

From Austen to Bridgerton: Decoding Dress in 'Costume Drama'

Dates	Thursdays 13 and 20 May 2021
Times	18.00-20.00
Location	Zoom (online)
Tutor	Jacqui Ansell
Level	All Levels



L-R (details): Henry Bone, *Mrs Paddon, after Newton* (After William John Newton), 1817
Attributed to Simon-Jacques Rochard, *A Lady, probably Princess Charlotte*, c.1815-17

Course Description

The hit Netflix series *Bridgerton* is set in 1813 – the same year that Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice* was published. With their tales of eligible bachelors and young ladies competing in the marriage market, there are some superficial similarities in the plots, but how accurately do our 21st-century eyes view the Regency Period in which these novels are set? How can looking at paintings, including works from the Wallace Collection, as well as prints, fashion plates and surviving garments, together with considering life in the Regency, help us to distinguish fact from fiction in the ‘costume drama’ genre? During this course we will delight in decoding the details of dress and the characterisation of figures through clothing – features which give this art form such potent appeal.

Session One: Setting the Scene - The Real Regency

The events of fictional *Bridgerton* are firmly set in a real time period: the London season of 1813. What were the characteristics of this period, and who were the main characters associated with it? Our first session will demystify the notion of 'the Season' - with presentation at court at its heart. We will find out about the notorious Prince Regent, his mother, Queen Charlotte, and the absent King, George III. The flamboyance of the interior décor and fashions of the time are the subject of superb caricatures by Gillray, Cruikshank and others. We will examine these in conjunction with other sources such as paintings, prints and fashion plates to delve deeper into the concerns and characteristics of this time.

Session Two: Lights, Camera, Action! From 'Clothing' to 'Costume'

Bridgerton is a 'costume drama' - one could also call it a 'bodice-ripper' - but what do these terms mean? For a dress historian, they can mean a frustrating deviation from the truth, giving a distorted view of what was really worn; but to insist on documentary-style accuracy would be to miss the point entirely. *Bridgerton* is pure 'escapism' - clothing is an aid to characterisation helping us to read familiar 'types' of people despite the unfamiliar time period and social setting.

With a nod back to earlier time periods, including the Tudors, in our second session we will consider the history of costuming for on-screen period drama. To contextualise *Bridgerton*, we will compare characterisation through clothing in adaptations of Jane Austen's work. Famous on-screen versions of *Pride and Prejudice* will help us to understand early 19th-century dress and deportment - and our 20th-century and 21st-century reactions to it.

Course Tutor

Jacqui Ansell gained an MA from the Courtauld Institute enabling her to decode and date dress in art. As an experienced gallery educator she has devised and delivered numerous courses for the Wallace Collection and the National Gallery. She is an accredited lecturer for The Arts Society, and Senior Lecturer at Christie's Education writing, presenting and tutoring online courses in Art History and Luxury. Publication topics include *Court Dress and Welsh Dress* and a forthcoming, richly-illustrated book about Vincent van Gogh's time living in Ramsgate, Kent in 1876 - Jacqui's hometown.

Previous Skills, Knowledge or Experience

None required. This course is designed as an introduction to the subject.

Joining Information and Format

This course will be taught through Zoom. For more information, including instructions on how to download and use the system, please visit www.zoom.us/support.

Each course session duration is 120 minutes, including a 5-minute break and short Q&A session with the tutor.

Participants will be emailed the Zoom Webinar ID and Passcode 48 hours in advance.
