

What makes a Golden Age

1642 to 1800

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1 - Formal gown

About 1760-65

Made of hand-painted Chinese silk, silk ribbon and netting trim

Chinese silks were commonly exported to England and were an alternative to brocades and embroidery in the mid-18th century. A variety of pigments were used, including malachite, silver and lead. The floral pattern indicates that the silk was made for a Western market.

The pleated 'sack' back gown was generally worn over wide hoops for formal occasions. This one was altered for a child's fancy dress at a later date.

2 - Garden hat

About 1750

Made of horsehair and silk, this hat was thought to be Chinese by its collector. In fact, this garden or bergère (shepherdess) hat was made in Europe from a stiff fabric woven with a mixture of horsehair and silk. The broad brim would have shaded the wearer from the sun, an elegant version of the summer hats worn by agricultural workers.

3 - Flintlock long gun for wild fowl shooting

About 1780

Made by Laughner, England

The sport of shooting birds on the wing developed after the invention of the flintlock in about 1635, and was fashionable on country estates in the 18th century. The long fowler was a variation of the standard fowling-piece, which was designed to kill as many waterfowl in a single shot as possible.

4 - Court suit

About 1775-80

The gentleman's matching suit of coat, waistcoat and breeches evolved from the late 17th century onwards. These garments became known as a 'suit of dittos' when made up in the same fabric, in this case a silk brocade with a striped ground and floral motifs. Striped fabrics and large buttons became increasingly fashionable during the 1780s.

5 - Earthenware *sgraffito* decorated posset pot

Dated 1687

Made in North Devon

On the cover is a figure of a fiddler surrounded by dancing couples. The inscribed initials, 'IH IR', probably commemorate a betrothal or marriage.

Posset was a popular drink of the age made with hot milk, spices and wine or ale. Spouts were provided on the pot so as to prevent the drinkers consuming the milk which had curdled on the surface. This rare survival shows that while our taste in drinks may have changed over the centuries, the nature of our parties and celebrations have not.

6 - Earthenware bowl and cover

Dated 22 June 1844

Made by Robert Fishley, Fremington

With applied and incised decoration of fruit and leaves and handles in the form of swans.

7 - Earthenware *sgraffito* decorated harvest jug

Dated 28 April 1775

Made in North Devon, probably in Bideford by Thomas Fields

The inscription on this jug celebrates the coming of the harvest. It is typical of the 18th century. The *sgraffito* decoration includes the royal coat of arms and motto with lion and unicorn supporters.

The word *sgraffito* comes from Italian, meaning 'to scratch', which for ceramic decoration means scratched through a covering of liquid clay, or slip.

8 - *Sgraffito* decorated harvest jug

Dated 1703

Made in North Devon

Inscribed: 'the fearful hare doth run a pace because the honds are on thare chace : the country hee is forst to fly : whilst thy are out with hue and cry : nature hath taught him in this strife to seeke for to presarve his life which hee by running doth obtaine and then the hounds retorne a gaine the huntsmen seing that doth cry : lett him goe his meat is dry : ile to my landladay with speed for I have greater need.'

9 - Man trap

Around 1750-1820

Used on Dartmoor

A fearsome device used to keep trespassers off enclosed land and to catch poachers. These traps were made illegal in 1827.

10 - Tailor's bill

1793-1795

A detailed account from William Heron to Laurence Palk, of Haldon, Devonshire, for everyday and regimental tailoring. It includes an order for fashionable waistcoats dated 17 May 1793.

11 - Waistcoat

About 1750-60

This garment of silk velvet and wool, with applied silver-gilt embroidery was made for William Adams, probably for an important winter occasion, as velvet was a winter fabric. Born in Totnes, South Devon, in 1724, William became a surgeon and burgess of the town. He would have been in his 30s when this splendid waistcoat was made for him.

12 - Draper's bill

1789

A list of 18th-century draper's stock, including waistcoat fronts ready for making up, on a bill for the Mayor of Exeter, 1789. One order was for two yards (1.8 metres) of royal purple lutestring, a type of glossy silk, at 5s 8d a yard (around £17.80 today).

13 - Coral rattle and teether mounted on silver whistle with silver bells

About 1814

Unidentified silversmith, marked (?) 'W.J.'

This high quality piece was a gift from Mrs Denham, a follower of the Exeter Prophetess Joanna Southcott for the Shiloh, her expected child.

She had announced that she was to give birth to the Messiah at the age of 64. The dove, crown and eight-pointed star motifs are all associated with Joanna.

14 - Baby slippers

1814

The 'Prince of Peace' and 'King of Salem' are stitched on the right and left slipper. Made from silk satin embroidered in silver thread and spangles, with silk ribbon ties.

The slippers are part of a set of garments which were probably made by the same London workshop for Joanna Southcott's expected child. A codicil to Joanna's will records the names of the believers who commissioned gifts for mother and baby. On her death they were to be returned to the donors.

15 - Passport to Paradise

Joanna Southcott

1806, paper, ink and wax

The 'seal' is signed by Joanna Southcott and dated 1806.

Joanna's 'passports' were sold to believers. The inscriptions always read the same: 'The sealed of the Lord elect precious Man's Redemption to inherit the Tree of Life To be made Heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.'

Papers were prepared in advance, then signed and sealed by Joanna ready for use.

16 - Page in Joanna Southcott's own handwriting

Undated

Indecipherable at first glance, this page may be an example of 'automatic' writing. It is just possible to pick out the word 'sickness'.

Joanna stated that she received her communications from a holy spirit. Many sources state that Joanna was illiterate, although she could sign her own name. She dictated her 'writings' to her assistants.

17 - Glass 'Southcott' communion beaker

About 1809

Made in England

The hourglass and quill pens are symbols of Joanna's prophecies. The inscription reads:

'IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1809 AGED 60 TO JOANNA SOUTHCOTT' and 'THE GIFT OF JOHN AND ANNE PYE TO JOANNA SOUTHCOTT OUR SPIRITUAL MOTHER AMEN.'

The Revd Tozer and John Pye were both disciples of Joanna. Pye, a successful London engraver, may have engraved these beakers himself.

18 - Glass 'Southcott' communion beaker

About 1809

Made in England

This beaker and its companion are wheel engraved with scenes from the prophecies of Joanna Southcott. Both include an apple tree with figures of Joanna and Shiloh beneath. The inscription reads:

'IS NOT THINE EVERYWHERE PRESENT DESPISE NOT PROPHECIES' and 'THE GIFT OF JOHN AND ANNE PYE TO W. TOZER. 16 NOVEMBER 1809. TAKEN FROM JOANNA SOUTHCOTT'S PROPHECIES. J.P. .'

19 - Silver two-handled cup from South Street Baptist church

1725-1726

Made by John Elston, Exeter

Two-handled cups and tumblers were sometimes used in place of communion cups by nonconformists

20 - Sgraffito decorated harvest jug

About 1850

Probably made by Robert Fishley, Fremington

Decorated with a ploughing scene and portrait of John Wesley. Wesley (1703-1791) was a founder of the Methodist movement who travelled to Devon several times.

As this jug reveals, Methodism held a long-lasting appeal with rural communities in the West Country. The religion, as seen here, encouraged people to experience Christ personally through their daily work and leisure time.

21 - The Last Judgement

John Weston (probably 1696-1733)

Made 1711

Weston was a talented Exeter sculptor. This fine marble relief was carved for the Kelland Monument in Ashprington church. The upper figures are the Blessed being carried heavenward by angels. The lower figures await Judgement or descend to the mouth of hell.

22 - Riding habit

About 1810-20

Made from Nankeen (undyed, unbleached cotton) with cloth buttons.

This hand-sewn garment was made to fit a young girl. It was probably intended to be worn during the summer months as a coverall for walking or riding. The natural unbleached cotton fabric was closely woven making it suitable for durable footwear, outdoor and protective clothing. Dry dusty roads created clouds of dirt which would not penetrate or show on the surface of the stout nankeen cloth. Nankeen was originally made in China at Nanjing, the city which gives the fabric its name.

23 - Summer bonnet

About 1834

Bonnets were fashionable wear for promenading in the summer months. Made from straw plait and silk ribbon, silk inner cap edged with blond silk lace.

Like lace-making, straw plaiting was a cottage industry in the 19th century. Workers would split and weave the straw at home, while the hats were made up in workshops and factories.

Plain straw plait bonnets were often trimmed at home with a variety of haberdashery.

24 - Formal shoes

About 1830

Made by Aushan, Cossitullah, Calcutta

Made with silk satin uppers and leather sole. They are straights (identical left and right) trimmed with pleated silk ribbons, with heel-less leather sole. These shoes appear to have been unworn, since the shoemakers printed paper label is intact. In Calcutta (Kolkata) India, a cosmopolitan colonial port city, indigenous craftsmen and traders catered to European tastes.

25 - Fan

About 1810-15

Brisé (from the French for broken) fans could be made in ivory, wood, tortoiseshell, or mother of pearl. Bone and greenhorn ones, such as this fan, were cheaper alternatives. The horn has a semi-transparent quality. Fine sticks are held together at the top edge by a series of ribbons, and at the bottom by a metal or decorative pivot. Small painted fans were fashionable summer accessories.

26-27 - Fashion plates

Publications including fashion plates became an important way of informing ladies of the latest styles. One of the most influential in the early 19th century was Ackermann's Repository of Arts.

26 - A riding habit featured in La Belle Assemblée

March 1807

Side-saddle habits were made with long trains which covered the legs when riding. Women did not ride astride. This plate shows a leather safety strap in use. La Belle Assemblée advertised fabrics and trimmings as well as publishing articles on everything from fashion and the arts to cookery and politics.

27 - A walking or promenade dress featured in Ackerman's Repository

1809

Fashion plate taken from Ackerman's Repository of the Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions and Politics. Walking dress was usually slightly shorter than indoor clothing, for ease of movement.

28 - Morning and fancy dress featured in an unidentified publication (probably *World of Fashion*)

1831

The newest fashions for November 1831 include morning dresses accompanied by large bonnets with fancy trimmings, as worn by the Countess of Jersey and Queen Adelaide, and a Grecian fancy dress costume.