As a PhD candidate whose research revolves around eighteenth-century underwear and accessories, the theme of the Costume Society’s 2013 annual symposium, ‘Accessories,’ could not have been more timely or relevant to my doctoral work, and as my first Costume Society symposium it was a wonderful introduction and emersion into the depth of knowledge the Society has at its finger tips. My attendance at the symposium was truly made possible thanks to the kind consideration and generosity of the Costume Society and Maney Publishing through the Student Symposium Award.

I am currently in my second year of my doctorate at Edinburgh University, working on my thesis, ‘Têtes to Tails: Eighteenth-Century Underwear and Accessories in Britain and Colonial America.’ Attending the conference was a wonderful opportunity to step back from the intricacies and minutiae of my work to consider the wider themes of a range of accessories spanning the centuries. The continual questioning and probing of what constitutes an accessory and what different types of accessories can signify throughout the conference created an overarching discourse around these often overlooked, but integral necessities of fashion.

This inquisitive dialogue was punctuated by fantastic papers, many of which, to my delight, discussed eighteenth-century accessories, for example, Veronica Main’s extensive and lively inquest into the straw hat and Professor Valija Evalds’ investigation of the apron. In addition to fuelling my curiosity to learn the range of current research of scholarship, papers like Christine Griffith’s documentation of the perfumed glove demonstrated a depth of methodological enquiry, questioning the limits of artefacts and text as evidence through a sensory lens, themes that resonate with my work. The scope of papers simultaneously developed my knowledge of accessories outwith my period and specific doctoral interests, while also inspired me both in considering the range of garments one can consider, but also how to extract their narratives. Bethan Bide’s framework of memory and oral history left me wishing the wearers of my garments could be interviewed to tell their stories. Keynote speaker, Professor Giorgio Riello’s provocative inquest of shoes demonstrated the apt ability to stretch a narrative from the popular mythology of Versailles to the concerns of fashion and production of today.

Listening to and engaging with these papers has given me a precious dose of perspective so often lost in the midst of one’s own research. The symposium also afforded me the opportunity to engage with like-minded dress history compatriots, spanning from fellow ‘budding’ scholars to self-named enthusiasts to founding members of the field of dress history. Everyone was so warm, inquisitive and eager to welcome me into the society. This chance to mix, mingle, discuss and engage was invaluable, especially as I am on the threshold of my career and entrance into this diverse field. It was great to meet and make connections with people both for future research endeavours, local and abroad, but also to enjoy genuine conversations with such a range people who hold such a breadth of knowledge and interests.

I am so grateful for the Costume Society for affording me such a thought-provoking and plentiful three days of research, networking and costume-related enjoyment. I hope to become an active member of the society in the years to come, but as a first taste, ‘Accessories’ fit like, dare I say it, a perfumed glove.