

1. Progress report

1.1. Publishable Summary



The CRP aims to create a new interdisciplinary European community of academics, museum curators and fashion and design professionals to debate issues concerning early modern fashion and its relevance to contemporary questions of creativity and innovation. We are using the networks and knowledge that we generate to support the public understanding of European creativity and innovation, both past and present, through our work with museums such as the Victoria and Albert Museum (UK), the Royal Armouries (Sweden), the National Museum of Denmark including the Open Air Museum (Denmark).

Work on our 'Fashioning the Early Modern project' began in June 2010; this report describes the achievements of the first eight months in February 2011. Our highlights include the development and launch of our interactive website and communication tools; extensive press coverage of the start of our project in Finland, Sweden, Denmark and the UK; the appointment of all of our research assistants and postdoctoral researchers and the commencement of their work; the first meetings of our Project Management Committee and of our External Advisory Committee and our first workshop which included dedicated early career training. We have also begun the planning of the gallery redevelopment at the Victoria and Albert Museum and our contributions to knowledge transfer elsewhere in the UK, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. Full details of our work can be found on: www.fashioningtheearlymodern.ac.uk.

1.1.1 Main Results to Date

Creativity and innovation are a key concept for 21st century governments. The European Union's 2020 plans are for an 'Innovation Union' while new ways of capturing creativity and their links to new technologies and new ways of living are seen as key for a sustainable economic future for Europe: <http://www.innovation-futures.org/>. Our project challenges the notion that innovation, and its promotion and management, is a new feature of European economies, arguing instead that it played a key role in early modern trade and society. The adoption of fashionable goods, whether these were new textiles, lace, ruffs, new ways of wearing ribbons and gloves or of fashioning one's hair, were very visible indicators of social standing and attitudes towards change. This study helps us to track transmission both across, time, place and social communities of new goods. It allows us to explore the factors behind their acceptance or rejection and the political, economic and social factors that enhanced or inhibited the acceptance of product innovation.

In our first meetings the Project Management Committee and the External Advisory board selected a range of fashionable goods to track between 1500 and 1800. This will be done by both project members and through crowd-sourcing using the website and our dedicated Facebook page. The latter already has 100 'friends' and has become an important point of contact for the CRP. We also have established a JISC email list which we use to provide regular updates about our own and related projects. The postdoctoral researchers and the Principal Investigators have been working in the relevant archives and collections and have already gathered substantial primary evidence for the project. The Research Co-ordinator has been creating the database and communications methodologies that will enable the sharing of this material.

Our first workshop took place in November 2010. This had two purposes, firstly to debate the question of what constituted innovation in fashion in Early Modern Europe, using knitting and knitted objects to overturn some basic conceptual ideas about the diffusion of innovations (See Wejnert, Barbara (2002): ["Integrating Models of Diffusion](#)

[of Innovations: A Conceptual Framework". *Annual Review of Sociology* \(Annual Reviews\) 28: 297–306. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141051](#) for background) and secondly, to train the early career researchers who had been awarded bursaries to attend the workshop.

The two-day event was held at the Victoria and Albert Museum’s Department of Furniture, Fashion and Textiles and was attended by twenty-two participants from six European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Sweden, United Kingdom). This included three curatorial staff, ten project members, eight PhD and postdoctoral students and one early career professional. The first day included a presentation from Professor Evelyn Welch on innovation and fashion. This was then followed by short 10 minute presentations from the PhD students who covered the use of fashionable items in Early Modern England, Scotland, Flanders and Italy. The students were able to get feedback from the more senior scholars on the project, including Professor John Styles, the chair of the external advisory committee and an ERC senior investigator working on early modern fashion, our Associate Partners from museums in Denmark and specialists in knitting from Denmark and Finland. Day One finished with a paper by Dr Maj Ringgaard from the National Museum of Denmark and the Centre for Textile Research, University of Copenhagen on knitted objects in Scandinavia, with a special focus on the high-quality items (some of which are still in private hands) that contradict the normal associations of knitting with lower social groups. On Day Two we were able (thanks to Queen Mary, University of London PhD student Susan North), to examine these items from the V&A collection, looking closely at seventeenth-century knitted silk jackets and other knitted garments in detail. Importantly, the curatorial staff from the V&A and the Danish museum collections were able to guide the early career and other academic colleagues through the process of careful object analysis, ensuring that we thought about methodological issues as well as captured key information about the garments themselves. Photographs of our activities can be found on our website. A selection is posted below:



Photos taken during the “Knitted-objects: close-inspection” session (led by Susan North, Queen Mary, University of London), Friday 12 November, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

1.1.2 Expected Results

During the next two years, we expect to create a central point for scholars and the general public who are interested in the study of early modern fashion in Europe. Through our website materials, publications and events, we will disseminate new information and ideas about the transmission of fashion which will be of relevance to a large group of academics and non-academics, including fashion professionals. We will also have been able to train an expanding group of early career academics and curatorial staff from different European countries in interdisciplinary

approaches to material culture studies and questions of creativity and innovation. We are also expecting to contribute to the debates concerning the policy infrastructure for innovation in Europe today.

1.1.3 Potential Impact and Use

Because of the close involvement of curatorial staff as both Principal Investigators in their own right and as Associated Partners, we have been able to have an impact from the very start of our project. It is important to stress that the Knowledge Transfer is a two-way process that has been embedded into our research methodology. Academic staff and PhD students from University settings are learning as much from the curatorial staff as the latter are gaining from Higher Education Institutions. For example, the Principal Investigator of Individual Project 02, Lesley Miller is leading the Victoria and Albert Museum's redesign and redisplay of the Europe, 1600-1800 galleries into which information gathered by the HERA partners will feed; the Associate Partners from the National Museum of Denmark were able to attend the London meeting and are now supporting the work by providing a detailed understanding of the materials in their collections. We will also be working with the legal profession and policy makers to ensure that the past informs policy in the present. In April we will be bringing the Fashioning the Early Modern project together with the other two HERA copyright projects together with Evelyn Welch's AHRC-funded 'Beyond Text: Performances, Sounds, Images, Objects' to hold a one-day event on 'Beyond Copyright'.

Contact Details

Evelyn Welch
Professor of Renaissance Studies
School of English and Drama
Queen Mary, University of London
Mile End Road
London E1 4NS
United Kingdom
Email: e.welch@qmul.ac.uk
Tel: +44 20 7882 5006
Fax: +44 20 8981 2848

Project Logo

