

Aussie visitor's historic dress

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AN Australian visitor, researching her Scottish roots, arrived at a Sutherland museum with an unexpected treasure.

Barbara Francis, took a family heirloom with her on her visit to Historylinks in Dornoch – a 300-year-old, woven silk dress originally worn by one of her ancestors.

And museum curator Lynne Mahoney was “overwhelmed” to be shown the historic dress, which has lost none of its vibrant colour despite its age.

She said: “I could not believe it when Barbara brought it in. I was absolutely astounded. The quality of the silk was just amazing.

“The dress gives an important insight into 18th century Highland culture.”

Ms Francis is descended from the Grey family who lived at Skibo Castle well before the days of famous philanthropist Andrew Carnegie's ownership.

She told staff that the dress, which she was given on her 16th birthday by a Scottish aunt, belonged to Katherine Grey and dated back to between 1700 and 1710.

Traditionally, girls in Ms Francis'



Staff at Historylinks Museum in Dornoch were thrilled to be shown the exquisite 300-year-old dress.

family have had their pictures taken wearing the dress on their 16th birthdays

Curators from the Victoria and Albert Museum recently saw the garment and believe that the silk was probably designed by James Leman of Spitalfields in London.

Ms Francis also spent time with Dr Nick Lindsay and Caroline Seymour of Clyne Heritage Society, researching more of her ancestors, the

Houstean family of Creich and Clyne.

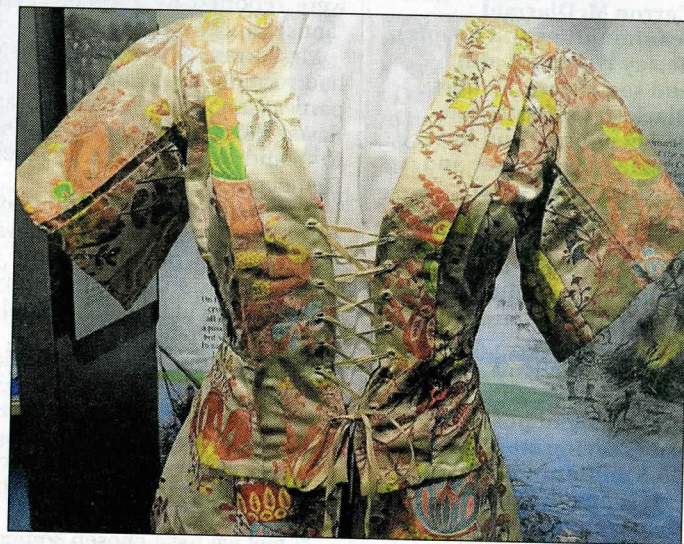
She was taken by local historian Anne Coombes to visit the remains of Creich House where Katherine Grey lived after her marriage into the Houstean family in the early 1700s.

The family were known to have been active Jacobites.

Ms Francis has now returned to Australia, making a stop-off in Switzerland with the well-travelled garment.



Ms Francis was given the dress on her 16th birthday by an aunt.



It is thought that James Leman of Spitalfields designed the fabric.