-tooth check silk dresses and corresponding jackets date from the early 1950s, and were large, white woven labels with 'Hartnell London – Paris' in green.<sup>704</sup> (Figure 6.14). Several of these same labels were found in the Hartnell-Mitchison Dress Collection, in the 'White Collection' – designed by Hartnell to promote Tiffany jewellery in New York c1971, demonstrating that these labels were in use for twenty years. (Figures 6.15 & 6.16). High-end ready-to-wear, designed by Hartnell for sale in his boutique, Le Petit Salon, was introduced to the ground floor at 26 Bruton Street in 1963 and were labelled differently. Hartnell menswear and ties, produced from 1974, were also 'signed' using his signature and garments from his Ready-to Wear collections from the 1970s were labelled using his signature reproduced in yellow on a white background (Figures 6.17 & 6.18).

A file containing correspondence between George Mitchison and John Andrews of Invicta Labels Ltd. dating from 1974 includes examples of the new satin labels woven at Invicta for Le Petit Salon.<sup>705</sup> The letter reveals that: 'there is a flap attached showing Norman Hartnell's signature superimposed on the name Hartnell, and we can weave same in which ever style you prefer.'<sup>706</sup> The new

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<sup>703</sup> Hartnell's high-end ready-to-wear, clothes, sold in his Petit Salon from 1963, were manufactured by the firm GVK and also by outworkers.

<sup>704</sup> The earliest garments belonging to the sisters are a pair of raspberry pink, full-length beaded evening gowns with short jackets dating from 1943, when the sisters were entertaining troops on the Burma front in India during the war. They have no Hartnell woven labels inside.

<sup>705</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 40. BC. 1974. 1.40 x 5.

<sup>706</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 40/BC/1974/File 1/File of correspondence pertaining to labels – includes examples of woven Petit Salon labels.

labels did not however use Hartnell's signature but the Hartnell name was woven in capital letters – white on green for Le Petit Salon, and green on white for the couture. (Figures 6.19 & 6.20). The letter also reveals that the labels had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office for approval.<sup>707</sup> It would seem that this was the moment when Hartnell's signature was discontinued from use in both couture and boutique labels and perhaps this change of label needed legal approval. (Figures 6.21 & 6.22).

### 6.3. Norman Hartnell Ltd., and Associated Companies

As already stated, Norman Hartnell Ltd., was incorporated on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 1929, with nominal capital at £10000 and shares at £1 each. (Figure 6.23). Hartnell International Ltd. was incorporated on 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1966 along with Hartnell Perfumes Ltd., a company that in the end never operated.<sup>708</sup> In 1955, Norman Hartnell Jewellery was incorporated, and high-end costume pieces including necklaces and earrings were produced for sale.

#### *6.3.1. Hartnell Jewellery 1955*

The design and manufacture of couture jewellery was along established practice in Paris from the pre-war years by Chanel and Schiaparelli, for example, and famously by Dior in the 1950s. As Alexandra Palmer's research confirms, Dior's costume jewellery was 'an important component of the complete Dior look ... Costume jewellery was coordinated with the collection in colour and texture and was realized in only three weeks, just one month prior to the showing of the collection ... and exclusive to his boutique.'<sup>709</sup> Dior purchased designs from the leading jewellery designers, but Hartnell, apparently designed his own jewellery collections in the mid 1950s.

Hartnell's creative work and business in jewellery retailing is here discussed for the first time. The Hartnell jewellery company was set up in 1955, and was equally owned by Hartnell and Mitchison. The names of the subscribers on the 'Articles of Association' (the shareholders and directors of the new company)

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<sup>707</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 40/BC/1974/File 1/File of correspondence pertaining to labels – includes examples of woven Petit Salon labels. Letter to Capt. Mitchison from John Andrews, Director at Invicta labels, Wednesday 25.9.74.

<sup>708</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/c1970s. The Schedule. Part 1. Associated Companies.

<sup>709</sup> Palmer, *Dior*, 64-66.

are Norman Bishop Hartnell, Company Director, and George Alexander Mitchison, also Company Director, and ‘The share capital of the Company is £5,000, divided into 5,000 shares of £1 each.’<sup>710</sup>

Two original commercial advertisement designs found in a bag of sketches were obviously produced by Hartnell to promote Hartnell jewellery at that time. They demonstrate the ways in which there was an attempt to maintain a uniform approach to the signature identity of the Hartnell brand, incorporating all goods produced under the company’s trademark name. (Figures 6.24 & 6.25). The use of two bold colours, dividing the sketched design, with the posed figure of a woman stepping across the blocks of colour with one white leg left in the black section of the design, and the Hartnell signature across the two-tone sketch, references one of Hartnell’s signature evening looks analysed in Chapter Four. Then bold silk fabrics were combined and then the join of these two fabrics was worked over with beadwork in corresponding colours. (Figure 4.4).

The Hartnell necklace and earring in the design is painted in the piece’s actual size and represents Hartnell’s taste in small flowers, the glass crystals and pearl drops directly mirroring his typical signature embroidery for which he was so famous. An example of this floral detail worked in beads and paillettes can be seen in the similarly embroidered silk sandals made for Hartnell’s personal use. (Figure 6.26). A necklace made to this design with the Hartnell name stamped on the reverse of the necklace was found on the Internet trading site *eBay*, in 2008, revealing that the clamped ‘jewels’ were green. Chapter Four has already described the use of clamped, coloured glass ‘jewels’ on Hartnell’s grandest evening dresses. In the Archive, two other Hartnell necklaces made in the 1950s were found also of clamped jewels, one in shades of orange crystals made up in a floral design, and one in pale pink and blue jewels - the colours Hartnell famously dressed Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother from 1939. The name Norman Hartnell is stamped onto the back of each necklace in capital letters.<sup>711</sup> (Figures 6.27, 6.28 & 6.29).

Treasured possessions now owned by Claire Williams, and kept in her personal jewellery box, are Hartnell’s own collection of tiepins. These are not made of

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<sup>710</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/B/1955/File 9/6.

<sup>711</sup> There is no paperwork in the archive relating to the manufacture of the Hartnell Jewellery so the identity of the manufacturer is unknown at the time of writing, August 2011.

coloured glass, as was his line of costume jewellery, but the small flowers like forget-me-nots, are worked in diamonds, sapphires and rubies, and one large pearl. (Figures 6.30). These exquisite objects, constantly publically worn close to Hartnell's heart, provide absolute evidence of his personal taste and identity. They also offer further evidence that what he chose to wear on his own body mirrored the designs created to be worn by his female clients, both in the form of garments and jewellery. This again suggests that his personal identity shaped, and significantly so, the identity of his global brand.

## 6.4. Hartnell Licensed lines and franchised products

Hartnell perfumes, also now subjected to analysis, were licensed and manufactured under Hartnell's name between 1953 and the mid 1980s. Licensing agreements between Hartnell's and the perfume manufacturers J.Grossmiths and Thos. Christy & Co., survive in the Archive.<sup>712</sup> These date from Grossmiths's first agreement in 1952 to the most recent perfume licensing agreement with Christy's that dates from 1982. These legal agreements between manufacturers and distributors and the couture house were vitally important to the financial success of the house between 1953 and the 1980s. These perfume manufacturers kept separate financial accounts and operated separately from the couture house, paying Hartnell's a percentage of the sales – a percentage that dwindled over the years. Hartnell was involved in the packaging and promotion of the product from the start, and had final approval on the packaging designs. The Hartnell trademark remained the property of Hartnell's who granted Grossmiths and Christy's 'the registered users' permission to use the Hartnell name under license.<sup>713</sup>

### *6.4.1. Hartnell perfume*

Photographs of collections taken in the showroom at Bruton Street in the mid 1930s show a Hartnell perfume on the glass shelves for sale in the Hartnell showroom. (Figure 6.31). The name of this perfume cannot be read and no material pertaining to possible perfumes sold at the salon pre-1953 exist in the

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<sup>712</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>713</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 25/ Licensing Agreement dated 1979 between Norman Hartnell Limited and Thos. Christy & Co., Limited.

Archive.<sup>714</sup> According to promotional material and correspondence, perfume was however apparently produced under Hartnell's name in Paris, and in the immediate post-war atmosphere of 1945-46 three new perfumes were devised for the North American market.

Hartnell went to Paris in mid September 1945, a month after the end of World War II, to meet with the shareholders of Hartnell's perfume company. Three new perfumes were launched in New York in November and December 1945, *Bright Stars*, *Gay Glitter* and *Stolen Heaven*, which were manufactured by Les Parfums Hartnell SA'. (Figures 6.32 & 6.33). Documentary evidence in the form of correspondence and designs for perfume advertisements for New York publications reveals that this Paris based perfume company had been operational at least since the late nineteen thirties. (Figures 6.34 & 6.35). It seems that during the Occupation of Paris, (1940-1944), little perfume had been sold in France, as the correspondence states:

As to business generally, it appeared that very little business had been done during the occupation, that Girdwood had in hand about £5,000 worth of perfumes and bottles and that approximately the company had 300,000 francs to its credit.' It was agreed on this visit that a new line of perfume for the American market was to be manufactured in France and sold through the French company.<sup>715</sup>

The advertisement for the perfume *Gay Glitter* shows a woman wearing a matching diamond tiara and earrings, and wearing Hartnell's signature, sequined evening glove draped across her male partner's shoulder, to sell the product. (Figure 6.36). The names of the perfumes also echo Hartnell's signature decorative motifs, with 'stars' and 'glitter' conjuring up images of his romantic evening wear, and in the photograph of the window display promoting the new perfumes at Bonwit Teller, the mannequin wears a full-length, mermaid line silk gown, and large stars are lit up beneath a cascade of sheer fabric. (Figure 6.37).

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<sup>714</sup> The earliest reference to perfume by Hartnell is from 1945, when his Paris based perfume business, which was set up before the war, launched three perfumes onto the North American market. These perfumes were manufactured in France and sold in New York department stores.

<sup>715</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 2. Business Correspondence. 1945/10.4: 1-3.

#### 6.4.2. "In Love": Licensing agreements for perfume and toiletries, J. Grossmiths and Thos. Christy & Co., 1952-1982

##### 6.4.2.a. Licensing agreement between Norman Hartnell (Mr. Hartnell) Norman Hartnell Ltd. (Hartnell's) and J. Grossmith & Son Ltd. (Grossmiths)

Hartnell's first perfume to be launched in UK, "In Love", created in 1952 (in development during the late 1940s) was eventually and significantly launched in Coronation year, 1953. Despite the much earlier introduction of perfume and toiletries by the French couturiers, (Paul Poiret's *Rosine*, 1911, Chanel's *No. 5*, 1921, Lanvin's *Arpège*, 1923 and Patou's *Tout Lelong* in 1926),<sup>716</sup> British couture houses were slow to do the same.

This first Hartnell *In Love* perfume agreement was to last seven years from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1952 with the option of renewal. The agreement shows that Grossmiths were to be the sole manufacturer of Hartnell's *In Love* and also responsible for the advertising and press publicity of the products. The cost of display material, dummies, testing bottles and samples was to be borne by Hartnell's. Several photographs of Hartnell's *Silver & Gold* fashion collection launched in coronation year, have these *In Love* showcards and samples of the perfume in the background. (Figure 6.38).

The involvement of British Royalty in Hartnell's commercial work was not considered appropriate, and Grossmiths agreed not to use Hartnell's royal connections to publicise the scent. The contract states that: 'In any publicity undertaken by Grossmiths for their own account no mention shall be made of Mr. Hartnell's position as dressmaker to any member of the royal Family without the written consent of Mr. Hartnell.'<sup>717</sup> Prices were fixed between Hartnell's and Grossmiths and Hartnell's were to receive 20% of the wholesale price received by Grossmiths for the sale of the perfume and corresponding toiletries.

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<sup>716</sup> Jacqueline Demornex, *Lucien Lelong*. Trans. Luisa Nitrato Izzo. (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2008) 29, Tomoko Okawa, "Licensing Practices at Maison Christian Dior." Régina Lee Glaszczyk, Ed. *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 83. For a further useful critical history of perfume, see Geoffrey Jones. *Beauty Imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>717</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/Draft Licensing Agreement between Hartnell and Grossmiths. Dated 11/2/53: 1.

In 1957, publicity for Hartnell's *In Love* was scheduled to appear in eight magazines aimed at different readerships from *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* to *She* and *Woman's Own*. Figures 6.39 and 6.40 set out exactly which months and specific dates the advertisements will appear in which magazine and the advertisement to be used. During the 1950s it would appear that Hartnell aimed to publicise his fashion house to a wide rather than a purely elite audience.

The agreement reveals that Hartnell's already had an arrangement to market Hartnell perfumery and perfume products in the United States of America and in Canada by an American perfumery house (as discussed above) and it was agreed that Hartnell's could sell this particular line of perfume on their premises.<sup>718</sup> Although Hartnell perfumes appeared to have been manufactured for the North American market from 1945, *In Love* was never manufactured or distributed there. As Geoffrey Jones has explained, in the decades after the Second World War, 'there was a renewed drive to globalize the beauty industry. The results were mixed.' Some brands became widely available, such as Max Factor, however markets for most brands were more regional than global.<sup>719</sup> This did not change until the last decades of the twentieth century. Letters in the Archive between individual consumers and Ann Price at Hartnell's from the late 1960s demonstrate that the perfume *In Love* was not manufactured or distributed by any outlets in North America. Clients had to write personally to Miss Price at 26 Bruton Street with their individual orders, which she relayed to Grossmiths so that they might post the products to these consumers. This arrangement proved very unsuccessful and unworkable, as many letters in the Archive indicate, and this contributed to financial problems.<sup>720</sup>

#### **6.4.2.b. Licensing Agreement between Norman Hartnell Limited and Thos. Christy & Co. Limited dated between 18/5/1970 to 31 Dec 1980**

When Grossmith's agreement came to an end at the end of the 1960s, another company, Thos. Christy & Co., re-launched *In Love* perfume and toiletries in 1970. The licensing agreement between Hartnell's and Christy's reads very

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<sup>718</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/file - Draft Licensing Agreement between Hartnell and Grossmiths. Dated 11/2/53: 2.

<sup>719</sup> Geoffrey Jones. *Beauty imagined: A History of the Global Beauty Industry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 232.

<sup>720</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File1/1967-68/ File or correspondence between Hartnell's, individual consumers and retailers in the United States.

similarly to that between Grossmiths and the couture house. A copy of the press release in the Archive reveals that Hartnell designed special dresses for his Autumn/Winter collection to tie-in with this launch, and these were displayed in a special fashion show to celebrate. The statement reads:

In Love and In Love Again ... These are the names Norman Hartnell has given to two of his evening dresses in this Autumn's Collection which you will have seen today. He has chosen these to compliment his ever popular range of "In Love" perfume and toiletries which were created for him ten years ago. Today we wanted you to meet Mr Hartnell in the highly personalised settings of his famous Salon in Bruton Street, and to see his own Autumn Collection specially presented for you.<sup>721</sup>

In 1970, Christy's agreed to pay Hartnell's 'a Royalty of twenty per cent of the net wholesale home price received by Christy from the sale of Hartnell perfumery.'<sup>722</sup> By 1985, amendments to the original license stated that Christy's were to pay Hartnell royalties of 6 ½ %.<sup>723</sup> The new contract with Christy's in 1970 proved very financially successful, as a letter from John Royle<sup>724</sup> to Tom Gurr<sup>725</sup> noted: 'John Glover has reported extremely good sales figures for the September Quarter. *In Love* is almost at the stage of the very best Grossmith years that is really wonderful after only ONE year's complete trading. The new perfume 'Forever' is producing figures better than the forecasts.'<sup>726</sup> As a press release stated in 1975: 'Why has "In Love" proved to popular for so long? The rose coloured packaging is elegant, the name is romantic, it is a couture perfume at a very reasonable price.'<sup>727</sup>

### ***6.5. Packaging and Perfume bottles 1961-1982***

In the spring of 1961 perfume bottle designs were ordered by Hartnell's from a Monsieur Colas, Univer (the French Glass Export Union), 17 Bis, Rue de Paradis, Paris, 10e. The three bottle designs were described as *Rose/Butterfly*,

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<sup>721</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 16/1970/Norman Hartnell Perfume Press Release, "In Love and In Love Again"

<sup>722</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 25/ Licensing Agreement dated 1979 between Norman Hartnell Limited and Thos. Christy & Co., Limited

<sup>723</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 25/Revised Draft Perfumery Agreement 31/7/1985.

<sup>724</sup> John Royle was Hartnell's Company Secretary between c1965 and c1980.

<sup>725</sup> Tom Gurr was in charge of all Norman Hartnell business interests in Australia between the 1950s and 1970s.

<sup>726</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 6/File 2/ 5/1972 Letter from John Royle, 301, Howard House, Dolphin Square, London, W.1. October 9th 1972, to Tom Gurr.

<sup>727</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 16/ *Hartnell's "In Love" – The Fragrance Which Has Withstood the Test of Time*. Press Release. September 30, 1975.

*Bunch of Violets* and *Geometrical bottle*. The moulds for the bottles are in the Archive along with photographs of the bottles made up in glass for publicity shots in around 1960. (Figure 6.41 & 6.42). These original moulds and dummies were found in the attic at in the Archive house amongst a box of Hartnell beaded Christmas cards dating between 1950s-1980s. (Figure 6.43). As discussed in Chapters Two, Four and Five, artificial flowers (especially roses) were a favourite decorative accessory of Hartnell's, and were also incorporated into his designs for eveningwear. Also, floral print silk fabrics were a feature of Hartnell's dress and coat designs for both Queen Elizabeth and Elizabeth II, especially for overseas tours, as described in Chapter Five. The butterfly also featured in his romantic ingénue styles for the young Princess Margaret. (Figures 6.44 & 6.45).

Two items of make-up packaging were found in the Archive including the *In Love* handbag phial – a small Doric column in black and gold with Hartnell's name in gold on the top.<sup>728</sup> (Figure 6.46). This was designed to contain a small bottle of perfume, and then slipped into a black sheath with Hartnell's signature in gold lettering. This column is reminiscent of Hartnell's columned Regency style interiors at Lovel Dene and the many marble columns once owned by Hartnell that decorate the interiors of Geven House today. (Figure 6.47 & 6.48).

Photographs of Grossmith's, Hartnell approved *In Love* packaging dating from 1957, shows the pink heart shaped talc dispenser that was to become, what was later described in a subsequent Christy's agreement in 1982, as 'sacrosanct'. It was recommended that for the re-launch of *In Love* in that year, 'that this remains as a standard pack and is available as a component for coffrets'. (Figure 6.49). However, revealing perhaps an understanding of the need to move away from this dated design towards a more modern shape, Christy's also added 'to enable us to update our brand image and to compete with all other major brands we recommend the introduction of a round talc drum.'<sup>729</sup> The pink and turquoise blue packaging of these toiletries, shown in figure 6.50, was also decorated with bows, roses and net trim, typical of Hartnell's favoured colours and embellishment, such as the turquoise beaded lace pyjama suit with artificial rose corsage, and also the regular styles that were a feature of his collections. He

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<sup>728</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/O/c1958/MU/12

<sup>729</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 25/Recommendations for the Re-Launch of Hartnell "In Love" Standard Packs and for Christmas Packaging 1982

also, as Chapters Four and Five have noted, dressed both Queen Elizabeth and Her Majesty the Queen in these colours.

In the re-launch of *In Love* perfume and toiletries in 1971, the range was packaged in pink and turquoise. The fragrance was promoted as ‘a mixture of jasmine and jonquil flowers with a long lasting quality.’<sup>730</sup> It was agreed that:

Christy and Hartnell’s shall cooperate in the design of all Hartnell perfumery and all packaging thereof and all advertising thereof and all the Hartnell perfumery shall be subject to the approval of Hartnell’s and in conformity with samples accepted by Hartnell’s. All advertising shall be first approved by Hartnell’s.<sup>731</sup>

In 1982, some changes were proposed to the *In Love* packaging. Hartnell had died in 1979, yet, in line with accepted practice in terms of maintaining the identity of the fashion house, the elements of Hartnell’s personal and professional identity discussed here were upheld. Recommendations for yet another re-launch of Hartnell *In Love* standard packs of toiletries and for Christmas packaging in 1982 stated:<sup>732</sup>

- i) we remain in the pink area as the basic Hartnell “In Love” colour.
- ii) instead of a single flat colour, we incorporate a feminine design
- iii) we remove as many window cartons as possible in order to upmarket the fragrance
- iv) we suggest a change in colour of the HL.33 bottle, soap and soap wrapper, and cube and cube wrapper, to a more delicate and feminine “Queen Mum” blue

At this time, Hartnell’s *In Love* competing ranges included Lenthéric, *Tweed*, Lenthéric, *Tramp*, Revlon, *Charlie*, Yardley, *Chique*, and Max Factor, *Blasé*. Hartnell *In Love* products were in fact cheaper than all of these individual products.<sup>733</sup> Interestingly, however, the choice to change the colour of soap wrappers to ‘a more delicate and feminine “Queen Mum” blue, would seem to root the Hartnell products firmly in the past rather than bring it into line with its competitors.

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<sup>730</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 16/1970/Norman Hartnell Perfumer – Press Release – In Love and In Love Again.

<sup>731</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 25/ Licensing Agreement dated 1979 between Norman Hartnell Limited and Thos. Christy & Co., Limited.

<sup>732</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 25/Recommendations for the Re-Launch of Hartnell “In Love” Standard Packs and for Christmas Packaging 1982.

<sup>733</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 25/Recommendations for the Re-Launch of Hartnell “In Love” Standard Packs and for Christmas Packaging 1982.

### ***6.5.a. Promotion and marketing techniques, "In Love" 1976***

In 1976 a document proposed a Trade Sales Assistant Competition (8<sup>th</sup> January 1976). The objectives were:

- a) to increase consumer sales via chemist outlets across the May-June period
- b) to better utilise the services of Chemist Counter Sales Assistants by stimulating their personal involvement in the achievement of "In Love" item sales in a competitive atmosphere
- c) to generally create a more vigorous and progressive trade attitude towards the "In Love" Range during the first 6 months selling period of the year – in association with the repackaging operation.

The plan was to select the 'sales girl' who sold the most items from the total *In Love* range during a stated period and a runner up from each of the four regions to ensure regional interest. The 1<sup>st</sup> prize was to be two items chosen by the winner from the Petite Salon 1976 Spring Collection, and for the regional winner, one item from this collection. All the winners were to be invited to meet Norman Hartnell at his Mayfair salon for lunch and selection of prizes.<sup>734</sup>

### ***6.4. The use of the In Love Dress as promotional material***

As exemplar of Hartnell's use of his preferred taste and identity in the marketing of his franchised products, a close study of his *In Love* dress offers a useful case study focus. (Figure 6.52). As already noted, the perfume and toiletries line *In Love* was originally launched in 1952, and subsequently re-launched by Thomas Christy & Co. in September 1971. This dress, designed to promote the re-launch of Hartnell *In Love* toiletries, was also included in his Autumn collection of 1971. It was designed and made-up in the colours of the original 1953 *In Love* talc bottle and packaging (pink with a turquoise label and gold writing).<sup>735</sup>

This style of beaded sheath dress with the silk chiffon sleeves, was an established staple style made for fashion collections and for the Queen during the 1960s-1970s, which had its roots in the 1930s tea gown – a feature of Hartnell's collections and theatrical productions. The Queen's dress for the 1975 state visit to Japan reveals the use of similar colours, the cherry-blossom flowers in pale pink organdie are stitched onto the kimono style tea-gown shape

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<sup>734</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 25/Proposals for Hartnell In Love Range Trade Sales Assistant Competition. 8<sup>th</sup> January 1976.

<sup>735</sup> The registered design of the plastic talc dispenser is marked Poly-Tainer Reg M/136/2.

traced directly back to Hartnell's 1930s tea gown. (Figure 6.53). These colours and decorative elements can be traced back to Hartnell's first 'collection' for the theatrical production *The Battling Butler*, for Desiree, in 1922. (Figure 6.54). The 1970s design for the Queen was a fusion of Hartnell's personal taste, and the Japanese unofficial national flower. The 1922 dress, the *In Love* dress and the similar royal dress for the state visit to Japan in the 1970s are all key examples of Hartnell's constant life-long taste and identity. They represent his 'signature' in garment form, providing latent, coded meaning behind the Hartnell trademark label.

### ***6.6. Hartnell Stockings 1957***

Christian Dior had launched a line of luxury nylon stockings in 1948 styling this hosiery to coordinate with his couture collections in terms of shades.<sup>736</sup> Following Paris couture's example, photographs and publicity material in the Archive shows that Hartnell stockings were originally launched in 1957 and were manufactured by Cambridge Hosiery Co. Ltd., 76, New Bond Street, London W1. (Figures 6.55 & 6.56). By 1979, Hartnell stockings were by Benson's Hosiery, Licensee and manufacturer of Hartnell stockings, with exclusive rights to use the Hartnell 'trade name' for their hosiery from 1979. The licensing agreement states that Hartnell had to approve 'the style and specification' of their goods, Bensons had to agree to pay either 'the annual sum of Ten thousand Pounds, or one and one half percent of the net selling price of licensed goods sold by Bensons.'<sup>737</sup>

Publicity cards in the Archive reveal that Hartnell understood the power of the new media of television advertising in 1957. They announce that 'From September to December 17,220,000 readers will see Norman Hartnell's stocking advertisements.'<sup>738</sup> (Figure 6.57). Also, that '14,000,000 viewers will see Norman Hartnell stocking Television Advertisements more than twice a week.' Two 'television films' were to be broadcast on the regional independent television channels, London, Midland, Northern and Scotland. (Figure 6.58). The printed show-cards were in the shape of pink hearts, reminiscent of the *In Love* talc dispenser and packaging. (Figures 6.59 & 6.60). Hartnell's script

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<sup>736</sup> Palmer, *Dior*, 93.

<sup>737</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 18/Bensons Hosiery Licence. 1979.

<sup>738</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 13/File 19/1-7. Publicity display cards for Norman Hartnell stockings, Autumn 1957.

signature is printed across the show-cards and the stocking boxes. The graphics of the stockinged foot and the woman in the tiered, mermaid line evening gown are clearly drawn by Hartnell himself. The publicity material and packaging for these ‘couture inspired stockings’ has Hartnell’s identity clearly stamped onto every element of the product, from the tiny heart at the top of each stocking to the names of each shade of stocking, from *In Love* to *Exotic*.<sup>739</sup>

The launch of *Eve*, an exclusive seam free nylon especially designed by Norman Hartnell for evening wear, made its appearance on the Hartnell ‘Black and Gold Stand’ at the First International Trade Fashion Fair at the Albert Hall in October 1957.<sup>740</sup> The development of Nylon in the post war period by Dupont in America and by ICI in Britain was on a vast scale. The role of British Nylon Spinners in promoting the synthetic fibre in Britain as at once labour saving and glamorous was enhanced by the London couturiers.<sup>741</sup>

Hartnell also designed his own line in nylon lingerie in 1957, promoted at the same time as his new line in stockings at the Trade Fashion Fair. (Figure 6.61). Hartnell hired the glamorous British Rank actress Shirley Eaton to promote his lingerie and stockings. She was photographed at the ‘Black and Gold Stand’, which was dressed with objects from his personal antiques collection including his blackamoor [sic] figures, now extant in the Archive house. (Figure 6.62). Figure –6.63 shows Eaton posing in front of the stand in a fur-trimmed dressing gown. The image brings together key objects through which this thesis has read Hartnell’s identity in the Archive, as already discussed here, and in Chapters Three and Four: his taste in decorative objects, his signature fur trimmed garment and his handwritten signature.

## 6.6. Hartnell ‘For Loveliness’ – The 1960s Cosmetic and Beauty Preparation Range

Again, in line with Paris couture in the late 1950s Hartnell’s developed a range of beauty products. Dior had launched his line of lipstick in 1955.<sup>742</sup> In the

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<sup>739</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 13/File 19/ Stocking ephemera, price lists, publicity photographs and show-cards.

<sup>740</sup> British Pathé International Fashion Fair video Newsreel Film issues date: 21/11/1957. Web. March 20 2011. <http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=34947>

<sup>741</sup> Susannah Handley. *Nylon: The Manmade Fashion Revolution: A Celebration of Design from Art Silk to Nylon and Thinking Fibres*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

<sup>742</sup> Palmer, *Dior*, 91.

marketing campaign, entitled Hartnell's 'New Beauty Preparations – For Loveliness', bottles for cleansing milk and face cream were designed to represent draped fabric, perhaps over a dressing-table – and Hartnell's range of make-up including lipstick and eye-shadow were produced in colours and shades very much to Hartnell's taste. (Figure 6.64). Very little material survives in the Archive pertaining to Hartnell's make-up line. A powder compact was found in drawers in the house (figure 6.65 & 6.66), and some paperwork was found damp in the cellar. Two red notebooks with notes on the schedule for the national make-up tour of Britain in 1961 were found in the attic, and publicity display material (possibly silk fabric for a display stand) was also found in the cellar. Interviewee Barbara Wimbush had also explained that she had been the compere for these make-up tours.<sup>743</sup>

Chapter Four explained that Hartnell had written an advice manual that was never published in book form, however it was published as *A Guide to Good Dressing* in series form in *Woman's Own* magazine during late 1958 and through 1959.<sup>744</sup> Hartnell had, as already noted, formed a close working relationship with the magazine *Women's Illustrated* from 1948 providing dress, knitting, embroidery and even dolls dress patterns and general sartorial advice aimed at the magazine's middle class reader.

Despite the name of the Hartnell face powder, *Bikini Tan*, (the residue of which is still present in the Hartnell compact), Hartnell was not keen on the suntan, but he did advocate women dyeing their hair. He also wore make-up both on stage in the 1920s and off stage later in life. (Figure 6.67). As already revealed, Anne Wright and Maureen Markham, workroom staff in the post-war period, remembered that he wore traces of face powder and nail varnish on his long nails, and Wright remembered that there was make-up lined up along the bath in the bathroom when she visited his flat for 'fittings'.<sup>745</sup> In terms of dress, in 1959, Hartnell recommended that women should 'make us of all the brilliant colours that are available today and learn to contrast them with vivid panache with your basic toning.'<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>743</sup> Barbara Wimbush. Personal Interview. 25 April 2007. NHOH/2007/4/Cassette Tape 1.

<sup>744</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 2/c1959. Typescript for *Dress Sense* by Norman Hartnell..

<sup>745</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Wright/NHOH/2010/16 and Markham/NHOH/2010/12.

<sup>746</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 42/File 2/c1959/Typescript for *Dress Sense*. Introduction: 9.

Following on from Hartnell's published advice on make-up and colour for women in 1958-59, Hartnell launched his own line in make-up and beauty preparations in 1960. In the cellar at Geven House, a very damp folder of paperwork pertaining to the launch of 'the New Hartnell Cosmetic Range' was found amongst some old, mouldy magazines. As already discussed in Chapter Four, skin, hair and clothing colours were central to his couture design practice. On a printed leaflet, with a handwritten (printed) message from Hartnell inviting an audience to 'a dress parade of models from my London salon and to introduce you to my collection of new beauty preparations,'<sup>747</sup> the 'Hartnell Cosmetics colour Chart' listed the new range of foundation, crème rouge, face powder, lipstick and eye shadow. Particular colours in each product were suggested, depending on whether women were 'blonde with pink-toned skin, mid-brunette with cream-toned skin or a red head with pink-toned skin' or had 'silver hair'. The language used in the naming of the colours of these beauty products reflects, again, Hartnell's taste in colour, and his romantic taste in fabrics and decorative motifs. *Hartnell Pink*, *Pink Tulle* and *Peach Candy* and *Cherub Pink*, linking the design, with 'pink-toned skin'.<sup>748</sup> Descriptions of these products link directly with Hartnell's decorative objects at Geven House – with cherubs decorating lamp bases and various vases, even the bed in his master suite at Lovel Dene, on which he posed in his spotted, silk pyjama suit and corsage, was decorated with cherubs. The naming of these products therefore, offer further examples of Hartnell's personal investment in the Hartnell brand identity. Two pieces of satin fabric, one pink and one blue, identified as part of a make-up stand that also include Hartnell's signature, and the words, *For Loveliness*, show the consistent use of his personal taste, his favoured colours and his royal dressing, used to sell every type of good produced in the Hartnell trademark name.

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<sup>747</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 1/Invitation card to a dress parade to promote Hartnell's new 'beauty preparations', at City Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 3pm Thursday, May 12, c1960.

<sup>748</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 4/File 1/Invitation card to a dress parade to promote Hartnell's new 'beauty preparations', at City Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 3pm Thursday, May 12, c1960.

## 6.7. Conclusion

In the development of the couture house, *Norman Hartnell*, in the post-war period, Hartnell and Mitchison attempted to harness new business practices in order to expand the commercial base of the company. The introduction of licensed product lines in Britain, directly linked to Hartnell Ltd., used the Hartnell trademark name, signature logo, and Hartnell's signature couture styles were reflected loosely in designs for Norman Hartnell Jewellery in 1955.

Hartnell's taste and identity permeates all the products produced in his name in the 1950s, particularly evident in the style and colouring of the packaging, but also in the naming of the product, and the design of the product itself.

In 1973 there were at least sixty-six known trademarks in the name of Norman Hartnell Limited worldwide and nineteen of them operated in Britain, the others spread over countries including the Argentine, Canada, Eire, France, Kenya, New Zealand, Tanzania, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, Spain, West Germany, United States of America, and Taiwan. These were mostly linked to Hartnell perfumes. Hartnell was a global brand and the identity of the brand and the designer were intertwined. The Hartnell trademark is still active, however nothing is produced in terms of couture, ready-to-wear, perfumes or products in the Hartnell name today.

## Chapter Seven

### A Life in the Archive: the Dress, Design and Identity of the London Couturier Norman Hartnell, 1921-1979: Debate of Findings and Conclusion.

#### 7.1. Findings

##### *7.1.1. The Archive*

The first task that had to be undertaken for this thesis was to sort through the personal and business archive of the late British couturier, Sir Norman Hartnell. As explained in Chapter One, the first encounter with the material in 2005 revealed files of business paperwork, fashion drawings and sketched dress designs, photographs and detritus from the salon (light fittings, for example), thrown together into bags bearing the Norman Hartnell trademark signature. The Archive was unmediated by any institutional archive system. Its condition was little altered from the moment it was taken from Hartnell's. The house in which the Archive 'lives' was, over time, found to contain many other types of material culture pertaining to Hartnell's life, including his decorative objects and furniture, his paintings and prints, and his chandeliers. The final discovery in 2010 was objects of Hartnell's personal clothing and jewellery, including couture made, beaded garments in feminine styles.

This thesis had six aims. The first aim was to re-examine what constitutes an archive, thinking outside the perimeters of boxes of dusty documents<sup>749</sup> towards the inclusion of other artefacts in which 'the story from the past' might be found.<sup>750</sup> Also, rather than trawling through records in an archive to discover my own identity, something that recent interest in genealogy has encouraged, and that Steedman has described as the construction of a modern identity through the process of identification<sup>751</sup> I have spent five years with Norman Hartnell's Archive in order to discover how much could be understood about *his*

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<sup>749</sup> David Iredale. *Enjoying Archives: What they are, where to find them, how to use them.* (Newton Abbot, David and Charles, 1973): 9.

<sup>750</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 77.

<sup>751</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 77.

identity. Clearly, the Archive exposed the everyday life and working practices of a twentieth century London couture fashion house, unpicked through the paperwork left behind as a result of Hartnell's working life.

There have, in recent years, been technological developments that have meant changes in the ways that material is stored, and digitisation has prompted a rethink in the ways that archives are understood. This shift in the ways of preserving and recording information has in turn prompted a change in the ways archives are discussed, from 'how' to archive, to the 'why' of archives, why archive and what should be saved. As Louise Craven has written, this has generated questions which: 'strike at the very foundation of the archivists' profession: questions about authenticity, original order, the unique record, custody and meaning.'<sup>752</sup> The approach taken to Hartnell's Archive, which is a personal and business archive, not an institutional one, has indeed encountered the issues of 'original order' and 'authenticity', and has considered the authenticity more important here, the original order already having been lost years before when the paperwork and sketches were removed from the salon at Bruton Street in 1985.<sup>753</sup>

Catherine Hobbs writes that personal archives can be studied as documentation of individual character.<sup>754</sup> The approach taken here to what was left behind after the death of Hartnell in 1979 is that, for the purposes of this research, *all* material culture found in the Mitchisons' house that could be traced to having been either personally or commercially associated with Norman Hartnell, was to be considered part of his Archive. In this way, as Chapter Two has shown, incorporating the objects chosen and worn by him (for example) reveals his personal taste and character, and his personal autobiographical writing absolutely offers, in Hobbs's words, a 'glimpse of his inner soul.'<sup>755</sup>

The biography of the Archive objects has mapped the journey of these things has been mapped over time, from Hartnell's personal homes in the 1930s to the home of Doris and George Mitchison (Hartnell's Business Manager, later Executive Director at Hartnell's) in 2005. Now, in August 2011, these objects

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<sup>752</sup> Craven, "Introduction", *What are Archives?* 1.

<sup>753</sup> See Chapter One section 1.5.2.

<sup>754</sup> Hobbs, "The Character of Personal Archives," 126.

<sup>755</sup> Hobbs, "The Character of Personal Archives," 126.

are in the possession of Claire Williams. The meanings of these objects to those that inherited them from Hartnell were discussed in Chapter One in terms of the narrative of royal and celebrity connection, memory and personal loss. This thesis has also explored the idea that the social life of this Archive<sup>756</sup> has conveyed much about of the biography of the man, Norman Hartnell.

### ***7.1.2. Hartnell's gendered and sexual identity***

The second aim of this thesis was to assess Hartnell's identity through discussion of selection of samples of material in the Archive. This thesis works with a sociological understanding of identity, understood here through text by Stuart Hall, Anthony Elliot and Steph Lawler as shown in Chapter One to be multifaceted and constructed over time within the historical context in which they are living.<sup>757</sup> It also considers gender identity as a social construct reiteratively performed using Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity.<sup>758</sup> It is argued throughout that Hartnell's queer, personal identity was key to his creativity as a couturier and impacted on his designing in terms of colour, fabrics and embellishment. I have also shown that his personal taste as an effeminate, cross-dressing gay man, in the context of the years of the twentieth century when homosexuality was illegal (1921-1968), permeated his couture collections, in particular in his designs for evening wear, and his designs for the women of the British royal family. Chapter Two identified two identities performed by Hartnell through dress and gesture, the 'debutante' and the 'dandy'. The latter was unpicked using work by Shaun Cole on gay men's dress, and Hartnell's coded dress in masculine styles was unpicked according to work by Andy Medhurst and Richard Dyer. Hartnell's 'body parts',<sup>759</sup> his personal clothing such as navy and white spotted ties and suede shoes, and red silk waistcoat embroidered with beaded red carnations that survive in the Archive, have added to a 'conjuring up' of the man.<sup>760</sup>

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<sup>756</sup> Arjun Apadurai. Ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>757</sup> Stuart Hall. "Who Needs Identity?" Stuart Hall and Paul de Gay. Eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996), Anthony Elliott. *Concepts of the Self*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), Steph Lawler. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. (Cambridge/Malden MA: Polity Press, 2008).

<sup>758</sup> Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. [1990]. (London and New York: Routledge), 2006.

<sup>759</sup> Hermione Lee, *Body Parts*. 3.

<sup>760</sup> Hermione Lee, *Body Parts*. 3.

Figure 1.37 of Hartnell with his house model girl Cynthia Holberhozer, shows Hartnell reflected in the mirror (Hartnell) looking wistfully at Holberhozer as she looks out at her own reflection.<sup>761</sup> She wears his signature beaded sheath dress and fur trimmed coat, discussed in Chapters Four and Five as one of three key signature styles. It is my thesis that it is also possible to argue that Hartnell dressed his clients, in particular his British royal clients, in couture garments in which he would like to have dressed himself. Chapter One worked with Claudine Griggs's concept on 'shifting genders' and managing queer identities in a private and public life. She has written that: 'for the observer, the image of gender defines gender; that's the story of the mirror. The reflection is an accessory of self.'<sup>762</sup> Hartnell surrounded himself with mirrors, and his showroom at Bruton Street was famous for the floor to ceiling mirrors still in situ in this listed interior. He transcended gender roles in private, managing a dual life, but this image of Hartnell with his model Cynthia, perhaps shows Hartnell looking at *her* reflection, seeing it as a truer reflection of his own identity. Cynthia wears Hartnell's beaded sheath dress and fur-trimmed coat in public, an ensemble that he could perhaps only have worn in private.

### ***7.1.3. Queering British royal style***

The third aim was to examine whether Hartnell's personal identity and taste impacted on his creation of British royal style. As already noted, in 1980, Diana de Marly did, very briefly, assess Hartnell's career in couture design. She wrote (and I repeat this direct quote for clarification):

Although it is argued that Hartnell was ultimately shackled by his work for royalty, his personality was the kind that was happiest working within restrictions imposed by protocol and one that also required such a highly visible arena for his extensive creativity to keep from being stifled. He was at his best when creating to promote and protect the image of the royal family and, as a result, can take much credit for actually designing an image that is no less venerable today than it was when he first began.<sup>763</sup>

De Marly's view confirms my findings on Hartnell's royal dressing in terms of 'promoting and protecting the image of the royal family'.<sup>764</sup> However, despite being 'shackled', his role as royal dressmaker did allow him to design the

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<sup>761</sup> See Chapter One

<sup>762</sup> Griggs, *S/He*, 4.

<sup>763</sup> De Marly, *The History of Haute Couture*, 278.

<sup>764</sup> See Chapter Five section 5.2.4.

clothes he really wanted to make, clothes that would not have been appropriate for his work-a-day client. Within the strict royal, court protocol, evident in paperwork and correspondence from Buckingham Palace with regards to wardrobes for royal tours and state gowns,<sup>765</sup> Hartnell, as De Marly writes, was allowed a ‘highly visible arena for his extensive creativity.’ De Marly hints at ‘his personality’, but what de Marly and others have missed, (or been reluctant to comment on), is that it was this formal, royal arena in which Hartnell’s queer identity, his taste in colour and embellishment and extreme forms of femininity, was allowed a free reign. The high spectacle of royal ceremonial occasion in the twentieth century also had involved the talents of other creative queer designers and royal image-makers such as Cecil Beaton, Victor Stiebel and Hardy Amies.

#### ***7.1.4. Hartnell’s creative and professional development***

The fourth aim of this thesis was to examine Hartnell’s creative and professional development as one of London’s top couturiers. Chapter Two looked at developments in his self-presentation over time through studio photographic portraits and established that his development as a young professional (he opened his house in 1923 at the age of twenty two) ran parallel to his developing personal identity and self-fashioning through dress and posing.

Chapter Six examined the Hartnell trademark, imbued with his queer taste in colour and design, and the development of products and licensed lines such as perfume, toiletries, stockings and jewellery under this brand identity. It noted however that the packaging and product design of *In Love*, perfume and toiletries in his pink and blue signature colours became dated, unlike that of his competitor couturiers in Paris, and that the products were not exclusive enough to maintain the luxury profile of the couture house into the late 1970s. This contributed to the long lasting instability in the business.

Despite the eventual business failure of the salon in the 1970s, in its heyday it had very real success. Through a close analysis of fashion drawings and

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<sup>765</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 15/File 3/Paperwork pertaining to the royal tour of North America and Canada by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, May-June 1939. Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Box 16/File 9/The Royal Tour of Canada June-August 1959. *Descriptions of Dresses*.

sketched designs and fashion photographs in the Archive, Chapters Four and Five established that his house style was made up of three key signature looks and five signature decorative embellishments. These were traced back to the fashionable, Paris inspired garments, designed for his personal use on stage, when he played the ‘leading lady’ in the Cambridge Footlights productions as early as 1921. These signature styles and embellishments, especially his couture designs for eveningwear, are therefore understood here to have been permeated with his personal taste in feminine colours, textiles and trim, such as feathers and artificial flowers. His taste for feminine styles in dress and interior decoration have been discussed here in terms of his effeminate, queer identity as a gay man in the first half of the twentieth century.

What has also become apparent in the course of researching Hartnell’s fashion design career is that although he continued to produce the dress and coat ensembles and crinolines for which he was well known, he also had a sense of humour and fun, hitherto unrecognised, and also attempted to adapt to fashions as well as reproduce his look. As a designer who continued to design his own couture collections himself rather than simply choose or approve the designs of an assistant designer, at the same time as reproducing stock styles year after year with their roots in his British royal dressing, Chapter Four, in its discussion of surviving dress in the Archive, has shown that he also developed new ideas and tried to keep his work fresh and amusing whilst adhering to his favoured pastel colours, use of silk chiffon and beading in evening wear.

### ***7.1.5. Hartnell’s taste in decorative objects and interiors.***

Chapter Three considered Hartnell’s personal creative taste in terms of his private collecting practice and the display of objects within the ‘queer space’<sup>766</sup> of his personal homes and rooms at his salon at 26 Bruton Street. Photographs of these ‘staged interiors’,<sup>767</sup> were taken for publicity purposes to show the public face of the private life of Hartnell as the connoisseur of antiques and purveyor of taste in interior design. Discussion of these photographs was part of what aim five of this thesis considered his public performance as the celebrity couturier and creator of the British royal image through his couture dress designs. This fame formed the platform on which the trademark identity

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<sup>766</sup> Betsky, *Queer Space*.

<sup>767</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 31-32. Potvin, “Collecting Intimacy”, 192.

of the couture house as a global fashion business was built after the war from 1946 but which had faded by the time of Hartnell's death in 1979.

## 7.2. A Life in the Archive: Five contributions to knowledge.

### *7.2.1. Archive Work.*

The work of sorting, wrapping, boxing, labelling and partial cataloguing of the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive, even before analysis could begin, has made a major contribution to opening up access to this archive for future researchers and to saving this important national treasure. The Archive still in private hands is not, however, stable or safe in its current situation and its future is not certain.

Caroyn Steedman, writing of the instability of archives in general noted:

... the story from the past has been altered by the very search for it, by its time and duration: what has actually been lost can never be found. This is not to say that nothing is found, but that thing is always something else, a creation of the search itself and the time the search took.<sup>768</sup>

What has been 'found' in the course of researching this archive is not the story I was originally expecting to find, and what has been written is not the thesis I had originally planned to write. Everything about the context of the Archive, its ownership and taxonomy – what was saved and what was not (even in the course of my research) - has contributed to the shift within this study, from a more straightforward analysis of his working life and creative output as the royal designer to a study of the couturier's identity through his Archive.

The time spent with this material (since 2005) in the location in which the material is kept (the house in Cornwall), has enabled a fresh reassessment of what constitutes an archive and a redefinition of an archive. I have interpreted an archive in a transitional state, during a brief window of time, an interpretation which took place as I sorted and boxed the material, often late into the night. Hundreds of photographs were taken in rapid succession as sketches and photographs came to light, only to be boxed up and replaced into the attic where most of them had been found. What has been most important here is that it is not just paper documents pertaining to Hartnell's business and

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<sup>768</sup> Steedman, *Dust*, 77.

commercial enterprises that are considered part of his archive, but the house in its totality, with its interiors, decorative objects, furniture, garments and all types of material culture.

### ***7.2.2. Mapping the work of a couturier***

With the exception of Stella Mary Newton's couture house memories from the 1930s, an edited version of which was reproduced by Jane Brideman and published in *Costume* in 2005,<sup>769</sup> the management and running of a London couture house has not yet been studied by dress historians. This thesis has looked in detail at the working relationships between designer, illustrator, business manager and showroom and workroom staff and examined working practices through the memories of those involved. Chapter Four discussed the staff hierarchy at the House of Hartnell, marrying individual staff and their daily working lives with the internal architecture of the salon and the material culture of couture production, from the 'stick back chair' to the 'gas iron'.<sup>770</sup> The design and production of couture garments at the house, from the sketching of a collection, assisted by Brenda Naylor (1944-1953) and Rusty Lewis (1968-1980s), to the choosing of fabrics, (Miss Louise, Louise Richardson 1924-1960), the interpretation of the fashion drawings by the fitters and hands, (Anne Wright, (1947-1957), to the modelling (Barbara Wimbush (1957-1960), Mara Levy (1968-1979) and Myrtle McGuire (1968-1972), and the selling of the couture models to clients, (Patricia Reid, 1944-1947), a realistic picture of everyday life at a London couture house from the perspective of those who worked there, has been pieced together. This account of working practices was dependent upon an oral history methodology and its role within this investigation recognises absences of an Archive dedicated to the named designer.

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<sup>769</sup> Stella Mary Newton. Edited by Jane Bridgeman. "London Haute Couture in the 1930s." *Costume*. No. 39, 2005: 4-27.

<sup>770</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Unboxed. *Valuation of Furniture, Fittings, Fixtures, Chandeliers, Mirrors and Decorations, The Property of Norman Hartnell limited, Bruton Street, London, W.1. and other addresses*. L.S. Harris & Co. Ltd. Valuers. 83-86 Crawford Street. London W.1. 21/06/1965

### *7.2.3. Identity of a couturier: Reassembling Hartnell's multifaceted Identity*

A close analysis of the ways in which a couturier's personal sense of identity and taste are closely reflected in his/her design work has been to date been very much taken for granted and not subjected to analysis. In the case of Hartnell this study is the first to do this. The facets of Hartnell's identity discussed here have included his sexuality (hinted at the V&A by Breward in 2009 in terms of Christian Dior's personal and working life),<sup>771</sup> his gender-queer identity and cross-dressing. What this thesis concludes is that Hartnell's own dressing developed the house style and signature look and also that his home was a direct representation of himself, revealing a very close relationship between his taste and his designing.

Personal identity is understood to be a cultural construction and a performance of the self. Hartnell constantly negotiated his self-hood and subjectivity throughout his life, as he experimented with different definitions of public and private self and made choices about who he wanted to be (or who he thought he was) and how he wanted to be perceived, through active, creative ways. The portraits, photographs, autobiographical writing, and personal garments belonging to Hartnell have been examined and interpreted here to illustrate how his sense of self was shaped and reshaped, influenced by other people and the world around him in terms of performance and self-presentation.<sup>772</sup> Hartnell's various identities, public and private, have been re-constituted and re-imagined through interpretation of the various clutches of material, including the decorative objects and antique furniture he collected and displayed, the letters he wrote, the clothes he wore, and above all the clothes he designed. Hartnell's personal gender, sexual, class, public celebrity and professional identities together formed the basis of his signature trademark and his global fashion brand, and his fame as Britain's most successful couturiers in the 1923-1979 period.

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<sup>771</sup> Christopher Breward. Conference paper, "Couture as Biography: The Romance of Design in the 'Golden Age'", *Unravelling Couture Culture*, 16-17 November, 2007, V&A Museum.

<sup>772</sup> Erving Goffman. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (London: Penguin Books, 1990): Preface.

### 7.2.5. *Contribution to Dress History*

Lou Taylor, has written that ‘The professional practice of artefact-based dress history involves first finding the clothing object, followed by its identification, conservation, display and final interpretation.’<sup>773</sup> This archive revealed a collection of 200 hitherto unknown surviving Hartnell garments. The Hartnell couture and high-end, ready-to-wear ‘Petit Salon’, or what Hartnell has referred to as his ‘budget clothes’,<sup>774</sup> found in the Archive in the house in Cornwall have been identified as either model gowns, kept at the salon for charity shows, or as part of the two personal collections of Doris Mitchison and Claire Williams.<sup>775</sup> It has even been possible to link many garments to sketched designs which also survived in the Archive. These were further identified through personal interview, newspaper articles or dated photographs, enabling an account of production rather than recognising garments in isolation. Thus this dress collection as part of Hartnell’s Archive is a rare find of special interest, specifically because by combining all these clues, a great many details of garments’ manufacture, use in publicity and final use became apparent.

As already discussed in this chapter,<sup>776</sup> one of this thesis’s contributions to dress history is the mapping out of the day-to-day running of a British couture house. Another contribution to the discipline has been the harnessing of material culture approaches to this study and the consideration of Hartnell’s design work in relation to a very wide range of objects. The relationship between Hartnell’s taste in decorative objects and interior design schemes, and his creative output in terms of twice yearly couture collections, examined in Chapter Three. Each type of material culture, from Hartnell’s dining room table and chairs to his Victorian ruby glass decanters and the model gowns in the Hartnell Archive, have been interpreted as a whole. Theories of collecting,<sup>777</sup> and of the consumption of ‘queer spaces’<sup>778</sup> have been discussed alongside theories of self-

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<sup>773</sup> Lou Taylor. *The Study of Dress History*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002): 3.

<sup>774</sup> The Petit Salon was the ready-to-wear boutique established at Hartnell’s in 1963. It stocked Hartnell designed fashionable garments made up in limited numbers in less expensive fabrics.

<sup>775</sup> See Appendix 2 for a full catalogue and description of these garments.

<sup>776</sup> See section 7.2.2.

<sup>777</sup> Russell Belk. *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), Susan Pearce. *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*. (London and new Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998).

<sup>778</sup> Aaron Betsky. *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), Christopher Reed, “Design for (Queer) Living: Sexual Identity, Performance, and Décor in British *Vogue*, 1922-1926.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian*

presentation<sup>779</sup> and the performance of gender.<sup>780</sup> This thesis therefore examines dress in general in its broadest context yet uses close material culture detail.

### ***7.2.6. The life of a man through his stuff***

To investigate and write a history of the lives of people through what they consume is not a new approach. Historian Amanda Vickery uses local and national record offices and archives for the written accounts of the consumption of Georgian material culture to write histories of women's lives,<sup>781</sup> and everyday life in the Georgian home.<sup>782</sup> Anthropologist Daniel Miller has created 'portraits' of people on an average London street in the twenty-first century; 'reading people through their possessions' as this study has done.<sup>783</sup> However, although successful biographies of couturier's lives have been written,<sup>784</sup> these have not attempted any kind of critical interpretation. This thesis has applied methods used for ordinary or typical to the celebrated.

## **7.3. Conclusion**

### ***7.3.1. The Archive***

Since the death of her parents, many of the objects I have defined as the Hartnell Archive, are now enjoyed by Claire Williams and her husband. In Hartnell's 'yellow drawing room' scheme from the 1960s, Mr and Mrs Williams watch television sitting today on Hartnell's yellow velvet sofas, surrounded by his ceramic swans, his Moore Brothers porcelain jardinières decorated with cherubs and flowers, marble columns and the pictures of guardsmen, painted by Hartnell between 1943 and the 1970s. Drifts of Mrs Williams' collectable teddy bears sit on his Regency chair and *chez long* that were once a feature of his drawing room at Lovel Dene in 1935 - a gay man's

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*and Gay Studies*. Vol 12. 2006: 377-403, Joel Sanders. *Writings and Projects*. (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2004).

<sup>779</sup> Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. 1959. (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

<sup>780</sup> Judith Butler. *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of 'Sex'*. (London/New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>781</sup> Amanda Vickery. *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>782</sup> Amanda Vickery. *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>783</sup> Daniel Miller. *The Comfort of Things*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008): 6-7.

<sup>784</sup> Axel Madsen. *Living for Design: The Yves Saint Laurent Story*. (New York: Delacourte Press, 1979), Alicia Drake. *The Beautiful Fall: Fashion, Genius and Glorious Excess in 1979s Paris*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

‘Regency Vogue’<sup>785</sup> style consumed differently in the twenty first century as part of the cultural biography of these objects.<sup>786</sup>

This thesis posits that the story of the journey, ownership and taxonomy of Hartnell’s Archive since his death tells us much about Hartnell’s personal and professional life, especially in terms of the significance of his personal relationships to his business life. It is therefore not only the clutches of material that can be read through the lenses of his multifaceted personal, professional and public celebrity identity, but that the journey that the Archive has taken since his death, has been shown here to reveal hidden aspects of Hartnell’s personality, character and personal life, all of which impacted deeply on his professional work.

### *7.3.2. Hartnell’s gendered and sexual identity*

I have argued here that Hartnell’s queer identity as an effeminate, cross-dressing gay man, was key to his creativity as a couturier. Little direct academic research has been published on the fact that, throughout the history of fashion, homosexual men have provided fashionable clothing for (presumably, predominantly) heterosexual women. The biographies of sixty named lesbian and gay fashion designers are included in a Wikipedia publication with absolutely no rationale.<sup>787</sup> Hartnell is included in this list. In Aldrich and Wotherspoon’s edited publication *Who’s Who in Gay and Lesbian History*, Hartnell is included as someone ‘who is significant in gay and lesbian history.’<sup>788</sup> Aldrich and Wotherspoon, only state that they chose to include their various subjects because ‘homosexuality had some particular bearing on a person’s public or creative life or his or her life story is in some way representative of wider trends in history’.<sup>789</sup> They also state rather vaguely that: ‘apart from being interesting individual stories, these biographies are also a window through which to view wider issues: at their most basic level, they tell us much about attitudes and behaviours in the past.’<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>785</sup> See Chapter Three section 3.3.

<sup>786</sup> Kopytoff, 1986.

<sup>787</sup> *LGBT Fashion Designers: Christian Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, John Galliano, Valentino Garavani, Norman Hartnell, Alexander McQueen, Leigh Bowery*. (Memphis, Tennessee: Books LLC, 2010).

<sup>788</sup> Robert Aldrich and Gary Wotherspoon. Eds. *Who’s Who in Gay and Lesbian History: From Antiquity to World War II*. (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>789</sup> Aldrich and Wotherspoon, “Who’s Who”, Introduction.

<sup>790</sup> Aldrich and Wotherspoon, “Who’s Who”, Introduction.

This thesis, however, makes the link between fashion theory, queer theory, and the work of one famous London couturier. Halperin writes that:

It is possible, after all, to recruit the queerness of past historical periods not in order to justify one or another partisan model of gay life in the present but rather to acknowledge, promote, and support a heterogeneity of queer identities, past and present. There is more than one strategy for entering into a queerer future.<sup>791</sup>

Continuity with past queer fashion history provides critical and insightful ways in which to understand the role of the gay male fashion designer in dressing women in the twenty first century.

An article entitled “The Straight Men of British Fashion” indicates that past attitudes persist in 2011. Simon Mills raises what he calls ‘a rarely discussed issue’ asking ‘why is women’s fashion so dominated by gay men? And is the wonderful world of fashion really tainted by heterophobia?’ According to Mills, it is naming the straight fashion designers that can become something of a ‘parlour game’.<sup>792</sup> Mills quotes Tom Ford’s 2011 interview with *Interview* magazine. Ford, who apparently stated: ‘I lust after beautiful women in the way that I lust after a beautiful piece of sculpture ... My lust for them is the same as my lust for beauty in all things ... that’s why I think gay men make better designers’.<sup>793</sup> This statement casts some light on the ‘eye’ of the designer, considering women as objects to be admired from a distance; objectified. It is evident however, through photographic evidence in the Archive, that many of Hartnell’s work-a-day clients were not the ‘beautiful women’ that Ford describes. It has been suggested here that perhaps Hartnell’s personal enjoyment of women’s clothes, both on and off stage, might provide some further indication as to why he was a fashion designer.

Personal testimony from the (mostly female staff) interviewed has revealed the character and personality of the man; his kind and gentle nature,<sup>794</sup> his effeminate, gender identity,<sup>795</sup> and the way in which he had to work hard as

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<sup>791</sup> David M. Halperin. *How to do the History of Homosexuality*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002): 16.

<sup>792</sup> Simon Mills. “The Straight Men of British Fashion.” *Evening Standard. ES Magazine*, 18 February: 39.

<sup>793</sup> Mills, “The Straight Men of British Fashion”, 39.

<sup>794</sup> Rusty Lewis. Personal Interview. 11 June 2010. NHOH/2010/15/Digital Recording.

<sup>795</sup> Maureen Markham. Personal Interview. 30 April 2010. NHOH/12/Cassette Tapes x2. Anne Wright. Personal Interview. 5 July 2010. NHOH/2010/16/Digital Recording.

creative director at the house with responsibility for much of the design work until his death, despite poor health.<sup>796</sup> It also revealed his poor business sense once George Mitchison was employed as Business Manager in 1946. As a result of Hartnell's love for Mitchison, the power dynamic between Hartnell and Mitchison, who was also a major shareholder in the company from the 1950s, tilted in Mitchison's favour. Letters in the Archive from Hartnell to Mitchison (undated, c1950s) reveal that he made Mitchison the gift of 5,278 of his ordinary shares in Norman Hartnell Ltd. Further letters to his lawyer David Jacobs requesting this settlement also reveals Hartnell's wish: 'whilst at the same time preserving to the utmost my control over the company.'<sup>797</sup> By January 1970 however, Mitchison was employed as Executive Director at Hartnell's and the balance of influence shifted further into Mitchison's hands.

### *7.3.3. Queering British royal style*

Britain's current monarch, Elizabeth II, who was dressed by Hartnell from 1935 until his death in 1979, and by rival couturier Hardy Amies from 1951, no longer patronises London's high-fashion houses, although she is dressed by a couturier, couture and fashion are not one and the same thing. Her clothes are now designed in-house by Angela Kelly, Personal Assistant, Adviser and Curator to Her Majesty the Queen (Jewellery, Insignias and Wardrobe), and made-up by an in-house team of dressmakers. Kelly follows the established Hartnell royal 'look' discussed in Chapter Five, as Her Majesty's outfit for the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2011 demonstrates clearly.

The Queen wore a yellow silk soft tailored dress and coat ensemble with matching yellow hat creating a block of unbroken colour. (Figure 7.1). This, as Chapters Four and Five have explained, was one of Hartnell's stock styles, devised for Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, from 1938. Sketches in the Archive for dress and coat ensembles from the 1959 royal tour of Canada demonstrate that this bright colour was often used for the Queen's clothes as it made her visible in a large crowd. (Figures 7.2). As Chapter Five has explained, Hartnell understood well the colours that worked best in terms of the royal body

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<sup>796</sup> Mara Levy. Personal Interview. 8 May 2010. NHOH/2010/13/Digital Recording. Emanuel Silverman. Personal Interview. 27 May 2010. NHOH/14/Digital Recording.

<sup>797</sup> Hartnell-Mitchison Archive. Unboxed. Letter to B.D. Jacobs Esq., Messers. M.A. Jacobs & Sons, 55/58 Pall Mall, St. James's Street, London SW1. N.d.

and public appearances. He also used this colour for the comedic actress Cicely Courtneidge during the 1940s for her appearances on stage in London's West End. The yellow worn by the Queen at the wedding in April (2011) singles her out, and although not the centre of attention on that particular day, she is nevertheless immediately visible and recognisable as 'the Queen'.

#### *7.3.4. Hartnell's legacy*

The Queen is also dressed today (2011) by Stewart Parvin, who also dresses her daughter, Princess Anne, and made the Queen's granddaughter, Zara Philips's wedding dress in July 2011. Parvin's boutique is at 14 Motcomb Street, London SW1, (originally the premises of Ian Thomas, Hartnell's assistant designer between 1953 and 1960), but Parvin's 'design studio' is based in a business park in Acton, NW10, demonstrating the shift in the production of couture garments in the workrooms of London's Mayfair salons, to the un-glamorous location of a business park.<sup>798</sup> Parvin's Spring/Summer 2011 couture collection included one sequined cocktail dress and three full-length evening dresses, including a black sequined gown. Photographs of his couture collection online follows in the footsteps of Hartnell's collections photographed by Scainoi's Studios in the 1930s, with each model-gown photographed on a model in his salon, complete with swagged curtains, mantle piece and antique chairs as props.<sup>799</sup>

However, in 2011 a surprising link was made between Hartnell's signature styles and the work of the Scottish high-end ready-to-wear fashion designer (based in Dalston, London), Christopher Kane. Kane's Spring/Summer collection for 2011 revisited Norman Hartnell's taste in colour and textiles, using hot pinks, vivid yellows and acid greens. (Figure 7.3). The collection was described as having been influenced by the Hartnell designed clothes for Princess Margaret, and made of what was described as 'fluoro lace', which was actually perforated leather with a vinyl coating.<sup>800</sup> As Chapters Four and Five have shown, Hartnell often used lace fabric for his royal styles (and his own

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<sup>798</sup> Stewart Parvin studied Fashion at Edinburgh School of Art and set up his own label in 1995. He holds the Royal Warrant of Appointment to HM the Queen.

<sup>799</sup> Stewart Parvin, London. Couture Collections. <http://couture.stewartparvin.com/spring-summer-2011> Web. September 2 2011.

<sup>800</sup> Christopher Kane. Spring/Summer Collection 2011. Tim Banks, London, September 20 2010. <http://www.style.com/fashionshows/review/S2011RTW-CKANE> Web. 2 September, 2011.

pyjama suits). In *Stylist* magazine (published to coincide with London Fashion Week, February, 2011), Naomi Reilly wrote: ‘This spring one of her (the Queen) favourite fashion designers has provided inspiration for Christopher Kane who has created a look he describes as “neon leather vinyl, with an Argyle jumper.’<sup>801</sup> Sketches in the Archive confirm this ‘look’ as Hartnell inspired, with Hartnell’s use of lace fabric and ‘fluro’ colours for his royal clients endlessly reproduced in the 1950s and 1960s. (Figure 7.4 & 7.5). Kane’s Hartnell inspired collection demonstrates that Hartnell’s signature styles have never quite disappeared from London’s fashion vocabulary. Interestingly, it is the contemporary fashion designer, Kane, who does not dress British royalty, rather than the traditional, royal couturier Parvin, that returns to these signature styles for inspiration to create something new and fashion-forward.

This study has proven that Hartnell’s queer taste and identity, evident in his designs for Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and Britain’s current monarch, Elizabeth II, became his trademark as Britain’s most celebrated couturier and formed the basis of the reputation of Britain’s longest running (1923-1992) and largest couture house (at its peak, Hartnell’s employed 500 staff) in the twentieth century.

The Hartnell Archive itself is also part of his legacy. It is a national treasure that, providing it is secured for the future, will provide researchers in the field of fashion and dress history and material culture and business studies with many different lenses through which to study his couture design work. The Archive offers an open window onto the lost world of London couture, as this study has shown. Above all, this thesis argues that Hartnell’s queer identity, as an effeminate, cross-dressing gay man, was key to the success of his creative fashion design work, his couture designs for the stage and his lasting legacy in terms of so successfully dressing the British royal women. The failure to openly discuss his queer identity has also obscured the complex interrelationships between his personal life and business which can be traced in the Archive.

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<sup>801</sup> Reilly, “Royal Fashion”, 42.

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A Life in the Archive: the Dress,  
Design and Identity of the London  
Couturier Norman Hartnell, 1921-1979.

Jane Hattrick

Appendix 1:

Norman Hartnell Oral History Project

# Appendix 1

## Norman Hartnell Oral History Project

List of interviewees: Staff members who worked for Norman Hartnell between 1924 and 1979.

As part of the research for this PhD thesis interviews were undertaken by the author with as many people that had worked for the late designer Sir Norman Hartnell as could be traced (see Protocol submitted for the approval of the Faculty of Arts Research Ethics and Governance Committee April 2010).

These interviews were recorded and an archive of these recordings exists on CD. Copyright remains solely with the author, Jane Hattrick, therefore neither the transcripts nor the recordings will be submitted with the finished thesis. These recordings could however be made available on request.

Included here is a list of all those interviewed who gave consent, with a brief synopsis of what was discussed in their interview.

- **NHOH/2007/1/ Tape x 1 (transferred to CD September 2011)**

Brenda Naylor (Hartnell's design assistant and sketch artist 1944-1953)

Date of interview: 26 February 2007

**Synopsis:** Brenda Naylor joined Hartnell's in 1944 directly from art school aged seventeen. She used to assist the designer with sketching royal likenesses and figures onto which he would add the dress designs. She discussed Hartnell's design processes, his lack of art school training, the various 'model girl's and clients and the ways in which royal designs were released to the press before major royal events such as the Britain's current Queen's Coronation of 1953. She also remembered visiting Buckingham Palace. She discussed workroom practices and workroom culture including staff hierarchy. She described how she used to take patterns of models from various Hartnell collections and make them for herself at home using the couture techniques she learned at Hartnell's.

- **NHOH/2007/3/Tapes x 2 (transferred to CD September 2011)**

Louise Richardson (Brown, Miss Louie) ('Matcher' from 1924, Stockroom keeper 1926 -1960)

Date of interview: 7/8 March 2007.

**Synopsis:** Mrs Louise Richardson (known as Miss Louie at Hartnell's) explained that she joined Hartnell's in 1924 aged fourteen years old as a 'matcher'. She discussed the various staff members and their jobs – Flo Smith 'Florrie' the 'packer', Teddy the driver, Jack the odd job man and the 'proper canteen' which was also run by Florrie. She discussed workroom culture at the House, including the role of the 'fitter' or dressmaker. She also discussed details of Hartnell's and Mitchison's personal relationship and Hartnell's various homosexual love affairs and Mitchison's business practice, which was not always 'above board.' She also explained the way in which garments were 'costed' (the costs of lighting and heating the workrooms, the workroom staff wages, and the cost of materials were all part of the final cost of the garments) and which famous clients didn't pay their bills. She could not remember the names of any of the textile suppliers from whom Hartnell chose fabrics. She explained that Hartnell Jewellery Ltd. was not a success and that George Mitchison's son, who was given the job of running this enterprise, was 'caught with his fingers in the till'.

- **NHOH/2007/4/ Tape x 1 (transferred to CD September 2011)**

Barbara Wimbush ('model girl' from 1957, compare from 1961)

Date of interview: 24 April 2007

**Synopsis:** Barbara Wimbush explained that she was thirty years old with two children when she became a 'model girl' at Hartnell's in 1957 for three years, she then worked as a compare for the promotional shows when Hartnell's make-up line was launched in 1961. She closely resembled Hartnell's loyal client, the Duchess of Argyll (a loyal client of Hartnell's) and modelled clothes specifically aimed at this client. She discussed the various staff members, and she remembered that Madame Jeanne the head Vendeuse (sales woman)

'always wore mauve'. She discussed Hartnell's sense of colour and the structure of the clothes he designed. She discussed the various fashion journalists of the day and their columns and the way the new fashion collections were reported. The press came to the first showing of the collection, the 'treasured clients' came to the second and the Queen would attend a private showing of a collection. She discussed the various workrooms, the staff hierarchies and the working culture at the House. Wimbush touched upon the launch of the Jewellery company and the launch of the Petit Salon high-end ready-to-wear boutique collection in 1963.

- **NHOH/2007/5/Tape x 1 (transferred to CD September 2011)**

Gerda Huddleston ('workroom girl', showroom assistant 1940s)

Date of interview: 27 April 2007

**Synopsis:** Gerda Huddleston joined Hartnell's in 1947 aged between seventeen and eighteen years old. She worked in Mams'elle's (Germaine David) couture dressmaking workroom for eighteen months and then in the showroom as an assistant Vendeuse (sales women) for another eighteen months. She was introduced to Hartnell's by the couturier Charles Creed via her father. She discussed workroom culture and hierarchies and working practices at the House and also the low pay and working conditions. She was middle-class and had the opportunity to leave the workroom and progress to the showroom, which she explained other workroom staff would not be able to do due to their working class status. Huddleston went on to work for the London couturiers Molyneux, Stiebel and Ronald Paterson. Huddleston collected scraps from royal dresses whilst she was at Hartnell's that were shown to me during my visit to her.

- **NHOH/2007/6/Tape x 1 (transferred to CD September 2011)**

Michael Guest (ready-to-wear designer during the 1950s)

Date of interview: 30 April 2007

**Synopsis:** Guest worked as a designer for another ready-to-wear company who designed a Hartnell export collection for the Australian market in the mid 1950s. He was given his own room at the Hartnell salon where he installed his own workroom staff. The designs were sketched by Ian Thomas, Hartnell's assistant designer, and were exactly the same as the designs for the British couture client – therefore wrong for the Australian market in Guest's opinion. The fabrics chosen were all too heavy for the Australian climate. This venture was not a success. He described Hartnell as a shy, kind man who was not 'tough enough'.

- **NHOH/2007/7/Tape x 1 (transferred to CD September 2011)**

Patricia Reid (Showroom Assistant in the late 1940s)

8 May 2007

**Synopsis:** Patricia Reid started at Hartnell's as a showroom assistant to Madame Jeannette in 1944. Reid explained that each Vendeuse had particular clients assigned to them and were linked to individual fitters (dressmakers) who would take their measurements and make their clothes. Tailor's dummies were padded out to fit each individual client. She explained that there were 500 staff employed and that she was paid 30 shillings a week and had to pay for her canteen lunch. She also named some famous clients. She explained the working day and her job liaising between the workrooms, model girls and showroom staff and her managing of the clients' appointment book. She also explained that vendeuse took it in turns to take on a new client when she arrived (usually introduced by an established client).

- **NHOH/2007/8/Tape x 1 (transferred to CD September 2011)**

Myrtle McGuire ('model girl' in the 1960s/1970s)

Date of interview: 11 May 2007

**Synopsis:** Myrtle McGuire was a 'model girl' at Hartnell's between the late 1960s and 1978. She discussed the various staff and their roles at the salon and also the various designers brought into design after Hartnell's death in 1979.

She described Hartnell as shy and kind and that his staff members were all loyal to him. She explained that Hartnell did many fashion shows for charity. She discussed the various other London designers and their relationships to one other and movement of staff between fashion houses. Much of the Hartnell jewellery line was stolen from the salon. Explained that Christy's manufactured Hartnell *In Love* perfume from 1970 and that various fashion shows were held to promote the perfume at that time.

- **NHOH/2009/10/Telephone interview**

Betty Foster ('workroom girl' 1942-1951)

**Synopsis:** Betty Foster joined Mams'elle's (Germaine Davide) dressmaking workroom as a 'junior hand' in 1942 aged fourteen. She described her working day and working practices at Hartnell's and the role of the 'fitter' (dressmaker) in interpreting Hartnell's sketched designs. Mams'elle's workroom made all the 'big' beaded evening dresses for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and Foster collected scraps of material left over from many of those dresses.

- **NHOH/2010/11/Tape x 1 (transferred to CD September 2011)**

Claire Williams (Daughter of George Mitchison and Doris Mitchison, Norman Hartnell's Goddaughter)

Date of interview: 13 March 2010

**Synopsis:** Claire Williams is the current owner of the private Hartnell Archive as part of Hartnell's estate (left to her father George Mitchison on Hartnell's death in 1979). Williams described her relationship with her 'Uncle Norman' and explained that Hartnell's had been part of her life from a very young age. Hartnell designed dresses for her from her first Christmas aged one year old until his death. Various dresses were made for Williams at the salon for special occasions such as her first visit to Ascot Races, her twenty-first birthday and her wedding in 1973. She worked in London and visited Hartnell's regularly to see the latest models. She was allowed to choose something every Christmas from the couture or Petit Salon collections.

- **NHOH/2010/12/Tapes x 2 (transferred to CD September 2011)**

Maureen Markham (Worked in the Hartnell embroidery room between 1955-1979)

Date of interview: 30 April 2010

**Synopsis:** Maureen Markham worked in the Hartnell embroidery workroom for twenty-six years. She described the working practices in the embroidery workroom, the role of the head of the workroom, Miss Edie Duley, in interpreting Hartnell's designs, and the way that the embroideresses worked in pairs across a tambour frame. She also explained the different techniques and types of bead/sequin, talking through actual embroidery samples during our interview. She revealed that the embroidery workroom and dressmaking workrooms made clothes in women's styles for Norman Hartnell's personal use.

- **NHOH/2010/13/Digital recording**

Mara Levy (House model between 1968 and 1980)

Date of interview: 7 April 2010

**Synopsis:** Mara Levy worked first for Hartnell's rival couturier Hardy Amies until 1968 when she became the sole House Model at the House of Hartnell for twelve years. She described her very close working and personal relationship with 'Bossy' as Norman Hartnell was known by some of his staff. She described his very poor health and his death. She discussed working practices and various staff members at the house, and the various Hartnell fashion shows in Germany. She described the naming of each collection, which she and Hartnell did over a glass of whisky with much laughter. She described the power dynamics between George Mitchison and Hartnell, describing Mitchison as 'the Gaffer' – the man truly in charge, who encouraged Hartnell to work hard until his death in 1979.

- **NHOH/2010/14/ Digital recording**

Emmanuel Silverman (executive Chairman)

Date of interview: 27 May 2010

**Synopsis:** Executive Director of Moss. Bros from the early 1960s Many Silverman bought Norman Hartnell Ltd. in 1987. He described the financial state of the House at the time it was purchased, and his business dealings with George Mitchison.

- **NHOH/2010/15/Digital recording**

Rusty Lewis (sketch artist 1963-1970s)

Date of interview: 20 June 2010

**Synopsis:** Rusty Lewis came to Hartnell's at the end of 1963 from Marcusa Dresses. She recounted her working relationship with Norman Hartnell and also with Ian Thomas, Hartnell's assistant designer between 1953 and the early 1960s. Employed as a sketch artist, she also worked for Hartnell hand painting his personal furniture and decorative columns used to furnish his interiors. She not only discussed Hartnell's 'eye for colour' and his choice of fabrics, but also described the working life of a fashion artist during the 1960s and 1970s and the introduction of the Trade Descriptions Act and the negative impact that this had had on employment for commercial artists at that time. Many of the sketched dress designs in the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive are by her.

- **NHOH/2010/16/Digital recording**

Anne Wright (Head of the dressmaking workroom)

Date of interview: 5 July 2010

**Synopsis:** Anne Wright described her working life at Hartnell's from when she joined Mams'elle's dressmaking workroom in 1947. She worked on Her Majesty the Queen's wedding dress. She became Head of the Workroom in the early 1950s. Wright explained the working conditions, how the workrooms were cold and the chairs were hard. She talked through techniques for treating fabric before the pattern pieces were cut out. She revealed that she did the fittings for Hartnell's personal couture garments in feminine styles that were

subsequently made-up in the workrooms. She remembered that he wore make-up and had long nails on which she could see traces of nail varnish.

A Life in the Archive: the Dress,  
Design and Identity of the London  
Couturier Norman Hartnell, 1921-1979.

Jane Hattrick

Appendix 2: Parts One and Two

The Hartnell-Mitchison Archive Audit  
and Catalogue

## Appendix 2: Part One

### The Hartnell-Mitchison Archive Dress Collection

The dress collection that forms part of the Archive includes examples of dresses made for a particular collection (from which couture copies were made) or client, referred to as ‘model gowns’. Amongst these ‘model gowns’ are the ‘maid of honour’ gowns from both the 1937 Coronation of George VI and the Coronation of Britain’s current monarch Elizabeth II in 1953, copies of what Hartnell refers to as ‘famous dresses’ such as gowns for the actresses Alice Deylisia and Gertrude Lawrence, model gowns made for collections dating between 1953 and 1977, the private collection of Hartnell designed garments for Doris Mitchison, dating from between 1948 and the late 1980s, the private collection of Hartnell garments belonging to Claire Mitchison dating from between 1953 and the late 1970s. This collection also includes baby and child’s dresses for Claire, which were made every Christmas from 1953 and for which a copy was always made for her new Christmas doll as a gift from her ‘Uncle Norman’.

There are four types of dress collection present today in the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive & Collection and these will form my research base for this chapter (chapter four). These collections comprise that of Doris Mitchison, (wife of George Mitchison) Claire Williams (daughter of George Mitchison) examples of model gowns from particular collections saved by Hartnell as examples of ‘Famous Dresses’, and lastly that of Norman Hartnell himself, to-date not included in the catalogue. The garments in these three collections have been catalogued and boxed by me during the research period for this thesis.<sup>802</sup> All four collections are used here as each one contains model garments from Hartnell couture and his high-end ready-to-wear ‘Petit Salon’ collections over time, as examples of what his various client groups including his royal and celebrity clients purchased and as examples of Hartnell’s key ‘looks’.<sup>803</sup> Hartnell’s dress collection contains key examples of ties, shoes, and

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<sup>802</sup> See Hartnell-Mitchison Archive Catalogue Part One for complete descriptions and images of garments in these collections.

<sup>803</sup> Hartnell’s high-end ready-to-wear, made by GKV Ltd was sold in the Petit Salon boutique situated on the ground floor at 26 Bruton Street, from 1963.

beaded evening wear, reinforcing his taste in colour and style both in menswear and women's wear.

As already explained, Hartnell's archive and collection is housed in the home that once belonged to George Mitchison and his wife Doris. This house is now owned and lived in by their daughter Claire. Neither Doris nor Claire can be considered average couture clients but apart from his sister Phyllis Stuart (190? – 1958) they were the women closest to Hartnell, considered by him to be members of his family. As has already been established, their lives were bound up with that of Hartnell in terms of taste, interiors and collecting, and in terms of the everydayness of Hartnell's social and familial life. It followed that the world of the Hartnell couture house and Hartnell clothes were part of their sartorial vocabulary.<sup>804</sup> As the wife and daughter of a business executive in the luxury goods industry, perhaps to own a couture wardrobe was not totally unexpected, although the size of these personal collections might be considered at odds with the social and financial position of these women, and their clothes were not paid for in the usual way but given free of charge by Norman Hartnell.<sup>805</sup>

These four dress collections survive for different reasons and have until the more recent past been stored in different locations. They are now extant together and make up the Hartnell-Mitchison Dress Collection. Some of the garments in Claire's collection have deep personal and sentimental value as Hartnell was her godfather, and he gave her a dress every Christmas from when she was a baby designed by him and made up in the Hartnell workrooms. Others were just models from past collections taken by Claire when she visited the couture house. Claire also had dresses made at Hartnell's taken from various collections throughout her adulthood, punctuating particular first events such as her first ball and the first time she went to Ascot races, her wedding and her 'going away' into marriage - the collection includes her wedding dress, designed especially for her, in 1973 and her 'going away' ensemble, also a one-off.

It is not known how Doris thought and felt about her Hartnell clothes, but Doris's collection holds sentimental value to Claire as her deceased mother's clothes. Yet the fact that these collections were saved at all and include Hartnell

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<sup>804</sup> Phyllis Stuart, Hartnell's sister, died in 1958.

<sup>805</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. 18 March 2010. NHOH/2010/11.

designs made between the late forties and mid 1980s, illustrates that these women were aware that their Hartnell clothes were of cultural value as representative of a celebrated couturier's work. Discussions with Claire have revealed that she was also well aware of the economic value and status of her Hartnell couture in comparison with the wardrobes of other young women in her social circle.<sup>806</sup>

### **Doris Mitchison Dress Collection**

There are thirty-nine ensembles, (around sixty garments) belonging to Doris Mitchison, which were designed and made at Hartnell's between 1948 and 1980, and make up the largest of the three collections. As the wife of George Mitchison, Doris had known Hartnell from 1939 onwards. Mitchison had been installed as Business Manager by Norman Hartnell after he had been demobbed from India at the end of 1945, and he went on to become Executive Director of Hartnell's and a major share holder in the company, until the company was sold to Manny Silverman in 1987<sup>807</sup>. Doris was not one of Hartnell's typically aristocratic or celebrity clients, but she did attend the Hartnell couture and Petit Salon dress shows and would have been aware of what was new at the house.<sup>808</sup> It would have been important for her to be dressed in Hartnell for all social events linked to the company (although it is not clear that she actually attend many of these, as printed invitations in the archive indicate, Mitchison and Hartnell were more often asked to attend together). Claire stated in an interview that Doris had no involvement in the company at all bar the one social event for the house staff held annually at the Mitchison's home in Ticehurst, Kent during the 1960s and 1970s for which she did the catering and was the hostess. In total, sixty-two individual garments by Hartnell are extant in Doris's collection plus ten or so hats to complete ensembles made by milliners who worked closely with Hartnell, Simone Mirman and Claude St Cyr.

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<sup>806</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. 19 March 2010. NHOH/2010/11.

<sup>807</sup> Manny Silverman took over the house in 1987. He had been Executive Director at Moss Bros., having worked for the company from the early sixties.

<sup>808</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. 19 March 2010. NHOH/2010/11.

## The Claire Williams (Mitchison) Dress Collection

Claire Williams' dress collection comprises eighteen Hartnell ensembles taken from either couture collections, from the Petit Salon collections or made for her as one-off designs between 1968-1978 (around thirty garments); mostly evening dress. Several day ensembles were unaccounted for at the time the collection was catalogued, including 'an orange wool dress, a green dress and coat, a tweedy suit and a brown suit.'<sup>809</sup> Claire's Hartnell wedding dress, headdress (by Simone Mirman) and veil from June 1973 was also not photographed and catalogued at this time. Claire also received a Christmas dress as a gift from her 'Uncle Norman' annually from December 1954 and her collection includes around ten child's dresses and corresponding hats plus around five doll's dresses along with the corresponding doll's hats to complete both ensembles by Claude St Cyr. The dresses include hand embroidered organdie baby dresses from the mid fifties and velvet dresses with mink fur trim from the early 1960s.

In 1968 at fifteen years old Claire had her first full-length evening dress made at Hartnell's. It is in hydrangea blue organdie with raised, appliquéd hydrangea flowers, apparently made from fabric left over from a dress made for the Queen Mother. Claire began attending Ascot races from the age of sixteen, and the Petit Salon linen mix dress and bolero jacket dating from around 1969 was probably for this event.<sup>810</sup> During the early seventies Claire lived and worked in London as a beauty consultant and was able to go into the salon regularly to 'see what was new'. Sometimes, if an original model from a collection that was no longer needed caught her eye on the rails she would take it. These model gowns in the collection have no Hartnell labels inside.<sup>811</sup>

Claire married Richard Williams in June 1973. Williams was then young Marine officer, holding the rank of 'Captain until 1980 then Major and Lt. Col a couple of years before he left, but we didn't go to any 'do's' then' and as his wife, Claire wore her Hartnell designed wardrobe to the various social events associated with his position.<sup>812</sup> For regimental dinners and ladies guest nights she wore black full-length gowns, for cocktail parties, black short cocktail dresses and for regimental balls she wore her coloured evening dresses, mostly

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<sup>809</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. March 19 2010.

<sup>810</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. March 19 2010.

<sup>811</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. March 19 2010.

<sup>812</sup> Email from Claire Williams to Jane Hatrick. Friday 25 June 2010.

executed in silk chiffon trimmed with feathers or embroidered with beads.<sup>813</sup> Claire Williams' collection of designs by her 'Uncle Norman' underlines that between the late 1960s and his death in 1979 Hartnell still designed a fashion collection with particular events in mind. Each ensemble or dress had a job to do for a particular type of client, from the young officer's wife to the Ambassador's wife, to the Queen.

**The Hartnell Model Gown Collection (a model being the original couture garment or ensemble in a collection from which others were copied for clients).**

This collection comprises forty-nine garments that make up what I have identified as model gowns either from a particular collection, such as *Pêche Melba*, Hartnell's last design made for the Spring/Summer collection of 1979, or made for major events such as the re-launch of Hartnell's *In Love* perfume in 1971.<sup>814</sup> It also includes the original models of gowns made for major royal occasions such as the Maid of Honour dresses for both the 1937 Coronation of King George IV and also the 1953 Coronation of our current monarch, Elizabeth II as examples of beaded crinoline gowns that Hartnell was famous for.<sup>815</sup> I have also now identified that various dresses as copies of 'Famous Dresses' made for actresses such as Alice Deylisia and Gertrude Lawrence during the 1930s, re-made for publicity events, are also extant in the collection, reflecting his prolific output for the stage in the 1930s and 1930s and the importance his stage designs had on his reputation and house style and the brand identity of the house.

This collection differs from the personal dress collections outlined above. The majority of the models were saved deliberately by the couturier himself and by his successors as the 'archive' of 'Famous Dresses', representative of his work. These were pieces possibly chosen by him to illustrate what he wanted to be remembered for and represented by. He may well have considered this collection, held in the Archive and collection today, as representative of the history of his designs, a reflection of his taste and his legacy.

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<sup>813</sup> Claire Williams. Personal Interview. March 19 2010.

<sup>814</sup> *Pêche Melba* Box 17/DM/1979/68, 'In Love' Box 18/DM/c1971/70,

<sup>815</sup> Maid of Honour Dress made for King George VI's Coronation in 1937, Box 14/DM/1937/59, and Maid of Honour Dress made for Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation in 1953, Box 14, DM/1953/58

Other garments seem to have randomly ended up as part of this archive such as the Countess Steadford's red velvet Peeress robe with white fur and lace sleeves, still in its original box with her name on it. Many of the ensembles are copies of original models worn by particular clients of Hartnell such as the full-length black velvet evening dress decorated with pink beaded embroidery and corresponding pink silk coat with black velvet lining apparently worn by the Viscountess Mountbatten in the mid 1960s.<sup>816</sup> A copy of a white crinoline gown with fuchsia pink bodice decorated with pink flowers dress made for Princess Margaret's birthday in 1951 was made up for a very tall and slim model girl for publicity events over twenty five years later.<sup>817</sup>

### **Norman Hartnell's personal dress collection (not included in the catalogue to date)**

The last part of overall collection comprises clothing and accessories owned and worn by Norman Hartnell himself and includes pairs of his shoes, his favourite navy blue spotted cravats and sky blue ties, his watch, his diamond and sapphire tie pins, his signet ring (visible in studio portraits of Hartnell from 1945), a white dress-shirt monogrammed with his initials in mauve thread and the gold and enamel monogrammed cufflinks given to Hartnell by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 1939. It also contains couture garments in women's styles made for Hartnell by loyal staff in the Hartnell workrooms including a pale turquoise beaded lace pyjama suit with pink rose corsage and corresponding beaded sandals and made in the 1960s and positively identified as Hartnell's by Maureen Markham and Anne Wright who made and embroidered them.

## Appendix 2: Part Two

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<sup>816</sup> HMA/Box13/DM/c1930/56, Box21/DM/c1970/81.1 and Box 21 DM/c1970/81.2

<sup>817</sup> HMABox10/ DM/c1970/46

## The Hartnell-Mitchison Archive: Audit and Catalogue

At the time of Jane Hattrick's PhD submission in October 2011 this part of the catalogue is not yet complete and the decorative objects and furniture once owned by Hartnell have not been included in this catalogue. This section provides an overview of the contents of the Archive.

Along with the collection of dress represented in *Appendix 2: Part One*, the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive also contains autobiographical and biographical writing by and about Hartnell, including drafts for his published memoir of 1955 and several unpublished typescripts and manuscripts for books on how to dress, a collection of poetry, and a transcript of a possible follow-up to his 1955 memoir, written in the early 1970s. Also surviving in the Archive is paperwork, and correspondence between Buckingham Palace and the House of Hartnell, pertaining to major royal events such as royal overseas tours, the royal wedding of 1947, and the Coronation of 1953. Suitcases containing hundreds of embroidery samples from many of Hartnell's fashion collections and royal designs, dating from around the late 1940s, are now wrapped in tissue, catalogued, photographed and re-boxed. Also, now ordered are magazines featuring articles on Hartnell and his life and work dating between 1930s-1970s, theatre ephemera and sketches, painted portraits of Hartnell and the Mitchisons, and beaded Christmas cards made up in the workrooms, which were sent to clients and suppliers each year. The Archive contains examples of the Hartnell commercial range of perfume and toiletries and make-up, personal objects belonging to Norman Hartnell, royal warrants c1938-1980s, and the remainder of what was Hartnell's library and book collection. Airline bags, treasury boxes, briefcases belonging to Hartnell and Mitchison and significantly, fifteen press

cutting books pertaining to Hartnell's career between 1921 and his Knighthood in 1977.

## Audit - General Contents of the Hartnell-Mitchison Archive

The archive contains autobiographical and biographical writing by and about Hartnell, including drafts for his published memoir of 1955 and several unpublished typescripts and manuscripts for books on how to dress, a collection of poetry, and a follow-up to his memoir, written in the early 1970s. It also contains paperwork, and correspondence between Buckingham Palace and the couture house, pertaining to major royal events such as royal overseas tours, the royal wedding of 1947, and the coronation of 1953. Suitcases containing hundreds of embroidery samples from many of Hartnell's fashion collections and royal designs, dating from around the late 1940s, are now wrapped in tissue, catalogued, photographed and re-boxed. Also, put into order are magazines which feature articles on Hartnell and his life and work dating between 1930s-1970s, theatre ephemera and sketches, painted portraits of Hartnell and the Mitchisons, beaded Christmas cards made up in the workrooms, which were sent to clients and suppliers each year. The Archive contains examples of the Hartnell commercial range of perfume and toiletries and make-up, objects of clothing and personal objects belonging to Norman Hartnell and the Mitchison family, royal warrants c1938-1980s, the remainder of what was Hartnell's library and book collection, airline bags, treasury boxes, briefcases belonging to Hartnell and Mitchison, furniture and decorative objects and antiques once belonging to Hartnell and displayed in his homes between 1934-1979, and significantly, fifteen press cutting books.

**Hartnell's decorative objects, furniture and personal effects (as discussed in Chapter Three).**

### *Image (1) - Photographs (fashion, portrait, interiors etc)*

Several hundred photographs exist in the archive including studio portraits of Hartnell dated between 1921 and 1975, personal 'snap shot' photographs of Hartnell and his family, also of Mitchison and his family, dating between 1901 and 1995, studio photographs of individual model garments from twice yearly

fashion collections dating between 1925 and 1977 and photographs of model garments from these fashion collections taken in the Hartnell salon at 26 Bruton Street. There are also photographs taken for publicity purposes, recognisable as reproduced in magazines such as *Picture Post* dating from the fifties.

Photographs survive of various staff members and the different workrooms and showrooms in the Mayfair premises dating between 1935 and 1977. There are also many photographs taken of the different interiors and exteriors of Hartnell's various homes taken between 1934 and 1965. These have been used in this study in Chapter Four.

### **Fashion Photographs (used throughout Chapters Four and Five)**

Of particular interest is the collection of photographs taken during the mid 1930s of Hartnell's fashion collections, which were photographed by portrait photographers from studios such as Scaioni's based at 20, Dean Street, London W1, either in the studio or in the showroom at 26 Bruton Street. They can be dated to post 1935 as the showroom is recognisable through its glass interior, the curtained recess, which forms the backdrop for photographs of many of Hartnell's fashion collections, and particular decorative features still present in the listed interior at Bruton Street today. These include the glass wall light in the shape of a boat sailing up the wall above the bevelled glass door into the showroom from the landing, decorated with stars.

From the early 1960s the representation of Hartnell's couture moved from inside the period showroom interior to the streets of Mayfair and Berkley Square, representing a shift in the fashion for fashion photography. Photographs in the Archive taken between 1962 and 1968 were photographed by the press on the streets of Mayfair.

### **Portrait photographs of Hartnell**

Hartnell was photographed by the celebrated and fashionable studio photographers of the day between 1928 and 1979 including Dorothy Wilding, Paul Tanqueray, Madame Yvonde, and Tom Hustler. No photographs of Hartnell have been found that were taken by Cecil Beaton.

## Personal snap-shot photographs

### Photographs of Hartnell's private and business interiors

#### *Image (2) - Original pencil and watercolour designs*

Around one thousand pencil and watercolour annotated sketched designs of different sizes by Norman Hartnell, Ian Thomas (Hartnell's assistant designer between 1953-1960) and several other sketch artists, including Brenda Naylor who worked for Hartnell between c1945 and 1955 and Rusty Lewis, who worked for Hartnell between 1963-1968 (and then freelance from home from the early 1970s-1980s). These sketches include around one hundred designs for actresses dating between 1922-1945, ten sketches for designs for military and nurses uniforms dating 1940-1980s, sketches for British Royal women including Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, Her Majesty the Queen, Elizabeth II, Princess Margaret, Princess Marina, the Duchess of Kent, and the Duchess of Gloucester dating between 1937-1979 and sketches for fashion collections dating between 1922 and the mid 1980s. These are considered here both as drawings made to sell the garment to the prospective customer, and also as working designs, which, were used by the staff at Hartnell's to construct the garment and to make alterations during the fitting process.<sup>818</sup>

#### *Text (1) - Business paperwork, accounts and licensing agreements*

Including the company's accounts dating between 1953 and 1985 (with some years missing), licensing agreements, correspondence and publicity material pertaining to perfume, stockings, ties and menswear produced under the Hartnell name.

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<sup>818</sup> A couture garment at Hartnell's would require at least two fittings and a final fit before the client would take reception of the final garment.

**Personal correspondence** (Hartnell's epistolary relationships - Hartnell and Princess Margaret (for example))

**Press-cutting books** (Covering Hartnell's career from 1922 to 1979)

**Inventories of premises, furniture, fixtures and fittings**

Norman Hartnell's properties from The Tower House, Regents Park, 1939-1949 and the premises at 26, Bruton Street, 1963, also Lovel Dene, his country house in Windsor and Rose Place in Ascot, his final home.

**Fashion show programmes, dress-show lists and couture house ephemera**

Despite the wealth of business paperwork that includes company accounts and licensing agreements, this material is random, disparate and disordered – much was found stuffed into cupboards and old suitcases. This material has been brought together and chronologically filed and given catalogue numbers.

***Text (2) – Auto/biographical writing, poetry, prose and personal letters***

From his own poetry handwritten during the War to autobiographical writing and personal letters, and scraps of handwritten notes, autobiographical traces of the man appear all over the archive revealing personal and working relationships, working practices, and his own personality. From a copy of Hartnell's 1955 autobiography (1955) through to final drafts of this, final drafts bound with a hand painted cover for both Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Queen Elizabeth II, working backwards to several earlier bound drafts, and several original draft chapters. Files of correspondence between publishers Evans Brothers Ltd., and Norman Hartnell and amended draft chapters by the editor Stanley Jackson reveal just what was edited from Hartnell's original manuscript.

**Autobiography: *Silver & Gold*** (various draft versions of Hartnell's autobiography revealing the editing process)

**Hartnell's poetry**

**Hartnell's prose**

**Personal Letters**

***Text (3) - Remnants of Hartnell's Library***

Piles of Hartnell's books were found in the cellar very damaged by damp and mould in 2005-6, but the larger proportion of what was left of his library was found in the attic of the house in 2008. A startling discovery, when it was thought that as no books were extant in the house that his library had been lost years before. List of themes include books on gardening, European royalty, biographies of other couturiers and theatrical personages and dress history books

**Books annotated by Hartnell**

**Books annotated by others, given to Hartnell**

**Books annotated by Richard Blake Brown**, Hartnell's closest friend, fellow Cambridge, student and cross-dresser. Books annotated from between 1928 – 1960s.