

Replicating the Lydia Lawrence bonnet: an 'experimental conservation' approach to collections care and public engagement for the D.H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum.

Who was Lydia Lawrence?

The mother of notable author, D.H. Lawrence, hailed from a modest terraced house on the outskirts of Nottingham, a skilled seamstress and forward-thinking woman: Lydia.

To help support her family in this relatively deprived area of Nottingham, Mrs Lawrence sewed clothing which she reportedly displayed for sale in a window facing on to the street at the family's home.

Why replicate her bonnet?

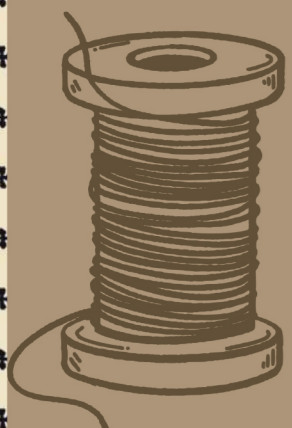
The bonnet is in a very poor condition and is too fragile for part of permanent display in the front sale window. Lydia's story is restricted, as the bonnet is an integral element in the museum's storytelling.



Replicas in heritage conservation

Literature surrounding heritage replicas discusses the ethics and authenticity of replication and the potential physical reproduction holds for public engagement and discussion surrounding objects, communities, and the heritage sector.

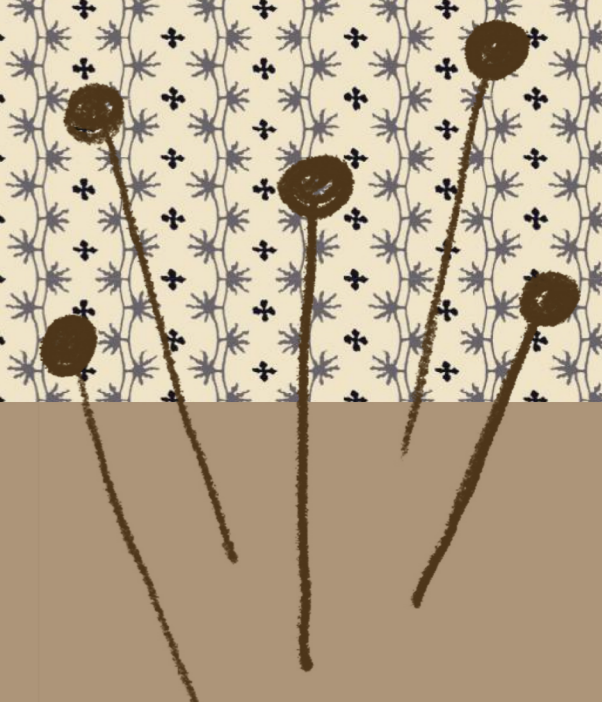
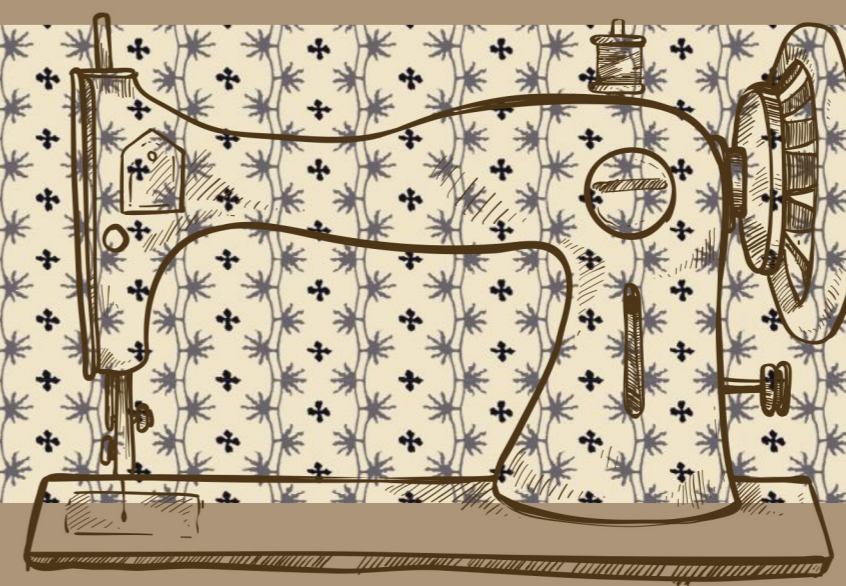
The opportunity to provide a tactile, material curatorial experience for public engagement allows for tangible, felt linkage between the past and present which a digital replica cannot emulate.



Conclusion

Replicas provide a tactile, intimate way of connecting to the past, by providing an opportunity to safely handle, observe and interact with the replica.

Participating in student research with support from UROS has aided me in developing my skills in textile conservation, given me the opportunity to present at a specialist textiles conservation symposium in 2024 and network with my peers in the field. I would recommend to any student to undertake research outside of their studies, to develop skills for both academic and professional development.

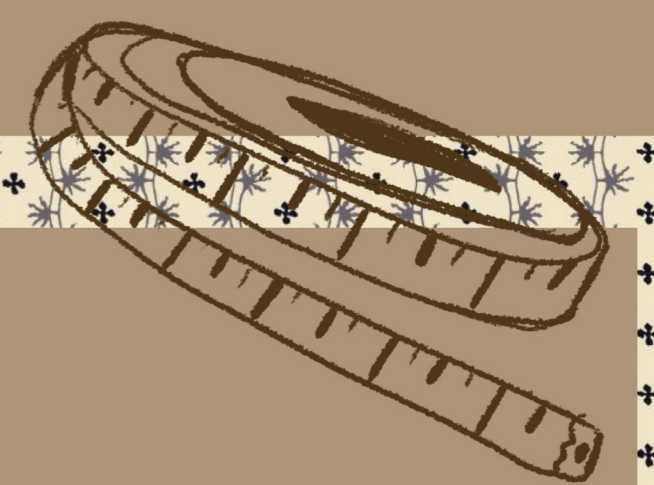


Methodology

The project began with visual observation of the original bonnet, increasing the technical understanding of the historic bonnet, to ensure authentic replication.

The fabric pattern was reproduced using a digital reactive printing technique available at the University of Lincoln, a digital reactive dye textile printer with support from specialist technicians.

Trials of the bonnet were then made, using a hand-crank 1930s Singer sewing machine, to increase authenticity by using historic methods.



Results

The resulting bonnet was successful following two toile trials, thorough observation of the original replica and detailed measurements.

The replica bonnet will allow the D.H Lawrence Birthplace Museum to tell the story of Lydia Lawrence and her family more effectively via the ability to safely display the replicated bonnet.

The results of the replicated bonnet show that through thorough observation of the original object and investigation of maker's craft methods, that a successful and effective replica can be made even by someone who has limited experience in traditional crafting methods.

References and acknowledgements

Replication of design: Pei Pei Lee, University of Lincoln BA(Hons) Conservation of Cultural Heritage Graduate, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/peipeilee/>
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D.H Lawrence Birthplace Museum Curator: Carolyn Melbourne

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