

For sale: notorious designs that made McQueen's name

Mike Wade

Almost 20 years after Alexander McQueen stunned London Fashion Week with his "Highland Rape" designs, items from his "aggressive and disturbing" collection are to be sold.

McQueen's notorious 1995 show drew gasps as fashion buyers witnessed a succession of women parade along a runway strewn with dead flowers, to a soundtrack of whistling winds and mournful church bells. It was, the designer said, his take on the 18th century Jacobite rebellion: "I wanted to show that the war between the Scottish and English was basically genocide."

Yet for all its notoriety, remnants of the collection are few and far between. After the show, most of the pieces were seized in lieu of his debts.

Among the surviving items are those coming to auction in London on Tuesday of next week. They belong to Trixie

Bellair (Nicholas Townsend), the drag artist who was a close friend of McQueen, who committed suicide in 2010. They include a lilac vinyl pencil skirt, and an ensemble of lilac suede trouser-boots and a floral print satin blouse.

Kerry Taylor, the founder of Kerry Taylor Auctions, said: "Highland Rape was Alexander McQueen's big breakthrough moment when everyone took notice of him, but at the time he was in financial difficulty. After the show was over he gathered up the clothes in bin liners and took them back to his flat."

"At some point after that, bailiffs went to his property and repossessed his goods, including the bags of clothes, so to this day we still don't know what happened to them, or whether the people they ended up with knew of their importance."

Born in Lewisham, and brought up in the East End, McQueen traced his

Scottish ancestry through his father. "My family were Celts from the Isle of Skye," he claimed. "I feel natural and at home in Scotland more than England."

McQueen played up a supposed Jacobite connection, and when he was awarded the CBE wore full Highland dress to the presentation. His ashes were scattered on Skye.

When some feminist critics condemned his 1995 collection, the designer was quick to hit

Alexander McQueen, CBE, in 2003 and a model in the controversial show



back. "They should have been grateful to me," he claims. "At least I gave them something to write about. They completely misunderstood Highland Rape."

"It wasn't anti-women. It was actually anti the fake history of Vivienne Westwood. She makes tartan lovely and romantic and tries to pretend that's how it was. Well, 18th-century Scotland was not about beautiful women drifting across the moors in swathes of unmanageable chiffon. My show was anti that sort of romanticism." Adding to the rarity of the lilac ensemble, at the 11th hour, McQueen decided against exhibiting it, for being "too pretty". It is expected to fetch £2,500.

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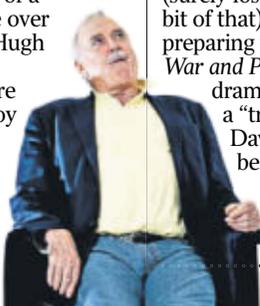
What MPs will do for a dare...

The admission by Penny Mordaunt, the Tory MP and sailors' favourite, that she gave a speech on poultry welfare just to win a bet that she could say "cock" in the Commons attracted uproar in the usual places, but it's nothing new. In his autobiography, John Major wrote about junior MPs daring each other to slip frivolous facts into speeches. In the course of one debate, Major had to mention that Anne Boleyn had six fingers on one hand, while Virginia Bottomley said that frogs swallow with their eyes shut and Matthew Parris said Burkina Faso was once Upper Volta. However, Tristan Garel-Jones bottled his task to claim that 18 per cent of people regularly bathed with another. A shame, given the revelations later about Major and Edwina Currie sharing a loofah.

BLACK FRIDAY BARGAIN

The American tradition of a post-Thanksgiving punch-up has come here. Black Friday on Oxford Street is one thing, but it's now spread to Oxford colleges. St Hugh's, alma mater of Theresa May, announced a "Black Friday Sale" and cut the cost of a night's B&B in college over Christmas to £48. St Hugh is the patron saint of cobblers, which is more or less how one old boy described the offer.

Don't have high expectations if invited to dinner at John Cleese's house. The Python, right, tells



Waitrose Kitchen that his signature dish is Corn Flakes. "I have a knack with them," he says. "Many people like milk, but if you're adventurous you could use redcurrant juice, coconut milk, guava-flavoured sparkling water or a nice wet curry." Call it the Kellogg's korma.

FARAGE'S FIGHTING FOREBEAR

When Nigel Farage gives the establishment a thumping, it's in his genes. Jeremy Clay, author of *The Burglar Caught by a Skeleton*, a book on bizarre Victorian news items, has found that Farage's German great-great grandfather, Nicholas Schrod, was convicted and fined 20 shillings for beating up the English. *The Daily News* reported in 1870 that Schrod, a cabinet-maker from Frankfurt who settled in London, heard two "young men of gentlemanly appearance" speaking with contempt for German military might beneath his window and duffed them up. "It seems to be a family trait, having a bee in the bonnet about nationality," Clay says, "but he proved his victims wrong: two Englishmen were no match for one German."

Damian McBride, the former Labour pitbull, is a fan of Tristram Hunt but worries that the shadow education secretary's posh name might hold him back. He blogs that people should henceforth call him "Hunty" rather than Tristram. "Don't stop until audience members on Question Time refer to him as Hunty when screaming at him about the deficit," he says. It's bound to happen one day.

TOLSTOY ON THE CHEAP

James Purnell, the BBC strategy director, is seeking annual efficiency savings of £1.5 billion (surely losing Paxman covers a fair bit of that), yet the corporation is preparing two versions of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*: a ten-hour radio drama for New Year's day and a "truly epic" Andrew Davies-adapted TV series to be broadcast next year. Maybe they could save money by having war on TV and peace on radio.

PATRICK KIDD

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