

## Preposterous Headdresses and Feathered Ladies: Hair, Wigs, Barbers, and Hairdressers

An Exhibit at the Lewis Walpole Library: May 8 - October 29, 2003

In the second half of the eighteenth century the hair of the fashionable world in England soared to new heights. From the Lewis Walpole Library's collection here is a selection of prints focused on hair and wigs, and on the hairdressers and barbers who created and tended them.

These images of "preposterous" hairstyles give evidence of the increased economic prosperity that made possible such extreme fashions as well as the luxury goods necessary to them. At the time of publication, the prints also served to communicate and disseminate the latest styles to a broader public.

English women borrowed fashionable hairstyles from France, particularly Marie Antoinette's fanciful headdresses, and English men returning from the Grand Tour brought back fashions as well as objets d'art. From the beginning there was ambivalence among the English about extravagant fashion, and the extreme style adopted by the young gentlemen back from their European travels, dubbed "Macaronies," was usually portrayed as ridiculous and sometimes even as unnatural. In 1764 Horace Walpole mentioned "The Maccaroni Club (which is composed of all the travelled young men who wear long curls and spying-glasses)," and a writer in the Oxford Magazine had this to say in 1770: "There is indeed a kind of animal, neither male nor female, a thing of the neuter gender, lately started up amongst us. It is called Macaroni. It talks without meaning, it smiles without pleasantry, it eats without appetite, it rides without exercise, it wenches without passion."

In addition to reflecting an English distrust of Continental (specifically French and Italian) excess in dress and manner, some of the prints also point up the confusion and sense of disorder caused by attempts at upward mobility. Satiric images abound of men and women putting on the clothes, and trying for the manners and hairstyles, of the upper classes.

Note : Our understanding of these prints is indebted to Frederick George Stephens and Mary Dorothy George, *Catalogue of Personal and Political Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), abbreviated here to BMCat. References are to numbered descriptions in this work.

The five orders of Perriwigs as they were worn at the late Coronation, measured Architectonically.  
[William Hogarth (1697-1764)]  
London: Published by William Hogarth, [1761].  
Engraving. 761.10.15.1.2  
BMCat 3812



Hogarth's representation of the headdresses he imagined might have been worn at the coronation of George III and Queen Charlotte reflects a preoccupation with fashionable hairstyles documented by Walpole, who witnessed the ceremony. Walpole wrote to Conway (25 September 1761); "Some of the peeresses were dressed over night, slept in armchairs, and were waked if they tumbled their heads." Hogarth is also poking fun at antiquarians who believed that the beauty of a work of art could be explained by measurements and proportions. Hogarth includes portraits; in the fifth Order, to the far left, is a profile of Queen Charlotte.

## Wigs

London: Published by M. Daryl, October 12, 1773.

Etching and engraving.

773.10.12.1.2

BMCat 5170



A man's profession often dictated the sort of wig he wore. Lawyers favored full-bottom wigs (long wigs reaching to the chest), merchants affected tie-wigs and queue-wigs (the hair at the neck was tied with a ribbon), and clerics wore bob-wigs (short frizzed wigs without queues). According to George in the BMCat, these heads are probably portraits, one meant to caricature Lord Chancellor Bathurst. This print has a companion, Hats, showing twelve styles of fashionable hats worn by men.

## Debating Society (Substitute for Hair Powder)

[Isaac Cruikshank (1756?-1811?)]

London: Published by Laurie & Whittle, May 5, 1795.

Etching and engraving. 795.5.5.1

BMCat 8771



In 1795, under William Pitt, a tax on hair powder was imposed, probably contributing to the increased popularity of natural hair at the end of the century. It has been said that when the tax was enacted, Whig leaders met and cut off their queues, thus heralding a move toward less extravagant hairstyles.

**Wigs All the Rage, or a Debate on the Baldness of the Times**  
Richard Newton (1777-1798)  
London: Published by Laurie & Whittle, May 24, 1798.  
Etching and engraving. 798.5.24.2  
BMCat 9325



In contrast with the styles of a quarter-century earlier, the wigs held aloft by these men and women all imitate natural hair.

**[The Barber Politician]**  
[c. 1771]  
Engraving. 771.0.61



The artist of this anonymous print shows the barber and his client engaged in strenuous conversation over the latest news. Walpole, in a letter to Horace Mann (13 July 1773), stops his mock ranting with the words, "Lord bless me, I run on like a political barber."

**The Village Barber. L.M. [Licentiate of Medicine]**  
**Henry William Bunbury (1750-1811)**  
**James Bretherton (fl. 1770-1781)**  
**London: Published by J. Bretherton, March 1, 1772.**  
**Hand-colored etching. 772.3.1.2**



This barber holds the tools of his trade: a lancet, a razor, and a shaving dish. Over his house, shown in the background, is the sign of a wig, and a board advertises not only categories of wigs but also food and drink, washing aids, and cures for various ailments: "BOBS, BOB-Majors SCRATCHES [plain wigs] & other wigs made here, also SAUSAGES, WASHBALLS[soap] Black Puddings Scotch Pills, Powder for the ITCH, RED HERRINGS, BREECHES BALLS & small BEER by the maker."

### A Penny Barber

[Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827)].

London, Published by William Holland, [1789].

Etching with aquatint. 789.0.59

BMCat 7605



The barber holds his bowl and soap and is watched with apprehension by his customer. Meanwhile, another man is stanching a wound over a basin, and the barber's helper irons a wig. On the floor and on the walls are wigs (including the customer's?), wig-blocks, and a razor.

### A Proctor without a Wig

George Moutard Woodward (ca. 1760-1809)

Engraving by Cruikshanks [i.e., Isaac Cruikshank (1756?-1811?)]

London: [Published] by Allen & West, January 14, 1797.

Engraving. 797.1.14.1

BMCat 9115



**The Shaver and the Shavee**  
Henry William Bunbury (1750-1811)  
Charles Bretherton (d. 1783)  
London: Published by S.W. Fores, April 12, 1801.  
Hand-colored etching. 801.4.12.1  
BMCat 4756



**A French Hair Dresser Running through the Streets to his Customers**  
[P. Stevenart?]  
London: Published by W. Darling, March 1, 1771.

Engraving. 771.3.1.2  
BMCat 4767



At the beginning of the century London had very few hairdressers; in 1795 more than 50,000 were practicing their art in Britain. It was widely acknowledged that the best hairdressers were French, and they were in great demand. The shears on his hip and the combs in his hair proclaim this man's trade. George, in the BMCat, suggests that Bunbury drew this image.

A Hint to ye Husbands, or the Dresser, Properly Dressed  
London, Printed for R. Sayer & J. Bennett, August 14, 1777.  
Mezzotint. 777.8.14.1



The husband here threatens the hairdresser with his riding whip while the lady leans back in mild alarm.

The Boarding-School Hair-Dresser  
London: Printed for Robert Sayer, September 24, 1786.  
Mezzotint. 786.9.24.1



A hairdresser is constructing a girl's coiffure, surrounded by implements strewn about the floor. On the table are a guitar and music, which, together with his intimate stance, suggest the need for a chaperone.

New Head Dresses for 1772  
Designed by D. Richie, Hair Dresser  
September 1, 1772.  
Etching and engraving. 772.9.1.1



These six heads show the latest hairstyles for 1772; the print must have served as an advertisement for Mr. Richie's skill.



**Miss Prattle, consulting Doctor Double Fee about her Pantheon Head Dress**

London: Printed for Carington Bowles, February 8, 1772.

Hand-colored mezzotint. 772.2.8.1

BMCat 5092



Both the lady in her enormous pyramid of hair and the good doctor in his legal wig and gown are slyly reflected in the picture on the wall above them of two monkeys taking tea.

**The Paintress of Macaroni's**

London: Printed for Carington Bowles, April 13, 1772.

Hand-colored mezzotint. 772.4.13.1.1

BMCat 4582



It has been suggested that the painter caricatured here is Angelika Kauffman. The Macaroni sitter is yet another of this era's extravagantly dressed and bewigged fashionable gentlemen.

**The Macaroni Painter, or Billy Dimple Sitting for his Picture**  
**Robert Dighton (1752-1814)**  
**Engraving by Richard Earlom (1743-1822)**  
**London: Printed for Bowles and Carver, September 25, 1772.**  
**Mezzotint. 772.9.25.1.1**  
**BMCat 4520**



The Macaroni Painter is Richard Cosway, R.A., known for his foppish dress. The sitter, in full Macaroni regalia, appears entirely satisfied with himself.

**The Macaroni. A real Character at the late Masquerade**  
**Philip Dawe**  
**London: Printed for John Bowles, July 3, 1773.**  
**Mezzotint. 773.7.3.1.2**  
**BMCat 5221**



This gentleman shows off the fashion of the day, from the rosettes on his shoes to the tiny three-cornered hat at the top of his headdress, a structure made of enormous side curls, a gigantic club, and a pyramid of hair. While the Oxford English Dictionary cites Walpole's comment in 1764 as the first recorded use of the term, the Macaronies came to greatest prominence in the early 1770s.

### The Old Beau in an Extasy

J. Dixon

London: Printed for Carington Bowles, [July 13, 1773].

Hand-colored mezzotint. 773.7.13.2

BMCat 4532



The Old Beau's hair is drawn into the fashionable style of a toupée to which the valet is fastening a huge club of false hair. It is worth noticing the curtain's tassel, whose shape and decoration suggest an ass's head hovering over the Old Beau as he admires himself in the mirror.

### The Preposterous Head Dress, or the Featherd Lady

London: Published by M. Darly, March 20, 1776.

Etching and engraving. 776.3.20.1

BMCat 5370



Both the lady and her maid sport the inverted heart-shaped pyramid all the rage in 1776 and 1777. The Duchess of Devonshire was said to have begun the fashion for ostrich feathers, seen here decorating the headdress along with fruit and carrots. Late in her life Lady Louisa Stuart wrote about the opposition to ostrich feathers as part of a headdress: "This fashion was not attacked as fantastic or unbecoming or inconvenient or expensive, but as seriously wrong or immoral. The unfortunate feathers were insulted mobbed burned almost pelted." (quoted in George, BMCat, V, 237).

**Lady All-Top**  
London: Published by J. Lockington, May 15, 1776.  
Etching and engraving. 776.5.15.1



Shown here is another magnificent heart-shaped pyramid of hair adorned with ostrich feathers, beads, and flowers, of the sort made fashionable by the Duchess of Devonshire in 1776. These hairstyles were labor-intensive and required cushions and wool, pomatum and powder, and an array of decorations. They were uncomfortable, they attracted insects and mice, and they could be fire hazards.

**Oh. Heigh. Oh.**  
**Or a View of the Back Settlements**  
London, Published by M. Darly, July 9, 1776.  
Etching and engraving. 776.7.9.1.2



In addition to poking fun at the highly decorated hairstyle of the day, this print alludes to the Ohio territory and thus to the coming American war.

**Rural Masquerade Dedicated to the Regatta'ites**  
London, Published by J. Lockington, July 9, 1776.  
Etching and engraving. 776.7.9.2  
BMCat 5379



In the upper reaches of this headdress are figures dressed for a masquerade, promenading through a garden. Below is shown what may represent the first regatta in England, held 23 June 1775, partly on the Thames and partly at Ranelagh, where a temple of Neptune had been built. The bearer of this enormous coiffure, despite the female body, may be meant to be Neptune or Father Thames.

**Phaetona or Modern Female Taste**  
London: Published by M. Darly, November 6, 1776.  
Etching and engraving. 776.11.6.1  
BMCat 5375



The lady and her hair dwarf the horses pulling her carriage, a phaeton. The Duchess of Devonshire may be the intended object of the satire here, given the ostrich feathers in the hair and the ducal coronet on the carriage.

### Miss Shuttle-Cock

R.S. [Monogram; i.e., "Richard Sneer," perhaps Richard Brinsley Sheridan]

London, Published by M. Darly, December 6, 1776.

Etching and engraving. 776.12.6.1

BMCat 5376



Here a man in clerical garb and his opponent, probably "Richard Sneer," use a lady as their shuttlecock. Lifted high in the air by the ostrich feathers in her hair, the lady's flight is helped by the light-weight cork used to shape the back of her dress.

George, in the BMCat, remarks that this print may have suggested these lines from David Garrick's prologue to Sheridan's *Trip to Scarborough* (first performed 24 February 1777):

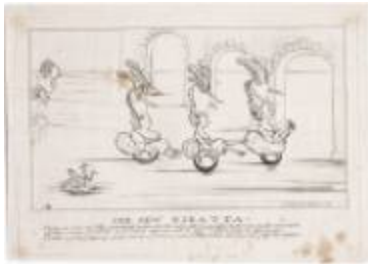
Ladies may smile--are they not in the plot? The bounds of nature have not they forgot? Were they design'd to be, when put together,  
Made up, like shuttlecocks, of cork and feather?

### The New Rigatta

R.S. [Monogram, i.e., "Richard Sneer," perhaps Richard Brinsley Sheridan]

London: Published by M. Darly, February 20, 1777.

Etching and engraving. 777.2.20.1



These racing ladies are floating on their "cork rumps" and being propelled by the breath expelled from three heads and directed toward their well-feathered headdresses. Heading for the arches of a bridge, the three are competing for prizes, among them "an entire new Wig" and "a new pair of Corks."

### Tight Lacing

R.S. [Monogram; i.e., "Richard Sneer," perhaps Richard Brinsley Sheridan] J.H.

London: Published by William Holland, [March 1777?].

Hand-colored etching and engraving. 777.3.0.9

BMCat 5452



The lady's maid has wound her mistress's stay-laces around a poker and is pulling with all her might, one foot braced against her skirt, which has been extended by a "cork rump."

### Tight Lacing. Or Hold Fast Behind

M.D. [Monogram; Matthew or Mary Darly]

London: Published by M. Darly, March 1, 1777.

Etching and engraving. 777.3.1.4



**Tight Lacing, or the Cobler's Wife in the Fashion**  
London: Published by William Hitchcock, November 4, 1777.  
Hand-colored etching and engraving. 777.11.4.1  
BMCat 5464



**Miss Juniper Fox**  
London. Published by M. Darly, March 2, 1777.  
Hand-colored etching and engraving. 777.3.2.1

Behind the cobbler and his wife is a picture of a leg of mutton and turnips, whose shape is reminiscent of the wife's headdress.





**Slight of Hand by a Monkey--or the Lady's Head Unloaded**  
London: Printed for Carington Bowles, c. 1770.  
Mezzotint.  
BM 4546



Both the butcher's boy with his basket and a young man on the other side of the wall are amused by the monkey's stealing of the fine lady's extravagant headdress.

**The French Lady in London, or the Head Dress for the Year 1771**  
From an original drawing by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm (1733-1794)

London: Printed for S. Sledge, April 2, 1771.  
Etching and engraving. 771.4.2.1  
BMCat 4784



The size of the lady's headdress is echoed by the mountain landscape on the wall behind her. Her curtsy has sent the gentleman's book (G.A. Stevens's Lecture upon Heads) tumbling to the floor and has terrified the dog, cat, and parrot.

L'Inconvenient des Perruques. The Inconvenience of Wigs  
C. Vernet [Carle Vernet (1758-1836)?]  
Engraving by F. Sansom (fl. 1788-1800)  
London: Published by S.W. Fores, April 7, 1798.  
Etching and engraving. 798.4.7.2



**Progress of the Toilet. The Wig**

**James Gillray (1756-1815)**

**London: Published by H. Humphrey, February 26, 1810.**

**Hand-colored etching and engraving. 810.2.26.2**

**BMCat 11609**



This is the second in a series of three plates describing a lady's toilet. The first is "The Stays" and the third, "Dress Completed." Here the lady titleernately reads Madame de Stael's Delphine and gazes into the mirror while her lapdog sleeps on a stool and her maid readies her wig.

**A Doleful Disaster, or Miss Fubby Fatarmin's Wig Caught Fire**

**Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827)**

**London: [Published] by Thomas Tegg, [1813].**

**Colored etching. 813.9.20.1**

**BMCat 12147**



Accidents such as this print depicts must not have been uncommon.