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Anna King's dress: trade and society in early colonial Sydney

ABSTRACT

A dress which belonged to Anna King, the wife of Philip Gidley King, the third governor of New South Wales, is one of the earliest surviving items of clothing with Australian provenance. Made from embroidered Indian muslin, the evening dress, dated to c.1805, is a significant item of colonial Australian material culture. Anna King's dress has regularly been cited as an example of the early trade between India and Australia. In providing updated research into the dress, including new insights from Anna King's diary, written on her voyage to Australia in 1799-1800, I move beyond the general recognition, made by James Broadbent and Marion Fletcher, that the fabric is of Indian origin, and challenge the assumption that it was imported into Australia directly from India. By tracing the origins of the fabric and investigating who may have made the dress this article illuminates the social life of an early colonial society making the transition from a penal colony to one which also provided opportunities for emancipated convicts and free settlers. A close study of this particular garment provides insights into the social mores of a small but developing settlement, the establishment of businesses, and the complex networks of trade that were developing between India and the colony. This article also argues that the dress – both in terms of its form, fabric, and manner of procurement – is evidence that genteel styles of dress from Britain were already arriving in the penal colony in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Introduction – the muslin dress in context

An evening dress, now in the collection of the National Trust of Australia (NSW), is an early surviving example of the movement of goods between India, Britain and the newly founded colony at Port Jackson (Fig. 1).¹ The dress belonged to Governor Philip Gidley King's wife, Anna, and dates to about 1805. Made of fine muslin embroidered with a sprig and dot design in

¹ The dress was donated to the National Trust of Australia (NSW) in 1968 by Miss H. Buchanan, a descendant of the King family.



Figure 1. Australia, *Evening dress*, c.1805. Cotton (Indian muslin), gilt silver thread, Sydney, National Trust of Australia (NSW), inv. No. 75161. (National Trust of Australia). Photograph courtesy National Gallery of Victoria.

gilded silver plate (the term for a flat metallic thread) the fabric is almost certainly Indian in origin, while the garment itself was most likely made in Sydney.² The very fact that there was a place for such a formal style of dress in these early years of settlement suggests there was an adherence to established social strictures and forms of etiquette which were transposed from Britain to the newly founded colony.³ This is supported by a watercolour of the King family (now in the collection of the Mitchell Library, Sydney) executed by the artist Robert Dighton in England in 1799 before the Kings embarked for Sydney (Fig. 2). It shows Anna and her daughters Elizabeth and Anna Maria wearing the high-waisted, white muslin dresses of the era, the type of genteel garments which were transplanted to the colony of New South Wales in the early years of settlement.

Anna King's surviving dress from c.1805 is a modest interpretation of the Neoclassical or Empire-line, high-waisted fashion that came into vogue towards the end of the eighteenth century and continued in various forms until the mid-1820s, when women's fashions once again emphasised the natural position of the waistline.⁴ The style, inspired by an interest in the antique and classical forms, was characterised by a slender silhouette, a low neckline and a seam line set high under the bust. This style favoured the use of light-weight and delicately embroidered cottons, the majority of which, until the early nineteenth century, were produced in India.

The numerous muslin dresses that survive in British and American dress collections provide evidence of the finely woven and embroidered fabrics which were produced in India for a Western export market. The finest of these cottons were the translucent hand-spun muslins woven in Bengal and imported in large quantities to Europe during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century.⁵ These fashions were accompanied by a craze for imported Kashmir shawls, which also feature widely in portraits and fashion prints of the time.⁶ Aside from the fabric itself being a luxury product, the

² Broadbent, 2003, p. 161 and Fletcher, 1984, p. 34.

³ See for example Maynard, 1990, p. 87.

⁴ The term refers to the high-waisted style of dresses worn by fashionable women during Napoleon Bonaparte's First Empire in France, 1804-15, see Byrde, 1992; Ribeiro, 1995.

⁵ Ghuznavi, 2006, p. 303; Ashmore, 2012.

⁶ For example, A.-J. Gros. Empress Josephine, 1809, oil on canvas, Musée Masséna, Nice; François Gérard, Madame Charles Maurice de Talleyrand Périgord (Noël Catherine Verléé, 1761-1835), later Princesse de Bénévent, c.1805, oil on canvas, 225.7 x 164.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. A version of the Kashmir shawl, known as a Norwich shawl, was manufactured in England. Clabburn, 2002. These shawls were imported into New South Wales in the early nineteenth century and regularly appeared in lists of goods for sale

wearing of white muslin also denoted status; the wearer being able to employ servants to regularly wash and care for the garments.⁷ Such were the connotations attached to the wearing of fine white muslin, that it was considered inappropriate and pretentious for those of lower social standing to wear dresses made of this fabric.⁸



Figure 2. Robert Dighton, *Philip Gidley and Anna Josepha King, and their children Elizabeth, Anna Maria and Phillip Parker*, 1799. Watercolour, 23.5 x 34.5 cm, Sydney, State Library of New South Wales, inv. No. ML 1244. (State Library of New South Wales).

The Governor's wife

When Anna Josepha King arrived in the settlement of Port Jackson in 1800 as the wife of the third governor of New South Wales, she had already experienced life in the colony. In 1791, as a new bride, she had made the voyage from her home in England to Norfolk Island, where her husband had been superintendent of the penal colony since 1788.⁹ Six weeks after they

in The Sydney Gazette. See S. Lord, 'S. Lord - Capital investment per the "Cato" ', The Sydney Gazette, 2 April, 1803, p. 3.

⁷ Ashmore, 2012, p. 46.

⁸ Byrde, p. 27.

⁹ King arrived on the First Fleet with governor Arthur Phillip and in February 1788 he embarked for Norfolk Island with a selection of convicts and military to set up a subsidiary colony. In 1790 King was sent back to London by Phillip to report to the government on the state of the colony and the difficulties it was facing. During this time he married his cousin Anna Josepha Coombe. Shaw, 1967.

arrived on the remote island her first child, Phillip Parker, was born. The Kings remained on Norfolk Island until 1796, when they returned to England due to Philip's ill health. Aside from Elizabeth, the wife of Captain William Paterson, who lived on the island for the first fifteen months of the King family's residence, Anna was the only woman on the island who was neither a current nor emancipated convict.¹⁰ The Kings lived in the basic dwelling that served as government house, and during their four years on the island Anna bore two more children. It is likely that the family had assigned convicts to assist with domestic chores. Ex-convict Jane Dundas, who had been in the service of Governor Phillip in Sydney, was appointed as housemaid to the Kings and had travelled with them to Norfolk Island.¹¹ The rudimentary circumstances and remoteness of the island would have required Anna to 'make do'. Such tasks would have included the sewing and mending of clothing and household linen. Indeed, Anna's skills as a needlewoman were recorded a number of years later, when the Kings had returned to Sydney. It was reported in 1801 that as part of the gifts sent to Pomarré, the chief of Otaheite (Tahiti) by Governor King in return for pork for the colony, 'Mrs King with her own hands made Poomarra a very Eligant Dress, Ornimented in the best manner'.¹² This dress was cut from a quantity of scarlet cloth which was had no doubt been imported from either England or India.

When Philip Gidley King returned to the colony in 1800 to take up the post of governor of New South Wales, he was accompanied by Anna and their youngest child Elizabeth, while their two elder children stayed in England to be educated. This was the first time a governor's wife had come to live in Sydney and government house became a family home as well as a site for official events and social activities. From the regular reports in the colony's first newspaper, *The Sydney Gazette* (first issued in 1803), it is evident that government house was the centre of a lively social scene that included officers and their wives, ladies and gentlemen and foreign visitors. In 1804 it was announced that, 'His Excellency the Governor requests the Pleasure of the Officers Civil and Military, with their Ladies, to a Ball and Supper at Government-House, on Monday the 4th of June, being the Anniversary of His Majesty's Birth-day'.¹³ These occasions would have called for the wearing of particular dress—officers in their uniforms, gentlemen in evening attire, and, women in evening or ball gowns. As hostess, the governor's wife would have been cognisant of dress protocols and ensured that her wardrobe included

¹⁰ Bassett, 1967; Shaw, 1967.

¹¹ Gillen, 1989, p. 110.

¹² Hassall, 1801, p. 110.

¹³ *The Sydney Gazette*, 27 May 1804, p. 1.

appropriate garments for such occasions. The style of Anna's dress, with its flat, bias-cut bodice and the concentrated gathering of the skirt at the centre-back waist dates it towards the end of King's term as governor.¹⁴ In 1806 he relinquished the post and the family returned to England where King died in September 1808.¹⁵

Anna King was among a small group of women who, married to colonial administrators, accompanied their husbands to Sydney during the last decade of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth centuries. Elizabeth Macarthur, Anna King and the Reverend Samuel Marsden's wife, Elizabeth, all married in Britain with the knowledge that they would soon depart to live in the newly-founded colony of New South Wales.¹⁶ In doing so, they prepared themselves for life in the remote colony. Aware of the limited and erratic supplies of goods, they took the necessities with them. As wives, mothers and supportive companions of their husbands, these women stood as examples of genteel, civilised society in the rough and ready surroundings of a penal colony.¹⁷ In this context, the style and quality of these women's dress served to differentiate them from convict and ex-convict women.

Muslin and general clothing in the colony

In the colony of New South Wales, Anna King's dress stands in stark contrast to the military and convict clothing worn at the time. Most convicts wore what was described as 'slop' wear, coarsely woven and roughly constructed garments provided by the British government. These ready-made garments resembled the type of basic everyday clothing worn in Britain by the labouring population.¹⁸ In the early nineteenth century male convicts in New South Wales possessed a short blue jacket, a shirt (usually of linen), a pair of duck (strong cotton) or gurrah (coarse Indian muslin) trousers, a pair of stockings, breeches, shoes, hat and cap.¹⁹ Women were issued with a jacket,

¹⁴ Byrde, 1992, p. 24.

¹⁵ Shaw, 1967.

¹⁶ Married in England in 1788, Elizabeth Macarthur arrived with her husband John, a lieutenant in the New South Wales Corps, on the Second Fleet in 1790. Steven, 1967. Elizabeth and Samuel Marsden married in 1793 and departed two months later when Samuel was appointed assistant to Reverend Johnson in the colony of New South Wales. Yarwood, 1967.

¹⁷ Donkin, 1988, p. 19.

¹⁸ Styles, 2007, p. 55. Styles describes the basic dress of plebian men and women in the eighteenth century as comprising shirt, breeches, coat and waistcoat for the men and petticoat, gown, stays (corset) and shift. Both wore stockings, shoes, hat and neck cloth.

¹⁹ Clark, Clark, Simpson, Terry and Wishart, 2010, p. 212.

petticoat, shift, cap, hat, a pair of stockings and shoes.²⁰ Within this context Anna King's dress is a surviving example of a rare early colonial garment. It is also an example of the British dress protocols and manners that were transmitted to Australia by women who came as free settlers in the early years of colonial settlement.

Early nineteenth century sketches of the settlement of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land depict military men in uniform, while convicts and the general population wear a mixture of blue and buff coloured jackets and trousers. In contrast, the small population of gentlemen are shown dressed in tailored coats, trousers and top hats, while ladies wear white Empire-line muslin gowns and outer garments of spencers and pelisses (Fig. 3).²¹



Figure 3. Joseph Lycett, *View of Sydney Cove from Dawes Point*, c.1819. In an Album of original drawings by Captain James Wallis and Joseph Lycett, c.1817-18, bound with *An Historical account of the Colony of New South Wales*, London: Rudolph Ackermann, 1821. Sydney, State Library of New South Wales, inv. No. FL471254. (State Library of New South Wales).

²⁰ Clark, Clark, Simpson, Terry and Wishart, 2010, p. 213. Although made in the thousands, none of these garments from the early colonial period survive.

²¹ See the watercolours by Joseph Lycett, *View upon the South Esk River*, Van Diemen's Land, c.1823, 20.7 x 28.5 cm, (Art Gallery of South Australia); *Woolloomooloo*, the residence of Edward Riley Esq JP, near Sydney, New South Wales, c.1823, 20.9 x 28.2 cm, (National Gallery of Victoria); *View of Parramatta*, New South Wales, c.1823, 16.5 x 26.7 cm, (Private Collection). McPhee, ed., 2006, pp. 188, 230, 256, Figs. 79, 114, 137.

Until the 1810s, when the mechanised mills of Britain overtook production of cotton, India was the source for all manner of cotton fabrics. Cotton growing and production originated in the Indian subcontinent and the finest muslins, known as Dakka muslins, were highly prized luxury exports.²² With the opening up of trade between Europe and India in the seventeenth century, and the establishment of the British and Dutch East India Companies (1600 and 1602 respectively) the export production of cotton expanded. In 1651 the British East India Company set up a muslin factory at Hooghly and another one in Calcutta in 1690. At its height in the eighteenth century, the Company had nineteen factories located in major weaving centres in India.²³

There was a large volume of trade in fine cottons between India and Britain, and early Australian newspapers provide evidence of the importation of Indian fabrics into the colony. Auction lists and advertisements published in the *The Sydney Gazette* list a range of textile and clothing goods, and muslins are regularly described by type. For example, in 1803 'tambour'd muslins of different patterns, plain strip'd, and checquer'd muslins' were on sale at the house of Ann Grant in Pitt's Row, Sydney.²⁴ Goods from speculative cargos could be purchased either at auction or through basic shops which often operated from the front room of a house.²⁵

Although Anna King's dress has regularly been cited as an example of the early trade between India and Australia,²⁶ there is no evidence that luxury metallic embroidered muslins, like that used in Anna's dress, were imported into Sydney in the early years of the nineteenth century. At that time, most basic necessities, such as food and clothing, were provided through the government commissariat store. Specialised items and luxury goods had to be obtained privately. People either brought sought-after goods with them from Britain, or enlisted friends or family to select items on their behalf. Auctions of deceased estates and of those departing the colony were another way of accessing specific goods.

Due to their cost and the limited market at the time, it is unlikely that gilt embroidered muslins were imported as part of the speculative trade of goods that moved directly between India and Australia. If they were being sold, it would be expected that a local supplier would extol the availability of such luxury goods and advertise his or her ability, in the face of local

²² Ghuznavi, 2006, p. 308.

²³ Ghuznavi, 2006, p. 308.

²⁴ Grant, 1803, p. 1.

²⁵ Kingston, 1994, p.10.

²⁶ Broadbent, Rickard and Steven, 2003, p.161; Fletcher, 1984, pp. 34-35; Maynard, 2016, 13.

competition, to import specialised items. It is therefore more likely that the fabric in Anna King's dress was imported either on request or was brought with her from Britain.

Trade between India and Australia

Within a few years of settlement, businessmen and emancipated convicts in Sydney took up the opportunity to bring in supplies of much needed goods. Simeon Lord, who had been transported to Australia in 1791 and emancipated early, became a prosperous businessman.²⁷ He acted as a middleman or agent, selling spirits and merchandise shipped to the colony by the officers of the New South Wales Corps.²⁸ In 1801, Lord was appointed public auctioneer, enabling him to sell goods on behalf of the captains of incoming cargo ships.²⁹ As a wholesale merchant and captain's agent, Lord was to make a substantial fortune, buying cargoes and selling on commission. In 1798 he bought buildings and warehouses in Sydney from where he ran his enterprises and by 1803 Lord was exporting oil and sealskins to London at considerable profit.³⁰ In the same year he imported a cargo of Fiji sandalwood, and in the following year Lord's attempt to sell sandalwood to China (via Canton) and bring back an illegal cargo of Chinese goods ended when the captain of the *Union* was murdered and the ship disappeared in Fiji.³¹ Such trading ventures, vulnerable to natural disasters and sabotage, were clearly a risky business, but it appears both the demand for goods and the large profits to be made were worth the risks.

In 1796, the trading house of Campbell Clarke and Company of Calcutta, sent their first cargo to New South Wales. This shipment was lost at sea. However, in 1798 Robert Campbell, who was a partner in the company, settled in Sydney and established a business at Dawes Point, complete with warehouses and a private wharf.³² By 1803 Campbell's import business

²⁷ Hainsworth, 1967. Lord was convicted in Manchester in 1790 of stealing numerous quantities of muslin and calico from the cotton manufacturer Robert Peel and Associates.

²⁸ Statham, 1990. The New South Wales Corps had been established in 1789 to relieve the Royal Marines. The latter had arrived with the First Fleet in 1788 to oversee the convicts and the settlement of the penal colony.

²⁹ Hainsworth, 1967.

³⁰ Hainsworth, 1967.

³¹ Hainsworth, 1967. The East India Co. had, by Royal Charter granted by William III, a monopoly on English trade east of the Cape of Good Hope. See Frost, 1975, pp. 606-7. Although greatly weakened after 1813 when the Company's monopoly on Indian trade came to an end, it was not fully dismantled until 1833. See Chaudhuri, 1996. Lord and other entrepreneurs regularly sought to circumvent the regulations, in some cases by concealing their stake in American ships trading in the region.

³² Steven, 1966.

appears to have been doing a brisk trade. In the 5 March 1803 issue of *The Sydney Gazette* Campbell advertises the sale of cargo from the recently arrived *Castle of Good Hope*, which included, sugar, table rice, pepper, soap, tallow and wax candles, pump and sole leather, pit and cross-cut saws, and a variety of chintz, handkerchiefs, blue gurrachs, frocks and 'Trowsers', and 'Soldiers' plain and frilled Shirts'³³ In the same publication, the 'Ship News' column describes the route taken by the *Castle of Good Hope*, which left (presumably from Calcutta) on the 1st of December and reached Ceylon a fortnight later on the 15th of December. She then made her way to Sydney through the newly charted 'Bass's Straits', rather than sailing around Van Diemen's Land. On board she also had a large quantity of livestock - 307 Bengal cows and six horses (including an Arabian stallion). It was noted that 250 of the cows 'were received by the Government at the Contract Price, i.e. 28l. per head'.³⁴ Evidently Campbell was bringing in mixed cargoes, part of which were on contract to the government and part on speculation, the latter being sold to the public from his premises.

During King's governorship sales of imported goods and descriptions of stolen items refer to clothing and accessories and lengths of fabrics. Amongst these are muslins, gingham, calicoes, chintzes, dungaree, red bird-eye bandana handkerchiefs, British and India dimities, calimancoes of different colours and nankeens.³⁵ The bulk of these textiles, which came either from India or Britain, were of a more utilitarian type, unlike the fabric of Anna King's dress.

While living in Sydney, Anna King is known to have received items of dress which she requested from Britain. During this time, she thanked Mr D'Arcy Wentworth for the pretty bonnet he had bought for her and the gift of a child's bonnet for her seven-year-old daughter Elizabeth.³⁶ The fabric for Anna's dress may have been purchased or ordered on her behalf but it is also possible that Anna brought the fabric with her when she embarked on her second voyage to Sydney in 1799. Her shipboard journal kept while aboard

³³ 'The sale of the Castle of Good Hope's cargo', *The Sydney Gazette*, 5 March 1803, p. 4.

³⁴ 'Ship News', *The Sydney Gazette*, 5 March 1803, p. 2.

³⁵ See for example, Ann Grant, 'For sale', *The Sydney Gazette*, 20 November 1803, p. 1 and 30 December 1804, p. 3. Dimities and nankeens are types of cottons and calimancoes are a type of striped or checked woolen fabric. The term tamboured refers to embroideries, at this time usually white thread on white muslin, executed on a frame in chain stitch with a tambour hook.

³⁶ Bassett, 1992, p. 62. D'Arcy Wentworth was a surgeon who arrived in the colony in 1790 and first served on Norfolk Island during King's tenure as governor of the island. Returning to Sydney in 1796, Wentworth became an influential citizen, with roles as a magistrate and as a founding director of the Bank of New South Wales. Auchmuty, 1967.

the *Speedy* laments the loss of ten pounds of muslin, which was spoiled from lying in damp chests. Her comment, 'I am however a few gowns out of pocket by this misfortune'³⁷ confirms that she had packed the fabric with the intention of having dresses made while in Australia.

Silver and gilt embroidered Indian muslin

Dresses dating to the first decade of the nineteenth century in American and British collections made from similar Indian embroidered fabrics attest to the export trade of gilt and silver embroidered muslin fabrics on both sides of the Atlantic. Embroidered with sprig, star and dot designs these dresses provide useful comparisons with Anna King's. Two dresses dating to the opening years of the nineteenth century in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston are made from imported metallic embroidered Indian muslin. The *White mull dress* (mull being an alternative word for muslin) with short puffed sleeves and wide square neckline is embroidered with an alternating pattern of dots and stars executed in silver plate (Fig. 4). Imported into America at a time when the trade of fabrics from India was at its height, the fabric was made up in America.³⁸ Similarly, the long-sleeved *Cotton dress* dating to c.1800 is embroidered with an overall 'powdering' of small eight-pointed stars, worked with flat gilded silver wire. Belonging to Henrietta Maria Levy of Baltimore, it is likely the dress was made in America.³⁹

Across the Atlantic in Glasgow, the Burrell Collection has a dress which was made in Great Britain in c.1805-1809. With short puffed sleeves and a high waistline, the dress, made of white Indian muslin, is embroidered with a regular overall pattern of small dots executed in silver plate.⁴⁰ The lower part of the skirt is embroidered with a deep band which features the almond-shaped boteh (also known as paisley), a common device used in Indian and Persian design and found in Kashmir shawls of the era.

³⁷ King, 1800, 4 January.

³⁸ Bean, 2006, p. 223.

³⁹ Finamore, 2015, email correspondence with the author, August 7, 2015.

⁴⁰ Johnson, 2016, email correspondence with the author, May 18, 2016.



Figure 4. America, *White mull dress*, early 19th century. Cotton (Indian muslin), silver flat metal embroidery, linen inner bodice, cotton ties, metal hook and eye closures. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mrs. Oric Bates, inv. No. 53.206. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Photograph © 2016 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

An English-made dress dating to c.1810 in the collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute, Japan is constructed from Indian muslin decorated with gold and silk thread embroidery.⁴¹ The overall sprig design is augmented with undulating vertical floral strips, a band of which has been used to form the hem, much in the same way as on Anna King's dress. A slightly earlier dress dating to c.1795, also in the collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute, shares similar undulating border features embroidered in silk thread.⁴²



Figure 5. Nikolaus Heideloff, 'Evening Dresses', *Gallery of Fashion* 1, no. 11, 1795, Fig. XLII., n.p. Hand-coloured engraving, 28.9 x 23.5 cm, (Bunka Gakuen Library).

The embroidered fabrics in these dresses formed part of the Indian piece-goods trade which produced finished lengths of fabric for the export market.⁴³ India has a long tradition of gold and silver embroidery linked to the Mughal courts.⁴⁴ Metal thread production and embroidery were specialised and skilled areas of production which were brought to great heights in India with the creation of sumptuous garments for the ruling classes.⁴⁵ Metalwork embroidery in India is differentiated between that

⁴¹ Starobinski, Duboy, Fukai, Kanai, Horii, Arnold and Kamer, 1989, pp. 90, 150.

⁴² Fukai, 2002, pp. 142-3.

⁴³ Ashmore, 2012, p. 23. A surviving example of a metallic embroidered muslin dress-length made in India for the export market and dating to 1800-1820 was auctioned by Christie's, London on 11 April 2008. Sale 5331, Lot 522. Christie's 2008: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/textiles-costume/a-length-of-superfine-embroidered-muslin-indian-5061808-details.aspx>, accessed May 18 2016.

⁴⁴ Naik, 1996, p. 121.

⁴⁵ Kumar, 1999, 169. The fabric of the angarkha, a long-sleeved gown, is similar to the metallic embroidered textiles made for the export market. The angarkha is embellished with gold

worked with a metallic thread wrapped around a silk core and the flattened thin strips of metal known as 'badla' work. This type of work is done by pointing and piercing the metal through the material. It is then cut and pressed flat.⁴⁶ This process was typically used to produce small dot designs, and it is this technique that was used to create the embroidery on Anna King's dress.



Figure 6. England, Dress, c.1795. cotton, gilt silver thread, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Museum of Art, inv. No. M.57.24.12. (Los Angeles Museum of Art, www.lacma.org).

embroidered sprig motifs which are evenly placed across a ground of finely woven white cotton; late 18th century; collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁴⁶ Naik, 1996, p. 144.

In the West, the vogue for gilt and silver embroidered Indian muslins, particularly those featuring overall dot, sprig or star designs, was concurrent with the Empire-line style of dress. These fabrics appear in fashion illustrations and surviving dresses from the mid-1790s to the 1820s. The February 1795 issue of the *Gallery of Fashion* features a fashion plate of an evening dress with a 'petticoat of fine muslin embroidered with gold' (Fig. 5).⁴⁷ The dress is worn with a robe of black and yellow figured silk velvet and the hair is trimmed with a spray of ostrich feathers. An English dress in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art dating to c.1795 is made from a gilt-embroidered muslin imported from India (Fig. 6).⁴⁸ The evenly spaced metallic dots and undulating floral border bear a distinct similarity to the fabric of Anna King's dress. Clearly such fashionable Indian imports were available for purchase in Britain when Anna King was selecting muslin dress lengths in 1799 to take with her to Sydney.

The dress and its maker

Anna King's dress is modest in style and economical in cut. Its neckline is cut high enough to adequately cover the bust, unlike the most radical gowns of the time, where the lowest of necklines barely covered the nipples, drawing widespread comment and disapproval.⁴⁹

A dress such as Anna King's would have been made to measure by a dressmaker or someone with reasonable cutting and sewing skills. At the time Anna was living in Sydney there was only one 'milliner and mantua-maker', an M. Hayes, who was advertising her skills in *The Sydney Gazette*. She assured her customers that her work would be 'executed in a Style of fashionable taste and neatness, with the utmost punctuality, and on terms that may recommend her to future favour'.⁵⁰

When examining the dress, it is apparent that, by comparison with fine British and French dresses of the time, this dress has been constructed in a simple and unsophisticated manner.⁵¹ The cut of the dress lacks the complexity of higher-end garments of the era and its finish is neat but not finely executed.

⁴⁷ Heideloff, 1795, 'Evening Dresses,' *Gallery of Fashion* 1, no. 11, 1795, Fig. XLII, n.p. Prior to the nineteenth century, the term petticoat referred to a skirt.

⁴⁸ Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1983, cat. 28, pl. 51, p. 148. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 'Woman's Dress, England, circa 1795', <http://collections.lacma.org/node/232523>, accessed May 21, 2016.

⁴⁹ Ribeiro, 1995, p. 94.

⁵⁰ Hayes, 1803, 'M. Hayes, milliner and mantua-maker', *The Sydney Gazette*, 17 April 1803, p. 4.

⁵¹ James Broadbent and Marion Fletcher both made similar mention of the dress's construction. See Broadbent, Rickard, and Steven, 2003, p. 161; Fletcher, 1984, p. 34.

This raises the question as to who made the dress? Close examination reveals that Anna's dress is hand-stitched together with small secure backstitches and all the seams finished so that the raw edges are enclosed to guard against fraying. In 2009, the textile conservator Skye Firth described the seams as being 'strong and intact'⁵², attesting to the robust construction techniques employed by the maker. The bodice has been cut on the bias and the side seams finished with two rows of topstitching that sit 4-5 mm apart. The vertical bust darts that run up from the high waist seam are also topstitched with a single row of small backstitches. A casing inside the neck edge allows for adjustment via a drawstring. This is a standard construction technique which helps secure the wide low neckline.⁵³ The short puffed sleeves are also regulated with a drawstring located at the lower edge of the sleeve. The skirt has been cut in two pieces, with a flat front panel that falls smoothly from the high waist and a back panel which is gathered towards the centre-back opening. The side seams have been cut so that they taper towards the waist and a separate muslin band attached to the lower edge of the skirt creates a decorative hem (Fig. 7). The band is embroidered with an undulating flower and stem design, while the scalloped lower edge is finished with metallic plate stitching. Although the hemline dips slightly at the back the dress lacks a distinctive train, perhaps an indication that there was only a limited length of pre-cut fabric available from which to create the garment.

The less complex cut of the Empire-line dresses meant that they could be made by someone with only moderate sewing skills.⁵⁴ In her detailed analysis of Jane Austen's silk pelisse of 1812-1814, Hilary Davidson acknowledges the difficulties in ascertaining whether a garment has been professionally or domestically made. Her examination of a number of contemporaneous garments established that, although sewing was a feminine skill taught from a young age, individual aptitude was wide-ranging.⁵⁵

The Marsden group of garments in the collection of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney illustrate this. Elizabeth Marsden, the wife of Reverend Samuel Marsden, and her daughter Ann, made their own clothes and eagerly followed the fashions from Europe. They also made-over dresses from old ones and altered their clothes.⁵⁶ Five items of clothing believed to

⁵² National Trust of Australia (NSW), 'Evening Dress - Worn by Mrs Anna Josepha King (1765-1844)', Sydney, n.d.

⁵³ Bradfield, 1985. See examples of dresses illustrated on pages 89-95.

⁵⁴ Ribeiro, 1995, p.110.

⁵⁵ Davidson, 2015, p. 210.

⁵⁶ Evans, 2012, p. 217.

have been sewn by Elizabeth and Ann date to the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The three dresses, child's shift and shirt habit demonstrate a high level of sewing skill. Well cut and finely sewn by hand, these garments are more professionally executed than Anna King's dress. Such comparisons raise further questions about the possible maker of Anna's dress. Was it the lone mantua-maker who was advertising her skills, or was it a domestic needlewoman or housekeeper? Or maybe Anna King herself?



Figure 7. Australia, *Evening dress*, c.1805 (hem detail). Cotton (Indian muslin), gilt silver thread, Sydney, National Trust of Australia (NSW), inv. No. 75161. (National Trust of Australia). Photograph courtesy National Gallery of Victoria.

Jane Dundas, formerly Governor Phillip's housemaid, was in the employ of the King family for fifteen years until her death.⁵⁷ Sentenced at the Old Bailey on 18 April 1787 to seven years transportation for the theft of linen tablecloths and napkins, Dundas was amongst the First Fleet convicts who sailed for Botany Bay.⁵⁸ Having left the English countryside for service in London it appears that Dundas, who was a laundry maid to the Rt. Hon. John Skinner, had been enticed by the large prize money being offered in the state lottery.⁵⁹ At her trial, she was described by Skinner's butler as an excellent maid who 'behaved vastly well always, bore a good character, a quiet sober girl.' Dundas explained that she had stolen the goods 'for the lottery' and intended to redeem them at a later date.⁶⁰ Twelve days after sentencing, she was sent to Portsmouth for transportation on the *Prince of*

⁵⁷ Donkin, 1988, p. 14.

⁵⁸ Gillen, 1989, p. 110. Uebel, 2000, p. 288.

⁵⁹ Donkin, 1988, p. 14.

⁶⁰ Donkin, 1988, p. 14. See Raven, 1991, for a discussion of government lotteries and how in the early nineteenth century they were deemed to be amoral, encouraging the young and impressionable to gamble.

Wales.⁶¹ Over a decade later, when the Kings settled in Sydney in 1800 as governor and first lady, Dundas, who had been in their employ since 1791, accompanied them on the voyage out.⁶² Taking up residence at Government House in Sydney, Dundas was their housekeeper for the next five years until her death on 22 December 1805 when the *Sydney Gazette* announced that, 'This day at noon died Mrs. Jean. Dundas, Housekeeper to His Excellency the Governor; whole Family deeply lament the loss of an honest, faithful, and affectionate servant'.⁶³

Dundas' estate, listed in *The Sydney Gazette* of 30 March 1806, largely comprises articles of clothing and textiles, including a white muslin gown, three dimity petticoats, twenty four plain pair of hose, a pair of silk gloves, a muslin bonnet, one green beaver hat, trimmings for gowns, 112 'skanes' of thread, twenty two yards of long cloth, one-and-one-third yards calico, needles, pencils, two watches and a writing desk.⁶⁴ The sale of the estate illustrates the value placed on clothing and textile staples and small luxuries when such goods were difficult to procure. The lengths of fabrics, trimmings, haberdashery and needles suggest that Dundas, like most women of her time, attended to household needlework and perhaps even basic dressmaking.⁶⁵

Although it is possible that Anna King's dress was made by an emancipated convict dressmaker, given the small number of professional dressmakers in the colony at the time, the relative simplicity of the dress' cut and construction and the fact that both Jane Dundas and Anna King were proficient with a needle, it is likely that the dress was made in the home – at Government House – by either Anna herself or her housekeeper and long-standing servant Jane Dundas. It may even have been a combined effort of cutting, fitting and sewing which was shared between the two women.

Conclusion

In a small but developing settlement, Anna King's dress provides an insight into the nature of early colonial society. Investigating the questions raised

⁶¹ Gillen, 1989, p. 110.

⁶² Jane Dundas is mentioned in the journal Anna King kept while aboard the *Speedy*.

⁶³ The *Sydney Gazette*, 'This day at noon died Mrs. Jean. Dundas', 22 December 1805, p. 1. Jane Dundas is also referred to as Janet or Jeannette. She was given the courtesy title of Mrs, although it appears she never married. Donkin, 1988. p. 15.

⁶⁴ The *Sydney Gazette*, 'To be sold by auction', 30 March 1806, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, there is no mention of scissors, which would have been a precious commodity at the time.

over its maker and how the finely embroidered muslin fabric came to Australia, reveal the skill sets of early settlers and convicts, the establishment of businesses in early colonial society, and the complex networks of trade that were developing between India and the colony. The dress's existence also demonstrates how individuals, through private channels, managed to procure specialty items which were not openly available in the colony. In providing evidence of early colonial dressmaking and the protocols of dress that existed in Sydney at the time, Anna King's dress sits within the context of a society which was shifting from a penal colony to one which welcomed free settlers and provided opportunities for emancipated convicts. Within this setting clothing acted as a tangible form of social demarcation, and Anna King's dress illustrates, both in terms of its form, fabric, and its manner of procurement, that while the colony was essentially penal in nature in the first decade of the nineteenth century, genteel styles of dress from Britain were already arriving.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1. Australia, *Evening dress*, c.1805. Cotton (Indian muslin), gilt silver thread, Sydney, National Trust of Australia (NSW), inv. No. 75161. (National Trust of Australia). Photograph courtesy National Gallery of Victoria.

Fig. 2. Robert Dighton, *Philip Gidley and Anna Josepha King, and their children Elizabeth, Anna Maria and Phillip Parker*, 1799. Watercolour, 23.5 x 34.5 cm, Sydney, State Library of New South Wales, inv. No. ML 1244. (State Library of New South Wales).

Fig. 3. Joseph Lycett, *View of Sydney Cove from Dawes Point*, c.1819. In an Album of original drawings by Captain James Wallis and Joseph Lycett, c.1817-18, bound with *An Historical account of the Colony of New South Wales*, London: Rudolph Ackermann, 1821. Sydney, State Library of New South Wales, inv. No. FL471254. (State Library of New South Wales).

Fig. 4. America, *White mull dress*, early 19th century. Cotton (Indian muslin), silver flat metal embroidery, linen inner bodice, cotton ties, metal hook and eye closures. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mrs. Oric Bates, inv. No. 53.206. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Photograph © 2016 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 5. Nikolaus Heideloff, 'Evening Dresses', *Gallery of Fashion* 1, no. 11, 1795, Fig. XLII., n.p. Hand-coloured engraving, 28.9 x 23.5 cm, (Bunka Gakuen Library).

Fig. 6. England, *Dress*, c.1795. cotton, gilt silver thread, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Museum of Art, inv. No. M.57.24.12. (Los Angeles Museum of Art, www.lacma.org).

Fig. 7. Australia, *Evening dress*, c.1805 (hem detail). Cotton (Indian muslin), gilt silver thread, Sydney, National Trust of Australia (NSW), inv. No. 75161. (National Trust of Australia). Photograph courtesy National Gallery of Victoria.

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