

History Wardrobe Newsletter

September 2009

The weather might be autumnal but we still wish you a warm welcome to our latest newsletter.

Lucy Adlington & Gillian Stapleton

Summer in Style

On the road with the History Wardrobe..

Yes, we've sneaked a photograph into this season's newsletter just to prove there really were sunny days this August. We managed three glorious days in a row while performing at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, for a Royal event with Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and a retinue of servants. A display of costumes from the film *Young Victoria* was complemented by two performances of *Dressing Queen Victoria* daily, as well as a host of other events, including myself - in the very beautiful crinoline dress pictured here - giving a talk on Victorian gardens. (You'd be amazed by my knowledge of 19th Century fertilizers..) The Queen was received with deep bows & curtsies, and loud huzzahs! She wore replicas of the Turkish diamonds presented shortly after her Coronation. Prince Albert hosted traditional races and games, looking splendid in his Field Marshal uniform.



Queen Victoria, Prince Albert & Lady Lyttelton at Osborne House, Isle-of-Wight

The Royal entourage stopped first at a garden full of surprises, which you really must visit if you get the chance - Biddulph Grange Gardens in Staffordshire. Her Majesty was gratified to see many loyal citizens (aka History Wardrobe fans) queuing for the performance. Afterwards Gillian and I went exploring the many secrets of the gardens. Gillian loved the Chinese water garden and I was thrilled to see genuine authentic totally Victorian replica Egyptian statues. The Sphinxes had very noble 19th-century smiles. They reminded us of a splendid engraving in the *Illustrated London News* (1845) of the Queen and Prince Albert attending an 18th-century fancy dress ball in full historical costume... but Albert still has his sideburns and moustache. Bless.

Of course the little red fiesta has delivered us to a great many more wonderful venues, literally too numerous to mention, because we've now topped 125 bookings this year (keep 'em coming!) Thank you very much for all your support, whether hiring or watching.

A Fine Tall Person...

"A fine tall person, a noble mien, and the report that was in general circulation within five minutes of his entering the room of his having undressed in public more than one hundred times already... and no sign of stopping!"

Yes, our most excellent Mr Darcy is as popular as ever and we were pleasantly startled to see just how many bookings he's amassed since the talk began in 2004. Gillian, who has sewn all the garments, says she's in the process of making a new set of drawers and new pantaloons as they get (and I quote) "the most wear and tear." What is the enduring attraction of this talk? Could it be the fact that actor Ian Stapleton clocks in at a cool seven feet tall in the hat and Hessian boots? Is it the way he struts into the room declaring that no one in the audience is "handsome enough to tempt me"? Or is it something to do with the number of buttons that have to be undone in a tantalizing fashion...? Oh give over! It's the combination of erudite research, confident delivery and exquisite attire. Honest.

As with all our talks, check the History Wardrobe website www.historywardrobe.com to find out if there are any public events near you. (If not, book us, says Gillian) (!)

New Acquisitions

I've succumbed and bought another new wardrobe...

How we love those tantalising moments when someone approaches at the end of the talk, bearing a carrier bag bursting with surprises; or when the postie appears with a mysterious parcel of donations. Thank you so much, as ever, for contributing to the History Wardrobe wardrobes. We love to hear about the folk who wore the donated items, and we're especially excited when we have a photograph of the garments or accessories being worn. These often go on display during the presentations.

This summer we've welcomed lovely new additions, including what seems to be the entire house contents of Mrs Peggy G-, who's clearly had a marvellous time collecting beautiful items over the years, and who owns a seriously impressive shoe collection. Peggy & friends lured us into her den of iniquity (well, we had ham sandwiches) plied us with gin & tonics and made us laugh so much with their stories (particularly the one about the man stuck in a funny yoga position.) Some of Peggy's items will be on display in Fabulous Fifties, along with a lovely pink polka dot 'playsuit' from a lady in Thirsk.

We were also corrupted (with cake and coffee this time) by no less a person than a Vicar who offered excellent company, a sight of her mother's 1940s wedding dress (peach satin brocade from Paris), and ownership of her grandmother Gertrude's scintillating black beaded evening dress, which Gillian dated to 1925.

Gillian is cursing at missing the opportunity of speaking to another lovely woman called Doris. Doris makes cakes. A lot of cakes. And she makes you eat them. All of them. It's great. I popped in to see Doris and hear her tales of hard work and fun times as a Land Army girl near Hull. Some of her brilliant anecdotes will be included in our forties talk Wartime Wedding and her WLA armband will be proudly worn.

Please don't think our collection relies on donations alone. We're keeping quiet about some of our purchases, meaning to spring them on you with future new talks. In particular, Story of the White Wedding, which we'll premiere in April 2010; also for the stunning presentation to be unveiled in 2011 - Titanic.

I can tell you we've added a charming child's chemise from the 1850s to the collection, as well as child's dress from c. 1820, which will be on show in Florence Nightingale, Respectable Rebel.

At the end of this month we'll be back to Manchester for the Textile Society Fair, clutching our purses (but setting aside £2 for chips and a mug of tea.)

New Talk

The premiere of Story of the White Wedding has already been booked by the North Yorkshire (West) Federation WI, which means we're merrily collection wedding ephemera, and Gillian is sourcing fabric for the gorgeous new bridal gowns she'll be creating - and I get to wear them!

We'll showcase full replica ensembles from the 1810s, 1870s & 1960s, as well as displaying original items from the 19th and 20th centuries. We even have a black wedding dress from the late 1800s.

I'm glad we now have an excuse for presenting a beautiful 1930s wedding dress and shoes donated by a most excellent lady at Kiplin Hall. The matching bridesmaid dress and bolero jacket will also be on show - they're divine. We don't yet have an original dress from the sixties... just in case you know anyone with a dress that needs a loving home.

We'll be creating a display of photos from every decade. One of the best sources for these is actually the York car boot sale at the racecourse most Saturdays. I buy whatever photographs I can, hating to see them neglected. Elsie Walton has been another stalwart, providing marvellous magazines that feature bridal trousseaus, as well as some fantastic sources of information about weddings.

Our Repertoire

Lots of lovely topics, all based on wide-ranging research, presented in a lively & engaging manner... with exquisite clothes, of course

Portrait of a Lady
Frills and Frivolity
Oh My Poor Nerves!
Undressing Mr Darcy
Fashioning the Past
Jane Austen's Christmas
Elegant Economy - the Clothes of Cranford
Jane Eyre, the Well-Dressed Governess
Story of the White Wedding
Florence Nightingale, Respectable Rebel
Dressing Queen Victoria
Votes for Women! & Putting on the Ritz
Wartime Wedding
Fabulous Fifties!

To find out more, please visit our website www.historywardrobe.com

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