

My attendance at the Costume Society Symposium, 2014 in Exeter was made possible thanks to the generosity of the Costume Society UK and Maney Publishing via the Symposium Student Bursary Award, for which I am very grateful. I applied as a student from the University of Brighton completing an MA History of Design and Material Culture, following my completion of BA History of Fashion and Dress, under the supervision of Professor Lou Taylor for both degrees. I would like to thank Professor Taylor for her contribution to my studies, as well as for her contribution as Trustee of the Costume Society, a position from which she resigned on the Sunday of the Symposium this year, having been a member since 1967.

The Symposium was a tremendous opportunity for me to extend my knowledge in the field of dress history. It provides the best opportunity annually to mix with makers, amateur enthusiasts (many of who are deeply informed) and industry professionals (both academic and from the museum) anywhere in the UK. Personally, with my aspirations to work in the field, combined with my enthusiasm for the subject matter, the week-end offered me an opportunity to study, network and quite simply, genuinely enjoy the company of like-minded attendees.

The quality of the speakers was exceptional and the depth of research evident in numerous papers was an inspiration. Of particular interest to my research and practice was Joanna Hashagen Bowes Museum *'I knew he was wild, but was ready to take a chance on his settling down, so in 1912 we got married' The story behind a wedding dress by Lucile*. Her in-depth analysis of the social history surrounding one woman's collection fits directly with my inquiry into Anna Pennington Mellor's House of Worth wardrobe. Joanna's meticulous inquiry used the material culture of her subject's wardrobe to explore issues including class, gender and identity in the early twentieth century. It was absolutely fascinating and provided me with a great deal of motivation to enjoy piecing together the social history of the collection I am exploring.

Similarly, Edwina Ehrman's social history rationale behind her curation of the V&A's Wedding Dress exhibition was entirely relevant to the approach I am formulating for my own practice. Coming from a material culture background, I aspire to talk about social issues through objects. Edwina's honesty about the difference of this approach to that of a design historian was frank and candid. It also provided a sound rationale as to why the exhibition has been so successful- the audience wants not only to see the dresses, they want to know who wore them, where and why. This is what I believe dress history should provide in the museum- a deeper understanding not just of fashion, but of the world around us.

My ultimate highlight was Sunday's visit to Killerton Park. Driving ahead with curator Shelley Tobin, I had my own private tour of the countryside as she pointed out the National Trust's buildings and explained how the trust's activities impacted on the area. More delights were to come, as I managed to wangle myself into the stores to help with setting up the objects for viewing for the Costume Society. I am never happier than when I am in a museum store, and having the chance to work with Shelley was just delightful. Her in-depth knowledge, her understanding of both the history of the garments and the audience to whom she was presenting, as well as her honesty about the restrictions within the workings of the museum reflected her deep commitment to the field. Shelley displayed a range of crepe that was of great interest to me, having listened to Lou Taylor present on mourning dress earlier in the

day. The viewing fed directly into my research, as more than half of the dresses in the Pennington Mellor collection are black, and trying to discern whether or not they were bought in a time of grief has been difficult. However, I am becoming more and more convinced that they were chosen for their elegance, rather than to mark her miscarriage or her husband's death.

The most powerful moment of the weekend though, reflecting the importance of the Costume Society at large, was when all our members filled out comment cards in support of the collection at Killerton House and the informed work of Shelley Tobin. I believe it should be part of the work of the Costume Society to offer support to curators being challenged by marketing departments lacking in-depth knowledge of good museum practice surrounding dress collections and displays. It was an important reminder to us all to make it our own standard practice to provide feedback to every venue we visit to view dress collections.

Here's to the continued vocal presence of the Costume Society UK in the year ahead.