



Dr Kate Strasdin's, of Falmouth University, delivering her paper "A Life in Fragments - Re-framing 19th Century Dress Practices through the Dress Diary of Anne Sykes" at The Reframing 19th-century Fashion and Dress Day Symposium. 11th June 2019. Photograph by the author.

Reframing 19th-century Fashion and Dress: a Symposium

Dr Hannah Rumball

On 11th June, University of Brighton hosted a symposium for 19th century dress and textile specialists, to gather like-minded scholars for research exchange and to formally establish the research network, now entitled *Nineteenth century dress and textiles reframed*. The day was open to all scholars with a research interest in 19th century textiles and dress and, following a call for participants, thirty international academics attended from as far away as Ireland and Canada.

Specifically structured around papers from invited participants, who are leading work in the field, the day considered a range of subjects, many of which employed a material culture methodology. As the day unfurled, and the five papers were delivered, clear and enticing themes emerged which intersected the wide array of objects and perspectives conveyed.

Mythologisation was an over-riding theme in Eleanor E. Houghton's (University of Southampton) "Charlotte Brontë's Moccasins: The Wild West Brought Home" as well as Dr Kimberly Wahl's (Ryerson University) "Clothing the Senses: Modes of Materiality in Pre-Raphaelite Dress." Wahl's paper considered how the mythology surrounding Pre-Raphaelite women's dress is interconnected with the longevity of the popularity of its evocation, as

well as academic understandings of the realities of Pre-Raphaelite clothing. Wahl noted how, in contemporary fashion spreads and styling, seeking to evoke the romantic ethereal quality of the aesthetic, there is a reliance on a sequence of key visual symbols which bear little relation to original realities of Pre-Raphaelite clothing. Wahl observed how the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood led the way in tendencies towards the alternative and unusual, especially representations of unconventional dress. However, the women depicted, such as Jane Morris, participated in the construction of the aesthetic by using their actual dress to carve out an artistic persona for themselves, outside of the confines of wider society and culture.

Houghton meanwhile, recounted her story of substantiating whether two glass-beaded, brown deer-hide, moccasins with matching ankle cuffs, belonged to the celebrated author Charlotte Bronte. Houghton openly acknowledged that her biggest task in working on Bronte's surviving wardrobe for the past three years, has been to unpick myth from reality. The slippers were donated back to the Bronte parsonage collection after 50 years of private ownership, and were embroidered with the initials CB, though not in Bronte's renowned careful, neatly embroidery style. The moccasins have a comfortable, informal structure and could easily have been worn as slippers, yet their design is associated with moccasins produced by the native peoples of Canada, to which Bronte never travelled. The derivation of the garments as belonging to, and being worn by, Bronte was successfully affirmed by Houghton through meticulous material culture and textual analysis. Letters illustrate their presence in Bronte's wardrobe, alongside a beaded bag, both almost certainly produced by the native Iroquois peoples of Canada. Here, a further theme of the global nature of dress and textiles' production and consumption arose, coinciding with the explicit themes raised in Jo Tierney's paper.

Tierney (University of Warwick) in "Globalising Nineteenth-Century Fashion History: The Circulation of British Textiles in West Africa, c.1870-1914" discussed how Manchester textile producers during the nineteenth century understood and catered for the West African market, to where most of their goods were being exported. Tierney illustrated how printed and dyed textiles were designed to meet the specific tastes of West African consumers, in contravention to the notion that colonies provided soft markets to British manufacturers, meaning manufacturers did not need to respond to regional demands and taste. Tierney's research illustrated how specialist designs were produced in varieties of colour ways for the West African market by Manchester textile manufacturers, and adaptations were made to existing manufacturing processes to imitate cultural and regional designs and techniques. Tierney's examination of 5,000 samples of wax printed or dyed cottons, in volumes of pattern books and in board of trade archives, from across 5 manufacturers illustrated several differentiating factors between textiles for West African and British consumption during this period. Motifs present in textiles for the West African market were far larger than for European markets, illustrating an understanding of West African visual culture, while a number of motifs present had cultural or regional significance. These textiles were produced for use as textiles wrappers, which could be manipulated and reused time and again, not as tailored garments. Yet, all that has currently been unearthed for Tierney's study are the discreet, rectangular samples dedicatedly pasted into folios; a form of a

fascinating 19th century compendium popular in business, and, as Dr Kate Strasdin's paper illustrated, domestic settings alike, and an especially fruitful repository for dress and textiles historians, even with an absence of corresponding completed garments.

Strasdin's (Falmouth University) "A Life in Fragments - Re-framing 19th Century Dress Practices through the Dress Diary of Anne Sykes" contemplated such albumisation practices, through what she has coined a "dress diary" from the period, gifted to her in January 2016. Collected together by one woman, Anne Sykes, between the 1830s and 1870s, over 2,000 rectangular or octagonal swatches are lovingly pasted into the leather bound volume and annotated with the wearer, garment and date details. Her research situated this example in the largely female practise of collecting, organising and consuming mementos, however Strasdin has sourced only five other surviving examples which bare parallels with her own domestic compendium of textile samples. Patterns of survival relating to dress diaries are rare, which she credited two factors. Firstly, the ephemerality of dress and textiles. Secondly, the practices' situation as a feminine hobby, which may have historically de-valued the object. Despite these two factors, Strasdin does think they were common. Strasdin's paper suggested how Sykes' proximity to Lancaster, then the centre of English textile production, would have influenced her understanding of fashion and textiles. Swatches compared to surviving dress examples from the period illustrate their fashionability, meaning Sykes and her community were clearly not women who were frightened of, or distanced from, fashion despite their situation in a provincial community.

This widespread, successful communication of fashionable styles and textiles was another theme which traversed the papers and consequent discussions, and was the explicit concern of Dr Katie Faulkner's (Courtauld Institute of Art) "In pure classical taste?": Sculptural discourse in early nineteenth-century writing on Fashion and Dress." Faulkner's research exploded the theory that sculpture and fashion were in opposition during the 19th century. Furthermore, that they were consumed in opposing manners, due to the readings of sculpture as permanence and ideal beauty, versus fashion as frivolity and extraneous adornment. Faulkner's research documented early European publications which intersected these concerns, illustrating how, during the early 19th century, a strong visual connection was created between sculpture and the dress people were wearing in popular publications. Faulkner discussed how, from the early 19th century, periodicals allowed women access to knowledge beyond the domestic, and were not addressed to a purely fashionable elite. For example, "Le Beau Monde" was considered, which published notes from lectures at the Royal Academy on the Greeks, on art, design and statuary. These educational articles, illustrate how those outside the elite sphere learned about 'high' art as a visual, and fashionable, inspiration. Faulkner's research illustrated how these periodicals used a varying set of approaches to address their readers but each presented dress and sculpture in relation to one another, regularly.

The explicit themes uncovered (including mythologisation, albumisation, the global nature of dress and textiles, as well as communication) through these papers, and discussions provided fruitful points for further discussion. They will be returned to in subsequent gatherings of *Nineteenth century dress and textiles reframed*. Partner events are now being

considered, between the network and bodies which specialise in the study of textiles, or even a conservation network, in order introduce new voices and perspectives to these raised themes. Should you wish to be kept abreast of any future events for *Nineteenth century dress and textiles reframed*, please email:

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