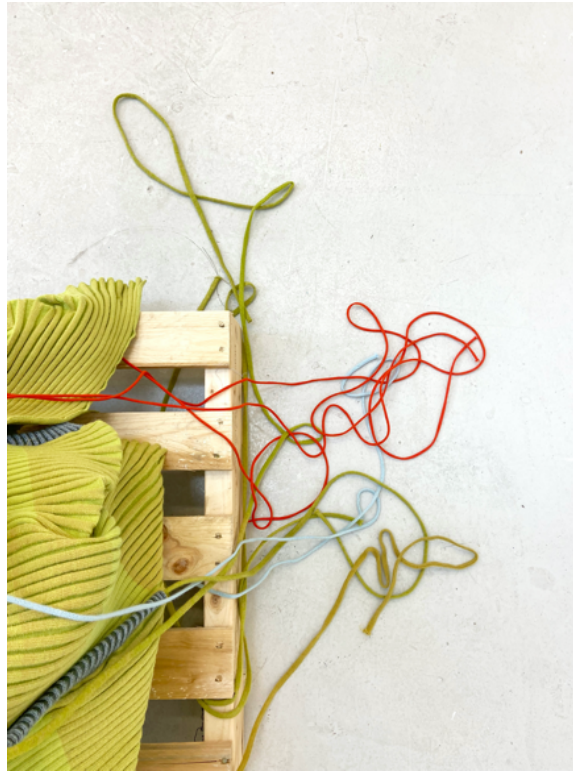


Multiple Identities: telling life stories through objects



*Image credit: Fabric and Patterns,
Work by Izzy Coyle. Textile Design BA (Hons).
Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London*

Tuesday 29 April 2025, 11am-5pm
In the Buttery, Wolfson College, Oxford
followed by a 5.30pm evening lecture and drinks reception

This joint study day between the Centre for Fashion Curation (London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London) and the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing interrogates the overlap between material culture and life writing, from memoir and biography to the care, collection and interpretation of objects.

ual: centre for
fashion curation

OC**LW**
OXFORD CENTRE FOR LIFE-WRITING

Programme

10.30am	The café is open for refreshments. Please find your way to the Buttery ready to start at 11am
	Session 1: Everyday Lives, chaired by Dr Kate Kennedy
11am	<i>Welcome</i> Dr Kate Kennedy, Weinrebe Director, Oxford Centre for Life-Writing
11.15am	<i>Keepers of the Royal Wardrobe: connecting lives across 500 years</i> Dr Eleri Lynn, Chief Curator of Historic Royal Palaces
11.45am	<i>Making menders visible: female ingenuity & invisibility, 1930s—1950s</i> Dr Emily Cockayne, Associate Professor of Cultural History, University of East Anglia
12.15pm	<i>Doing feminist life-writing with clothes: the creative possibilities of Jean Rhys's dress</i> Dr Sophie Oliver, Senior Lecturer in Modernism, University of Liverpool
12.45pm	Discussion
1pm	Lunch break You can bring your own packed lunch, or buy lunch in hall using any credit/debit card. We have reserved a table at the back of the hall for study day participants to eat lunch together.
	Session 2: Objects and Identity, chaired by Rebecca Gowers
2pm	<i>National Identity and Music in Eighteenth-Century England</i> Dr Alice Little, Researcher in music and the history of collecting
2.30pm	<i>Elio Fiorucci: Escaping Description</i> Judith Clark, Professor of Fashion and Museology, University of the Arts London
3pm	<i>Three objects, three moments, three stories.</i> Dr Christine Checinska, Senior Curator, Africa and Diaspora: Textiles and Fashion, V&A
3.30pm	Tea and coffee break Refreshments will be served in the Buttery
4pm	Session 3: Thinking Differently About Collections, chaired by Dr Alice Little
4pm	<i>Window Dressing</i> Claire Wilcox, Professor in Fashion Curation UAL and Visiting Scholar OCLW
4.30pm	<i>Peopling a collection</i> Dr Georgia Haseldine, Senior Curator, V&A East Storehouse
5pm	Closing notices: Claire Wilcox and Dr Alice Little
	Comfort break
5.30pm	Evening talk in the Leonard Wolfson Auditorium: Alexandra Pringle, former editor-in-chief of Bloomsbury Publishing, in conversation with Claire Wilcox, introduced by Hermione Lee
7pm	Drinks reception in the cafe
7.30pm	ends

Biographies and abstracts



Dr Kate Kennedy is a biographer, cellist, and broadcaster. She is one of the foremost critics of twentieth-century music, and lectures in Music and English at Oxford University. Kate is the Director of the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing and a Supernumerary Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford, having previously held Research Fellowships in English and Music at the University of Cambridge. She is also Director of the Centre for the Study of Women Composers, Director of the Museum of Music History, and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Her newest book *Cello: A Journey Through Silence to Sound* was published in August 2024 with Head of Zeus / Bloomsbury. It is a group biography that weaves together four narratives of cellists who suffered various forms of persecution, injury, and misfortune. *Dweller in Shadows: A Life of Ivor Gurney* was published by Princeton University Press in 2021: it was shortlisted for the Royal Philharmonic Society Prize and awarded the American Musicological Society Prize in 2024. The result of many years of research, it is the first comprehensive biography of the poet/composer's work. She has published widely, including *The Silent Morning: Culture and the Armistice, 1918*, *Literary Britten*, and *Lives of Houses*.

She is a regular broadcaster and academic consultant to both BBC TV and radio, writing and presenting many Radio 3 documentaries, on subjects ranging across music history and biography. In 2017, she was awarded Oxford University's Vice-Chancellor's Prize for Excellence in Public Engagement with Research.



Dr Eleri Lynn, Chief Curator of Historic Royal Palaces

Keepers of the Royal Wardrobe: connecting lives across 500 years

Eleri's talk will focus on her first acquisition for Historic Royal Palaces, that of a 16th century silk hat known as the 'Bristowe' hat, said to have given to one Nicholas Bristowe by Henry VIII himself after the Siege of Boulogne. The provenance of the hat, and the family lore surrounding its origins, led out into research questions that both illuminated overlooked lives at the Tudor royal court and showed the continuity of care for objects down the centuries. It also provoked questions about authenticity, provenance, and the value of practice-based research.

Dr Eleri Lynn is an experienced curator, museum leader, and award-winning author, specialising in Tudor fashion and textiles. She has curated and overseen exhibitions and galleries at Historic Royal Palaces, and previously at the Victoria and Albert Museum and Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales. Eleri is a Trustee of the Royal School of Needlework.



Prof. Emily Cockayne, Associate Professor of Cultural History,
University of East Anglia

Making menders visible: female ingenuity & invisibility, 1930s—1950s

This paper will look at textile mending (broadly focused in the 1930s—1950s). It will consider not just some of the methods employed to extend the lives of garments but also the experiences of the menders. Glimpses into the lives of Eleanor Griffiths and 'Ruth K' will reveal how the invisibility of mending in the period around the war rendered some details of the lives of menders invisible to us now.

Emily Cockayne is Associate Professor in Cultural History at the UEA and author of four books: *Hubbub. Filth, Noise & Stench in England* (2007), *Cheek by Jowl. A History of Neighbours* (2012), *Rummage. A History of the Things we have Reused, Recycled and Refused to let go* (2020), and *Penning Poison. A History of Anonymous Letters* (2023). In *Rummage*, Cockayne detailed historic mending and recycling efforts and explored some of the back history of the 'Make Do & Mend' mentality. Cockayne is also a keen mender and patchworker.

Objects on display: mending paraphernalia, a book from the 1930s, a small cotton flour bag and a mid-twentieth century tunic. They are all handleable.

Dr Sophie Oliver, Senior Lecturer in Modernism, University of Liverpool

Doing feminist life-writing with clothes: the creative possibilities of Jean Rhys's dress



My talk will focus on an object I have often used to think about a method of writing lives and cultural criticism through clothes. This unusual dress, a house dress from the 1910s that belonged to the author Jean Rhys and now belongs to me, is a sensory route into particular histories, a material means to speculate, and an imaginative connection between me and the modernist, feminist past that I study. I will show how I have used the dress in combination with traditional scholarly methods to write about Rhys's life and work, and I will suggest what is new, productive and feminist about this approach. I will finish with some reflections on all that is afforded by doing feminist life-writing and criticism with objects, perhaps especially clothes.



Sophie Oliver is Senior Lecturer in Modernism at the University of Liverpool. As an interdisciplinary curator she has made exhibitions at the British Library and the National Poetry Library, and is working on another for the Harry Ransom Center. As a feminist scholar her work has been published in *Modernist Cultures*, the *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*, *Modernism/modernity*, and collections devoted to feminism, archives, Jean Rhys, and fashion.

As a critic she appears regularly in the *TLS* and on BBC radio. Her recent BBC documentary, 'At Home with Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas', told a story about their lives together using objects from their homes. Sophie's first book, *Undone: A Women's History of Modernism Told Through Clothes*, will be out in 2026 from Manchester University Press.

On display: Jean Rhys's dress [please do not touch]



Rebecca Gowers has written two novels, both longlisted for the Orange Prize (now the Women's Prize for Fiction). In 2014 she became the fourth editor to revise and update *Plain Words*, the classic guide to English usage by her great-grandfather Sir Ernest Gowers, after which she wrote her own satirical companion volume, *Horrible Words*, both published by Penguin. She has also written two works of non-fiction inspired by family archive materials. Each is focussed on the cultural ramifications of a Victorian murder case that happened to involve one of her forebears, in the first case as the principal witness; in the second, as the victim. *The Swamp of Death*, about a grisly 1890 murder in the Canadian backwoods, was shortlisted for a Crime Writers' Association Golden Dagger award, and was serialised on Radio 4, while *The Scoundrel Harry Larkyns and his Pitiless Killing by the Photographer Eadweard Muybridge* was shortlisted for a Historical Writers' Association Golden Crown award. She recently appeared in the feature documentary *Exposing Muybridge* along with Muybridge aficionado Gary Oldman.

Dr Alice Little, Researcher in music and the history of collecting
National Identity and Music in Eighteenth-Century England

This paper focuses on music collecting in eighteenth-century England, particularly the work of John Malchair (1730-1812) and William Crotch (1775-1847) in Oxford and London, who collected and categorised music into national groups. Music labelled 'English' was conspicuous by its absence from manuscript and printed tune collections of the eighteenth century, and yet there were many tune collections being made in England at this time. Today's talk will introduce this material and discuss how it might have been used to help collectors and musicians define national identity – of themselves and others. To hear discussion and examples of the music mentioned today, you can listen to Alice's podcast, *Folk Tunes and Englishness* (Bird Lime Media, 2021).

Dr Alice Little works on the history of music, music collecting, and national music. She has held documentation and curatorial posts at the British Museum, Horniman Museum, Museum of Music History and Bate Collection of Musical Instruments; she was a Research Fellow in Music at Oxford University, was a Junior Research Fellowship in History at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and held two Knowledge Exchange Fellowships at The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities to work on eighteenth-century manuscript and printed music collections.



Judith Clark, Professor of Fashion and Museology, University of the Arts, London

Elio Fiorucci: Escaping Description

The paper will look at research conducted in private archives in Milan and London leading up to the recent exhibition dedicated to 'Elio Fiorucci' held at the Triennale di Milano. Fiorucci's own voice – taped at the end of his life – provided the clues to the famous idiom associated with his eponymous fashion brand.

Judith Clark is Professor of Fashion and Museology and Co-Founder of the Centre for Fashion Curation at University of the Arts London; and visiting Professor at IUAV, Venice. She is the founder

and Director of Judith Clark Studio, an experimental interdisciplinary studio dedicated to fashion exhibition-making.



Dr Christine Checinska, Senior Curator, Africa and Diaspora:
Textiles and Fashion, V&A

Spinning a Yarn of One's Own

Three objects, three moments, three stories.

The cross-cultural entanglements brought about by migration cause the meanings and values of everyday things to shift. This performative presentation explores the way in which such things as a grey wool pinstripe suit, a set of iron curling tongs and a painting, when taken together and meditated upon, can suture the fragmented stories of the Jamaican presence in Britain. Each object connects to my father, my mother and me. Each moment represents a point of transition. Each story weaves together to form a fragment of an autobiography in which fact and fiction blur.

Dr Christine Checinska is an artist, designer, curator and storyteller. She is the V&A's Senior Curator of Africa and Diaspora Textiles and Fashion, and Lead Curator of the international touring exhibition "Africa Fashion". She serves on the Costume Institute's advisory committee for the 2025 exhibition "Superfine: Tailoring Black Style". In 2025 she will embark on a research fellowship at Yale Centre for British Art. Christine exhibited work the exhibition "The Missing Thread", Somerset House, London, 2023-2024. She was a co-curator of "Makers Eye: Stories of Craft", Crafts Council Gallery, London, 2021. Recent publications include 'Material Practices of Caribbean Artists Throughout the Diaspora', in "Crafting Kinship: A Visual Journal of Black Caribbean Makers", Marlene Barnett (ed.), 2024.

Objects on display: a man's pinstripe suit, curling tongs, possibly a painting. All can be handled.



Prof. Claire Wilcox, Professor in Fashion Curation, University of the Arts London and Visiting Scholar, OCLW

Window Dressing

Ten years on from the V&A exhibition *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* Claire will be discussing how vitrines and glass windows, the photographic lens and the crystal ball, have been a constant source of intrigue, informing both her curatorial career and, as the daughter of shopkeepers, her own relationship to the mystery of cabinets and collections.

Claire Wilcox is Professor in Fashion Curation at the Centre for Fashion Curation and Cultural Programming, University of the Arts London and former Senior Curator of Fashion at the Victoria and Albert Museum. She has curated many exhibitions at the V&A including Radical Fashion (2001), Versace at the V&A (2002), Vivienne Westwood (2004), The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957 (2007), From Club to Catwalk: London Fashion in the 1980s (2013), Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty (2015), Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up (2018) and most recently, Fashioning Masculinities: the Art of Menswear (2022).

Objects on display: a pair of memento mori earrings containing locks of hair. Created by Shaun Leane for Alexander McQueen's 'Sarabande' Collection, Spring-Summer 2007.



Dr Georgia Haseldine, Senior Curator, V&A East Storehouse
Peopling a collection

On the eve of opening the new V&A East Storehouse, Georgia will share how Storehouse has been designed to make space for many voices and plural interpretations. This talk will discuss the strategies devised with local communities to 'people' the museum's vast stored collection with memories, experiences and reflections as well as mull on how objects can facilitate the telling of life stories.

Dr Georgia Haseldine is Senior Curator of V&A East Storehouse, a project she has led since 2022. She previously collaborated with Theaster Gates on the Question of Clay research project (V&A, The Whitechapel Gallery and Serpentine Galleries) and devised numerous public engagement projects from setting up brickfields to connecting anti-racism protestors to industrial ceramics collections. She completed an Arts & Humanities Research Council-funded doctorate at Queen Mary University of London and the National Portrait Gallery on the art history of protest in 2019 for which she was awarded a scholarship from the British Federation of Women Graduates and a post-doctoral fellowship from Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

Evening lecture: Alexandra Pringle in conversation with Claire Wilcox



Alexandra Pringle

Writer, editor, literary agent and publisher. She was the fourth person to join Virago Press in the '70s. As agent she represented Deborah Levy, Ali Smith, Maggie O'Farrell, Amanda Foreman and others. She was editor-in-chief of Bloomsbury Publishing for more than two decades, working with bestselling authors Khaled Hosseini, Donna Tartt and Elizabeth Gilbert; Women's Prize winners Ann Patchett, Madeline Miller, Kamila Shamsie and Susanna Clarke; Booker Prize winners George Saunders and Margaret Atwood, and Nobel Prize winner Abdulrazak Gurnah. She comes from the Afriats, an ancient family of Berber Jewish

traders whose caravans travelled from Timbuktu to Mogador. The Silk Road Slippers logo is her family trademark from the '20s. She is writing a memoir, *Caravan*, to be published by Canongate in the UK and Simon & Schuster in the US. She is Visiting Professor at the Centre for Fiction at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Alexandra will be in-conversation with Claire Wilcox discussing her progression from publisher to writer, and from working with authors to trying to be one. Hermione Lee will introduce the evening event. Please join us in the cafe afterwards for drinks.