

condition. Thus, two years ago, a fundraising project was launched by Britain's National Trust¹ to pay for its conservation.

It turned to textile conservator Zenzie Tinker to do the job. Zenzie loves historical dress because of the link with the past. 'Working on costumes like the Beetlewing dress gives you a real sense of the people who wore them; you can see the sweat stains and wear marks. But it's quite unusual to know who actually wore a garment. That's the thing that makes the Beetlewing project so special.'

Before any of Zenzie's conservation work can begin, she and her team will conduct a thorough investigation to help determine what changes have been made to the dress and when. This will involve close examination of the dress for signs of damage and wear, and will be aided by comparing it with John Singer Sargent's painting and contemporary photographs. Then Zenzie and the National Trust will decide how far back to take the reconstruction, as some members feel that even the most recent changes are now part of the history of the dress.

The first stages in the actual restoration will involve delicate surface cleaning, using a small vacuum suction device. Once the level of reconstruction has been determined, the original crocheted² overdress will be stitched onto a dyed net support before repairs begin. 'It's going to be extraordinarily difficult, because the original cloth is quite stretchy, so we've deliberately chosen net because that has a certain amount of flexibility in it too,' says Zenzie. When the dress is displayed, none of our work will be noticeable, but we'll retain all the evidence on the reverse so that future experts will be able to see exactly what we've done — and I'll produce a detailed report.'

Zenzie has estimated that the project, costing about £30,000, will require more than 700 hours' work. 'It will be a huge undertaking and I don't think the Trust has ever spent quite as much on a costume before,' she says. 'But this dress is unique. It's very unusual to see this level of workmanship on a theatrical costume, and it must have looked spectacular on stage.' If Terry was alive today, there's no doubt she would be delighted. Unlike many other actresses, she valued her costumes because she kept and reused them time and time again. 'I'd like to think she'd see our contribution as part of the ongoing history of the dress,' says Zenzie.

- 7 The National Trust conducted useful research to assist Zenzie's plans for the dress.
- 8 There will be some discussion over the changes that Zenzie's team should make to the dress.
- 9 Zenzie's estimate for the timing of the project is realistic.
- 10 Ellen Terry's attitude towards her dresses was typical of her time.