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Daywear in the late 1830s.

Preface – A Beautiful Mystery

In January of 2016 I was given an extraordinary gift. Wrapped in brown paper that had softened with age and moulded to the shape of the object within, I discovered a treasure almost two centuries old that was to reveal the life of one woman and her broader network of family and friends. Underneath the brown paper was a book, a ledger of sorts, that was covered in a bright-magenta silk, frayed along the edge of the album so that a glimpse of its marbled cover was just visible. The shape of the book had distorted, being narrower at the spine but expanding to accommodate the contents, reminding me of my mum's old recipe book, which had swelled over the years as newspaper cuttings and handwritten notes were added.

This book, measuring some twelve and a half inches long by eight and a half inches across, contained pale-blue blank pages, originally unlined and unmarked. As I carefully opened the front cover and looked at the first page, my breath caught: this was indeed a marvel. Carefully pasted in place were four pieces of fabric, three of them framed in a decorative waxed border – scraps of silk important enough to have been memorialised. Accompanying each piece of cloth was a small handwritten note inked in neat copperplate: names; a date: 1838.

As I turned more leaves, a kaleidoscope of colour and variety unfolded. There were small textile swatches – sometimes only two pieces at a time, and sometimes up to twelve – all cut into neat rectangles or octagons and pasted in rows that blossomed across each page. The notes were written above each snippet of fabric, sometimes curving around the shape of it, becoming part of the materiality of the volume. I knew from the

very outset that this was something precious, an ephemeral piece of a life lived long ago. It was a beautiful mystery.

The elderly lady who gave me the book explained what she knew of its provenance, which was very little. While she was working in the London theatre world in the 1960s, a young man assisting her in the wardrobe department found this unusual curiosity on a market stall in Camden. He thought that the pages of the scrapbook, filled as they were with colourful textiles, might be of interest in the theatre wardrobes where she worked. The book remained in this lady's possession for fifty years until she passed it on to me.

There was no immediate indication of who might have created this amazing 'dress diary', as I called it; of who had spent so much time carefully arranging the pieces of wool, silk, cotton and lace into a chronological documenting of lives in cloth. Whilst there was much I was uncertain of, however, one thing I knew for sure from the careful handwriting that arched over each piece of cloth: this was the work of one woman. I just didn't know who she was.

In the months that followed I began to try and unravel some of the stories that might be contained in the album's pages. Rather than detail its contents digitally, I had a sense that, to be authentic, I needed to write everything down in longhand. I bought a leather-bound book of handmade paper and a black ink pen and started at the beginning, transcribing each tiny caption. I wrote down names, dates, fabrics, colours and patterns, trying to see who might emerge, looking out for clues about who the author could have been. I counted more than 2,000 pieces of fabric: some patterned, others plain; some large and others much smaller. There were pieces paired with longer captions, and others that bore simply a year or even nothing at all.

The book was full of names: Fanny Taylor, Hannah Wrigley, Mary Fletcher, Charlotte Dugdale, Bridgetanne Peacock, Maria Balestier. I recorded more than a hundred different names in the book, binding their

wearers to clothes worn long ago – some appearing with great frequency across its pages and others only fleetingly, acquaintances made and lost amongst friendships of longer standing.

I found that only seventy fragments were associated with male garments, and only seventeen of the names recorded were those of men. It seemed that at a time when so much of literature and the arts was focused on the endeavours of men, this was a book dedicated to the world of women. I decided to try and piece together the lives of some of these women through the clues that were left behind, scant though they often were. Using what felt like a forensic approach in its detail, I focused on fragments of cloth to illuminate the world these women inhabited, enabling a wider context to emerge. What began to appear were the tales of an era, placing these lives into the industrial maelstrom of the nineteenth century with all its noise, colour and innovation.

The structure of the album, the names and the cloths themselves suggested that this was not a volume compiled in the rarefied spaces of the aristocracy, but something more quotidian: the creator being a woman of some means, but inhabiting the world of the well-to-do middle classes. This woman and others – women whose lives would otherwise go unrecorded, hidden in the shadows of history – found themselves unwittingly front and centre of this story.

The practice of making collections of one kind or another was a common activity in the nineteenth century. Taxonomies of the natural world, cataloguing flora and fauna, abounded. Plant-hunters were collecting seeds, entomologists were charting insect life and in the 1830s – the years in which this diary commenced – Charles Darwin was beginning to pose his theories outlining evolutionary changes in species that were to shake the very foundations of scientific understanding. The determination to bring order in a fast-shifting world reached into domestic spaces too, and households around the UK began to create albums of ephemera. Early photographers produced fantastical albums with prints and

watercolours, and scrapbooks were filled with keepsakes, autographs, poems and drawings.

Women's creative pursuits were many and varied, but rarely were their efforts recognised as anything more than diversions. The decorative handicrafts of women have traditionally been read as acts of leisure: idling away the hours in the domestic spaces afforded to the middling and upper classes, and wasting time on inconsequential endeavours. Thankfully, more recent revisionist histories have begun to challenge these perceptions and to take more seriously the objects made by women, to view them as artistic practices rather than foolish accomplishments. Take the botanical collages created by Mary Delaney. At the age of seventy-two, Mary, whose colourful life up to that point had included friendships with Jonathan Swift, George Frideric Handel and the great social commentator of the day, William Hogarth, embarked on a project that would become her legacy. She watched one day as a geranium petal fell to the floor and felt compelled to replicate the fragile petal in paper, carefully cutting out its replica. She repeated the process until she had created a life-size collage of the plant, which she called a 'flower mosaick'. She then arranged the cutouts onto a piece of black paper and pasted them on. So lifelike was the result that her friend the Duchess of Portland proclaimed that she could not tell the real flower from the paper one.

Whereas the creator of the book I was examining used a pale-blue background for her own form of mosaic, Mary Delaney created the inkiest of black backdrops, by painting white paper in black watercolour until it was as dark as it could be. She practised her art form over the next decade, cutting thousands upon thousands of tiny slivers of paper in all the colours of the botanical rainbow to create hundreds more of her now-famous collages. 'I have invented a new way of imitating flowers,' she wrote in a letter in 1772. So detailed were her creations that botanists still refer to their accuracy, and they are studied with awe at their home in the British Museum.

A 'flower mosaik' by Mary Delaney, 1778.

The dress diary in my possession is rare, but is not the only one of its kind to remain. One famous surviving example was created by Miss Barbara Johnson, starting in the middle of the eighteenth century and continuing into the early nineteenth century. As a single woman whose finances had to be carefully managed, Barbara began to catalogue the textiles that she purchased for making up into clothing. She snipped pieces of precious cloth and pinned them into a large accounting ledger, including details of their type, cost per yard and the kind of garments that they would become, once sent to the dressmaker. She even pasted in small black-and-white engravings from early fashion publications to indicate the ambitions that she had for her new clothes. For more than seventy years she maintained her album, adding 121 samples to its pages. It served a practical purpose, helping her to balance her books and providing financial clarity. More than that, though, it was a colourful record of Barbara's journey through life and the central place that dress played in her day-to-day world. The album was saved by her extended family and eventually became part of the collections at the Victoria and Albert

Museum in London, one of their rare treasures. It is the only one of its kind in their collection.

In fact in the whole of the UK I failed to find another album like either Barbara Johnson's or the one that had fallen into my own hands. That is not to say they do not exist, or were not created in greater numbers in decades past. My mystery diarist could not have been the only one in the nineteenth century to choose to record an aspect of her life in this way, and the very tactility of cloth lends itself to this form of remembrance. There may well be volumes of fabric scraps languishing in trunks in attics, or wrapped in the bottom drawer of an elderly chest. There may even be examples that were once catalogued and then forgotten in an archive or a museum, their value yet to be identified.

A dress diary suffers from the double ignominy of being about largely female experiences and about dress – concerns that, in the nineteenth century at least, lent them little by way of artistic merit. The field of dress history has been an academic discipline that has had to fight for recognition amongst more traditionally respected scholarship, the study of clothing being perceived as an ephemeral concern. There have been many occasions during my own career when I have been introduced at an academic conference as a historian studying (cue a long pause and a raised eyebrow) 'fashion'. The slight bemusement that has so often accompanied such introductions reveals a deep-seated perception of dress as superficial and inconsequential – that to be interested in clothing is to lack seriousness. Yet here we all are dressed in clothes, making daily decisions about how we will face the world. We might use dress as our armour, a protective carapace to shield us from censure, or we might use it to express our place and space. Even if we have no interest in fashion, we still choose garments that are indicative in some way of the cultural landscape that shapes each one of us. The creator of my album shared these daily decisions, preferring this colour or that fabric in her own environs.

In America there are a handful of albums that share similarities with mine, volumes created by women describing, in material form, the decisions they made about the contents of their wardrobes. A few years ago, during a New York blizzard, I battled through snowy streets to visit the Brooklyn Museum on an entirely different research errand. I was the only visitor that day. The stewards were slightly bemused that anybody had ventured forth through the drifts on the pavements, but my visit to the US was of short duration and I was determined not to miss an opportunity. Having made notes on a number of documents in their collection, I noticed an intriguing facsimile volume on display in the reading room. It was a photocopy of a book that had little pieces of fabric attached to its pages, alongside annotation and photographs. I had never seen anything like it, as this was before the gift of my dress diary, but it proved to be a serendipitous discovery, unknowingly pre-empting the acquisition of my own album some years later. Thanks to the weather, I was the only person in the room, and the collections assistant asked if I would be interested in seeing the book itself. She brought it out for me to study and I spent a happy hour perusing its pages.

The album had been created by a woman named Ida Jackson, who was born in Cazenovia in New York in 1855, and her album was a personal journey charting her own life – from scraps of her childhood to her adult years. Unlike the album now in my possession, Ida attached the occasional photograph of herself, so that future viewers could bring to mind the wearer of the fabrics that she included, fastening cloth and the trimmings that went with it, alongside a description of the garment. Her chatty asides positioned her in a world of changing styles more clearly than the briefer notes appended to my own volume. Next to one blue-and-white striped cotton she wrote, 'Wore above draped black mohair skirt when overskirts began to come back into fashion.' She even recalled specific trips by means of the dress she had worn, including a beige-and-white striped silk worn in 1873, which she captioned, 'Worn on visit to

C——town for feet.' There are so many unanswered questions in *that* intriguing note.

Ida's was not the only example of a dress diary to emerge in the US. The Brooklyn Museum holds another album kept by Helen Ranney, dating to the late nineteenth century. Inside the cover of this book, Helen pasted a newspaper clipping that gave definitions of fabric names. Next to small squares of cloth she wrote briefly about their origins – 'Little Girl School' or 'Best Dress'. And she went even further, noting which ones she liked and which ones she didn't, a reminder that we are all prone to an impulse-buy that we later regret, then as now.

New Englander Ann Eliza Cunningham kept her 'sewing diary' in the mid-nineteenth century, attaching large swatches of cloth to the pages of a patented scrapbook that extended to 144 pages. She noted momentous occasions through dress and included the purchase of the cloth and the maker as well, uniting each stage of the garment, from store to body. Next to a boldly patterned printed-cotton rectangle she noted, 'Bought at Uncle Gideon's Store in May 1849, Rhoda cut it, wore to school the first morning I made my appearance at the Lunenburg Academy June 7th 1849.' Here are the owners of the drapery store, Rhoda Saville the dressmaker and Ann Cunningham herself stepping out in her new dress for her first day at school.

Another young woman, Mabel Lewis Patterson, continued to fill a scrapbook that was started by her mother Marcia in 1872, and recorded almost every item of clothing that she owned until the age of twenty-four, when she left home for college. Like Ann Cunningham, Mabel linked garments to special occasions, so that they became tied to that time and place. An embroidered white silk was described by Mabel as 'My graduation gown – Made by Miss Gano May 1893. Commencement the evening of June 12/93. Subject of my essay "A Lost Art".' These scraps serve to take the wearer back to a single point in time. There is something unutterably poignant about such scraps, and indeed about the clothing

that was important to people in their lives. Dress curator Kay Staniland wrote of the public fascination with surviving royal dress that 'it offers an actual contact with its original owner, an outer skin which is still strongly permeated with the bodily characteristics of that personality'. For me, this extends beyond royal dress. Remnants of wardrobes are like the ghostly outlines of our ancestors. Perhaps that was how the maker of my album felt when she began to document her own life in clothes.

Where the diary in my keeping seems to differ from the few other surviving dress diaries is that it recorded lives beyond the maker's own, encompassing those in her orbit. This woman decided at some point to gather the contents not only of her own wardrobe, but of those of her family and friends, and to memorialise them in her bright-pink silk-covered album. The decision to refer to herself always in the third person made the identification of the author all the more challenging; and, unlike more intimate diaries, the captions establish a curious distance. Perhaps the point was to try and archive the fabrics objectively, rather than making this a personalised object. It is difficult to establish what her motives were. One caption alone hints at a strategy of collecting, inked above a woven silk picture of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The note reads: 'Mr McMicking's contribution to this book given to him by one of the Gentlemen of the French Embassy to China.' Her note suggests that she was actively sourcing textiles for her book, casting her net far and wide to find interesting additions to its pages. Over tea perhaps, making polite conversation, she may have shown Mr McMicking the book she was compiling and requested that he might add to its pages with a contribution of his choosing.

Finally my careful transcribing of each tiny caption paid off. Across a single square of floral printed cotton, on the top right-hand corner of one of the pages, came the breakthrough I had been hoping for. It was to be the revelation that cracked the code for the entire volume. In the same neat, fine script that populated the whole book were the words

'Anne Sykes May 1840. The first dress I wore . . .' She was revealed. The one and only time that she referred to herself in the first person, Anne Sykes identified herself as the keeper of the book; the creator of its 422 pages; the person who had pasted the 2,134 swatches of fabric into her album and recorded the names of those 104 different people and their clothes. I had found her.

Anne's identity radiated out in myriad hues and materials, connecting her to her world and allowing us to join her. Discovering that Anne Sykes was the hitherto-unknown creator of the book that I had been meticulously transcribing was at once both exciting and perplexing. I felt certain that she had to be a dressmaker, a woman whose role in life was to clothe her clients, taking a keen interest in shape and style, keeping the secrets of bodies. In that moment I could never have anticipated just how much I would be able to uncover.

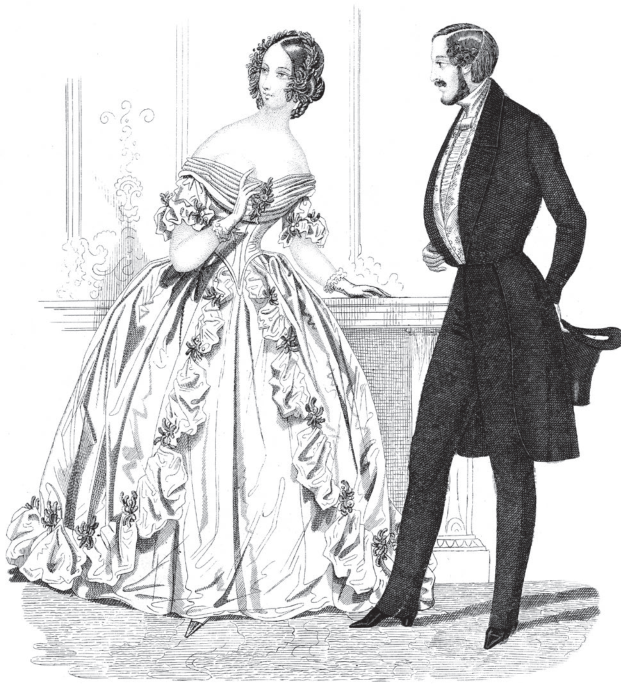
Swatches in the album reveal that Anne attended parties and fancy balls, her book being full of the formal clothes that both she and her friends wore on these occasions. It is full, too, of the everyday. Of cotton and wool, of dressing gowns and slippers, bonnet ribbons, petticoats and cloaks. Cloth of all types was a valued commodity and its purchase was not undertaken on a whim. She recorded the purchases that she made from Miss Brennand's smallwares establishment and shopping trips that her friends made to Liverpool and Manchester. Individually the swatches give little away, but by piecing together clues, we can weave together the strands of Anne's life into a colourful patchwork of family and friends.

That Anne kept her dress diary more or less chronologically is evident from its structure and the dates recorded. The album starts at the very commencement of Queen Victoria's reign and maps those momentous decades of everything that came to be 'Victorian' – a parallel life synonymous with industry and Empire. Although the notes are brief, the writing changes. As the years pass, the notes become scarcer and the fine copperplate larger and not so neatly formed. All of life is revealed as the

pages progress: mourning clothes to mark the loss of loved ones, dresses worn to christenings, gifts for birthdays and Christmas.

In a sense, Anne's album is a form of 'life writing', taking in ordinary folk; not the grandees of traditional written histories, but the bystanders, the participants in everyday life, their loves and losses, joys and sorrows. It is a fragmentary story of life experienced at home and abroad, a domestic world and an international one, of courage in unfamiliar lands and of building a community of friendship. Through small and seemingly inconsequential wisps of fabric, Anne Sykes's diary lays bare the whole of human experience in that most intimate of mediums: the clothes that we choose to wear.

Family



Friends in the 1840s.

CHAPTER I

My Charming Anne

Anne Burton & Adam Sykes

I wore a white satin gown with a very deep flounce of Honiton.

Queen Victoria's journal, 1840

The very first page of my book, now bulging with the fabrics of many lives, began with just two people: Anne and Adam Sykes and their wedding, which took place on 20 September 1838 in St George's Church, Tyldesley, an industrial town near Manchester. There are four pieces of material on the page, three of them framed with decorative paper borders, and the fourth, a length of lace, carefully pasted amongst them. The handwriting differs from the rest of the book – the only time that another hand made a contribution to its contents. The captions that are inscribed offer fond reminiscences of their wedding day. Above a rectangle of white checked muslin, Adam Sykes wrote, 'This is the dress my charming Anne was married in.' Alongside it is a sample of his own wedding outfit, the remnant of a cream satin with a woven floral tendril trailing across its surface, above which he wrote, 'And this is the vest I had on at the time. Adam Sykes.' The narrow trim of bobbin lace beneath is described, 'This is the lace that trimmed the dress that my charming Anne was married in'; and finally, occupying the width of the page below,

a pale-oyster satin: 'This is the dress she wore after the wedding at Breakfast.' It is an orderly page, each piece of fabric a neat rectangle.

It was Adam who contrived to memorialise their day, and Adam who chose the pattern of display. It might seem obvious that the first page would reveal the most and that it was the natural place to start, but until I had discovered Anne's name as the keeper of the album, the first page actually made little sense. The nature of studying inanimate objects is that you have to try and hear the voices for yourself, and they are not always clear. Until the book was linked directly with the name of Anne Sykes, none of the other entries were fathomable. But now I had Anne, I had Adam and, thanks to a small swatch that mentioned the town of Preston, I had the county of Lancashire. I entered exactly that into an online search and was rewarded within seconds with a link to a digitised list of parish-register entries from the church of St George's in Tyldesley, recording their union. The sandstone church of St George's where they began their marriage still stands, the path to the church door running at right-angles to the solid golden blocks of the building – the path to Anne and Adam's union. A single document such as this acts like the first domino that sets all of the others falling. To find the marriage record is to find many others, from baptism to burial, and much of life in between.

Perhaps Adam bought the book for Anne as a wedding gift, visiting a smart stationer's establishment in the days preceding their marriage and deliberating over this book or that. Maybe a number of different volumes were laid out for his inspection, the marble-papered bindings each being unique in design. There is only a glimpse of the book's original cover visible beneath the frayed edge of the bright-pink silk, but it reveals a marbled design in shades of blue with a red-leather spine. Marbling was a technique that arrived in Europe from Japan in the seventeenth century and it had become hugely fashionable. Diderot's *Encyclopedia of Science, Arts and Industries*, published over a twenty-year period in the second half of the eighteenth century, depicts the art of the *marbreur de*

papier; the marbler and the tools of his craft. In the late 1830s accounting ledgers and all manner of other book bindings were decorated with marbled designs, curlicues of colour in gorgeous swirls and elaborately named – 'Shell', 'Peacock' and 'Bouquet'. Maybe Adam arranged this first page and then wrapped his gift after their wedding, presenting his charming Anne with this tender record of their special day. But what was the path to their union? Who were Anne and Adam?

Anne was born in Clitheroe, Lancashire on 27 December 1816, to James and Alice Burton. She was baptised in the Baptist Lower Chapel in Accrington. She was the fourth child that her mother, Alice, had borne and there would be another four sons to follow. Already, then, Anne arrived in a household whose nursery was busy with an older sister aged eight, a brother aged seven and another sister aged five. Anne would be twelve years old by the time her youngest brother Frederick was born in 1828, amounting to exactly two decades of the pressures of pregnancy and the potential perils of birth for her mother Alice. According to records, only Elizabeth, Anne's older sister born in 1811, disappeared from sight before adulthood. It might be that her name has been misspelt somewhere in the transcribing of accounts. With so many names and variations, she may be there, but if so she is lost amongst the deluge of ancestral mnemonics. It might be that sadly she died, another notch on the list of countless infant deaths during this period before modern medicine was able to save children from any number of common but fatal illnesses – diseases such as typhoid fever, cholera, tuberculosis and dysentery.

Anne's father James was a prominent mill owner, so textiles were the foundation upon which Anne's life was built. Little is known of her life prior to her marriage in 1838. She was a daughter of industry, a consumer of the cloth, rather than a maker of the clothes. In 1828, ten years before Anne's marriage, James Burton moved with his family from Clitheroe to Tyldesley and, on entering into a partnership with the Jones brothers, his

star as an industrialist steadily rose. He lived in Burton House on Factory Street, an unusual building at the very heart of Tyldesley's manufacturing district. For the next ten years James and Alice lived there with their eight children, surrounded by the evidence of James Burton's industrial successes and living a comfortable life as a result. The house is no longer standing, but an old and grainy photograph taken in the 1860s shows a building built at an angle, one face of it fronting onto Factory Street itself and the other onto a private garden. Two tall chimneys rise directly behind it, and beyond are the imposing mill buildings over which James Burton was the master spinner. By the date of Anne's wedding he had charge of New Mill in Tyldesley, and over the next decade he would go on to build a further four cotton-spinning mills of his own. James was 'new money' in the shifting social landscape of the period, a self-made man who would take a keen interest in his community.

Clothing required a long chain of transactions, beginning with the purchase of cloth, which was then handed to the dressmaker or tailor and made into a garment of the customer's choice. On 24 December 1798 Jane Austen wrote in one of her letters, 'I cannot determine what to do about my new gown; I wish such things were to be bought ready-made.' In the diary, notes that mention dresses – whether purchased or given – actually refer to the cloth required to make up the gowns, in the 1830s and 1840s especially. This is exactly the structure of the dress diary that was kept by Barbara Johnson, in which she pinned the snippets of cloth that she had purchased, as evidence of her financial expenditure each year. Next to a floral cotton, for example, she wrote, 'Seven yards and half of dark callicoe, ell-wide, 4s 3d a yard. Made at Bath.' The separate stages of the dress's creation were recorded, moving from draper to customer, from customer to dressmaker and, in its final incarnation, back to the customer. Women invested time and thought into these acquisitions, first choosing the type and pattern of fabric, assessing the amount required for the specific garment type and then discussing with their

dressmaker the chosen style. It required a knowledge and vocabulary of dress and cloth on the part of both client and maker, which would be lost with the ready-to-wear revolution. At the turn of the nineteenth century clothing was made specifically to fit individual customers, and it was this manner of dressmaking – with scraps of leftover material retained for safekeeping – that facilitated the creation of a book such as Anne's.

Only a very few fragments in the album pre-date Anne's marriage, offering the merest glimpse of her life prior to her union with Adam. Across a single page she includes five pieces of printed cotton that connect her to some of the women in her life as a young unmarried woman. One cream-and-brown striped swatch with trailing florals is captioned, 'Maureen Mary and Anne Burton a Primrose Print'. The identity of Maureen Mary is, frustratingly, lost. Anne's sister was called Mary, but according to baptism records for the Lower Chapel in Accrington, this was her first and given name rather than a middle one, so the Maureen is a mystery. An especially bold design in a deep brown with green-and-yellow geometric motifs is annotated: 'Anne Sykes, Mrs Cruikshank and Mary had cloaks of this in 1836.' Anne did not marry Adam until 1838, but it is quite feasible that, post-dating these swatches as she added them to her album, she forgot to use her maiden name for the earlier swatch. Imagining this particular fragment as three generously proportioned cloaks takes a leap of the imagination, the colour and pattern being quite eye-watering, even with so small a piece as this.

Another brilliantly patterned piece bears the inscription, 'Maureen Mary and Anne Burton had dresses of this in 1834 – it was given to us by Mr Pope of Hurrick.' At the age of eighteen, Anne wore this colourful paisley patterned dress and Maureen Mary had one made from the same fabric. The clues are tantalising, but who is Maureen Mary and who is Mr Pope? It became clear, as the detective work continued, that not all of the people would be – could be – found. We might imagine them living a life that included a pink printed paisley dress and a wonderfully bold

geometric cloak, even re-creating the silhouette of their clothed bodies to bring to mind the shape and colour of their chosen garments, but where that life began and the arc to its conclusion will for ever remain just out of reach. If Anne's mother, Alice, kept any of her childhood clothing, then Anne chose not to include it in the album. Possibly she recorded only those garments that she still possessed by the time she married: remnants of her old life that warranted brief inclusion, but merely that in a book dedicated to her future, not her past.

I often wonder how Anne and Adam first met. Was it a family connection forged through the power looms and printworks of Lancashire? Did one of Anne's brothers know Adam through his close connections to textile trading in Liverpool? It is impossible to know whether they liked each other immediately or whether it was a relationship that grew out of a longer-standing familial network. Was Adam romantically inclined, offering Anne a ring of his own choosing to mark their engagement, or was their union to be more pragmatic? I would like to imagine the former, since the very existence of the album was seemingly the gift of Adam himself. Perhaps it was a chance encounter that led to their courtship and eventual marriage, a now-unknown event that ended in the neatly written column in the parish register of St George's Church in Tyldesley. I hope theirs was a marriage based on a genuine fondness for each other. Whilst the album charts shared experiences over much of a lifetime, it cannot catch the emotions that went with them. Of the ups and downs, the tears and the tensions there is no evidence, but I like to think that laughter and warmth formed the foundation of their years, a joint endeavour that began on the day of their marriage in 1838.

When Adam Sykes carefully framed that square of cream figured-silk waistcoat next to a corresponding square of white checked muslin, he was uniting himself and Anne in cloth as in life, bound together on the very first page of the book that Anne would carry forward to document their lives through material remembrance. Without Adam, there

would have been no album. He was a constant in Anne's world, historical records catching them at different moments in the course of their marriage; but in the glimpses of Adam offered by Anne in her dress diary we get to know him a little better, or at least have a sense of the character behind the silk waistcoats and the entries in mercantile records.

Adam was born on 12 July 1807 in the Lancashire parish of Accrington, the very town in which Anne herself would be baptised nine years later. His father, James, married Charlotte Dugdale in 1791. Charlotte's family warranted a page in *Burke's Peerage*, the directory of aristocracy and landed gentry first published in 1826, indicative of the minutely designated hierarchies of the period. On Anne and Adam's wedding certificate, James was described as a 'designer', probably a reference to a textile-related industry, designing patterns for printed cloth. Textiles were the foundation of Adam's family's life, as of Anne's. Whilst details of his childhood are absent, that he was an ambitious boy is a fair assumption, given that by the age of twenty-two he had formed a business partnership with a Robert Wise and was given the responsible charge of overseeing the company's trading affairs in the newly established settlement of Singapore. It was a bold step for a young man to take at the time, embarking into the unknown and tying himself to a part of the world that would have been unfamiliar in almost every conceivable way. Adam remained in Singapore for five years, returning in the mid-1830s to continue as a young merchant operating out of the Exchange building in Liverpool.

Sometime prior to 1838 Adam obviously considered that he had enough to offer as a husband and – time and place now unknown – began his courtship of Anne Burton. The merest hint of their relationship prior to marriage is given by Anne with the inclusion of a swatch of lustrous black silk brightened with a woven coloured spot, which Anne captioned, 'Mr Sykes' vest new one Sunday when he came to Tyldesley Aug 1838.' Only a month before their marriage, it is possible to imagine Adam buttoning his new black waistcoat and arranging his tie, before shrugging on his coat