

EDWARDIAN FASHION

DANIEL MILFORD-COTTAM



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Winter 1913: luxurious cocoon coats and wraps for day and evening wear created by Revillon. Drawn by J. Simont.



SHIRE PUBLICATIONS



‘A group of hats showing a style of trimming which could easily be done at home.’ From *The Girl’s Own Paper*, July 1906.

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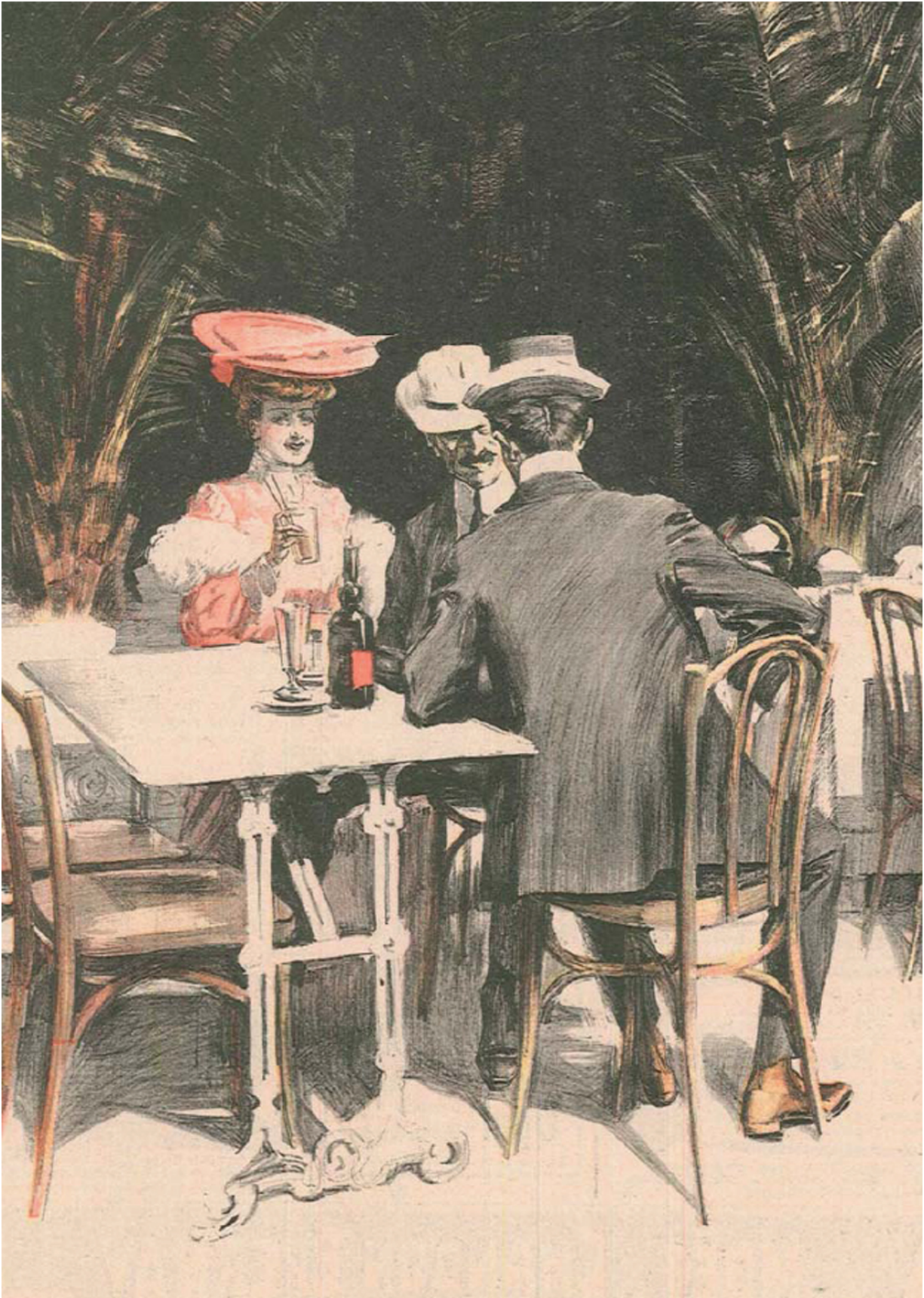
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A pretty woman in a pink hat and feather boa and two men enjoy a leisurely drink in a Viennese café, mid-1900s. Drawn by Ferdinand von Rezníček.

INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE SCENE

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY had barely begun when Queen Victoria died on 22 January 1901. As Britain entered a new century, it also had a new monarch in Victoria's son, Edward VII. In more ways than one, it was time for change, and this was never more apparent than in the clothes people wore. Many garments, looks and styles that now form part of the standard fashion vocabulary were developed as wardrobe staples during the first two decades of the twentieth century, laying the foundations for the startlingly rapid changes and developments that would follow.

In contrast to the strict moral values and stability represented by his mother, Albert Edward was an exciting, even scandalous new king. Kept from taking too active a role in running the country until 1898, he had long indulged his passion for social pleasures. These included good food, theatre, sport, gambling – and other men's attractive wives, despite the acclaimed beauty of his own wife, Alexandra. Although in their late fifties, the new king and queen represented undeniable glamour and sophistication. The 'Uncle of Europe' was a conservatively dressed monarch, albeit one renowned for his sartorial style. He was known for his strong views on appropriate dress, though his tweedy leisure wear ultimately proved more influential than his insistence on frock coats or attempts to revive knee-breeches for formal occasions. Alexandra, still a strikingly attractive woman in her later years, was regarded as the epitome of royal elegance, her likeness widely distributed through photographic reproductions and illustrated publications.

During the Edwardian period, fashion reporting became increasingly widespread. Fashion journalism through the nineteenth century had tended towards barely critical description of the latest looks with name-checks of

dressmakers and vendors or, in the case of satirical magazines such as *Punch*, merciless mockery. A notable exception was the widely distributed *The Girl's Own Paper*, first published in 1880, which kept its predominantly middle-class readers (of all ages and both sexes) informed on the latest fashions, including the dress reform movement, in an even-handed but opinionated manner. Whilst 'Norma' observed new modes and suggested ways for the *Paper's* readers to follow them on a limited budget, she was equally capable of blunt criticism on economic, practical or aesthetic grounds. In contrast, the well-connected Mrs Eric Pritchard, who wrote for *The Lady* and *Lady's Realm*, was one of the first truly outspoken high-profile fashion journalists. Her articles encouraged readers to view fashion as a guideline rather than a prescription for dress. Towards the end of the Edwardian period, new forms of fashion magazines began to appear. From 1912, Lucien Vogel published the *Gazette de Bon Ton* in Paris, which was imported into Britain by Condé Nast, who in 1909 had transformed a snooty American social gazette called *Vogue* into a widely marketed women's magazine offering exclusive fashion information. Although a British edition of *Vogue* appeared only in 1916, after the war made importing the American issues impossible, such publications significantly widened the availability of fashion information.



Edward VII at Sandringham, November 1902. The king is dressed for the country in knickerbockers and grey wool jacket, with a tweed

Inverness coat with cape sleeves and Homburg hat. Photograph by James Stack Lauder for Lafayette.

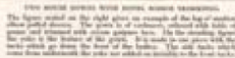


Queen Alexandra at Sandringham, November 1902. Still beautiful at fifty-eight, Alexandra habitually wore high collars to conceal an operation scar. Photograph by James Stack Lauder for Lafayette.

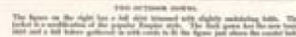
In 1902 Mrs Pritchard published *The Cult of Chiffon*, a style manual that aimed to introduce women to the concept of chic, and encouraged them to consider dress critically whilst appreciating its aesthetic qualities. The author shuddered at bourgeois late-Victorian modes – strictly functional underwear and heavy silk dresses ‘with more than a mere suggestion of bugle trimming, and a front of “something” all the way down’, instead praising the feminine lingerie, “frou-frouing” draperies’, and pretty blouses worn by her self-assured ‘Lady of Chiffon’. This representation of the new fashionable Edwardian woman understood and embraced her personal style and seductive powers and, whatever her budget, found ways to express her individual femininity rather than treating fashion as a uniform.

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the back and is made perfectly plain and full lining, with a few tucks at close together down the center of the back and down the front, you would then take some insertion Valenciennes lace about an inch wide, and tack it on in the shape of a V on the chest. You would then make this V with a narrow bill of lace whipped on to each side of the insertion, and finish it off at the three points with wide flares of silk lace.



young adults and late teens, with the exception of the latter, who are about ten weeks old, and each of these groups has a different type of hair whorl on top of the head, with meridians of ridges rising from the crown of the head. The youngest group retained the meridional mode of hair whorl, but the older groups had lost this pattern. The oldest group had the meridional mode of hair whorl, but the meridians were not as distinct as in the younger groups. The hair whorl on the head of a good grade pointer was of the meridional mode, but the meridians were not as distinct as in the younger groups. The hair whorl on the head of a good grade pointer was of the meridional mode, but the meridians were not as distinct as in the younger groups.



The look described by Mrs Pritchard was also endorsed by the leading designers of the day. Whilst male couturiers, such as the legendary Charles Frederick Worth and his sons, had dominated French fashion design since the 1850s, by 1900 they were being challenged by an increasing number of women. Not least of these was Jeanne Paquin, vice-president of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture*, and creator of exquisitely detailed outfits that were light, graceful, and – most importantly – competitively priced and available to a diverse clientele. Paquin was one of many female couturiers to maintain success and fame in the Edwardian period. Others included the Parisians Madeleine Laferrière, the Callot Soeurs, Madeleine Chéruit and Jeanne Margaine-Lacroix; and in London, Sarah Fullerton Monteith Young, Lucile, and Elizabeth Handley-Seymour. The designer with the highest profile, however, was a provocative Frenchman and former Worth employee, Paul Poiret. His audaciously simple graphic designs had a powerful impact on established fashion. Their unashamedly theatrical quality and strong colours were avant-garde by 1900s standards,

particularly in relation to the 'Lady of Chiffon', and had a significant effect on early 1910s fashion.

In addition to dressing aristocratic and wealthy clients, couturiers such as Paquin also catered for performers, and provided dresses for their on-stage appearances. Theatre and popular culture were particularly influential during the Edwardian period, inspiring fashion fads and new styles such as the 'Merry Widow hat' originally created by Lucile for Lily Elsie in *The Merry Widow* (1907). The subsequent publicity given to the likes of Lily Elsie, Jeanne Granier, dressed by Paquin for *La Veine* (1902), and Mrs Patrick Campbell, who wore Handley-Seymour in *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1913) and *Pygmalion* (1914), was invaluable for their couturiers. Descriptions, often illustrated, of the clothes were widely published through newspapers and magazines, and photographic postcards were avidly collected. Whilst the idea of sharing Paquin with Carolina Otero, Folies-Bergères star and *grande horizontale*, might have scandalised a few potential clients, many couturiers had a wide-ranging customer base. The irreproachable House of Worth, after all, had always dressed both European royalty and those whose husbands – or lovers – could afford its high prices.



Two gowns designed by Jeanne Paquin for the French actresses Marcelle Prince and Andréé Marly, 1909. Published in *Le Théâtre*.

LIBERTY COSTUMES



THE WORLD-RENOUNDED LIBERTY DRESSES ARE
SELECTED AND DESIGNED FROM THE MOST BEAUTI-
FUL EXAMPLES IN THE PAST HISTORY OF COSTUME

(Patterns of the celebrated Liberty dresses past Price)

The above designs have been and remain the property of the Liberty & Co. Ltd. and are not to be used without their permission. All Rights Reserved. London. 1905.

Dress and coat created as part of Liberty's range of artistic costumes, 1905. Shown in an interior with fashionable Arts and Crafts furniture and Art Nouveau ornaments that would also have been sold through Liberty.

Along with the British house of Redfern, Paquin was one of a number of couturiers to have salons in London and Paris by the beginning of the 1900s. This meant that clients did not need to travel internationally in order to purchase Paris gowns. For those without the wherewithal to patronise couturiers, dressmaking establishments, and tailors for the men, catering to local tastes and budgets, were widespread. In smaller towns and villages, general stores included a limited range of fabrics, notions and merchandise relevant to their customer base. The capable needlewoman, as she had always done, might offer her services as dressmaker to her local community or even set up a small business in the nearest town. Many women also made clothes at home for themselves and their family, sometimes with the assistance of a local sewing-woman. Ready-to-wear garments for men, women and children were also available at almost any price level. Even the

wealthiest clients had the option to buy ready-to-wear blouses, hats and the occasional dress to supplement their made-to-order wardrobes.



Modes de Deuil.
PETER ROBINSON'S MOURNING WAREHOUSE
256, REGENT ST., W.

Mourning in every detail.
Refined and Elegant.
Modes of the Moment adapted.
Prompt Execution.
Garments in Stock for every degree.
Fashionable Materials.

"The center of a distinctive profession, and production of taste."
Vital Garment, Oct. 20.

All grades of Mourning kept in stock for immediate use, and upon receipt of Letter or Telegram, a competent Assistant will be despatched to any address in Town or Country to carry out all the requirements of Modern Mourning Orders.

Funerals Conducted.

Telegraphic Address—
"Peter Robinson, 256, Regent St., London."
Telephone—3665 GERRARD.

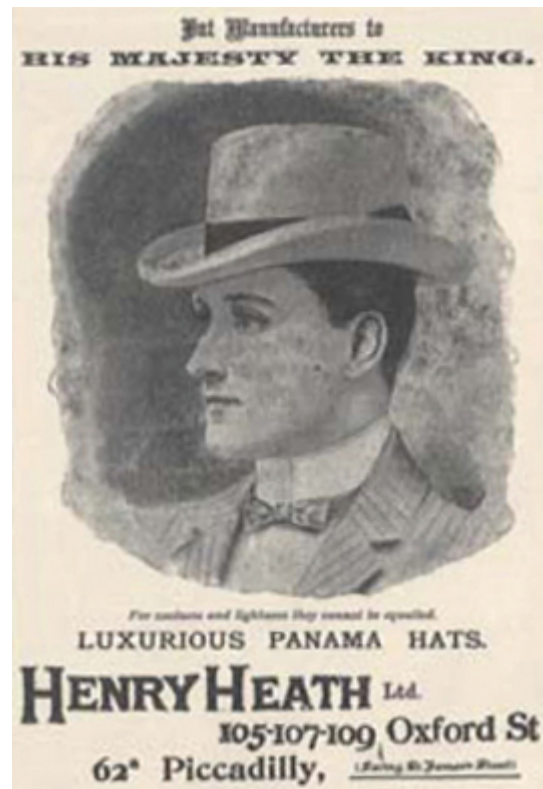
PATTERNS AND ESTIMATES FOR MOURNING POST FREE.
Letter Orders Executed Promptly.

PETER ROBINSON, LTD., 252 TO 264, REGENT STREET, W.

Advertisement for *Modes de Deuil*, 1909. The department store Peter Robinson took advantage of the mid-Victorian obsession with death to establish itself as the foremost source for fashionable and correct mourning for any situation. Their famous Mourning Warehouse on Regent Street, London, offered a personalised mourning planning service, right down to conducting funerals if required.

Department stores rose to prominence in the nineteenth century and were a key part of almost any town or city's shopping experience. Alongside fabrics, haberdashery and a wide range of ready-to-wear garments including dresses, underwear, outerwear and children's clothes, these establishments offered in-house dressmaking and alteration services. In London, many stores had distinct identities. Liberty & Co offered 'artistic and historic costumes' alongside Arts and Crafts merchandise and a wide range of imported Asian textiles, whilst Peter Robinson Ltd had a renowned mourning and half-mourning dress department. Many imported

Paris designs for their clientele. Outside of London, notable British department stores included Jolly's of Bath, Kendal's of Manchester, and Jenner's of Edinburgh. Although such establishments might offer men's garments, most men chose to go to tailors and male outfitters for their wardrobes. As with women's clothes, it was possible to buy cheaper-quality ready-to-wear suits, and in particularly desperate circumstances second-hand clothing was an option.



Advertisement for men's Panama hats from Henry Heath of London, 1901.

The increased availability of published fashion articles, magazines, postcards and other sources meant that the majority of Edwardians had the ability to keep themselves informed regarding the latest styles. This was particularly important, given how fashion in the fourteen years before the First World War embarked upon dramatic and rapid changes that set a precedent for the rest of the century.

1901–5: AN ERA OF UNREMITTING OPULENCE

FASHIONS rarely change almost overnight; however, they can change very swiftly. In the late 1890s, women's fashions had been gradually softening. Although outer fabrics remained quite stiff and substantial, such as crisp taffeta and brocaded silk, the effect was tempered slightly by trimmings such as gauze overlays and frills of silk chiffon and lace, and a sense of movement provided by twinkling beading. Such beading was frequently incorporated, along with braid, into heavy pre-made passementerie which was appliquéd to the dress, rather than directly embroidered upon the material. This often gave a quite stiff, formalised effect, as textiles needed to be sturdy enough to bear the weight of such dense, typically inflexible embellishment. The beads could be made from jet (a shiny black mineraloid formed from fossilised wood), cut and polished steel (which gave a diamond-like effect), or black glass imitating jet. Despite the interplay of light upon beading and patterned fabrics, the general effect could be rather heavy. Even lightweight dresses followed the model of a gored skirt hanging in stiff, flared folds and a high-necked, tightly fitted and boned bodice. By the end of the 1890s, the exaggerated leg o'mutton sleeve had become rather smaller, although sleeves were often still puffed.

Within a few months of Queen Victoria's death, it seemed as though women's fashion had dramatically turned around. Whilst the basic construction of separate skirt and boned bodice changed little, materials and trimmings were softer, sheerer and lighter – both in weight and in hue. At this time, the perfect lady of fashion was presented as being mature, worldly-wise and sophisticated. Mrs Eric Pritchard described the 1902 ideal

as ‘tall, slight and of graceful carriage; not a stiff creature enclosed in whalebone armour’.

Perhaps the most significant element of early Edwardian fashion was underwear. The enduring notoriety of the Edwardian corset owes much to the exaggeratedly voluptuous effect and minuscule waists portrayed in many contemporary fashion illustrations. Such drawings, just as exaggerated in their way as heavily manipulated fashion photographs of the early twenty-first century, are often presented as evidence for the highly fetishised myth that all Victorian and Edwardian women wanted the smallest possible waists and, almost without fail, were prepared to endure extreme tight-lacing in order to achieve this end. While a small minority of women – mainly actresses and performers – did deliberately tight-lace and make a feature out of their tiny waists (the French singer Polaire famously boasted that her waist measured 16 inches), the practice was thought rather vulgar and generally viewed with disfavour. Mrs Pritchard informed her readers in *The Cult of Chiffon* that having a well-formed, nicely proportioned figure (whether stout or thin) was infinitely preferable to anything else, saying ‘there never was a time when tight-lacing was less in favour’. Although the Edwardian corset did indeed enhance the ‘S-bend’ figure, its flat-fronted cut pushing the bosom up and forward, and the hips and posterior back, it was not solely responsible for the effect. Petticoats and skirts with smooth fronts and sweeping back fullness, and bodices with extravagantly draped busts created an optical illusion of extreme voluptuousness. The neatly belted waist, surrounded by bouffant draperies and swirling hems, inevitably seemed smaller than it really was.



Despite ruffles and lace trimmings, fashionable dress was still relatively stiff and formal at the end of the nineteenth century. Fashions for summer 1898 by Maison Rhinn, Paris, published in *Moniteur de la Mode*.



This risqué French postcard is part of an early 1900s series showing a woman gradually undressing. Although her drawers are worn over the flat-fronted corset, its effect on the figure is clearly reflected in the mirror.



‘The Petticoat of Aspiration’ illustrated by Rose le Quesne for *The Cult of Chiffon*, 1902. The deep bust flounce on the camisole would

have both enhanced the figure and prevented corset ridges showing on the outside.

In addition to strongly advising her readers to purchase the best-quality, most well-fitted corsets they could afford, Mrs Pritchard championed beautiful lingerie as a woman's universal right. She argued that it was essential for a woman's self-esteem to know that her unseen garments were just as attractive and feminine as her outside appearance. 'There is something so hopelessly vulgar in beautifying only "the outside of the platter,"' she declared, railing against 'hideous' Victorian underwear: plain calico 'petticoats immaculate,' sturdy grey coutil corsets, and 'drab-coloured merino combinations – thick, rough and high to the neck'. Despite the undeniable sensibleness of such underclothing, she asked 'Can one wonder that marriage is so often a failure, and that the English husband of such a class of woman goes where he can admire the petticoat of aspirations?' To guide her readers further, she explained how, even on a limited budget, soft cotton muslin and washing-silk were affordable and practical fabrics from which to make pretty undergarments. This did not preclude woollen underwear, essential in cooler weather, with Mrs Pritchard recommending silk petticoats lined with flannel and lace-trimmed, ribbon-threaded silk-and-wool knit combinations worn next to the skin. Cream or white was the customary colour for underwear, though ribbon trimmings and drawstrings, corsets and the silk top-petticoat were frequently coloured, and a few fashionable women, who did not find white becoming, wore coloured underwear in pink, yellow and blue. Mrs Pritchard also noted a trend led by a handful of wealthy American women for black undergarments, which showcased both pale skin and exquisite white lace trimming.



The importance of a well-fitted corset was paramount. This 1906 leaflet encourages the women of Plymouth, Devon, to take advantage of free consultations with a visiting 'expert fitter' from the American Royal Worcester Corset Company. Employing over two thousand women workers, Worcester in Massachusetts claimed to be the world's largest corset-manufacturing city.

While the early 1900s are associated with opulent, intricately detailed gowns in fragile fabrics, which looked attractive in publicity material, the reality was rather more practical. Event-specific dressing was increasingly important, and smart people took care to dress appropriately for the occasion. The wealthiest women had multiple costumes, ranging from theatre and evening gowns to morning and afternoon dresses and practical costumes for hunting, yachting and other active pursuits. Many establishments offered both simpler everyday garments and extravagant occasion dresses. Even clients of the House of Worth – run by brothers Gaston and Jean-Philippe Worth – demanded practical alternatives to the sumptuous gowns Jean-Philippe preferred creating. In 1901 Gaston, ever the businessman, responded by shrewdly employing a young designer to focus on daywear and coats for Worth. His name was Paul Poiret.

The most fashionable daywear was often as elaborately trimmed and accessorised as evening wear. In the most extreme fashions, sleeves were exaggeratedly full and flared, sometimes caught in at the wrist, echoing the effect of the hems which pooled about the wearer's feet. The effect was further emphasised by the full, overhanging bodice fronts, which formed pouched drapery in front before being caught up into the waistband. The soft, clinging fabrics of the outer skirts were kept from wrapping cumbersomely about the legs by layers of underskirts, with a rustling silk or brocade top-petticoat directly beneath the skirt. Moderate versions of these styles were widely worn, with many women favouring less full sleeves and hemlines that barely skimmed the ground as more practical for walking.



In this 1904 postcard, actress Dora Barton wears a day dress with a flat-fronted skirt with sweeping pleated back fullness, full bishop sleeves, and a large cape-collar. As a result, her tall but unfashionably slender figure appears modishly voluptuous.



Two cloth promenade dresses trimmed with fur for January 1904. Note the extremely large sleeves and the spotted hat veil.

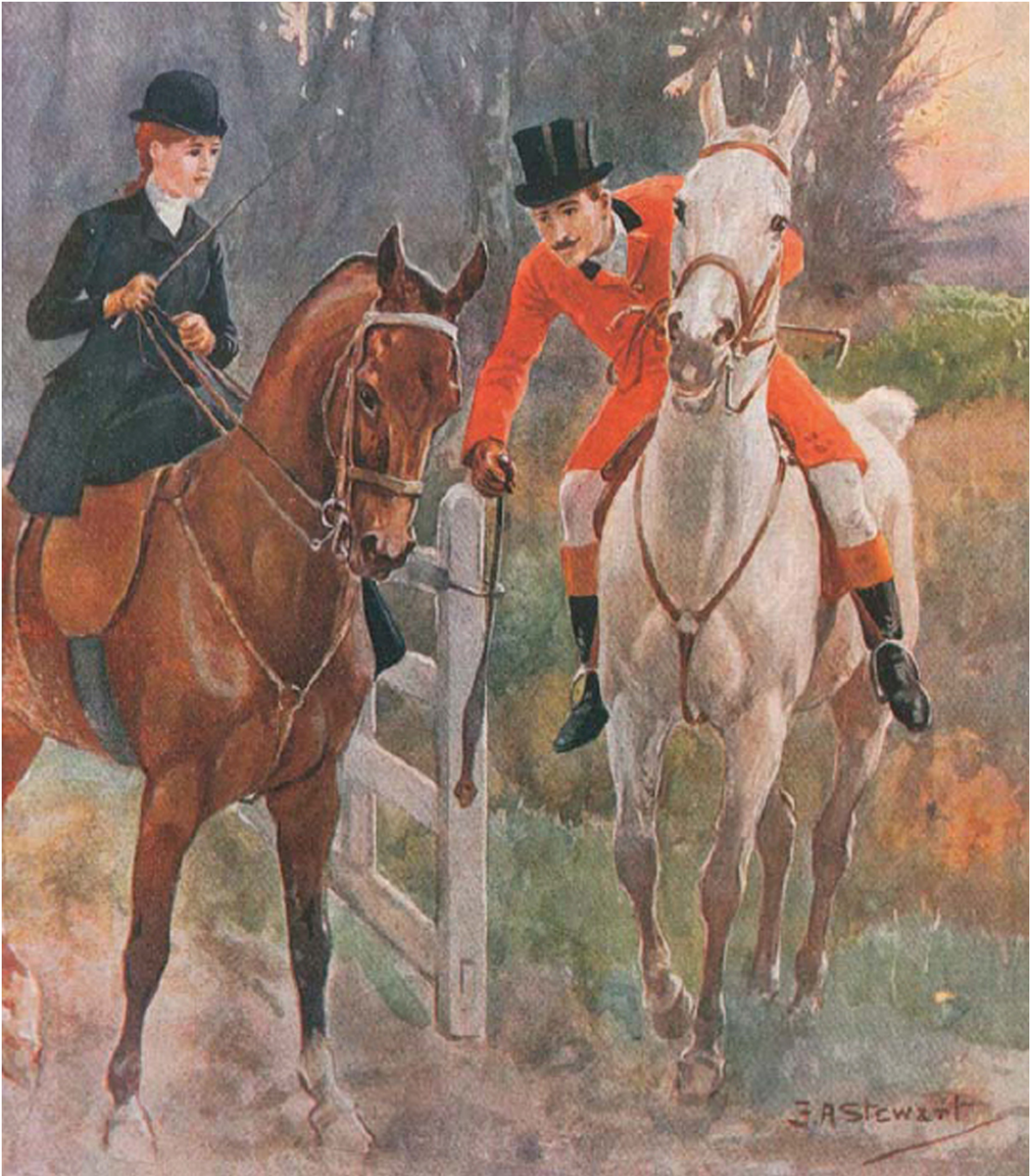


Two Irish lace evening blouses and two silk day blouses with 'the latest idea in tucks, collars and vests' for July 1906. *The Girl's Own Paper*.



Many women wore modified, less extreme versions of fashionable dress. This unknown young woman wears a light-coloured dress with puffed sleeves, pouched bodice and lace trimmings. British, c. 1905.

There were other solutions for the follower of fashion on a limited budget. The two-piece construction of separate bodice and skirt meant that alternative bodices, blouses or 'waists' were popular and economic wardrobe staples at almost any social level. Although well-off women wore elaborate waists with skirt-and-jacket costumes, blouses were mainly associated with frugality and limited means. Charlotte Bartlett, the poor relation in E. M. Forster's *A Room With A View* (1908), surprised her family by appearing in a smart Sunday frock instead of one of her despised blouses. Women on even more limited means, such as Barry Pain's lower-middle-class heroine Eliza, might have at least one 'dressy blouse' to pair with a pre-existing skirt for evening wear or to wear to the theatre.



A woman in a side-saddle riding habit with a bowler hat and a man in hunting pinks. Drawn by J. A. Stewart for *The Bystander*, October 1906.

Riding had been long acceptable as a sporting pursuit for women, and the habit with tailored jacket, sweeping skirt, and masculine shirt and stock, worn with a bowler hat or top hat with a veil, remained standard wear. The

asymmetrical skirt of the riding habit was designed to accommodate the posture of a woman riding side-saddle, and its surplus material was carried in one hand or thrown over the arm while walking. Many lady riders wore matching woollen breeches or leggings underneath their habits. In addition to equestrianism, there were many other popular sports and occupations that required special dress. Not least of these was the new pastime of motoring. The all-enveloping duster coat and veil (sometimes with an inset visor or goggles) became a widely advertised uniform for the Edwardian lady motorist.



Motoring dress illustrated by Rose le Quesne for *The Cult of Chiffon*, 1902.



The latest fashions in motoring hats and veils for July 1904.

Also popular, and more widely accessible than motoring, were golf, tennis and bicycling. For these, many women chose outfits intended to serve both as sporting wear and as serviceable, neat daywear. This concept emerged in the late nineteenth century when Redfern & Sons became known for beautifully tailored riding habits and activewear. Although originally designed for sporting pursuits, including archery and yachting, Redfern outfits were so stylish that their royal and aristocratic clients wore them as smart daywear. They were among the first to offer the ‘costume’ – a tailored jacket and skirt ensemble that, by the mid-1900s, had become an essential part of the well-dressed woman’s wardrobe. In the following decade, the costume would become known as a suit, under which name it has endured well into the twenty-first century.

For the active woman unable to justify the extravagance of a golfing ensemble or other sport-specific costume, sensible tailored skirts and practical shirt-waists were a popular alternative. Such outfits regularly incorporated menswear details such as collars with neckties, and masculine accessories including feminised brogue shoes, and headgear including flat caps, trilbies, and the unisex straw boater.



A lady in an elegant tailored costume with a man in yachting cap and blazer. Mid-1900s. Drawn by Ferdinand von Řezníček.



Yachting dress illustrated by Rose le Quesne for *The Cult of Chiffon*, 1902.

Fashionable hats could be complicated constructions of wired fabric or straw pinned at various angles atop high-piled hairstyles. They were often embellished with flowers and feathers, although from the mid-nineteenth century there was increasing awareness of the cruelty inherent in trimming hats with wings, rare plumes, and even whole stuffed birds. *The Girl's Own Paper* was a longstanding critic, 'Norma' openly expressing revulsion at such modes and stating firmly that only farmed ostrich feathers and the feathers of birds killed for food were acceptable. This was the same rule set by the Society for the Protection of Birds, founded in 1889, and recognised by royal charter in 1904. The society was an active and vocal organisation supported by many high-profile society figures, including the Duchess of Portland, its president from 1891 to 1954. Following the royal charter, the RSPB received a further boost in 1906 when Queen Alexandra assured them that she never wore osprey feathers, and gave the society permission to use her name to promote their cause in any way they saw fit. Despite such high-profile support, and the society's campaigning, many fashionable hats continued to be trimmed with taxidermy and rare feathers such as those of the Raggiana bird-of-paradise well into the 1910s. For active pursuits

and travelling, more sensible headgear was worn, often secured with a veil or scarf tied under the chin.



Two tennis dresses drawn for *The Girl's Own Paper*, August 1906. The left-hand girl has an unusual sleeveless bodice over her masculine shirt-waist with collar and tie.

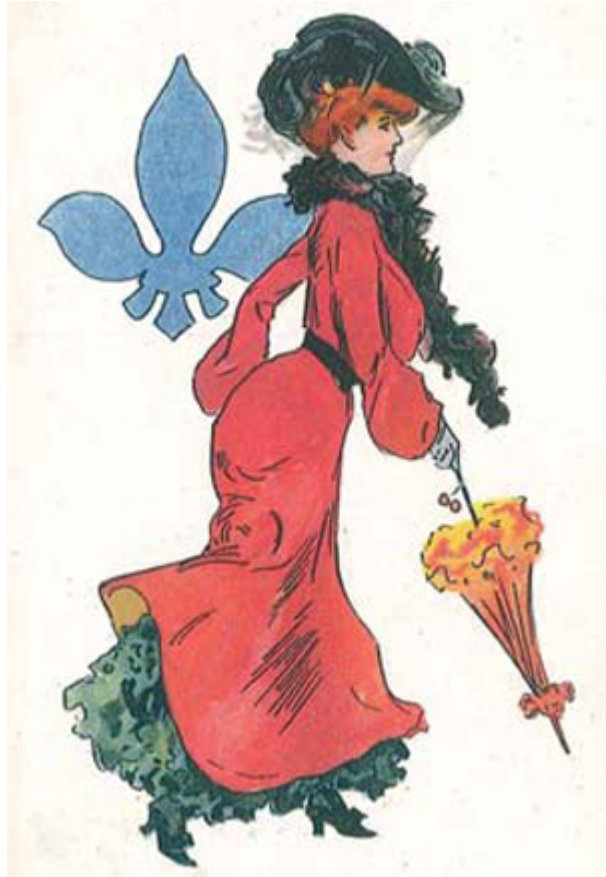


Fashionable hats trimmed with stuffed birds from Stagg & Mantle's department store, London. July 1903.



Fashionable hats from Swan & Edgar's department store trimmed with grapes, feathers and ribbon bows. London, October 1904.

For summer, parasols and feather boas were popular, with fur stoles and muffs for the winter. Decorative belts were popular accessories for skirt and blouse ensembles, and handbags were frequently small and delicate. Trailing skirts could be held off the ground by a skirt-lifter, a decorative metal contraption similar to a pair of tongs, which hung from the waistband and held the train firmly off the ground. Some skirts had an attached cord at knee height, designed to be held gracefully in one hand without clutching an unseemly handful of material.



An elegantly accessorised woman of 1906 with hat, feather boa and parasol walks along, her skirt raised to offer a glimpse of frothy petticoat and elegant Louis-heeled shoes.

Although more often than not hidden by full skirts, feet were far from neglected, with the toe of an elegant high-heeled shoe regularly glimpsed alongside a flash of underskirts as a hem was raised for ease of movement. The smartest footwear was well-fitted and quietly unobtrusive in neutral colours, with Mrs Pritchard declaring: 'As for the boots that are visible a mile away, we certainly do not wish to see the woman who is wearing them.' Gloves, just as subtly coloured and unobtrusive, were widely worn as a sign of respectability, either short for daywear, or longer for evening wear. Fans were an indispensable part of the evening outfit.

In contrast to high-cut daywear with collars concealing the neck, the most modish evening gowns could be extremely low-cut. Throats frequently stayed concealed behind jewelled chokers in imitation of Queen Alexandra, whose trademark collars hid a small scar. The cut of the bodice was often the only way to tell an evening gown from an afternoon dress, as

even the highest-end gowns might be made with alternative bodices to coordinate with a single skirt. Along with low necklines, evening dresses regularly had elaborately draped sleeves such as Worth's 'long tulle scarf held above the elbow by a row of diamonds and finished by two emerald tassels', described by Poiret in his autobiography. Such casual luxury was typical of the most fashionable outfits of the period.



Glacé leather shoes, with elegantly waisted Louis heel and delicate floral embroidery. French, early 1900s.



'Noël en Angleterre', 1905. Chokers were often worn with extremely low-cut evening necklines. Drawn by Jacques Wély.

By the mid-1900s it became apparent that unremitting opulence, whilst appropriate in certain contexts, was somewhat out of place in the everyday

wardrobe and certainly beyond the means of all but the wealthiest women. As the 1900s reached the halfway mark, women's fashions embarked upon the first of the rapid periods of change which have come to define fashionable dress in the twentieth century.



‘Lace Novelties for Ascot’, July 1903. The extreme opulence of early Edwardian fashion is clear in these costly gowns of fragile lace, with luxurious fur stoles and lavish hats.



An extravagant pale pink evening gown trimmed with lace and bunches of artificial grapes, worn by the actress Millie Legarde in 1904.



Day and evening dresses seen at the Hotel le Meurice restaurant in 1909. By the end of the decade women's fashions had developed a cleaner silhouette.

1906–10: ARTISTIC MODES AND THE DIRECTOIRE GIRL

AS THE EXTRAVAGANCE of the early 1900s swiftly settled, a rationalising mood took hold. While basic styles and accessories changed little from the first part of the decade, sleeves and skirts were both gradually becoming narrower, revealing a figure no longer obscured by blousy draperies and abundant decoration. Applied flat trimmings, such as braid, bands of embroidery, and lace, replaced three-dimensional frills and flounces, and focused attention on the crisper, cleaner silhouette in both day and evening dress. This helped democratise fashion, as the smart woman on a limited budget was no longer reliant on conspicuously expensive ornament or lavish use of fabric. If her clothes were neatly cut and well fitted, she could be as stylish, if not more so, than her wealthy counterpart in a Paris costume.

For daywear, the new corslet skirt with a high-fitted waist was worn with blouses and either a short jacket or longer, fitted coat. Many dresses, both day and evening, began to be made with connected bodice and skirt, as the higher, fitted waistlines made two-piece dresses increasingly impractical. One-piece construction emphasised a neater, slimmer figure. The change was reflected in underwear too, with the ruffled corset-cover and multiple waist-slips often replaced by a single full-body petticoat. Hems remained floor-length, with the ‘foot-free’ or ankle-length cut a popular option for younger women.

For summer daywear, one-piece white gowns in lightweight cotton, often with embroidery and lace insertions, were hugely popular. Called ‘lingerie dresses’, presumably because of their fabrics, the most expensive were exquisitely hand-sewn using the finest lawns and lace, some entirely made of hand-worked lace or Irish crochet. Ready-to-wear versions using

slightly sturdier fabrics were available at most price levels, with the cheapest versions made of white muslin inset with a few strips of machine-made lace. Such dresses could be worn with different coloured ribbons, sashes and slips to vary their appearance, and despite their apparent fragility many could be carefully washed. However, maintaining the whiteness and cleanness of outer garments was time-consuming, and negated any illusion of practicality that washability might suggest. Similar themes were seen in the best clothes of well-off Edwardian children, whose spotlessly laundered, elaborate white frocks, coats and sailor-suits advertised how their parents and nurses had both money and time to dedicate to maintaining their attire.



Long coats and applied braiding, particularly along seams, helped enhance the leaner lines of the new fashions. Walking suits retailed by Hart and Sons, April 1909.

By the Edwardian period, many couturiers enjoyed a high profile, with several being household names. While wearing an obvious Worth had undeniable cachet, not everyone appreciated having the creator of their garments so readily identifiable. In 1904, the novelist and social commentator Marie Corelli cuttingly observed that ‘when Lady A sees her loathed rival Lady B’s dress described in half a column of newspaper “gush” she straightaway yearns and schemes for a whole column of the same kind’. As much to thwart would-be imitators as to maintain the

mystique of her elegance, the wealthy client might have the couture labels removed from her gowns before going away to a house party so that other lady guests could not, by subterfuge, discover the name of her modiste for themselves. Other ladies deliberately sought out dressmakers who, in addition to offering the highest-quality garments, promised absolute discretion and avoidance of vulgar self-promotion. Such seamstresses succeeded through word of mouth, relying upon their satisfied customers to recommend them discreetly to other, equally publicity-shy ladies.



The finest lingerie gowns might be made entirely of delicate handmade lace. Gown retailed by Peter Robinson, June 1903.



White cotton lingerie dress with lace insertion, 1908–9, with a *c.* 1909 straw hat and a 1911 crochet handbag made from a magazine pattern.



Lingerie dresses often used the same fabrics as underwear and children's clothing. Actress Ellaline Terriss's daughter Betty is dressed in frilly white cotton *broderie anglaise*, 1906. Note her mother's elaborate hairstyle.



The model girl at work. Illustrated by Rose le Quesne for *The Cult of Chiffon*, 1902.

In contrast, couturiers who sought out publicity either did so through advertising in magazines and publications, innovative business practices, or by designing eye-catching garments. One of the most successful couturiers to exploit all three was the London-based Lucy Duff-Gordon, better known as Lucile, who is credited with developing the modern catwalk show. Lucile trained her model girls to actively present garments to an audience, rather than passively wearing them for individual clients. Her innovative presentations drew a great deal of publicity. Marie Corelli wrote a scathing critique of one such ‘symposium’ held in 1904, describing how, to the strains of a Hungarian band, Lucile’s models paraded about a stage in toilettes called ‘Pleasure’s Thrall’, ‘The Red Mouth of a Venomous Flower’, and ‘A Frenzied Song of Amorous Things’. Although men did on occasion accompany their wives – or mistresses – on dress-shopping expeditions, Corelli observed that the audience included a number of ‘remarkably offensive’ men described as ‘Piccadilly-trotters’ and ‘loafers’ who deserved kicking for blatantly ogling the girls. The criticism did Lucile no harm, but boosted her profile as a purveyor of romance and seductive escapism. In 1907 she dressed Lily Elsie in *The Merry Widow*, including an

exaggerated wide-brimmed hat laden with feathers and flowers. The operetta was successful, Lucile's modish costumes were widely publicised, and, rather than being a short-lived fad, 'Merry Widow hats' stayed fashionable for several years, establishing the new standard model of large hats which sat securely over full hairstyles.

Foreign textiles such as Japanese and Chinese silks and Middle Eastern embroideries were admired for their aesthetic qualities and beautiful colouring, which offered an alternative to the early 1900s predilection for muted tints and soft, faded effects. Such fabrics were among the merchandise imported by the Parisian store Babani, founded in 1894 by Vitaldi Babani, an influential proponent of artistic dressing. By 1905 he had become the leading vendor of Japanese kimonos, or '*robes Japonaises*', to wear as dressing gowns. Babani also imported Liberty textiles from London and, along with Poiret, had a licence to retail garments by the Venice-based artisan Mariano Fortuny. Fortuny's hand-dyed, tightly pleated clinging silk 'Delphos' gowns, worn with stencilled chiffon or velvet wraps, quickly became popular at-home wear for Babani's more adventurous clients. Although greatly admired for their beauty and the artistic way in which they combined ancient Greek styles with medieval and Renaissance textile patterns, such garments were not intended to be worn in public.



Lily Elsie dressed by Lucile for *The Merry Widow*, 1907. The lavishly trimmed 'Merry Widow hat' became one of the most enduringly popular theatre-inspired fashions of the decade.



Millinery from Tucker Widgery's, London, April 1908. Although on a smaller scale, these hats piled high with flowers and feathers and sitting securely on the head were clearly influenced by the Merry Widow hat.

For those who wished to express their artistic tastes visibly, some dressmakers, such as the London-based Sarah Fullerton Monteith Young and the department store Liberty, specialised in fashionable dresses and outerwear which sensitively incorporated ethnic elements, Arts and Crafts embroideries and artisan textiles. Such garments might also feature details associated with alternative and artistic dress, such as smocking, flowing drapes and hanging sleeves, but in a way which enhanced the outfit's overall fashionableness. This diplomatic approach, at odds with the rather more provocative tactics of Paul Poiret, was widely admired and imitated.

Poiret, who opened his fashion house in 1903, considered himself an artist whose duty was to challenge conventional fashion and release women from its dictatorship. Ironically, he insisted that he alone knew how women should dress, although such dogmatism was tempered by his advice against

following fashion too closely, and he encouraged women to develop individuality and personal style, rather than blindly following every new trend regardless of whether or not it was flattering or suitable. Meanwhile, he eliminated petticoats from his designs, radically slimming the silhouette, and sought to eradicate the corset. The lack of subtlety in his work had been evident since his early days at Worth, when a Russian princess notoriously described one of his audaciously simple kimono-inspired cloaks as a sack fit only to hold the severed heads of peasants. In 1908 he combined the boldness of his designs with the bravura of modern art by commissioning Paul Iribe to draw an album of his latest models. Not only were Iribe's vibrantly coloured images a startling contrast to traditional fashion illustration, but Poiret's high-waisted, straight-cut column gowns offered an avant-garde alternative to defined waists and voluminous skirts. Most significantly, one of his clearly uncorseted models leaned forward, revealing her lower leg through a gauze-veiled slit in her skirt.



Babani robe Japonaise d'intérieur worn by the actress Georgette Sandry, 1909. As their name implies, these imported Japanese kimonos were worn only indoors, as dressing gowns and tea-gowns. The unusual furniture and decorative fan probably also came from the Babani store.



Three artistically styled dresses from Dickins & Jones, London, February 1909. These gowns incorporate imported Indian silks and richly embroidered Chinese shawls into their unusual asymmetrical draped designs. Although their beauty and originality would have been widely admired, few women wore such obviously exotic toilettes.

The slit skirt and uncorseted figure were also taken up by Jeanne Margaine-Lacroix, who in 1908 sent three models wearing extreme versions of her latest gowns to the Longchamps racecourse. Unlike Poiret's columnar gowns, Margaine-Lacroix's sinuous '*robes Tanagréennes*' were so clingingly form-fitting that it was possible to tell that the wearers wore neither corsets nor petticoats. The designer defended her designs in the face of scandalised criticism, pointing out that in fact they were worn over 'a tight elastic silk jersey', and that their barely boned constructions did not

preclude them from being worn to advantage even by ladies with imperfect figures.



Jeanne Margaine-Lacroix gown worn by the actress Lucienne Debrenne, 1909. The clinging, form-fitting spiral cut of this gown would have been achieved by draping and bias-cutting – the latter technique claimed to have been invented a decade later by Madeleine Vionnet. The seeming absence of underwear suggests one of Margaine-Lacroix's boneless elastic jersey corsets-*Sylphide* may be worn underneath.



Actress Marguerite Leslie in a green Directoire evening gown trimmed with old-rose coloured lace, 1908.

The Margaine-Lacroix style, which the press rechristened ‘Directoire’ after the fashions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, became popular, with dressmakers creating reworked versions for their clients. Although Directoire adaptations were typically designed to fit a traditionally corseted and petticoated figure, in rather less scandalously clinging fabrics, and rarely had the slit in the skirt, they imitated the general form-fitting, high-waisted principle of Margaine-Lacroix’s creations. A week after Longchamps, the elegant actress Lillie Langtry, best-known of Edward VII’s many mistresses, wore a Directoire gown to the races at Chester. The fashion even became the subject of a saucy music-hall song, ‘The Directoire Girl’, sung by Marie Lloyd:

*The new directoire girl has set the world a-whirl
Her costume is so very directoire
Divided down one side, each time she takes a stride
It shows enough to make the men expect more!*



‘Celia’ evening dress, October 1909. While the side-split skirts of the original Directoire gowns were perhaps too extreme for many, a modified version for overskirts became popular, as here, where a bead-embroidered silk skirt is split over a white satin underskirt. This ‘theatre frock’ was available in various colours for nine and a half guineas from Swan & Edgar, London.

In contrast to Poiret, who is sometimes incorrectly credited with the Longchamps incident, Margaine-Lacroix made no secret of her scorn for ‘bizarre clothes’ in vibrant colours, instead favouring subtly coloured drapery and tasteful decoration as a means of enhancing the natural female form. Also an innovative corsetiere, since 1899 she had invented and patented several designs for barely boned elasticised knit fabric ‘corsets-*Sylphide*’, and offered *Sylphide* dresses made along the same lines. In addition to this, several years before the technique was more famously developed and refined by Madeleine Vionnet, Margaine-Lacroix was an early pioneer of cutting dress-fabrics on the bias to bring out their clinging qualities.

Partly as a result of the publicity given to the extreme designs of the likes of Margaine-Lacroix and Poiret, but largely because of the evolution of style, the ostensibly uncorseted, naturally slim figure came to reflect the fashionable ideal by the end of the decade. Despite Margaine-Lacroix’s attempts to reform corsetry, boned corsets were far from eradicated. Instead, they were simply (and seemingly without irony) redesigned for an *au naturel* effect, which compressed the waist and hips rather than rearranging the body mass as their predecessors had done. This made them particularly

restrictive for the pear-shaped figure. As some styles extended well over the hips, sitting could prove quite tricky.



The new corsets were designed to give a more natural silhouette.
Drawn by Henry Gerbault for *Le Rire*, 1910.



The heart-shaped silhouette of the end of the decade is demonstrated in a brown velvet dress tapering into a narrow hem and worn with a musquash stole. October 1909.

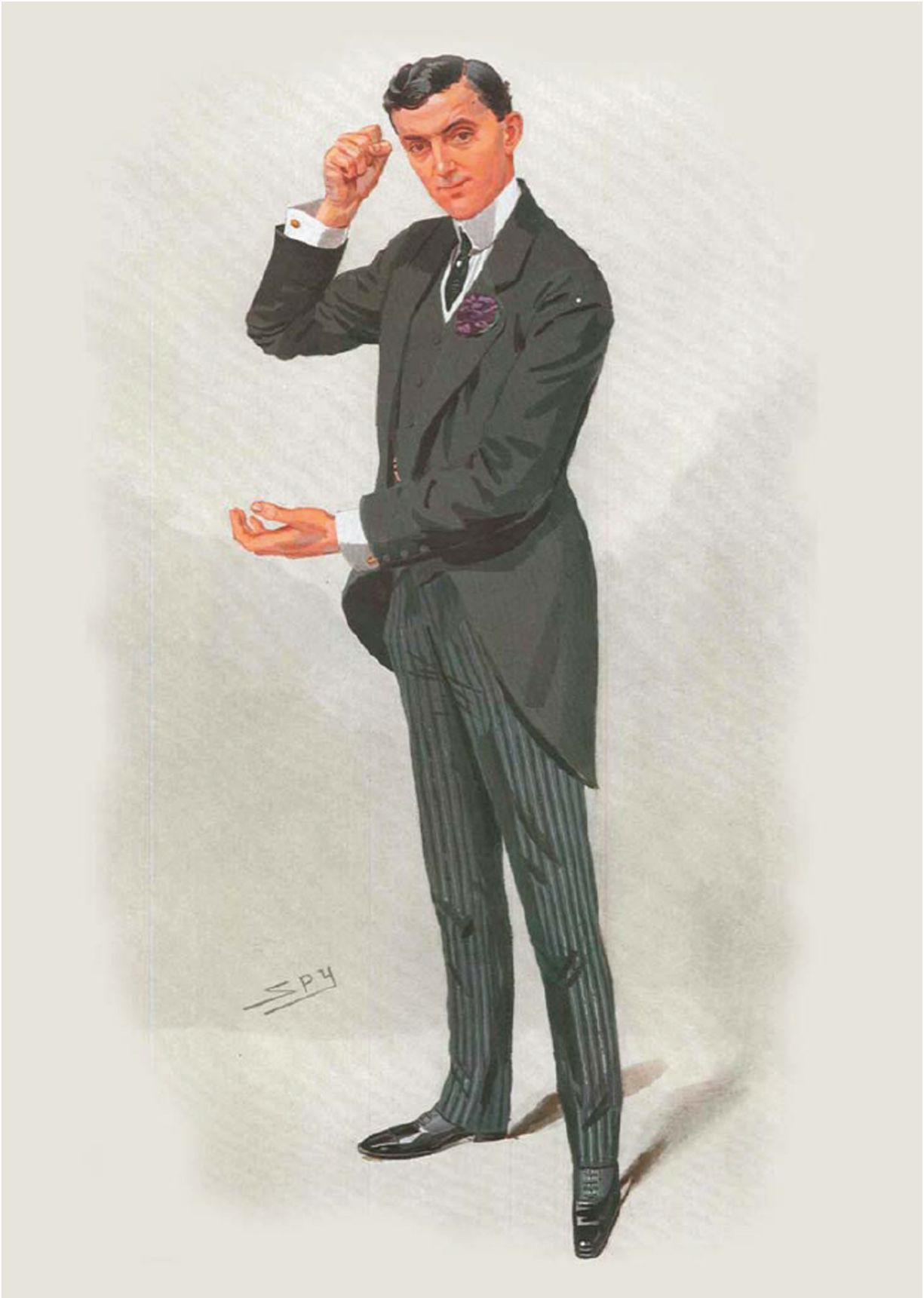
Apart from a reduction in the number of petticoats worn, and a general decrease in bulk, the undergarments worn with the new corset did not change noticeably from the beginning of the decade. Full-legged frilled knickers were replaced by slimmer, more closely fitting knee-length drawers with elasticated waists and knees. The new 'directoire knickers' were made in one piece, rather than the traditional nineteenth-century construction of two separate legs held together by a tape at the waist.

During the course of the first decade of the century the fashionable silhouette had changed dramatically. When Edward VII came to the throne, the smart woman was pyramidal, her extravagantly full hem sweeping upwards to the apex of a high-dressed hairstyle with a relatively small hat. At the time of his death in May 1910, almost a full decade later, the pyramid was upside-down, with exaggeratedly wide-brimmed hats tapering downwards into narrow hems, with a neatly shod foot providing the point of the new heart-shaped silhouette.



Memorial card for Edward VII.

Edward was the last British monarch to lend his name to an era. The term 'Edwardian' lingered on, absorbing the early 1910s, despite unsuccessful attempts to claim 'Georgian' status with the succession of Edward's son, George V.



Smart Edwardian daywear of morning coat, waistcoat and striped trousers as worn by the politician and barrister Edward Hemmerde in 1909. His polished leather shoes have grey cloth tops, and a purple buttonhole offers a discreet touch of colour. Caricature by Spy for *Vanity Fair*.

MENSWEAR: MORNING COATS AND LOUNGE SUITS

WHILE women's dress changed quite dramatically from that of the late Victorian period, changes in menswear in the early twentieth century were subtler. As with women, men were expected to dress correctly for the occasion, with Mrs Humphry warning in her etiquette book *Manners for Men* (1897) that 'if a man does not dress well in society he cannot be a success'. The fashionable man had an influential model in Edward VII, said to own the largest wardrobe of men's clothing in the world. While much of it was ceremonial robes and uniforms, Edward had always appreciated good clothes. As Prince of Wales, he became an arbiter of style, popularising dinner jackets worn with black ties and low-cut evening waistcoats which prominently displayed spotless white shirt-fronts. His royal prerogative enabled him to bend sartorial rules, although he was often heard loudly criticising inappropriate dress in others, particularly in formal attire.

Apart from a widely emulated habit of leaving his bottom waistcoat button undone in order to more comfortably accommodate his epicurean girth, the king ironically had greater influence on leisure wear and sporting dress than on formal wear. His attempts to revive knee-breeches for evening wear, and to retain trousers creased down the side rather than the front, were both unsuccessful. Although he approved a mid-1890s redesign of the frock coat so that it loosely fastened in front with linked buttons, or hung open, which was flattering to older and stouter figures, many elegant young men favoured short coats. The frock coat was beginning to be thought old-fashioned by 1901, suitable only for Sundays or for the most conservative daywear. Edward probably unintentionally hastened its downfall by wearing a tweed suit and felt homburg hat to the Goodwood races, startling the other attendees in their regulation frock coats and top hats. As a result of this, by

1901, men attending spectator sports in the summer were increasingly wearing flannel and linen suits, straw Panama or boater hats, blazers, white trousers, and, of course, the royal-approved homburgs and tweeds.

Clothing for sport added to the demands on the gentleman's wardrobe. Mrs Humphry commented on the need for outfits 'for walking, riding, driving, visiting, boating, hunting, shooting, golfing, bicycling, tennis, and cricket, dining, smoking, and lounging, football, racing, and yachting, to say nothing of uniform and the Court suit, besides the now developing motor-car costume'. However, compromise was typical, and outfits could serve for more than one purpose. In order to play tennis or cricket, or mess about in boats, the sportsman might shed the jacket of his modish summer-weight suit in light-coloured linen or heavy cotton. However, once the sportsman was done with his exertions, he ran the risk of being considered ill-bred if his coat was not immediately resumed. The tweed knickerbockers of the shooting-suit worked equally well for golf or for cycling. Indeed, Edward had set a precedent where the hard-wearing tweed Norfolk suit of belted, deeply pleated jacket and matching knickerbockers sufficed for general country living. Apart from hunting dress when, as and if required, the only other change of clothing deemed indispensable for the man in the country was evening dress.



The redesigned frock coat of the late 1890s and early twentieth century hung open in front, rather than being fully fastened. John Hamilton-Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen, wearing his coat with matching trousers over a pale cream-coloured waistcoat, represents elegant but conservative male daywear. Caricature by Spy for *Vanity Fair*, 1902.

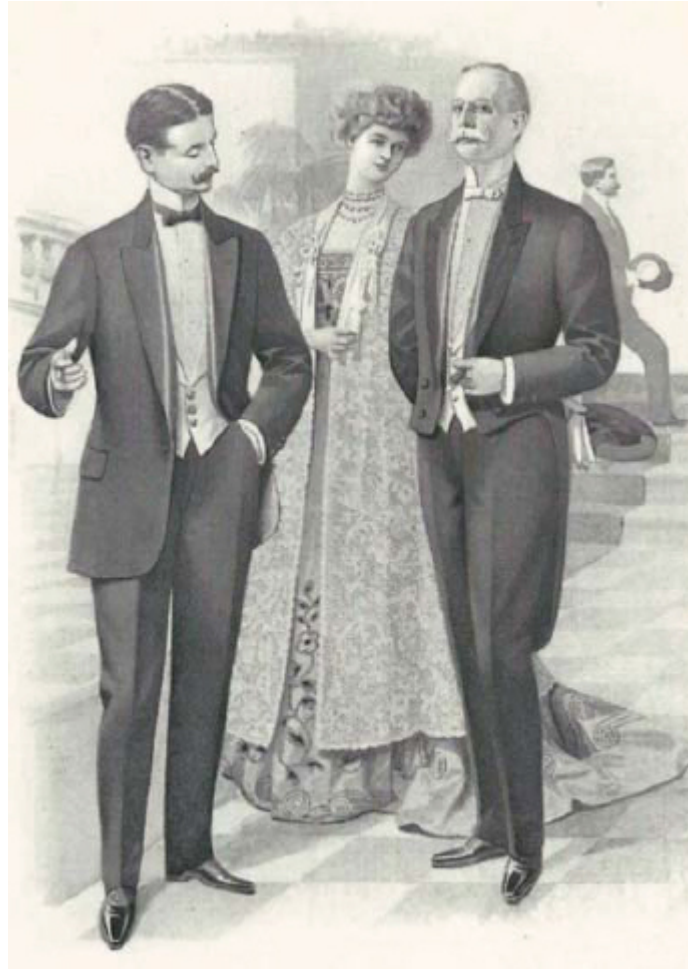


Light-coloured suits were popular for summer wear. For strolling along the beach in 1908, this man wears a single-button jacket and front-creased trousers with pale shoes, a Panama hat, and a spotted necktie.



The hard-wearing tweed Norfolk suit was popular country wear. It had a distinctive pleated jacket with practical patch pockets and knickerbockers and, as in this 1908 illustration, was often worn with a flat cap.

Evening dress consisted of a black coat and coordinating trousers, often worn with an expanse of crisp, starched white shirt-front and a low-cut waistcoat, which could be in either black, matching the suit, or white to coordinate with the shirt. The bow tie was either black or white, to coordinate with the waistcoat. White ties and waistcoats were seen as more formal than black. The tailcoat, like the frock coat for daywear, represented absolute formality, while the tailless dinner jacket that Edward had popularised as Prince of Wales was increasingly worn for informal and semi-formal evening occasions. The American interpretation of the latter became known as a tuxedo after being worn by wealthy, high-profile homeowners of Tuxedo Park, a rustic municipality on the outskirts of New York.



For 1908, two key evening wear looks. The younger man sports a new dinner jacket or tuxedo with a black bow tie, whilst the older man is more conservatively dressed in black tailcoat, white tie and waistcoat.

The well-dressed man about town changed his clothing more frequently than in the country. The standard of elegance was based on the three-piece suit of coat, waistcoat and jacket, which could be made in matching materials, or in different colours and fabric. Wearing two matched pieces, with a contrasting third such as a darker coat or lighter waistcoat, often with a top hat, was considered more formal, with the morning coat with cutaway fronts preferred to the frock coat. When worn with a top hat and striped trousers, the morning coat was appropriate for the City worker.

Stiffly starched shirt-fronts and high collars were ubiquitous. Despite the introduction of a soft-fronted business shirt in the mid-1900s, it would not be widely worn until the 1920s. Masculine underwear was straightforward and functional, usually comprising a sleeved vest and long

pants (or one-piece combinations), in knit fabrics such as jersey. The elastic fabric enabled ease of movement, and, if made from wool, was warm, dry and comfortable to wear.



Men's knit jersey underwear advertised by Docteur Rasurel, 1904.

Neckties were compulsory, and, although pre-tied ones were available, they were seen as inferior to self-tied versions. The bow tie was particularly popular at this time, either in black or white for evening wear, or for wearing with the lounge suit, while cravats were worn with more formal daywear. Coloured ties were popular, though only the most dandified young men followed the example of Saki's rather effete but exquisitely elegant hero, Reginald, with his penchant for apricot ties with lilac waistcoats. The tie in too bright a colour or too loud a pattern was considered rather vulgar, with Reginald denouncing spotted ties as a 'horror' fit only to be worn 'in secret, or in Tottenham Court Road'.

The colours rule also applied to the fully coordinated three-piece lounge suit – worn with a bowler hat or homburg, or a straw hat in the summer – that served as informal everyday wear. Although suiting materials were offered in a wide range of colours and patterns such as tweed, checks or stripes, the well-dressed man chose good-quality fabrics that prioritised discretion and tastefulness over eye-catching conspicuousness. Some men wore matching ties and socks in vivid colours that echoed the shades

present in their clothing, although E. F. Benson in *Dodo's Daughter* (1913) commented that such a man 'dressed rather too carefully to be really well-dressed'.



Although increasing numbers of men risked introducing colour and pattern into their wardrobes, this startling bright green and red tie with a blue lounge suit and black-striped white waistcoat was perhaps too showy to have met with widespread approval. Caricature of the sporting author Harding Edward de Fonblanque Cox by Kite for *Vanity Fair*, 1909.

Social consciousness was a major influence on dressing. Many older middle-class men continued to dress conservatively, their frock coats demonstrating due deference to the idea that innovation in dress was an aristocratic privilege. Hugh Stutfield, writing in *The Sovereignty of Society* (1909), observed that snobbery was 'not merely a pillar of the aristocracy, but a mainstay of British dominion'. He deplored the setting of fashions by wealthy 'butterflies' from the highest ranks, and how the styles thus set were further propagated by 'snippety light journalism' dictating the appropriate number of buttons for a coat, or the correct style of moustache.

Young men were most likely to try to demonstrate their fashion awareness by following such publications' advice to the letter, often rather too literally. When those on limited incomes had to rely on cheap clothing, the effect could come across as too showy and exaggerated for elegance, incurring the disapproval of both their elders and more sartorially aware young men, such as P. G. Wodehouse's elegant Psmith. In *Psmith in the City* (1910), the horrified hero decided to abandon all efforts to reform his colleague Bristow's wardrobe after that man appeared in a flashy satin tie, 'rainbow' waistcoat, and worst of all, patent-leather boots with white kid uppers.



By 1910, the fully matched three-piece suit was widely worn by younger men such as the twenty-eight-year-old John Crichton-Stuart, Marquis of Bute. His beautifully tailored brown suit with a fine stripe is worn with brown shoes, a discreet green necktie, and a fashionable waxed moustache. Caricature by Who for *Vanity Fair*.



The three-piece suit was often made in quite boldly patterned or coloured fabrics, such as this checked tweed worn by the actor-manager George Alexander, with a bow tie, *c.* 1905.



Many younger men went clean-shaven. This unknown young man was photographed in his three-piece suit in September 1909.

As with women's footwear, men's shoes were expected to be elegantly formed, well-fitted and unobtrusive, making young Bristow's glossy black-and-white boots particularly appalling. Style-wise, their cut was unremarkable, as ankle boots with cloth tops had carried over from the nineteenth century as the normal masculine footwear. Button fastenings gradually decreased in popularity as laced shoes proved more practical. Black was the only acceptable formal colour, with brown, grey or tan permissible for informal daywear. Sporting or country shoes had rounder toes, with the punched-leather, double-stitched brogue particularly popular. For formal wear and town wear, spats provided further protection to the ankles and upper part of the shoe.



A fashionably dressed bridegroom is somewhat nonplussed by his bride's outfit. This is a comic postcard from a c. 1911 series making fun of harem pants. In reality, such a wedding dress probably never existed!

Like women, many men wore gloves, which were also made in neutral and unobtrusive colours. Edward VII favoured grey with black stitching, and owned dozens of pairs of such gloves. Other accessories included the walking stick, which could be made from a wide variety of materials, including malacca cane, bamboo, and various woods, or replaced with a tightly rolled umbrella. While many men wore pocket watches with a chain, the wristwatch was emerging as a practical option for the sporting or military man.



A typical man's boot dating from the early 1910s. Leather with cloth upper and button fastenings.



By 1910 the bowler hat and matched three-piece suit were widely worn by men at all social levels. Trousers with turn-ups were a relatively new detail. Drawn by Edouard Touraine for *Le Rire*, 1910.

George V, who became king in 1910, was just as rigorous as his father where dress was concerned, although his tastes were old-fashioned and unadventurous. He was never to share Edward's sartorial reputation or influence. In line with the rigidity of the new monarch's personal style, menswear underwent no dramatic changes in the 1910s. However, the general look became cleaner and sharper, with minimal ostentation. The completely coordinated lounge suit was almost universally worn as daywear by young and many middle-aged men, except for the most formal occasions. The bowler hat also replaced the top hat as the most commonly seen headgear, and was often black, to coordinate with the suit, but could be made in lighter colours, such as grey or fawn, to match informal suits. The Scottish socialist Keir Hardie famously owned neither top hat nor frock coat. When he became the first independent Labour member of Parliament to be elected, he wore a black lounge suit and trilby hat to demonstrate how his sympathies lay with the ordinary man on the street, rather than with his universally frock-coated and top-hat-wearing fellow MPs.



The plain black lounge suit and sober tie were virtually a uniform for the working professional man in the early 1910s. This young man, Riccardo, was photographed in 1912.

The constancy of men's fashion during the 1910s owed much to the First World War, which effectively stalled menswear for almost half a decade while the majority of men went into uniformed military service between 1914 and 1919. It would not be until after the war – when George V's eldest son, Edward, Prince of Wales, emerged as the ultimate eligible bachelor – that menswear began actively evolving once again. Young, dashing, and renowned for his elegance, the future Edward VIII was certainly his grandfather's grandson in more ways than one.



Lourain 12

Danse de l'Ours (The Grizzly Bear), Edouard Touraine, 1912. For the fashionable early 1910s female, her modishly narrow skirts were all too often a hindrance preventing her from participating in the latest ballroom dances. The Grizzly Bear was part of a menagerie of popular dances named after animals, including the Bunny Hug, the Camel Walk, the Kangaroo Hop and even the Lamé Duck.

1910–14: HOBBLE SKIRTS AND EXOTICISM

PERHAPS the most defining garment of the early 1910s was the hobble skirt, which appeared towards the end of Edward VII's reign. The concept of a skirt that actually inhibited walking was irresistible to satirists and comedians, inspiring hundreds of cartoons and comic postcards. However, it offered an undeniably elegant silhouette that contrasted with the voluminous petticoats of a decade earlier. The slender skirt and attractively detailed blouse were the foundation of early 1910s fashion, and, a century later, rising hems notwithstanding, still represent a classic womenswear look that has never really gone out of style.

As with any extreme fashion, many claims and stories have sprung up around the origins of the hobble skirt. Poiret personally claimed responsibility, boasting 'Yes, I freed the bust, but I shackled the legs.' One of the most pervasive myths is how the style originated in mid-air in 1908, when Mrs Berg, the first woman to ride in an aeroplane, tied a cord about her petticoats to prevent their blowing about in the sky. The sight of her tottering about in her tied skirts afterwards was alleged to have inspired an unidentified Parisian designer to create the first hobble skirt. However, given that skirts had been rapidly narrowing in fullness since the mid-1900s, the hobble represented the natural outcome of this evolutionary process. A slim skirt, not necessarily hobble-hemmed, was an economical option on a limited income as it required less material and was versatile enough to dress up or down, with blouses, bodices, jackets and coats to vary the look.

One of the great ironies of the hobble skirt was that it emerged at a time when women were becoming increasingly active. The sweeping skirts of the previous decade had at least permitted ease of walking, which, at its

narrowest, the hobble certainly did not. It severely limited the fashionable woman's ability to hurry for a bus, climb into an automobile or a carriage, or even – had she strong enough suffragist leanings – participate in a 'Votes for Women' march. Even more ironically, many smart women could not place their feet sufficiently far apart to properly perform the new and increasingly popular ballroom dances. Such dances, as demonstrated to great acclaim by Vernon and Irene Castle, included the tango, the Turkey Trot, and the Bunny Hug (which in 1914 was renamed the Foxtrot). A September 1910 editorial stated:

Narrow in its confines, uncomfortable in the wearing, because of its pull-back effect, the women who wear them, so it is reported, have discovered that not only is free locomotion well nigh impossible, but if the wearer even makes use of her natural step when encased in one of these new freak gowns there is danger of a stumble and fall when least expected, and there is the added excitement of practically tearing the skirt asunder if it be fashioned of light material, unless a mincing gait is assumed.



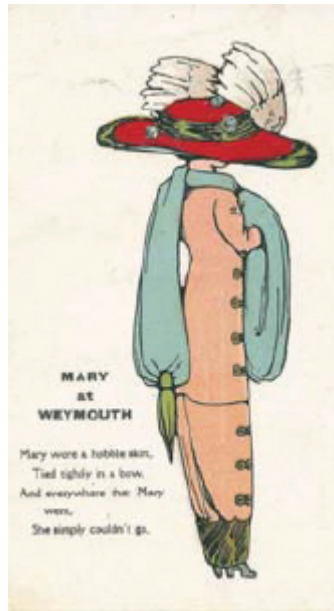
The fancy blouse or bodice worn with a plain skirt was widespread. This unknown woman, photographed c. 1910, wears an elaborately tucked silk and lace waist with her dark skirt.

This highly critical article went on to describe a new 'feminine piece of torture' designed to prevent such accidents, the 'hobble-garter', which comprised two garters fastened below the knee and connected by a short strap of elastic webbing. It is not clear how many women, if any, actually

went to the lengths of wearing such an extraordinary article. However, wearers of the ‘freak gowns’ were far from devoid of humour, with several reports (and an illustration in *The Illustrated London News*) of ladies thus dressed laughingly participating in ‘hobble skirt races’. Designers and dressmakers came up with solutions to make the hobble less restrictive. Paquin concealed pleats in her designs, and others, including Lucile, offered slit or wrapped skirts. Despite these concessions, many women – particularly older women, those with conservative tastes, and those who valued the ability to walk unimpeded – chose to retain moderately full skirts, with space for at least one petticoat underneath.



The hobble skirt was almost certainly not invented in mid-air, but this image of two fashionable women chatting up an aviator shows how large hats, parasols and handbags helped counterbalance its extreme slimness. Drawn by Gris for *Le Rire*, 1910.



The hobble skirt provided inspiration for hundreds, if not thousands, of comic postcards making fun of the new mode.



‘A “Sack Race” for Wearers of “Hobble” Skirts: Ladies in “Tube” Frocks Engaged in a Speed Contest.’ Drawn by René Lelong and published in *The Illustrated London News*, 13 August 1910.



Many women wore dresses with moderately full, yet slim skirts in preference to the restrictive hobble. This girl, Maud, wears a printed muslin dress, 1915.

The reduction in layers of clothing worn by the fashionable woman led to criticism, particularly when combined with details such as slit skirts and the emergence of the low V-neckline in day bodices and blouses. The latter, though often filled with an embroidered lawn or lace modesty piece, was considered risqué, and sometimes disapprovingly called a ‘pneumonia neckline’. Increasing exposure occurred in other ways too. By the early 1910s, some gowns had become so revealing that the phrase ‘x-ray dress’ was coined to describe particularly diaphanous toilettes. The term even reached the highest levels of Paris fashion. In May 1914, Jean-Philippe Worth recalled a client’s objections to the tissue-thin taffeta that lined her new dress, commenting that had her wish for an even sheerer, thinner lining been granted, the effect would have been that of an x-ray dress. Another colloquialism, ‘peekaboo’, had been used since the early 1900s for dresses and blouses made with eyelet embroidery or lace insertions. Although more widely worn and less controversial than ‘x-ray dresses’, the idea that bare flesh might be glimpsed through an eyelet was titillating, even more so with less space for layers of underclothing to thwart the would-be voyeur. The

lace-trimmed and embroidered white lingerie dress remained a popular, widely worn summer option.



Many V-necklines on day dresses were quite moderate, as on this dress worn by the actress Gladys Cooper, c. 1912

Undergarments changed little in the early 1910s. Fashionable underwear often consisted of a pair of combinations or a camisole and knee-length drawers worn under one of the new slim-line corsets introduced at the end of the previous decade. Tango knickers were a newly introduced alternative to drawers, comprising a length of fabric doubled up, the ends forming the waistband, and part of the side seams left open to accommodate the legs. A full petticoat or waist slip might be worn under a fuller skirt. The fashion for a naturally slim figure meant that increasing numbers of women were daring to leave off their corsets if they were lucky enough to be the right shape already. To counterbalance the narrow hem, some hobble skirts were made with draped hips, creating a peg-top silhouette, and the tunic-length overskirt was a very popular detail. Such details allowed fashions to accommodate and camouflage slightly more curvaceous figures.



A dramatic Lucile lace and chiffon evening ensemble for spring 1914. A diaphanously clinging gown is worn beneath a sheer coat trimmed with exaggeratedly large box-pleated ruffles. Using transparent fabrics could lead to such outfits being called 'x-ray', even if not all that much was actually revealed. Note the tango shoes laced up the ankle and lower leg.

Ironically, given how slender and high-waisted the dresses beneath were, many fashionable coats, mantles and jackets were extremely loosely cut and fitted, often emphasising a very low waistline. While the fitted coat and jacket remained very stylish, the smartest costumes had slightly outsize tunic-length jackets, whilst sumptuous velvet and brocade evening coats enveloped their wearers like cocoons. Kimono-style cuts were popular, a continuation of the exotic influences which had become increasingly widespread in the later 1900s. Many wealthy women had furs in their wardrobes, such as silver fox stoles and sable coats, or chinchilla as a trimming to brocade evening wraps. Silver fox, a rare natural mutation that

had not yet been successfully bred by commercial furriers, was particularly coveted and valuable. During the First World War, Worth offered three silver fox pelts to a wealthy American client for the pre-war price of \$37,500 (equivalent to just under \$885,000 – around £570,000 – in 2013). Even cheaper but nice-quality fur coats – made from musquash or nutria – were beyond the means of many at prices roughly equivalent to £1,700 to £2,000 in 2013. The notorious fox fur, complete with glass-eyed mask and dangling paws and tail also came to prominence during the early 1910s, although would not become ubiquitous for another two decades.



Roller-skating in 1913. In addition to sumptuous furs by Revillon, a selection of fashionable hats is seen here, including several forerunners of the 1920s cloche hat, made from draped and wrapped fabric, and more typical wide-brimmed hats. Drawn by J. Simont.

Accessories became even more important as a result of the slimmer fashions. Large, capacious handbags replaced pockets, and helped counterbalance the narrower skirts. In cooler weather, large muffs with concealed compartments served the same purpose. The ankle-length skirts focused attention on the feet, making silk stockings and smart, Louis-heeled footwear an even greater necessity. Although buckles, bows and decoration

on the toe were more visible, elegant day footwear – as in the previous decade – was not intended to demand attention. Evening shoes were often made of metallic kid or brocade. A popular new style was the ‘tango sandal’, a pump with ribbon lacings over the exposed foot, which could either be tied in a bow, or criss-crossed up the increasingly visible lower leg.

The large hats from the later 1900s gradually reduced in size, if not dramatic impact. Generally, they were often simple in form with bold embellishment such as a large striped silk bow, one or two superb feathers, or a mass of artificial flowers encircling the crown. Types of trimmings were rarely intermingled, and hats continued to fit the head securely, with hatpins helping guarantee this. Owing to the size of the hats they secured, hatpins had become extremely large, to the extent that they could be considered offensive weapons. In 1913 Olive Smith, a London typist, was successfully sued for damages after her protruding hatpin accidentally stabbed another passenger in the face on an omnibus. Her case was not helped by the judge noticing that there was no guard on her hatpin in the courtroom. A forerunner of the head-hugging cloche hat emerged in the early 1910s. Unlike its better-known 1920s version, it was made large enough to accommodate fuller hairstyles. By 1913–14 fashionable hats were often quite small and jaunty, either with a high crown and small or turned-up brim, or shallower with a wide brim.



Woman's shoes in bronzed kid leather with bead embroidery, American, c.1910.



This evening shoe in the tango style was made by Bally in the early 1910s. Dark purple silk in a traditional Chinese pattern with gold metallic lamé ribbon laces.



The contrast between the discreet blue day dress for town wear and the elaborately draped evening wear in rich brocade with fur and tassel trimmings is clearly illustrated in this 1913 drawing by André Edouard Marty of outfits by Premet, Paris.



‘Trois Robes Nouvelles’ by Georges Lepape, published January 1913 in the *Gazette du Bon Ton*. The extreme simplicity of Poiret’s boldly coloured and patterned tubular gowns and exotic turbans was in stark contrast to the intricately decorated ensembles and elaborate hairstyles favoured by many fashionable women. Note the dancer in the background wearing yellow harem pants.

Evening dress in the early 1910s underwent a key change. Prior to the early 1910s, many evening dresses were essentially low-cut equivalents of fashionable day dress, with the same fabrics and trimmings often found in both. Although the basic silhouettes remained the same, day dress became simpler and more practical, whilst formal gowns used more adventurous silhouettes, fancier decoration, and details not normally found in daywear such as whimsical pointed trains and floating scarf drapery. While classic silk and satin fabrics could serve for both day and evening, richer brocades, metallic lamés and delicate chiffons were clearly intended for evening wear, and muted cotton and woollen fabrics usually denoted daywear. Although

cross-over remained between the two, particularly when dressing to attend events such as the races, the clear separation of day dress from evening gown would remain well-established through the twentieth century.

By the early 1910s, Poiret had reached the height of his influence. His explicit passion for exoticism was underscored by the replicas of antique Indian turbans that he placed on his clients' heads. Along with making clothes directly based on kimonos and traditional robes, he reclaimed pre-existing ethnic garments, lightly altering them to render them fashionable. One such evening coat, remodelled from an Uzbek robe in scarlet and gold silk brocade, is now in the Gallery of Costume in Manchester. The culmination of his passion for the exotic came in 1911, when Poiret threw an extravagant fancy-dress ball, 'The 1002nd Night', inspired by *A Thousand and One Nights*. To attend the spectacular event – which featured costumed jugglers and magicians, fireworks, live parrots and monkeys, and Poiret himself as a whip-wielding sultan ruling over a seraglio of model girls – guests were expected to dress the part. Those who arrived in a Japanese kimono thrown over standard evening clothes were ordered to change immediately into vibrantly coloured, jewel-encrusted Eastern-inspired garments provided (and designed) by the host, or be sent home. The approved costumes featured lavish turbans, metallic fabrics, wired tunic hems, and harem pants. These same details appeared in Poiret's own designs, with many going on to feature prominently in fashionable evening wear.

There was even a brief fad for harem pants seen peeping out from beneath the hems of day and evening skirts. The harem pants craze was more enthusiastically taken up by satirists and cartoonists than by fashionable women, and harem pants were unsurprisingly short-lived as a day-to-day garment, though a popular option for fancy-dress balls. The previous year, Jeanne Margaine-Lacroix had cautiously attempted to introduce divided skirts or *jupe-culottes* for day wear. Her wide-legged trousers were worn beneath long apron overskirts, with only a few inches of leg showing beneath the hem, which gave the initial impression that her models were wearing fashionable slim gowns. Despite Margaine-Lacroix's discreet attempt to introduce a new practical element to the feminine wardrobe, *jupe-culottes* were even less successful than harem pants. Apart from the leggings worn beneath riding habits (which were almost never alluded to) it would be at least another decade before trousers began to be

taken seriously as a feasible part of the fashionable woman's wardrobe, and at least another generation before the idea of the woman in trousers met with wider acceptance.



This comic postcard, c. 1911, compares an elegantly dressed woman in a purple costume with pink harem pants to a small child with her knickers falling down.

Although the deliberately fantastical Poiret style did not meet with universal approval, it was very much in demand. Many designers produced their own versions of his gowns, and dressmakers offered to make imitations of high-end dresses for their clients. Elizabeth Handley-Seymour, who set up her establishment in London in 1910, offered replicas of Paris designs to her highly fashion-conscious clients alongside her own work. Together with gowns by established names such as Worth and the Callot Soeurs, these designs included a number of Poiret models, including a close replica of the famous 'Sorbet' dress of 1913. With its short, lampshade-skirted, kimono-sleeved tunic scattered with stylised floral motifs, and draped wrap-skirt, Sorbet epitomises Poiret's focus on colour, form and decoration rather than refined dressmaking or sophisticated construction. In addition to this, it is often described as the first couture dress made to be worn without a corset, although Margaine-Lacroix's work and Poiret's 1908

robe de minute, an unstructured rectangular evening gown foreshadowing the 1920s chemise dress, both challenge this claim.

The question of copying was not without its moral issues. Since the late nineteenth century it had not been unusual for wealthy but thrifty clients to buy a few couture gowns in Paris, and then have their personal dressmakers create multiple copies in alternative fabrics. However, there was a darker side to copying, particularly in the United States where unscrupulous manufacturers took advantage of the distance from Paris, as Poiret found on a visit in 1913. It was one thing for a skilled dressmaker to reproduce your designs for individual clients – particularly if they could not make it to Paris for fittings – but discovering shops stocked with mediocre ready-made garments with counterfeit labels bearing your own name was intolerable. Upon returning to France, Poiret started a group addressing the problem of commercial piracy, with the backing and support of fellow couturiers who shared his outrage at having the prestige of their names so abused.

It was unsurprising, though, that Poiret had been singled out for this dubious honour. By April 1914, the so-called ‘king of fashion’ represented such elegance that Handley-Seymour updated one of his designs, originally created in 1911, for Mrs Patrick Campbell to wear as Eliza Doolittle in the London premiere of George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. To mark the character’s transformation from Cockney flower-seller to the epitome of well-spoken sophistication, Eliza’s final costume was a pale grey hobble-skirted dress with low V-neckline and graphic black accents, its swinging jacket revealing a black lining boldly patterned with pink roses. She wore a jaunty black toque trimmed with an upstanding spray of feathers. With its flashes of vibrant colour and natural silhouette, the costume also represented the conclusion of the dramatic changes in fashion that had taken place since Edward ascended the throne in 1901.



A young woman in a sailor-collared dress with full 'war crinoline' skirt gazes at a photograph of a soldier. Chéri Hérrouard for *La Vie Parisienne*, October 1916.

EPILOGUE: THE FIRST WORLD WAR

WHEN WAR BROKE OUT at the end of July 1914, many people expected it to be of short duration. However, the First World War consumed the rest of the decade, effectively ending the Edwardian era. Although conflict officially ceased on 11 November 1918, post-war treaties (including the 1919 Treaty of Versailles) continued being signed until 1921.

With many men at war, women assumed their jobs, becoming train guards, shipyard workers, gamekeepers and bus conductors, among other roles. In many cases, knickerbockers and overalls were essential workwear, with Women's Land Army recruits advised that, despite their mannish trousers, they were 'English girls who expect chivalry and respect from everyone they meet'. Where skirts were worn, they were fuller, and shortened to mid-calf length. Alongside the modified skirts, the need for upper body movement led to the widespread popularity of loosely belted coats, cardigan jackets, and lightly fitted blouses. Such practical developments swiftly and inevitably entered the fashionable wardrobe, replacing full-length skirts and tight bodices, and guaranteeing that everyday hemlines would rarely touch the ground again.

For the winter of 1915–16 Handley-Seymour offered a fashionable 'three-piece suit' based on a Doucet design. With its full, swinging mid-calf skirt and flared asymmetrically belted coat, it contrasted with the slender silhouette of 1914. The fuller skirts, although not necessarily worn over hoops, were called 'war crinolines'. The mode was simultaneously declared practical and patriotic, as the sight of prettily dressed women was expected to boost the morale of soldiers on leave. Many female couturiers continued working during the war, including Handley-Seymour, Lucile, and in Paris Jenny and the Callot Soeurs. Where male couturiers such as Jean-Philippe

Worth carried on, they were usually too old for active service, although his nephews Jean-Charles (who became Worth's head designer after the war) and Jacques served. Poiret was conscripted as a military tailor, closing his house from 1915 to 1919.

Fabric and clothing were not rationed, despite inevitable shortages. With many families losing relatives to the war, subdued black or drab-coloured clothing expressed national solidarity – that, and bright colours were scarcer following the redirection of dye-making chemicals to the manufacture of explosives. By 1918, 70 per cent of wool produced in the United Kingdom was reserved for official use, whilst in the United States, where wool was even scarcer, women were encouraged to view silk as a patriotic alternative. In Britain, an unsuccessful attempt was made to introduce the 'National Standard Dress', a silk garment designed to serve for any occasion – day or evening dress, tea-gown and even nightdress.



The 'Women on War Work' series of collectable cards was published in 1916 by Carreras Limited for distribution in packets of Black Cat cigarettes. They showed women employed in fifty different professions that had traditionally been filled by men before the war.

Surviving photographs and garments show that, despite the short-lived war crinoline fashion, many women wore simplified dresses with shorter, comparatively straight-cut skirts and blouse and skirt ensembles. Such relatively unshaped garments were comfortable, practical, and easy to wear in a way that preceding fashions had not always been. The final stamp of approval came from successful post-war Paris designers, including Gabrielle Chanel and two ex-army captains, Edward Molyneux and Jean Patou. Rather than revisiting pre-war modes, their modern garments were based on the new silhouettes. The post-war woman, in many ways, was considerably different to her Edwardian precursor.



Embroidered white cotton summer dress worn by an unknown woman during the First World War.



Two fashionable Parisiennes of 1918. The short hairstyles and relatively simple outfits, consisting of a pink blouse and plaid skirt and a straight-cut blue and black chemise dress belted under the bust, foreshadow early 1920s fashion. Drawn by Suzanne Meunier.

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PLACES TO VISIT

The following list is far from exhaustive, but lists a few institutions that regularly display historic dress and/or have dedicated fashion galleries. Many museums and institutions have at least a few examples of Edwardian clothing, although these may not always be on display. It is often possible to arrange for a study appointment or private viewing of this material, if you give enough notice.

UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND

The Bowes Museum, Newgate, Barnard Castle, County Durham, DL12 8NP. Website:

www.thebowesmuseum.org.uk

Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, Royal Pavilion Gardens, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 1EE.

Website: www.brighton-hove-rpml.org.uk

Chertsey Museum, Runnymede, Surrey. Website: www.chertseymuseum.org/Fashion

Fashion Museum, Assembly Rooms, Bennett Street, Bath, BA1 2QH. Website:

www.fashionmuseum.co.uk

Gallery of Costume, Platt Hall, Rusholme, Manchester, M14 5LL. Website:

www.manchestergalleries.org/our-other-venues/platt-hall-gallery-of-costume/

Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Market Street, Preston, Lancashire, PR1 2PP. Website:

www.harrismuseum.org.uk

Killerton House, Broadclyst, Exeter, Devon, EX5 3LE. Website: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/killerton/

Museum of London, 150 London Wall, London, Greater London, EC2Y 5HN. Website:

www.museumoflondon.org.uk

National Museum of Ireland: Decorative Arts & History, Collins Barracks, Dublin. Website:

www.museum.ie/en/exhibition/the-way-we-wore.aspx

Snibston Discovery Centre, Ashby Road, Coalville, Leicestershire, LE67 3LN. Website:

www.snibston.org.uk

Victoria & Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 2RL. Website: www.vam.ac.uk

Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast, County Antrim, BT9 5AB. Website: www.nmni.com/um

UNITED STATES AND CANADA

The Bata Shoe Museum, 327 Bloor St W, Toronto, ON M5S 1W7. Website:

www.batashoemuseum.ca

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60614. Website:

www.chicagohistory.org/research/aboutcollection/costumes

Fashion History Museum, Southworks, 64 Grand Avenue South Cambridge, Ontario, N1S 2L8.

Website: www.fashionhistorymuseum.com

FIDM Museum & Galleries, 919 South Grand Avenue, Suite 250, Los Angeles, CA 90015. Website:

www.fidmmuseum.org

Kent State University Museum, 515 Hilltop Dr, Kent, OH 44242. Website: www.kent.edu/museum/

McCord Museum, 690 Sherbrooke St, W, Montreal, QC H3A 1E9. Website: [www.mccord-](http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/)

[museum.qc.ca/en/](http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 5th Ave., New York, NY 10028. Website:

www.metmuseum.org

The Museum at FIT, The Fashion Institute of Technology, Seventh Avenue at 27 Street, New York

City, NY 10001-5992. Website: www.fitnyc.edu/13666.asp

The Museum of the City of New York, 1220 5th Ave, Manhattan, NY 10029. Website: www.mcny.org

Museum of Costume and Textiles, 363, rue de la Commune Est, Montréal, Québec, H2Y 1J3.

Website: www.mctq.org/en/

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Avenue of the Arts, 465 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115.

Website: www.mfa.org/collections/textiles-and-fashion-arts

The Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queens Park, Toronto, ON M5S 2C6. Website:

www.rom.on.ca/en/collections-research/centres-of-discovery/textiles-fashions

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COVER IMAGE

Front cover of *Good Housekeeping*, October 1912.

DEDICATION

To the memory of the magnificent, redoubtable Atherton Harrison, a truly splendid lady who believed in me from our very first meeting.

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