

8 December 2008

Maria Hayward (University of Southampton)

Making Magnificence: Dress at the Court of Henry VIII

Henry VIII is the most recognisable of English kings. One portrait (in its various versions), Holbein's Whitehall Privy Chamber mural, defines how everyone imagines him. It also defines how we assume he dressed. However, Maria Hayward, now established as the leading authority on dress at the early Tudor court, was keen to stress that there was more to Henry's dress sense than the outfit in which Holbein happened to show him. Hayward's first aim was to stress the astonishing variety of Henry's wardrobe. The occasion, the seasons, the liturgical calendar, periods of court mourning and the latest fashions could all affect his choice of clothes. The range of colours he wore was also much wider than the surviving portraits tend to suggest. He dressed to stand out and, especially when meeting other monarchs, competitively. His ambition was to be the best dressed man at the English court; and he usually was. The sums he spent to ensure this were vast. Hayward calculates that his clothes bill for the entire reign must have come to about £173,000. But, then as now, money alone was not enough to create a successful personal style. For that, he depended on the royal tailors. The other aim of this paper was to celebrate these forgotten, faceless craftsmen who helped make Henry such an enduring fashion icon. Their role was always much more than simply cutting clothes. They advised the King on the latest fashion trends, supplied the sumptuous fabrics he wore and worked with the other craftsmen to create a co-ordinated look. Together with their master, these men determined the styles of elite male fashions in England throughout this period. **AB**