

How the past is inspiring a new generation of fashion

The history of Norfolk's fashion and textile industry is finding a place in the present thanks to Norwich Fashion Week. Fashion editor and chair of Norwich Fashion Week **EMMA HARROWING** reports.

Travel back in time to the 1700s and Norwich was a fashion capital. From brocaded damasks to fine quality worsteds, textiles that were shipped far and wide, and worn by royalty, were designed and made in Norfolk.

Norwich was a major centre of trade and commerce with a large part of the city's wealth coming from the manufacture of textiles. Most weaving businesses were small scale, independent and self-financing and by the beginning of the 19th century most produced cloth for the luxury market.

The next 40 years saw some of the finest and beautiful woven prints being produced that were made into shawls. Worn by the wealthy as status symbols, the Norwich shawl was born. But as with most fashions, the trend for wearing these large shawls gradually fell out of favour, and demand for faster fashion using cheaper cloth rose. Norwich was at an increasing disadvantage to the industrialisation in places such as Yorkshire and Lancashire who



could produce cloth quickly and cheaply and by the 1850s the focus of industry in Norwich began to change. Although textile manufacture did continue through the 1900s, industries such as brewing, starch and mustard making, printing, leather and shoe making began to lead the way.

Today some fashion-led industries

still remain and an increasing number of designer/makers and weavers are bringing back bespoke fashion making to Norfolk.

Norwich Fashion Week is one organisation that is leading the way when it comes to highlighting the importance of this mix of traditional and new ways of fashion manufacturing. As part of Norwich



■ Left and above left, Norwich shawls from the Costume and Textile Association. Above right, Joy Evitt with the Alexandra Shawl. Pictures: SUBMITTED/BILL SMITH

Fashion Week 2016 later this month, catwalk shows will provide a platform for Norfolk fashion and textile designers, with a specially curated pop-up shop aimed to encourage people to buy local design and talks by some of the county's leading clothing and shoe manufacturers and designers.

Joy Evitt, chairman of the Costume and Textile Association and heritage coordinator for Norwich Fashion Week, believes that there is scope for designers and makers to revive the past fashion successes: "It is great that Norwich has a successful textile design degree course and fashion degree course at Norwich University of the Arts and it's fantastic to see some home grown designers working in Norwich.

"Norwich Fashion Week is

inspirational throughout the year supporting fashion in and around Norwich so all the ground-work is there for the future designer."

Norwich Fashion Week works in collaboration with the Costume and Textile Association, a charity dedicated to promoting and enhancing the unique collection of clothing and fabric held by the Norfolk Museums Service. Over the years the Costume and Textile Association has bought costumes for the collection, ranging from those made and worn in Norwich centuries ago, to those created for the 2012 Olympic ceremony.

"The Costume and Textiles association is important to Norwich because we aim to make people aware of its wonderful heritage while supporting the Norfolk Museums and encouraging

Your guide to the heritage events at Norwich Fashion Week 2016

The Norwich Fashion Week Design and Enterprise Day

New for Norwich Fashion Week is a free day of talks, workshops and shopping. The Design and Enterprise Day aims to inspire, educate and inform with talks and presentations from Van Dal, The Shackleton Company, Caro London and the Costume and Textile Association. There is also the chance to shop from specially selected local designers and manufacturers including Eclectic Eccentricity, Blu Studios, Mae and Mabel, Van Dal, Shackleton Clothing, Anna Mudeka and more.

■ Wednesday March 16, 10am until 4pm, OPEN, Bank Plain, Norwich. Free entry.

Fashion 360

Norwich University of the Arts hosts a selection of talks, discussions and display of work to celebrate connectivity, pattern and form. Student work will be exhibited to complement the ideas and practice of invited designers, makers and creatives to reveal the global processes, skills and technologies usually hidden from view. The headline speaker is celebrated designer Orla Kiely who will talk about her creative practices and the influences behind her iconic designs.

■ Wednesday March 16, exhibition from 5.30pm and Orla Kiely talk at 6.30pm at Norwich University

of the Arts, Duke Street. For ticket availability visit www.nua.ac.uk/visit

The Vintage Show, sponsored by Zaks American Diners

Original vintage and vintage inspired designers join the line up on this year's Vintage Show catwalk as designs from the past get a contemporary twist.

■ Sunday March 13, 7.15pm for an 8pm show at OPEN, Bank Plain, Norwich. Tickets £10 available from OPEN and at www.open247.org.uk

The Designers Show, sponsored by Canaries Official and Hippodrome Great Yarmouth

See some of the best up and coming

and established designers and creatives Norwich has to offer at The Designers Show.

■ Tuesday March 15, 1.30pm for a 2pm show and 6.30pm for a 7pm show, at OPEN, Bank Plain, Norwich. Tickets £10 from OPEN and at www.open247.org.uk

If the shoe fits

As part of Norwich Fashion Week, The Museum of Norwich hosts an evening celebrating shoes. Explore the galleries to discover mannequins modelling the latest collections from Norwich shoe-maker Van Dal, look at shoes that are not usually on display and listen to the stories from Van Dal's shoe makers

about how their shoes are made. Designer Carol Lake will also be there with her collection of shoes made by Van Dal, and a series of art works from Artbeat64, aka Simon Pritchard, will be on display.

■ Wednesday March 16, 7pm until 9pm at Norwich Museum at the Bridewell. Entry £7.

■ Norwich Fashion Week 2016, sponsored by Archant, Norwich BID and City College Norwich takes place from Thursday March 10 until Thursday March 17. For more information visit www.norwichfashion.co.uk or OPEN, Bank Plain, Norwich, 01603 763111.

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FEATURE

NORWICH
FASHION
WEEK 2016

■ Above and below right, the Shackleton Clothing Company designs luxury clothing in Norwich.

Pictures: SIMON BUCK

contemporary textiles, “ says Joy. “A good example of the work we do is our exhibition in October - Norwich shawls: past glory, present inspiration.”

Taking inspiration from Norfolk’s fashion past to create the fashions for today is a trend that keeps growing. The Costume and Textile Association’s Shawl Spectacular of 2013 saw students from the Norwich University of the Arts create new designs inspired by the historic Norwich shawls, and the county’s thriving vintage and fashion scene has produced milliners, jewellers, accessory designers, clothing and shoe designers.

Textile designer Carol Lake who owns her own design studio on Upper St Giles in Norwich, is one designer who is combining the old with the new. Working with Norfolk heritage shoe brand Van Dal, Carol has designed a contemporary collection of floral print heels and pumps, made in Van Dal’s factory in

Norwich. Carol will be showcasing her collection at The Shoe That Fits event during Norwich Fashion Week at Norwich Museum at the Bridewell, which will also see shoe makers from Van Dal talking about their craft.

It is not just local history that is providing inspiration for Norfolk’s next generation designers and makers. The Shackleton Clothing Company, who are part of the Norwich Fashion Week Design and Enterprise Day at OPEN, takes its inspiration for its collection of knitwear, boots, outerwear and accessories from the style of Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton.

“The Shackleton brand started life as Britain’s first banjo factory in more than 60 years, and we named our first instruments Shackleton, inspired by the morale-boosting role that a banjo played in Ernest Shackleton’s epic Endurance expedition 100 years ago. Shackleton

himself described the banjo as ‘vital mental medicine’,” explains Simon Middleton, founder and managing director of The Shackleton Company.

“The brand grew quickly and now embraces a range of beautiful British-made menswear, designed in Norfolk and manufactured in factories across the UK. Our knitwear and outerwear is now stocked in London boutiques as well as in the Natural History Museum, and even in the ‘Penguin Post Office’ at Port Lockroy in Antarctica itself.

“All of the clothes are closely based on styles worn by Shackleton and his men, and our most popular product is a replica of Shackleton’s own sweater.

“We won Best Menswear stand at the huge Pure London show only last week, and we’ve also shown at Jacket Required and a series of Best Of Britannia events. Of course we still make superb handmade banjos at our Norwich factory too.”

Others, such as vintage inspired textile designer Caroline Cutts, who set up her nightwear and loungewear brand Caro London in Delhi and is stocked in Liberty’s in London and is also showcasing as part of Norwich Fashion Week, has recently moved to Norwich to set up her design studio in what she calls “a creative city”.

Norwich Fashion Week is even starting to attract international designers. This year fashion designer Orla Kiely is giving a talk to inspire up and coming fashion designers at the Norwich University of the

Arts, an event that parallels the excitement surrounding Vivienne Westwood’s visit to Norwich Castle in 1999 when she opened the Style and Splendour exhibition.

Whether the new generation of fashion designer in Norfolk is influenced by local history or international inspirations, most are working on bespoke or luxury items that mirror the successful local fashion industry of the past. As consumer interest in made in Britain and customised items increases, so too does the trend for items that are uniquely made, which makes Norwich and Norfolk fashionable once again.



■ The Shoe That Fits exhibition, a collaboration between Van Dal and Norwich Museum at the Bridewell, which celebrates Norfolk’s shoe heritage, is coming to Norwich Fashion Week 2016.

Picture: KERRY CURL

Pam
Taylor
In the
countryside
Potter Heigham

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Volunteering adds so much extra to all our lives

Having just taken over once again as Convenor of the British Dragonfly Society’s Dragonfly Conservation Group, my thoughts have turned to the ever present issue of volunteers. Every charity needs them and most charities could not function without their army of unpaid helpers. So why do people volunteer and how can we attract more people to these vital tasks?

My own roles in the BDS are entirely voluntary and I also volunteer my services to other wildlife organisations, so I do have a little insight into this matter. For my own part I get great satisfaction out of the work I do. I strongly believe that we can’t protect our wildlife unless we know where it is and the habitat areas it relies on most. I therefore spend a lot of my time recording sightings of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, dragonflies and other insects. In the main these records get passed to the county recorders for checking and collation. Again, I’m the county recorder for dragonflies, so I play a part in this work too.

I also spend time each summer leading guided walks, giving talks, running workshops and attending events. Meeting people face-to-face and helping them to better understand the natural world around us really gives me a buzz. Of course, some of those I meet know far more about natural history than I do, so I also take pleasure in sharing their knowledge and learning something new. This is part of the information exchange so vital to volunteering and its enjoyment.

Above all, I think it’s that feeling that you’ve made a difference that is most important. True, this can come from paid work, and I feel I do make a difference to young lives by my school teaching. I just hope my teaching makes a positive difference, but where teenagers are concerned, it’s sometimes difficult to tell!

So come on people! With spring just around the corner, now is the time to wake up, get moving and volunteer. Whether it’s wildlife recording, practical conservation work, cultural interests in our county’s museums or something else, your time and effort can make a difference. Please contact an organisation and offer your services today!