

## **Textile Tips**

*Textiles are fragile... and this only gets worse over time.*

*Take time to try a few simple tips to keep your vintage clothes well-stored.*

*These are only hints of course. Always ask an expert for a more specific opinion.*

### **Light**

Textiles don't like light! We can't all go to the extreme of filtering out UV light to protect our textiles, but minimise the amount of time your textiles are exposed. Textiles on display for long periods of time will suffer – dyes fade and fibres become brittle – silk fibres especially.

### **Dust & Dirt**

I avoid washing antique textiles. The damage isn't worth it and sometimes the marks are part of the charm. (Sometimes they're unavoidable, like the tiny 'rust' spots on Edwardian silks that show they've been artificially weighted with tin salts). However, dirty clothes do attract moths – you can't win. Have a costume curator or conservator examine your garment before even a delicate hand-wash. One bridal expert advises using a hair-dryer on a low setting to get the creases out of bridal veils – ironing net can be catastrophic.

### **Storage**

Museum conservators may advise against storing clothes in plastic garment covers as they can actually attract dust and if sealed created a mouldy or corrosive micro-climate – all very alarming. However, home-grown costume lovers may find this is the most practical way to cover garments hanging in a wardrobe. Snap-top plastic boxes won't pass the museum test, but they're just the job if you've no better alternative, especially since they can be sealed well. They are translucent though, so keep all the contents well-wrapped in acid free paper to avoid light damage.

Cardboard boxes, especially vintage ones, can be disastrous for the textiles once carefully packed inside. Acids and dyes seep into fabrics and can leave permanent discolouration. If you can't afford acid-free cardboard boxes (they're not at all cheap – your dry-cleaner's may offer them for storing bridal gowns) then at least use lots of acid-free tissue paper to buffer the clothes, and change the paper every so often. (By the way, the tissue paper you're given in shops or with gifts most likely isn't acid-free – it's purely decorative.) Another more traditional method is to use well-laundered cotton sheets for wrapping textiles in. If you're handy with a sewing machine you can create garment bags from these sheets for items on hangers.

Bodices and long gowns need extra care when storing. Use 'sausages' of acid-free to pad out arms, and other areas that need bulking out. Fold acid free around delicate areas such as lace

collars, and also around fastenings, so they don't snag. Hats need to be padded with acid-free inside, to keep their shape.

Creases cause cracks, especially in silks and satins, so use rolls of acid-free between the folds of a large skirt if it is going in a box. Use as large a box as practical, to have as few folds as possible.

Try not to store too many items in one box, so they become crushed.

In some cases, dresses can be hung, though please be wary of the weight of the garment. This can cause too much stress on the 'shoulders' and cause tearing. You can sew tapes to hold the additional weight of the skirt. Padded hangers are vital – preferably padded in well-washed cotton, so dyes don't mark your garment. Garments with heavy embroidery, beading or bias-cut skirts are probably best stored flat in boxes.

### **Pests**

Clothes moths, carpet beetles, wood-boring insects and rodents... creatures from a textile nightmare! Good housekeeping is the best prevention. Keep storage areas tidy and look out for evidence of infestation. Avoid storing textiles in dirty, dark, humid and stuffy conditions. I use bags of dried lavender – if nothing else the wardrobes smell nice.

### **Handling**

Museums can keep costumes in mint conditions. We like to be able to see and handle ours! Make sure your hands are clean. Preferably wherever you're going to display the textiles will be clean too, although this isn't always possible. Simple white cotton gloves are advised for handling delicate textiles. These do leave some fibres and are a little clumsy, but better than sticky fingers. Be careful when handling items and re-packaging. If you're displaying them do not use blu-tak, sticky tape or glue!

### **Afterward**

If, after reading the above, you're alarmed at the mere thought of owning antique textiles and clothes – please don't be! History Wardrobe costumes have to 'earn a living' so they have to be repeatedly packed and displayed – to the great pleasure of our audiences. Treated with care and respect textiles should last to delight more generations. Enjoy the craft-skills, colours, cut and design of your textiles, as well as the memories they may hold.