

‘The Artistic Aspect of Dress’: the Story of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union

By Robyne Calvert

Abstract

This article presents a short biography of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, a dress reform society formed in 1890 with the aim of ‘teaching both men and women how to discriminate by choosing and rejecting, and so gradually moulding the exigencies of our climate and situation, the claims of artistic arrangement of drapery, and harmony of colour.’ It presents a new account of the group that goes beyond previous discussions, which have been solely gleaned from the group’s journal Aglaia. A brief history of the organisation under the leadership of artists such as Henry Holiday, Walter Crane and G.F. Watts will precede an examination of their 1896 ‘Exhibition of Living Pictures’, and a discussion of their educational journal Aglaia and its later iteration The Dress Review, illustrating the creative production and philosophy of Artistic Dress from this later period in its history.

Keywords: Artistic Dress, Aesthetic Dress, Victorian art, Victorian fashion, Healthy and Artistic Dress Society, Dress Reform

INTRODUCTION

The signs are many that the educated world is endeavouring to introduce beauty into its daily life, that the time is past when Art was supposed to mean pictures in frames.¹

A fusion of art and life underpins the evolution of Artistic Dress, the Victorian sartorial practice through which individuals communicated their identification with artistic circles, life, and philosophies that challenged the boundaries of mainstream tastes.² In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was an ever-increasing desire to educate the general public on ‘good’ design to improve oneself, including more beautiful and healthful forms of dress. After nearly three decades of exposure to the holistic design philosophies promoted by the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the ‘Cult of Beauty’ associated with Aestheticism, Victorian society was inculcated with the concept that art was not just something to hang upon the wall, but could in fact be a ‘way of life’. The Healthy and Artistic Dress Union (H&ADU) was founded on this principle, as illustrated by the above quotation, taken from the introduction to the first issue of their journal *Aglaia* in July 1893.³

Comprised of a mixture of artists and dress reformers, the group promoted Artistic Dress through what we would nowadays call activism, particularly awareness and promotional activities such as meetings, publications, exhibitions, and even performances. They actively encouraged sartorial practices which, they hoped, would become ingrained in society, or at the very least become a basic aspect of artistic training and production. Although the H&ADU is often mentioned in the literature on nineteenth century dress, there has not as yet been a focused exploration of this group’s history. Stella Mary Newton’s important 1974 study, *Health, Art & Reason: Dress Reformers of the 19th Century*, only discusses the history of the H&ADU briefly, spending a bit more time analysing *Aglaia* in the context of Socialist dress practices.⁴ Subsequent texts rely on Newton’s research, and have not gone further to research the wider history of the group and its activities. This is largely due to scant evidence: papers of the society seem to have been lost; and most research has

been gleaned from the pages of *Aglaia*. However there is more to be learned from reports of their meetings and activities in the press, as well as some recently rediscovered archival material. This article presents a short biography of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, outlining their pedagogy and activities under the leadership of artists such as Henry Holiday (1839–1927), Walter Crane (1845–1915) and G.F. Watts (1817–1904); and revealing new research that uncovers that the group had a much broader, and longer, impact than previously thought.

BEGINNINGS

The wearing of Artistic Dress developed through the participation in artistic social circles of the Victorian era. Inspired by Pre-Raphaelitism, and cultivated in the galleries, studios, and ‘At Homes’ of artists and patrons of the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic movements, by the 1880s it was an established counter-culture trend in fashionable society. It was out of these associations, and from a growing affinity with the Dress Reform movement, that the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union was formed at a crowded meeting in Morley Hall, London, on Wednesday, 2 July 1890.⁵ Perhaps surprisingly, however, none of the artistic luminaries who were to become leaders of the group seem to have been at the very first meeting - or at least not active enough to have made the press reports.

Many of these news items were brief and came under a header ‘To Teach Women to Dress Sensibly’ (or something similar), and the reports indicate that much of the discussion was initially related to women’s clothing. One meeting report offers greater detail: an article in the *North Wales Chronicle* titled ‘Down on the Dressmakers’.⁶ Dr Sophie Bryant (1850–1922) - amongst the first women to earn a Doctorate of Science in England - presided over this meeting, which also prominently included two physicians who seemed to be central to the cause, W. Wilberforce Smith c.1890) and Charles Read (active c.1890).⁷ Both Bryant and

Smith continue to be active in the H&ADU, writing articles for *Aglaia*, but Read, about whom little is known, doesn't appear actively again in the extant literature. This is rather unfortunate since he offered the third resolution at this inaugural meeting, 'That the society should be called the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union'.⁸

According to the same article, 'Miss Orms' proposed the meeting's first resolution 'in a speech in which she deprecated the idea of anything conspicuous or eccentric.' This led to the *de rigueur* discussion on the evils of the corset, and the 'inconvenience of dress made by ordinary dressmakers.' Madame Antoinette Stirling (1841–1904), a popular Anglo-American singer, made this remark and commented that dressmakers 'objected to her broad shoulders', and 'it would be well if [they] would fit the person instead of squeezing the person into the dress'. She continued, 'Put gentlemen into stays and in one week they will be banished for ever from society.'

The second resolution was proposed by 'Miss Hughes of the Cambridge Training College' and was to recommend that full members should pay a subscription of 2s 5d per annum; and associates pay no fee. These seem to have been adopted amidst further discussion and commiserating on how those in attendance had been the butt of jokes, including John Callcott Horsley, R.A. (1817–1903), who revealed that he had been called 'Clothes-Horsely' after a cartoon in *Punch* represented him 'as a draped clothes-horse'.⁹ Horsley was the only artist mentioned in this article. However, one other notable person was in attendance, and vocally so: Florence Wallace Pomeroy, Viscountess Harberton (1843–1911), the founder and leader of the Rational Dress Society.

The Viscountess apparently did not agree with the idea that clothing should not be 'conspicuous or eccentric', which was likely to be understood as referring to the Rational Dress she promoted. She conceded, however, that the group would be likely to 'win many members' under those conditions, and 'inferred that it ran a better chance of popularity than

her own—the Rational Dress Society’. She wished them luck, yet made it clear that to her mind their proposals were not radical enough, thinking they would merely be ‘limping feebly along in the wake of fashion, and more likely to degenerate into a dowdy, frumpish and unattractive style of dress...’ To this, Bryant reportedly commented that ‘Lady Harberton’s was the doctrine of revolution, while the new society’s was that of evolution.’

H&ADU MEETINGS AND EXHIBITIONS

And so, the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union was born. Through clubs, exhibition societies, ‘At Homes’, and other social gatherings, they furthered their didactic agenda. The activities of the group subsequent to the first meeting are unclear, however there is a news item reporting ‘a recent meeting’ in the *Woman’s Herald* on 28 November 1891 at the Cavendish Rooms, where many future meetings would take place.¹⁰ Dr Wilberforce Smith was again present and ‘gave an interesting resumé of the scope and future work of the Union,’ which included the publication of a ‘periodical well illustrated’, telling us *Aglaia* was already being developed. This meeting was presided by the man who would ultimately become the President and leading voice of the H&ADU: Henry Holiday.

Holiday, a successful painter, stained glass designer, sculptor and illustrator, came under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites while still a student at the Royal Academy in the 1850s, having met Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 – 1882), William Morris (1834 – 1896), and Edward Burne-Jones (1833 – 1898) through his friends Simeon Solomon (1840 – 1905) and Albert Moore (1841 – 1893). Like them, he had a great interest in costume and fancy dress (Figure 1), and very quickly became associated with the second wave of Pre-Raphaelitism, and a follower of Arts and Crafts design principles.¹¹ In fact, his wife Catherine (1839–1925), whom he married in 1864, was one of Morris’ most talented embroiderers. While Holiday perhaps didn’t achieve the lasting fame of some of his friends, he was certainly ensconced in

the key artistic circles, for example successfully working with William Burges (1827–1881) on interiors for Worcester College, Oxford; and exhibiting works like his acclaimed *Dante and Beatrice* at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1883. This painting would in fact inform one of his principal endeavours for the H&ADU, as we shall see. But it was first his role as the ‘Artistic Editor’ of the Union’s journal *Aglaia* that made him the most prominent voice of their undertakings.

The activities of the group always included quarterly meetings where members would exhibit artistic and healthy clothing made with Liberty fabrics as well as Dr Jaeger’s Sanitary Woollen System. According to press reports, Holiday chaired many of the subsequent meetings, which we can suppose led to his ultimate presidency. These were also the main places to see Artistic Dress first hand, some of which were related in the press. From a meeting on Friday 27 April 1894 at the Cavendish Rooms:

One of the most artistic gowns was shown at the Jaeger stall, consisting of a medieval white woollen, shaped to the figure, and trimmed with bands of green and mauve embroidery. The sleeves were in a mauve woollen fabric.¹²

At the following meeting on 10 July 1894, Holiday was wearing one of his own creations:

The Chairman and one other gentleman appeared in the new evening dress devised by the society for gentleman’s wear, consisting of evening coat and vest in velvet, faced with silk; silk stockings, and knee-breeches. One gentleman wore brown, the other green, each substituting a soft, unstarched white silk shirt, with turned down collar, instead of the orthodox starched linen or ordinary wear. The coats had rolled collars and deep cuffs of the shape known as gauntlets to milliners and others. It is suggested, in a leaflet issued by the Union, that the cuffs might be frilled, to hang over the hands, and that the tie should be of very thin silk trimmed with lace. The stockings are to be harmonious in colour with the velvet or velveteen of the coat, and the vest may be of watered silk, white or coloured. It may also be composed of brocade or corded silk.¹³

These meetings also included small exhibitions of items, but the popular press seemed most interested to focus on what people wore, reports of which often appeared in gossip columns.

The *Hampshire Telegraph* wrote about the June 1895 meeting in a tone that somewhat expressed its disapproval:

The majority of the costumes worn by those present were of an extraordinary and unique character, and attracted considerable attention in the public streets near by, as the members walked through them to the meeting. Every possible eccentricity of design in feminine attire appeared to be represented, with the one exception of the old “Bloomer” dress. Most of the ladies wore a newly-designed costume consisting of a jersey, like that worn by seamen, with knickerbockers and a short skirt... The gentlemen wore a peculiar kind of evening dress designed especially for the Union, and consisting of knee breeches and a crimson-coloured dress coat.¹⁴

However, four days later, a somewhat humorous clarification appeared in another Hampshire paper, the *Advertiser*, under the column ‘Gossip on Men and Things’:

Two ladies, who act as honorary secretaries of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, are anxious it should be known that the few women who wore eccentric costumes at a recent meeting of the association must not be taken as representing the aims of the Union, which simply seeks to promote healthy and becoming dress without marked singularity. The costumes which caused comment were illustrative of bicycle and gymnastic habits, and only showed their wearers’ particularities [...]. It still, however, remains a mystery why women should attend a public meeting in gymnastic dress. Did they expect a scrimmage, and were they prepared at a moment’s notice to act as ‘chuckers out’ of the gentlemen in silken knee breeches?¹⁵

This exchange, though highly amusing, reveals the ongoing resistance to these ideas, and perhaps gives us another reason why the H&ADU subscription wasn’t moving as quickly as they had hoped. This is perhaps an underlying reason why they decided to put on one of the most ambitious endeavours they had yet taken on, the following year: The Exhibition of Living Pictures.

THE EXHIBITION OF LIVING PICTURES

It was decided that the H&ADU would organise a major exhibition of living pictures, or *tableaux vivants*, to promote their mission to the public in an entertaining manner. The press picked this up with alacrity when it was announced in late 1895, and it seems that many were looking forward to the event.

Tableaux vivants, sometimes called living pictures or more rarely *poses plastiques* or living statuary, had been a popular form of entertainment for centuries. In one of the very few articles on the subject, Brenda Assael tells us that ‘while dating back to antiquity, living pictures can be traced to the eighteenth-century Neapolitan drawing room displays by Lady Emma Hamilton, who famously covered her semi-nude form with shawls. Once they dropped, she was said to portray a series of grand gestures as if the statues she represented, like Helena, Cassandra, and Andromache, had come to life.’¹⁶ In the late Victorian era, however, these performances were usually not so titillating, and some found these forms of entertainment a bit antiquated and dull. On February 2, 1893, a correspondent for the ladies magazine *Hearth and Home* wrote:

I do not always like *tableaux*. They are apt to be formal, dull, horribly respectable in the worst sense of the term, a sort of vague compromise between the debauching frivolity of a ‘stage play’ and the inept enervation of a back drawing-room conjurer—of the egg-producing species. You sit, as a rule, for about half-an-hour in dreary expectation, then a curtain goes up for a quarter of a minute and you behold a plain woman of your acquaintance masquerading as Mary, Queen of Scots, or a tea-party young man simpering as Charles the First about to be decapitated. It is not lively, and life is so short we cannot afford to waste half-hours with such unbridled prodigality.’¹⁷

Nonetheless, the reviewer goes on to give a favourable review of *tableaux* arranged in aid of the poor at Chelsea Town Hall. While perhaps not of great import in the very large London theatrical world, this small event is significant for the research at hand, for amongst those participating in the *tableaux* were key members of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union: the artists Louise Jopling (1843–1933), G.A. Storey (1834–1919), and A.L. Baldry (1858–1939)

and the dancer Lily Linfield (active c.1872). Jopling arranged some of the *tableaux*, and ‘was also seen in the wonderful *tableau* of Bluebeard’s unfortunate wives, quite a gruesome masterpiece.’¹⁸ Baldry played the role of Bluebeard, and his ‘clever wife a charming and pathetic Fatima.’

It is as yet undiscovered whether these two, or other members of the H&ADU, performed other *tableaux vivants* in these years, but in 1896 the group put on an exhibition of ‘Living Pictures’ at St. George’s Hall, London. In addition to press reports, a set of photographs of the *tableaux*, belonging to Crane, survived and are in the Crane Archive. The event, which was performed three times on 14-16 May, was led by their then-president Holiday. The title *tableau* cleverly reconstructed his illustration for the cover of *Aglaia* (Figures 2-3). Holiday arranged a scene on ancient Egypt comprising ‘a pavilion looking upon the façade of the Temple of Luxor, in which was seated a princess with companions and attendants’.¹⁹ A reviewer for the *London Daily News* assured potential visitors that ‘the dresses of the ladies taking part in this scene are not transparent, as were those of the ladies of Egypt in the time of Rameses II, but they are so made as to conceal as little as possible the outline of the form’.²⁰ When considering the Union’s view that historical garments complemented the natural form, these dresses no doubt served a delightfully didactic function. Likewise for the garments in the ancient Greek *tableau*, arranged by Mr. John Fulleylove, whereby the *Daily News* reviewer was somewhat more practical in his/her criticism of this scene, observing: ‘The dresses are charming enough to invite imitation, but they are, unfortunately, but ill-suited to the requirements of our countrywomen in a climate like our own’.²¹

The Medieval Italy *tableau* was also arranged by Holiday (Figure 4), and was in fact directly based on his painting *Dante and Beatrice* of 1884 (Figure 5). This scene from the *Vita Nuova*, where Beatrice denies the poet her greeting, is not only the perfect subject with which to represent the elegant tunic dresses of this era, but is also a reference to the lingering

influence of the Pre-Raphaelites in both the rendering of subject matter and theme. Holiday was likewise taken with this particular scene, travelling to Italy to make studies for the view of the Arno; making numerous sketches for the work, and even going to far as to make maquettes of the figures (now in the collection of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). There is even a related photograph that survives in the collection of the Watts Gallery, Compton, which depicts Holiday as one of the models, wearing Artistic Dress in the form of a velvet suit complete with knee-breeches.²²

The painter G.A. Storey, who like Baldry was a pupil of Albert Moore, chose to bring to life Joshua Reynolds's 'Three Ladies Waldegrave', to represent eighteenth-century England. The views on the dreariness of contemporary fashion were arranged by Mrs Carol E. Kelsey (active c.1896) (who was reported in the press often as speaking out against the corset), depicting 'the genteel, the shabby-genteel, and the shabby' through figures in 'black top hats, straight coats, and boots' on the men 'while the women show all the views of distorted waists, pinched toes, high heels, and balloon sleeves'.²³ By contrast, the future street scene arranged by Holiday and George Herbert Kitchen (1870–1951) reflected broad streets with houses that looked 'roomy, airy, and comfortable', with clothing that reflected 'suitability to various pursuits.'²⁴

Walter Crane styled a pastoral scene that the Daily News comments would 'appeal for its rustic charm' and that 'the dresses are bright and sweet in colour, picturesque in form, and the picture needs only something resembling sunshine to make it perfect'.²⁵ The scene is hardly what one might imagine as futuristic, even in the *fin de siècle*, but it may be better understood in consideration of Crane's Socialist interest in labour.²⁶ This scene complements the elegance of the Aesthetic party tableau (Figure 6), styled by Louise Jopling with dresses chosen and provided by Arthur Lasenby Liberty (1843–1917). According to the Daily News, 'several well-known ladies and gentleman take part in it', but unfortunately does not mention

who they are. This final scene was meant to encapsulate the ideals of healthy and artistic dress, with the ladies wearing loose fitting tea gowns, and the gentlemen in velvet coats, breeches, and silk stockings. Holiday left his thoughts on the success of this exhibition in his 1914 memoirs:

The Hall was crowded, and they were voted a great success. Looking back to that time, it is satisfactory to be able to say that a decided improvement has taken place; even the top-hat, which had resisted all attacks for nearly a century, has almost disappeared, and colour is beginning to be seen in men's dress. As for ladies, the change for the better is striking; they seem to have learnt, what we constantly urged in "Aglaia," that dress, if it is to be beautiful, must conform to the figure, and this seems happily to be the rule with most of the dresses now worn.²⁷

AGLAIA

Throughout this period, the H&ADU largely focused on producing their most lasting contribution to this subject, their journal *Aglaia*. In late 1892 Holiday was interviewed by *Hearth and Home* magazine in an article called 'The Crusade against Corsets. A chat with one of the Crusaders'.²⁸ The interview took place not long after the H&ADU November annual meeting, and Holiday speaks of the progress they have made toward the publication of their new journal, illustrated by a proof of the cover (Figure 2) he designed. The author states, 'its charming design, reflects Mr. Holiday's love of Greek art, his clever treatment of drapery, and his general artistic feeling'. The image is a thoughtful arrangement of the three Graces: Aglaia, the 'patroness of personal adornment', takes pride of place at left in a full length chiton; and her sisters Thalia, representing health and youth, and Euphrosyne, symbolising mirth and merriment, are perched at right, arranged around the space reserved for the contents of each issue. This design became the 'brand' for the H&ADU, used not only for *Aglaia* but for their pamphlets, advertisements, and later publications.

Hearth and Home was enthusiastic about *Aglaia*, and related the journal's mission according to Holiday, which echoes the sentiments expressed in the group's founding meeting:

In no sense is its aim strictly that of a fashion book, but rather a deduction of what is pure as relates to art and health from adoption. *Aglaia* will propose no violent revolution in matters of attire, such as the Rational Dress Association advocates, but its contents will be directed to teaching both men and women how to discriminate by choosing and rejecting, and so gradually moulding the exigencies of our climate and situation, the claims of artistic arrangement of drapery, and harmony of colour. The *Aglaia* neither befriends the Bloomer costume nor the Harberton divided skirt, nor does it claim kinship with Æstheticism. It casts in its lot with the world of fashion, but more as a mentor than a censor.²⁹

Later, in his 1914 memoirs, Holiday recalled this mission and stated that the journal's name: '...distinguished it from Lady Harberton's "Rational Dress" movement, which aimed at health and utility, but ignored beauty. I felt very soon that our work would be ineffective unless we issued a journal, and in 1892 we decided to start one and to call it "Aglaia".'³⁰ In the 1890s, the sartorial debates that were prolific in fashion magazines of the 1880s evolved into more focused, didactic discussions, exemplified by *Aglaia*. However, *Aglaia* was sadly short-lived: only three issues were ever produced, the first in July 1893 (six months after the *Hearth and Home* preview), and then a Spring and an Autumn issue in 1894. They were rich in their research and information, beginning with an introduction that laid out their manifesto, which by the second issue was fairly refined:

The Union is in no way connected with any professional house; its object is purely educational. We propose to create a healthy taste in dress by the following methods:-

1. By inculcating right principles.
2. By rendering familiar the form which has to be clothed.
3. By presenting ideals from past ages, and suggesting ideals for the future.
4. By critically examining existing forms showing their good points and defects, thus encouraging every favourable variety, discouraging all that is

unwholesome or tasteless, and, when occasion offers, suggesting further improvements.

5. By giving occasional designs.³¹

Aglaia contained not only detailed reports of the Union's activities, but also articles on improving dress and taste by leading artistic figures of the time such as Holiday himself, Walter Crane, and G.F. Watts. In terms of the history of Artistic Dress (and Dress Reform), the subjects of these articles are by this point almost redundant. They are the same arguments which had been repeated over the past few decades: the corset malforms the body; the natural form is beautiful; male dress is drab and dull; colour should be natural and complementary to complexion; clothing should be appropriate to climate, and not constrict the body, etc.

Lesser-discussed additions to these debates include a focus on the feet (proper shoes, which mould to the shape of the foot, was a subject of interest); and a very detailed discussion by Wilberforce Smith on 'Corset Wearing: The Medical Side of the Attack', which was spread over the first two issues.

Holiday's contribution to the first issue was titled 'The Artistic Aspect of Dress', a paper that he had given at the 6 May 1892 meeting of the H&ADU. In this he offers a brief history of the best forms of dress (Greek and Medieval), and then discusses the aforementioned 'usual suspects' of those things that cause ugliness in dress. He includes a series of clever illustrations showing classically draped figures in a variety of poses (Figures 7-8), some with a corset superimposed over them, so the reader may see exactly how the corset interferes with natural motion. He titled these drawings 'Nature Proposes, But The Corset Disposes.'

Holiday also discusses 'Work Dress' for women at some length, which, although he states that 'It is now understood that [women] are rational human beings, capable of healthy exercise, whether in work or in games, and of active pursuits, intellectual and artistic', it seems his idea of 'work' is still rather gentle, and discusses dress suitable for 'practising the piano or the violin, modelling, embroidery, and needlework generally'. Within this, he

encourages women to be experimental in these sorts of dresses, and in their tea gowns, observing:

...they might at least give themselves as much liberty in dresses intended for the studio. When engaged in artistic pursuits, there would be an eminent suitability in the cultivation of especially artistic dresses... experiments... if successful, might be susceptible to more general adoption... others might try varieties of it for tea-gowns, and a decided success might ultimately start a distinct fashion.³²

He was no doubt thinking of his own wife in this case, and others of his friends such as Jane Morris (1839-1914) and her daughter May (1862-1938). Holiday is highlighting something for the general public (hopefully) which has already been taking place, and which illustrates the development of Artistic Dress: that it evolves as alternative fashion in the home and studio, and then leaves it to enter the public sphere.

Holiday also discusses a dress of his own design, which he says was shown at a previous meeting of the union, and provides illustrations of it (Figure 9). He wished it to be a dress for indoor work and outdoor play, and provides a description that shows that he was not averse to using new technology to meet his aims:

I endeavoured to attain this end by constructing a dress which should fall loose from the shoulders, opening all down the front. This was gathered round the waist by a double girdle containing two loops in front, into one or both of which the dress could be drawn to any height that might be convenient... You will see... that in one drawing the sleeves are tucked up to the elbow, while in the others they descend to the wrists; this is managed by elastics, which give the effect of a puffed sleeve when it is drawn up to the elbow. A lady, who had the dress made, tells me she finds it very convenient and comfortable, not for outdoor work only, and I think you will see by the drawing that, when drawn up into the loops, it takes of itself very graceful folds.³³

The illustrated dress is certainly picturesque, and looks as if it was taken directly from a Pre-Raphaelite painting. In an ironic manner, at least in this particular example, Artistic Dress has not changed much at all over the past several decades. And we know now that this type of

dress never became exactly mainstream, but rather paved the way for more practical clothing at the start of the next century. But perhaps it is as Liberty states, the artists involved in the H&ADU saw a second chance to promote Artistic Dress after the 'craze' of Aestheticism had died down, and within the new milieu of Dress Reform. And certainly the commercial success of Liberty's, particularly in popularising tea gowns, helped with this agenda.

Holiday's design is certainly progressive, but still might be seen as serving both to liberate and objectify the female wearer. Part of his motivation is to have a more picturesque appearance to everyday life:

...may I suggest that for all walking purposes where the dress has to be gathered up in any way, it falls far more gracefully if drawn up to one side, than if pulled into bunches all round. Some of these points if generally understood would almost revolutionise the appearance of our streets...³⁴

He desired to influence male dress as well, observing that the:

...hideous uniformity of black chimney-pot hat, black coat, black boots, trousers nearly black - all shapeless and colourless - would be enough to persuade one that there was no such thing as love of beauty in man, were it not for the important reflection that such a barbarous spectacle was never seen in any country until this century.³⁵

Holiday elaborated on these problems in *Aglaia* No. 2 with an article on 'Men's Dress' (which he again illustrates with comparative drawings that heavily advocate loose knee breeches), while drafting in G.F. Watts to write about 'Women's Dress' that focuses on matters of taste, about which he begins:

Taste is a very difficult quality to define since it will be, to a great extent, merely a matter of opinion and individual sentiment; and it is impossible to guide it in the matter of feminine costume, excepting in so far as some governing principles can be laid down.³⁶

He then proceeds to state succinctly what should be avoided in terms of good taste, and does so with an artist's eye by discussing lines that should not be broken ('any arrangement that diminishes or disturbs the effect of the upright spring of the neck from the level shoulders,

more beautiful than anything else in the world'), and drawing comparisons with the shape and poise of the Venus de Milo (also illustrated in this issue). Both Watts and Holiday, in discussing how a dress might be worn to suit (and display) the body, are pointing to more than just clothing, but styling of clothing, as essential to Artistic Dress. Holiday does not just offer a garment pattern, but discusses *how* it might be worn. Watts focuses on the body, and what should be highlighted in terms of its form, rather than discussing an actual garment to wear, recognising that he is less likely to influence taste, and may perhaps instead act as an authority and guide on matters of artistic style.

Watts and his wife Mary (like Catherine Holiday, a practicing artist) were Vice-Presidents of the H&ADU alongside several other notable figures, some of whom have been considered in this study, notably Hamo (1850-1925) and Agatha Thornycroft (1865-1968), and Louise Jopling. Walter Crane was not listed on the original Executive Committee, but joined later on. Like Holiday, Crane had a long-standing interest in dress through his Pre-Raphaelite-influenced Arts and Crafts work. Crane left behind many designs for dresses, some even with notes for construction, such as one (Figure 10) which states it is a 'Gown of Liberty silk made straight from a yoke & held only by band of same at waist. Yoke quilted. Sleeves full to elbow'.³⁷ Another sketch, depicting an empire-waist gown (another style H&ADU advocated) that crosses over the bosom, is very similar to a velvet dress now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 11), which I would argue is perhaps one of the more famous (and reproduced) of the extant Artistic Dresses.

In fact these dresses were illustrated in an article in what was to be the final issue of *Aglaia* in Autumn 1894 (figure 12). Crane, also a noted lecturer and advocate for Arts and Crafts education, was an ideal candidate to contribute to a series of three essays 'On the progress of taste in dress...' as related to three specific topics: 'Art Education', written by Crane; 'the Stage' (theatre), written by the artist and critic A.L. Baldry and his wife, the

actress and dancer Lily Linfield; and 'Manufacture' by Arthur Lasenby Liberty. Crane's essay analysed the contemporary dress of both genders, which he found particularly dull in the case of men's 'tubular' clothing and lack of colour, similar to the criticisms that Holiday and Watts levelled, which itself echoed arguments published by the Artistic Dress pioneer E.W. Godwin (who established the Art Dress department at Liberty) almost twenty-five years before.³⁸

This is not to say Crane's thoughts are unoriginal, but, much like this thesis, build upon those of his predecessors. One way he does this is through an illustration that compares late Victorian male dress unfavourably to the 'medieval simplicity' of fourteenth-century dress (Figure 13). Interestingly, the costume he illustrates is a real one: not only did he use it for the figure of Cimabue in his watercolour *The Apotheosis of Italian Art*, of 1885-86 (Collection of the Manchester Art Gallery, 1917.4), but he wore it himself on the occasion of a 'Coming of Age' ball given for his son in 1897, seen in a photograph with his wife Mary dressed as Laura (Figure 14). While the occasion was one that allowed this sartorial play, Crane yet advocates medieval dress over contemporary fashion in *Aglaia*, and in numerous drawings he made of dress designs (see above):

I think there can be no doubt, for instance, of the influence in our time of what is commonly known as the pre-Raphaelistic [*sic*] school and its later representatives in this direction, from the influence of Rossetti (which lately, indeed, seems to have revived and renewed itself in various ways) and the influence of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. But it is an influence which never owed anything to academic teaching. Under the new impulse, the new inspiration of the mid-century from the purer and simpler tones, forms, and colours of early mediaeval art, the dress of women in our own time may be said to have been quite transformed for a while, and, though the pendulum of fashion swings to and fro, it does not much affect, except, in some small details, a distinct type of dress which has become associated with artistic people—those who seriously study and consider of the highest value and importance beautiful and harmonious surroundings in daily life.³⁹

The third and final volume of *Aglaia* was rounded out by the usual notices and reports, with one pointing to the possible source of struggle that the group had: ‘We have received numerous complaints from persons interested in the movement, of difficulties they have experienced in communicating with us, owing to the absence of any permanent headquarters and a resident secretary’.⁴⁰ It seems the group was working on a fourth issue of *Aglaia*, too, with some production on it judging by a comment in *The Girl’s Own Paper* by a correspondent calling herself ‘The Lady Dressmaker’ on 28 November, 1896:

So I must begin by mentioning our old friend the “Healthy and Artistic Dress Union,” which last month issued its Sixth Annual Report. From this it appears that the Union is making steady progress, though somewhat slow, and that it has at present two hundred members. A review of the magazine, *Aglaia*, published by the Union, has already been given in THE GIRL’S OWN PAPER, and the committee are anxious to issue a fourth number, which they cannot do while they are hampered by want of funds.⁴¹

Two years had passed since the last publication, so the assessment of ‘slow but steady’ progress was generous. Why was the group not able to produce another issue? Cost was certainly a consideration, particularly if their membership was not growing sufficiently. But the financial difficulties that stymied *Aglaia* might have been exacerbated by another episode, one which brings to light an undiscovered chapter, and personage, in the history of Dress Reform.

HELENA HOPE-HOSKINS

While the first issue of *Aglaia* lists no publisher, the second very clearly shows that it was ‘Published by Hope-Hoskins, 110, Strand, W.C.’. By 1894, Helena Hope-Hoskins (active c.1890-94) was the society’s Editor and Publisher, an occupation with which she had limited experience. She was very active in the Dress Reform movement, and had in fact started her own magazine in 1893, called the *Pioneer of Fashion*. It received positive reviews from

several fashion magazines, particularly for being a publication led by a woman. *Le Follet* stated:

WE cannot too warmly recommend to our readers a new quarterly magazine entitled the Pioneer of Fashion, of which Miss Hope-Hoskins is the editor and proprietor, and we believe she enjoys the distinction of being the first girl to start such an undertaking single-handed. Her enterprise and energy, combined with talents of no ordinary calibre, have enabled her to achieve a well-deserved success.⁴²

Le Follet also praised the magazine for ‘the decided superiority of language over that which appears to be sometimes considered good enough for contributions to ladies’ papers’. So it was smart, diverse, well-received, and run ‘single-handedly’ by a woman. An accomplished woman as well, for Hope-Hoskins had won awards for her Reform Dress designs, most notably the Sanitary Institute prize medal for Jaeger woollen underclothing at the Exhibition of Sanitary Apparatus and Appliances in Liverpool, 1894.⁴³ That same year, she established yet another dress society, the ‘Anti-Corset League’; the name explains itself. However, while lecturing in Liverpool, she explained a bit more about her position on this matter:

Many health reformers, in their endeavours to crush the pernicious practice of tight-lacing, have preached total abolition of the corset, but the league clearly sees the necessity of something of a corset nature which shall possess the good features of a ‘figure support’ without the many drawbacks of the ordinary cuirass of today...⁴⁴

Perhaps this gives us a hint at what her award-winning Jaeger woollen underclothing was – a supportive but perhaps unboned structure, something similar to the stays of the earlier part of the century? For her lecture, she apparently ‘wore clothing entirely composed of Jaeger material, which was nevertheless of pretty colour and artistic design’ and spoke of ‘her wish to see rational yet artistic dress generally worn.’ She seemed to be a well-known figure in reform circles by this time, and her dress was described in the press, such as in reports of the H&ADU meetings:

A conspicuous figure was that of a lady [revealed in other reports to be Hope-Hoskins] clad in the walking dress advocated by the Union, consisting of a petticoat and drapery over it, both quite short enough to avoid contact with the ground, and loose enough to afford perfect freedom to the limbs of the wearer. It was carried out in very pale green, with hat to match, a colour which would be rather conspicuous for walking costume.⁴⁵

So what then does the seemingly confident, tireless and successful Hope-Hoskins have to do with the demise of *Aglaia*? This research has uncovered just one last mention of Hope-Hoskins in the press - or anywhere – which offers a rather depressing conclusion:

A LADY'S BANKRUPTCY.—At the London Court of Bankruptcy, yesterday, the Official Receiver reported in the case of Miss Helena Hope Hoskins that the debtor in January 1892, without capital, commenced business as an advertising agent ; that from December, 1892, she had been the proprietor of a quarterly journal, the *Pioneer of Fashion*, which she produced and published until the end of 1893 ; and that in October last she also established a society styled “The Anti-Corset League,” with a small subscription for membership, of which she was nominally secretary. The accounts show liabilities £1,043, and assets £419.⁴⁶

Although *Aglaia* was not mentioned (she had no ownership in it), Hope-Hoskins' bankruptcy could have certainly caused difficulty for the H&ADU. She seems to be no longer involved after this date (in anything), and as such we may only postulate theories. But her story does certainly paint a fascinating picture of one of the Reformist members of the H&ADU – and she is worth perhaps further research, particularly in regards to the other periodicals she produced.

THE DRESS REVIEW

It has been thought that the only issues of *Aglaia* were those mentioned here, and that the last issue in 1894 marked the decline of the H&ADU. Little evidence of their activity has been found beyond the 1895 meetings and exhibition, but new research reveals that the journal – and hence the society – carried on into the early twentieth century. *The Dress Review* (Figure

15), published by the H&ADU and with the same cover as *Aglaia*, was a continuation of the journal that shows not only did the group endure, but had grown considerably in number and breadth.⁴⁷ It seems to have similar goals (and similar articles) to the original *Aglaia*, and a more successful run: at least 18 issues were produced quarterly from July 1902, the last known being Vol. 2 No. 4, October 1906.⁴⁸ It included more photographs of dresses (rather than hand drawings), and in fact reprinted some from international magazines like *The Studio*, which was a critical place for the dissemination of design culture from its first issue in 1893. The H&ADU still had agency in artistic circles: Holiday was still listed as president in 1906, with vice-presidents including Crane, the Thornycrofts, Mrs G.F. Watts (Watts had died by this date), and Louise Jopling. The July 1903 issue also included an article on 'The Dress and the House' written by committee member Janet Ashbee (1877-1961), wife of the Guild and School of Handicraft founder, Charles Ashbee (1863-1942). Further, the group grew in breadth, and perhaps even caught on more successfully outside the capital. The H&ADU report for 1902 states: 'Your committee have... no meetings to record in London, but in the provinces some of our members have held very successful gatherings.' Mention is made of Birmingham, Halesowen, Manchester; and the list of Members includes subscriptions from throughout Britain, including Scotland and Wales, though most seem to be from London and the Midlands. Additionally, we see H&ADU beginning to recognise the international scope of Artistic Dress, particularly that in Belgium, Germany, and Austria. The same issue as above, for example, includes a discussion of 'The Dress Movement in Germany', as well as an illustration of the 'Arab Djibbeh'.

There is much more to be said about the contents of *The Dress Review*, which will be included in future publications on this subject. For the present discussion, it is evidence that the interim activities of the group seem to have inspired interest and participation in a much

broader way than previously thought. This was likely achieved through their more social and performative activities, which were educational, and more than likely supreme fun.

CONCLUSION

It remains true that the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union played an important role in the distillation and dissemination of Artistic Dress principles throughout this decade and into the next century. Further research is needed to determine the ultimate fate of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, especially in regards to what might still be undiscovered about their later, regional activities, as per *The Dress Review*. By that time, many of the original patrons were elderly (or deceased), but one letter printed in the October 1905 *Dress Review*, written by Walter Crane, speaks of the 'slow evolution' of dress, and perhaps for the first time, of technological change which may come to bear on it:

Until great social and economic changes take place in the constitution of society, therefore, I do not think we can expect any very general adoption of new types of dress except special adaptations to practical purposes of new inventions, such as the motor, which has brought in quite a distinct type of costume, both for men and women, not without a certain weird picturesqueness sometimes (the linen coats of the chauffeurs are quite a good feature). When again in a community of workers, people are proud of their employments, and consider it an honourable distinction to wear the distinctive dress appropriate to their work, we might again have great variety and beauty, bringing character and colour into common life.⁴⁹

While the activities of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union have been largely lost to time, it is hoped that this article will expose a bit more about their breadth and practice, in the case that other scholars may uncover further evidence on their history and influence. The relative obscurity of the group does not seem to reflect the reality of their activities. They were perhaps niche, but it is difficult to quantify how their reach may have influenced the development of fashion into the twentieth century. Artistic Dress may have still seemed

unusual to the average person, but for creative producers involved in making fashion – Lucille, Worth, and Poirot to name but a few - how might the work of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union have provided imaginative inspiration for new styles, especially for New Women?

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to those who supported this research, including the Pasold Fund who granted me a PhD Bursary; and my supervisors Margaret F. MacDonald and Clare Wilsdon. Other helpful advice and discussion has been given by Kimberley Wahl, Lynn Hulse, Peter Wilson and Catherine Eyre. Thank you also to the Women’s Library at the London Metropolitan University, the Costume Society, and to the editors and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

ORCID

Robyne Calvert [0000-0001-5662-3782](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5662-3782)

REFERENCES

¹ Henry Holiday, ed., *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, vol. 1 (London: Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, 1893), p. 3.

² For a complete history of Artistic Dress, see Robyne Erica Calvert, “Fashioning the Artist: Artistic Dress in Victorian Britain 1848-1900” (PhD, University of Glasgow, 2012).

³ H.&A.D.U. is the acronym the society uses in *Aglaia*, and is adopted here for simplicity.

⁴ Stella Mary Newton, *Health, Art & Reason: Dress Reformers of the 19th Century* (London, 1974), pp. 140–42.

⁵ Anonymous, “Down on the Dressmakers,” *North Wales Chronicle*, July 12, 1890, Issue 3267 edition.

⁶ Anonymous. This article may have been syndicated from a London source, but at present this is the only version I have found. A sub headline states that ‘Mrs Mary Davies Helps To Found Another Dress Reform League’, but I have been unable to determine who this was – though it is quite possibly the renowned folk singer Mary Davies (1855 – 1930) who helped found the Welsh Folk Song Society. She was living in Bangor during this time and until the death of her husband in 1905, when she moved to London (where she was born), and was active in both places.

⁷ Kathleen E. McCrone, *Playing the Game: Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914* (University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 95; and “The First New Graduates - 150th Anniversary - University of London External System,” <http://www.londoninternational.ac.uk/150/history/first_graduates.shtml> [accessed January 12, 2012]. Sophie Bryant (1850-1922) ‘was an avid cyclist and encouraged students and teachers to ride; she also rowed on the Thames, was a great walker and even climbed the Matterhorn.’

According to the University of London, she was ‘An early candidate for the University of London’s Special Examination for Women. A brilliant scholar and teacher, and one of the first two women to graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree, she was the first woman Doctor of Science and the first woman to be elected to the University of London Senate.’

⁸ Anonymous, “Down on the Dressmakers.” Little is known about W. Wilberforce Smith, but he published articles on anatomical studies in medical journals; further information on Charles Read is unavailable.

⁹ Rather than his manner of dress, this jest was aimed at his criticism of the new fashion for nudes at the Royal Academy, influenced by the French salon, which he objected to in a lecture at the Church Congress according to *Punch*, 31 October 1885, p. 195: ‘Lady (interested in Mr Horsley’s model speech at the Church Congress, to artist friend): “What are Mr Horsley’s initials?” Artist: “J.C. Horsley. ‘J’ is John.” Lady. “And ‘C’, what’s that?” Artist. “Evidently, Clothes-Horsley.”’ Thanks to Margaret MacDonald for finding this.

¹⁰ Anonymous, “English News: The Healthy and Artistic Dress Union,” *The Woman’s Herald*, November 28, 1891.

¹¹ The photograph of Holiday in chainmail was likely the suit he had made for himself, which he used for his mural of the Magna Carta in Rochdale City Hall. See Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life* (London: Heinemann, 1914), 175–76; and Clare A. P. Willsdon, *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940: Image and Meaning* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 175. Thanks to Clare Willsdon for calling this to my attention.

¹² Anonymous, “The Healthy and Artistic Dress Union,” *Daily News*, April 28, 1894. It is interesting to note that this dress is made in colours that would be adopted by the Women’s Social and Political League in 1903, but no connection to suffrage is mentioned in this article.

¹³ Anonymous, “Annual Summer Meeting,” *Daily News*, July 11, 1894.

¹⁴ Anonymous, “The Rational Dress Movement,” *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle Etc Issue 5936*, June 15, 1895.

¹⁵ Anonymous, “Gossip on Men and Things,” *The Hampshire Advertiser Issue 5115*, June 19, 1895.

¹⁶ Brenda Assael, ‘Art or Indecency? Tableaux Vivants on the London Stage and the Failure of Late Victorian Moral Reform’, *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), 746.

¹⁷ Anonymous, ‘Untitled (Tableau Vivant)’, *Hearth and Home*, February 22, 1893, 157.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Holiday, 406.

²⁰ Anonymous, “Healthy and Artistic Dress Union,” *Daily News*, May 14, 1896.

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Henry Holiday with Ada Forestier-Walker as Beatrice and Unknown Man as Dante*, 1896 [Watts Gallery dates as 1883 as painting; however this photo relates to Exhibition of Living Pictures]. Photograph, 3 x 4 in.. Watts Gallery, Compton [COMWG2008.163.4341].

²³ Anonymous, “Healthy and Artistic Dress Union,” *Daily News*, May 14, 1896.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For more on this, see: Morna O’Neill, *Art and Labour’s Cause Is One: Walter Crane and Manchester, 1880-1915* (Whitworth Art Gallery, 2008).

²⁷ Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life*, p. 51.

²⁸ Anonymous, “The Crusade Against Corsets,” *Hearth and Home*, December 22, 1892.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Holiday, 403

³¹ Henry Holiday, ed., *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, vol. 1 (London: Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, 1893), 5.

³² Henry Holiday, “The Artistic Aspect of Dress,” *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union* 1, no. July (1893), 23.

³³ Holiday, 23–24.

³⁴ Holiday, 24.

³⁵ Holiday, 18.

³⁶ G.F. Watts, ‘Women’s Dress’, *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union* 2, no. Spring (1884), 23.

³⁷ Drawing by Walter Crane (WCA.1.2.3.1.48), Walter Crane Archive, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester.

³⁸ See E.W. Godwin, ‘A Lecture on Dress (1868)’, *The Mask*, April 6, 1914; E.W. Godwin, ‘Modern Dress’, *The Architect*, 15 (June 10, 1876), 368.

³⁹ Walter Crane, ‘On the Progress of Taste in Dress, in Relation to Art Education’, *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, no. 3 (1894), 7–8.

⁴⁰ Holiday, *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, 1, 36.

-
- ⁴¹ The Lady Dressmaker, 'The Day's Apparel', *The Girl's Own Paper*, November 28, 1896.
- ⁴² Anonymous, 'The Pioneer of Fashion', *Le Follet: Journal Du Grand Monde, Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts &c. &c.*, July 1, 1893.
- ⁴³ Anonymous, "The Sanitary Institute," *Liverpool Mercury Etc Issue 14580*, September 25, 1894.
- ⁴⁴ Anonymous, "Day to Day in Liverpool," *Liverpool Mercury Etc Issue 14601*, October 19, 1894.
- ⁴⁵ Anonymous, "The Healthy and Artistic Dress Union."
- ⁴⁶ Anonymous, "A Lady's Bankruptcy," *Birmingham Daily Post Issue 11461*, March 13, 1895.
- ⁴⁷ Catherine Eyre, "Peasant Arts - Haslemere," October 2010, <<http://peasant-arts.blogspot.com/>> [accessed 10 December 2019]. Many thanks to Catherine for kindly sharing her research on the Haslemere Peasant Movement with me.
- ⁴⁸ Fifteen of these are held in the archive of the Women's Library at London Metropolitan University.
- ⁴⁹ Walter Crane, "Letter from Walter Crane," *The Dress Review* 1, no. 14 (October 1905).

ROBYNE CALVERT is a Cultural Historian with research interests focused on the history of art, architecture and design in Britain. In her role as Mackintosh Research Fellow at The Glasgow School of Art, she is charged with fostering innovative research and teaching arising from the reconstruction of the Mackintosh Building. She also lectures in architecture and design history and theory at GSA, and is also a visiting lecturer in dress history at the University of Glasgow.