

*F*ASHION  
*F*UNCTION ACCESSORISING THE LONG  
AND *O*RNAMENT EIGHTEENTH CENTURY



**2016 FAIRFAX HOUSE GEORGIAN STUDIES SYMPOSIUM**

**19 September 2014**

## **10:05-10:45 KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**ABSTRACT: Nigel Arch (formerly of Historic Royal Palaces)**

### ***A great deal of finery – accessorising the Georgian courtier***

The royal court was the fount of social and political influence so that appearance at court was vital for anyone seeking advancement in Georgian England. How you appeared said everything about you- and the accessories you wore or carried were as important as your dress or suit. In this lecture we shall understand what exactly the court was and who could be present. We shall look at how officers of the Royal Household distinguished themselves from the rest of society; how the ladies and gentlemen attending court expressed their status from their headdress to the buckles on their shoes; how codes of behaviour were expressed in fans, swords and firearms; and how some of the accessories of military dress were important to display in Society and at Court.

## **10:50-12:20 PANEL 1: ACCESSORISING FASHION AND FUNCTION**

Chair: [to be confirmed]

**ABSTRACT: Susan Vincent (University of York)**

### ***Ogling, quizzing and spying: the eighteenth-century eyeglass***

A distinctive accessory of the long eighteenth-century, the eyeglass was a monocular lens set in a decorative frame and handle, which when attached to a ribbon was hung from the wearer's neck. Contrary to contemporary conduct advice, which enjoined a self-disciplined gaze and a polite use of the eyes, this accessory made a fashionable virtue out of staring.

Using textual sources as well as the more abundant visual evidence of portraiture and satirical prints, this paper explores the different ways of looking enacted with the eyeglass, and the distinct but intersecting contexts in which it appeared. We thus find this accessory contributing to depictions of the effete and mannered fop, the lecherous voyeur, the myopic connoisseur, and the insolent cool of the dandy. Taking a step back from these 'types', it becomes apparent that the eyeglass fitted into the broader pattern of eighteenth-century developments: urbanisation, commercial expansion, the rise of the middle and aspirant classes, and an Enlightenment epistemology that grounded knowledge in empirically tested observation. In the midst of such developments, in a small but significant way the eyeglass came to stand for both the discerning eye, and its absence.

**ABSTRACT: Elisabeth Gerner (University of Edinburgh)**

***Agents of expression: Embroidered and satin print muffs***

This paper examines the social and artistic relationships between eighteenth-century women and the cylindrical accessory that enveloped their hands: their muffs. The muff, originally designed to warm the hands in the sixteenth century, transitioned from a garment of necessity and function to one of fashion, and by the end of the eighteenth century, was produced in a luxurious range of furs, feathers and silks.

While the fur muff dominated in popularity as a symbol of status and fashionability, a second type of muff offered women a much more variable and complex form of expression. Silk muffs acted as a medium on which women could adorn themselves with ornamentation through embroidery and the attachment of satin prints. These two spheres of sartorial decoration provided a specifically gendered means of expression and self-fashioning, through which women projected their sociability, creative artistry and artistic patronage to society. Questioning whether the muff's silk face can act as a canvas, and thus questioning the limits of decoration and the capacity of accessories, this paper situates the muff as one of the most expressive and multifaceted accessories within a woman's sartorial oeuvre.

**ABSTRACT: Mary M. Brooks (Durham University)**

***'What was most chaste she loved best': exploring accessories to cover and protect in seventeenth-century England***

Seventeenth-century embroideries invariably show three Biblical women, Eve, Bathsheba and Susanna, naked expect for a conveniently placed leaf or fabric drape across their lower body.

This depiction of the semi-naked female form contrasts with the message given to young women about the importance of covering the body and the head both for the sake of modesty and for health. The Virgins Pattern John Batchiler's 1661 memorial poem for Susanna Perwich praised her modesty, achieved through accessories which she probably embroidered herself:

Nor naked was her back or breast,  
What was most chaste she loved best.  
Whisks, Handkerchiefs, she'd always wear,  
Where others shamelessly went bare

Men too were obsessed with covering their heads to prevent illness and define their status. This lecture will explore the accessories used by seventeenth-century men

and women to cover and protect the body to achieve both moral and medical acceptability. It will look at how these are depicted in seventeenth-century embroideries and examine in detail surviving examples of coifs, forehead clothes, caps, hoods and hats in English collections.

**ABSTRACT: Elizabeth Spencer (University of York)**

***The apron in the eighteenth century: representation and reality***

In 1721 the Duchess of Queensberry arrived at the Bath Assembly wearing a white apron, but was denied entry by the Master of Ceremonies, who reportedly 'stripped' her of her apron and declared that 'none but Abigails [maidservants] appeared in white aprons'. The apron, however, became a fashionable accessory over the course of the century. It therefore complicates contemporary accounts of emulation like Bernard Mandeville's, who described the 'Emulation and continual striving to outdo one another' of all classes. This paper will first discuss contemporary representations of the labouring classes in both elite and popular culture – including paintings, prints, ballads and poetry – to suggest that, while the apron could be interpreted as a symbol of industry and innocence, it could also become a symbol of fertility, sexuality, and of rural simplicity in contrast to negative representations of the urban. I will discuss the adoption of the apron by the elite in the second part of the paper, which, when it has been discussed at all, has been lumped together with notions of 'pastoral dress'. By looking at the letters and diaries of women who belonged to the titled elite and the lesser gentry – collectively termed 'the elite' – as well as prints and conversation pieces, I offer a more complex interpretation. While elite masquerade costume explicitly evoked pastoral stereotypes in order to achieve an overt subversion of identity, the conversation piece demonstrates that the apron had become a prop in the enactment of an elite leisured lifestyle beyond the masquerade; as an item of 'half dress', it was at once deemed appropriate for private leisure time – made public in the conversation piece – for hospitality within the home, and for sociability outside of it. These conventions were imposed not by pastoral stereotypes, but by the rhythms of elite daily life as it was understood, and expected to be. The final part of the paper will attempt to reconstruct the reality of the daily wear of aprons in London, and moves beyond discussions of the emulative 'mill girl who wanted to dress like a duchess'. Using the Old Bailey Proceedings, I will uncover at least some of the ways in which the labouring classes adapted their aprons to everyday life in the capital. Furthermore, by looking at newspaper advertisements for lost and stolen aprons, I examine the ownership of aprons amongst the middle classes in London and uncover vibrant, decorative aprons before they even became an elite fashion.

### **13:20-14:50 PANEL 2: VISUALISING THE SYMBOLIC ACCESSORY**

Chair: [to be confirmed]

**ABSTRACT: Kate Anderson (National Galleries of Scotland)**

#### ***The Painted Pearl: the cultural significance of pearl jewellery and accessories, as depicted in the portraits of the long eighteenth century***

For centuries pearls have been highly prized for their beauty and their versatility for use in jewellery, accessories and decoration. It was during the Restoration period that the jewel gained real prominence in the dress worn by wealthy members of society – it is said that the value of natural pearls tripled around this time. The fashion for pearls reached its peak in the eighteenth century when pearl chokers, ropes and hair ornaments were worn to complement the romantic costumes of pastel silks and fine lace. Meanwhile the demand for pearl jewellery from the middle classes saw an influx of imitation pearls. Today we can trace the history of pearl in jewellery through the portraits that are found in public and private collections. The National Galleries of Scotland has a rich collection of portraits which illustrate the allure of the pearl by artists including John Michael Wright, Allan Ramsay and Thomas Gainsborough. Focussing on British portraits, this paper will discuss the fashion for pearls during the long eighteenth century, examine the painterly depictions of these precious gemstones and discuss the symbolism and messages associated with the pearl.

**ABSTRACT: Maryam Farahani (University of Liverpool)**

#### ***The Orient in Western fashion: otherness dressing melancholy portraits***

This paper is about multimodal prevalence, quality, and historical influence of Oriental dressing elements in fashion, demonstrated in Western literature and art. To this end, my particular take on accessories expands on two directions. First, I discuss the relationship between Oriental items and elements as accessories in Western melancholy portraiture, be it verbal or visual. The dismal face of melancholy has proved increasingly attractive to recent scholarship of literary, philosophy, art, and socio-cultural histories of intellectuality in the West, specifically in France and Britain (Ingram, Sim, Lawlor, Terry, 2011; Baker, 2011; Lund, 2010; Farahani, 2010; Radde 2009; Porter, 2006; Pfau, 2005). I discuss how Oriental and ethnic dressing, in addition to varieties of accessories, communicate a social meta-aesthetic relationship resonant in the high status accorded to the white melancholy individual. On the other hand, I argue that poignancy of accessorised portrait(s) - either as intrinsic or as a transcendent quality in melancholy portraiture - is altogether a matter of question, especially where Oriental elements and items are applied to

create and recreate ideas of beauty and the sublime. I reflect on Occidental application of Oriental elements to introduce the subject of melancholy accessories.

**ABSTRACT: Helen Metcalfe (University of Manchester)**

***At home with the Georgian bachelor: accessories, performance, and masculine identity***

The domestic arena was a site from which the Georgian bachelor could display his status, eligibility and personal values through the consumption and presentation of material culture. Contemporary assertions of the bachelors' transitory domesticity and meaningless, errant lifestyles have been further reinforced in the historiography of eighteenth century Britain, thus suggesting a one-model bachelor identity. This paper will re-evaluate the figure of the bachelor by exploring how the domestic consumption practices of single men could help underpin both their masculine identities and subsequent presentations of self.

The responsibility of accessorising the eighteenth century home has frequently been considered the province of women. Whilst recent scholarship has now offered men a more visible role in the choices and organisation of domestic decoration, this is explicitly viewed through the lens of the married man. The Georgian bachelors' relationship to the home has therefore remained ambiguous, and marital status has, until now, excluded single men from historical debates on the cultures of consumerism and consumption within the home. I will show how accessorising the home, both ornamentally and functionally, was equally important to the Georgian bachelor, contending that these men sought to express their individual identities in refined, diverse and thoughtful ways.

**ABSTRACT: Nel Whiting (University of Dundee)**

***'In's PLAID arry'd': unpicking the threads of Francis Charteris's tartan***

At some time between 1745 and 1747 Allan Ramsay painted a marriage picture of Francis Charteris and Katherine Gordon. While she wears blue satin and is decorated with pearls and rubies, he is accessorised with a theatrical sweep of tartan and a basket-hilted broadsword.

The symbolic representation of tartan in art, pageantry and bodily display has been varied and unstable across history and there was real elasticity in tartan's symbolic meaning at this time. Murray Pittock has argued that it carried 'reverberations of history and patriotism', a link to the Scotland of yore. In this way, wearing tartan or being depicted in it could be a declaration of an individual's alignment with ancient and independent Scotland. Robin Nicholson argues that rather than being accurately

ancient this 'sentimental attachment' to tartan was linked to poetical outpourings of eighteenth-century writers such as Allan Ramsay senior. A tartan throw such as that worn by Francis was also a strongly gendered accessory, evoking notions of a virile and muscular masculinity.

Tartan was then, as Vicky Coltman argues, 'a potent agent in the pictorial representation of identity'. But what did it signify for Francis, what kind of national identity was he projecting? The threads of meaning in this tartan accessory need to be carefully unpicked.

### **15:10-16:30 PANEL 3: COLLECTION & INTERPRETATION**

Chair: [to be confirmed]

#### **ABSTRACT: Rachel Boak (Waddesdon Manor)**

##### ***A penchant for the eighteenth century: Baroness Edmond de Rothschild (1853-1935) as a collector of accessories***

The Rothschild family came to prominence in the early 1800s and dominated the European financial scene for the remainder of the century. However, as collectors their taste focused on the decorative arts of eighteenth-century France, embodied in the panelling, textiles, furniture and porcelain that adorned their houses.

Adelheid, Baroness Edmond, was born into the Rothschild family in 1853 and married her French cousin Edmond in 1877. While her husband concentrated on drawings, prints and engravings, they both collected furniture, paintings and porcelain as furnishings. But Baroness Edmond's own enthusiasm lay in the direction of eighteenth-century costume, textiles and accessories: buttons, bags and purses, caps, fans (five of which are displayed in Head to Toe), hat and hair pins and seals. Her collections later came to Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire by inheritance and are now in the care of the National Trust.

This paper will explore Baroness Edmond's taste in and use of accessories, as a nineteenth-century French collector looking back to the previous century. Her enthusiasm for fancy dress trimmed with historic lace and buttons, and fragments of dress fabrics, will be set against the revival of interest in eighteenth-century fashions in the 1870s and the collections of antique lace and other trimmings and accessories being formed by women at that time.

#### **ABSTRACT: Dawn Hoskin (Victoria & Albert Museum)**

##### ***'All the conversation here at present turns upon the balloons': a 'balloonmania' handkerchief of 1783***

The scientific achievement of balloon flight caught popular imagination across Europe and this enthusiasm was reflected in the production of fashionable and domestic goods featuring ballooning iconography. This paper will take the form of a case study of a handkerchief produced in Alsace (now part of France) in commemoration of the first ascent of a manned, hydrogen-filled, balloon, from the Tuileries Palace on 1st December 1783. This handkerchief provides us with an example of ballooning merchandise produced at the peak of the 'balloonmania' in France. It demonstrates manufacturers' ability to respond quickly to public interests

and events; to produce a commemorative, fashionable yet practical object, which was both appealing and attainable for a wide cross-section of society.

Working out from the physical object I will explore what insights it can provide about social, cultural and visual fashions in France (and wider Europe) at this time. Particular consideration will be given to:

- The functional accessory as commemorative display piece
- The relationship between prints and the decorative design of accessories in disseminating depictions of balloon flights
- Parameters affecting artists and manufacturers aiming to exploit markets for ballooning memorabilia

NB: This handkerchief will be displayed in the Victoria & Albert Museum's new Europe 1600-1800 Galleries which open in 2015.

#### **ABSTRACT: Alison Larkin (Alison Larkin Embroidery)**

##### ***Captain Cook's waistcoat: questions on recreating history***

The project is intended to re-create a waistcoat which was being stitched for Captain James Cook by his wife Elizabeth while he was away on his third voyage to the Pacific Ocean from 1776-1779. After reports of his death in Hawaii reached England, the waistcoat was never finished, and the pieces eventually came to the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia.

The waistcoat was stitched on Tapa Barkcloth brought from Tahiti by Cook after his first voyage to the Pacific. It is backed with linen, and stitched with silk and metallic threads. A research visit is being undertaken, to examine the original pieces, plus a completed waistcoat made earlier for James by Elizabeth, which is in the collection of Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand. The latter will provide details of potential construction methods, chest size and materials that might have been used. The project raises a number of questions on various aspects of the process. How had Elizabeth planned to complete the waistcoat: did she intend more embroidery, or was her plan to allow the exotic material to be shown off? What ideas might she have had about buttons, construction? How does the waistcoat compare with other surviving items in collections, and how has the process been informed by research into extant examples?

There are also questions about the exotic fabric used. There is very little tradition of stitching on Tapa cloth in Polynesia: it is usually painted or printed. How does it stand up to stitching, and how durable is the fabric in the British climate? Would the textile have become more popular in Britain if Cook had returned to wear the waistcoat at Court?

In addition there are the questions raised by the actual process of recreation: should it be re-created as it was then, as it is now, or as it might have been had it been completed? How does the availability of fabric, materials etc in the 21st century affect the process? Hopefully some at least of these questions will be answered, or at least raised for further discussion, by the recreation work here described.

The project has been funded by The Society of Antiquaries of London Janet Arnold Award, and by the Normanby Charitable Trust.

**ABSTRACT: Alison Fairhurst (University of Lincoln)**

***How to read a shoe: a guide to making the most of women's shoes of the eighteenth century***

Women's shoes of the eighteenth century are a valuable historical resource which has largely been overlooked. This presentation will illustrate how different aspects of these shoes, such as materials, styles and construction, can help reveal a much wider concept of the eighteenth century than just fashion as might be perceived at first glance. The need for the closer examination of such shoes will be emphasised along with the various pitfalls that might be encountered during this process such as the differing details supplied by different museum records (which may occur even within the same museum). Secondary sources can also be contradictory making comparisons between the existing corpus, without examination, difficult.

Issues which should be taken into account before conservation and preservation decisions are made will also be discussed highlighting the dilemma that shoes in poor condition can actually be of more value in terms of a data resource than those which would seem display ready.

**16:30-17:00 CONCLUDING REMARKS & DISCUSSION**

Chair: Nigel Arch