

## Transcript for The Significance of Vestments

Have you ever wondered what role women played in preserving the Catholic faith in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in England and Wales after the English Reformation? Why was the embroidering of vestments dangerous? And what inspired the designs they chose?

I am Rebecca Somerset, archivist at the British Jesuit Archives and today I will be interviewing Dr Jan Graffius, Stonyhurst College Collections curator about her experience of curating a new exhibition for Jesuit Collections, where these questions are explored. In our roles as archivist and curator we are both privileged to collect, preserve and make available for research Jesuit written and material history and so as we saw significance in bringing these two complimentary collections together we created a collaborative partnership resulting in the Jesuit Collections online exhibition platform. As well as getting Jan to share some insights into the behind the scenes work, I also will ask her about caring for vestments as these form a large part of the new exhibition.

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RS: Jan, I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to speak with me again. Last time we spoke about the significance of relics and the online relic exhibition *How bleedeth burning love* and it was great hearing more about your insight into caring for relics and their significance. I am excited to begin today's interview and to share with our listeners more about this new exhibition, to hear about some of the behind-the-scenes experiences and touch on caring for vestments. So, let's get started, and what better way than by asking what is this exhibition about?

JG: *Many thanks Rebecca, for the chance to talk about this new exhibition.*

*I have long been fascinated by the stories behind some of the remarkable artefacts I look after at Stonyhurst, many of which were rescued, as you say, from the iconoclasm of the English Reformation and hidden, or shipped overseas to Europe for safekeeping. The objects themselves, such as Mary Queen of Scots' Holy Thorn from the Crown of Thorns, or gorgeously illuminated illustrated manuscripts are rightly very famous. Others are more obscure, but have equally fascinating stories.*

*And I wanted to know more about how these objects were rescued, who hid them. How they were, in many cases, smuggled overseas to English Catholic*

*Colleges, such as St Omers, which was the foundation of the present day Stonyhurst.*

*The credit is often, and rightly, given to missionary priests, many of whom were Jesuits, and who were working in very difficult and dangerous circumstances, but time and again, when researching the history of these artefacts, the names of women came up. These women rescued and hid medieval vestments and relics, often at great risk to themselves, and they commissioned and created extraordinary works of art in precious metals or embroidered and jewelled silk. Their stories are less well known, and I felt it was time to give them their due place.*

*A 17<sup>th</sup> century Latin epitaph from a church in Aldcliffe in Lancashire provided me with the final prompt:*

*catholicae virgines nos sumus: mutare vel tempore spernimus. anno domini 1674*  
*which translates: We are Catholic Virgins: We scorn to change with the times.*

*This text was inscribed in defiant memory of the recusant sisters, Eleanor and Catherine Dalton. It would have served equally well as Helena Wintour's epitaph in 1671 and for the numerous unsung women who refused to change with the times and chose to weather the storms which resulted from their decision to work against the tide of history.*

RS: Mmm. Quite right. It's definitely long overdue for these stories to be told! And it's such a wonderful opportunity to showcase the hidden stories that we are privileged to care for. I'm sure that some people might be surprised to find such stories about women lurking just beneath the surface within such a male environment as the Jesuit collections undoubtedly are. So the new exhibition sheds light on the work of Catholic women to protect and create Catholic cultural history, but what inspired this topic?

JG: *I am very fortunate to care for an extraordinary collection on behalf of the British Jesuit Province of mid 17<sup>th</sup> century vestments, designed and embroidered by this woman, Helena Wintour. Her story is romantic and tragic and triumphant; her father was a Gunpowder Plotter and was executed when Helena was five. She was orphaned by the age of ten, and spent much of her life looking after the children of others, never marrying herself. Instead she chose a life of artistic creativity and spiritual erudition, which found its expression in these glorious vestments. Which she embroidered with her name and family crest. A brave thing to do, at a time when Catholicism and all its trappings were*

*prohibited, and the penalty for harbouring Catholic priests, as Helena also did, was death.*

*So it started with Helena, and the more I looked, the more examples of determined, artistic, powerful and brave women I found.*

RS: As with the relics, I have heard you speak about Helena previously on several occasions and your admiration for her has been very clear. The more I learn and reflect on that time in history, I am more and more struck by the courage she showed in identifying herself as the creator of these vestments, such a forbidden item to have. I can't help but ask on our listeners' behalf as I already know the answer, but you've chosen a fairly seemingly provocative title: *Hot, Holy Ladies*. What inspired this choice?

JG: *When I first encountered this phrase, it made me laugh, and then I realised it was the perfect description of the women in this exhibition. The word 'hot' refers to the strength of their religious convictions, rather than anything more salubrious and in fact it was an insult written by a Catholic priest, William Watson, in a book that he'd published in 1602. Watson was deeply anti-Jesuit, and was annoyed that so many English women were dedicated to helping the Jesuits in their work. He regarded these women as having been dazzled by the glamour of the Jesuit missionaries, deluded by the heat of their zeal into supporting the wrong type of Catholic missionary.*

*Women in the early modern period were legally regarded as second class citizens. They lived under male authority pretty much all of their lives, subject to the control of a father, or a brother or a husband, unable to own property in their own right, and seen as being incapable of rational thought or reason.*

*However, there was a loophole. Widows who had inherited wealth from their husbands were allowed to keep legal control of their affairs, and had a far greater freedom allowed to them by society. Such women could live independently and engage in clandestine, illegal acts, such as maintaining a secret Catholic chapel, without fear of objection from a husband, or indeed without the worry of landing him in deep trouble if things were discovered.*

*And because women were less culpable in the eyes of the law, as they were thought not to be able to reason in the same way as men, their lawbreaking carried lesser penalties. In many cases, their husbands were penalised for the*

*wife's wrongdoing, as it was thought that the men should have executed better control over their wives.*

*So the women in this exhibition took full advantage of their legal situation, using the excuse of their status as supposedly weaker beings to get away with illegal activities such as sheltering priests, running secret Catholic schools and fitting out underground chapels. The penalties for men found to have committed such crimes was severe, but many women were able to run huge risks and, in many cases, get away with it.*

*I love reading accounts of women confronting the local authorities who were raiding their homes often in the early hours of the morning. Playing for time saying they couldn't possibly meet the raiding party of men until they were fully dressed, and using their feminine weakness and feigned fear to win precious minutes, allowing the priest and his incriminating vestments to be bundled into a hiding hole.*

RS: Such clever ingenious women doing that! And I will come back to this point of Catholic women taking advantage of their sex to help preserve their faith shortly. But given that your inspiration started with Helena Wintour, it is hardly surprising that she is fairly central, at least to the online exhibition, again we will come back to there being a physical and online exhibition in a moment.

As you said the exhibition was inspired by Helena Wintour's vestments. We are fortunate that in the British Jesuit Archives there is a remarkable collection of letters and testimonies which tell the story of the circumstances of Helena's death in 1671, in fact 400 years ago. These documents are referred to as Helena's will, but of course this was actually only a declaration of intent rather than a legal will, as being a Recusant Helena was not allowed to bequeath property. Again, as with the relics we used the opportunity of the collaborative partnership Jesuit Collections to reunite documents, in this case Helena's will, which are held by us here at the British Jesuit Archives with the objects to which they relate, in this case the vestments, that you are caring for at Stonyhurst. Taking a step back for a moment, when did you first encounter Helena and what struck you about her?

JG: *As you say, Rebecca, the British Jesuit Province has a remarkable collection of vestments and documents relating to Helena Wintour. And as you've said the vestments are at Stonyhurst under my care, and the Jesuit Archives have very*

*generously lent Helena's will and associated letters to Stonyhurst for this exhibition.*

*The first time I saw Helena's work would be probably more than 40 years ago on a visit to Stonyhurst before I started work there. But the first time I saw her work I was astonished at its rich beauty, its skill and its extraordinary artistic and spiritual passion and flair. When I started work at Stonyhurst twenty years ago I started looking into her story and the more I looked into it, the more fascinating it became.*

*She lived, for much of her life, in the eye of a storm. Her father and uncles were Gunpowder Plotters and were executed, as I've said, when she was only five years old. Left, after the early death of her mother to care for a household, her only surviving relative, her nephew George, was deeply involved in the Civil War on the Royalist side, and in fact died of the effects of imprisonment by Cromwell's government. For such a prominent Catholic family, associated with treason and having demonstrable royalist sympathies (George was actually knighted by Charles I for his support), to be living at a time when the practice of Catholicism was still illegal and when many of the priests and laypeople were being imprisoned, tortured and executed for their defiance of these laws, Helena resisted the considerable pressure to conform and held fast to her beliefs. She supported the Jesuit mission both financially and practically, sheltered Jesuit priests and created this extraordinary body of embroidered work, which against all the odds has survived to the present day.*

*You mention Helena's will. It is amongst the documents you have lent to this exhibition. Signed, in a spidery wavering hand on the morning of her death in 1671. It's a deeply moving document in which Helena declared her intent to leave her precious embroideries to the Jesuits almost with her last breath.*

*We know a good deal more about Helena from the other letters associated with the will, or as you say, it's not strictly speaking a will, but we refer to it as such. No sooner was Helena dead, than her nephew George's widow, Lady Mary, claimed the vestments for herself. Helena's friends, her doctor, her lawyer and her executor all wrote sworn testimonies insisting that Lady Mary's claims were invalid. And from these letters we get a glimpse of Helena's character- fiercely resisting Lady Mary's repeated attempts during her life time to 'borrow' the vestments, indicating her exclusive knowledge of embroidery techniques invented by English Catholic nuns in Liege and unknown in England. Most characteristically, the letters describe how Helena dictated and signed her will*

*on the morning of her death, calling for her spectacles and snapping at her goddaughter, Nell, to 'get out of the light, wench'. Helena's fierce independence, her unique artistic ability, her courage and fiery temperament, for me made a compelling combination. As you might have guessed I am a huge fan.*

RS: Yes. She sounds such a strong woman indeed! Which brings me to another powerful female figure who has, it seems to me, left quite an impression on you, and it's also a link between the relic exhibition and this new one. This is the figure of the Spanish noblewoman Luisa de Carvajal, who came to England to help spread Catholicism in Protestant England, and of particular interest to us, helped to secure relics of some of the martyrs. Having heard you speak about her numerous times and on your recommendation to learn a bit more I have just finished reading "The She-Apostle: the extraordinary life and death of Luisa de Carvajal". What struck me was the observation made by the author Glyn Redworth regarding the fact that what kept Luisa from being sent back home or indeed imprisoned for lengthy time was that she was female and I quote "being a woman provided a degree of protection because the men who governed the country were reluctant to concede that a female could harm the interests of the state" (p161). I feel that one of the things you highlight through the *Hot, holy ladies* exhibition is of course how wrong it was of these men to underestimate the power and influence of women in upholding their Catholic faith. You have already spoken about this, but perhaps you would expand some more on whether women used their femaleness or sex perhaps also to make it easier for them to keep doing, to keep upholding the Catholic faith, because they were provided with a certain protection?

JG: *Oh definitely. We touched on this earlier, but there are many examples of women using their supposed meek and feeble status to carry out extraordinary acts of subversion, for which, let's remember if caught the penalties were terrifying. And indeed Anne Line, Margaret Clitheroe and Margaret Ward were all executed for sheltering or aiding priests, not to mention the numerous women who were imprisoned, or who lost their income or homes for defying these laws. Ironically, Margaret Ward was executed for her part in arranging the prison escape of William Watson, whose insulting term Hot Holy Ladies provided the inspiration for this exhibition. Margaret smuggled a rope into Bridewell prison, where she had inveigled her way into being allowed to visit Watson, and arranged for a boatman to collect him once he had climbed out of his window. Watson escaped, but Margaret was captured and executed.*

*Some of the most extraordinary reliquaries in this exhibition are associated with Anne Vaux, a staunch supporter of the Jesuit mission in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and in whose houses many Jesuit priests were sheltered and protected. Henry Garnet, the Jesuit leader in England, wrote about the time in 1586 when a search party broke into Anne's house in Hackney as he was saying mass. Anne, her sister Eleanor, and Eleanor's young adopted daughter, Frances, saved Garnet from capture and incidentally the women from a possibly similar fate to Margaret Clitheroe and Margaret Ward. I quote-*

*'the ladies, Anne and Eleanor, went down with the child Frances to see what was astir. The pursuivants and the constables were already in the hall, their swords drawn. Frances was undismayed 'Put up your swords' she cried 'or else my mother will die- she cannot endure to see a naked blade,' Then making to fetch some wine for her swooning mother, she ran out, locked the doors of the hiding place where the priests were, and ran back to parley with the pursuivants.'*

*The eleven year old Frances' cool courage and spirited defiance was evident on another raid later that year- again as Garnet relates:*

*'she barred the staircase after a sudden intrusion. A pursuivant, to frighten her, held a drawn dagger at her breast, and threatened to stab her should she refuse to hand over the priests. Frances retorted 'If thou dost it will be the hottest blood that ever thou sheddest in this life.'*

RS: Wow! Remarkable courageous women! I'm finding that I'm having to say this a lot so no wonder that you wanted to bring greater prominence to their stories as revealed through the objects you care for!

Unlike the first exhibition, this one is different in that there is both a physical exhibition to which people can come and visit hopefully in spring 2022 Covid situation permitting of course. How else would you say that this exhibition is different to the first?

JG: *I think, Rebecca, we learnt a lot from the relics exhibition, How Bleedeth Burning Love. I certainly learnt that an online exhibition needs to be short and succinct, that you can't expect busy people to spend an hour or more on their phones scrolling through lengthy stories. That's in fact why people visit real exhibitions, and set aside plenty of time for doing so.*

*Obviously the previous relics exhibition was intended to be a real exhibition, and the online version was a last minute reaction to the realities enforced upon us by*

*the Covid lockdown. I am still very proud of what you and I produced, but I am also glad of the opportunity to learn and reflect on the experience.*

*So as you said this exhibition will most definitely have two incarnations. The lingering effects of Covid have pushed back the opening of the physical exhibition at Stonyhurst until Easter 2022. But from that date, in the Easter holidays and then the summer holidays of 2022, we will be open to the public and hope that many will visit and have a chance to encounter the many extraordinary artefacts in this exhibition- these include a 15<sup>th</sup> century cope commissioned by Henry VII, Mary Stuart's Prayer Book and Holy Thorn relic, some of the amazing metalwork commissioned by Anne Vaux, Thomas More's wife Alice's gorgeous gold and pearl crucifix, amazing illuminated manuscripts, and, of course, the vestments. From Helena's richly worked, jewel studded, symbolic creations, to humbler chasubles patched and pieced from farmers' wives Sunday best frocks, our visitors will be able to encounter these breath-taking objects in reality.*

RS: Well I'm certainly hoping to get up to see the physical exhibition! It is of course wonderful to see close ups in photos and watch films of items but there is nothing like being able to see the objects in person, as you say in reality.

And I know that there are other events and things, such as an illustrated children's storybook, that we are planning around the exhibition, which we will advertised as these are confirmed and ready for public consumption. How does the online exhibition fit in with the physical exhibition?

JG: *Well we are creating a variety of short films to accompany the exhibition, which will allow those who cannot at the moment travel to the beautiful Ribble Valley in Lancashire, to experience something of the beauty of the exhibits. The films will focus on Helena Wintour's life and work, as she's kind of the focus of the exhibition. There's a 20 minute film recreating her life, followed by a series of short films which will highlight each of the sets of her remarkable vestments, the techniques she used, and her artistic and spiritual inspiration. So, hopefully the physical exhibition will be enhanced by the online exhibitions, and hopefully, the online exhibitions will provide a rich insight into some of the artefacts on display in the physical exhibition. Ideally everyone should see both, but at least this will give anyone with access to the internet a chance to experience something of the glory of these vestments.*

RS: And they are beautiful. Definitely worth seeing! One of the things we valued last time about having to do a virtual exhibition was the wider global reach this

meant so as you say this way anyone with access to the internet should be able to do so even if geographic limitations mean they can't view the physical exhibition.

This is now the second online exhibition, and I wonder what new skills you have learnt from doing online exhibitions?

*JG: Gosh. Well I have learned that you cannot look more than one day ahead without something forcing you to change your plans.*

*So much of this new work took place during lockdowns of one kind or another, and I think the experience of talking to colleagues, such as yourself, Rebecca, remotely, helped me to make a transition of sorts from my comfortable working life curating real things, real life objects into display cases, to a much more nebulous place where you seek to engage your audience through the spoken word, with moving and static images.*

*What have I learned? Well I have learned to script text and record it, and to match it with images, which is different from writing museum labels. Actually I haven't learned how to script text really. I still write far too much. I am trying to understand how people actually use these online experiences. It's been quite a salutary experience, scripting and curating content that I find fascinating and exciting but making it succinct into a way that will fit in with people's busy lives. I mean my entire professional life up until the pandemic consisted of working in a scenario where it is expected that people will come to look at an exhibition in your museum or a published book, on your own terms. Venturing into the online world means that you are competing with an infinite number of competitors, and you have to make your mark quickly.*

RS: Yes indeed there was a big learning curve when we ventured into the first exhibition, especially given how short notice it was, and, as you say, to a certain extent we are still learning as we are discovering more about what the viewer statistics tell us and we are trying to use this to guide us in creating future content.

So, this time around there was a bit of filming. What was your experience of this?

*JG: It's all been very challenging! Great fun but challenging.*

*After the relics exhibition, Rebecca, you and I thought it would be good to introduce some filming, and as we know a fair bit about Helena's life story, she was the obvious candidate. So there would be a mixture of voiceover, still images and live filming.*

*First I had to script the whole thing, and was very grateful for the experience of Kevin and Rowenna, the filmmakers, who had a better understanding than I did of what would work visually which helped me to adapt the script to work with a moving image rather than a static artefact in a display case.*

*Then casting was next. Mostly this was done through friends and family who could be strong-armed. Of course with the pandemic still proving to be a real issue, it turned out that about 80% of the original planned cast were not able to take part and we had some last minute nerve-racking substitutions including one on the day of filming itself.*

*If the film was to have any authenticity at all, accurate costumes were required. We used the Royal Shakespeare Company, who have an extensive wardrobe of amazing 17<sup>th</sup> century clothing and accessories. It was a bit awkward at times, having persuaded friends and family to take part, to then ask for their measurements. Then we had to dress the cast, using corsets, bum rolls, bodices and caps, as well as managing hairstyles and makeup.*

*I had to check that the locations were suitable. Luckily, working in a magnificent 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century building meant that that was less of an issue than might have otherwise been imagined.*

*And of course it being 2021 we had to ensure social distancing protocols and provide separate dressing rooms for children and adults, and space for accompanying parents to supervise small children. Which meant obviously plenty of food, snacks, water, tea and coffee, with care for dietary requirements and allergies. I had to manage the shooting schedule to ensure that the younger children were not overfaced, or overtired. Filming is surprisingly tedious, repetitive and lengthy, but hopefully also exciting and creative. Certainly the children who took part were amazing and they loved every minute of it.*

RS: Wow! So much planning and work that goes on behind the scenes! But I'm sure no doubt it was all worth it and seeing the great outcome of it all now it's remarkable.

I know that the exhibition is not only about vestments, but there certainly is a considerable focus on such, so perhaps you could tell us a bit more about what vestments can teach us?

*JG: That's a big question! Trying to break it down, I would say that the vestments in the exhibition fall into a number of different categories each of which has their own story.*

*First are those medieval vestments which were targeted for destruction after the onset of the English Reformation in 1540, which led to the dissolution of the monasteries and the institution of Henry VIII's new Church of England. This huge religious and cultural upheaval had a profound effect in England, and the government's determination to gather everyone, willingly or not, into the new state church provoked an official crackdown on all things associated with the Roman Catholic religion and the items associated with its worship and spiritual practices.*

*These medieval Catholic vestments were frequently adorned with heavy, almost three dimensional embroideries using split stitch techniques and much gold thread, creating lifelike embroidered images of saints and the Holy Family. This technique was known as opus anglicanum, or English Work. This kind of embroidery was renowned and prized throughout Western Christendom from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was sought after from small English parishes to the palaces of bishops and the Vatican itself. During the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I, opus anglicanum was specifically sought out to be destroyed, as it represented a specifically Roman Catholic form of liturgy. Luckily, the way in which opus anglicanum was constructed meant that it could easily be picked apart from its backing fabric, and the precious embroideries rolled up into small parcels which were easily transported across the Channel to safety at places such as St Omers. There the precious embroideries were unrolled and remounted onto lavish fabrics, and were used again in English Catholic liturgies, where they represented Catholic continuity from before the Reformation.*

RS: Is there an example of this in the online or the physical exhibition and would perhaps the Henry VII cope be an example?

*JG: Yes, definitely, although the opus anglicanum mounted on the Henry VII cope is perhaps overshadowed by the fabulous cloth of gold and red silk damask on which it is mounted. This fabric is woven with scrolled Lancastrian roses and*

*golden portcullis badges and crowns. The opus anglicanum takes sort of second place.*

*The next category is slightly less glamorous: make do and mend vestments which were created from worn out dresses and furnishing fabric. These featured heavily in the Jesuit missions of the 1580s to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Jesuit missions desperately needed to move from Catholic house to Catholic house in short periods of time, to avoid capture. If they had to carry their own vestments, that could slow them down, and would also have been incriminating should they have been intercepted on their travels. And so recusant women began to make basic sets of vestments from their own clothes and furnishing fabrics. These were hidden on site, to allow the Jesuit priests, the itinerant priests, to travel unencumbered.*

*In time, women began to elaborate these vestments. Many young English and Welsh girls were sent across to be educated in English convents in Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp and Lieges. There they learned the latest embroidery techniques using gold threads, pearls and jewels. Their reading provided them with a rich vocabulary of symbolic images, much of which was based on Jesuit spiritual writers, such as Robert Southwell and Henry Hawkins. And so a third kind of vestment came into being- made from rich silks and jewels, and founded on a learned and pious education.*

RS: Presumably Helena's vestment fit into this later category?

JG: *Absolutely. Yes. Helena's vestments represent probably the ultimate example of these richly embroidered, heavily bejewelled vestments, whose symbolic images found their inspiration in English Catholic poetry and meditative writings of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.*

RS: They are absolutely wonderful. I think we both agree on that. Why should vestments be preserved? Is there anything that makes caring for vestments more difficult than caring for relics? And finally, what guidance can you give listeners?

JG: *Why should they be preserved? Well, I would hope that the previous discussion would answer that question comprehensively! They are a fundamental part of English and Welsh Catholic history of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are also, and this is an area which is regularly overlooked by early modern historians, a fundamental part of English and Welsh creative,*

*literary and artistic history. There is a huge exploration awaiting curators and historians, examining the crossover between recusant artistic culture and mainstream English artistic culture.*

*Yes, vestments are in general much more difficult to care for than relics. Vestments are almost entirely made from organic materials such as silk and wool, which are very vulnerable to damage from light and UV radiation, not to mention moth and insect infestation or the problems of damp.*

*The best advice I can give if you are tasked with the care of ancient vestments is to try and ascertain the age and the materials involved. Silk, wool, metal thread or spangles are prone to deterioration, infestation, mildew and tarnish. So knowing what you are dealing with is very much half the battle. Try to avoid handling them without protective gloves, that handling you know can contribute to wear and tear, but also add the problems of acidic sweat and grease from palms and fingers. Keep textiles in comfortable conditions, ie between 18 and 20 C and in relative humidity of 50 – 55%, wrapped in acid free tissue, in the dark, regularly checked for moth and other pests. If in doubt, seek the advice of textile historians in local museums. In fact this last point is probably the most important. Ask for professional help; it will be willingly given.*

RS: Thank you Jan! Perhaps from a curatorial point of view a bit more controversial but should such historic vestments still be used or should they be regarded as museums objects?

JG: *Vestments are not museum objects, or at least, were not created to be displayed in museums. Each piece is unique with a multiplicity of stories to tell, from the times in which they were created, to the people who used them and those who hid and preserved them until such time as it was safe for them to be seen in the wider community.*

*Vestments find their fullest expression when they are used for the purpose for which they were created- namely to be worn for the celebration of the Catholic mass and sacraments. But for a curator, this poses a delicate balancing act between the significance of such use and the essential need to preserve these fragile, unique vestments. And always, it is the preservation of the vestments which takes priority.*

*At Stonyhurst we are greatly fortunate to have a number of beautiful vestments, from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which are robust enough to be used, sparingly and judiciously but for the purpose for which they were created.*

*Indeed, one of the great privileges of my curatorial life is laying out such beautiful and historic vestments for significant liturgies, feast days, baptisms, weddings, ordinations, first holy communions and funerals. I choose the vestment from a conservation and a spiritual stand point. And then I read the riot act to the priest involved, indicating exactly what I will do to him if he ignores my instructions.*

RS: I can just imagine the fear you instil when you do this...Perhaps there is a good reason why you admire the fierceness of Helena so much?!

You've made it clear how significant these vestments are to understanding English and Welsh Catholic history of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. What resources are there for studying them?

JG: *In many ways the history of Catholic textiles is in its infancy. Academic researchers, writers and historians are slowly catching up with curators, to realise that these artefacts matter and have much to teach us. At the end of this podcast you will find a number of links to such sites. I confidential except that in the coming years, you will find an awful lot more.*

RS: I'm going to be presumptive but I'm guessing anyone wanting to venture into researching vestments is free to contact you to begin such discussions.

JG: *Absolutely! Happy to.*

RS: You are of course privileged to care for so many remarkable objects at Stonyhurst, but thinking especially about those that you have chosen for inclusion in this exhibition, what is your favourite item and why?

JG: *Can I have two?*

RS: Certainly.

JG: *The Helena Wintour Black Velvet Chasuble. It is embroidered with glittering starbursts and electrically charged doves of the holy spirit set onto midnight black velvet. Each of the starbursts has a monogram referring to Ignatius Loyola*

*or Francis Xavier, or Mary and Joseph, or Joachim and Anna, Mary's parents. It's a beautiful, technically extraordinary and powerfully symbolic piece of work.*

*My second is a 20<sup>th</sup> century chasuble, which is on loan from the Jesuit Campion Hall at Oxford University. It's known as the Mrs Johnson chasuble, but I prefer to think of it as the Diana Ross and the Supremes vestment. One of the themes of this exhibition, as I have mentioned earlier, was the refashioning of recusant women's clothing into chasubles in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the English Jesuit Martin d'Arcy collected couture ballgowns belonging to rich Catholic socialites and debutants and had them turned into chasubles. Mrs Johnson's ballgown is sequinned over every inch, in a psychedelic mind boggling pattern of green, blue and gold waves. The resulting chasuble is utterly compelling and a complete jaw-dropping show-stopper. If you want to see it, you will have to visit the exhibition at Stonyhurst.*

RS: In case anyone needed another reason to come to the physical exhibition, this is obviously it!

I'm sure listeners are wondering whether they can expect more from us. Can you share anything about our future plans?

JG: *Yes. Well, you know, we have both been thinking about moving into some very different territory for our next venture! I have long been fascinated by the College's remarkable scientific collections, which include natural history, meteorological, astronomical and botanical holdings. These date between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and provide a remarkable commentary on the study of the natural world, humanity's evolving understanding of it, and of the impact we have wrought upon our natural surroundings and climate.*

*As you know, Rebecca, only too well, there is an extraordinary material in the Jesuit Province archives concerning famous Jesuit scientists and astronomers, and other observers of the natural world. I have forgotten exactly how many craters on the moon have been named after Jesuit scientists, but there's quite a few.*

*And this study doesn't only include established scientists: there are some surprising figures such as the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. In fact there is a podcast on the JesuitCollections website about Hopkins, which touches on his interest in science, nature and the northern climate.*

*So maybe, bearing in mind the urgency of the issue of climate change, we can use our joint resources to examine this subject, through artefacts, photographs and archival records, commenting on the role we all need to play in caring for our common home, and examining the lives and work of some of the extraordinary pioneers of nature conservation from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards.*

*I have to say that one of the biggest rewards of the last two years, frustrated as we have been by Covid and lockdowns and the inability to reach out to physical audiences, has been this collaboration with JesuitCollections and the opportunity to explore other ways of sharing our artefacts and our stories.*

*Whatever happens in the future, whether we return to the old normality or not, the Jesuit Archives and Stonyhurst Collections will continue to work together in new and hopefully innovative ways. So I hope our listeners will access the Helena Wintour film and the short videos showcasing her remarkable vestments. I hope also that people will continue to feed back to us suggestions which will enable us to improve and innovate. We have amazing stories to tell, and such stunning objects to share, and we hope that you, our listeners, keep in touch with them as we continue to bring them to you.*

RS: Yes. I fully agree with you that we have so many wonderful items and stories still to share and that we will continue to explore how to do so. And as we said at the beginning the complimentary nature of our collections of you having the objects, us having records relating to it, is so useful to reunite them even if only digitally. And as Jan said please do share your feedback and suggestions with us. There is a mailing list on the JesuitCollections website to which you can subscribe to be kept informed of new developments, and I would encourage you to consider signing up to if you haven't already done so. Finally, let's end with what you hope the impact of this exhibition is?

JG: *I hope that people will appreciate Helena Wintour's amazing life story and her extraordinary artistic and technical creativity.*

*I hope that we can bring a new understanding of the incredibly important, and massively underappreciated role of Catholic women in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and their integral part in saving so many of the beautiful and significant artefacts held today by Stonyhurst and the British Jesuit Province.*

*I would love to think that a few people would be inspired to take up embroidery – it is an affirming, expressive and very rewarding discipline. We desperately need textile and embroidery conservators in this country. Maybe this exhibition could provide a platform for new talents?*

*And above all, I hope that people enjoy it, and find something of the enthusiasm, love and burning creativity displayed by Helena Wintour, Anne Vaux, Mary Bodenham, Susanna Hyde, Margaret Beaufort, Mary Arundell and, of course, the inimitable Mrs Johnson and her sequins.*

RS: Yes, indeed, I think certainly that you have brought these remarkable women's stories to light for others to learn about. So, thank you Jan for doing that! It is always such a great pleasure to talk with you and to be able to share your wisdom.

JG: *Pleasure is mine!*

RS: I'm sure listeners will now feel better informed about the historic importance of vestments and the role that recusant women played in preserving the Catholic faith. And I'm sure, like me, that they can't wait for another interview with you on some as yet undecided topic! Let's speak soon! Thank you Jan.

JG: *Thank you.*

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RS: I hope you enjoyed today's podcast. If you want to see the new *Hot Holy Ladies* exhibition or to listen to the previous podcast interview with Jan then head over to [www.jesuitcollections.org.uk](http://www.jesuitcollections.org.uk). The podcast can be found under the heading 'Extras' in the relics exhibition.

As previously stated, if you want to keep up-to-date with new content or future exhibitions then please consider signing up to our mailing list, which can be found on the exhibition pages. You can also find our contact details there.

And your feedback is always welcome so do drop us a line to let us know what you made of this podcast. If you enjoyed it please consider sharing it with others too.

Thank you for listening!