

Julia Sutton, President, welcomed members back after the Summer recess and then introduced the speaker Sarah Slater, who was dressed in a lovely maroon taffeta dress typical of the 17th Century. She is a Guide at Hampton Court, and at Windsor Castle and her talk was entitled 'Secrets, Scandal and Salacious Gossip at the Royal Court between 1660-1830.

There were many secrets and much scandal in court and it was accepted, even expected, that men of the royal family had sexual liaisons outside of marriage. In Georgian times Londoners could refer to Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies. The women who provided these favours for commoners had various names such as 'Ladies of Pleasure', 'Bunters' and 'Park Walkers' to name but a few. Sarah also mentioned Mr. Francis Grose's Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue. This was put together based on the phrases Grose had heard on the streets, in pubs, the docks, on ships and from anywhere where those who were not members of the so-called 'polite society' would congregate. In the not so straight-laced Victorian England, there was a great increase in sexually transmitted diseases and various unsuccessful legislation was introduced to prevent it.

For women of nobility it was essential to be white-faced to show that they had never had to work outside in the sun. Some beauty products were very harmful to the skin. A beauty spot on the face but in different places meant different things – in some cases it covered scarring from one disease or another or gave sexual messages. What was extremely worrying for women living in that age was the constant state of pregnancy they had to endure as there was no reliable method of contraception and many women died young and sometimes in childbirth. There were various methods that could be used to control pregnancies, one of which was thought to be breast-feeding. A misconception in itself. There were other rather primitive methods that also mostly failed to work. However – much much later came the Pill! But, that's another story.

The next meeting of Bosham WI will be on Wednesday 2nd October at 2.30pm and the speaker is Sheila Willis, an ex policewoman whose talk is entitled 'Handbags to Handcuffs'. Everyone is welcome and if you require more information, please look at the website boshamwi.co.uk

Jennifer Fidler