

## **Back to the Future of Fashion Past: Re-fashioning Future Garment Making**

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### **Abstract**

The analysis of historic garments can reveal hidden information of past construction and reconstruction processes. Historically many garments, owing to the shifting value of clothing both economically and culturally, were unpicked, repaired, restyled or re-fashioned. This is no-longer the case. With the main stay of contemporary fashion dominated by transglobal corporations owning multiple brands the cost of clothing has been driven down. Clothing is cheaper than ever before and for many it can be more cost effective to buy new (Hoskins, 2014).

It has been well documented that the current method of disposing of used clothing is unsustainable (Morley et al, 2009; Allwood et al, 2006). In the UK alone clothing of an estimated worth of £140 million goes to landfill every year (WRAP, 2017). Stoked by human desire and demand driven by a fashion system built on economic growth and obsolescence, worldwide these statistics are set to increase. By 2030 clothing consumption is projected to rise by 63 percent (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). This paper presents my practice-led research into historic methods of past reconstruction and re-fashioning techniques. Through primary research and practical application, I discuss if a solution can be found to the growing expanse of unwanted clothing by investigating how our predecessors valued and reused their clothes.

Drawing on the work of my master's thesis, Re-fashioning Shoddy: an historical and cultural exploration of the shifting values of recycled clothing (Aspinall, 2010); my practice-led doctoral research investigated historical re-fashioning skills by analysing, as case studies, three demonstrably altered historical garments. The case studies span a 200-year time frame, from the mid 18th century to the mid 20th century, a period which incorporated significant changes in textile and garment production, both industrial and domestic. The selected historical garments were reconstructed from one wearable style to another, exemplifying sewing and adaptation techniques pertinent to the culture which re-fashioned them.

The case studies acted as agents to inform the practice. The garments were studied in an archival setting following Jules Prown's (1982) material culture methodology, adapted and applied for the analysis. Historical re-fashioning techniques relevant to today's clothing culture were identified and realised into four contemporary garments. The resulting research pieces demonstrated that historical re-fashioning techniques can be reinterpreted and developed for use within the craft of present-day garment construction as a provision for sustaining and pro-longing the life of redundant and surplus clothing. The viability of the research was successfully evaluated by conducting a series of workshops with post-graduate students from the London College of Fashion.

The study of the historic garments uncovered narratives of re-fashioning techniques and skills that demonstrate the ingenuity and resourcefulness of past makers. The practice-led studies develop these narratives of skill by applying a design process generated from the research, for use in the construction of contemporary clothing.

The student workshops demonstrated that the design methodology can be applied as an instructive, pedagogic technique for teaching practice-based students' additional methods of developing a sustainable fashion practice. The process of examination coupled with research, immerses the student into a practice-led process which can foster a creative and historically informative approach to sustainable garment design and construction.

**Key words:** re-fashioning, material culture, pro-longed life, textile waste, pedagogy

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## Introduction

Extant garments are rarely found in flawless condition. Owing to the shifting value of clothing both economically and culturally, many items of surviving historic dress have been repaired, modified or even unpicked and re-fashioned. This research questioned whether re-fashioning techniques and skills previously used to prolong the life of garments could be applied in a contemporary context and developed as a sustainable design methodology.

The research was qualitative and practice-led consisting of two associated but separate areas of enquiry. The first was text and object-based with its research firmly rooted in the study of dress history, material culture and museum studies. Three garments were investigated as case studies. Two of the garments dated from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, pre-industrial and post-Industrial Revolution. The third was a Make Do and Mend garment constructed during World War II (WWII).

The second area of study was practice-led. Utilising findings from the first stage of enquiry a series of contemporary garments were constructed. These were situated within the study and context of sustainable clothing design and contemporary home dressmaking.

My interest in re-fashioned historic garments developed whilst employed as a researcher, technician and archivist in a conservation studio and simultaneously studying for an MA in Fashion Curation. It was cataloguing the studio's large and varied textile collection that I noticed that many of the garments had been repaired, modified, re-fashioned or all three. I became fascinated with the re-fashioned garments as the workmanship demonstrated a creativity that did not necessarily rely on skill but an ingenuity in the re-use of fabric.

Historically textiles were an expensive commodity and unlike today, where redundant clothing is frequently discarded, any responsible householder, rich or poor, would not let cloth go to waste (Baumgarten, 2002, p.184). One has only to view the 18<sup>th</sup> century court records from the Old Bailey London to comprehend this. Stealing clothing was a frequent and punishable offence. Whilst researching case study 1 I discovered that the original owner of the garment, Nancy Pawsey, had her trunk stolen 'from the Silso wagon' (1782) (Old Bailey on-line). The contents included a variety of clothing, a silk gown, a pair of stays and a handkerchief. The thieves were convicted and transported for seven years. The punishment is indictive of the value of clothing at the time. The embodied energy that went into the production of textiles and the construction of the garments was reflected in its monetary worth.

Additionally, there was money to be made by not only selling second-hand clothing but also through the pawn trade (Arnold, 1973; Ginsburg, 1980; Lemire, 2005). Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the introduction of technological advances such as the sewing machine and the paper pattern (Godley, 1995; Spanable Emery, 2012) it was generally still more cost effective to reuse and modify garments than to buy new.

This area of dress history became the focus for an MA project. I curated a hypothetical exhibition, *Re-fashioning Shoddy*, exploring the shifting historical and cultural value of recycled clothing. The exhibition took the visitor on a journey explaining that contemporary practices such as 'upcycling' are not new activities but have been practiced successfully for centuries.

This hypothesis raised further questions. Significantly if these past practices had been successfully used to repurpose or re-fashion garments, could some of these techniques be reintroduced as a contemporary creative waste saving design methodology? Could a solution to the growing expanse of textile waste be found by investigating ways which our predecessors re-fashioned their valued clothing?

These questions formed the starting point for my practice-led PhD. My aim was to critically examine historical re-fashioning, to ascertain if some of the skills and methods used could be applied in a contemporary context.

A component of this research involved testing the viability of such re-fashioning techniques in a series of workshops with post graduate students at London College of Fashion. A pedagogic process emerged. This paper discusses the development of the process from my initial aims of creating a waste saving sustainable design methodology.

Throughout this paper, the phrase 're-fashioning' references the skills and techniques involved in the remodelling and restructuring of garments. As my research focused on skills used to 're-fashion', clothing I have inserted a hyphen between the prefix 're' and 'fashion' to accentuate the Latin meaning of 'again; anew; once more' (2006, p.1200).

### **Analysis of Material Culture**

Material culture is the study of artefacts to extract the beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of a particular community or society at the time the object was created (Prown, 1982).

My research began with an object led examination of the re-fashioned historic dress. Dress historian, Lou Taylor (1998, 2002, 2004) asserts that when studying an historic garment, object-based research begins by focusing on its materiality and construction. For the formal investigative examination of the garments I drew principally on Jules Prown's (1982) methodology. Its pragmatic approach is multi-disciplinary and incorporates analytical, theoretical and practice-based methods. Additionally, it specifies an intellectual and subjective level of participation with the object. Important because it is impossible to ascertain with any certainty why a garment was re-fashioned. The evidence can only be analysed, and a speculation made.

The methodology is structured in three sequential and comprehensive stages: description; deduction and speculation. In addition, I incorporated practices from a range of other disciplines including anthropology, dress history, textile conservation and historical pattern cutting.

## **The Methodology**

### **Stage 1: description**

The descriptive phase examines the dimensions of the object, the material used in its fabrication, how it has been constructed and its articulation. To ensure that this phase of the examination process was time effective I devised an analysis form to simplify the recording of the garment's internal evidence.

In addition, I found that it was imperative to take photographs. A macro-lens was utilised to document the seams and the sewing threads used to construct and re-fashion the garment. Special attention was paid to small puncture marks in the fabric, frequently evidence of unpicked stitching.

Making annotated drawings, recording construction details, both back and front, became another essential tool. These drawings provided an essential link between my written descriptive and photographic evidence.

### **Stage 2: deduction**

The next stage in the methodology is the 'deduction' process (Prown, 2001, p.80). In this stage, the examination shifts from the actual object to a subjective relationship between the analyst and the object at the precise moment in time and involves the empathetic linking of the interpreter's world or experience with that of the object. During this stage it is the analyst's task to find out what [the object] can tell and perhaps deduce what it can no longer tell. The analyst can gain an intellectual comprehension of the object, the degree of which depends on the analyst's prior knowledge and experience.

### **Stage 3: Speculation**

In this phase of the analysis there are few rules or proscriptions. What is desired is creative imagining, the free association of ideas and perceptions, tempered only by the analyst's common sense and judgement (Prown, 2001, p.83).

As the 'analyst' I reviewed the information and evidence generated from the previous two stages. Questions arising during this evaluation provided an 'affective insight into the cultural values' (Prown, 2001, p.83) of the society of the persons who re-fashioned the garment.

This process led to a series of questions such as:

- When was the garment originally constructed?

- What processes were used during the construction and subsequent re-fashioning of the garment?
- How and why has this garment survived?
- Can information be gleaned that could be used in the re-fashioning of a contemporary garment?

The answers to these types of questions were integral to the practice phase of this research. The knowledge that sprang from this final stage of the methodology entirely influenced how I re-fashioned or, as in case study 1, constructed a new garment.

Whilst Prown's (1982) methodology was the linchpin to my garment analysis, certain phases of his more theoretical work were adapted to meet the needs of this practice-led study. To record the garments' internal evidence the analysis form had an added section for a description of workmanship (Pye, 1968; Zimmerman, 1981).

Additionally, to claim total objectivity in the descriptive stage was disingenuous, so I drew upon Fleming's 'identification' phase and included relevant questions such as 'is it actually what it purports to be...' (Fleming, 1974, p.156). The outcome of the analysis would be entirely different if, for instance, the garment turned out to be a historical reproduction designed for fancy dress or stage.

In stage 2, the deduction, I compared the garments' mode of construction, material, style and quality of workmanship with another garment of a similar date and type (Fleming, 1974; Severa and Horswill, 1989). In stage 3, the speculation, relevant questions such as those previously outlined were included. Questions of this type were critical to the formation of the hypothesis that was imperative to the practice-led outcome of this research.

### **The Case Studies**

The three garments, analysed as part of each case study, date from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. All three garments were selected from museum collections.

For each case study there was a lengthy garment analysis and speculation process followed by an equally lengthy practice-led process of design, application, and construction. For the purposes of this

paper I outline case study 1 and briefly summarise case studies 2 and 3. To read the full account of the analysis, design and construction journeys of the studies see my PhD thesis *Back to the Future of Fashion Past: Re-fashioning Future Garment Construction* (March 2019).

### Case study 1: Mrs Guiney's Gown<sup>1</sup>

#### Garment Analysis

Case study 1 was a pink brocade Princess dress constructed circa 1878-80 and located in the Museum of London. The name 'Princess' dress derives from the Princess of Wales (later Queen Alexandra) who made this dress style popular (Cunnington & Cunnington, 1960). According to the museum's catalogue the dress was constructed from a silk brocade woven circa 1750 - 1770. The dress was originally 'the property of Queen Charlotte' wife of George III (Museum of London/54.76.1).



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Fig. 1  
The Princess dress  
as viewed in the  
Museum of  
London.

Fig. 2  
The Late 18<sup>th</sup>  
century bodice.

Fig. 3  
The 1840s bodice.

Museum of  
London/54.76.1  
(Aspinall, 2011)

Other than being constructed from 18<sup>th</sup> century silk brocade, the dress bore no obvious stylistic or construction details which would link it to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The catalogue stated that the dress had been given to the last owner's great grandmother by Queen Charlotte herself.

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<sup>1</sup> For clarity, the garments in this research were referenced either by the name of the individual who owned or donated the garment to the museum in which they are housed.

Included with the acquisition was a late 18<sup>th</sup> century bodice, the bodice of an 1840s gown and a tied-up bundle of silk brocade offcuts. Both bodices were sewn from the same silk brocade used to construct the Princess dress, as were the offcuts.

The accession file held written correspondence between Mrs Guiney (the dress's former owner) and the then Assistant Keeper of the museum. Dated June 1954 the letters detailed the provenance of the dress, its bodices and offcuts. According to family mythology, the dress had belonged to Queen Charlotte and was acquired by Mrs Guiney's relative, Anne (Nancy) Pawsey née Wilton. 'She [Nancy] was a very skilled embroideress and apparently taught Queen Charlotte and her Court Ladies to embroider ...' (Mrs Guiney to Assistant Keeper, 1954, Museum of London/54.76.1).

There was also an undated note recording that silk historian, Natalie Rothstein had examined the garments and believed that the silk brocade used in their construction was woven in Spitalfields, London, possibly by the company Batchelor, Ham and Perigal.

In my endeavour to comprehend and extract the techniques used to re-fashion the Princess dress I began the analysis by applying the aforementioned material culture methodology. In the presence of the assistant curator I worked through the first two stages of the methodology.

Stage 3 of the methodology, the speculation, required reviewing the information ascertained in the previous two stages (Prown, 1982) and carrying out relevant contextual research to comprehend the motivations and techniques behind the garment's re-fashioning.

The findings from stage 3 culminated in the following speculative hypothesis.

### **Hypothesis**

Each year, Queen Charlotte, an advocate for the education of girls, would donate £500 per annum year to Mrs Pheobë Wright's School of Needlework, Soho, London. Opened circa 1772 the school taught impoverished but respectable but young women how to professionally embroider and unusually for this time, to read and write. Mrs Wright had two nieces, Nancy and Sarah Wilton, both of whom she taught to embroider.

In her correspondence with the then Assistant Keeper (Museum of London) Mrs Guiney makes specific reference to Nancy Wilton, of whom she is a distant relative (Mrs Guiney to Assistant Keeper, 1954,

Museum of London/54.76.1). Apparently, Nancy Wilton was 'considered the most skilled student in the school' (ibid). Queen Charlotte specifically requested that she work the primary embroidery on the head cloth of her state bed (Hedley, 1975, p. 319). We do not know the exact dates of when Nancy embroidered the bed hanging but it has been documented that the bed was 'near finished' in June 1777 (ibid.). Did Nancy, perhaps, acquire the dress from Queen Charlotte as gift of gratitude?

Alternatively, Queen Charlotte may have presented the dress to Nancy as a wedding present. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776 Nancy married Joseph Pawsey, the steward of Wrest Park in Bedfordshire. For an employer the gifting of clothing was an easy way of clearing a wardrobe and/or 'conferring favour' (Ginsburg, 1980, p.121).

Mrs Wright died in 1778 and the management of the school passed to Nancy. Nancy died on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1814 aged 67 (Roberts, 2004). Her only daughter, Harriet took over the running of the school. It is probable, as was suggested by the Assistant Keeper in his correspondence with Mrs Guiney, that Harriet acquired the garment and was the first person to re-fashion it. This explains the presence of the saved 18<sup>th</sup> century bodice that, on examination, appears to have been unpicked/separated from its skirt. The 18<sup>th</sup> century bodice resembles that of a *Robe à l'Anglaise* (Waugh, 1968, p. 306), the skirt and petticoat of which would have provided ample fabric for a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century bodice and skirt.

Referencing Mrs Guiney's letters, it would appear that Nancy's grandson's wife, Helen Deane was the last person to have worn the dress (Mrs Guiney to Assistant Keeper, 1954, Museum of London/54.76.1). Therefore, it is quite probable that she executed or commissioned its second re-fashioning. The bodice from the garment's second re-creation was removed and the silk brocade from its skirt was constructed into what it is today, the Princess dress.

When discussing the role of the souvenir Susan Stewart states that a memento saved from an experience can be intimately mapped against the life history of an individual (1993, p.138). This experiential reminder may have little monetary value but is of great worth to the possessor due to its connection to biography and its place in the individual's life. The object becomes emblematic of the 'worth of that life and of the self's capacity to general worthiness' (ibid.). Helen Deane may have preserved the 1840s bodice along with its sister bodice from the previous century for such reasons. Was the prestige of the dress's royal origins the motivation behind the safeguarding of these historic remnants?

The Princess dress is in good condition; it has received little wear and tear or corrosive staining. It is adorned with lace, ruching, pleated and gathered strips of a contrasting ivory duchess silk-satin.

The  $\frac{3}{4}$  length sleeves are embellished with a cuff of ruched brocade. However, on inspection, there is evidence of hand stitched seams running through these sections. The thread and nature of these tight stitches led Hilary Davidson, the then assistant curator and I, to speculate whether this decoration had been created from some aspect of the original 18<sup>th</sup> century dress. It was an interesting possibility and a consideration when deliberating which techniques could be extracted and applied in a contemporary context.

From this case study, I can conclude that there were many variables that allowed Mrs Guiney's gown to be in use for so many years.

The original 18<sup>th</sup> century gown was constructed from a superior quality, warm and expensive silk brocade that is notably strong and robust. Woven on a draw loom it has a thicker and denser materiality than its modern industrially woven equivalents (Tiramani, 2018). Its skirt and petticoat constructed from lengths of silk, sewn selvedge to selvedge, could be easily unpicked and repurposed.

By 1840, the date of the first re-fashioning, its style was outmoded but the fabric was not, and its value was significant. This could explain the reasoning behind the re-fashioning. At that time to re-fashion a dress or have it professionally re-fashioned was not unusual (Burman, 1999; Ginsburg, 1980).

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the gown was re-fashioned for the second time, mechanisation had transformed the textile industry. Not only was spinning and weaving performed on an industrial scale but also the sewing machine had been integrated into both the domestic and professional dressmaking sphere. Although mechanisation increased production high quality fabric such silk brocade was still at a premium.

In addition to the silk brocade's inherent economic worth, the dress's connection to Queen Charlotte may have generated an attachment; the royal association producing a sense of pride and worth. This status is evidenced by the Museum of London who have archived it as such.

## **Design and Construct**

### **Contemporary Explorations: Extracted Techniques**

The in-depth analysis of Mrs Guiney's gown enabled a comprehension of how, and possibly why the Princess dress was re-fashioned. With each generation, the appearance of Mrs Guiney's gown was altered, corresponding to the changes in fashion. The future gowns that lay dormant in the dress were not predetermined but, as with many historic garments, there was an implicit assumption that it would be re-fashioned, or the fabric repurposed.

Contemporary women's clothing is not generally constructed using the equivalent amount of material as 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century women's dress. Despite this, my creative practice was to not too dissimilar.

Drawing on information from the hypothesis, instead of re-fashioning a garment already in existence, I would design and construct an entirely new garment. Embedded within it would be another preconceived design, ready to be released and re-fashioned. By unpicking the seams of the original garment, the embedded design could be accessed and constructed by laying a paper pattern on the unpicked fabric pieces of the original dress. This fabric for the second garment could be cut out and constructed in the manner of home dressmaking.

Inspirational to my design process were vintage paper patterns. During WWII, to inspire British and American women to re-purpose textiles and clothing, the commercial companies produced patterns such as *Make Do & Mend for Victory* (Vogue 9137, 1942) (fig.4) <sup>2</sup>. One in particular demonstrated a way to transform a man's suit into a woman's skirt and matching jacket.

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<sup>2</sup> The late Joy Spanabel Emery, paper pattern dress expert and former Professor at University of Rhode Island scanned and emailed me a series of patterns dating circa 1942. All of which demonstrate how to unpick a men's garment and reconstruct it into a women's suit.

## Layout No. 3

### JACKET-VOGUE 9137

For this jacket pattern, the coat was entirely ripped apart except for the two front darts. If suit fabric is turned, front darts are ripped and sewed in again on the other side. Directions are given on page 55 for closing the pocket slits which are then covered with patch pockets. Sometimes an extra pocket is added at the top.

Other jacket patterns that may be used for the same effect, Hollywood 406, Advance 2617, Simplicity 3632.

### SKIRT-VOGUE 9001

The skirt was chosen because it is straight and has a kick pleat in the back which can be easily cut from the material available.

Full cutting instructions — pages 33, 34; special tailoring hints — page 35; easy sewing suggestions — page 48.

*This drawing and the picture on page 32 show the suit as it appears when completely remade.*

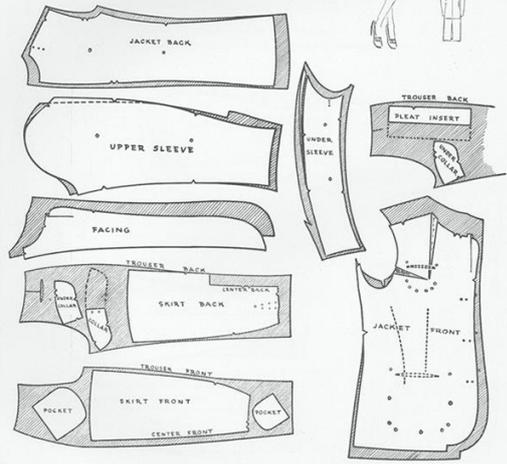


Fig.4

Layout 3 Jacket and Skirt. Vogue 9137. Make and Mend for Victory. Courtesy of the late Joy Spanabel Emery. Rhode Island Commercial Pattern Archive.

The stylized illustrations printed on the front envelopes of commercial paper patterns was an additional point of reference. Not only do they present how the patterns would look if constructed but also detail the quantity and type of fabric required. An early 1960s Simplicity 'slenderette' pattern illustration inspired me to incorporate an overlapping right front panel to the design of Contemporary Garment 1 (CG1). The additional panel would utilise a generous amount of fabric which would be critical when creating the design for the embedded second garment.

Throughout my research the historic textiles I examined were generally of a superior quality to contemporary industrial woven fabrics. The Princess dress was no exception. Although fashionable as a dress fabric in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries brocade silk is generally now used for upholstery purposes. To construct a dress designed to be re-fashioned I needed to select a material, not too dissimilar to the silk brocade, that could withstand unpicking and restitching.

I selected a silk-satin crepe. It is of a superior quality, has a structure and weight not unlike some historic silks and appears robust. It was essential that the fabric was durable in order to survive unpicking and reconstruction. Additionally, when constructing Contemporary Garment 2 (CG2), the density and lush sheen of the silk's weave meant that puncture holes of the unpicked stitches, with agitation, could be disguised.

Whilst it was imperative that my selected silk could withstand being unpicked and reconstructed, the style of the garment needed to be attractive and desirable. I hoped to design a 'classic', a garment that would not date easily. Gabrielle Chanel, a designer associated with 'modernism' and 'reductionism', both relevant to my design ethos, loved the colour black, famously creating 'the [classic] little black dress' (De La Haye, 2013). Released from its association with mourning (Hollander, 1993) black, from my own observations, is a popular colour choice for many. Black became the dominant colour not only for this design-practice but also for the following two case studies.

In the late 1870s when Mrs Guiney's dress was re-fashioned for the second time, a cream satin-silk crepe was introduced. This was likely to be a fashionable choice as many Princess style garments feature contrasting fabrics often applied as embellishment. For example, the V&A has on display a Princess dress constructed predominantly from blue jacquard-woven silk which has a ruched front created from a plain cream silk (V&A collection, museum no. Circ.606-1962). Acknowledging this feature, I introduced a secondary fabric into the design of my dress.

### **Contemporary Garment 1 and 2**

Contemporary Garment 1 (CG1) was designed to be deconstructed and re-fashioned into Contemporary Garment 2 (CG2). The paper pattern pieces of the second garment could, be positioned on the relevant dismantled sections of CG1 in the manner of home dressmaking. For this process to succeed the design of CG1 needed to incorporate adequate fabric, including seam allowance.

To achieve this, I incorporated an overlapping front panel. This panel, when unpicked, would provide sufficient fabric to construct the sleeves of CG2. There would also be surplus fabric to create a low funnel collar (CG2). The line of the skirt in CG1 would evolve from an A-line to straight shape with a side split in CG2. The self-fabric tie-belt on CG1 would acquire a buckle (CG2).

The original 18<sup>th</sup> century dress, given by Queen Charlotte to Nancy Wilton was constructed entirely by hand. However, by the time the garment was re-fashioned in the late 1870s the sewing machine was in popular use (Putnam, 1999). The progression of fashion along with the techniques used to construct the dress, from hand sewing to mechanisation, are echoed in each of its transformations.

I too, would integrate a detail pertinent to our contemporary fashion system into my design. This was achieved by incorporating, as my contrasting material, a digitally printed fabric.

Drawing upon the naturalistic themes of Spitalfields silks, as seen in the facsimiles of the sample books (Rothstein, 1994, p.71), I designed a contrasting fabric. Using a collage technique and importing contemporary fashion images from Vogue, my printed fabric is a modern emulation of these textiles.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, dye chemistry was quite advanced and the English silk dyers were able to create vibrant colours (Rothstein, 1994). With the aid of digital printing my textile mimicked a bright turquoise that echoed certain 18<sup>th</sup> century British silk swatch samples.

The contrasting fabric was to be printed on a silk that was of a similar weight and weave to the black satin in CG1. However, I was informed by the print technician at my research institution that such silk could not be used in the institution's printer. I therefore selected a more robust fabric, a cotton and silk blend.

Similar to Queen Charlotte's dress CG1 was designed and constructed for a pro-longed life, and to be re-fashioned. To achieve this, the garment's stitching needed to be resilient. A seam is improved in strength if two lines of sewing share the stress. A French seam, with two parallel lines of sewing, is twice as strong. All of CG1's internal seams were constructed with French seams. Additionally, this prevents damage caused by fraying.

The seam allowance was approximately 1.5cm. This is wider than used in manufacturing and home dressmaking. A common error is 'to spoil a garment by seeking too fine an economy' on the amount of material used (Williams, 1945, p.50). Generous turnings give strength and will allow for adapting and unpicking. Additionally, a 'small amount of fabric left over may prove of great value in the repair of any accidental damage or for minor alterations' (ibid.). The lining of CG1 is designed to transfer and adapt for CG2. Linings, as well as allowing the garment to hang well, protect the outer garment from body excretions and add warmth.

A flat pattern cutting technique was used to produce the pattern for CG1. The sleeves on CG1 are 'set-in' wide 'bell-sleeves' (McEwen, 1950, p. 75) and half lined in self-fabric. This sleeve lining is significant as the collar band for CG2 is designed to be cut from it. CG2 was designed to be distinctly different to CG1. The sleeve designs for both CG1 and 2 were influenced by illustrations featured in *Your Pattern Cutting* (MacEwen, 1950). This once popular book features fashions from the 1930s – 1950 that incorporate complicated design details. These require skilful cutting and fabric manipulation both of which were necessary for the success of my design process.

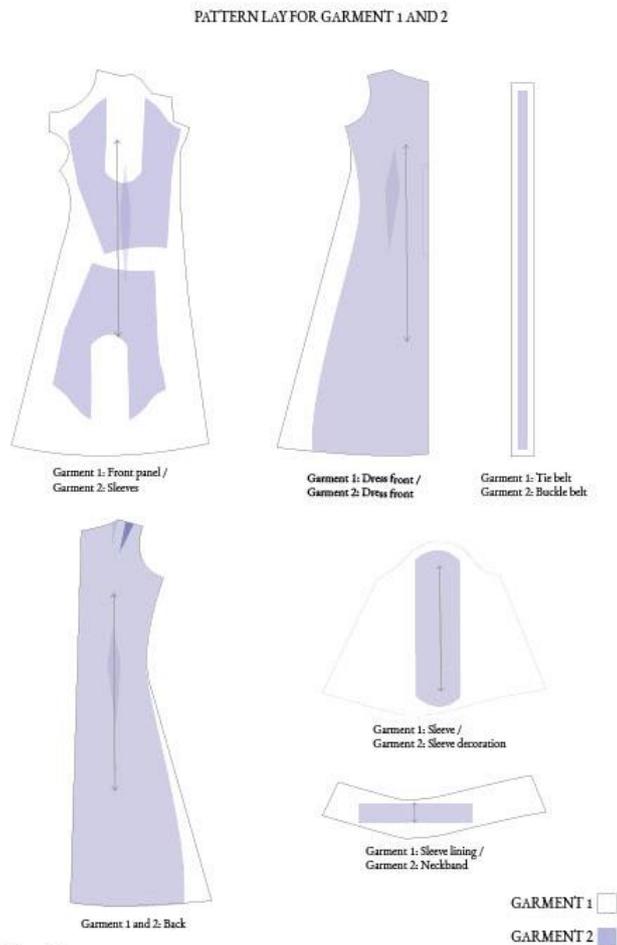


Fig.5  
Pattern lay for Contemporary Garment  
1 and 2.

Figure 5

To ensure that the patterns were correct both dresses were constructed first in calico, followed by further toiles in a cheaper fabric of a similar weight and handle to the final satin-silk crepe de chine.

Both dresses were constructed on a professional sewing machine. The self-fabric belt with covered buckle for CG2 was outsourced and constructed by Mrs. Rose of Taylors Buttons, London. The dresses fasten at the back with a concealed black zip with hook and eyes. Both garments were hand finished in order to embed value into the garments.

Comparable to my interpretation of the re-fashionings behind Mrs Guiney's dress, the Local Wisdom project cites examples of wearers loving and prolonging the life of clothing that had once belonged to relatives (Fletcher, 2016, p.162). To design this type of connection into a garment would be almost impossible. However, the decision to purchase a garment which has been designed to be re-

fashioned, the process of adaptation, along with time invested could generate an attachment that may resonate with a specific kind of wearer.

The techniques learnt from the analysis of Mrs Guiney's dress demonstrated that a garment can be designed and constructed with a possible intention for future reuse or re-fashioning embedded within it.

Furthermore, utilising simple technology similar types of garments could be embroidered with a web address allowing the wearer, if they so wished, to download the pattern of the second garment and reconstruct it into its second iteration. A dress with two lives: designed with longevity embedded into its structure.



Fig. 5  
Top row: Finished prototypes for Contemporary Garment 1 designed to be re-fashioned into Contemporary Garment 2 (bottom row).  
(Images: Wendy Lee Warne and Mark Tamer, 2017)



Figure 5

## Case Study 2

The garment analysed for case study 2 was a late 19<sup>th</sup> century women's *jaquette* located in the archives of the Palais Galliera, Paris, (B7421.1 no *habit transforme* LXVI/1890). Re-fashioned from a Louis XVI men's court coat (1774 – 1791), the *jaquette* is an example of the 19<sup>th</sup> century French bourgeois fashion of transforming 18<sup>th</sup> century male embroidered coats into female *redingotes* and *jaquettes* (Bosch, 2013). Bosch suggests that French bourgeois society of the 1850s - 1890s would choose to re-fashion 18<sup>th</sup> century men's court coats not for economic reasons, but for the social significance they held for the women who wore them. In French society at that time to wear clothes adapted from the *Ancien Régime* indicated the antiquity of one's family heritage, thus demonstrating your privileged class and relation to aristocracy.

Using the work of Nora Waugh (Diagram XXI, 1964, p.70) and referring to my own analysis and research, I constructed a half size toile of how I imagined the original 18<sup>th</sup> century coat to have looked. I then re-fashioned this toile into the style of the *jaquette*. In doing so I was able to figure out the techniques which had been applied in the re-fashioning process.

As previously stated, the coat may have been re-fashioned and worn as a signifier of a previous patrician class (Bosch, 2013). However, the re-fashioning was also an effective reuse of an expensive, hand embroidered, silk garment. Using a number of simple re-fashioning techniques, the decorative court coat was re-fashioned into a fashionable women's *jaquette* a century later.

For the creative component of this case study, it would have been possible to interpret the 19<sup>th</sup> century re-fashioning techniques on any number of male garments. Women have adopted male dress for reasons of power and practicality as well as style for decades. However, I sought to apply my learnt re-fashioning's skills on a garment that could be considered less obvious than a man's suit jacket or a tuxedo.

I considered the sartorial formality of British Army dress uniform to be not too dissimilar to the that of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century French court. The order of dress is authorised and prescribed with great importance placed on the presentations of its members.

Seeking a military dress garment to re-fashion I approached the military tailors Meyer & Mortimer in Sackville Street who donated a No.1 dress jacket which had been abandoned by its former owner.

Using skills extracted from the analysis this former No. 1 officers dress jacket was re-fashioned into a contemporary women's short coat designed and constructed for everyday wear. Each stage of the re-fashioning process from the narrowing of the waist to the application of the embroidered embellishment originated out of the speculative hypothesis of the re-fashioned 18<sup>th</sup> century court coat.



Figure 6

Fig. 6 Top: the *Jacquette* re-fashioned from a male court coat (circa Louis XVI) (B7421.1 *habit transforme LXVI/1890 Palais Galleria*). Bottom row: the short coat re-fashioned out of the No.1 army dress jacket. (Mark Tamer, 2018)

### **Case Study 3**

The garment analysed for this case study was a Make-do and Mend dress in the archives of Worthing museum. The garment is similar in style to many of the dresses constructed in Britain during WWII. It has wide padded shoulders, a flared gored skirt and falls just below the knee. It is a fascinating example of this waste saving scheme as the analysis revealed that it had been entirely constructed (and repaired) out of repurposed materials. Every aspect from its unusual zipper, originating possibly from a leather purse or handbag, to the embroidered inserts decorating the dress came were repurposed from previous objects. I speculated that no new materials had been bought to construct it.

After analysing the dress in detail, I identified the maker's inventive and imaginative reuse of redundant materials as a skill that could be explored further in my creative practice. I therefore decided to construct a contemporary garment by re-fashioning a redundant garment using only materials I had at hand. Nothing, not even thread, would be bought.

I decided to re-fashion a dress that was constructed, by my grandmother, six years prior to the outbreak of WWII. As a young woman she had crocheted the dress as part of her trousseau. The techniques I used to re-fashion her dress were not only influenced by the Worthing Make-do and Mend garment but also from research I conducted on the Make Do and Mend scheme. Additionally, to compliment the dress, I constructed a matching jacket made entirely from waste household material.

Case study 3 began as an examination of repurposing skills and strategies using techniques gleaned from the analysis of the Make-do and Mend Garment. The process of re-fashioning and repurposing was not only an exercise in adapting my technical knowledge to work with the materials at hand, but also an act of discipline to relinquish envisioned any predetermined design outcomes. The construction of the jacket and re-fashioning of the dress was constrained by the self-imposed prohibition on buying anything new. This constraint forced me to find inventive solutions. Unlike the re-fashioning of the No.1 dress jacket in case study 2, or the garments created for case study 1, the process became an act of remembrance and the repositioning of my grandmother in my memory.

Through the tactile process of working with the garments, a previously unexamined narrative of my grandmother's life evolved. The dress embodied or became a vessel that unveiled aspects of her life

before and after WWII. ‘Unveiled’ because her early life was never discussed, only pieced together after her death through the re-fashioning of the dress.

Mrs Guiney’s relatives (case study 1) re-fashioned the dress twice over approximately one century. Could this have been an act of remembrance, or was it a good re-use of expensive silk? In its dormant years her dress, similar to my grandmother’s, was also valued enough not to be discarded. The practice-led research for this case study produced an understanding of the attachments that can be formed and deepened through the act of re-fashioning a redundant but personally valued garment.



Figure 7

Fig.7 Top row: the original Make Do and Mend dress as viewed in Worthing Museum (museum no. 1962/3071) constructed from re-purposed materials. Bottom row: author’s grandmother’s dress re-fashioned by author to a contemporary style. The jacket, designed to compliment the garment, was constructed from used Dylon Colour Catchers® and embellished with left over wool unravelled during the dress’s re-fashioning process.

## Evaluating the Methodology and Design Process

To assess the viability of my design methodology I set up a series of workshops. Unlike my own process of examination, analysis and design practice, which took place over many weeks, the workshops would need to be much shorter. Instead, three two-hour sessions were devised to take place over three consecutive weeks. The aim was to introduce the participants to the concepts of historically inspired re-fashioning as an alternative form of sustainable design practice.

Two London College of Fashion course leaders, Alex McIntosh, (former head of MA Fashion Futures) and Suzanne Baldwin, head of the MA in Pattern Cutting and Garment Technology were approached. Both considered the workshops relevant to their students' final outcomes and the workshops were scheduled for the forth coming academic year.

An outline of the workshops with a suggested reading list plus three supplementary information sheets were sent to the course leaders to forward on to the students. The additional material included the 'garment analysis form' plus two other sheets: Identifying Fabrics; Investigating Historic Dress. These resources, devised by me, give suggestions on what to look for when investigating a re-fashioned/modified historic garment.

Outline of the Workshops were as follows: -

### Session 1: Overview (2hrs)

- Introduction and presentation of *Back to the Future of Fashion Past: Re-fashioning Future Garment Making* research.
- Discussion of the lifecycle of clothing both historic and contemporary, creatively reducing material consumption and waste.

### Session 2: Garment Analysis Workshop (2hrs)

- Object-based analysis of historic garment
- Analysis and documentation of historic garments (photo and annotated sketches)
- Initial design and ideation thoughts
- Students told to bring in a redundant garment for following session.

### Session 2: Facilitated Student Discussion (2hrs)

- Student Design Showcase

- Presentation of their re-fashioned garments (PowerPoint, photos, sketch book with garment experimentations)
- Group feedback on re-fashioning concept and skills, future applications

The workshops delivered to both cohorts were identical. In session 1, a 30-minute presentation was delivered discussing my research, the methodology and my informed research practice. The methodology was explained using a simple diagram illustrating the three stages of analysis: description, deduction and speculation. I explained that due to time restriction the students would work collaboratively. To illustrate the process, I placed the garments I constructed for case study 3 on a dress stand for the students to examine.

Session 2 began with a recap presentation and students were shown an example of my design research practice, the re-fashioned jacket constructed for case study 2.

After a short discussion the students moved on to viewing the historic garment (the descriptive phase).

In preparation, I had laid out a re-fashioned 19<sup>th</sup> century outfit. A grey silk bodice and its matching skirt along with its decorative off-cuts, removed and saved from the time it was re-fashioned. These included a number of triangular grey silk ruffles, long strips of hemmed gathered silk and a piece of matching silk with hand knotted fringing. The garment is an interesting example of historic re-fashioning. If examined closely, one can view evidence of how it was re-fashioned from one style to another. Sewn into the waistband of the skirt is the embroidered dressmakers label – I W Caley & Co. For clarity, I will henceforth refer to this garment as the Caley & Co.



Figure 8

Fig. 8 The re-fashioned Caley & Co. on display in the workshops. In front of the garment are the offcuts from the time that the garment was originally re-fashioned.

I encouraged the students to inspect and examine the garment (descriptive stage). As the Caley & Co. is a designated teaching garment, there was no need to wear conservation gloves. The students were given the choice whether they used the garment analysis form or not. There was no pressure to record its every detail as this would have been time consuming. They were encouraged to take photos and make sketches.

The students were given the opportunity to view the re-fashioning details through magnification (a portable thread counter). Using this device, they could observe the puncture marks of removed stitches, ironed out folds and hems with clarity.

The Pattern Cutting and Garment Technology students spent more time examining the Caley & Co. than the Fashion Futures students. Some even began to 'decode' the tiny perforations, evidence of unpicked stitching, giving opinions on how they considered the skirt of the garment had been re-fashioned. Without realising it, these students had moved into the deductive stage of the analysis, bringing in their own knowledge they were subjectively discussing the garment.

At the end of the examination, I placed the Caley & Co. on a dress stand for the students to observe in its three-dimensional form. They were surprised by the small size of its waist. I explained that the wearer would have worn a corset. This would reduce the waist and also support the bodice. By imparting this knowledge, I was moving the students further into the deductive stage.

I then offered a suggestion as how and when I considered the Caley & Co. had been re-fashioned. Whilst I had not analysed the garment in any depth, I put forward the idea that the ensemble bore a resemblance to Christian Dior's 1954 evening gown the 'Zemire' (V&A collection T.24:1 to 5 -2007). I suggested that as clothing rationing in the UK had not ended until 1949, the Caley & Co. was possibly re-fashioned using techniques similar to those promoted during the wartime Make-do and Mend campaign.

At this point I emphasised that the examination and subsequent research was not a conservation or curatorial exercise, it was an interpretation of historic re-fashioning skills and what we as practitioners could draw from them

To encourage the students to look beyond the Caley & Co.'s appearance and accelerate their analysis through to the deductive stage I had selected some relevant texts to aid them with their analysis. By looking at the books my intention was to inspire and encourage the students to research and formulate a short hypothetical analysis of how the Caley & Co. may have been re-fashioned.

The sessions ended with groups displaying the redundant garment that they would re-fashion using the techniques gleaned from their analysis of the Caley & Co.

At the beginning of the third and final session, a short revisionary presentation was given. The students were allowed 30 minutes to put the finishing touches to their re-fashioned garment. The session was then handed over to the students. Each groups presentation demonstrated the ways in which they had re-fashioned redundant garments, drawing on what they had learnt from the analysis of the Caley & Co.

Whilst the garments produced by both cohorts of students were all creative and inspired examples of how historical re-fashioning can be applied to re-purpose redundant clothing, in this paper I will discuss the work of two groups of students, one from each workshop.

### **MA Fashion Futures**

This group of three students entitled their presentation *Reconstructing with Historic Inspiration*. They demonstrated how they had been inspired by the Caley & Co, to re-fashion two redundant bras into a single lingerie set, consisting of a smaller bra with a matching thong.

The bras had been donated to the group by one of its members. Both black bras were underwired, and one was embellished with white embroidered lace. They had received little wear and owner was keen to give them a second life.

The aforementioned garment analysis form was used to not only record details of the Caley & Co. but also to document and map the re-fashioning of the two bras. For this group, the prepared form made it easy and quick to take down relevant data and make sketches.

When originally constructed, the Caley & Co. was heavily embellished with strips of decorative ruched silk. When it was re-fashioned the strips were removed and some were applied to trim the sleeve cuffs. These repurposed decorative embellishments along with research from *Victorian Fashion & Costumes from Harper's Bazaar: 1867-1789* (ed. Plum, 1974) inspired the group to re-fashion the two bras into the matching lingerie set. They stated that the examination of the historic garment and observing how the decorative elements had been repurposed were major influences in their re-fashioning process.

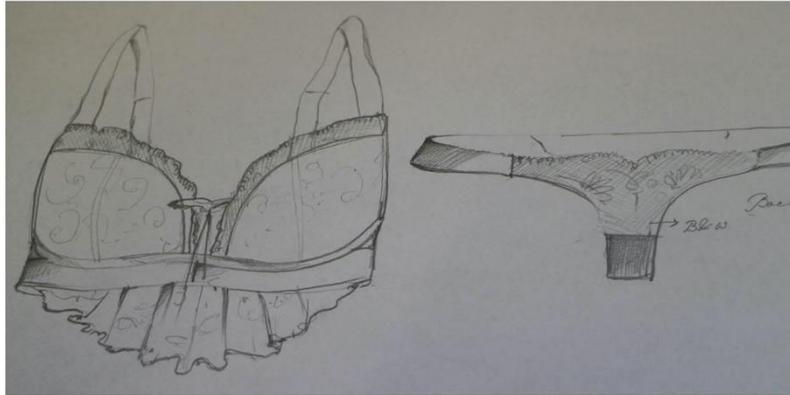


Fig. 9 Students from the MA Fashion Futures, use techniques inspired from the analysis of the Caley & Co. to re-fashion two redundant bras into a matching lingerie set (Aspinall, 2018).



Figure 9

### MA Pattern Cutting and Garment Technology

This group of four students began with four redundant garments: two shirts; a man's jacket and a women's trench-style short coat. They began, as stated 'by observing everything' (2018, Ying as quoted in Aspinall, p. 169). They considered all aspects of the Caley & Co. but focused mainly on the

gathered embellishment on the cuff of the bodice and the garments offcuts. They noted that the bodice of the Caley & Co. was constructed from ten panels of silk, a technique they described as 'segmentation' (2018, Ying as quoted in Aspinall, p. 169).

During their presentation the group discussed their progression through the methodology; beginning with analysis of the garment through to conducting secondary research on Victorian pattern cutting techniques, specifically bodice construction.

Their process began by closely surveying their four redundant garments. Fashioned with a full circular front and back they unpicked the sleeves of the trench-style short coat. Inspired by the volume of fabric pleated into the waist band of the Caley & Co.'s skirt, they utilised the unpicked circular-shaped fabric of the 'trench' and, from the centre-back, pleated it outwards to create a style resonant of Caley & Co.'s skirt.

The second jacket was unpicked and reconstructed with one half turned inside out. To give the jacket a fitted appearance it was re-fashioned using their 'segmentation' method. Two pleats were inserted into the back of the jacket. They were placed specifically to make the jacket more comfortable; when the jacket moved the pleats would open. To create a look similar to the overall shape of the Caley & Co, they positioned the shoulders of the redundant jacket on each hip.

One of the shirts was unpicked and its fabric used as a lining. The re-fashioned garment fastened at the centre-front using buttons repurposed from one of the shirts and a strap unpicked from the trench-style jacket. The group progressed through all three stages of the methodology and from the analysis constructed their final garment.

At the end of the final session I asked both cohorts of students for their opinions on the workshops and asked them to fill in an anonymous feedback form. The MA Fashion Futures' all agreed that social media had given upcycling a bad reputation. They realised that when one took the effort of taking a garment apart and considered its aesthetic, it could be re-fashioned and didn't have to look like it had been upcycled. Furthermore, the process of the historical investigation gave them a different perspective on the re-use of redundant garments.

The feedback from the MA Pattern Cutting and Garment Technology students focused on the technical side of re-fashioning. One group acknowledged that all their redundant garments were well

constructed but commented that the quality of the materials ‘was not that great’ (2018, Bowen as quotes in Aspinall, p.171). Jia considered that the outcome of their re-fashioning process was a way of ‘challenging stereotypes’ stating that we need to move away from the idea that the ‘designer is king’ (2018, Jia as quoted in Aspinall, p.171).

The workshops were designed to introduce the students to historically inspired re-fashioning as methodology to prolong the life of redundant or waste garments. It was apparent when reviewing the anonymous feedback form that the majority of the students found the sessions informative and interesting. Many learnt how to analyse a historic garment and importantly how past techniques historically used to prolong the life of clothing could be applied in a contemporary context to reduce waste.



Figure 10

Fig. 10 The MA Pattern Cutting and Garment Technology group, using techniques extracted from the Caley & Co., re-fashioned four garments into their inspired jacket.



## Conclusion

I began my research project with the aim to critically examine historical re-fashioning to ascertain if the skills and methods once habitually applied to re-fashion garments could be applied in a contemporary context as a waste-reducing sustainable strategy. Whilst I did not set out to be an

educator, through my research I realised that teaching historically inspired re-fashioning skills in an educational context could not only be an informed way to develop this research but also an instructive technique in teaching practice-based students additional methods to developing a sustainable practice.

The workshops verified that the process of examining re-fashioned historical garments and then applying these interpreted re-fashioning skills on students own redundant garments was innovative and informative. Innovative as the workshops gave the students the opportunity to apply their practical skills using a different approach to sustainable design and garment construction. Informative as they acquired knowledge of historic garment construction techniques and an understanding of a material culture research method analysis.

Whilst my process of examination, research and practice for the three case studies took substantially longer, was more detailed and immersive, it is apparent from the workshops that this adapted version of Prown's (1982) methodology and my subsequent re-fashioning process has the scope to be condensed to reach different audiences with the potential to influence future fashion makers.

This research determined that by applying the adapted methodology in an education setting, the study of historical re-fashioning technique can introduce future fashion makers to:

- Alternative modes of clothing design and construction.
- Past construction techniques and skills including historical methods of pattern cutting.
- Dress and textile history.
- The validity of the dress archive.
- Collaborative practices of working with redundant and surplus clothing.

As a pedagogic process the workshops demonstrated that this practice-led research can be applied to educate and inspire future fashion students in these neglected but relevant re-fashioning processes as an alternative method of waste reduction.

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