

WECS Wardrobe

weecs
west of england
costume society



www.wofecostumesociety.org

Calendar

Janet Arnold Study Day 'Shape Shifting'

THE CHANGING FEMALE SILHOUETTE
THROUGH THE 19TH CENTURY

Saturday 5 October 2024

■ Bath & County Club

Christmas Meeting

Saturday 16 November 2024

'FROM FLEECE TO PLEATS'
— PAUL HENRY, KILTMAKER

■ Bath & County Club

AGM

15 February 2025

Summer issue 2024

£8.50: Free to members



From Fleece to Pleats
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Janet Arnold Study Day

Programme:

9.30am	Registration with Coffee/Tea
10.10am	Ian Chipperfield – The Staymaker
11.10am	Coffee Break
11.40am	Dr Becky Munford – Bloomers, Rationals and Divided Skirts: the Visual Problem of the Woman in Trousers
12.40pm	Lunch Break
2.10pm	Raffle
2.25pm	Paula Harmon – Dressed for Detection
3.35pm	Close

SHAPE SHIFTING – THE CHANGING FEMALE SILHOUETTE THROUGH THE 19TH CENTURY

Saturday 5th October 2024

**Bath & County Club,
Queen's Parade, Queens Square,
BATH, BA1 2NJ**

£ 28.00 for WECS Members

£ 38.00 for non-members

Lunches are £12.00

This year's Janet Arnold Study Day takes a glimpse into the history of corsets, bustles and crinolines, how they were made and worn, and how the advent of bloomers and the transition to divided skirts and early trousers impacted women's lives and society.

Ian Chipperfield – The Staymaker

Ian's interest has always been in how things were done in the past. He originally trained as a modern dressmaker and pattern cutter, while at the same time starting to research in museum reserve collections. Over the last 30+ years he has studied garments from many museums' reserve collections in great detail, adding new research and garments to his own archive.

Over the years Ian's knowledge and skills have been sought by many groups and organisations. He has taught a wide range of sewing students, from absolute beginners to re-enactors, period dancers, bridal makers, sewing teachers and degree lecturers.

An experienced lecturer, Ian has delivered sessions to costume societies, museums, genealogy and WI groups around the country, often bringing his replica clothing to demonstrate.

Dr Becky Munford Lecturer at Cardiff University - Bloomers, Rationals and Divided Skirts: The Visual Problem of the Woman in Trousers

Becky's Research interests are in gender and feminist theory, modern and contemporary women's writing, literary and visual cultures of fashion, dress and the body (especially trouser-wearing women), girlhood and spectrality.

She is the creator of Women in Trousers: A Visual Archive (www.womenintrousers.org), a digital resource that is home to images of bloomers, knickerbockers, divided skirts, slacks, culottes, breeches, dungarees and shorts, amongst other bifurcated garments, which capture the multiple and often unstable meanings attached to trousers and trouser-wearing women from the 1850s to the 1960s.

Becky's talk is about the advent of the bloomer and the 'visual problem' of trouser-wearing women in the public sphere.

Paula Harmon - Dressed For Detection

One minute you're an ordinary Victorian or Edwardian woman, the next minute you have a crime to solve. Whatever should you wear?

Paula Harmon has published a number of historical mysteries. The Margaret Demeray series is set in the 1910s. The Caster & Fleet series (co-written with Liz Hedgecock) is set in the 1890s. In both series, the main female characters – on different incomes – want to follow the prevailing fashions, but still have to solve mysteries and tackle crime. Would their clothes hinder them? Or would it be perfectly possible to manage, corsets and all?

Using information and images from her research, including fun facts, Paula will talk about what her characters might have worn and how they might have got around any inconvenience their clothes might have posed. From remodelled ball-dresses to cycling outfits to suffrage Margaret, Katherine and Connie as they dress to detect.

Booking and Membership Forms

Please note that whereas booking and membership forms were previously included as inserts in WECS Wardrobe, as a result of our new arrangement with the printers, this will no longer be the case.

Instead, members who are on email will receive them by that means and members who are not on email will receive them separately by post.

Nevertheless, bookings and membership application/renewal can be made via the website wofecostumesociety.org or the QR code on the front of the magazine.



WECS Christmas Meeting

**Saturday 16 November 2024
2pm – 4pm**

Join us for our Christmas Meeting at The Bath and Country Club to enjoy some festive refreshments and a superb talk by Paul Henry the Kilt Maker,

From Fleece to Pleats

Paul Henry makes kilts in a time-honoured way, whether traditional or contemporary, whether hand sewn or sewn by machine.

Both styles are designed with a high rise and are fully tailored. All wool kilts have a hand sewn built in stabiliser, pad stitched hair canvas and internal lining and two straps and buckles.

Paul is a multi-talented artisan who has been making kilts for many years, his talk for WECS will illustrate the process and procedures of making a beautiful bespoke kilt. Starting with the sheep fleece and spinning, to dyeing methods for the yarns, and designing a tartan fabric. Paul's lively and informative presentation covers each stage all the way through to creating the knife edge pleats, with fascinating historical facts throughout.

Blanka Matragi – Timeless

Until 31.12.24



The combination of the unmistakable charm of the Art Nouveau spaces of the Municipal House's billiard and card rooms and Blanka Matragi's exclusive Haute Couture models has created a unique cocktail intoxicating the senses. The Municipal House now presents a renewed exhibition mapping her more than thirty-five-year career as a fashion designer and designer together with the 2017 Elements Collection which is enriched with the latest technologies not only in materials, but mainly in the approach and use of authorial innovative ideas in a 3D effect with illusionistic elements. You can also see glass, porcelain, sculptures, chandeliers, jewellery and graphics.

**Municipal House,
Obecní dům, a.s.
Náměstí Republiky 5
PRAGUE, Czech Republic
www.obecnidum.cz**

Unpicking Couture

Manchester Art Gallery

Until 12.1.25

Unpicking Couture premieres spectacular high-end fashion which has recently entered Manchester Art Gallery's collection.

Created by influential designers and fashion houses, each outfit represents a groundbreaking moment in fashion and includes works by Christian Dior, Elsa Schiaparelli, Azzedine Alaïa, Cristobal Balenciaga, Pierre Cardin, Vivienne Westwood, Yohji Yamamoto, Bruce Oldfield and Alexander McQueen.

This exhibition celebrates pioneering creativity and design. The two main themes of the show are: investigating the links between fashion and emotions, in the form of dopamine dressing which encourages dressing for joy, and focusing on repair and restoration, inviting us to consider the lifecycle of a garment and the way it is valued and cared for.

The exhibition will reveal the recent restoration of a 1930s silk velvet jacket by Italian couturier Elsa Schiaparelli; Unpicking Couture promotes



sustainable approaches to repairing and preserving much loved and well-worn clothes.

The garments will be on display for the first time. They were acquired through a National Heritage Lottery Fund Collecting Cultures grant from 2015-20.

Unpicking Couture will expose the work that underpins the care of dress collections through a meditative film that captures the process of dress mounting and how the craft and skill involved, mirrors the work of dressmakers and couturiers.

**Manchester Art Gallery
Mosley Street
Manchester M2 3JL
manchesterartgallery.org**



Mr Darcy's Shirt!

Just a little something you might like to see! I went to the Bankfield Museum in Halifax in June and saw Colin Firth's "Wet Shirt" from "Pride & Prejudice" which the Museum bought at auction earlier this year for £25,000! Now on permanent display.

My picture has the light behind it and is in a glass case so looks rather wet!!

Ann Brown

Outlaws: Fashion Renegades of 80s London

04.10.24 – 09.3.25

Outlaws: Fashion Renegades of 80s London centres around the legendary nightclub Taboo, opened by designer and performance artist Leigh Bowery in 1985.

Imposing 'dress as though your life depends on it, or don't bother' as the dress code, the Taboo circle, which included fashion designers BodyMap, dancer Michael Clark and pop star Boy George, sparked a scene that used the language of hedonistic excess to create fashion, art and popular culture.

Displaying original garments and accessories from Leigh Bowery and over thirty designers, including custom-made pieces from private collections, plus photography, film and artworks, the exhibition focuses on this vibrant alternative arena where the anarchic energy of the night spilt over into experimental creativity by day.

Image credit: 1989 Leigh Bowery at Maximus + in Dublin! © Dave Swindells

**Fashion & Textile Museum
83 Bermondsey Street, London SE1 3XF
fashiontextilemuseum.org**



Nature's Tapestry : Botanical Embroidery at Hidcote

Until 30.09.2024

Hidcote is hosting botanical and embroidery artist Olga Prinku in the exhibition hall this year. Olga's work combines dried and preserved flowers and other natural materials with tulle fabric, to create motifs inspired by nature.

Olga has been visiting Hidcote through the seasons to collect materials which she has used to create three artworks inspired by the garden. These will be displayed alongside her wider body of work.

Her work uses materials like seed-heads that we ordinarily overlook to create intricate and unique artworks inspired by the changing of the seasons, and the raw beauty of the natural world.

The exhibition is located in the Entrance Hall of the house and is free to enjoy.



**Hidcote,
Hidcote Bartrim,
Nr Chipping Campden,
Glos GL55 6LR**
nationaltrust.org.uk

'Art without Heroes: Mingei'

William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow until 22 September 2024

There were a number of reasons to visit this exhibition: to enable my sister to visit another significant house associated with William Morris; to view the assembled pottery collection (she's a potter) and to explore Mingei objects, especially textiles and clothes.

Art Without Heroes: Mingei, is the most wide-ranging exhibition in the UK dedicated to Mingei, the influential folk-craft movement that developed in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s. With works including ceramics, woodwork, paper, toys, textiles, photography and film the exhibition incorporates unseen pieces from significant private collections in the UK and Japan, along with museum loans and historic footage from the Mingei Film Archive, (reference William Morris Gallery)

The exhibition is divided into three parts; the first focuses on the craft objects that the Mingei movement looked to for inspiration so expect beautiful, but unsigned pots, wooden kokeshi dolls, textiles, dress and lovely examples of visible mending and repairs to everyday clothing. A patchwork fabric boro bodok (sheet) would have been spread out on a bed of dry leaves on the floor for sleeping or during childbirth. At first glance it is a lovely object but equally a reminder of the necessity of re-use and recycling in rural communities as it was made up of layers of recycled and patched fabric. Work clothes patched and repaired were shown alongside a

Kasuri kimono where pre-dyed yarns were woven into patterns in the fabric, a robe made from elm bark and a sashiko farmer's coat.

Highlights for me were the robes, the boro bodok, the hand stitched sandals and the Kasuri Kimono.

Mingei, pronounced min-gay, is a term coined by the Japanese philosopher Yanagi Soetsu, encourages us to appreciate that the beauty of these objects is linked to their use: textiles and clothing, toys, rice bowls, tea pots and jars.

The second part of the exhibition focuses on the 20th century and I guess this is where the connection to William Morris comes in and attention is turned to a counter balance to rapid industrialisation and modernisation by championing craft. So whilst this part was primarily about ceramics and features work by Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada and Masu Minagawa (who from ten years of age painted hundreds of teapots a day). In Mingei she is celebrated not only for her art but the tradition of her art.

The highlight for me here though was a woven silk panel, from a craft maker who farmed his own silk worms, spun his yarn and wove the cloth.

The final part looks at contemporary versions of Mingei and focuses on firms such as Muji (think simple affordable everyday day goods), artists such as

Edwardian Legacy

28.09.24 – 02.05.25

The dawn of the 20th century saw Worthing emerge from Late Victorian stagnation into a period of rapid urban growth, linked to the Golden Age of seaside holidaying and the advent of the motor car. The horrors of the infamous typhoid epidemic were left as a memory, with civic pride and substantial external investment leading to Worthing becoming one of the premier seaside resorts of Edwardian Britain. This exhibition will showcase a large range of costume, fine art and historical artefacts from the period, along with a showreel of photographs from our extensive collections.

**Worthing Museum, Connaught Theatre,
Union Place, Worthing BN11 1LG**
Wtm.uk



Theaster Gates and start-up companies making ecological clothing using natural materials and traditional forms.

The highlights for me here were the garments based in the oral histories from village elders: an Echizen shirt, Tatsuke trousers and a vest by Itoshiro Ten made in organic cotton and dyed with marigold and indigo.

There are 80 items in the exhibition, each telling a story at an individual level, however as we went around the exhibition so much about Japan, its history in relation to the indigenous Okinawan and Ainu, and its colonial history in Korea was revealed.

Mingei is a historical movement, a set of principles that remain relevant to craft, manufacturing and material consumerism. A thought-provoking exhibition and well worth a visit.

Plus there is a detailed exhibition about William Morris as well as wonderful gardens, and Walthamstow offers much for visitors who enjoy shops, markets and the occasional tea and cake!

■ Marian Banks

British Fashion Icons at Blenheim Palace

For many decades Blenheim has been the hub for hosting glittering social functions, catwalk shows and private parties along with many family functions.

In the Spring and early summer this year Blenheim celebrated this element of its history with fashion displays from eleven celebrated British Fashion designers. The State Rooms of the Palace made a fitting backdrop to the many glorious creations by iconic designers, all of whom had personally chosen the area where their outfits were displayed.



On entering the double height Grand Entrance Hall, designs by the late Dame Vivienne Westwood illustrated her flair for dressing the dramatic and sometimes daring socialites but always with an eye for beautiful fabric and wonderful tailoring. This complemented the ceiling artwork by painter James Thornhill depicting John Churchill bowing before Britannia.

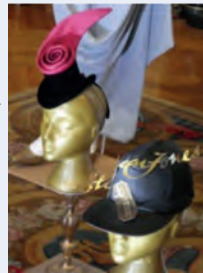
Proceeding along the visitor walkway one comes across a small staircase with mannequins displaying the classic simplicity and ever wearable designs of the late Jean Muir.



Couture dress designer Charles James in a similarly grand room.



Fashion accessories were represented by Lulu Guinness and Terry de Havilland, who pushed boundaries in creative bespoke footwear worn by fashion luminaries such as Kate Moss, Jerry Hall and Margot Robbie. Headwear for Christian Dior by the milliner Stephen Jones was also on display.

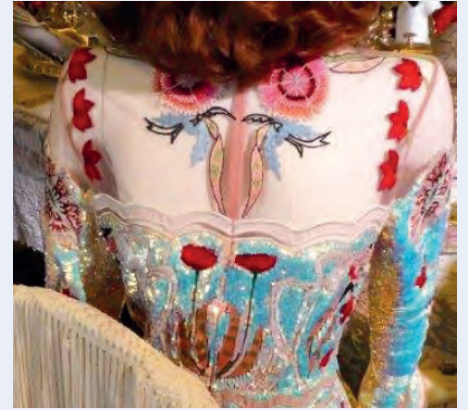


The Red Drawing Room provided a fitting backdrop for the carefree, colourful Bohemian prints by Zandra Rhodes (a lot of which were made in her favourite hot pink), where a selection from her 6000 piece archive was on display.

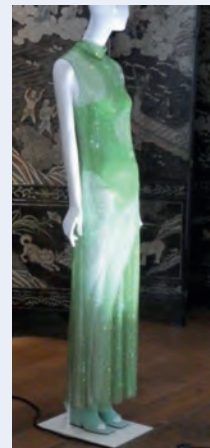


Continuing through the visitor route, the Green Room displayed Barbour's iconic waxed jackets, worn by generations of country gentry and more recently by urbanites, were to be seen. Churchill's siren suit kindly loaned by Turnbull and Asser the famous men's outfitters was to be found in an adjoining room.

Alice Temperley's sophisticated and beautiful evening wear was exhibited in a dinner party setting which displayed the wonderful creativity of her work.



The Long Library was a fitting venue for the designs of Stella McCartney. As well as examples of both evening wear and many casual wear items there were also, displayed on a table, swatches of the vegan leather for which she is well known and has used in her collections since 2001.



Whilst the eye of the visitor was drawn to the many beautiful outfits there were occasions when some of the Blenheim silverware outshone them as in the case of this magnificent table centre piece in silver.



■ Patricia Cooke

The Stitcher, the Podcast and the History of the Suit

Last year I suddenly found I could no longer pursue my hobby of embroidery due to cataracts in both eyes which even made reading difficult. I have always loved going into my work room, shutting the door and listening to my favourite music while stitching. I missed that terribly until a friend said I ought to start listening to podcasts instead, so I downloaded Spotify onto my phone and soon discovered hundreds of podcasts, which certainly kept me entertained until I could stitch again.

But more than any other, I enjoyed listening to *The Rest Is History*, with Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook. The one that I enjoyed the most was one I can highly recommend to any readers of WECS Wardrobe who haven't already listened to it – *The Rest is History No 459 – The Suit, Savile Row and Smartly Dressed Men*. The blurb finishes: ... "Join Tom and Dominic as they travel through the glamorous, colourful and often adventurous history of the suit. From Chaucer's England and the Black Death, fashion feuds between Kings, through the Napoleonic Wars, into the Highwaymen and Pirates of the 18th century; Beau Brummell and the rise of the dandy, the macaronis and the fop, right into the illustrious origins of Savile Row, and some of the suit's contemporary champions..."

Listening to it made me realise that five of my early embroideries all have examples of different styles of men's suits, starting with an 18th century waistcoat and finishing with a thoroughly modern suit made from tie-dyed African cloth.

For the first ten years of my career, I worked in a West End theatre wardrobe and loved working on period dramas and although I retrained as a Hospital play specialist after I got married, I still enjoyed going to Costume Society meetings. When I retired 16 years ago I started to volunteer at The Fashion Museum in Bath and then realised that what I really wanted to do was hand embroider pictures of historic costume.

I had discovered that the 18th century waistcoat Beatrix Potter copied for the little mice to embroider in her book *The*



Tailor of Gloucester was actually a real one from the V&A so I ordered a photo from the museum and using it and the book I worked it as accurately as I could in silk floss and called it 'No More Thread'.



Shortly after finishing it, WECS organised an outing to an exhibition of some of the Ballet Russe costumes at the V&A. I really wanted to embroider something showing one of their incredible ballets and discovered all the original *Petrushka* set and costume designs by Alexandre Benois were on the internet, so I decided to work on the opening scene at the Shrovetide Fair in St Petersburg showing Vaslav Nijinsky as *Petrushka* and Tamara Karsavana as the ballerina. I really enjoyed embroidering the costumes for all twenty characters on stage - obviously the three principal dancers and the magician in his long painted golden coat, but also ensuring all the dancers in the crowd were as accurate as possible, including the various uniforms of the men.



For my next embroidery, I decided to work on the opening scene from the 1979 production of *My Fair Lady* starring Liz Robertson, an actress I had worked with some years earlier and who had shown me all her gorgeous costumes designed by Tim Goodchild when I visited her after a performance. These designs too were on the Internet along with the original set designs. Once again I was able to accurately copy all the Edwardian costumes, although because this scene takes place in Covent Garden at night, all the men's suits are covered by their overcoats. But the two market porters are both wearing working men's shirts, waistcoats and trousers.

My next embroidery was a scene from a children's show I had worked on in the 1960s. The sets and costumes were all taken from Van Gogh's paintings and the old couple on the left are lifted straight from 'The Potato Eaters.' The man has just been turned into a bear by the evil Rat King, the weird looking character in the green tail coat and battered top hat. He plans to take over the world by changing anyone into an animal if they say 'I couldn't care less'. The man in the silver suit is a visitor from outer space who's come to help stop the Rat King's devilish plan. I think his lurex suit must have been how the costume designer imagined a man from space might have dressed when she was working in the 1960s!

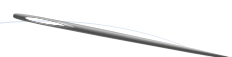


The final embroidery in this theatre series was *The Lion King* which I saw in London and loved. The costume designs are by Julie Taymore and I love the costume of the actor who carries the puppet, Zazu the hornbill-advisor to King Musafa. The programme notes say that his costume is a version of Western formal dress rendered in African tie-dyed fabric with a geometric patterning based on Kuba cloth.



Now my vision is back to normal after two successful cataract operations and I am currently working on the fourth of a series of embroideries showing scenes of the British countryside. And once again, as I settle down at my frame, I shut the door of my workroom but now often listen to a good podcast while I stitch.

■ Jill Hazell



Sargent and Fashion

■ Ann Brown - helped by notes from the exhibition



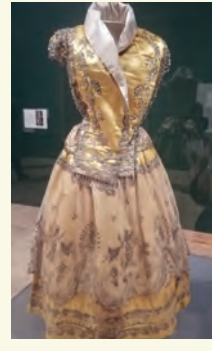
Lady Assoon wearing Taffeta Opera Cloak



Detail of Dress by House of Worth



Portrait of Ellen Terry wearing the Beetle Wing Dress



Costume for Carmen Dauset Moreno (Carmencita)



Fancy Dress Costume for Sybil Sassoon

In July, on the hottest day of the year, it was a relief to go into the air conditioning of Tate Britain to visit the exhibition "Sargent and Fashion". Almost 60 of Sargent's paintings were on display, including major portraits which rarely travel. Several period garments were showcased alongside the portraits they were worn in. The show examined how John Singer Sargent used fashion to create portraits of the time, which still captivate today. Sargent used fashion as a powerful tool to express identity and personality. He regularly chose the outfits of his collaborators or manipulated their clothing. This innovative use of costume was central to his artwork – for example, tugging a heavy coat tighter around a man to emphasise his figure or letting a dress strap sensuously slip from a woman's shoulder. These daring sartorial choices that allowed him to express his vision as an artist.

This exhibition has now sadly closed but this gives an idea what joys were on display. As you entered, a very dramatic black taffeta opera cloak was on display and nearby was the portrait of Lady Sassoon wearing it but with pink roses pinned on along with a string of pearls, bangles on both wrists and a spectacular hat of black ostrich feathers. Lady Sassoon had much in common with Sargent and they became close friends. Sargent enjoyed working in black on black, inspired by the Dutch painter Frans Hals. Black dresses became fashionable for women of all ages during the late 19th century and this is illustrated by the prevalence of black in Sargent's portraiture. During the 1880s, he painted almost half of his female sitters wearing black gowns. The colour was so integral to his work that, when visiting his friend, Claude Monet, Sargent was unable to work when he learnt that Monet did not have any black paint!

One portrait of Sargent's caused quite a stir, that of Virginie Gautreau, which was first exhibited in 1884 at the Salon

held in the Palais des Champs-Élysées in Paris. The painting originally showed one of the jewelled straps slipping off the Virginie's shoulder. Sargent insisted he painted her "exactly as she was dressed" and Virginie described the portrait as a masterpiece in a letter to a friend. Nonetheless, the painting was ridiculed both by critics and the public and many people denounced the indecency of the dress as a bid for attention. The strap was subsequently repainted and Sargent left Paris soon afterwards, his own reputation also somewhat damaged. As for Virginie Gautreau, her mother lamented the cost to her daughter's reputation. Sargent kept the portrait until after Virginie's death in 1915 and wrote "I suppose it is the best thing I have done".

After settling in England in the 1880s, most of Sargent's portraits were painted in his London studio. His sitters thought carefully about the clothes that he would paint them in, the messages their choices would send, and how well particular outfits would translate to paint. One French critic noted "there is now a class who dress after pictures, and when they buy a gown ask "will it paint?" There were examples of dresses designed by the house of Worth, one being an evening dress of 1880 which belonged to Sarah Choate Sears, made from bengaline, a shiny, ribbed fabric made from silk, or silk blended with cotton. It is embellished with hundreds of faux pearls, each individually attached. Another 1902 portrait by Sargent of Mary Crowninshield Endicott Chamberlain includes a black velvet hair ornament decorated with feathers and beads along with a cream painted silk fan which were on display on loan from the Fashion Museum, Bath. Also from the Fashion Museum was a large Flemish style Linen Argentan needle lace collar.

The exhibition moved on to portraits and performances, negotiated between sitter and artist. Ellen Terry and Carmencita were professional performers who

appealed to Sargent's love of music and theatre. This was the highlight of the exhibition for me as the "Beetle Wing Dress" that Ellen Terry wore for Lady Macbeth in 1888 was on display. Some may remember we had a talk about this dress at one of our study days after it had been conserved. Sargent attended the opening night of a production of Macbeth on 27th December 1888 and immediately resolved to paint Terry as Lady Macbeth. Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones saw it in progress and made suggestions about the colour, which may account for the difference between the blues of the painting and the greens of the actual dress. Alice Comyns Carré, Ellen Terry's chief costumer, created this dress in collaboration with Terry and the designer and dressmaker Ada Nettleship. The dress is crocheted from green yarn and blue tinsel, giving the impression of chain mail. The iridescent wings of jewelled beetles add further lustre to the garment. The ensemble is completed with a purple velvet cloak ornamented with lions. The costume which Carmencita wore to perform flamenco dances was also on display, along with Sargent's portrait and an old movie of her wearing it while dancing.

The exhibition concluded with a very dramatic fancy dress costume made for Sybil Sassoon, Countess of Rocksavage, by the House of Worth in 1922. Sargent commissioned this dramatic lace-trimmed black gown and matching cape as Sybil had a penchant for dressing up, to wear to a fancy dress ball.

By 1907 Sargent had effectively stopped painting commissioned portraits. He served as a war artist during the First World War when he made his largest oil paintings. After the war Sargent still occasionally painted portraits, usually of his friends. His late portrait of Sybil Sassoon is an expression of the intimacy and affection developed over many years between artist and sitter. John Singer Sargent died on 14th April 1925.

Is your passion for
fashion?

Could you stand at the
rostrum and talk about
costume?

Is there a fashion or costume related topic that's close
to your heart? Perhaps a hobby or job that you
have a lot of knowledge and experience of?

Could you give an engaging **fifteen minute** illustrated talk or
demonstration about it? After all if it interests you it's very likely to
interest the other members of WECS too!!

If you think you'd like to give this a
go please get in contact with me,
stating what the topic is and how
you'd approach it.

For example:

Conduct a talk with a PowerPoint
presentation and / or props and
examples relevant to the subject.
Or give a demonstration, or 'have a
go' workshop.

It could make a super **WECS**
meeting event, and it would be
such a helpful resource should a
scheduled speaker pull out at
the last minute too.

Contact Andrea Bartlett at:
programmesec@wofecostumesociety.org



Keep Wardrobe Full!

I'm sure you have all been visiting wonderful exhibitions
during the summer - do let me know what you have seen
so that I can tell everyone. What have you been doing,
reading, discovering online? Write and tell me so I can
share it ...

Copy for the next newsletter to Caroline Bartlett by 28
October 2024 please to: editor@wofecostumesociety.org

WEC'S Members Sale Table

We will have a members' sale table at the Janet Arnold
Study Day to help us raise funds.

Donations welcome or items on a sale or return
50/50 basis.

Please bring them on 5th October 2024
contact Annie: annierose9@gmail.com
if you have any queries.

Book Review

The Dressmakers of Auschwitz.

The true story of the women who sewed
to survive

Lucy Adlington

Don't let the subject matter discourage
you from reading this remarkable book.

The first thing to point out is that this
is not a fictionalised account, it is a true
story as recounted by Mrs Bracha Kohut and the families of
the other key women whose stories are involved. Lucy Adlington has
pieced together these personal accounts with documentary evidence
and provided in depth wider historical context to create a moving and
informative book.

The narrative is engagingly constructed, and tells the story of family
and friendships, endurance and resistance forged in the cruellest
environment. The skilfully written details of dramatic events that take
unexpected turns, build up a compelling page-turning pace.

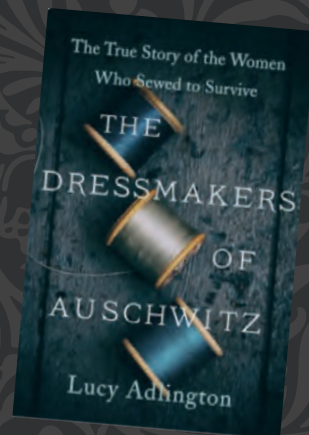
Lucy Adlington is a social and textile historian with an interest in the
evolution of clothing, she is also the founder of History Wardrobe, where
she curates clothing exhibitions and creates workshops and talks. As
well as writing factual books based on her research interests, Lucy
also writes young adult fiction, and it was after her fictionalised story
of dressmakers in WW2 concentration camps called 'The Red Ribbon',
had been brought to the attention of 98-year-old Bracha Kohut - the
last surviving dressmaker from the fashion salon at Auschwitz, that this
rendition of the extraordinary true account came about.

The historical facts are simply staggering, the scope of the holocaust
across Europe and its devastating impact, is even now hard to process
and comprehend. The immense scale of the organisation, the
dehumanisation of the inmates at Auschwitz and the bizarre existence
of a couture fashion salon within it seems almost too hard to believe.

Yet Hedwig Hoss, the camp commandant's wife set up the salon with
the express acquisitive and greedy purpose of providing herself and the
elite wives of other high ranking Nazi officials with the most beautifully
made and exquisite clothes. These were created by women who had
been at the top of their fashion and tailoring professions in Germany,
Slovakia, Bratislava, and France, before the war and being sent to
Auschwitz-Birkenau just because of their religion, ethnicity or political
beliefs. The lives of the women in this true story - Bracha and her sister
Katka, Hunya, Marta, Irene and her sister Kathe were spared from the
gas chambers because they could sew.

The book is now a New York Times best seller and has been translated
in 22 languages.

■ Andrea Bartlett



WECS Committee

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