

History Wardrobe

Newsletter Spring 2012

Dear All...

I've called this a 'spring' newsletter because as I write the weather is ridiculously warm and sunny and because I'm looking ahead to a busy spring in the History Wardrobe events diary. Until then I'll be catching up on research projects, checking and mending costumes and preparing for this year's fabulous new talks...



In **Agatha Christie & Art Deco** you can expect dazzling fashions and dramatic readings celebrating the life and times of the Queen of Crimes. This talk premieres in August.

Discover just why Mrs Christie's life was as interesting as any novel, from her work in the world of archaeology to the drama of her eleven-day disappearance.

For **Ladies of a Certain Age** we turn the spotlight on old maids and matriarchs from Jane Austen's novels, from Miss Bates to Lady Catherine de Bourgh.



Lively readings are interspersed with insights into the realities of life for women past their first blush of youth in Regency England - not forgetting praise for literature's most marvellous spinster - Jane Austen herself.

This talk debuts at the Cokermonth Georgian Festival in May.

So... read on to find out more about wonderful new additions to the History Wardrobe collection. Also, inspired by my own love of walking, I've included some super photographs of women walkers in the 19th & 20th centuries.

- Lucy Adlington

Making Mayan Fabric

Much as I love textiles I must confess to rather poor sewing skills, so I've huge respect for the Mayan women I encountered during a recent trekking holiday in Guatemala. Still using traditional methods dating back many hundreds of years, the women produce the most sensationally colourful woven and embroidered cloth.

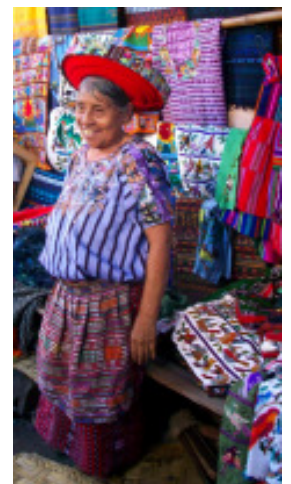
Under the rule of Spanish conquistadors, Mayan people were compelled to keep to a distinctive and defining style for their village. These styles are still being worn in the Guatemalan highlands, not just on high days and holidays.

I attempted to use a 'backstrap' loom myself, under the patient tutelage of Amelia, in a remote town on the slopes of a volcano where the women have formed a co-operative to showcase and sell their creations. I acquired other textiles from friendly village women encountered during various treks.



Amelia waits and winces as I tangle her threads...

The experience has given me huge respect for the dedication and flair required to fabric by hand. The majority of fabrics we use in Britain are machine-produced for a mass market, of course, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't appreciate the resources that go into their construction and transport. Value your textiles!



Traditional Mayan costume

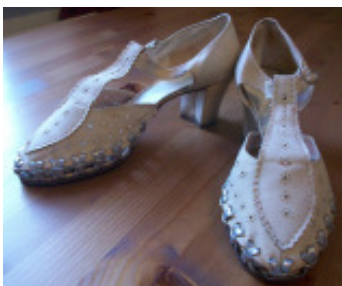
New Acquisitions

As ever we love new additions to the Wardrobe (frequently requiring the purchase of actual new wardrobes).

As the cost of collecting antique textiles and vintage clothes increases so significantly, we're increasingly grateful for all the kind donations. It's such a pleasure to receive oddly-shaped parcels in the post containing such costume history treasures as 1940s parachute silk, beautiful bridal wear and charming hats.

We also love ephemera such as photographs, patterns, magazines and sewing notions... so keep bringing those interesting bag-fulls to History Wardrobe presentations! THANK YOU

Here's a sneak preview of some new items...



1940s wedding shoes with an unusual silver leather cross stitch detail



Genuine wartime parachute silk, already cut to make slinky underwear...

Both items on show in **Wartime Wedding**



Amazing bronze striped taffeta bodice & skirt from the late 1850s



Smart Edwardian walking outfit on display in **Titanic**



Slinky 1930s silk pajamas



Silver & blue lame 1930s evening gown

To be worn in **Agatha Christie & Art Deco**

Stylish patterns from the 80s and 60s Inspirational for **Fifty Years of Fashion**



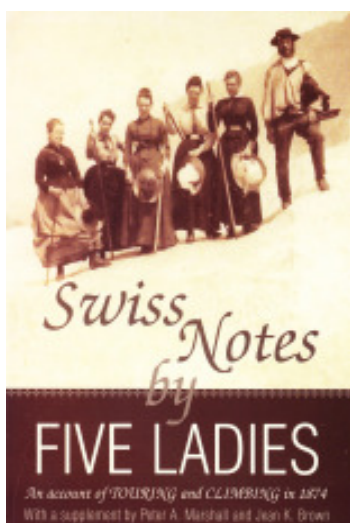
1906...



... to 1986

Two bridal outfits for **Story of the White Wedding**

Climbing Mountains in Crinolines



Published by Peter A. Marshall ISBN 0-9544643-0-3

Inspiration for life and work can come from many sources. History Wardrobe's Number One Fan, Elsie, has loaned a wonderful book called *Swiss Notes by Five Ladies* - a truly charming account of a group of women hiking in the Swiss Alps region in 1874. Their leader and chaperon is none other than Mary Taylor, friend to Charlotte Bronte.

Three of the women succeeded in what is believed to be the first female ascent of Mont Blanc. It's remarkable just how athletic some 19th century women were, given the restrictions of their clothes. I'm still trying to track down a photo I once saw of women crossing a glacier in crinoline cages...

The photograph on the book cover shows a group of women from a similar era, in long skirts and stout boots. This led me to hunt out other images of women walkers... and prompted me to try some hiking of my own on the sunny slopes of Guatemalan volcanoes.

This summer I'm planning a tour of the Mont Blanc area to visit some sights seen by Mary Taylor's expedition. I'll also be seeking out spots shown in a find from a car boot sale: an album of photographs from 1920/21 showing a group of girls on holiday near Mont Blanc (opposite). They're clearly enjoying their winter sports, dressed in boots and woollies to enjoy the snow. To complete the theme - *How to Climb Mont Blanc in a Skirt* - an account of female adventurers in the 18th - 21st centuries.

In the next newsletter I'll turn to summer pastimes to show you fancy seaside fashion!



From Elsie's photograph collection:
Two sturdy ladies from the late 19th century enjoy the most important part of any walk... refreshments.

From the 1920/1 album:
A woolly scarf and big hat to go tobogganing...



... but only a blouse and long cardigan while taking to the slopes.



Also from Elsie's collection:
I'm not sure these ladies from the mid 1920s are really serious about their walking. The silk stockings are nice though...



A rather more modern hiker... I descend yet another volcano with all the comforts of modern gear.



From the Photo Album



Lucy Ridley has proved elusive when it comes to recent photographs, which is a shame considering how authentic she looks in the 1960s turquoise crimplene mother-of-the-bridal outfit in the hilarious **Fifty Years of Fashion 1940-1990**. (At least there is no photograph evidence of me in a pink shell

suit, with my hair up in a scrunchie.) I do, however, have this lovely picture of Merry as an 18th-Century lady's maid, whilst performing Portrait of a Lady at Markenfield - a delightful medieval moathouse near Ripon.



Markenfield, near Ripon. Just as beautiful inside...

On the Bookshelf

Miss Prudence Bebb will delight all fans of the Regency era with the latest in her charming series of social history books. The depth of her research is perfectly complemented by a light touch of wit. *Life in Regency Halifax* is published by Sessions of York.

Miss Bebb, a popular lecturer with various historical societies and author of many other books, both fiction and factual, is currently researching Regency Sheffield.

You may recognise the lady on the cover...

Life in
REGENCY
HALIFAX



Prudence Bebb

NewTalks

Research is going well for this year's new talk *Agatha Christie & Art Deco*, though I do wish there weren't quite so many Christie novels to read (75 + short stories & plays). I'm currently working out a motive for the murder mystery that will accompany the presentation. Could the photograph above be a clue as to method...? This talk premieres at the Frazer Theatre, Knaresborough, August 15th.



Designs are now complete for new Regency costumes to be seen in *Ladies of a Certain Age*. Several happy hours in Bombay Stores, Bradford, have resulted in some utterly sumptuous fabric finds, in particular for Lady Catherine de Bourgh. This talk premieres at the Cockerthorpe Georgian Festival, Friday May 4th.

History Wardrobe 2012 Presentations

Portrait of a Lady
Oh My Poor Nerves!
Ladies of a Certain Age
Florence Nightingale - Respectable Rebel
Votes for Women!
Titanic
Agatha Christie & Art Deco
Wartime Wedding
Fabulous Fifties
Fifty Years of Fashion 1940 - 1990
Story of the White Wedding

Contact History Wardrobe

For details of all talks, information on bookings or enquiries about costume history

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