**'Gold and Silver by Night'.**[i]

**Queen Alexandra: A Life in Color**

Alighting from the royal yacht on March 7th of 1863, the young Danish Princess Alexandra, imminent bride-to-be of Edward Prince of Wales, was the subject of a detailed description in *The Times*. The royal correspondent William Russell wrote: "An instance of the desire of Her Royal Highness to consult the interests of the people of her adoption, and to prepare a pleasant surprise for the Queen was mentioned as resting upon authentic detail. Ascertaining some time ago the favorite color of Her Majesty, silver grey, she caused a poplin dress of that shade to be manufactured at the well-known establishment of Messrs. Fry of Dublin, and appeared in it for the first time on the occasion of her entry." (Russell, 1863: 40) It was an astute choice, appealing both to the British public and more personally to her dominant mother-in-law to be. It offered a respectful nod to Queen Victoria's favorite color whilst at the same time indicating a sartorial shrewdness at which Alexandra would excel for the almost half century of her public life.

This text will consider how such a prominent a figure as Alexandra, meticulously managed her appearance through clever color choices. Lacking a political voice she nonetheless was able to appeal to a broad spectrum of society, from her peers to the British public and from those at home to those abroad. Non-verbal communication through dress that was reported upon so frequently in the Court Circular[ii] bolstered her popularity during times when other members of the British monarchy, her husband included, were not held in such high regard. Alexandra utilized color choices in garments to speak for her in the public sphere of her life, allowing dress to create both a diplomatic and a patriotic narrative relative to the occasion. In more recent years this attention to sartorial detail has become more commonplace for prominent female royals who use the symbols and colors of dress as a form of compliment to nations and institutions during public appearances, this strategy, however, was in its infancy in the second half of the nineteenth century. Whilst Queen Victoria recognized that this could be a useful visual tactic, the death of Prince Albert meant that her legacy in dress terms was to be famously monochromatic. Following her husband's death in 1861, Queen Victoria chose to wear only black garments for the rest of her life as a visual marker of her continuing grief for his loss. Alexandra too was changed by life experiences that also included profound loss and her color choices changed as these events left their mark upon her, both physically and mentally, the color palette of her dress mapping her emotional states. mapping the palette of her dress. The text will examine how Alexandra relied upon garment choices to shield her from some of the more problematic aspects of her changing physicality when public expectations of her clothed royal body were required to mask her own

corporeal limitations. Additionally this text will provide an opportunity to consider how the surviving garments from Alexandra's wardrobe, including over one hundred and thirty objects conserved in museum collections around the world, paint in the colors of Alexandra's apparel which otherwise remain bound to the greys of contemporary photographs.

From the very beginning of her life as a popular member of the British monarchy, Alexandra embraced color in dress. Through the annotation of her clothing reported in the Court Circulr between 1870 and 1890 we get a sense of the spectrum of strong colours which Alexandra wore on chronicled occasions. Although these reports represent just a fraction of the public outings that Alexandra made in her almost forty years as Princess of Wales, they capture the range of color that she was prepared to embrace and was entirely in keeping with the broad range of colors then in vogue. Charlotte Niklaus's (Nicklas C, 2009) recent research has revealed the scope of color in dress during this period whilst C. Willett Cunnington's seminal volume charting changes in dress in the nineteenth century confirms the variety of color in dress that was both available and acceptable, suggesting that the young Princess's choices were, if not fashion forward, at least recognizably modish (Cunnington,1990 ed). The shared public awareness of her appearance might be suggested as conspiratorial in nature, where the Princess and her public could recognize what particular color choices signified. There was a sophisticated sartorial vocabulary present in the columns of the fashion periodicals and the broad variety of hues described offered to those in the role of observer an assortment of color that might be decoded thanks to the ubiquity of such fashion journalism. Alexandra was astute at choosing garments appropriate to the time and place of wear and color was part of that choice. The complexity of the descriptions offered by the Court Circular of Alexandra's attire supports the idea of this communal knowledge of garments described. For example, from March of 1883 "Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales wore a dress of dark green velvet over a jupe[iii] of pale green brocade embossed with gold and volants[iv] of lace, fastened with bunches of shaded carnations." (*The Times*, March 6, 1883) From May of the same year: "Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales wore a gold satin dress interwoven with currant-color over a jupe of same silk covered in fine plisses[v] of tulle striped in gold and narrow fringes of currants." (*The Times*, May 29, 1883) Whilst in July of 1885: "Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales wore a dress of myrtle green Lyons velvet and eau de nil satin duchesse, trimmed with silver tissue and Irish lace." (*The Times,* July 3, 1885)

There are few surviving garments associated with Alexandra that pre-date 1890. A rare piece now in the collections of the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising Museum, Los Angeles supports the reputation of the vibrancy of her dress (Color image 1 – Blue wool blouse

c.1863). It is a vibrant blue wool blouse with white braided trim and has an inner waistband attached at centre back. The strings continue around to the centre front waist but are not attached, causing the blouse to fall free. It is entirely hand-made and lined in China silk dating to c.1863. It was possibly worn as a maternity garment as it incorporates the adjustable element in its construction. Blue was apparently a color that she often preferred, according to an early biographer Sarah Tooley: 'Blue is her favorite color and was much used for her dresses and bonnets at one time.' (Tooley,1902:161) It is possible that there was some sentimental attachment to her choice of blue. Charlotte Crosby Nicklas observes that certain colors were named after popular public figures and whilst she does not record a color named for Alexandra, there was a Dagmar blue, named in honor of the Princess's younger sister (Crosby Nicklas, 2009: 270-80). There is no surviving evidence that Alexandra herself chose Dagmar blue for garments in her own wardrobe but a synchronicity of color choices between the sisters was to be an occasional feature of their relationship.

Such diversity of color remained a feature of Alexandra's wardrobe for almost thirty years, during which period she established herself as one of the most popular and recognizable women of her day with a reputation for greater affability than many other members of the monarchy. She rarely spoke in public and so arguably her reputation was built upon the widely disseminated image of her strikingly colorfully clothes royal body.

**Diplomacy and Patriotism**

Knowing the frequency with which descriptions of her appearance featured in the press, Alexandra used such accounts to make some diplomatically canny selections in dress for certain, civic occasions. Her non-verbal communication through dress suggested above, via her vibrant color choices was used to even greater effect when Alexandra was in attendance as the Queen's representative both at home and abroad. Notable examples were the highly sensitive State visits to Ireland in 1868 and 1885.

The royal couple had first visited Ireland together in April of 1868, less than twelve months after heightened activity by the Irish Fenian activists had caused widespread governmental anxiety (Kelly, 2006). Queen Victoria had her reservations about the possible dangers of such a trip in the face of Irish hostility although she herself had sailed across the Irish Sea on a similar visit in 1849. In spite of Victoria's reservations, it was Disraeli who entreated with her to allow Alexandra to accompany her husband, recognizing how powerful her presence might be: "Is it not worth Your Majesty's gracious consideration whether the good might not be doubled if His Royal Highness were accompanied by the Princess? Would it not add to the grace and even the gaiety of the

event?" (Battiscombe,1969:92) The Queen consented and the trip proved to be immensely successful in no small part owing to the appearance of Alexandra who silently expressed her fondness for the Irish on her return to England: "All that the Princess could do to show the friendly Irish populace that she had not forgotten them was to appear at Ascot in the same outfit that she had worn at Punchestown Races – a green dress of Irish poplin trimmed with Irish lace, with Irish shamrocks in her white bonnet." (Battiscombe, 1969:96)

She took the same approach for the State visit made with Edward in 1885. *The Times* described Alexandra's chosen attire for a number of functions, the garments for which were all presumably intended to compliment the Irish people. On April 9th at a Drawing Room and Levee in Dublin: "The Princess of Wales wore a dress of bronze velvet draped in gold embroidery embossed with shamrocks. Her head-dress and tiara were of diamonds."(*The Times*, April 9,1885) Three days later at a State Ball in Dublin: "The Princess of Wales wore a dress of cream satin duchesse trimmed with gold and silver embroidery, veiled in lisse embroidered with gold and silver shamrocks; her headdress was a tiara of diamond ornaments." (*The Times*, April 12, 1885) Finally, on April 22nd the newspaper described the Princess of Wales' dress for the Citizen's Ball in Dublin: "Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales wore a dress of green velvet over a jupe of pale green satin and silver gauze, draped with Irish lace, fastened with bouquets of shamrock and lilies of the valley." (*The Times*, April 22, 1885)

These decorative accents consisting of national symbols, whilst not dominating the ensemble, were nonetheless an obvious and therefore easily reportable means of paying a monarchical tribute. During another State visit to the country in 1904, Alexandra was in mourning according to the etiquette which still prevailed at that time. In recognition of her role during the visit however, she waived such protocol as *The Queen* reported on May 7th: "Queen Alexandra, who doffed her mourning for the occasion, a compliment thoroughly appreciated, appeared in black velvet covered with a beautiful paletot of bright green cloth adorned with velvet appliqué and sable, and a toque of green chiffon to match." (*The Queen*, May 7, 1904) The relatively simple gesture of donning an emerald green outer garment in public was enough to secure both press editorial and local popularity. After her return from Ireland, Alexandra made one final sartorial gesture of her appreciation of the Irish welcome she had received as reported in *The Times* on May 18th at the first Drawing Room in Buckingham Palace. The Princess of Wales wore: "a dress of rich yellow satin and silver brocade, draped with silver lace; corsage to correspond, made by Mrs Sims of Dublin." (*The Times*, May 18, 1885) This resplendent color description is one of the only instances during this period that a newspaper mentioned a dressmaker by name, surely intended as a diplomatic tribute.

Regular royal visits to Scotland also precipitated similar sartorial choices based upon national identity. Evidence for this survives in two tartan ball gowns both datable to the years between 1865 and 1870. For Alexandra herself, a young Danish woman, tartan held no symbolic associations at all but she was able to recognize its significance for others her new social and familial circles. Queen Victoria herself participated in the mythologizing of Scottish national dress with her appropriation of tartan as her visits to Scotland became ever more frequent. Sir Walter Scott's colorful tales ultimately assisted in the adoption of tartan into 'Britishness' after its banishment due to its rebellious associations. However, the wearing of tartan by the British army began to imbue it with a changing sense of loyalty to the crown when worn in a military context: "Tartan as a sign of patriotic valor could also signal its final manifestation: heroic martyrdom." (Pittock, 2007:133) Along with Victoria's sentimentality towards tales of the Jacobites and her romanticized Highland vision she was to fill Balmoral with a host of commissioned decorative objects that referenced the tartan aesthetic. Alexandra's sentiments regarding her Scottish sojourns were apparent in her description of the house near Balmoral which was the couple's Scottish residence as "dear old melancholy Abergeldie" (Battiscombe, 1969:220). Nonetheless she recognized that a sartorial nod to its traditions would be appreciated both by her mother-in-law and those in attendance at the public functions during which these vibrant red, green and white gowns were worn. Both of Alexandra's dresses are extremely similar in both style and color of tartan although separated by a number of years and so are suggestive of a uniform, a hint that she was perhaps 'dressing up' for her Queen exemplifying this tactical approach to color in dress.

As for Alexandra's own sense of national pride, this was an area of some difficulty. In an early edict from Queen Victoria following her son's engagement to the Danish Princess, it was accepted that: "There must be no Danish lady-in-waiting to encourage her to talk in her own language; no little Danish maid even. Ladies-in-waiting and maids alike must be of sound English stock." (Fisher, 1974:47). Alexandra's Danish heritage was a serious drawback to the marriage as far as Victoria was concerned. Ideally Edward's bride would have hailed from Germanic roots but Alexandra had been Albert's favored choice and she deferred to his wishes in death as in life. Wisely, Alexandra opted to flatter her indomitable mother-in-law frequently through her choice of garments when in the United Kingdom, but there is evidence to suggest that when representing the British monarchy abroad she felt no such compunction to try and deny her ancestral heritage. A working sketch by the artist Nicholas Chevalier reveals the vibrancy of color choice in Alexandra's dress worn to the wedding of Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna to Prince Alfred on January 23rd, 1874. The Princess of Wales is depicted wearing an ensemble consisting of a white lace bodice and underskirt, surmounted by a red overskirt, train and sash. Red and white are

the colors of the Danish flag. This was a wedding attended by a diversity of European royalty and Alexandra represented her adopted nation of Great Britain. Nonetheless, the gown of her choice was a reflection of her own national identity on a world stage.

Where Alexandra had favored strong, bright colors from the 1860s through to the 1880s, changes in her life wrought by illness and loss were to have a visible effect upon her sartorial chromatic choices. In January of 1892, Alexandra suffered one of the greatest losses of her life with the death from pneumonia of her eldest son Prince Albert Victor or Eddy as he was popularly known. The heartbroken Alexandra wrote to her mother in Denmark on the day of his funeral: "I have buried my angel today and with him my happiness." (Fisher, 1974:143) Biographers acknowledged the Princess's rejection of strong colors from this point onwards until her own death in 1925: "she began a period of mourning that was to last for years. (No, this is a quote so I'll have to keep it as is I think Never again did she dress in the old, bright colors which had for so long been her hallmark." (Fisher,1974:143) The contemporary biographer Sarah Tooley, published her book *The Life of Queen Alexandra* in 1902, only a decade after Eddy's death. She too records: "of late years she has preferred silver, gray and pale shades of heliotrope." (Tooley, 1902:161) As Queen Victoria had mourned her beloved Albert for thirty years in deepest black so too Alexandra's grief manifested itself through her choice of dress. Unlike Victoria, however, Alexandra recognized that descent into unrelenting black would be an unpopular decision and wisely opted for the muted shades of half mourning. Many more of Alexandra's garments survive from the 1890s onwards and all from this period support the suggestion that she rejected the brighter tones of her earlier years as Princess of Wales. In museums as dispersed as Tokyo and New York, Toronto and London, Bath and Los Angeles, all of Alexandra's extant garments there conserved and dating to after 1892 are either silver, grey, white, mauve, pale yellow, cream, purple/lilac or black. It demonstrates astuteness on her part that, despite her grief, there was still a public expectation that she should appear suitably elegantly attired.

Adhering to accepted mourning etiquette did not preclude Alexandra initiating change from the rigid enforcement of mourning wear that affected women in particular. Full mourning dress was an obligatory aspect of a woman's wardrobe in the nineteenth century and mourning warehouses such as Jay's in London catered to a variety of budgets. The complexities of mourning could be problematic for those attempting to live and work within the circle of the royal household as Marie Mallett, lady in waiting to Queen Victoria, on a stay at Balmoral recorded with some exasperation in a letter home: "I am in despair about my clothes, no sooner have I rigged myself out with good tweeds than we are plunged into the deepest mourning for the King of Portugal, jet

ornaments for six weeks! And he was only a first cousin once removed. So I only possess one warm black dress. It is a lesson never, never to buy anything but black!" (Mallet, 1968:32)

A document found amongst Queen Mary's papers in the Royal Archive reveals that Alexandra conformed to the mourning requirements of the period. The inventory made by Alexandra's dresser, Mrs Giltrap, of her mistress's clothing compiled after her death records: "Three Good Black Spangled Court Gowns; One High Blk & Steel Gown worn at functions; Many other good black dresses left in the wardrobe."(Giltrap, 1925) Alexandra remained aware of the public's expectations of her clothed royal body but by the 1890s she was at the forefront of some slight change to the rigours of strictest mourning as deep crape began to fall from favor. Lou Taylor's seminal work on mourning dress describes Alexandra's minor non-conformity at the funeral of her own son Eddy: "Princess Alexandra of Wales refused to wear [crape] at the funeral of the Duke of Clarence in 1892 and then at Queen Victoria's funeral in 1901." (Taylor, 1983:222)

Whilst generally observing Court etiquette there was one occasion, however, when Alexandra decided to subvert, albeit harmlessly, the status quo directly through the choices she made regarding the color of her dress. This small act of defiance was remarked upon by Lady Louisa Antrim, one of her ladies in waiting: "The Queen's showmanship became conspicuous the moment she was asked when full mourning had to stop. Could her Court drop the black dresses and jet beads for a grand function that happened to coincide with the last official day? Refusing to give a ruling ('such questions bore me intensely'), Alexandra guessed that her ladies would stick cautiously to black, as indeed they did, while she herself appeared in stunning white, gleaming with jewels, like a solitary star in the night sky." (Longford, 1979:79) This new resolve was a signal of intent – that as Queen, Alexandra would control the sartorial expectations assumed for her.

It is from 1901 and the assumption of her new role as Queen that the surviving garments associated with Alexandra undergo a change of aesthetic. Without exception, these dresses shimmer. Constructed from silk and chiffon and richly embellished in beadwork, metal thread embroidery, sequins and spangles they are uniform in their conspicuousness. Whilst the palette of the foundation layers remained the same as those from the 1890s, confined to white, mauve, pale yellow, grey, silver and gold, and some black, the embellishment applied to the surface of each garment that dates to after 1901 exceeds anything from her years as Princess of Wales. (Color image 2 – Douillet evening gown, c.1910) Almost overnight, it would appear, the new Queen (she refused to be called Consort) ensured that she would take center stage at evening events due to her adoption of sparkling attire.

A clear distinction, immediately noticeable, is in the nature of the embellishment on her evening wear. The gowns from the 1890s display fewer elements of applied decoration – a lace trim, a décolletage decorated with motifs of pearl or diamante, a figured silk, but generally they comprise largely unadorned bodices and plain, gored skirts. Where the later garments differ, is in their almost total surface decoration. Five of these later gowns exhibit trailing floral designs, repeated in motifs across the bodice and covering the garment with gold or silver embroidery, reminiscent of Alexandra's coronation gown. Four others do not feature any discernible motifs, but are covered with spangles and sequins across their entirety. This tendency towards more overtly spangled public garments was recalled by Margot Asquith in her memoirs: "The Queen, dazzlingly beautiful, whether in gold and silver at night, or in violet velvet by day, succeeded in making every woman look common beside her." (Asquith, 1922:128) Her recollection was of Alexandra 'the Queen' in a conspicuous and sparkling display at formal functions.

The most obvious conclusion to draw from Alexandra's later evening dresses is the need on her part for visibility. The new Queen, who had been subservient to her mother-in-law for forty years, was now allowed to outshine every other woman in the room. These garments suggest that she expressed this right literally in her sartorial choices. As a visual demonstration of her place at the very top of the aristocratic hierarchy, Alexandra covered herself in fabrics that would have glittered under the artificial lights of the ball rooms, at the State dinners and myriad evening functions she was obliged to attend. Alexandra had decided that 'majesty' should be represented sartorially through a gem covered display. She wanted to be the image of a Queen that Victoria, for all her solemnity and strong monarchical sense of duty, had never been at functions where she was the most important woman present.

There is also the possibility that this overt glitter of silver and gold was born out of yet another motive. From the late 1860s Alexandra had been left profoundly deaf and with a limp following a bout of rheumatic fever she had suffered in 1868. On a daily basis she coped remarkably well. Lord Esher remarked that in spite of her deafness "she says more original things and has more unexpected ideas than any other member of the family."(Brett,1934:346) Large evening functions were, however, challenging for her. She wrote a grateful letter to her daughter-in-law after one such occasion: "You, my sweet May are always so dear and nice to me and whenever I am not quite au fait because of my beastly ears you always by a word or even a turn towards me make me understand."(Cited in Pope-Hennessy, 1959:328) As the deafness worsened she adopted a practical strategy in her approach to these larger, formal occasions. The extensive photographic record shows that in private and during the day, Alexandra dressed relatively simply. The surviving evening gowns reveal that at formal functions her style underwent a significant

change. As with so many of her sartorial choices from a fifty year career, these public outings that were so much a trial to her had to be managed astutely. The sparkling, embellished garments became a form of armor for her, acting as a barrier and shield from the public and its gaze, protecting her true self through a shimmering and diverting display. Her glittering clothes were intended to distract from the fragile corporeal reality and offer a vision of 'queenliness' (Yes, at least it isn't in the dictionary, hence the inverted commas!) that might fend off unsolicited conversation.

Alexandra never recorded in her own words her relationship with dress and so it is impossible to know for certain how she managed these tensions between her public and private clothed body. It is possible, however, to extrude more about her physicality and disguise through clothing in a single garment now in the collections of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. The dress is a court gown dating to c.1902 and its color and embellishment fit the notion of the conspicuousness she exhibited in public garments after 1901. The foundation fabric is bright yellow silk appliqued with small round silver spangles and paste diamante studs but most striking of all are the large hand painted purple irises placed at intervals over the skirt and bodice. Close scrutiny of the bodice revealed that the iris motifs painted down the center back at the fastening did not match – they appeared lopsided when the hooks and eyes were drawn together. It appeared as though the couture house responsible, Morin Blossier, had made a rather ill-fitting garment. This seemed unlikely and, prompted by Alex Palmer the Curator at ROM, I contacted Jean Druesdow.[vi] Jean had mounted a number of Alexandra's gowns at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for an exhibition in 1982 and her reply was illuminating. She wrote: 'The dresses belonging to Alexandra at the MMA indicate that she had some curvature of the spine – the center back is not straight or symmetrical, as I recall, and there was much talk about it when we did the 'Belle Epoque' Exhibition' (Druesdow, 2011). This then was the explanation for the mis-matched purple irises. A spinal curvature has never been mentioned by any of Alexandra's previous biographers. The limp that she had carried for so many years had apparently caused this deterioration in her spine and her clothing was altered accordingly. Rather than displaying some failing on the part of the couturier, the boldly painted iris motifs were cleverly placed so that they sat symmetrically when the dress was worn by the Queen, thus disguising the deformity. She normalized her silhouette through structural changes to the gown and with the sleight of hand of a stage magician, mis-directed the observer through bright colors, spangled embellishments and the swirl of the purple iris away from any unwanted speculation about her health and well-being. It is a strategy that was described in a more recent context by Jean Spence, writing of her struggles to present a 'normal' silhouette following a mastectomy. She describes the problems of clothing an altered body as: 'part

of the landscape of every woman's efforts to clothe herself in a manner which reflects her own self-perceptions and desires but which must be ever alert to the ascription of feminine identity in the public world.' (Spence, 2001:186) More than most women of her generation, Alexandra faced this challenge daily, masking and shielding elements of herself in a regally glittering display.

In four instances (so far) are photographs that relate directly to known surviving garments – Alexandra's wedding dress of 1863, a fancy dress of 1874, a half mourning dress of the 1890s and her Coronation gown of 1902. In each of these cases, the reality of the fabric and its vibrancy exceeds the clarity of nineteenth and early twentieth century photography. Whilst images of their marriage were extensively circulated, only a study of the dress itself revealed the silver weft and the glitter this lent to the overall effect. Although a detailed description of the 1874 fancy dress was given by The Times ('HRH wore a ruby colored Venetian dress, with a blue front to the skirt, sewn with jewels and gold embroidery' *The Times*, August 8, 1874) only the garment can reveal the actual richness of that description. The coronation gown, captured in its resplendence by Luke Fildes in 1902 is brought more vividly into three dimensions when studied at close quarter with its gold lame underdress, embroidered gold net overdress, gold lace and faux pearls. Focusing, however, on one particular garment allows the dichotomy of object and image to be examined more clearly. An iconic image of four generations of the royal family appears to show Alexandra wearing a rather plain outfit. The photograph depicts her standing next to her daughter in law Mary and behind Queen Victoria who is holding her great-grandson David (future King Edward VIII). (B/W Image, Four Generations of Royalty, carte de visite, 1894) The image was taken on the day of David's christening in 1894, a momentous occasion celebrating the longevity of the monarchy in this photograph spanning four generations. Alexandra is the grandmother and mother-in-law in this image although the effects of retouching have perpetuated the myth of her youthfulness. In the picture, her dress appears plain and unadorned, impossible to discern its detail from amongst the greys of the developed print. The dress itself is revealed to be far more decorative (Colour image 3 – Dress bodice 1894). It is a striking gown of half mourning complete with lilac spotted silk ground, black moiré trimmings and coffee colored lace. In spite of its associations with grief and the palette of its materiality, it is anything but subdued. The lilac ground has faded somewhat with time, but within the folds are revealed the vibrancy of the color and the contrast with its black polka dot print. As with so much of her public wardrobe, it is of Parisian manufacture, the waist tape confirming that it was made by Mme Fromont, Rue de la Paix, Paris. Alexandra's choice on this day of public celebration was canny. She ensured that she conformed to expectations of etiquette in a dress of half mourning for her eldest son Eddy who had died less

than two years previously. However, it was not muted half mourning. Next to Victoria's black and Mary's pale lace gown, Alexandra's was a more colorful and dramatic choice. Hers was not the role of faded grandmother but of perpetually stylish Princess in French couture. Lord Esher observed in 1901: 'The Queen – retaining her grace and beauty – does not strike one as a grandmother!' (Brett, 1934: 298)

**Conclusion**

Following her husband's death in 1910, Alexandra largely retreated from public life. She was no longer required to present a dazzling display of regality, nor did she have to negotiate the daily reports on her appearance in the press. Her wardrobe accounts reveal that after 1910 her consumption of dress reduced radically and she lived in comparative isolation at Sandringham, her favorite residence. For fifty years, however, she had played an important role at the heart of the British monarchy, using her appearance to bolster both her own and royalty's popularity. She dressed diplomatically for State visits in a manner that is now taken for granted with female members of the royal family. She used the colors of her attire not only as a subtle indicator of her grief but also as a concealment of her physical difficulties, the grand display acting as colorful armor. She also used color in her dress to make public statements of her place in the hierarchy of monarchy such as her choice of gown for her grandson's christening in 1894. Color was central to these choices that are now revealed in the garments that have outlived the Queen.

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[i] In her 1922 autobiography, Margot Asquith recalled Queen Alexandra's great ability to dress appropriately for any given occasion; "whether in gold and silver by night or in violet velvet by day." (Asquith, 1922:128)

[ii] The Court Circular was an authorized account released by the Royal household of the whereabouts and activities of key members of the royal family that was printed daily in *The Times*.

[iii] Jupe is the French word for skirt and was commonly used in the nineteenth century to denote this part of a larger ensemble.

[iv] A ruffle of lace.

[v] 'plisses' is another French textile term that means fine pleating. This was often carried out by a 'plisseur', which was a specific textile trade.

[vi] I am indebted to the Royal Ontario Museum for their support given to me as their chosen Gervers Fellow in 2011 and also for Alex Palmer's helpful suggestions during my research there.