

THE COSTUME AND TEXTILE SOCIETY OF WALES

NEWSLETTER 2012-2013

When the Committee organised the 2012-2013 Programme, we were aware that the summer would be taken up with the Jubilee celebrations and the Olympics, and as we were all busy with family and work commitments it was decided not to offer a workshop or outing, but to concentrate on the Programme from September onwards.

'A few of our favourite things' A show and tell session after the AGM, on the 21st April, illustrated the wide variety of interests and skills that our members possess. It was a joy to see what people had brought and to listen to the stories that they had to tell. We examined vintage costumes; family heirlooms handmade children and baby clothes, a man's Fair Isle jumper; a lace jumper knitted from natural hand spun yarn from a variety of fleeces, also a white cotton knitted and crochet antique bedspread. Glorious iridescent embroidered cushions and appliqued pictures, inspired by the work of a previous speaker and modern pieced samples and an 'art quilt', exhibited at the Birmingham Quilt Show at the NEC, were passed around and admired. I am aware that our members often travel long distances to attend meetings and we try to obtain the best most engaging speakers, this makes for a visual and factual feast, but often it has been such a busy day that we do not get to exchange news and views so this was a great opportunity to talk and there was a lot of animated discussion during the afternoon.

15 SEPTEMBER 2012

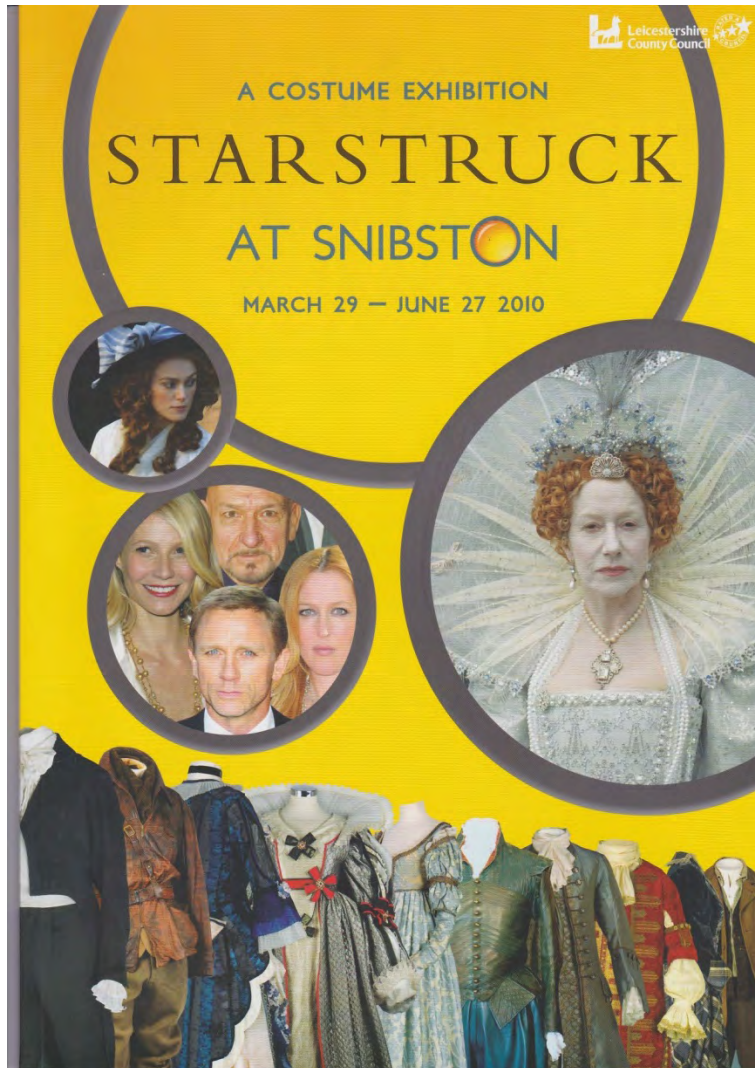
Philip Warren *My Hero! Fantasies of historic dress in Movie Costume*

We were really pleased to welcome Philip Warren for a return visit to speak to us about the costumes created for stage and screen, as seen in the exhibition **Starstruck** held at Snibston in 2010.

Philip Warren is Principal Curator of Collections, Leicester County Council and is responsible for the Symington Corsetry Collection at Snibston. His talk on *Hollywood Heart-Throbs, Leading Ladies and Fantasies of Historic Fashion*, explored how cinema and television have created contemporary heart-throbs out of historic and fictional characters and the role of costume in their transformation.

Clothing sends subliminal messages to the observer, actors wear masks, put on faces, adopt a hairstyle, dress in costume to become someone else. Costume is a key element in telling a story and can elicit a wide range of reactions and emotions in the audience. Early cinema was very effective at exploiting the sexual images of its actors and actresses, Mae West,

Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable and Johnny Weismuller, to name but a few. They became stereotypes for heroes and villains; the early Errol Flynn film *Captain Blood* defined the Pirate's image, which influenced all subsequent films, including that of Jonny Deppe in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. In similar fashion Errol Flynn's costume in *Robin Hood* became shorthand for every subsequent cinema and television depiction of the Outlaw, think of Richard Todd, Kevin Costner and Russell Crowe, also the 2007 TV series starring Jonas Armstrong. Designers also play with cross referencing as in the Bond movies, with iconic images of Ursula Andress and Danial Craig emerging from the sea in their swimwear!



Costumes play a critical role in the success of any period drama. There are numerous films about the Tudors on cinema, television and the theatre and Elizabeth I has been played by a fabulous succession of actresses wearing spectacular costumes. Designers have had to dress her at every stage of her life, as a young princess, newly crowned queen and throughout her nearly 45 year reign, these costumes have been meticulously researched and inspired by portraits of the period. To quote Sandy Powell the costume designer 'Queen Elizabeth had over a thousand dresses-... she carried all her wealth on her frocks.' The details within the costumes were also symbolic and the importance of the sets and costumes created for the Queen

and her court have been recognised by many prestigious awards to Costume Designers Mike O'Neil, Alexandra Byrne and Sandy Powell, whose work was on show in the Starstruck Exhibition.

Costumes are also valuable in enhancing the narrative of a film, helping to giving visible clues as to the social status and profession of characters, as well as their relative wealth or poverty. We can follow the progress of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, just by watching her clothing. We first see Vivienne Leigh in a white high necked dress, then in a

revealing ball gown and who can forget the green velvet curtains refashioned to impress Ret Butler? Finally surrounded by luxury and dressed in red velvet she is painted as a Scarlett woman abandoned but defiant and ready to fight on to another day.

Films from the 1930's have been used to showcase modern fashion talent and have had a major impact on the tastes of the viewing public. *Chariots of Fire* and *The Great Gatsby* set off an interest in retro styles in menswear. *The Devil Wears Prada* and *Sex in the City* both used clothes by major designers, indeed the Vivienne Westwood gown worn by Carrie at her wedding was still on sale on the web at the time of the lecture. After the success of his film *Moulin Rouge*, Baz Luhrmann was commissioned by Chanel to make a mini version featuring the Chanel No 5 perfume and starring Nicole Kidman who wore a gown designed by Karl Lagerfeld.

We were swept along by the breath-taking variety of Characters and their costumes that have been depicted on screen, Cowboys, Warriors, Outlaws and Adventurers both male and female. Biblical and Classical characters, Sheiks, Dukes, Duchesse and Kings all had a mention. The 18th and 19th Centuries have provided a particularly productive playground for the cinema with tales of lives, loves morals and immorality. Heroes and heroines dressed up in costumes designed with painstaking attention to historical detail and often of great beauty when seen in close up in films such as *The Age of Innocence*, *Gosforth Park*, *The Duchess*, *Portrait of a Lady* and *The Aviator*. Philip left us eager to view again many of the films of which he had spoken. It was a bravura performance full of colour and packed with information and enormously enjoyable.

Barbara Painter - *Frock Tales*

In the afternoon we settled down to listen to '*Frock Tales*', the personal story of the career of Barbara Painter as illustrator, designer and costume maker. Inspired at school by drawings of French fashion by Rene Gruau and the illustrations of Robb in the Sunday papers, Barbara recalled her first project, a corset made of saddle felt. She studied at the London Collage of Fashion and upon graduating was encouraged to work as a freelance illustrator in Paris.

Returning to London, Barbara worked for Susan Small on fashion sketches, gained practical workshop experience and taught at Southgate Collage. Employed at Burman's Costumiers on the film '*The Great White Hope*', she helped to create costumes for hundreds of extras. She became Wardrobe Mistress for 'Oh! Calcutta', at the Holborn Theatre, in London and then travelled to Canada to work in Toronto, for Malabar, a company supplying theatrical Costume and Dancewear for TV and Cinema.

Returning to Britain, Barbara began to reproduce and replicate costumes for Museums; a Space Suit for the Science Museum, Shakespearian costumes for Tokyo Museum, a costume copied from a contemporary picture for the Waterloo Exhibition at Delft. She had made

Period costumes for Re-enactment Groups and described in detail the research and techniques required to re-create two magnificent costumes for James I and Robert Dudley.

As Costume Supervisor, Barbara worked for three months with Costume Designer Carol Lawrence and a group of volunteer stitches to make 350 costumes for the Medieval Cycle of York Mystery Plays. It was an enormous and very successful event held during the summer of 1976 within the walls of St Mary's Abbey in York. There has been much subsequent collaboration with Textile Groups creating costumes for the staff at Bury St Edmunds Museum and at the Downland Museum to assist in their interpretation roles.

In South Wales, Barbara has designed clothing for Llancaiach Fawr in Nelson. A Tudor manor house restored and furnished as it would have been in 1645 when in the possession of the Pritchard family. She advises a local group of needlewomen who sew period costumes for the staff who re-enact the domestic life of the house. Individual costumes are made for each character and have been researched from the collections at St Fagans. The brief is to make historically accurate garments, sewn by hand, using natural dyed and authentic hand spun textiles which must be durable and feel comfortable, also the staff should enjoy wearing their clothes while playing their parts as characters and servants in front of the visitors. I think they have been successful as Llancaiach Fawr continues to be a popular attraction in the Valleys.

Barbara Painter concluded her talk with a description of the latest project with which she has been involved back in Suffolk. At Ixworth House, a National Trust property, near Bury St Edmunds, an innovative display of the servant's quarters has been set up in the Rotunda Basement. 'Ixworth Lives', set in 1930's, recreates the lives of domestic staff in a grand country house, drawing on personal family memories of staff and visitors. The actors have been encouraged to add authentic accessories to their costumes and this re-enactment project has been popular with both NT volunteers and visitors.

Today we had a comprehensive view of two very different aspects of costume design and construction looking at the glamorous images created on screen in 'My Hero' and then recreating period costumes in 'Frock Tales' for everyman.

17 NOVEMBER 2012

Yvonne Hellin-Hobbs – *Jubilee: A Celebration of British Monarchy on Stage and Screen*

Exhibition designer, curator and organiser Yvonne Hellin-Hobbs, spoke about her *Jubilee* exhibition on show during the summer of 2012 at the Assembly Rooms Ballroom, in Bath.

Yvonne's career in the film and TV industries spans 25 years, working as a costume technician her film credits include *Batman* in 1989, *Return of the Native* in 1993 and *Sense and Sensibility* in 1995 and TV credits include *D Day* in 2003 and *Jiro* in 2008.

In 2011 Yvonne curated the exhibition *Dressing the Stars* which was mounted in Bath. Drawing on her Wardrobe Mistress experiences she selected the costumes and accessories, created by British Costume Designers who won or were nominated for American and British Awards. Her latest exhibition told the story of the Monarchy since the First King of England was crowned in Bath Abbey until the present day, drawing on the way that kings and queens have been portrayed in story, rhyme, portrait and play. She outlined the problems and rewards involved in staging the *Jubilee* exhibition explaining how the story was to be told, costumes and accessories to be selected and sourced and how everything was to be fitted into the space available in the Assembly Rooms Ballroom.

Many of the costumes on display came from Cosprop, the company that creates period costumes for film, stage and theatre. (Some of you may remember the talk that Susan Hardy gave to us at St. Fagans in 2006, describing the enormous stock held by Cosprop and the people, who create new costumes, repair and refit existing ones.)

Monarchs were arranged by Dynasty; demonstrating changing fashions but also changing perceptions of individual rulers, for example the early Plantagenet's, were portrayed in armour, as they reigned during a period of social upheaval. However the popular depiction of the Jacobean monarchs was of richly decorated fashionable dress that did not reflect the Civil War or foreign wars that took place during their reigns.

As the curator of the *Jubilee* exhibition Yvonne had to edit the information provided for each monarch. Space being at a premium each entry was restricted to some 200 words and costumes and pictures were selected to replace wordy descriptions of the long and complex reigns of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and Victoria.

Space was not the only consideration in setting up the *Jubilee* exhibition, time was also at a premium. With the help of a Conservator, who had to inspect the condition of every item on display, and a team of student volunteers, gaining work experience, Yvonne set up the show in a week. Opened on 17 July *Jubilee; A celebration of British Monarchy on Stage and Screen* was a popular exhibition in Bath during the summer of 2012 and is now available as a touring exhibition.

Dr Claire Smith – ‘Poor Woman, I shall support her as long as I can, because she is a Woman, and because I hate her Husband’: the Queen Caroline Quilt

The afternoon speaker was Dr Claire Smith, Curator of Posters and Prints at the British Film Institute Archive in London. Prior to her appointment at the BFI, Claire worked as an Assistant Curator at the Victoria & Albert Museum. She is the third speaker from the V&A to address the Society in as many years.

During her time at the V&A, Claire was fortunate enough to work on the critically acclaimed exhibition *Quilts 1700-2010*. This blockbuster exhibition included examples of Welsh quilting – two quilts were lent by the Jen Jones Welsh Quilt Centre and three from St Fagans. Amongst the St Fagans contingency was a rather unusual patchwork quilt known as the ‘Queen Caroline Quilt’. The quilt in question features a printed central panel containing a portrait of Queen Caroline, consort of King George IV, with the inscription ‘Her Most Gracious Majesty, Caroline Queen of England’. Very little is known of the exact origins of the quilt, but it is thought to have been made in the Brecon area in about 1820.

In her thoroughly researched and thought-provoking lecture, Claire explained that Queen



Caroline gained much public support during her ill-fated marriage to the Prince Regent, later George IV. As early as 1813 Jane Austen declared ‘Poor Woman, I shall support her as long as I can, because she is a Woman, and because I hate her Husband’. She was famously refused entry to Westminster Abbey for her coronation service on 19 July 1821 and was never crowned as queen. Every sordid detail was reported in the popular press in a way that foreshadows the modern cult of celebrity.

Although we have no way of knowing the exact thoughts of the quilter, Claire argued that by stitching an image of Caroline into her quilt, the maker was bringing to the fore the overlap between the domestic and political landscapes.

9 FEBRUARY 2013

Andy Burke *Shoe Design Through Time*

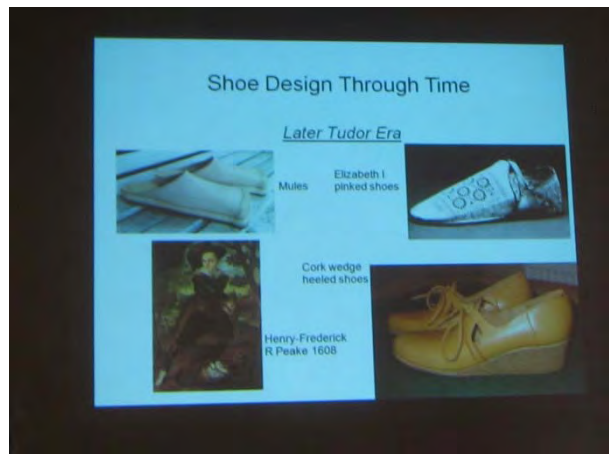
Andy Burke left a career as an IT services manager to develop a business as a shoe maker. He is a Craftsman who describes himself as a manufacturer of historical shoes and boots for re-enactment, theatre, museums and historical display. He also makes bespoke modern and wedding shoes, bringing many examples from his collection for us to examine and handle after his talk.

Shoemaking has a long and complex history and its methods and terminology need some explanation. The *last* is the wooden former which gives the shoe its shape; shoe sizing was introduced during the reign of Edward III, size increasing by 1/3 of an inch, the width of a barleycorn. *Clicking* describes the process by which a hide is cut into pieces, usually by hand, to obtain leather of the right strength and elasticity to make the various parts of a shoe - the vamp, gutters, insole and sock.

There are three main methods of construction, lasted, welted and cement lasted. Early Roman shoes were wrapped and laced around the foot, marching shoes were more, and in Caerleon Museum there are clay tiles which still carry the imprint of such footwear.

Medieval shoes and boots were cut by eye, then built up in layers on a left and right handed last and finally turned inside out, they had no heels and boots were laced up at the side. By Early Tudor times there were huge changes in shoe design and construction. Welted boots were worn by German mercenary soldiers, while sailors shoes recovered from the wreck of the *Mary Rose* were made on straight lasts, same shape for both feet. These had rounded toes while fashionable Court shoes had square toes, as seen in royal portraits. Elizabeth I owned pierced and pinked shoes and mules which had cork wedge heels.

In the 17th century heeled shoes were worn by men and women and mules were popular with rich and poor alike, but only the rich could afford to have their shoes embellished with stump work embroidery. To protect their shoes



outside women wore 'patterns' to raise themselves above the muddy streets and men wore tight high boots for riding. Toe shape varied and might be round, square or pointed according to fashion.

By the 18th century shoes made of leather and fabric were fastened across the instep, with a buckle to tighten and improve the fit. Placed in such a prominent position on the foot buckles became increasingly ornate and were seen as a statement of wealth. They could be purchased separately from the shoe, often made of a variety of metals and alloys, but there was a demand for buckles made of precious metals in a variety of shapes and set with paste and real gems. Toe and heel shapes continued to change, during the Regency Period women's shoes were very narrow, flat or with small heel, male dancing shoes were similar, but their riding boots were more substantial and influenced by the military campaigns of the time.

The 19th century witnessed the industrialisation of shoe manufacture, making cheaper footwear available to the masses and there was still a steady demand for artisan made boots and shoes; regular customers would have their own last, though all were made by the turned method. Footwear was fast becoming a fashion accessory, men's styles have tended to stay much the same during the last century but trainers and sportswear, manufactured abroad, have begun to dominate the market.

Elen Phillips *Piecing the Past: The Wrexham Tailor's Coverlet*

We are fortunate to have had the support of senior staff at the National History Museum at St Fagan's since the formation of our Society, their contribution on academic, historical and technical matters have been invaluable and we always look forward to hearing about their latest research. So we were delighted when Elen Phillips, Curator for the Social and Cultural History Department, responsible for Costume & Textiles agreed to talk to us about a very special piece of textile.

Over 200 quilts are held in the Museum Collection, representing over 300 years of Quilting in Wales. The quilts are stored and conserved at St Fagans where they are a rich resource for academics and students of Craft, Design and Social history; special textile pieces have been loaned around the world, featured in Quilt Exhibitions, in books on quilting and inspired modern quilt makers. The subject of Ellen's talk was the brilliant patterned and colourful patchwork coverlet made by James William, a tailor from Wrexham, North Wales, in the 19th century.

For most of us patchwork and quilting is a leisure activity for pleasure and company, but in the 19th century there were professional quilters in most small towns in Wales and itinerate quilters would travel around staying a week or two with farming families repairing and quilting bedding and clothing. Today we are more likely to define ourselves as textile artists,

making a social commentary, one such artist is Becky Knight whose work has been on show at the museum, and consisting of recycled beer cans it prompts us to examine our relationship with alcohol.

The Wrexham Coverlet described as 'one of the masterpieces of our visual culture', was made by James Williams who was a military tailor, working in Wrexham, the home base of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. This is not a quilt, which is a textile sandwich, but a coverlet, as it has no backing and it was created over the course of ten years from 1842 to 1852. There are 4,525 pieces of full woollen cloth, all hand stitched, raw edge to raw edge and made from the off cuts from the workshop floor, the colours reflect those of military uniforms from the local Militia. The fine needlework and attention to detail in the creation of the coverlet and the scope of James William's design was breath-taking, but what of the maker himself? Elen set out to discover more about the man who made the coverlet and gained an insight into his fortunes and into contemporary social history in Wales.

The coverlet came into the possession of the Museum in 1935 when the Sub Department of Folk Culture was located in Cathays Park. There were already many quilts in the collection, reflecting the importance of the Rural Industries Bureau in fostering the needlework skills of women in South Wales during the Depression. Young women were trained in Aberdare Technical Collage to sew quilts and garments of the highest standard. During a time of depression and low male employment, Welsh women were able to supplement their family income by making fancy goods for the rich; single and double quilts, cot quilts and dressing gowns found a ready market in the major London stores.

Richard Williams reluctantly decided to sell his grandfather's coverlet to help his family at a time of financial hardship. Illness and depressed trade during the 30's forced him to accept a much smaller sum than the original price asked from the Museum Trustees, but we are fortunate that he was aware of the cultural and artistic quality of the coverlet and did not want it to go to another Institution - 'my fellow countrymen should have the opportunity to admire a work of art'.

James Williams and his family appear on the 1851 Census Records, living in Collage Street where he ran his business as a tailor close to other craftsmen; 3 shoemakers, a milliner, labourer and gardener. James and Elizabeth had seven children; they employed two men and a boy at the time of the Census. It was usual for a boy to be apprenticed at the age of 12 with a Tailor, living with the Master and his family. Usually an apprenticeship lasted seven years, at first the boy would carry out basic tasks, heating irons and sweeping floors, and then sitting cross legged on the floor he would produce a test piece, such as the tiny sample of a shirt from 1850 and eventually the craft of tailoring.

Quilting became very popular in 19th century Britain and patriotic quilts were made for public display; these were made by men rather than women and their purpose was to show political affiliation, knowledge and beliefs. Weavers, sailors and soldiers all contributed and

James Williams was not the only tailor who used his free time to create textile work. Antony Davies, 1810, worked in London and John Monroe from Glasgow spent 18 years creating a Patriotic Quilt, describing himself as a 'Paisley Artist Tailor'.

Elen described the coverlet as a visual autobiography reflecting the thirst for knowledge of a wider imperial world. New goods flooded into Britain from abroad, people were exposed to new ideas and images of foreign places from soldiers, seamen, missionaries and merchants. James Williams pieced scenes of black figure hunting under a palm, a Chinese pagoda and heraldic symbols at the top a crown and the four emblems of the Union. There was an



intense pride in the technological achievements of the period and this was reflected in the depiction of Telford's Suspension Bridge over the Menai Straits and the Cefn Viaduct, near Wrexham, with a small train passing over the top. Other scenes include biblical motifs: Cain and Abel, Adam naming the animals and Noah's Ark point to the importance of religion and the Bible in Society and education of the period.

The coverlet became an exhibition piece and was displayed at the *Art Treasures Exhibition* in Wrexham in 1876, at Wembley in 1925 and at Wrexham National Eisteddfod, in the Arts and Craft Tent in 1933. For now it is housed safely in the

Collection Stores in St Fagans and it will take pride of place again in the New Galleries that are planned at the National History Museum.

We had learnt so much about James Williams's life and the society in which he lived, but, despite extensive research Elen was unable to obtain his picture. So although we will never know what he looked like, several generations of his descendants still live in Wrexham and Elen was able to meet them and has taken their photograph. They are justifiably very proud of their ancestor and retain an interest in this beautiful example of Welsh craftsmanship.

The next meeting will take place on Saturday 13 April. The **AGM** will be followed by our Guest Speaker, **Heather Toomer** who will talk about Antique Lace. ***Lace for Peacocks and Peahen***, takes a look at early 17th Century clothing and accessories of the Tudor and Jacobean Court.

Heather Toomer has helped to curate the exhibition ***Painted Pomp: Art and Fashion in the Age of Shakespeare***, a time when men and women dressed to impress, displayed are portraits and early 17th century clothing and accessories, also two beautiful replica outfits from the Globe Theatre made by Jenny Tiramani.

Now showing until 6th May at The Holbourne Museum of Art, Great Poultney Street, Bath

Other Exhibitions of interest

Quilts, textile treasures from Wales, Ceredigion Museum Gallery, Terrace Road.
Aberystwyth. 2 Feb- 11 May

Kaffe Fassett Comes to Wales, The Welsh Quilt Centre, Lampeter. 9th March- 2nd Nov

Gaye Evans