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Fashion through the Decades



1950s fashion parade on Hastings Pier, HPC0106.003



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Fashion through the Decades

1900s - Women

At the beginning of the 20th Century most women either made their own clothes or had them made up. There were thousands of dressmakers around the country and almost every middle-class woman had some needlework skills so could alter and repair clothes if not make them from patterns. The ‘well bred, well-off’ British woman understood the importance of correct dress, as opposed to fashion, for the right occasion.

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 often embellished with decorations of lace collars and broad ribbon ties. Separates were popular, with ground length skirts fitted over the hip, often with trains. Costumes were made out of wool, linen, cotton or silk and always topped off with a hat – frequently adorned with flowers, lace, ribbons and feathers.

1900s - Men

Men wore three-piece lounge suits with bowler or cloth caps. Beards were now reserved for mainly older men and most young men sported neat moustaches and short hair. Men’s fashion was dictated by propriety and formality.

1910s - Women

During the early years of the decade, frilly, puffed blouses and fluted skirts continued to be popular but with the outbreak of World War I (1914–18), changes in dress were dictated more by necessity than fashion. As more women were forced to work, they demanded clothes better suited to their new activities and adopted practical, working clothes. They sometimes wore uniform, overalls and even trousers. By the end of the decade, hemlines had risen to mid calf and the corsets were being relaxed or discarded.

1910s - Men

In general, styles were unchanged from the previous decade. The three-piece suit remained the norm, until 1914 when military uniforms took over.

1920s

The 1920s brought dramatic changes to fashion for both women and men. Fashion entered the modern era.

Women

As more women entered the workforce and were given the right to vote, fashion became more accessible, practical and comfortable. Waistlines dropped to hip level, obscuring natural curves for a tubular, androgynous look and young, very fashionable 'flappers' wore their hems at knee level, with neutral coloured stockings and colourful garters. Some even wore trousers! Hemlines for others drifted between ankle and mid-calf. Natural fabrics, wool and cotton, were dominant but synthetic alternatives, like rayon, were beginning to arrive. Other fabrics used - crepe de chine, silk georgette, satin. Metal hooks and eyes, and zips were also being introduced. Jewellery was prominent – large brooches, long strings of pearls. Hair was worn short and bobbed, sometimes close to the head, and the distinctive cloche hat (a close fitting, bell shaped hat) was very popular.

Men

Men's fashion also became less regimented and formal. Suits were simpler, slimmer and brighter. 'Sports' clothes – sweaters and knickerbockers (loose fitting breeches gathered at the knee) were adopted by some. The mid 20s saw the arrival of 'Oxford Bags' – lower sitting, baggy trousers with creases, turn-ups and belts rather than braces. Wearing a hat however – a cloth cap, trilby or homburg - was still the norm.

1930s

The light hearted, forward-looking attitude and fashions of the [late 1920s](#) lingered through most of 1930, but by the end of that year the beginning of the Great Depression and mass unemployment began to affect, if not the upper classes, the rest of country. A more conservative approach to fashion displaced that of the 1920s.



The Mayor of Hastings celebrating May Day in the 1930s. The image is a great example of the types of clothing women were wearing at the time. HPC052.004

Women

The drop-waist androgyny of the previous decade gave way to a slinky femininity in the 1930s. 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. Gloves were essential and 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. Hollywood and the movies also began to be very influential as people wanted to wear the styles they had seen on the screen.

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, a tie was not obligatory. It was common for men to be clean-shaven, and bowler hats were now generally only seen by city businessmen.

1940s

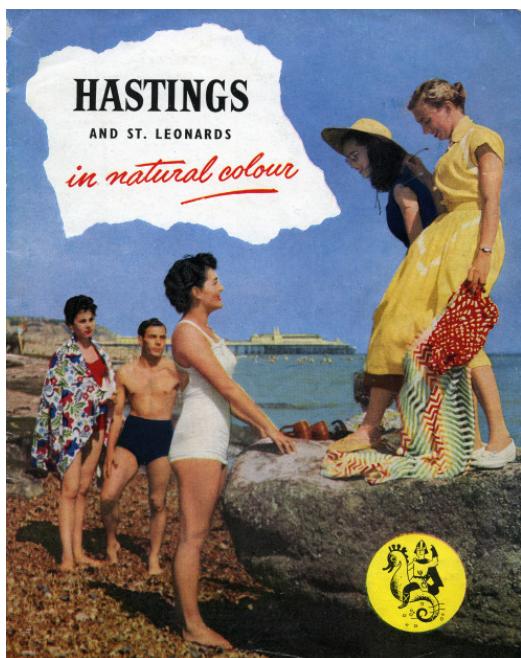
The Second World War brought severe fabric shortages, rationing, the Utility Clothing Scheme and 'Make do and Mend'.

Women

Women's fashion in the 40s divides into 2 separate parts. The first – 1940-46 - was dominated by the World War II. Dress was consciously utilitarian. The Utility Clothing Scheme (introduced in 1941) restricted the amount of cloth and dictated the maximum length and width of a skirt, the number of pleats, buttons and trimmings – limitations that gave rise to simple designs in the form of jackets or dresses with square, padded shoulders and straight knee-length skirts. Shortages however were often a spur to creativity - frivolous hats, boldly patterned headscarves, tall platform shoes an attempt to brighten up the utilitarian look. The second part arrived in 1947 with the introduction of Christian Dior's 'New Look'. Ultra-feminine, grandly extravagant, luxurious and romantic it revolutionised 1940s fashion and the female silhouette. Skirts became longer and fuller, boxy shoulders were softened and rounded, waists cinched and hats grew wide and saucer shaped.

1940s Men

During the war, most men wore military uniform of some kind so fashion remained relatively static. After 1945, many men leaving the armed forces were issued with a 'de-mob' suit, consisting of shirt, tie, double-breasted jacket and loos- fitting trousers.



A publicity booklet from the 1950s, promoting Hastings as a holiday destination
(HPC041.128a)

1950s

An era influenced by Hollywood glamour, the development of mass-production techniques and the introduction of new, man-made 'easy care' fabrics.

Women

The 'New Look' continued to dominate the 1950s. Daywear consisted of skirts and jackets or day dresses in tweeds and woollens. Dresses had pencil or full skirts in plain fabrics or floral prints. Separates and trousers, or 'capri' pants were becoming popular. The glamour of films and film stars also had a profound effect. Figure hugging sweaters, as worn by Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell, Brigitte Bardot's 'black and white cotton gingham wedding dress, the gamine look of Audrey Hepburn were all influential.

Men

Fashion still revolved around the suit but was becoming less rigid. Tweed or check jackets worn with non-matching trousers; open collars for casual wear; the 'drip-dry' shirt. Teenagers began to appear as a separate group, with fashion influenced by American stars who wore leather jackets and jeans. Teddyboys – in tight trousers, long jackets with velvet trim, pointed shoes - also appeared.

1960s

A decade of sweeping change that broke many fashion traditions and generated ideas and images which still appear modern today. Youth driven, 'Swinging London', Mary Quant, Biba, the mini skirt, bell bottoms, tie dye, long hair, the boutique, 'vintage', hippies, PVC, paper dresses, Pop and Op Art, the Beatles, psychedelia, Twiggy, Vidal Sassoon...

1960s Women

Young people's income was at its highest since the end of the Second World War, creating the desire for a wardrobe which did more than simply copy adult dress. Designers like Mary Quant and Barbara Hulaniki's Biba provided clothes that were aimed specifically at young people, of which the mini-skirt was the most distinctive. Women wore pale foundation and emphasised their eyes with kohl, mascara and false eyelashes. Hair was long and straight or worn in a shaped bob or wedge. Musical taste and styles of dress were closely linked and it was the mod look which first popularised the simple geometric shapes typical of the 1960s. Towards the end of the decade the hippy movement from the west coast of America emerged, experimenting with colours, patterns and textures borrowed from non-Western cultures. Older or more conservative women still tended to dress in skirts below the knee with tailored jackets, coats or cardigans.

Men

Perhaps the most remarkable development in 1960s dress was the dramatic change in menswear. Suits were often abandoned. Colourful new elements were introduced, such as the collarless jacket, worn with slim-fitting trousers and boots. During the mid-1960s frills and cravats were worn with vividly printed or flowery shirts. Finally, lapels and trousers took on exaggeratedly wide dimensions. Clothing became increasingly unisex as men and women shopped at the same boutiques for similar items.



Jean Spears and her family on the Pier in 1970s (HPC118.001)

1970s

Nicknamed the ‘me’ decade. ‘Please yourself’ was the catchphrase of the 1970s. Some saw it as the end of good taste.

Women

The decade began with a continuation of the [hippie](#) look from the [60s](#) with a distinct ethnic flavour and extremely bright colours. Popular early 1970s fashions for women included [Tie dye](#) shirts, Mexican peasant blouses, ponchos, capes, and military surplus clothing, [bell-bottoms](#), frayed [jeans](#), [midi skirts](#), and ankle-length [maxi dresses](#). Boots were at the height of popularity. The hippie look disappeared to give way to trends such as glam rock, disco and punk, counterbalanced for some by the ‘countrified’, nostalgic style of Laura Ashley. By late 70s sports clothing as everyday wear had arrived.

Men

A crazy time for men’s fashion. Early 70s - platform shoes and bell bottom trousers were staples. Wide collar shirts in loud, patterned materials. 3-piece disco suits – think John Travolta in ‘Saturday Night Fever’. Leisure suits and track suits featured although the release of the film Quadrophenia in ‘78 sparked a bit of a Mod revival.

1980s

The economic boom of the 80s coupled with society's newfound attitude towards success led to a materialistic decade with an emphasis on expensive Brand-named clothes and fashion accessories.

Women

Big hair, big shoulders, big make-up. The era of Power dressing, Dynasty, Dallas and bling. The Aerobics craze introduced Lycra, leg warmers, ripped sweatshirts, headbands and trainers. Many emulated Madonna's 'street urchin' look – short tulle ra ra skirts over leggings, fishnet gloves, bleached, untidy hair, lace ribbons crucifix jewellery and brassieres worn as outerwear. Crop tops, washed denim, batwing sleeves, metallic shiny materials. In the UK, Goths and Goth fashion appeared.

Men

Double breasted Power suits a la Gordon Gekko arrived, although the tracksuit and trainers fashion continued. Slogan t-shirts were popular for both sexes. In the USA, Michael Jackson influenced teenage boys and young men's fashion whilst in the UK, New Romantic was the new wave - Vivienne Westwood moving on from punk to the frilled buccaneer shirt and baggy trouser 'pirate look'.

1990s

The multiplicity of trends that bloomed during the 80s was curtailed by the economic recession at the beginning of the 90s. It was no longer the done thing to follow fashion slavishly. With the increased availability of the internet and widespread travel, fashion is becoming globalised and more homogenous.

1990s Women

Fashion united around a new minimalism, styles of stark simplicity became the vogue. A dramatic move away from 'sexy' to stark and simple. Ready-to-wear retailers (Gap, Topshop, Miss Selfridge etc) provided comfortable, casual, wearable clothes. Retro clothing inspired by the 1960s/70s was also popular.

Men

An anti-conformist approach to fashion lead to the popularisation of the casual chic look - t shirts, hoodies, jeans and trainers. Rap music had an influence on street fashion (baggy, low slung jeans and trainers) and the 'grunge' look also featured.

2000s

Known as the 'mash up' decade – a fusion of styles often recycled from the 1930s to the 1980s.

Women

Fashion moved away from the unisex and minimalist. Eco friendly and ethical clothing appeared. Skinny jeans, Ugg boots, leggings, hippie and Boho inspired dresses, skirts over trousers. The 2000s continued the trend of tattoos and piercings among both sexes that had begun in the 1990s.

Men

In the early 2000s, many [mid and late 1990s fashions](#) remained fashionable, while simultaneously introducing newer trends. Although the 2000s did not have one particular style, they revived clothes primarily from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

2010s

The 2010s have so far been defined by a revival of the austerity era period pieces – hipsters, beards, unisex early 1990s styles, steampunks....

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