

AGM 2010 & beadwork at Colchester Museum

Wendy Buck

The lecture at this year's AGM was given by the costume curator of Colchester's Hollytrees Museum, Danielle Sprecher, who is now a member of the Society and our new fashion correspondent (see pp. 19-20 for her first bi-annual article).

Many of our local museums have only a tiny percentage of their collections on display and Colchester is no exception so from storage Danielle brought out numerous beadwork items to show us as well as one or two exceptional textile →



Fig 1 Beaded wall pocket, Cree, Canadian Marginal Plains or Canadian Subarctic, late 19th century. Couched overlay beadwork technique, Venetian beads. Edged with blue woollen hemtape.

Fig 2 Two halves of an 18th century purse/bag done in sablé work using approx. size 20/0 beads.

Fig 3 Beaded purse, Haudenosaunee, Northeastern North America, c. 1850. Applied with floral beadwork and French brass sequins within solidly beaded linear borders on dark velvet, edged with silk ribbon. Venetian beads, commercial cotton thread sewn. The solidly beaded borders are a relatively rare trait, making this quite a special little piece.

Fig 4 Early 19th century knitted beadwork parasol (c. 1820-1830?) with Venetian gondolas? All Castle Museum Colchester Collection.



Photos: Graeme Morris

items. The diverse range of items from the textile collection included some Turkish beadwork – a beaded snake probably done by a prisoner of war in WWI (Fig 7) and also a very small beaded purse, crocheted and after inspection by members of the Society judged to be earlier than the beaded snake (Figs 6 & 7 on p.29).

There were also some Native American beaded purses, I particularly liked the smaller of the two, a white beaded wall pocket with floral detail and beaded onto a pale blue wool background, highly stylised in design yet beautifully simple at the same time, the purse was actually more of a pocket, with a beaded loop at the top so it could be hung up on a wall and was probably for a fob watch to sit in (Fig 1).

Other unusual items were a beaded Jersey dress, probably from the late 1920's or early 1930's, the dark navy of the jersey setting off the dark fuchsia/raspberry colour of the tamboured beaded flowers particularly well. This is a colour combination I had not considered before, and it worked extremely well. Another favourite item of the day for many of the people who where there was the beaded early 19th century parasol (Fig 4), with its images of Venetian gondolas making it probably an upmarket tourist souvenir from Venice.

Popular with members too was a pair of Straits Chinese shoes the museum owns which (although I had seen them before) one could not fail to be impressed by! The colourful beadwork of flora and fauna included a wonderfully detailed beaded butterfly on the toe of each shoe.

The rest of the selection was a mixture of Victorian and 20th century items – delicate beaded cuffs in size 15/0 seed beads, and a lovely example of real micro-beadwork (often called 'sablé work') in the form of two panels probably done in size 20/0 or even smaller seed beads (fig 2)!

Two items which where on display for us (not beaded but well worth a mention) were a beautiful drawstring purse (a real gem)



Fig 5 Colchester Castle Museum



Fig 6 Two views of a Turkish four-sided crocheted bag, early 20th century. Two opposing sides are crochet-beaded, the other sides crocheted in fine crewel yarn. Castle Museum Colchester Collection. (See also in colour on page 29, fig 7)



Fig 7 Bead crocheted snake made by a Turkish prisoner-of-war and dated 1919. Castle Museum Colchester Collection

which displays the skill of the embroiderer who made it and was probably 17th century in date and a novel purse with a frame in the shape of a nautilus shell covered in sheer cream silk and with a concertina opening, lovely and early 19th century in date.

The lecture did run over, as these things tend to, as Danielle was keen to exchange her knowledge of the items and collect new information on some of them too from our knowledgeable members.

I must also make mention of two other displays which where on view that day – along one side of the hall were 3 long tables displaying items which members had brought in as a 'show and tell' of everyone's latest finds, and wonderfully diverse that was too, and on the other side of the hall were another 3 long tables displaying

the City & Guilds beadwork samples and design folders, which came from the course run by Pandorion, Colchester's local bead shop.

An enjoyable afternoon and wonderfully cool inside Colchester Castle, on what was the hottest day of the year to that date. Many local museums have reserve collections with samples of beadwork in them, so if your local group are looking to hold an outing or stage an event its worth giving them a ring to see if private viewing is possible. And if you locate some 'hidden gems', do let us know as it may be we can arrange a future AGM visit to your museum too! (See page 31–32 for details of our 2011 AGM, workshop and talk at Whitby Museum, North Yorkshire)

