

Call for Papers

Date : March 12, 2007

Clothing childhood, fashioning society: Children's clothing in Britain in the 20th Century

- 17-18 January 2008 at the Foundling Museum, London WC1
- *2008 PASOLD RESEARCH FUND CONFERENCE* -- In association with the Department of Anthropology, University College London -- With the London College of Fashion
Conference Organiser: Dr Kaori O'Connor, UCL Email: k.o'connor@ucl.ac.uk *Pasold Organiser:* Professor Pat Hudson, Director, Pasold Research Fund

The young Baby Boomer as child consumer, from John and Janet Go Walking, James Nisbit, London, 1951.

The Pasold Research Fund owes its existence to the success of Ladybird, which, under the direction of Eric Pasold, became the largest children's wear company in Britain and then Europe in the years after World War II. It is therefore particularly fitting that this should be the first conference devoted to British children's clothing and textiles in the twentieth century.

Textiles and clothing are, of course, not just goods – they are also social values in material form, commodities produced and consumed at the intersection of commerce and culture. As such, they have unique potential as tools of combined social, economic and cultural analysis that has yet to be

fully explored. This is especially true of children's clothing. To date, studies of contemporary clothing and textiles have focussed on adults, 'youth' and the now-familiar distinctions and discourses of gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, locality and class. By contrast, children and their clothes have remained largely invisible to scholarly study, despite the fact that the emergence of children's consumer culture is a defining phenomenon of our times. What happens when the twentieth century – a period of unprecedented social, economic and technological change – is seen through the lens of children's clothes and textiles, their changing styles, the industries and businesses that produced them, the childhoods they fashioned and the markets they created?

The conference is informed by recent work that uses material culture in the historical study of society and economy. A pioneering work in the field is *The Commodification of Childhood* by Professor Dan Cook, the conference's keynote speaker, which focuses on the American children's wear market in the twentieth century. Cook shows how social values, culture change and commercial practice combined to facilitate the emergence of the child consumer in America, as seen through the production and consumption of children's wear. The conference provides an opportunity to consider the British clothing industry, society and childhood in a similar way, and to establish parallels and points of difference between British and American processes, products and practices. It is also intended that the conference will lay the foundations for future work of this kind. Among possible topics of interest:

- The effect of World Wars I and II on the production and consumption of children's clothes.
- Case studies of the British clothing and textile industries, and of particular British children's wear companies and labels.
- Fashions in children's clothing.
- The impact of synthetic/man-made fibres and fabrics on children's wear.
- Twentieth century dyes and the significance of colour in children's wear.
- Social class as reflected in design, style, production and consumption.
- Trade archives and the social and economic history of textiles and clothing.
- The emergence of women and mothers as forces in consumer culture.
- The rise of department stores and shops as cultural and commercial institutions with infants' and children's wear departments.
- The acceptance of ready-made garments for infants and young children as symbols of modernity and embodiments of rational scientific childcare.
- The fabrics of childhood.
- Exporting 'the English look'.
- The culture of home sewing, needlework and knitting for babies and children.
- The development of child-focussed advertising and promotion of clothing using storybook characters, cartoons, comics and radio programmes.
- Children's clothing as agents of age segmentation and gender differentiation.
- The emergence of the child as a commercial persona, marking a turning point in consumer culture and in culture generally.
- The growing marketing emphasis on girls rather than boys, and the reconfiguration of girlhood through increasingly complex age grading, size ranges and aspirational merchandise.

- The effects on production, consumption and society of the Baby Boom (1946-1964) that followed World War II and the emergence of teen and subteen girls as major figures in the post-war marketplace.
- From at least 1960 onwards, concern about 'sexual precocity' among subteen girls and about the blurring between chronological maturity, social maturity and the stylistic expression of maturity.
- The phenomenon of competitive parenthood as seen in the conspicuous consumption of children's clothes epitomised by celebrity children.

As always with Pasold Conferences, the aim is to facilitate critical dialogue across disciplinary boundaries and between academic and other practitioners, particularly those from archive, museum and conservation fields.

- The period of time covered by the conference is 1900-2000.
- 'British' refers to clothing and textiles made or worn in Britain during this period and can include imports and exports.
- 'Children' includes babies, infants and young people up to the end of the teenage years but the focus of the conference will be primarily on pre-pubescent children.

Within these parameters, papers are welcomed from the fields of textile history, social and economic history, dress and fashion history, design history, sociology, anthropology, material culture, business history, conservation; and from archive and museum professionals as well as academics. This should include postgraduate students and new researchers who may be interested in giving a short presentation (10 mins), as well as established researchers with more developed work.

Please submit your 300-word abstract including a title, along with full contact details and brief cv or affiliation by email to Dr Kaori O'Connor, University College London (k.o'connor@ucl.ac.uk) by 12 April 2007.

A book is one of the planned outcomes of the conference, and submitters should signify their willingness for their work to be included in the publication, if selected.

Cook, Daniel Thomas 2004. *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer*. Durham and London, Duke University Press.