

HISTORY SOCIETY

REPORT BY MASTER DAVID HUNT

On the evening of 8 November the Bingham Room hosted a History Society lecture organised by the indefatigable Master Timothy Shuttleworth. The speaker was Professor Evelyn Welch MBE of King's College, London, a fellow of both the Royal Society of Arts and the Royal Historical Society. The subject of her address, which she illustrated with an extensive selection of portraits, photographs and other visual aids, was 'Black Caps, Ruffs and Gold-Trimmed Gloves: What the Fashionable Judge Wore in Renaissance Europe'.

After a characteristically amusing introduction from Master Shuttleworth, during which he commented that Francis Bacon so loved shopping in Cheapside for Italian silks that he might fairly be described as the first shopaholic, Professor Welch began by reference to the portrait of Sir Richard Hutton, a judge of the Court of Common Pleas, which hangs in the Bingham Room.

Sir Richard was called to the Bar by Gray's Inn in 1586, and his portrait was a continuing theme throughout her talk. (Incidentally Sir Richard, as Master Shuttleworth reminded us, was one of the five judges who in 1637 were brave enough to defy King Charles I and dissent in the Ship Money case of *R v Hampden*.) Professor Welch expressed the hope that by the end of her lecture we would be able to look at many of the portraits which grace the Inn in a new light, and that we would also get a sense of what it felt like to wear the garments that we see so proudly displayed in them.

As Professor Welch reminded us – by reference to a portrait of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham and a close associate of King Charles I, in which he is depicted wearing an extraordinary lace collar starched and held high on a metal frame with a slashed doublet dripping with pearls – in the first part of the 17th century it was the men who were fashionable, both in England and in continental Europe. It was, she explained, the contrast between such extravagant costumes and, for want of a better word, the uniforms worn in court during the period from 1580 to 1680 that she wished to explore.

The contrast was starkly illustrated by three portraits that Professor Welch showed together on the screen. In the centre stood Sir Edward Coke, flanked by two elegant gentlemen of the 1618–1630 period. Both gentlemen were wearing elaborately embroidered doublets and breeches, and outlandish shoes, and also displaying a fashionable amount of leg, clad in white satin stockings.

Sir Edward, however, shows himself as a judge in scarlet robes, with a miniver cloak (miniver being an unspotted white fur edged with grey derived from the belly fur of the winter coat of the Northern red squirrel) and what had by now become an extraordinarily unfashionable renaissance ruff. On his head he wears a coif and a black cap. This dress accords with the set of rules which the

judges signed on 4 June 1635. These included the rule that 'judges in term-time are to sit at Westminster in the courts ... wearing their velvet caps and coifs of lawn and cornered caps'. Judges were 'to wear square caps all the time at Westminster'.

Caps were also obligatory 'in Divisional Courts, in church on Sunday mornings on circuit, at the opening of the Commission, and when trying criminal cases'. From spring to mid-autumn it was mandatory for judges to wear a taffeta-lined black or violet silk robe with deep cuffs lined in silk or fur, and a matching hood and a mantle, the taffeta lining being replaced with miniver during the winter months. Special scarlet dress replaced this standard costume on holy days or on visits by the Lord Mayor, scarlet being a colour traditionally restricted to the highest levels of the nobility. As Professor Welch explained, in time the coif became the wig and the ruff became the bands, with bands replacing ruffs by the time of the Restoration.

Professor Welch then focused on the tactile qualities of, in particular, gloves and ruffs. The ruff was, as Professor



Sir Richard Hutton.

Welch put it, a really strange thing to wear. Indeed, by the time of Sir Richard's portrait, ruffs were completely out of fashion and no one else was wearing them. A ruff consists of layers of pleated starched linen, often with an underlying metal support. It kept the head up and was very uncomfortable – there is no rational reason to wear one (but then there is no rational reason to wear a tie either!). To manufacture a ruff, one needed a piece of linen of high quality. You starch it, pleat it, pin it and then sew it onto your collar. But after a week or so it gets filthy, so you have to unstitch it, unpin it and then, after laundering it, go through the entire sequence all over again. So what was expensive was not the ruff itself but its upkeep. Owning a ruff involved complicated and messy work, and a whole suite of them, to wear in succession, was required.

As for gloves, how did one let other people know that one was up to date and fashionable, while at the same time demonstrating that one belonged to a particular tradition? Sir Richard achieved that by clutching a single glove in his right hand. It was not because he had lost or dropped the other glove, but simply that it had become the custom for portraitists to show their subjects with one or two gloves. When one looks more closely at Sir Richard's glove, it is very long, reaching up to the elbow – more of a gauntlet for outdoor wear, particularly riding. What Sir Richard is displaying is an absolutely up to date best glove that you can buy in Cheapside.

It was a feature of such gloves that they had an extensive fringe, elaborate braid and very long fingers, indeed false fingers in the sense that they would extend far beyond the wearer's own fingers. The main body of the glove was made by glovers using a wide range of animal skins, dog skin being particularly popular for the finest gloves (a most unattractive idea for a dog lover like myself). So such gloves were an expensive way to demonstrate

both your fashionability and your wealth, but also that you belonged. The decision to show yourself holding a particular type of glove was clearly deliberate.

Another feature of such gloves is that they were perfumed. So any contemporaneous viewer of Sir Richard's portrait would have known that the gloves were imbued with either the very strong scent of musk or, in the summer, the lighter scent of, for example, jasmine or rose water. The glover would work alongside the perfumier to create a specific scent individual to the wearer.

Nor is it just your gloves that would be perfumed; so are your wig and your shoes and, if you are a woman, your farthingale, in part at least because you are terrified of pathogenic air and you are trying to create a bubble of personal air around yourself.

Finally, Professor Welch turned to another, and to me at least surprising, aspect of gloves, namely their giving and receiving as an important part of courtiership during the Elizabethan and Stuart eras. By way of example, she showed us a list of perfumed gloves given to Queen Elizabeth I at the 1599/1600 New Year. For both men and women, the perfuming of gloves, the giving of gloves and the use of gloves as a ritual gesture was far more important at the time than the wearing of gloves. Indeed one of the challenges in the context of bribery was that often the gloves came stuffed with gold coins.

The Treasurer rounded off the evening with a short speech of well-deserved thanks to Professor Welch. I referred earlier to the hopes mentioned by Professor Welch at the outset of her lecture. I for one left the Bingham Room with those hopes fulfilled; I am sure that the remainder of the audience were of the same view. I also left relieved that I never had to wear a ruff! ■