READING MUSEUM SERVICE

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

NINETEEN FORTIES CHILDREN'S CLOTHING H282

Girl's Party Dress



This child's party dress is made of rayon, an extremely popular fabric in the 1940s. Rayon was the first manufactured fibre. It was developed in France in the 1890s and was originally known as 'artificial silk' or 'wood silk'. The name rayon was created in 1924. Unlike most man-made fibres, rayon is not synthetic. It is made from wood pulp, a naturally occurring, cellulose-based raw material. As a result, rayon's properties are more similar to those of other cellulose-based natural fibres, such as cotton or linen, than synthetic fibres such as nylon or polyester. Rayon absorbs moisture and is therefore, breathable, comfortable to wear, and easily dyed in vivid colours. Another advantage is that, unlike nylon, it does not build up static electricity. Rayon fibres are still commonly used by clothes manufacturers today.

Boy's Bathing Trunks



These are made of wool, which would become heavy and uncomfortable in the water. Until the 1940s boy's and men's bathing suits were often made to cover the upper body as well as the lower and had straps over the shoulders similar to women's one piece bathing suits. These shorts were made by Morley, a Nottingham firm that specialised in knitwear.

Boy's Knitted Pullover



This pullover is made of 'virgin wool'- wool which has come straight from the sheep and not been previously involved in the manufacture of any other garment. Nowadays, in Britain, people tend to expect this of all their clothing, but this was not always the case. The war made it almost impossible to import cloth and other materials from abroad and the clothing manufacturers in Britain had more important items to make for the war effort, such as uniforms, parachutes and other items needed in the battle against Germany. Therefore during the war and for several years afterwards people and manufacturers took to recycling clothes out of necessity. Sometimes this involved unravelling clothes and reusing the wool to make other items. With so much recycled material being sold during and after the war, the fact that something was brand new became a valued selling point. 'Virgin Wool' became a signifier of something luxurious and good. The colours on this pullover were especially fashionable following the war. Can you think why?

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Baby's Petticoat



Long petticoats were worn beneath and over day gowns. This petticoat is made from winceyette. Winceyette, sometimes also referred to as flannelette, is a lightweight fabric, usually made of cotton that is raised on one or both sides to make it soft to the touch. It was commonly used for baby nightwear until the development of soft and stretchy man-made textiles, which could be used for garments like babygros.

Baby's Nightgown



This nightgown is made of cotton. As such it would have allowed the baby's skin to breathe through the fabric and would have also been easy to wash. Long garments like this could be tucked under a baby's feet in a pram to keep them warm.

Baby's Vest



This tiny vest for a new born baby is made of wool. Being warm and washable, wool was often used for baby's vests. This vest was commercially produced in Britain by a company called Kosiclad. Notice how plain this vest is compared to modern baby clothes. Why do you think this is the case?

Baby's Dress



This baby's dress has been hand made with great care and skill. Due to clothes rationing during the war and post war years, many people frequently made their own clothes, often by recycling other garments. It is a similar style to dresses manufactured today.

Boy's Grey Socks



Ankle socks were mainly worn by small boys. Older boys wore longer socks, usually made of grey wool, which reached to just below the knee.

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Girl's White Socks

Ankle socks were popular with girls of all ages. This pair is cotton, with a coloured, patterned border.



Combined Cadet Force Collar and Hatband



The Combined Cadet Force (CCF) is a Ministry of Defence sponsored youth organisation in the United Kingdom. The CCF came into being in 1948, but was born out of the Army Cadet Force, one of the oldest youth organisations in the country, dating back to 1859-60. The aim of the CCF is to provide a disciplined organisation within the school, enabling pupils to exercise responsibility and leadership and to learn from the services how these qualities can best be developed. Cadet corps were extremely popular with schoolchildren during the war and in the post-war years.

Boy's Blue Wool Shorts

These shorts are of a traditional pattern, which continued from the 1920s until recent years. They are made of pure wool, with a cotton lining. Boys wore shorts until an older age than nowadays and long trousers for small boys were rarely worn.



Girl's Gym Shorts

These shorts would have been worn by a girl for PE lessons. They might also have been worn outside school in the summer of the later and immediate post war periods, as fashion clothing was not readily available. How do they compare to shorts that you wear for PE today? Why do you think they are different?



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Boy Scout's Shorts

These khaki shorts belonged to a member of the Boy Scout movement. Scouting is a worldwide youth organisation which aims to develop young people physically, spiritually and mentally so that they participate constructively in society. Scout activities usually have a practical emphasis and take place in the outdoors. The Scout Movement was founded in 1907 by Robert Baden-Powell, a retired Lieutenant General in the British Army. The original uniform consisted of a khaki shirt, shorts and a broad-brimmed hat. Baden-Powell himself wore shorts instead of trousers, so that the young would identify with him better. Nowadays uniforms are frequently blue, orange, red or green, and shorts are often replaced by long trousers. These shorts are made of hard wearing cotton to make them last for as long as possible.

