

It may come as a surprise to present day feminists who once discarded their ' bras ' as a gesture of defiance, to learn that until the beginning of the 19th century it was most unusual for English women to wear drawers. When they were introduced in the early 1800s they usually consisted of two separate legg attached to a waist band , calf-length and known as ' pançalettes '. The lack of such a garment was soon to be compensated for by an enormous number of petticoats and by the mid-century skirts had become fuller and fuller until they reached the crinoline size, supported by layers of underpinning. This usually consisted of a flannel petticoat next to the body, another padded with horsehair, then one of cotton stiffened with braid, over which was worn yet another with horse hair flounces and finally one or two of starched muslin. About 1850 some of these encumbrances were replaced by a frame, either of bamboo, whalebone or metal hoops, suspended from tapes and known as crinoline, ( from ' crin ' the French for horsehair ) .

This monstrous growth of skirts resulted in a ' crinoline war ' one of the leading ' generals ' in which was Friedrich Theodor Vischer, a professor of aesthetics who declared the fashion to be ' an exaggeration which does not add to the beauty of the slim figure but distorts and annihilates it and gives it a completely false conception of the feminine build . When the contours from the hips onwards increase in size the eye no longer seeks to compare the huge bulk with the small diameter of the waist. ' The crinoline, he considered, was not only ugly but ' impertinent ' because of the large amount of room taken up by its wearer and the ' monstrous challenge ' which he translated as a woman saying in effect to men ' Would you like to step down from the pavement or do you dare brush against me ? When you sit next to me in the theatre, would you like to take my dress on your lap or sit on it ? Can you feel the hoops, the impregnable fortress , the terrible chastity belt which presses against your calves ? ' Only a Frenchman would have<sup>dared</sup> to speak so frankly of unmentionable matters and portions of the anatomy. Charles Strutt's paper carried a very large amount of advertising for various forms of clothes for men and women but very little mention is made of underwear, except stays.

Dorsets have come and gone throughout the history of fashion changing shape from something akin to the modern one piece swimsuit

to little more than a wide belt. At the beginning of the 19th century the natural flowing lines of the ' empire ' styles did away with any construction altogether but the escape was short-lived and within a decade stays had returned with increasing restrictions.

Tightlacing has long been acknowledged as one of the main causes of the Victorian woman's ' delicacy ' and tendency to faint on the slightest provocation. In 1859 a Paris newspaper reported the tragedy of a young lady, who all her rivals admired for her tiny waist, having died two days after a ball. Her family wanting to know the cause of her sudden death at such an early age, decided to have an autopsy performed the result of which showed that her liver had been pierced by three ribs fractured by tight lacing.

Where do you buy your stays ? questioned a quite saucy ' Gazette ' advertisement ' The idea of you asking that question ! ' ( mock horror ) Why, at George Roberts of course ' . ' Just where I buy mine and have done these twenty years. He has all the new kinds of belts and bodices with the new front fastenings ever invented.' George Roberts, with a shop in Lowndes Place Terrace, Knightsbridge, was also the maker of the ' Princess Eugenie Crinoline Skirt. A rival, Joseph Finchett, recommended his French Corsets, ' self-adjusting stays which require no lacing and can be on and off in a minute, ' possibly the fore-runner of the modern ' roll on ' . Bailey's Elastic Ladies Belts ( the description is his own ) were of a more remedial nature than fashion, ' being some of the most useful articles worn by those delicate in constitution as a support for the back and abdominal muscles giving the greatest possible comfort after accouchment.' Mr Bailey also sold another unmentionable object, ' urinals for travel ' , this must be the only time the ' Gazette ' ever printed such a delicate word, for while complaints <sup>were common</sup> on lighting and drainage no mention is ever made of lavatorial sanitation, even in the vaguest terms.

As the skirts became larger, so bonnets were smaller and necklines higher than they had been a decade earlier and very few women would be seen in the street without a headcovering of some sort, if not a bonnet or cap, even the poorest found some old bonnet or rag to tie over their hair, or failing that a discarded man's cap. A huge trade had built up in bonnets, which could cost anything from a few pence to pounds. Joseph Finchett advertised no less than 15,000 to choose from at his ' General Mourning Warehouse, at Bridge Road, Hammersmith . Broadway, ' of every description including brides' mourning bonnets

from sevenpence to three guineas.

Men's headgear was either one of the tall 'stove pipe' hats, or for the country, a cap, and two extremely sinister-looking types are chosen to illustrate an advertisement for 'cheap hats and caps at Peers shop next to the Hippodrome Riding Ground in Craven Place Bayswater.' Perry's Patent Flexible Hats sold at 85 The Strand and 251 Regent Street were 'very light and soft round the band to allow egress of perspiration and prevent detention of blood to the head.'

Fashions in furnishings, where almost every item that could be padded or cloth-covered was dressed (possibly through the inspiration of the cloth manufacturers and weavers) were reflected in clothing. Women's dresses were braided, tasselled, frilled and decorated wherever possible, representing interminable hours of work by the pathetically rewarded 'rag trade', although mass production was beginning to make clothing cheaper than food. Hibton and Hannams of Ledbury Road, Bayswater, had 400 print dresses for sale at 1s 11d (the price of two loaves of bread) while at Merrington's closing down sale of their shop at 51/53 Edgware Road, bargain hunters could buy rich mantles of velvet, lined with silk and quilted, worth three guineas but selling off at £ 1.5s and very wide petticoats reduced to ninepence halfpenny.

Furs were popular as trimming and J. Williams, old established fur store at 37 Crawford Street, Bryanstone Square, would supply grey squirrel for 3s 6d to 10s 6d and sable for 5s 6d.

Women's coats were usually short, just reaching the knees over the wide full-length skirts but even more popular were shawls of all weights and sizes, folded into a triangle with the point at the back. In 1851, an American woman, Amelia Bloomer of New York, created a sensation by appearing in a jacket and short skirts over long Turkish trousers caught in at the ankle and societies were formed before and against the spread of this fashion.

Men's coats were also short, the 'frac', or frock coat, going out of fashion except for formal wear, and a popular description for a loose outer garment was the paletot, coats were also often worn like cloaks with the sleeves hanging. Bowman & Co, tailors, of 165 Sloane Street, advertised their scale of charges as 'black dresscoats for 42/- angora and doeskin trousers from 18/- but Mr Herbert habit maker of Maddox Street Regent Street, added 'Ici en parle Francais' to

encourage the belief that his establishment was really one at which garments 'would be found to bear the distinct marks of a first rate West End House.' 'Gentlemen's dress made to measure' at W. Beffords, tailor and woollen draper in High Street Kensington offered a suit in superfine black cloth for three guineas while William Baker, of Hammersmith Gate, guaranteed a good fit, with or without straps, for his angola tweed trousers at 13s 6d a pair. In addition to all kinds of clothing for ladies and gentlemen and the 'infantine class' Edward Groves, in Edgware Road, proprietor of the West End Clothing Establishment, sold 'every kind and description of servants' liveries from which ladies and gents could select their own style from plates of the modern school'.

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The 'infantine class', once past babyhood, was dressed in much the same overcovered manner as adults, but there were at least some pioneers who wished to change this fashion to a more healthier form of dress. Among these was plain Mrs Smith, described in her 'Gazette' advert as a 'physiological infantile outfitter' who 'begged respectfully to call the attention of parents and infant guardians to her improvements and inventions in infant clothing, constructed in such a form and materials as shall be conducive to the healthy development of the child. Parents now suffering from the loss of children born with delicate constitutions may be enabled to preserve the lives of their future offspring by embracing her plan.' Unfortunately she did not give any description of what that plan might have been.

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heart rending sacrifice will be conceded on the part of the creditors of which the public will do well to take earnest and prompt advantage. Among the lots to be sold as well as yards and yards of silks, satins, muslins and hundreds of cambric nightcaps, were 300 'curious ladies' head dresses of pure Himalaya goats hair, value seven shillings, for 1s 4d. each. Curiouser and Curiouser!

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The alternative to the new mass-produced ready made clothing for women was the dressmaker and the ' gazette ' abounds in advertisements by such as Mrs Ruffle ( a Happy Families name indeed ! ), Fashion Dress and Mantle maker of Campden Street ( whose husband was suitably an upholsterer ), and who charged a mere half a crown ( 2s 6d ) to make a cotton dress and 4s 6d for full-trimmed gowns from ladies' own materials. The Kensington Work Society, organised by St John's Church, Notting Hill, to provide work for poor women in the parish made up plain shirts for a shilling, frilled nightgowns for 1s 6d. pillow cases at sixpence a pair and handkerchiefs a shilling a dozen, and the work would not have been done on a sewing machine! Occasionally there would be a sale of articles made by the women and the announcement said that although any person could buy, ' should ladies purchase it is expected they will pay the full price. '

Shoes were also as cheap as low paid labour and mass production could make them. Wharton & Co of High Street, Notting Hill, with factories in Finsbury vert. ed a stöck of ladies coloured boots and Spring shoes in May 1855, fine cashmere boots ( fabric was often used for footwear as well as leather ) at 2s 6d and mens' boots from 4s 6d up to 10s 6d for superior calf Wellington boots.

Whartons described themselves as the ' makers of the celebrated red boot, ' and had factories at Bath Street Finsbury and Weymoth Street in Old Kent Road . Some of their shoes had 'military heels ' and they also offered a large assortment of ladies' highly vulcanised overshoes 'well adapted for the lawn or seashore ' at 3s 10d a pair.

The gentlemen's selection included Old Gents broad soles for tender feet at 12s 6d. and Bluchers ( named for the Prussian General ) at four shillings. Superior French clogs were 1s 3d a pair.

Goods would be delivered within seven miles daily ' in our own carts and for the convenience of our numerous friends in the suburbs our carts will wait upon families on Wednesdays and Fridays at Acton, Gunnesbury, Ealing, Hanwell, Drayton Green and Greenford calling at all intervening places.'

Few women used hairdressers as in the upper classes their maids were expected to carry out this service and the lower orders had no time for such fripperies, styles were comparatively simple compared to the Regency period with its curls and ringlets and the hair was usually worn with a centre parting and brought down over the ears before being drawn back into a plait or twist at the nape of the neck. Those who might want to use a hairdresser had the choice of Mr J Cook

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lately of Vickerys, in Tavistock Street, Covent Garden, who had recently set up shop in High Street, Notting Hill as an 'ornamental hair manufacturer' and offered commodious rooms as well as being willing to attend to boarding schools (in which the neighbourhood abounded) and dressing gentlemen's hair by the quarter.

Men of the gentry class paid much attention to hair dressing as 'Gazette' advertisements and editorial comments indicate, and many would have encouraged their women folk to stir up this home made Pomade Divine. This required a pound of washed and purified beef bone marrow, three quarters of an ounce each of cinnamon, borax, benzoin orris root and cypress wood and  $\frac{1}{4}$  ounce each of nutmegs and cloves. These spices had to be kept in the marrow, melted by the heat of boiling water for six hours (nothing was done in a hurry!) before being strained through a flannel and bottled. Another 'pomade for beautifying the hair' could be made by mixing a pint of oil of sweet almonds with two ounces of lard and one and a half ounces of spermacetti (wax made from whale oil). An agreeable scent could be added when cool, but 'avoiding cassia or cinnamon as these perfumes operate prejudicially upon the hair.' These preparations both sound more attractive than an 'artificial bears grease' made with suet, three ounces being mixed with an ounce of lard and olive oil, plus ten drops of oil of cloves and a dram of tincture of benzoin.

Aristocratic ladies apparently preferred to rely on another miracle preparation for their hair beauty. Crokes Household Treasure, a utilitarian name for 'the celebrated hair wash which not only prevents greyness and baldness but allays irritation of the scalp. It was confidently recommended for use in the nursery after fever, Sea Bathing, Sickness and in India and hot climates. Among those who gave testimonials as to its efficacy were Lady Blaquiere, who said she had found it most useful in stopping her hair falling off and the Countess of Sandwich who wished for a couple more bottles to be sent to her at 28 St James Place as soon as possible. (It was available from Messrs Newbury and Sons at 45 St Paul's Churchyard,)

Jewellers may not have considered Strutt's 'Gazette' the sort of journal in which they would care to take advertising space and there are few announcements by them, but watch-makers and repairers were attracted to the domestic readership and one of the regulars was Kyezor from Geneva, now in business at Edgware Road on the corner of George Street, from whom one could buy an 8 day spring dial clock in a handsome mahogany case for £ 2. 6s.

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Long before the death of Prince Albert had made mourning jewelley even more fashionable than it was already, jewellers had specialised in mourning brooches, ear-rings and other keep-sakes which usually incorporated a lock of hair of the deceased, and the 'Gazette' carried numerous advertisements for 'this craft-' hair neatly plaited and arranged into lockets, ear-rings and watch glasses '.

Scent would have been considered 'fast' by most Victorian women but a little light floral fragrance or cologne was permitted, something such as the Norland Bouquet, 'an agreeable durable perfume for the handkerchief or the drawing room and the reigning favourite in the neighbourhood' at two shillings a bottle.

Beauty preparations for women were hardly less homely than the hair preparations. Cold Cream was made with white wax, spermacatti and almond oil scented with orange flower water. A Honey Paste was said to 'prevent as well as cure chapped hands from the roughness which ensues from the use of camphorated pastes'. This consisted of a wholesome mixture of almond oil and paste mixed with egg yoke.

If you preferred ready-made preparations there was Lococks Lotion 'a clear skin and a beautiful complexion for a shilling! Removing all imperfections of the skin.' No wonder Lococks wanted purchasers to ensure it was wrapped in blue paper with a label printed in blue upon a pink ground as 'a spurious copy is offered for sale'. The genuine article could be obtained from Messrs H<sub>anna</sub> at Oxford Street

'Gazette' women readers were offered some kindly advice on the choice of colours according to their complexions 'Rose red cannot be put in contact with the rosiest complexions without causing them to lose some of their freshness such as the inconvenience caused by the use of rose coloured linings in the boxes of a theatre. '

A delicate green was recommended as being favourable to all fair complexions which are 'deficient in rose and which may have more imparted to them without inconvenience. But it is not for those who have a tint of orange because the red they add to this tint will be of a brick hue. Yellow imparts violet to a fair skin and is less favourable than a delicate green but the combination is very heavy and full. '

When the 'Gazette' lingered too long in the kitchen, as Charles Strutt had feared it might, such frivolous advice was doubtless devoured by servants whose lives were drab in the extreme and would

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never have had to set their charms against the rival blush of a box at the theatre, but even servants could dream, and dress up a little in their time off, which was likely to be precious little. Those who did indulge in such vanities earned themselves a rebuke in the 'Gazette' from a correspondent using the pseudonym of 'Observer' which in its censorious patrobism takes some beating, even viewed in the light of Victorian class consciousness.

' Can you not prevail on some of the clergy who read your paper to preach oftener on common things, such as truth, gossip ( which is so sad and leads to slander ) and the love of dress which is latterly becoming a crying evil? It is bad enough for the higher classes but far worse in the lower, for the desire for finery leads them to the most serious faults, disregarding of parents' counsels ...also very often to actual theft in order to maintain it.

( Servants get good wages and are fed and sheltered well yet instead of laying up for the future and helping their old parents and doing any charitable act, spend every farthing on smart dress . Many of the poor who are glad to receive meat and other gifts from charity, even they will starve themselves to procure finery. Is it not acting a lie hoping that strangers will take them for other than they are... , ? Why is it that maids wish to dress like ladies ?

' All really right-judging people would be far better pleased and respect both servants and the poor if they saw they were not ashamed of that station in life<sup>in</sup> which it has pleased God to place them.

' Most Mistresses constantly lament this love of dress in servants but as long as mistresses tolerate, and I fear even encourage their maids, it is most difficult to check it . If <sup>only</sup> mistresses could be persuaded to join together to discourage this evil and it would be well for the servants to know that they must leave off dressing so, as other places would them not be open to them....'

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(Fashions Fads and Fancies),

Smarting under such ~~conserious~~ rhetoric many a servant would have readily agreed with Nathaniel Hawthorne, an American who spent some years in the 1850s touring in Europe observing the customs of the natives and later writing a series of sketches on ' Our Old Home ' and gave a very unflattering commentary on English women of the time. He considered them neither refined nor elegant. Ladies look like cooks and housemaids , as a general rule they are not very desirable in their youth and in many instances become perfectly grotesque after middle age , so massive, and not seemingly with pure fat but with solid beef !  
' You think of them as composed of sirloins with broad and thick steaks on their immense rears. They look as if nothing could ever move them and indeed they must have a vast amount of physical strength to be able to move themselves . '

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