

Academic claims that election colours have faded

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As the UK election looms, a historian at the University of Hertfordshire has revealed that political colours have lost much of their impact.

Dr Katrina Navickas, a lecturer in history at the University's Social Science Arts and Humanities Research Institute, looked at political clothing and adornment in England during the period 1780-1840 and found that although many of today's political symbols have their origins in the 18th century, today's parties no longer stand for many of the principles that those symbols represented.

She also contrasted reports of political apathy among today's electorate with the efforts made by the British 200 years ago. "Ordinary people really cared about politics in the 18th Century," said Dr Navickas. "Even women and the working classes, who didn't have the vote, made an effort to make a political statement through wearing a ribbon in party colours. Clothing was an ideal way for women to express their political preferences and aristocratic women even made whole fashions out of party colours. For example, the infamous Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, designed a dress of light blue and beige stripes, in support of the leader of the opposition."

In a paper entitled *That Sash Will Hang You: Political Clothing and Adornment in England, 1780-1840*, which will be published in the American history journal, [Journal of British Studies](#) in July, Dr Navickas looked at how clothing was a major means of public communication in the 18th Century.

As a result of these new findings, Dr Navickas observes that the Labour ‘red’ of the eighteenth century, which stood for socialist principles has faded to a pink; the original ‘orange’ of the Liberals plays no part in their yellow image of today; only the Conservative party seems to have remained true to the ‘true blue’ image and gone even darker. “They seem to be harping back to their ‘blue veined’ aristocratic roots and have even adopted the Oak Tree, which is very much a symbol of the Tories of the eighteenth century,” she added. “Although it is interesting that current environmental concerns have made ‘green’ into the colour for the parties to fight over.”

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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