

Cymdeithas Gwisgoedd a Thecstilau Cymru

The Costume and Textile Society of Wales

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY TO OCTOBER 2016

6 FEBRUARY 2016 *Workshop Challenge – Create a sampler in a day*

In response to requests to include a workshop in our annual programme it was suggested that we could set an Embroidery Challenge which we might be able to complete in a day.

Jill Salen kindly offered to design a Tester Sample based upon a project that she sets her students every year at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, here in Cardiff. She had assembled kits for all the 24 members and guests who were seated around tables in the Committee Room at St Fagans. Each kit contained a printed illustration of the sampler together with embroidery fabric, threads and a needle. The purpose of the Sampler was to illustrate the stitches most commonly used in costume construction which included running, hemming, button hole and blanket stitches, as well as button fixing and some more fancy embroidery.



We spent a busy morning over our samplers, chatting, helping each other and later examining the samplers which had been assembled by our members. The samplers came in many sizes, some were new and some over a hundred years old and either had family associations or stories attached, after our own day's

efforts we had a greater appreciate of the needlework skills of their makers. Finally Jill was delighted to announce that Elinor Plow had managed to complete her sampler and Jill presented her with a *blackwork* pin cushion as a prize for her diligence. Most of us had more stitching to do at home, but we had enjoyed the challenge and I want to thank Jill for the tremendous enthusiasm and hard work that she put in to making the day a great success.



Framed up example of finished Sampler

9 April 2016 AGM 11.00am

Guest Speaker - Harriet Waterhouse *His First Suit*

Following the AGM at which we discussed the previous year's activities, received the Treasurers report which shows a healthy balance and looked forward to future events such as the Vintage Village Bazaar and the new Programme we took a break for lunch.

At 1.30pm we welcomed our Guest Speaker **Harriet Waterhouse**, whose training is in design but with an interest in all aspects of costume and much of her working time has been spent researching and writing about the subject. She has a comprehensive knowledge of accurate period style and colour, particularly of the Tudor Period. She is a designer and participant at regular Tudor Re Creations held at *Kentwell Hall*, a Tudor mansion at Long Melford.

Harriet has made costumes for the Globe Theatre as well as working on TV and film sets and I believe she is currently working on a period film project.

Harriet Waterhouse *His First Suit*

Harriet introduced her talk with a Victorian picture c.1900 titled '*His First Suit*', a depiction of a small boy newly dressed in jacket and trousers having outgrown his baby dresses. This was an important and emotional moment for parents and children alike. In a time of high infant mortality, (particularly in the 16th and 17th Centuries the focus of Harriet's research), it signalled that a child had survived infancy, he left the domain of his mother and sisters and entered the world of men and the responsibilities of adult society.

There were practical reasons for the use of dresses or skirts. Young children grow more rapidly in height than width and prior to toilet training dresses made nappy changing easier, using washable fabric strips or tail clouts.

The origin of younger boys wearing dresses may be that before 1550 skirted garments, tunics and gowns were worn by both sexes. A linen shirt was washable leaving the legs bare, split breeches (split at the crotch and still used on young children in Asia and Tibet) were designed to allow the shirt tail to hang out, all worn under a long coat or petticoats. A baby of 6 to 12 months wore short coats so it could toddle, then dressed in progressively longer garments until he was ready to be breeched, then he would no longer be referred to as a child but called a boy. Depicted in portraits it is possible to distinguish boys from girls by the props they carried such as swords, whips and the doublet, sashes and sword belts worn over their long coats.

Childhood was fraught with danger, sickness, disease and accidents all taking their toll on infant lives, so it must have been a celebratory moment when a boy was breeched. It was common to view boys by the age of seven to have reached the age of reason and less likely to die by accident. Of course there were always exceptions, sadly the 5 year old son of Sir Henry Slingsby received his first suit early so that his ailing mother could see her son breeched before she died.

Once breeched a boy had to be able to dress himself, often a long and laborious process and he had to lace his own points. Doublets were worn over

a shirt and fastened to the hose at the waistband with pairs of points tied through eyelet holes. Boys attending school might still wear a long coat as part of their uniform as seen at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Bristol and the Blue Coat Charity School.

Harriet had researched the construction of the clothing worn by a Tudor Child and had made her small son a long skirted coat which is shown here together with a black cap. The coat which opens at the front is tied at the waist with a sash and is worn over a linen shirt. Grouped on the table are typical child's toys, a hoop, wooden horse, a whip and a wooden sword.



When Harriet's son reached his seventh birthday the family had the opportunity to hold a breeching ceremony as part of a Tudor re- enactment event at Kentwell Hall, in Suffolk. He received a splendid scarlet suit, a miniature version of adult clothing, a doublet and hose, complete with codpiece and pockets. He was presented with a bonnet and sword and given money for good fortune. It was a day to honour her son, who rose to the occasion, wearing his new clothes as he danced around the grounds making the money jingle in his pocket to the delight of the visiting spectators.

We were delighted that Harriet had brought the two suits of clothes for us to see and generously allowed me to take photographs for this Newsletter.



Two views of the Tudor Child's clothing. The doublet fastened at the front by eleven buttons is laced to the trunk-hose at the waist. The trunk-hose is cut with wide panes edged with braid matching that on the doublet sleeves and on the codpiece. The black fabric revealed under the panes is padded to keep a full rounded shape. A linen shift or shirt shows at the neck and wrists and black hose covers the legs.

Vintage Village Bazar

On a bright sunny day on Saturday **23 July 2016** we held what is becoming an annual **Vintage Village Bazaar** in St Fagans Village Hall. Tables were taken by members, friends and relations also we had some new stall holders who put on a good show of vintage and retro items. There were lots of crafted gifts, people had been busy this year and table holders had sorted yet more material, linens, patterns and yarns to inspire future projects. A big thank you to everyone who contributed, organizing and running the event and it was lovely to see and chat to so many of our members on the day as many of you have been involved in interesting projects, with displays in Swansea and Cowbridge coming up in the Summer months.

24 November 2016

Jane Williams *Creating Costumes for Men at the WNO*

Jane Williams currently works in the Costume Department of the Welsh National Opera as a Cutter specializing in Men's costume.

I am always fascinated to learn what inspires people in early life and how it influences their future careers. Jane told us that she wanted to be a dancer after watching shows by Roger and Hammerstein, then having seen *'The King and I'* she understood the power of costume and loved dressing up. Many of us recognised these feelings, but Jane had gone on to combine the love of dance and dressing up when she developed a talent for Ice Skating. While at school she skated in competitions and later gained work experience as a Dresser for Ice Shows before enrolling on a Fashion Degree in Cheltenham which had a large historical component.

After graduating Jane worked for a time for *Bumbleweeds Magic Wardrobe*, in Cheltenham, making fancy dress historical costumes and masks. However, sewing budget outfits in fully washable material has limited long term appeal so she decided to go back to college. She gained a place on a Post Graduate course at RWCMD, in Cardiff to study Theatrical costume design. For her final project Jane demonstrated her needlework and cutting skills to make a pure silk *Polonaise Costume*, worked by hand and historically accurate, researched in museum collections and from the drawings in Janet Arnold's books. Now working as a Costume Maker at the WNO Jane finds the technical challenges of pattern cutting exciting and loves men's tailoring and design for opera. *Wozzeck* by Alban Berg was the first production for which she cut the costumes. The collaborative process with designer, cutter and tailor who creates the toile and the makers is complex and often beset with technical problems. They are working on multiple costumes for a chorus of 20 male and 20 female singers who may be dressed in modern or historical costume depending on the opera. Often there is a preponderance of black in the costumes and while some are neutral in appearance others such as the wraiths in *Don Giovanni* are spectacular and very technically challenging to make and wear.

We were shown pictures of many of the WNO's productions on which Jane had worked, with insights into their creation. *Othello* in 2008 was a huge and extremely complicated opera, employing out workers from the whole of Wales, who worked long shifts to complete this massive project. Some designers have very clear ideas about costumes and Buki Schiff was wonderful to work with on *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* in 2010 . There are amusing moments too, as when Jane described the full body suit made for the lead singer in *Falstaff*.

This year has been busy with the production of two new operas, *In Parenthesis* to commemorate the WW1 Battle at Mametz Wood and *Figaro Gets a Divorce* the final opera of the Figaro Trilogy. Most of the male costumes for *In Parenthesis* were original WW1 uniforms, purchased from North Wales. New sheepskin jackets were made in house and these were broken down with the uniforms for the battle scenes. The preparation for *Figaro Gets a Divorce* where much more elaborate, Sue Blane ,the designer, made up the fabrics for her costumes using multi-coloured ribbons applied to black suiting. We had the impression that it was a fun show and everyone involved had a busy but enjoyable time. Next show will be *Kiss Me Kate* for which some of us already have tickets and we will be watching the costumes with added interest.



Some of the props on display from left to right heavy sculpted chain mail shoulder guard, linen ruff, applied ribbon waistcoat front and a thick felt sleeve coated with button polish part of a costume for *Don Giovanni*.

In conclusion Jane has also worked on some of the *Dr Who* costumes, doing some interesting tailoring for the Alien Butler and she is a Freelance Tailor, wherever does she get the time! It was lovely to listen to someone who enjoyed her work so much.

Thomas von Nordheim *My Life and Work in Ladies Couture Tailoring*

The second speaker of the day had arrived just an hour earlier having travelled via Gloucester on the train from London. Thomas von Nordheim is a Couture Tailor working at his Central London Studio where he runs courses on tailoring, vintage sewing techniques and millinery. He has lectured at the London College of Fashion, written books on Tailoring and has worked at Hampton Court developing patterns from the Royal Palace Dress Collection.

Thomas von Nordheim charmed us with the account of his career which started in Dusseldorf where he served a three year long apprenticeship at 'Lore Lang' an old style Haute Couture Salon. He endured tedious hours of tailor tacking and floor sweeping before being allowed to progress to the cutting rooms, but he acknowledged that he had received a thorough grounding in flawless workmanship. In the early 90s Thomas moved to London to work as a tailor's cutter and design assistant for numerous couturiers. He joined 'The House of Lachasse', a top couture house established in 1926, where Hardey Amies started his career and made clothes for an illustrious list of clients.

When Lachasse closed Thomas received an award from NADFAS and set up his own Couture Atelier in Bloomsbury, situated in an old industrial building converted into workshops. Working by himself he cuts and makes his own jackets, but he also uses other tailors to make trousers and skirts; he sources materials from British mills and suppliers in Europe and collects antique buttons for his jackets and suits.

Over the years Thomas has attracted a loyal list of aristocratic and wealthy clients, who return to his Atelier for the suits, dresses and outfits that they wear for special occasions, weddings and investitures throughout the Social Season. The skill with which he combines beautiful fabrics, layering lace on

silks and tweed was illustrated throughout his talk. He particularly enjoys working with clients who know what look they want to achieve and make informed choices as to the materials and details they want on a garment. He referred to a lady who, later in her life, was marrying for the second time and wanted a striking gown for the occasion. Together they chose a length of deep burgundy silk and some lace, which was dyed to match the colour of the antique lace veil, a family heirloom, which she proposed to wear then Thomas designed and tailored a magnificent gown. The formal family photograph of the bride and her family have the look of a painting by an old master, which was probably the image that was sought.

A further set of pictures showed a pair of wedding dresses designed and made for the daughter of one of his clients. The first dress was made of pale yellow silk, with a fitted bodice and ballerina length skirt, delicately ornamented with fabric flowers of the same silk and topped by a wide brimmed picture hat. The second, to be worn for a church blessing, was a simple floor length full skirted gown of white silk tulle-very sweet and both must have made the bride feel and look lovely. Both dresses the product of flawless workmanship from the Atelier of Thomas von Nordheim. Creating elegant, flattering costumes with the attention to detail that his couture training had instilled, perfection in all the smallest details, such as the placement of a hand worked buttonhole on a lapel or a beautifully set in pocket.

Through his love of period design Thomas has received commissions for stage and opera productions at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and The Metropolitan Opera in New York making tailored coats and uniforms for leading singers. His costumes for the opera *The Marriage of Figaro* and the ballet *A Month in the Country*, for which he made a traditional German styled coat led him to comment on the problems faced in cutting garments for the different body shapes of singers and dancers.

When he is not working in his Studio Thomas teaches Tailoring at the London Collage of Fashion and he runs courses on couture and vintage tailoring techniques and millinery, indeed he was about to teach a tailoring course for the postgraduates at the RWCMD in Cardiff. The black and white jacket, made from soft shimmery tweed with stand up collar, slightly flared hem and antique

buttons displayed on a stand was one of the pieces that he was to use to illustrate couture techniques.

In addition, during his busy career Thomas von Nordheim has also found time to write a book, for students and tailors entitled '*Vintage Couture Tailoring*', published in 2012. He did not have a copy to show us, but it is available on line and looks very useful to students and amateur makers and professional tailors.

It was a pleasure to listen to his talk and there were many questions at its conclusion which he answered with enthusiasm.

I have tried to remain faithful to the content of our speaker's talks and any errors are my own. I hope you have enjoyed the Newsletter and will enjoy the forthcoming meeting in November.

Gaye Evans (Chairman)