

Conservation Treatment:

Pair of Working Women's Stays c.1750's
Emily Austin

One of my main conservation projects during my one year HLF internship at The Bowes Museum, County Durham, was the conservation of a working women's pair of stays c. 1750. They were discovered concealed in a building in Whitby and are due to go on loan into the Victoria and Albert Museum 'Undressed: 350 Years of Underwear in Fashion' exhibition in 2016. The boned stays are constructed in brown cotton with a linen lining and thick wool padding.



Below: Overall front and back view of the stays laid flat before treatment.

The stays were in poor condition with several unsuitable previous repair patches stitched beneath large areas of loss to the padded linen lining. The patches were unsightly and offered very little support to the damaged areas. There were also abraded areas along the vulnerable edges which had worn away and were fraying. After discussions with my supervisor and the Museum's textile curator, it was decided that the treatment should focus on the structural damage and to leave most of the staining in tact.



Above: Before and after images of an area of loss to the linen lining.



Above: Overall inside view of the stays following conservation treatment.



Left: Measuring out dyes to dye patched supports.

Above: Underarm padding encased in dyed nylon net.

After general surface cleaning, the treatment began with the previous repairs being removed which left loose areas of the lining vulnerable to abrasion. Patches of linen were dyed using Novacron to colour match the stained lining, inserted and couched into place. Where the removal of the previous patches had left a void in the padded inner lining, small silk covered polyester wadding cushions were inserted, before securing the patches in place. Conservation nylon net was dyed using Lanaset and stitched into place over the vulnerable fraying and worn areas, this will reduce further abrasion during handling or mounting. The wide cotton tapes on the outside of the stays were blanket stitched where fraying to avoid further loss of threads.

The stays will go onto be mounted and packed for the exhibition next year.



Above: 1. Before removal of repair patches. 2. Humidification using magnets and with silk cushion inserted. 3. After conservation..

Conservation Treatment:

Various underwear for outgoing loan

Emily Austin

Alongside the working women's pair of stays, I was also required to assess and conserve three other undergarments for the upcoming Victoria and Albert Museum 'Undressed: 350 Years of Underwear in Fashion' exhibition in 2016. The objects needed various levels of conservation treatment which I needed to complete to a strict deadline.

The three objects were:

A box containing men's paper pants c.1960.

A boned maternity belt. Late 19th Century.

A man's belt worn for a wedding c.1830.



Above: The paper pants c.1960.

The paper pants required no conservation treatment and only loan documentation was created for these.

The boned maternity belt was surface cleaned using a low suction vacuum, followed by a smoke sponge. The narrow linen tapes were humidified using contact humidification (layer of semi-permeable Sympatex, blotting paper and Melinex as a barrier layer).

The man's belt required dyed support patches which were couched into place using fine Scala polyester thread. The splits in the brown cotton had occurred along seams and at button holes. Therefore some seams were unpicked and then re-stitched once the patch had been put in place.



Above: Surface cleaning and humidification of the linen lacing

These objects will now go on to be mounted and packed ready for transit to London next year.



Above: Before treatment. Patch inserted after another seam has been unpicked. After treatment.



Left: The maternity belt front and back views. Above: Moth casings and debris which were removed during surface cleaning. The lacings after humidification.



Above: Front and back images of the man's belt showing the brown cotton outer fabric, kid leather lining and linen lacings

Mounting and Storage:

Lace Bonnets from 'Common Grounds: Lace Drawn From the Everyday' Exhibition

Emily Austin

A three month project during my internship was the treatment and mounting of lace for a temporary exhibition of the Blackburne collection. Alongside my fellow ICON/HLF intern Maria Pardos, I wet cleaned these four lace bonnets to remove yellow discolouration and multiple creases. Following this we were given the task of creating a set of four invisible bonnet mounts.



Below: The bonnets on display above un-mounted bonnets.

Taking inspiration from other mounts currently in the Bowes Fashion & Textile Gallery, each bonnet was measured and a custom made base with Mellinex support was designed and made. The base comprises of foam core covered in Baumanns fabric attached to a metal stand with magnetic base. The upper support of Mellinex is stitched to the foam core base and provides an invisible mount for the light weight bonnets. We then worked alongside the curatorial team and technicians to install the bonnets into the gallery.

Once the bonnets were de-installed we then designed and made storage mounts for the four lace bonnets to provide support and prevent the creases re-forming.



Above: The finished Fosshape form with bonnet.

The mounts were made from Fosshape ©, a non-woven low melt polyester fabric. Sections of Fosshape© were stitched together prior to setting with a hot steamer. A pre-carved Ethafoam block was used as a mould for a small head shape. The Fosshape form was covered in silk jersey to provide a smooth fibre-free surface for contact with the bonnets. The Fosshape mounts are held securely when the storage box is handled but can be removed for easy access.



Above: The finished mounts in an archival hat box.

Above: Creating and covering the Fosshape form.

Assisting with Exhibitions:

'YSL: Style is Eternal' Exhibition July 2015

Emily Austin

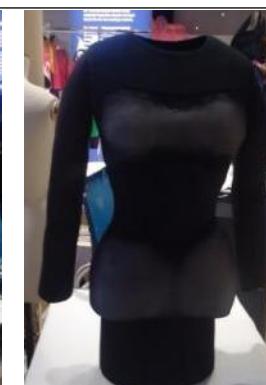
As part of my placement at The Bowes Museum I was able to assist with many of the temporary exhibitions which came to the museum. One of the most exciting was the contemporary fashion exhibition showcasing garments by Yves Saint Laurent. As part of the Museum's conservation team, I assisted with the condition checking of most of the items on display as well as costume mounting, dressing and installing accessories into the exhibition space.



Condition Checking and Un-packing:

Working alongside the external exhibition team from the YSL foundation I condition checked costumes and accessories.

I also helped un-pack over 50 outfits which all had accessories, as well as some archival materials.



Costume Mounting:

As a team I helped to create hat mounts from carved Ethafoam blocks for displaying pieces from the hat collection. Some of the mannequins needed adapting using padding or Melinex skirts added with limited time and materials. E.g. The above 1980's jacket required extra padding to be added and then I installed the adapted mannequin with jacket into a secure display case.

Dressing:

The majority of outfits were displayed on fibreglass mannequins which needed careful un-packing. Working in pairs I assisted with the dressing of the costume and attaching accessories which were secured using clear nylon thread. Before the opening of the exhibition all the mannequins were surface cleaning using museum vacuums.

