



needed that touch of gentleman's tailoring, which is such an important development in fashion", says Leong, "Fortunately my colleague, Paola Di Trocchio, found a wonderful linen shirt with a beautiful chest frill in our own collection dating from around 1815, quite a nice addition given the whole wet-shirt-in-the-pond scene that is so inauthentic, but now so much part of Austen-TV legend".<sup>7</sup>

The highs and lows contained within Austen's storylines are complemented by the ups and downs of the period's waistlines, as the exhibition traced the development of some of the major trends in women's fashions. When Austen was born the 'natural' waistline, albeit corseted and with wide-hooped panniers, was *de rigueur* for the woman of style. By the 1780s, Enlightenment ideas of liberation and freedom had filtered down to influence clothing.

No less an arbiter of fashion than Queen Marie Antoinette of France (1755-93) instituted the wearing of more simple dress when not constrained by court etiquette, particularly after Louis XVI made her the gift of the Petit Trianon in August, 1774. Here the Queen and her retinue would relax, perhaps wearing the rustic '*robe à la Polonoise*', *toiles de Joüy* cottons, and later the '*gaulle*', a simple muslin dress featured in the controversial portrait, "Marie Antoinette en chemise (Chemise à la Reine)" (1783) by Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun (1755-1842).

Marie Antoinette's equivalent in England as a sartorial trend-setter, her friend Lady Georgiana Spencer, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806), popularised the style across the Channel after receiving a '*gaulle*' as a gift from the Queen.<sup>8</sup> The exhibition had an interesting link to Georgiana, a portrait miniature (c.1794) of her companion Lady Elizabeth Foster (1759-1824), who at that point was the Duke of Devonshire's long-term mistress (and eventual wife after Georgiana's death). In the painting, Lady

Elizabeth is wearing a plain white gown tied with a wide pink sash (showing the upwards migration of the waist), and a white scarf draped casually around her head.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution (1789-99) neoclassicism became the prevailing fashion, with high-waisted diaphanous muslin gowns and flowing lines in the 'Grecian style', inspired by Greek and Roman statuary. These fashions were adopted in England around 1800, and such was the craze for muslin that even Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* boasts of his expertise in advising his sister Eleanor about her purchases. "Mrs Allen was quite struck by his genius. 'Men commonly take so little notice of those things', said she... 'You must be a great comfort to your sister, sir'".<sup>9</sup> >>>