

Have you ever read about a Victorian dress, and wondered: “What color, exactly, is heliotrope?”
Did you ever read an Elizabethan novel and say: “Did anyone *really* wear Puke?”
When Chaucer wrote: “his eyen bright citrin” – did you wonder about what color is citrin?
Have you wondered when aniline dyes were invented, how indigo was used, or how black fabric was dyed?

Perhaps you have wondered when the color London Smoke was used, or when Eiffel red was invented.

Here is the book to tell you!

Elephant’s Breath and London Smoke

Historical Color Names, Definitions, and Uses

This book will tell you about color in history – the names of colors, when they were used, how they were used, what they looked like, and where they came from. There are dye recipes, paint ingredients, poetic language and general commentary – all in the words of period writers.

You will learn about mourning colors, the effects of artificial light on color, advice on what colors to wear, the colors found in cosmetics and theatrical make-up, and the names of the colors of horses. You can read about symbolism in colors, heraldic colors, and complaints about the names of colors.

I have perused fashion magazines, books of dye recipes, art books, painter’s manuals, mineralogy guides, tomes on color theory, metaphysical texts, poetry and fiction, but especially period dictionaries and encyclopedias. Any resource that might give a hint on what a color looked like or how it may have been used was fair game, from Chaucer to Chemistry Journals.

Most of the entries were printed in English, American, Canadian and Australian publications from around 1380 to 1922. Because, French was the language of fashion, many of the English terms are French words. I have tried to explain those colors, too.

This dictionary endeavors to define color names in the words of the English speaking people who used those colors. It is especially aimed at women’s fashion, but artists will also find it useful.

If you are curious about color, you will want this book!