

DRESS & TEXTILES COLLECTION

Introduction

The museum began collecting costume in 1913. About 4500 items have been acquired since then. Dating from the 17th century to the late 20th century, the collection's strength is in the 19th century, particularly women's dress.



The fragile nature of dress requires a large reserve collection so that when there is an opportunity to display examples in a permanent gallery, they can be changed frequently; it also means we have a good resource for temporary exhibitions and research. Because fashions alter seasonally museums need a reasonably large collection to show a comprehensive history of dress.

The museum's dress collection reflects the fashionable reputation the town maintained during the late 18th and 19th centuries. Some items are similar to those you would find in other fashionable regional towns, others are unique to Cheltenham. Most of the collection would have been worn by fairly well-off people; poorer people continued to wear their clothing until it wore out.

▲ Woman's dress, about 1790

Women's Dress

Dresses, suits, outerwear, accessories and underwear are all represented. Some of the most outstanding items are a double-sided painted 17th-century fan; two late 18th-century dresses, one hand painted cotton, the other silk brocade; a purple and cream court dress of about 1874; and a small collection of 1920s beaded dresses.

Men's Dress

Much of the men's dress consists of formal suits worn for dinner or weddings. There is a small collection of army uniform, mainly late 19th century; some accessories and informal wear. Of particular interest is a fine collection of 18th-century embroidered waistcoats.



Man's waistcoat, about 1760 ▲

Children's Dress

The collection is mostly 19th century and its strength is in baby gowns, some identified as christening, and baby caps. There are a few main garments and accessories from the 18th and 20th centuries.

What's special to Cheltenham ?

The collection has some unique examples of dress with local importance; some are nationally significant as well. These include a small group of clothes worn by the Whinyates family who lived in Cheltenham and India in the early 19th century. The clothes are European in style but made from Indian fabrics, for example muslins embroidered with silver and gold thread work or beetle wings.



▲ Woman's bodice, about 1805, Whinyates collection

Another special aspect of the collection is the dress and accessories from local Cheltenham shops. These date back to the late 19th century and include garments from Shirer and Haddon, Cavendish House and Wards; footwear from Slade and a few hats from local milliners, including Madame Wright and Madame Beatrice Taylor.

Dress from World Cultures

The museum has a small collection of dress from Asia, including dragon robes and tiny shoes for bound feet from China. There are late 19th-century and early 20th-century examples of national dress including some from Austria, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Turkey and former Yugoslavia.

Textiles

The collection includes a few patchwork quilts from the early 19th century to the early 20th century. There is a large collection of lace, mostly 19th century, and a mixture of machine, bobbin and needle laces. Embroidery is represented by samplers ranging from mid 17th-century hand samplers to those from the 18th-20th centuries and other hand and machine embroideries. The museum has a small collection of furnishing textiles from the late 19th-mid 20th centuries, some of these relating to the Arts & Crafts Movement. There are textile samples by the Arts & Crafts designers Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher who were based in Painswick.



Detail of quilt by Jane Pizar, 1860 ▲

Archive

There are fashion plates dating from the 18th to the early 20th centuries and some paper patterns and magazines.

Current collecting

Very limited space restricts our collecting; therefore at present the museum is only considering costume and textiles with a Cheltenham connection or special significance.

To find out more about specific examples of costume and textiles held by the museum please contact: Collections Manager, Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum, Clarence Street, Cheltenham GL50 3JT

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Email: artgallery@cheltenham.gov.uk

Visit our website: www.cheltenham.artgallery.museum



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