**The Power of Gold**

**COSTUME SOCIETY CONFERENCE 3-5 JULY 2015**

**Saturday 4 July**

**Report by: Jamie Robinson**

It seemed somewhat apt to be congregating in blazing sunshine at the V&A on the first weekend of July for the Costume Society’s **Power of Gold** Jubilee Conference. Weather, venue and subject matter came into alignment, each perfectly suited to celebrate the Society’s fiftieth anniversary; a promising start to a truly glittery weekend. Romy Cockx kicked off proceedings, taking to the floor to discuss *Exhibiting the Power of Gold in Antwerp* with a tantalising taste of what lies in store for visitors to the soon to open Museum for Silversmithing, Jewellery and Diamonds (suggestions are still being proposed for a snappy title but the ‘Museum of Bling’ was certainly a popular favourite). Natasha Awais-Dean followed Romy, with *Glittering Garments and Precious Pieces* in which she examined the multi-sensory and multi-purpose nature of gold adorning the male body in the age of Tudors and Stuarts, when gold was both medium and message.

Sylvia Ayton MBE presented this year’s Student Design Awards with candidates from the University of Westminster exhibiting their eighteenth century inspired golden creations. Catriona Wilson was the worthy winner with a poignant design which was not only visually stunning but layered with subtle historical references. The concealed eye inside of Catriona’s coat, alluding to the period trend of exchanging ‘lover’s eye’ miniatures as clandestine tokens of affection, was an ingenious touch. Second prize went to Isabel Evans, with a Special Award in the memory of Anne Brogden, designer, teacher and founder member of the Society, going to Abiola Onabule. Each of the six garments was a truly spectacular testament to the hours of research and practical skill in construction that had gone into them. All six students should be very proud of their work.

It would not have been a day at the V&A without a bit of McQueen mania and Claire Wilcox obliged us in the next presentation with a behind the scenes insight into the curatorial challenges of re-exhibiting *Savage Beauty* at the V&A and a virtual tour through McQueen’s collaborative approach to craftsmanship. Shelly Tobin drew the lectures to a close with a playful presentation on the subject of Lurex® *Real or Plastic? The Golden Alternative* which opened with iconic Abba imagery, still making headlines for all the wrong reasons. Tobin broke down our associations of Lurex® with scratchy 70s synthetics and re-aligned the brand with the luxury market of the previous decade. As the sun finally cooled day one came to an end with a delightfully good-humoured conversation between Deirdre Murphy and Geoffrey Munn OBE, the BBC Antiques Roadshow Jewellery expert. Munn arrived for the conference equipped with a number of exquisite and rare examples from his own collection (regaling his audience with tales of the bus journey he had taken with his priceless cargo in tow). Munn spoke of the sensory engagement that we have with objects of the past to evoke the past, echoing the words of the afternoon and concluding that gold is so powerful it can lure even the sirens.