

History of Fashion 1840 – 1940

(Extract from Victoria & Albert Museum)

1840s

Women

1840s fashion is characterised by low and sloping shoulders, a low pointed waist, and bell-shaped skirts that grew increasingly voluminous throughout the decade. Evening dresses were often off the shoulder. Hair was parted in the centre with ringlets at the side of the head, or styled with loops around the ears and pulled into a bun at the back of the head. Paisley or crochet shawls were fashionable accessories, as were linen caps with lace frills for indoor wear, and large bonnets for outdoors. Capes with large collars were fashionable.

Men

Very fashionable men sported low, tightly cinched waists, with rounded chests and flared frock-coats that gave them a rather hour-glass figure inspired by Prince Albert. They also wore tight trousers and waistcoats, with high upstanding collars and neckties tied around them. Hair was worn quite long, but swept to the sides. Moustaches and side-burns were popular.





1850s

Women

In the 1850s, women's skirts were domed and bell-shaped, supported by crinoline petticoats. They often featured deep flounces or tiers. Long bloomers and pantaloons trimmed with lace were popular. Tiered cape-jackets were fashionable, as were paisley patterned shawls. Deep bonnets were worn and hair was swept into buns or side coils from a centre parting.

Men

Men wore matching coats, waistcoats and trousers, with hairstyles characterised by large mutton-chop side-burns and moustaches, after the style set by Prince Albert. Shirts had high upstanding collars and were tied at the neck with large bow-ties. High fastening and tight fitting frock coats were also very fashionable; though a new style called the sack coat (a thigh-length, loosely fitted jacket) became popular. The bowler hat was invented around 1850, but was generally seen as a working class hat, while top-hats were favoured by the upper classes.





1860s

Women

1860s women's dress featured tight bodices with high necks and buttoned fronts. White lace was popular for collars and cuffs, as were low sloping shoulders that flared out into wide sleeves. The skirt continued to be full and bell-shaped until around 1865 when it began to lose its volume at the front and move its emphasis towards the back. Hair was worn with a centre parting tied into low chignons at the nape of the neck, with loops or ringlets covering the ears. Ornaments for evening wear included floral wreaths, ostrich feathers, pomegranate flowers, wheatears and butterflies.

Men

In the 1860s it was fashionable for men's coats and jackets to be single-breasted and semi-fitted, extending to the mid-thigh. Waistcoats were often collarless and single-breasted, and trousers were occasionally cut from a narrow check cloth. High, starched collars were worn with cravats and neck-ties. Hair was parted from the centre and moderately waved. A particular hairstyle, known as 'Dundreary whiskers' or 'Piccadilly weepers', were long pendant side-whiskers worn with a full beard and drooping moustache.





THE WIFE & HER COURT



1870s

Women

1870s women's fashion placed an emphasis on the back of the skirt, with long trains and fabric draped up into bustles with an abundance of flounces and ruching. The waist was lower in the 1870s than the 1860s, with an elongated and tight bodice and a flat fronted skirt. Low, square necklines were fashionable. Hair was dressed high at the back with complicated twists and rolls, falling to the shoulders, adorned with ribbons, bands and decorative combs. Hats were very small and tilted forward to the forehead. Later in the decade wider brimmed 'picture hats' were also worn, though still tilted forwards.

Men

Coats and jackets were semi-fitted and thigh-length. Generally, both jackets and waistcoats were buttoned high on the chest. Shirt collars were stiff and upstanding, with the tips turned down into wings. Hair was often worn parted in the centre, and most forms of facial hair were acceptable, though being clean shaven was rare.





1880s

Women

1880s women's dress featured tightly fitting bodices with very narrow sleeves and high necklines, often trimmed at the wrists with white frills or lace. At the beginning of the decade the emphasis was at the back of the skirt, featuring ruching, flouncing, and embellishments such as bows and thick, rich fabrics and trims. The middle of the decade saw a brief revival of the bustle, which was so exaggerated that the derriere protruded horizontally from the small of the back. By the end of the decade the bustle disappeared. Hair was worn in tight, close curls on the top of the head. Hats and caps were correspondingly small and neat, to fit on top of the hairstyle.

Men

For men, lounge suits were becoming increasingly popular. They were often quite slim, and jackets were worn open or partially undone to reveal the high buttoning waistcoat and watch-chain. Collars were stiff and high, with their tips turned over into wings. Neckties were either the knotted 'four in hand', or versions of the bow-tie tied around the collar.







1890s

Women

In the early part of the decade, women wore tight bodices with high collars and narrow sleeves, much as they had done in the previous decade. From about 1893 however, sleeves started expanding into a leg-of-mutton shape, which was tight at the lower arm and puffed out at the upper arm. Wide shoulders were fashionable and horizontal decoration on the bodice further exaggerated the line. Skirts were worn in a full-length, simple A-line. Masculine styles and tailoring were increasingly popular, and women sometimes sported a shirt collar and tie, particularly when playing golf or out walking. Hair was worn high on top of the head, in tight curls. Hats were small or wide with lots of trimming, but generally worn squarely on top of the head.

Men

The three-piece lounge suit was very popular and regularly worn from the 1890s onwards, and it became increasingly common to have creases at the front of the trousers. Frock coats were still worn, but generally by older or more conservative men. Collars were starched and high, with the tips pressed down into wings, though by the end of the century collars were more frequently turned down and worn with the modern long, knotted tie style. Hair was cut short and usually parted at the side. Heavy moustaches were common, and older men still sported beards. Some men now went clean-shaven.







1900s

Women

The S-bend corset was fashionable during the 1900s. It thrust the hips backwards and forced the chest forward into a fashionable pouter-pigeon shape, emphasised with puffed, frilly blouses that were often embellished with decorations like lace collars and broad ribbon ties. Separates were popular, with skirts fitted over the hip and fluted towards the hem. Hair was worn in a centre parting, often looped around pads and false hair to create a wide 'brim' of hair around the hairline. This hairstyle was worn under vast, broad-brim hats with low crowns, and adorned all over with flowers, lace, ribbons and feathers.

Men

Men wore three-piece lounge suits with bowler or cloth caps. Jackets were narrow with small, high lapels. Most collars were starched and upstanding, with the corners pointing downwards. Some men wore their collars turned down, with rounded edges and modern knotted ties. Beards were now reserved for mainly older men, and most young men sported neat moustaches and short hair.







1910s

Women

During this decade, frilly, puffed blouses and fluted skirts continued to be popular. A slightly high waistline was fashionable, as was a long tunic-like top worn over an ankle length A-line or 'hobble' skirt (cinched in at the hem). During World War I (1914–18), women adopted practical, working clothes and they sometimes wore uniform, overalls and trousers. Hair was worn in a centre parting, often looped around pads and false hair to create a wide 'brim' of hair around the hairline. This hairstyle was worn under vast, broad hats with shallow crowns, heavily trimmed with flowers, ribbons and feathers. Towards the end of the decade, younger women sported short bobs.

Men

The three-piece lounge suit was commonly worn, but from 1914 to the end of the decade, many men were photographed in military uniform. Hair was worn parted at the side or the middle. Older men sported beards, but younger men wore moustaches or went clean-shaven.





1920s

Women

At the very beginning of the 1920s it was fashionable for women to wear high-waisted, rather barrel-shaped outfits, and tunic-style tops were popular.

However, between 1920-2 the waistline dropped to hip level, obscuring natural curves for a tubular, androgynous look. Young, very fashionable 'flappers' wore their hems at knee level, with neutral coloured stockings and colourful garters.

Hemlines drifted between ankle and mid-calf for the duration of the decade.

Jewellery was prominent, including large brooches and long strings of pearls.

Hair was worn bobbed, sometimes close to the head, and the distinctive cloche hat (a close fitting, bell-shaped hat) was very popular.

Men

Men wore narrow-cut lounge suits, with pointed collars turned down, and plain or simply patterned modern knot ties. Cloth caps were popular amongst the working class, though trilbies or homburgs were worn by the middle classes.

Hair was cut very short at the sides, parted severely from the centre or the side and smoothed down with oil and brilliantine, or combed back over the top of the head.





1930s

Women

the drop-waist androgyny of the previous decade gave way to a slinky femininity in the 1930s. Parisian couturiers introduced the bias-cut into their designs, which caused the fabric to skim over the body's curves. Long, simple and clinging evening gowns, made of satin were popular. Often the dresses had low scooping backs. During the day, wool suits with shoulder pads, and fluted knee-length skirts were worn. Fox fur stoles and collars were popular, as were small hats embellished with decorative feather or floral details, worn at an angle. Hair was set short and close to the head, often with gentle 'finger waves' at the hairline. Sports and beach-wear influenced fashionable dress, and the sun-tan was coveted for the first time.

Men

Men now generally wore three-piece suits for work or formal occasions only. Two-piece suits (without a waistcoat) and casual day wear were becoming increasingly common, including knitted cardigans, tank-tops, and soft collared or open necked shirts. For the first time it was not obligatory to wear a tie. Trousers were very wide, with turned up hems and sharp creases down the leg. They were belted high at the abdomen. It was common for men to be clean-shaven, and bowler hats were now generally only seen by city businessmen.







1940s

Women

As a result of the war there were severe fabric shortages, which lasted until the end of the decade. Clothes were made with a minimum of fabric, few pleats and no trimmings. Skirts were a little below the knee and straight, worn with boxy jackets and broad, padded shoulders. Many men and women wore uniforms. From 1942 onwards some clothes were made under the government Utility Scheme that rationed materials. They are identifiable by a 'CC41' stamp, which is an abbreviation of the 'Civilian Clothing Act of 1941'. During the war, accessories were important because of their relative affordability; tall platform shoes or sandals, and tall flowery hats were fashionable. Hair was worn long, with stylised waves and rolls on top of the head. In 1947, Christian Dior introduced his 'New Look', which revolutionised 1940s fashion. Skirts became longer and fuller and boxy shoulders were softened to become sloping. Waists were cinched and hats grew wide and saucer shaped.

Men

During the war, most men wore military uniform of some kind. Hair was short at the back and sides, and most men were clean shaven. Men in civilian clothing were often dressed in lounge suits with broad shoulders, with wide trousers belted high at the abdomen. After 1945 many men leaving the armed forces were issued with a 'de-mob' suit, consisting of shirt, tie, double-breasted jacket and loose fitting trousers.







Working-Class Dress

By Barbara Burman

<http://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/fashion-history-eras/working-class-dress>

For much of the period between the eighteenth century and the present, most people in western countries could be characterized as working class. Many occupations and styles of living are encompassed, ranging from independent skilled artisans in regular work to unskilled labourers or the unemployed. Despite a numerical majority and their central place in social, cultural, and economic history, working-class people, like women as a group, until recently have been hidden from written history and their clothing has been overlooked or subject to only generalized or romanticized interest. What they wore also remained under-represented in museums, due to a low survival rate caused by the thrifty reuse of clothing or its worn-out condition, and the tendency of museums to collect and preserve elite fashions rather than utilitarian clothing. In the early 2000s there is widespread interest in occupational dress, the clothing of the poor, and the role of working-class clothing consumption in the development of a consumer society during this period. Academic studies in this field make use of an array of sources including inventories, court records, and household accounts to pursue this interest in the earlier part of the period and the use of oral history, film, and photography helps ensure the more recent past is better documented.

Occupation, Social Position and Clothing

One of the most marked gulfs between the appearance of working people and their employers was the use of livery for retainers and household servants. This practice of providing uniform clothing in the colours and style of a particular household was used to augment wages, and it served to embody hierarchy by distinguishing between employees and employer and between ranks of employees themselves. Livery was in widespread use during the period, as it had been since medieval times. It was far from universally popular with its recipients. By the nineteenth century it had become archaic in appearance, such as breeches and wigs for footmen, and had become very limited in use. It has been superseded to some extent by corporate uniforms. Domestic service was a major employer of women until World War I and generated styles of clothing representative of moral and practical notions of order and cleanliness.

Working people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who did not get livery or other clothing as part of their employment often struggled not only to clothe themselves and their families at a basic level, but also to keep up certain levels of cleanliness and respectable appearances on which their continuing employment or their participation in local and church life depended. However, throughout these centuries, employers and the elite, in general, expressed anxiety about the consumption of clothing by working people. Increasing use, more styles, and a variety of available textiles, and the so-called democratization of fashion were judged to weaken conventional distinctions between social classes. Expenditure on clothing by working people was thought to indicate potential extravagance, vanity, and improvidence. There were numerous Victorian cartoons mocking both the domestic servant and her employer as the servant appeared in stylish crinolines or other finery. This was frequently observed in Britain, where social distinctions in dress are thought to have prevailed for longer than in the United States. In the twentieth century, new synthetic materials, simpler styles, affordable fashion magazines, dance halls, and the cinema especially, spurred greater access to fashionable clothing for working women. More recent adoption of homogeneous leisure wear means that social distinctions may be less visible than ever before outside work.

Working Clothes and Fashion

Modish and symbolic use of working-class dress entered general consumption in various ways and in general over the last three centuries; there has been a significant flow of garment types and textiles from utilitarian and occupational clothing into fashion. Examples include appropriation of military combat styles into everyday wear and the rough and thorn-proof warmth of local Scottish and Irish tweeds that were adopted for fashionable urban use in Victoria's reign. Sailors wore "trousers" long before they entered fashionable male wardrobes. What was produced in nineteenth-century America as denim work wear for men is, in the early 2000s, universally available as fashionable leisure wear for men, women, and children alike and authentic antique jeans command high prices among collectors.

Doc Marten boots had a similar pattern of appropriation and cult status. English agricultural smocks of the nineteenth century were adopted and revived as artistic dress, popularized by Liberty's for well-off urban women and children at the end of the century, echoing nostalgia for a largely imagined idyll of rural England.

Politicians have made use of the symbolic value of materials or garments associated with working-class life, such as when Keir Hardy, elected as one of Britain's first working-class members of parliament, insisted on wearing a rough-spun tweed suit and a flat wool cap instead of the more formal garb usually seen in parliament. President Lyndon Johnson famously wore a cowboy hat to signify his allegiance, and President Jimmy Carter often wore a sweater rather than more formal attire.

In the arts, performers and actors such as Dolly Parton, James Dean, Marlon Brando, and Charlie Chaplin have used working and utilitarian dress to powerful effect. Subcultures, as disparate as Hell's Angels, hippies, punks, and New Agers, have often demonstrated their nonconformism by blending garments from a variety of sources, including working clothes. In the 1970s many pioneer feminists adopted dungarees as a sartorial rejection of fashion and conventional gender roles.

"Everybody knows that good clothes, boots or furniture are really the cheapest in the end, although they cost more money at first; but the working classes can seldom or never afford to buy good things; they have to buy cheap rubbish which is dear at any price" (Tressell, p. 296).

"To imagine New York City in 1789 is to conjure up...tattered beggars, silk-stockinged rich men, pomadoured ladies and their liveried footmen, leather-aproned mechanics and shabby apprentice boys, sleek coach horses, pigs...where the riotous world of the labouring poor surrounded a small, self-enclosed enclave of the wealthy and urbane" (Stansell, p. 3).

The making and wearing of replica working clothing from the past has become widespread through the popularity of historical re-enactment and the use of living history to interpret historic sites. The shift such clothing makes in its esteem and value may have no single explanation; rather, it may embody a complex range of social, cultural, and economic factors over time. Mass production of clothing, urbanization, and more recently, new attitudes to work and leisure, money, and credit, may change not only our clothing but the identities they represent.

Provision

Before the advent of systematic state support in the twentieth century, various local or parish bodies and charitable organizations took responsibility for those

unable to help themselves, and clothing for such men, women, and children was often part of the provision. Outside this framework, provision was uncertain because it was dependent on income, locality, and luck.

Second-hand clothes were an important element in the clothing strategies of working people. These could be obtained as cast-offs from employers, or from markets and specialist shops in urban areas. There were large warehouses buying and selling second-hand clothing in bigger cities by the eighteenth century, and Henry Mayhew describes a vibrant trade in the wholesale and export of old clothes in 1850s London.

Where women possessed adequate sewing skills, much clothing was made over or recycled: For example, children's clothes were made from cut-down adult garments. The pawning of best clothes played a central part in many household economies. This provided regular cash, and often clothes left all week in the pawnshop were stored in better conditions than was possible in damp or overcrowded homes. In many working households, mothers were traditionally in charge of the budget, and there is evidence that they often clothed and shod working husbands, sons, and school-age children before meeting their own needs.

Sewing clothes at home was assisted by the advent of the sewing machine and effective paper patterns from the 1860s onward, but these were unaffordable for many women. Others sewed at home to earn cash by making or renovating garments for local customers.

Theft played its part in the provision of clothes for use or resale, and in the eighteenth century there are numerous records of vanished household servants who took quantities of clothing with them to pawn or sell. Peddlers travelled around selling clothing, accessories, and cloth to individual households in the eighteenth century before communications and transport improved.

Many working people continued to clothe themselves and their families in ways more suited to their circumstances than traveling to expensive shops. Local or workplace clothing clubs and, by the mid-nineteenth century, mail order with payment by instalments played an important part in enabling them to be adequately and fashionably clothed.

Huge markets for slops and utilitarian clothing, including uniforms for the military, led to the development of the mass manufacture of ready-mades from the eighteenth century onward. In America the manufacture of jeans for men

demonstrates the growth of factory-based specialist clothing companies. As urbanization coupled with expanding markets during the nineteenth century, new jobs grew up in service industries such as banking and insurance, which resulted in large numbers of low-paid white collar jobs for men and women. A big manufacturing sector developed for affordable clothes for this work, such as suits, blouses, collars, and shoes, which could be widely distributed through growth in urban retailing.

Specific Modes and Items

The common utilitarian dress for labouring men before the twentieth century was made up of breeches or trousers, jackets, and waistcoats of hard-wearing materials such as moleskin, fustian, or corduroy. In some situations, working women were the first women to don breeches or trousers. This occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century in Britain (in pits and mines, in work associated with fishing, and in brickworks), and in the United States (where women did agricultural work), and in some utopian communities.

In many manual occupations, until shorter skirts were widely accepted, women simply hitched up long skirts in various ways. Commonly, in many countries, they wore aprons and woollen shawls. In eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain, the red woollen, hooded cloak was commonly worn by rural women. Women used boots instead of shoes; pattens and then clogs were valuable assets for workingmen and -women on dirt roads and later in factories and mills. Stout and durable footwear has always been a major investment for those undertaking physical labour. Similarly in the United States, denim became widely used by the second half of the nineteenth century for tough work by cattlemen, on the railways and in the mines. Roomy and rugged work shirts accompanied these. Leather and suede have been used in working garments for centuries and persists to the present day, providing hard-wearing and durable covering in the form of aprons for blacksmiths and chaps, gaiters, gloves, and various specialist items and outerwear for other occupations.

Although Britain differed from continental Europe in having no recognizable regional folk dress, two agricultural garments stand out as characteristic of rural workers, and these were worn either at work or as Sunday best. These were smocks for men, from the eighteenth century onwards, which provided a measure of protection and warmth; and the cotton sunbonnet for women, which was decorated with tucks and piping and had strikingly long panels to protect the neck. Fishermen have always had special clothing needs to protect them

against the elements. In this context, oilskin was developed in the nineteenth century, and the woollen hand-knitted, close-fitting and ornamented upper garment for fishermen known variously as a gansy, jersey, Guernsey, knitfrock, and later sweater or jumper, became associated with the island fishing communities of Britain. Versions of it were later widely adopted as warm, informal attire for both sexes.

Occupational dress evolves as new occupations emerge, and innovative protective elements are introduced as new risks appear. In the industrializing period, boiler suits accompanied the use of steam power, and since the advent of forms of power that propel us into alien environments, special forms of clothing have been developed for, among others, pilots, divers, and astronauts. To an extent, occupational dress has often represented social and local or regional identities. In this sense, it has shown more style and commanded more loyalty than is strictly utilitarian. In 2002 in northern England a local bus driver was fired for refusing to exchange his habitual cloth cap for a baseball-style company cap. The dramatic fantail hats of the garbage collectors of early nineteenth century England or the intricate patterning on fishermen's knitwear have all testified to expressive and creative elements in occupational dress.