

A Living Panorama: Parasols at Canterbury Museum

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Canterbury Museum cares for a collection of 76 parasols largely acquired by Honorary Curator of Colonial Exhibits at the Museum, Rose Reynolds, during the second half of the twentieth century. Despite their significance as personal objects, parasols remain a mostly unexamined aspect of textile and fashion history. This paper addresses this gap by explaining the characteristics of the parasols in Canterbury Museum's collection and situating parasol use in the context of nineteenth and early twentieth century Canterbury and New Zealand. Throughout the paper, parasols are highlighted as objects passed down matrilineal lines and intimately connected with women's stories in the Museum.

Keywords: fashion history, gender, parasols, Rose Reynolds, textiles

Introduction

Widower Smith Howard (1808–1893) and his three daughters made their way from Gravesend, England, to Lyttelton aboard the *Charlotte Jane* in 1850. They took with them a number of items to help them begin their new life in Canterbury, as well as precious personal objects. Among these items was a brown silk carriage parasol, shown in Figure 1, which was likely brought out by one of the daughters in memory of their mother.¹ The parasol was kept by the youngest daughter Mary Elizabeth Howard (1844–1917) and was donated to Canterbury Museum by her granddaughter Miss Harriet Buss in 1958.

The act of taking the parasol on such a long journey and passing it down the maternal family line highlights its significance as a family object and as a memento to remember the dead. Women, especially, appear to have valued parasols not only as personal items that were aesthetically pleasing, but also as important

connections to significant individuals. This reflects Tanya Evans' (2012) findings about family, memory and material culture in colonial Australia. Evans argues that women were instrumental in passing clothing and other handmade items, as well as the associated skills and knowledge, down the maternal family line. As families migrated to and settled in a new place, Evans argues that these practices became a crucial aspect of family history construction. It also meant that clothing and material were highly valued on the journey to Australia (Evans 2012: 208, 217, 222). Parasols were likely to be valued as objects that could not be easily obtained or made by settlers in the nascent years of colonisation in New Zealand. According to Maria Vazquez, who analysed and described the parasols in the University of Rhode Island's historic textile and costume collection, despite their significance, "parasols are a largely undocumented genre of fashion history" (Vazquez 2018: 90). This paper will use Canterbury Museum's collection of 76 parasols



Figure 1. An early Victorian carriage parasol with a timber shaft and a cover of light brown shot silk brocade with a black silk fringe. The ferrule appears to be made from ivory and has two tassels. One image showing the parasol closed and folded, the other showing it open and extended. Overall length 740 mm, diameter 560 mm plus 90 mm fringe. Canterbury Museum, EC158.107



Figure 2. Cream Edwardian parasol with net cover and turned wood handle. One image showing the top of the open parasol, the other showing the interior of the open parasol. Overall length 1000 mm, diameter 920 mm. Canterbury Museum EC162.178

to explain some of the parasols' key features and attributes, to reference their social use in a Canterbury and wider New Zealand context, and to highlight the connections that women had to these objects.

The Gendered Nature of Parasol Donations and Collections

The parasols in the Museum's collection whose dates of manufacture span nearly 100 years (from the late 1830s to 1930s) were overwhelmingly donated by women (88%), generally by daughters or granddaughters of the original owner. Where men did donate them, this may have reflected the conundrum faced by the inheritors of a mother's personal effects. A likely example of this



Figure 3. Sarah Phoebe Walker (1875–1962). Sourced from www.ancestry.com.au

in Canterbury Museum's collection is an Edwardian parasol (Fig. 2) with no real connection to New Zealand, which was donated to the Museum by Dr Donald Walker in 1962. His mother, Sarah Phoebe Walker (1875–1962) (Fig. 3), was born in San Francisco, California and only arrived in New Zealand in 1950. After Sarah's death in 1962 her son donated the parasol and 30 other items of women's and children's clothing.

Parasols were not only linked to family members, but also to other significant figures. Another parasol (Fig. 4) was donated because of its supposed connection to Queen Victoria. According to the donor, Queen Victoria had given it to one of her ladies in waiting, who in turn gave it to the donor's father Percy Rosetti Peters (1889–1963), a medical masseur in London, in lieu of payment for treatment in about 1923.

Parasols were overwhelmingly donated by women and at Canterbury Museum they were also largely collected by a woman, Rose Reynolds MBE (1907–1994), Honorary Curator of Colonial Exhibits from 1948 until her retirement in 1980, which further confirms their status as a gendered objects in the Museum. The first parasol in the collection, an 1870s sunshade, was donated by a Miss Gerard in 1948. This parasol was soon joined by parasols from the Canterbury Pilgrims and Early Settlers Association's collection which was transferred to Canterbury Museum in 1949. Rose Reynolds acquired more parasols (Fig. 5). She systematically collected domestic furnishings and costume, developing one of the best collections in New Zealand. Her collecting was partly a reflection of a wider trend around New Zealand, as Pākehā New Zealanders held fashion parades and pageants during settler centennial celebrations. Many of these items, often related to women, were later donated to museums. The Cavalcade of Fashion parade, partly organised by Canterbury Museum in 1950, included a public appeal for clothing dating from the first 100 years of the Canterbury settlement. Many of these items became a part of Canterbury Museum's permanent collection (Regnault 2021: 10). During her time at the Museum, Rose oversaw the acquisition and care of 60



Figure 4. Cream Edwardian parasol with net cover and turned wood handle. One image showing the top of the open parasol, the other showing the interior of the open parasol. Overall length 1000 mm, diameter 920 mm. Canterbury Museum EC162.178

of the 76 parasols in the Museum collection. There have been no donations of parasols at Canterbury Museum since 2009.

Overall, objects connected to women are under-represented within the Museum's collection, and those that do exist fit firmly within the realms of domestic life. By telling the story of personal items in Canterbury Museum's collection that were owned by women we can extend the presence of women in the Museum's collection and in Aotearoa New Zealand's history. This paper will begin by outlining three types of parasols. The characteristics of each type will be explained, followed by a discussion on the use of parasols in Canterbury and New Zealand. The next section will highlight parasol features such as handles and linings and the paper will conclude with biographies of some of the owners of the parasols featured in this article.

Types of Parasols

As outlined by Vazquez, there are three main types of parasols; carriage parasols, walking parasols and sunshades (Vazquez 2018: 172). Canterbury Museum has examples of all three and these are described in more detail in the following sections.

Carriage Parasols

Carriage parasols, which have a hinge in the middle to allow them to be folded in half when not in use, were developed in the 1840s. They were designed in response to the popularity of travelling in an open carriage due to Queen Victoria's preference for travelling in this way (Vazquez 2018: 18). The idea was to see and be seen and while a parasol might provide shade it was also an important fashion statement. Parasols needed to be compact so that they did not get in the way when they were not in use, hence the hinge in the middle. Carriage parasols remained popular until the 1880s (Vazquez 2018: 19). Canterbury Museum has 17 carriage parasols with those that could be photographed open shown in Figure 6.

Colours and trimming varied greatly but most carriage parasols had eight ribs. In 1869 a four rib parasol appeared but these were made only briefly due to their flimsiness (Vazquez 2018: 2) and are now relatively rare. Amazingly, Canterbury Museum has a four rib parasol, shown in Figure 7. Another unusual parasol is one in the shape of a four leaf clover (Fig. 8) which belonged to Scottish woman Jean Alice Stevenson née Boyd (1836–



Figure 5. Rose Reynolds MBE (1907–1994) Honorary Curator of Colonial Exhibits 1948–1980. Canterbury Museum 1980.175.71172



Figure 6. Twelve of the carriage parasols in the Canterbury Museum collection in approximate order of manufacture (left to right, top to bottom) from the 1840s to 1880s. The remaining five are too fragile to be opened.



Figure 7. An unusual square carriage parasol with only four ribs, made in 1869. The cover is black and white striped satin with a silk fringe. This parasol is doubly unusual in that the ivory ring for hanging the parasol is still at the top of the shaft – many have not survived. One image shows the top of the open parasol, the other shows the closed parasol with its handle folded. Overall length 640 mm, width 610 plus 60 mm fringe. Canterbury Museum EC174.112



Figure 8. A carriage parasol in the shape of a four-leaved clover which dates from the 1850s or 1860s. It has a folding timber shaft with an ivory ferrule and ring. The fabric is silk edged with braid and the parasol has long cream silk tassels. One image shows the top of the open parasol, the other shows the closed parasol with its handle folded. Overall length 640mm, diameter 540 mm plus 90 mm fringe. Canterbury Museum EC160.10



Figure 9. An early Victorian carriage parasol with silk cover, tassels and an ivory shaft and ferrule. One image shows the open parasol from the side, the other shows the closed parasol with its handle folded. Overall length 620 mm, diameter 600 mm plus 90 mm fringe, Canterbury Museum 2008.133.1

1910), who arrived in Canterbury with her husband John in 1862.²

Carriage parasols were the most expensive of the three types of parasols and being able to afford one implied status (Vazquez 2018: 42). Their shafts were usually timber, but ivory was a popular, though even more expensive, option when buying a parasol. A typical example of an ivory shaft with a metal hinge is shown in Figure 9 while Figure 10 shows an unusual screw threaded ivory handle.

Walking and En-tout-cas Parasols

Walking parasols have a spike or a sturdy ferrule (tip) for contact with the ground and a greater overall length than carriage parasols and sunshades. En-tout-cas (in any case) are very similar but have waterproofing on the fabric to protect the user from unexpected rain (Vazquez 2018: 21). The latter have not been included in this article as they are essentially umbrellas. Walking parasols (Fig. 11) are the most numerous in the Museum's collection, reflecting both their practicality and women's active lifestyles. They remained fashionable until the 1920s (Vazquez 2018: 85).

Twelve of the 16 walking parasols in Canterbury Museum's collection date from the late Victorian period and onwards with later examples becoming increasingly similar in style to umbrellas.

Sunshades

Sunshades (Fig. 12) differed from carriage and walking parasols in that they did not fold in half with a hinge and were not long enough or robust enough to be used as a walking parasol. Some sunshades, such as that in Figure 13, had long lace trims or tassels but others more closely resembled modern umbrellas (Fig. 14).



Figure 10. An unusual carriage parasol shaft which has a screw thread to connect the two ivory shaft pieces rather than the usual shaft. Made by Sangster's of London, "Umbrella and Parasol Makers to the Queen & Royal Family", early Victorian. Overall length 605mm, diameter 500mm plus 130mm fringe, Canterbury Museum EC161.122



Figure 11. Eighteen walking parasols from Canterbury Museum in order of their approximate date of manufacture (left to right, top to bottom), from the 1840s to 1930s



Figure 12. Sunshades in the Canterbury Museum collection in order of their approximate date of manufacture (left to right, top to bottom), from the 1840s to 1930s

As they were much simpler to make than carriage parasols they could be afforded by middle class women. The cost of the materials used indicated the status of the owner (Vazquez 2018: 44). More recent sunshades were made from cotton and linen and were often printed (Fig. 15) and handles tended to be heavier and curved, making them easier to hold onto. By the 1930s frills and flounces had disappeared.

Context

Parasols have a long global history, with parasols and umbrellas becoming distinguished from each other in the eighteenth century as the former became known for its use as a sunshade (Vazquez 2018: 2–3) and the latter for protecting the user from rain. The type of materials used, as well as the style of the parasol, were important

indicators of the wealth of the owner. Even though the manufacturing of parasols became cheaper over time, they still retained their quality as a status symbol. They signalled not only that the owner was able to afford such an item, but also that they had the leisure time available to use it and were attending the associated events – such as picnics and balls – where a parasol would be appropriate attire (Vazquez 2018: 45). Parasols were also associated with pale skin, something that carried additional implications in a settler colony such as New Zealand, where European-style clothes were used as tools by missionaries to ‘civilise’ Māori. However, as Claire Regnault notes, Māori often interpreted European dress in their own way and wore it to their own advantage (Regnault 2021: 22–26, 29).

There is very limited existing literature about the

use and manufacturing of parasols in New Zealand. Vazquez proposes that parasols waned in popularity in America during the 1920s and 1930s (Vazquez 2018: 86, 90). Online database searches of local Canterbury newspapers suggest that this is also accurate for our case study, with the most significant shift occurring after 1910, when the incidence of articles featuring the words parasol and sunshade decreased substantially. In 1941, local Christchurch department store Ballantynes had a window display on Fashion of the Past, which included parasols and crinoline, firmly relegating parasols to the realm of history (*Press*, 28 August 1941: 3). Vazquez suggests that a decline in the use of parasols partly reflected “the desire to move away from the upper class appreciation for the matronly appearance” (Vazquez 2018: 86). This “appearance” likely included features of the parasols such as lace, fringes and embellishments on the fabric. Later examples of Japanese-inspired sunshades in the Museum’s collection (Fig.12) appear to demonstrate this change since they tend to solely feature patterned fabrics.

Another factor that affected parasol use during this time was that tanned skin became more fashionable (Vazquez 2018: 86), especially for middle class Pākehā women. Sunbathing also became part of health advice for families, although precautions were still given about prolonged exposure. In a reprinted article in the *Star* in 1930, the author Phyllis Wray cautioned against sunburn: “Begin with short ‘doses’ of exposure, though, for you must tan and not burn. Burning, redness, fever and blisters destroy cells.” (*Star*, 17 January 1930: 13). Methods for preventing sunburn other than parasols, like creams and hats, were increasingly advertised. One article in the *Temuka Leader* advised the following method for warding off freckles: “Broad-brimmed hats, especially in red yellow, [sic] and brown shades, protect the skin. Or, if you must go hatless in garden or country, use a gay Japanese parasol, which is cheap and light.” On very sunny days, the article states, “a special anti-freckle make-up is invaluable” (*Temuka Leader*, 22 November 1932: 8). This evidence suggests that the parasol increasingly became less practical for women to use and highlights the shift to using lighter fabrics on parasols. As the *Waikato Times* commented in 1930:



Figure 13. A brown satin sunshade with floppy lace trim. It has a cream satin lining and a matching etched and painted timber handle and ferrule. The parasol is thought to date from the 1870s. Overall length 840mm, diameter 780mm (including trim), Canterbury Museum EC164.31

“No more the tiresome habit of holding up the sunshade and clutching it every few moments when the least wind blows. On goes the beach hat and there is [sic] stays.” (*Waikato Times*, 1 December 1930: 13).

Prior to this shift, newspapers provide evidence that parasols were valued items, with consistent reporting of lost parasols, as well as some larceny cases about stolen parasols. This could reveal likely class differences, such as when a woman named Bella McDonald was visiting William McClay’s servant in Sumner and allegedly stole a silk handkerchief and a parasol, although she was not convicted (*Star*, 17 February 1887: 3).³ Their cost was highlighted by advertisements from local business Lethaby’s that began in the late nineteenth century, stating that a new “black and white parasol” cost 25 shillings, whereas “your old one can be Covered [sic] and made equal to new for 5s 6d” (*Lyttelton Times*, 8 December 1899: 1). Sarah Amelia Courage wrote



Figure 14. A British-made sunshade from the 1920s or 1930s with a floral cotton cover with a detail of the carved and painted curved wooden handle. One image shows the interior of the open parasol, the other shows the detail on the handle. Overall length 570mm, diameter 820mm Canterbury Museum EC176.501



Figure 15. This parasol is part of the Mollie Rodie Mackenzie (1919–2020) collection, a comprehensive assemblage of twentieth century New Zealand fashion purchased by Canterbury Museum in 1984. It is modern in style and is very similar to an umbrella except that the linen cover is not waterproof. The shaft is painted timber but the handle itself is blue plastic. It is labelled “British make” and dates from the 1930s. Overall length 520 mm, diameter 750 mm, Canterbury Museum 1984.70.4253

about a charity fair for Christchurch Hospital in 1865, commenting that “Gay parasols made bright patches of colour – a living panorama.” (Courage 1976: 227). An example of prevalence of parasols can be seen in Figure 16. References like this can give us some insight into how parasols brought colour into the cultural life of Christchurch.

In terms of fashion, nineteenth century Canterbury newspapers, like newspapers around New Zealand, frequently reported on what the latest Parisian and other international fashion trends were (Regnault 2021: 14). This did not mean that New Zealand developed its trends concurrently. The *Star* contained a description of the dresses worn by the actress Genevieve Ward in the play *Forget-Me-Not* in 1884, including a description of a parasol: “The parasol with its long stick is a novelty to

Christchurch eyes, and is of moss-green and pale blue to match the dress.” (*Star*, 6 December 1884: 3).

Parasols were not only a valued fashion item that served to protect the owner from the sun, but they were also associated with social norms about flirting and socialising. It is unclear how widely such norms, like holding the parasol in a certain way to signal one’s affection, or staring coquettishly from underneath a fringed parasol, were used by women. These ideas and others do appear in literature quoted in the newspapers, which is not unusual considering parasols were a popular accessory for women. Their use as tools for flirtation was certainly heightened in the literary genre for dramatic effect. For instance, one story reprinted in several instalments in the *Star* contains the following line: “‘Won’t you explore?’ asks Isobel, glancing up at him seductively from beneath her heavily-fringed parasol” (*Star*, 6 January 1874: 3). Flirting through the use of parasols was known about enough for jesting articles to be written about the dangers such flirtation posed. The *Lyttelton Times* published such an article in 1884, containing a guide about parasol flirting with comments such as: “Halting suddenly while holding it closed over the shoulder – I have your eye”, and “Closed and pounded rapidly and with great violence over your head and ears – I do not love you any more [sic].” (*Lyttelton Times*, 18 October 1884: 4).

A reprinted article in the *Ashburton Guardian* from the *Boston Courier* took this further by arguing that women “meddling with political questions of which they do not comprehend the simplest rudiments” should devote time “to advocate a reform and a decency in the use of the sunshade.” (*Ashburton Guardian*, 20 October 1886: 2). Parasols, associated with fashion and frivolity, could be used to denigrate women. However, women also used this social commentary to their own advantage. In 1894, the *Press* published an article entitled “New use for the parasol: advice to prohibitionist ladies”. This was a report of an article run by the *Australasian*, which described how women interrupted a meeting held in Christchurch by “Moderates” on the liquor question. The women, who were in favour of prohibition, were “beating their parasols on the floor, and stamping with their feet” to create upheaval at the meeting, yet according to the *Australasian* this was ultimately a



Figure 16. A sea of gay parasols at Joseph and Sarah Kinsey’s residence at Clifton, Christchurch, in 1908. Canterbury Museum 1940.193.75

fruitless endeavour. The *Press* article concluded thus: “Even if the ladies broke their parasols over the heads of members of Parliament the [liquor] traffic would continue.” (*Press*, 10 April 1894: 5).

To place parasols further in a local context, Canterbury Museum has eight images of women who chose to be photographed with their parasols. In most cases this meant taking their parasols with them to the photography studio, indicating the importance of this fashion accessory. Emma Parkerson was photographed in her Christchurch garden with her closed parasol on her lap (Fig. 17) but all of the other images (Figs. 18 to 23) are studio portraits with the possible exception of the most recent one (Fig. 24).

Parasol Features

Handles were an important consideration when buying a parasol as they would last much longer than the fabric cover which could be replaced. In 1902, Mrs Eric Pritchard of London, recommended buying a beautiful handle “which will do duty again and again. Naturally silk wears out, but a beautiful handle does not...” (Pritchard 2017: 195). In 1912, reports from a London correspondent published in the *Timaru Herald* signalled that “once again the craze for the bizarre is shown in the parasol handle” (*Timaru Herald*, 27 July 1912: 1 supplement). The correspondent used examples such as carved parrots’ heads, the automated handle and the use of crystal. Canterbury Museum’s collection has some interesting examples, including an 1880s sunshade with a carved griffin head (Fig. 25) and a handle that may or may not have been made to represent an example of New Zealand’s native flora (Fig. 26).

Handles in the shapes of twigs and branches were a popular and cheaper option for an individual look. Examples can be seen in Figures 27 and 28. From the 1890s, when parasols became more utilitarian, handles tended to be smaller but were still decorative as can be seen in the examples in Figures 29 to 31.

Parasols were made in a variety of shapes, in fact in such variety that it makes them difficult to categorise. Most parasols were dome shaped, but some other shapes were notable, such as the pagoda shape shown in Figures 32 and 33. Some parasols were flat (Fig. 34), others were a flat conical shape with lace fringes (Fig. 35). Figure 36 shows additional shapes that we could not find names for (see Vazquez 2018: 26).

The Inside View

Some of the parasols have surprising linings. The first parasol to be added to Canterbury Museum’s collection was a sunshade which features a wonderful bright blue lining designed to complement the blue trim on the exterior (Fig. 37). Figure 38 shows an eye-catching combination of gold and black. Another study in contrast is found in a walking parasol with a purple outer and a yellow interior (Fig. 39). Another rather plain black walking parasol belonging to Sarah Courage has a mass of ruffles and lace on the inside (Fig. 40).



Figure 17. Emma Parkerson née Mount (1810–1894) of Christchurch holds a carriage parasol on her lap in this photograph taken by Alfred Barker on 21 June 1870. Canterbury Museum 1944.78.222



Figure 18. A studio portrait of an unnamed Christchurch woman who chose to be photographed on her one person horse-drawn gig c.1885. She is holding what appears to be a carriage parasol. Standish & Preece Photographers, Canterbury Museum 2021.18.70

This style must have been popular with Sarah Courage as another of her walking parasols has a lining of pink ruffles (Fig. 41).

Parasols such as Sarah Courage’s in Figure 40 and the lavender lined parasol in Figure 34 played a role in making their holder look more becoming. Marion Rankine (2017), quoting Charles Blanc in *Art in Ornament and Dress* (1877), states that there was considerable pressure for a woman to look marriageable,



Figure 19. A studio portrait of an unnamed woman who is holding her satin and lace walking parasol, c.1880s. Standish & Preece Photographers, Canterbury Museum 2021.18.95



Figure 21. A studio portrait of two unnamed women. The married woman on the right has a pen and journal while her daughter or friend holds an Asian style sunshade. Canterbury Museum 1980.175.93220



Figure 20. Christchurch resident Mary Jane Margaret Gibbs (formerly Tussell, née Preece, 1849–1898) with her lace fringed sunshade, c.1885. Standish & Preece Photographers, Canterbury Museum 2021.18.107



Figure 22. A “Mrs Rainton” with her walking parasol. “Mrs Rainton” is thought to be Annie Eliza Rainton, née Cuthbertson (1873–1954). Canterbury Museum 1980.175.67997



Figure 23. A Mrs Frederick Warren of Christchurch with her walking parasol. HH Clifford Photographer, Canterbury Museum 1980.175.87415

i.e., youthful, for as long as possible. The use of parasols helped maintain a pale and unweathered complexion and “a carefully chosen parasol could go even further and by casting a bloom of youth across a woman’s features” (Rankine 2017: 83). A quip published in the *South Canterbury Times* highlights this further: “When a young lady asked to look at a parasol, the clerk said, ‘Will you please give the shade you want?’ ‘I expect the parasol to give the shade I want,’ said the young lady.” (*South Canterbury Times*, 16 May 1885: 3). By choosing a flattering colour for the interior of the parasol, wearers could enhance their complexion.



Figure 24. Miss E Smith and sunshade, c.1930s. It is difficult to determine whether this parasol is made of paper or fabric, but this photograph nevertheless demonstrates the change in wider fashion trends in the 1930s, especially when compared with the frills and lace in photographs such as Figure 13. HH Clifford Photographer, Canterbury Museum 1980.175.75902

Parasol Owners

While some of the parasols at Canterbury Museum have little or no provenance details others do have the name of the original owner. To expand information about the women connected to objects cared for by the Museum, brief biographies of some of the owners of the parasols



Figure 25. An 1880s or 1890s sunshade with a satin cover, trimmed with lace, a metal shaft and a carved timber griffin’s head as the handle. One image shows the open parasol, the other shows the detail on the handle. Overall length 870 mm, diameter 810 mm plus 50 mm fringe. Length of handle 175mm, Canterbury Museum EC181.59,



Figure 26. This sunshade has a knob in the shape of a fungus native to Australia and New Zealand, *Cyttaria gunnii*. Whether this is coincidental or deliberate is not known. The original owner was Emma Charlotte Lena Hardy-Johnson (1867–1929) who was born in India and arrived in New Zealand with her parents in the mid–1870s. In 1887 she advertised dancing and deportment classes in Christchurch and continued teaching after her marriage to Edward Thomas in 1891. The classes were taken over by her daughter Evelyn Comyns Thomas (1892–1974) in 1922 and it was Evelyn who donated the parasol. Overall length 910 mm, diameter 1020 mm, Canterbury Museum EC150.273

studied for this article have been compiled. These have been organised chronologically from the approximate date of manufacture of the parasol. The fact that the biographies are brief reflects the paucity of information on individual women during the Victorian era. The authors wanted to have a photograph of each parasol owner in this section, but in some cases no photograph of the woman could be located.

Harriot Riddiford (née Stone)

Harriot Riddiford (1816–1891) (Fig. 42) probably brought her black silk parasol (Fig. 43) with her when she came to Wellington with her husband Daniel on the *Adelaide* which arrived in March 1840.⁴ Daniel worked as an immigration agent for the New Zealand Company (*Evening Post*, 7 September 1891: 2) and Harriot's obituary recorded that she "cheerfully undertook her



Figure 27. An 1870s black silk walking parasol with a machine lace trim, brass fittings and tree branch style handle (inset). This parasol was donated by the daughters of Lucy Jane Matthews, née Peache (c.1853–1927) to the Canterbury Pilgrims and Early Settlers Association. Lucy and her husband William came to Otago in 1878 and as the parasol dates from about this time it is possible that Lucy brought it with her from England. One image shows the open parasol, the other shows the detail of the handle. Overall length 835 mm, diameter 930 mm plus 100 mm trim, Canterbury Museum, PA.1291



Figure 28. This 1880s walking parasol has a cane shaft and a root, or root imitation, has been used for the handle and the ferrule. This cheerful brocaded satin parasol was brought to New Zealand by Florence Emily Maud Bassil (1902–1980) during the 1960s. The parasol had belonged to her mother Martha Tilley of Sussex, England. Canterbury Museum EC179.243



Figure 29. Detail of handle and knob on an Edwardian walking parasol in the style of French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) who revitalised baroque style and idyllic rural scenes. Canterbury Museum EC67.56



Figure 30. Hand painted ceramic knob on late Victorian silk parasol which was too degraded to be opened. Canterbury Museum PA.1299



Figure 31. An Art Nouveau style enamelled ceramic knob on a walking parasol originally used by Emily Clara Burrowes, née Strange (1867–1936). Canterbury Museum EC178.943



Figure 32. A pagoda style late Victorian walking parasol made of chiffon with frills, net fringe, ribbons on the shaft and ferrule and bunches of flowers painted onto the cover. Provenance unknown. Overall length 930 mm, diameter 1060 mm, Canterbury Museum EC67.60



Figure 33. This late Victorian walking parasol of black net and chiffon with beige applique was used by Agnes Macfarlane (1854–1924) who was born at Lowburn Station in Canterbury. Agnes married George Jameson in 1874 and the couple had 10 children. Agnes's daughter Mary, who donated the parasol in 1970, remembered that her mother used it when she attended garden parties and weddings. Overall length 930 mm, diameter 1030 mm, Canterbury Museum EC170.34



Figure 34. A small early Victorian carriage parasol with white painted wooden handle and shaft lined with lavender silk and topped with cream lace. Overall length 585 mm, diameter 620 mm, Canterbury Museum PA.1306



Figure 35. Flat conical shaped parasols with lace fringes. Canterbury Museum, left to right PA.1291, EC164.31, EC167.67



Figure 36. A selection of parasol shapes. A, Cotton cover with black lace around ferrule, overall length 810 mm, EC172.89. B, Cotton cover with timber dowel shaped shaft, overall length 660 mm, EC178.395. C, Silk cover with wooden shaft and handle and ivory tip, overall length 715 mm, EC168.43.

share of the hard work and privations incidental to all new settlements, and by her decision of character and her amiable disposition was enabled to lighten the labours of her husband..." (*Evening Post*, 7 September 1891: 2). Harriot was survived by nine children. The connection between the donor, Miss P Griffiths of Marton, and Harriet Riddiford has not yet been established.

Georgina Bowen (née Markham)

Another parasol (Fig. 44) that may have been brought to New Zealand by its owner is one owned by Georgina Elizabeth Markham (1838–1921) who married Charles Christopher Bowen (later Sir Charles Bowen) in London in 1861 (Fig. 45). Charles (1830–1917) had been living in Canterbury since 1850 and after their marriage the pair lived at Middleton in Christchurch (Fig. 46) "where their

home became a well-recognised centre of hospitality" (*Press*, 7 June 1921: 2). Here Charles continued his political career, and it is likely that Georgina attended many social engagements. Georgina was very involved with the local church (her father was a rector) and after her death she was described as a "gentlewoman" who had "exercised great influence in the moulding of the early standards of Canterbury" (*Press*, 7 June 1921: 2). The parasol was donated to the Museum by one of Georgina's daughters.

Ellen Reeves (née Pember)

The parasol in Figure 47 was donated to the Museum in 1951 by Elizabeth Hope O'Rorke from the estate of her aunt Ellen (Nellie) Mary Reeves (1866–1951). It was originally owned by Ellen Pember (1833–1919), the wife



Figure 37. This silk sunshade, which dates from the 1870s, opens to reveal a lining of bright blue (inset), which beautifully complements the (now rather faded) blue on the outside. Donated by Miss Gerard in 1948, this was the first parasol to be added to the collection. Overall length 700 mm, diameter 580 mm, Canterbury Museum EC148.56



Figure 38. This chiffon parasol, from around the turn of the century, has gathered frills and is trimmed with small gold, blue and pink flowers. The ribs and stretchers are made from gold coloured metal, creating an eye-catching and complementary interior view. One image shows the open parasol from the side, the other shows the interior of the open parasol. Overall length 960 mm, diameter 900 mm with 100 mm trim, Canterbury Museum EC183.111



Figure 39. A delightful contrast is provided by the lining of bright yellow silk (detail) in this late Victorian brocade walking parasol. One image shows the top of the open parasol, the other shows the interior lining detail. Overall length 750 mm, diameter 1070 mm, Canterbury Museum PA.1296



Figure 40. Sarah Courage's late Victorian black silk walking parasol has a plain exterior but a mass of ruffles inside. One image shows the top of the open parasol, the other shows the interior lining detail. Overall length 915 mm, diameter 1000 mm, Canterbury Museum EC150.202



Figure 41. On this late Victorian black silk walking parasol, also owned by Sarah Courage, the trim gives a hint of the mass of pink ruffles inside. One image shows the top of the open parasol, the other shows the interior lining detail. Overall length 920 mm, diameter 1030 mm, Canterbury Museum EC150.203

of William Reeves, journalist and politician, and the mother of politician and poet William Pember Reeves. William and Ellen married in England in 1853 and came to Canterbury in 1857 on the *Rose of Sharon* and Ellen brought the parasol with her. In 1864 the couple built a grand house which they named Risingholme on

11 acres of land at Opawa (Fig. 48). Ellen's parasol was first displayed at the Museum in 1951 when the Early Colonists' exhibition at the Museum was updated by Rose Reynolds (*Press*, 14 April 1951: 2).⁵

Jessie Irving (née Greenham)

Canterbury Museum has a walking parasol (Fig. 49) which was part of the wedding ensemble of Jessie Mary Greenham (1844–1908) who married James Irving in England in 1870. Jessie brought the parasol with her when she came to New Zealand on the *Crusader* in 1879 with her husband (who was the ship's doctor), eight children and a nanny. The family was subsequently expanded to 11. Dr Irving had his own private hospital in Christchurch (The Limes) where the Town Hall now stands. The parasol was donated to the Museum by Jessie's granddaughter in 1957.

Sarah Courage (née Hopwood)

Two parasols (Fig. 50 and 51) were donated by the daughter and granddaughter of the writer Sarah Amelia Hopwood (1845–1901). Sarah (Fig. 52) married Frank Courage in England in 1863 when she was 18 years of age and soon afterwards the couple emigrated to Canterbury. Sarah then lived with her husband on a remote farm in North Canterbury. She kept a journal (which has not survived) and in 1896 published an account of her first years in Canterbury describing her life as a young wife in the country. Despite the fact that she used *nom de plumes*, Sarah's pithy descriptions of her neighbours saw most of the small number of books she published burned, but the book was republished in 1976. Sarah had a great sense of humour but was something of a snob and critical of the dress of others if it didn't come up to her high standards.

Janet Helmore (née Gray)

Janet Maud Helmore née Gray (c.1865–1947) owned an Edwardian cream lace parasol (Fig. 53) which was donated to the Museum by her son Heathcote Helmore. Janet was the daughter of Hon. Ernest Gray who arrived



Figure 42. Mrs Harriot Riddiford (1816–1891). Masterton Archive 16-155/99



Figure 43. This black lacy and elaborate early Victorian silk parasol has a carved ebony twig style handle with an ebony ring and ferrule. The exterior is black silk satin with shoulders of embossed velvet and a large circle of lace around the ferrule. There is a fringe of machine lace and the same lace has been used in the interior lining. Images show the open parasol from the side, the interior, the lace detail, and the handle detail. Overall length 790 mm, diameter 810 mm plus 170 mm trim, Canterbury Museum EC167.67

in Canterbury in about 1853 and was a member of the Legislative Council from 1866 until 1883 (*Press*, 4 August 1897: 2). Her husband was a solicitor. In her obituary it was said that she took little part in public affairs but was a gracious hostess at Millbrook, the family's large house and grounds in Fendalton (*Press*, 6 January 1948: 2). No doubt the parasol would have been useful at the many garden parties Janet hosted. This parasol appears to be the only item in Canterbury Museum's collection that was owned or used by Janet Helmore.



Figure 44. Georgina Bowen's carriage parasol, probably made before 1850, features an intricately carved ivory handle and shaft with a brass sleeve. The pink silk cover has an overlay of handmade lace and the interior is lined with pale blush silk. Overall length 650 mm, diameter 650 mm plus lace overhang, Canterbury Museum PA.1292



Figure 45. Georgina and Charles Bowen. Photograph taken by Alfred Charles Barker, probably in the late 1860s. Canterbury Museum 1944.78.313



Figure 46. Middleton Grange Homestead, a photograph by Alfred Barker, 23 November 1867. Canterbury Museum 1949.148.976

Philippa Nancarrow (née Fosberry)

Another woman that the Museum only has one object relating to was described as “Mrs Richard Nancarrow” in the donation information. The object, the parasol in Figure 54, was owned by Philippa Anna Fosberry (1856–1945) (Fig. 55) “one of the handsome Miss Fosberrys” who married Richard Nancarrow in Hokitika in 1876.⁶ After Richard’s death, Philippa decided to leave Greymouth for Christchurch and, such was the regard that she was held in, was presented with a purse of

sovereigns by 30 leading men of the town to help her in her new life (*Greymouth Evening Star*, 28 March 1901: 4). In Christchurch Philippa rarely appeared in the public eye but no doubt used her parasol when attending social events. The parasol was donated by her daughter.

Emma (Maia) Aston

One of the more modern parasols (Fig. 56) in Canterbury Museum’s collection was owned by a remarkable Māori woman, Emma Susanna May (Maia) Aston (1906–1978).



Figure 47. Carriage parasol with hinged ivory stick, probably made during the 1850s. The cover is made from fawn and blue brocade with lighter blue silk edging and lined with beige linen. The ivory ferrule would have had an ivory ring for hanging the parasol, but this no longer exists. One image shows the open parasol from the side, the other shows the interior. Overall length 715 mm, diameter 620 mm, Canterbury Museum EC151.54



Figure 48. Ellen and William Reeves in front of their residence, Risingholme, c.1880. Canterbury Museum 19xx.2.2078

Maia was born in Dunedin and served as a nursing sister with the Royal New Zealand Air Force during the Second World War and at one point was stationed in Fiji. She was captured by the Japanese and spent time in Changi Prison. After the War Maia was working as a matron for the Colonial Sugar Refinery Company on Viti Levu, Fiji, when a hurricane hit. She was secretary for the hurricane relief committee and worked long hours to make sure relief was distributed. After her return to New Zealand in about 1953 she married her cousin, widower John Morrison Williamson. In later years she worked as a social worker (*Press*, 18 November 1872: 6, 28 November 1972: 6, 25 August 1978: 2).⁷

Conclusion

Sarah Courage's description of "a living panorama" featuring "gay parasols" at an event in Christchurch's Botanic Gardens in 1865 neatly hints at the vivid colours and provides a useful corrective to the black and white photographs from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that shape how we imagine the past (Courage, 1976: 227). The 76 parasols held by Canterbury Museum, like women's European dress brilliantly showcased by Claire Regnault (2021), give us a tangible sense of the sartorial theatre of the period that so inspired contemporary artists. One thinks here of Claude Monet's



Figure 49. A walking parasol that was part of a wedding ensemble in 1870. The parasol includes three turned knobs, one of which is on the handle. Both the linen cover and silk lining are unfortunately not in good condition. One image shows the top of the open parasol, the other shows a side view. Overall length 790 mm, diameter 700 mm, Canterbury Museum E157.163



Figure 50. A black silk walking parasol with ruffled lining and trimmed edge owned by Sarah Courage (see Fig. 40 for the interior view). The black painted wood shaft has a black taffeta ribbon bow and an embossed silver knob. Overall length 915 mm, diameter 1040 mm, Canterbury Museum EC150.202

strikingly vibrant *Woman with a Parasol - Madame Monet and Her Son* (1875) or William Powell Frith's *Life at the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)* (1875) that delighted Queen Victoria and helps us to picture Sarah Courage's "bright patches of colour" in Christchurch 11 years later. Parasols mattered and were owned by women from across society, even though the Museum's collection is biased toward the well-to-do, the most prominent and the well connected. They speak to questions of social status, aesthetics, and the performance of gender, and also offer clues about the rituals and symbolism associated with



Figure 52. Sarah Amelia Courage (1845–1901). Reproduced from Courage, 1976



Figure 51. Another walking parasol owned by Sarah Courage (see Fig. 41 for the interior view). This one has a tree branch style handle and an inner cover in glorious pink, which would no doubt cast a flattering light on the skin of anyone underneath who was pale. Canterbury Museum EC150.203, overall length 920mm, diameter 1030mm

love and flirtation. Parasols provided protection from the harshness of the sun but could be used by determined women prohibitionists to disrupt or cancel meetings in support of "moderate" liquor trading. The collection also highlights broader societal shifts.

By the 1930s, changing fashion trends and a differing relationship to sun exposure meant that the Victorian and Edwardian parasols decreased in popularity. Above all, Canterbury Museum's parasol collection stands as a testament to the efforts of Rose Reynolds, who understood the cultural significance and emotional power of domestic items at a time when curators were more attuned to natural history and ethnology. Most of our parasols were donated by women and the ways that they were passed down matrilineal lines, as with Mary Elizabeth Howard's well-travelled carriage parasol, attests to their place as tokens of remembrance.



Figure 53. Janet Helmore's cream silk Edwardian walking parasol with silk hand-run embroidered lace cover and trim and timber handle. Overall length 890 mm, diameter 970 mm plus 95 mm trim, Canterbury Museum EC150.314



Figure 54. Philippa Nancarrow's Edwardian walking parasol. It has a cover of cream chiffon covered with black lace. The fabric is woven à la disposition, designed specifically to fit the shape of the parasol. The handle is cut glass and there is cream silk ribbon on the shaft and tip of the parasol. One image shows the top of the open parasol, the other shows a side view. Overall length 990 mm, diameter 1040 mm, Canterbury Museum EC164.4

Limitations

While preparing for the decant of Canterbury Museum's textile store in 2022 for the Museum's redevelopment, the idea was born to explore Canterbury Museum's collection of parasols, all neatly stored in one section of mobile shelving. As decanting was already underway, photographing the parasols, with the assistance of a conservator, was a hasty affair. While writing this article the authors would have dearly loved to revisit the parasols to check details, but access was not possible. Given these constraints, the goal of this article is not to provide a comprehensive overview of the Museum's collection of parasols, but rather to explain some of its key features and to highlight some of the women who owned these objects.

Another difficulty encountered was accurately dating parasols, a problem faced by other researchers (Hooper 2016: 7; Vazquez 2018: 4). Parasols have been dated to their most likely time periods of early Victorian (1837–1850), mid-Victorian (1850–1870), late Victorian (1870–1901) and Edwardian (1901–1910).



Figure 55. Philippa Fosberry (left) with her sister Eva. Hokitika Museum, 3446

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Figure 56. This cheerful cotton parasol dates from the 1930s to 1940s was owned by Emma Susanna May (Maia) Aston. It was probably made in Singapore and may date from Maia's time there as a prisoner of war during World War Two. One image shows the top of the open parasol, the other shows a side view. Overall length 520 mm, diameter 750 mm, Canterbury Museum EC1989.28

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/11968216/person/220163228852/facts> [accessed 6 January 2023].
- 2 <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/19800964/person/202265815859/facts> [accessed 6 January 2023].
- 3 The terms 'umbrella' and 'parasol' are used interchangeably in this article.
- 4 List of passengers on the *Adelaide*, arrived at Port Nicholson 7 March 1840. <https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~ourstuff/genealogy/Adelaide.htm> [accessed 6 January 2023].
- 5 <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/76104349/person/48364998642/facts> [accessed 6 January 2023].
- 6 Macdonald Dictionary Record: Richard Nancarrow, <https://collection.canterburymuseum.com/objects/715636/macdonald-dictionary-record-richard-nancarrow> [accessed 9 February 2023].
- 7 <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/43792483/person/170095622840/facts> [accessed 24 January 2023].

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