

# Meridith Towne

Costume Historian & Researcher, Period Fashion Dressmaker & Tailor, Speaker & Presenter,  
Educational Workshops

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## Summary

A Costume Historian who delights in researching the effect of clothes on history - particularly women's history!

As a Costume Historian I help historic sites, libraries and social groups to add a unique element to their meeting by providing lively informative presentations on women's history through fashion, enhanced with an extensive visual display of original costume.

My range of talks include; 'Romance in the Raj', 'Make Do and Mend', 'Confessions of an Edwardian Shopoholic', '100 Years of Hats', 'Women of Adventure'. New for 2014, in celebration of The Tour De France in the UK, 'The Need for Speed: Victorian Lady Cyclists'.

See [meridithtowne.co.uk](http://meridithtowne.co.uk) for more details and to book me as a speaker for your event.

As a Historic Dressmaker, I help museums and historical properties to increase footfall and income by creating costume to; complement exhibitions, enhance visitor experience with dress-up rails and boxes, to be used by staff and to facilitate learning within their education programme, which makes the whole property unique and attractive to visitors. I can provide a maintenance service to ensure the investment in costume is economical in the long-term.

I offer made-to-measure period costume for private individuals looking for a unique or themed outfit. Gaining inspiration from original costume and working with the clients ideas, I design and make the costume they have always wanted, fully tailored, to create a truly bespoke outfit.

For more information and a guideline of prices see [meridithtowne.co.uk](http://meridithtowne.co.uk), or email me at [merry@meridithtowne.co.uk](mailto:merry@meridithtowne.co.uk)

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## Experience

### **Costume Maintenance at The Royal Armouries, Leeds**

January 2012 - Present (2 years 3 months)

I undertake monthly maintenance of the costumes for the Education Department so they can continue to wear costume for special events and presentations. Tasks can be as simple as replacing buttons to altering whole garments, and has lead to various commissions for additional items.

### **Costume Historian and Dressmaker at Meridith Towne**

March 2011 - Present (3 years 1 month)

## **Freelance Presenter at The History Wardrobe**

March 2011 - Present (3 years 1 month)

I assist with costume-in-context presentations for The History Wardrobe, which takes me across the country and to various different venues, including libraries, historic properties and ladies social groups. Audiences can range between 20-200 people and provides a great opportunity to share my passion for costume with others.

As part of this role I undertake additional research, using 1st hand sources where possible, on each subject to enhance my performance. Subjects include 'Titanic', 'Agatha Christie and Art Deco', 'Story of the White Wedding', 'Votes for Women', 'Wish You Were Here', and as of 2014 'Women of the Great War'.

This role can also include making historical costume to display and wear at events as part of the presentations.

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## Projects

### **Lady Darnley's Suit for Rochester Bridge Trust Exhibition**

December 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

The Rochester Bridge Trust approached me with a photograph of Lady Darnley at the opening ceremony of one of the bridges in Rochester in 2014. They wanted the outfit she was wearing recreated for their new exhibition.

The photograph did not highlight the details of what she was wearing so extensive research into the fashions of the period, including the fabrics and colours that were popular, was undertaken to get a clearer idea of how the ensemble would look. Magazines, original costume (from my private collection), swatch books, dressmaking guides, contemporary patterns, fashion plates and photographs were all used in the interpretation of this project.

The suit was made from dark red silk taffeta, as the evidence from the photograph indicated the suit was of a dark colour (red was a popular choice) and made of a fabric that was crisp in nature. It was lined in a striped collar as seen in the photograph. As the collar and fastenings could not be seen from the original image, a simple rounded collar was added and a hook and eye fastening with matching belt was incorporated in the design (similar to contemporary dress designs). The jacket was given structure by adding wadding to the shoulders and front and quilting it with the lining before attaching to the main fabric, as seen on a contemporary jacket I have in my collection. The ruffled effect on the bottom of the jacket was an intriguing feature of the outfit. I could find no evidence of anything similar in the sources I had at my disposal, and though peplums were popular in the years presiding the First World War, they were very different to this. Hence, I made the decision to include the ruffling onto the jacket rather than the skirt.

Original accessories of shoes, handbag, feather boa and gloves were all sourced for the display and a hat was commissioned from Farthingdale Hats.

### **1950s Wedding Dress**

August 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

A private commission for a 1950s inspired wedding dress.

Though based on an original vintage pattern, the bodice was redrafted to accommodate the clients larger bust. Further adjustments, including three-quarter length sleeves and a ruched waistband were also added to enhance the design. Made from duchess satin, with a boned bodice and a lace overlay.

### **Regency Seaside Dress**

July 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

Created to be worn by Lucy Adlington in 'Wish You Were Here' presentation with The History Wardrobe.

Made from a very light cotton with a line and spot pattern. Extensive planning and care was taken in the construction to ensure the lines of the pattern ran straight throughout the dress and matched on the pattern pieces. The dress had long under-sleeves and short puff over-sleeves. Both sets of sleeves had piped cuffs in a contrasting cream. A back fastening dress, with self covered buttons and hand-stitched button holes.

### **Knights' Cloaks**

July 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

A commission to produce four cloaks for The Royal Armouries, Leeds, to be worn by the staff working as knights at the Summer Jousting events. The cloaks were colour co-ordinated to the standard and heraldry of each knight so they could be easily identified in the field by the spectators. They were made from velvet with a satin lining - a feature specified by the client as the cloaks needed to slide easily off the lances without getting caught. The corners of the collars were reinforced with leather and two eyelets were inserted so the cloaks could be attached to the knights' armour.

### **Wish You Were Here**

July 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T., Lucy Adlington

A happy history of seaside clothes and swimwear from the less than flattering Regency bathing chemise, the Victorian woolen suit to the dangers of the knitted swimming costume and the birth of the bikini. A great opportunity to research, not only the history of swimwear, but also the whole culture of the seaside and the Great British Holiday, plus the evolution of sun oils and creams. An extremely fun and lively talk supported by a wealth of knowledge gained by extensive research.

### **15th Century Archer's Surcoat and Hose**

May 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

Made to be worn for medieval archery demonstrations. The design was based on an original surcoat from the period but adapted for purpose with additional movement in the shoulder and back, plus drawstring waistband on the hose for ease of use. Care was taken to find wool and linen in authentic colours and crewel wool was used to hand stitch the finish.

### **Agatha Christie and Art Deco**

March 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T., Lucy Adlington

What clues can clothes provide about a suspect? How did Poirot know that it was the shoes that gave the murderer away? This is a talk featuring a dazzling display of 1920s and 1930s costume whilst uncovering the truly mystifying world of Agatha Christie crime fiction.

### **Great War Fashion**

February 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T., Lucy Adlington

Due to be released in October 2013, *Great War Fashion* by Lucy Adlington, will provide a fascinating and comprehensive insight into the experience of women during the Great War told through the clothes they wore. I feature throughout the book modeling original garments from the period, including a bathing suit and nurse's uniform.

### **Women of Adventure**

January 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

A new talk on the intrepid women of the Victorian and Edwardian era who climbed the Alps in crinoline cages, carrying parasols and travelled the Arabian desert wearing corsets and flannel underwear!

Extensive research was undertaken to uncover the stories behind the many women who undertook these, or similar journeys. Replica costumes were made for the display and to wear plus a full display of original maps and luggage was sourced.

An extremely popular talk, booked for Spring 2013 by multiple libraries and luncheon groups.

### **Katherine Stewart Riding Suit**

January 2013 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

A reconstruction of the suit worn by Katherine Stewart as she explored the Arabian Desert at the beginning of the 20th Century, part of the collection at The National Museum of Scotland. Made from white pincord and modeled on a male riding suit with a long loose jacket and riding breeches. Buttons on the interior of the coat and top of the breeches can be attached using a tab so the jacket can be hitched up to facilitate riding.

### **1860s Victorian Dress and Winter Cape**

October 2012 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

A gold silk bodice and skirt ensemble with braid detail, made for Victorian themed Christmas events. Due to the seasonal conditions a green velvet, wool lined, hooded, hip-length cape with a fur trim was also made. Additional items such as a gold silk drawstring bag and fur muff were created to compliment the outfit.

### **Battle of Agincourt Tabard for Re-enactment**

June 2012 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

The recreation of a medieval knights tabard worn for the re-enactment of The Battle of Agincourt, plus it featured on an episode of 'Dick and Doms Absolute Genius' on the CBBC. The project was extensively researched to achieve the highest possible level of authenticity within the restraints of modern materials. Hand worked eyelets, delicate stitching for the heraldry and a hand finish mean it is suitable for re-enactment.

### **1920s Evening Gown Inspired by Aubrey Beardsley**

June 2012 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

A bespoke full length bias cut evening gown, unique in design, featuring hand-drawn decorative panels down the back, mimicking the fall of a peacocks tail. These panels were heavily drawn and worked into using a layer of fine black chiffon, beads and sequins, the top one featuring the head of the peacock. The highest panel came round the hips to the front, where a clasp provided the fastening of the dress and gathered the material to give the gown shape and fullness. The dress was commissioned and worn by a young lady for her 21st birthday party.

### **Tudor Dress for Lute Player**

April 2012 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

A red and gold damask Tudor open gown with gold petticoat created for a lute player doing musical events. The bodice was stiffened with buckram and front fastening with hooks and eyes. Gold piping detail to the waistline gave the waist distinction.

### **Viking Dress for Jorivk Viking Festival 2012**

February 2012 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

The Jorvik Viking Centre commissioned a Viking outfit for the bride at the Viking Wedding event to be held at York Minster, as part of The Jorvik Viking Festival 2012. The dress is made from wool, the hangerock is linen and both were trimmed with hand-woven wool tablet weave.

### **16th Century Gown for Conisbrough Castle, English Heritage**

March 2010 to Present

Members:Meridith T.

This gown was made to be worn for tours and education workshops at Conisbrough Castle, English Heritage. Made from blue wool and lined with linen, the bodice has a centre front fastening with hooks and eyes and long sleeves, with large turned back cuffs.

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## Skills & Expertise

**Recreation of historical costume**

**Period sewing techniques**

**Historical Research**

**Costume Design**

**Historical Interpretation**

**Fashion History**

**Sewing**

**Dressmaking**

**Presentations**

**Written & Oral Presentation Skills**

**Engaging Public Speaker**

**Draping**  
**Fashion Design**  
**Costumes**

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Education

**The Northern College of Costume**

Historical Costume for the Stage, 2010 - 2010

**Durham University**

Bachelor's degree, Archaeology, 2006 - 2009

Activities and Societies: Ladies Polo Captain for Durham University Canoe Club

**Wilberforce College**

A-Level, Apparel and Textiles, 2004 - 2006

**Hornsea Secondary School**

1999 - 2004

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[Contact Meridith on LinkedIn](#)