Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

READING MUSEUM SERVICE

VICTORIAN LADY H311

Two-Piece Costume



This costume dates from about 1890. The cloth is known as pure wool barathea. In the 1870s bustles were popular. A bustle is a framework which is worn under a skirt to increase its fullness. By 1890 this contraption was no longer fashionable. A plainer, more natural shape began to appear, which can be seen in the skirt in this box. Corseting, on the other hand, which pulled the stomach in and created a small waist, continued to be widely used.

The Bodice. The sleeves of this bodice are pleated at the top and are gathered into a tight wrist-band. This kind of sleeve was popularly known as a 'bishop's sleeve'. Although a corset would have been worn under this garment, there are also metal stays stitched into the waist to create a slim body shape. In addition, there is a belt on the inside of the waist to pull the bodice in as tightly as possible. The false bolero front, with its decorative appliqué decorations, gives an illusion of a three-piece effect. Although the bodice is entirely black the contrast between the matt wool and the glossy silk, along with the complex stitching and decorations, creates a very rich garment.

The Skirt. The skirt is cut to produce the fashionable trumpet-shape and is longer at the back than the front, giving a slight train effect. If you look closely at the braid on the hem you will see that it is brush-edged. This was to protect the bottom of the skirt from dust and dirt. The front fastening of the skirt conceals a pocket. Although this dress would have been worn high up on a waist that had been pulled in by a corset the waist size is only 61cm (24 inches) - very tiny! Bands of glossy silk with appliqué decorations add interest to the skirt, similar to the effect created on the bodice.

Cape



Short capes were fashionable at various times in the Victorian age. This example is of brocaded silk with a satin finish design. The padded silk lining would add warmth. The inside pocket appears to be home-made and not part of the original construction. The fashionable high neck is decorated with a frill of ribbon bound net-like cloth called organza. A dash of subdued colour is provided by the neck lining. The cape is closed by hook-and-eye fastenings.

Reading Borough Council

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Bonnet

Small decorative bonnets were fashionable in the 1880s and 1890s. This little bonnet is designed to be worn at the front of the head, with the 'widow's peak' at the centre of the forehead. It is fastened by tying the ribbons under the chin. The wire frame of the bonnet is trimmed with black velvet and the top is decorated with a spray of artificial flowers, jet beads, silk and velvet ribbons.



Human Hair Bracelet

Jewellery incorporating human hair was very popular in the nineteenth century. Some hair was plaited or arranged in plant-like forms and set into brooches, watch-chain decorations and earrings. This kind of jewellery sometimes used hair from the head of a dead relative. Hair jewellery was also crafted as love tokens from sweethearts, family members and cherished friends. Rings sometimes had hidden compartments for a sweetheart's hair. This bracelet joins the end of the braided hair with a small gold heart, which suggests it may have been a love token rather than a mourning token.



Netted Purse

This is made from silk and metallic thread and follows a pattern popular in the Victorian period. Ladies sometimes knitted their own purses and joined them to a commercially produced, hinged frame.



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Buttonhook



A buttonhook was an essential part of the dressing table equipment of the Victorian lady. Victorian dresses, gloves, boots and shoes were often fastened by long rows of small buttons. Fastening them all up could take quite a while and be difficult, particularly if the buttonholes were quite small and tight. A buttonhook made the process easier. The hook was pushed through the buttonhole and latched around the button which could then be tugged through the buttonhole. Such a device was particularly useful to help put on shoes and boots.

Whalebone Stay

Strips of whalebone (baleen) like this were used to make stays, which were inserted into corsets and other articles of clothing to stiffen them and help pull the wearers body into an upright and slim posture. In the Victorian period men as well as women sometimes wore a corset to achieve a fashionably slender shape.

In 1881 the Rational Dress Society was founded in London. Its aims were to 'protest against the introduction of any fashion in dress that either deforms the figure, impedes the movements of the body, or in any way tends to injure the health. It protests against the wearing of tightly-fitting corsets; of high-heeled shoes; of heavily-weighted skirts, as rendering healthy exercise almost impossible; and of all tie down cloaks or other garments impeding on the movements of the arms.'

Reformers introduced the Emancipation Bodice as an alternative to corsets. This was a tight sleeveless vest, buttoning up the front, with rows of buttons along the bottom to which could be attached petticoats and skirt. However a slender figure achieved through wearing a corset continued to be popular until the First World War.

Hat Pin

Hat pins were used to anchor the hat firmly to the hair. Very small hats such as the one in this collection tended to slip out of place and larger hats needed to be fastened in place to stop them blowing away in breezy weather. As hats became larger hat pins became longer and more ornate.

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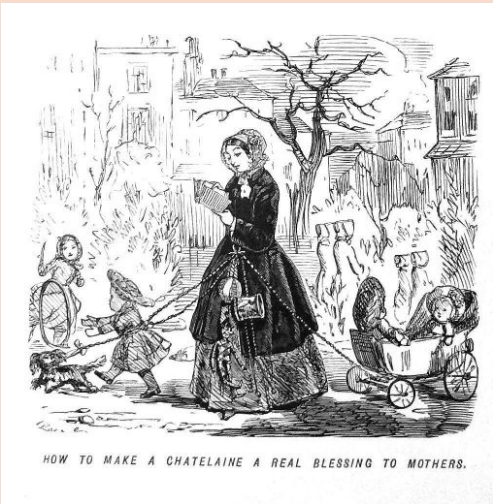
Chatelaine



The chatelaine was named after the mistress of a French castle in the Medieval period. The mistress was entrusted with keys and other essential household items. During the Victorian period there was a revival of interest in all things medieval and this was reflected in everything from architectural styles to clothes. The Victorian building which houses the Museum of Reading was built in the 1880s and is in a Victorian neo-Gothic style which was meant to suggest the decorations on a medieval cathedral. Before about 1840 museums tended to be built so that they looked like a Greek temple, for example the British Museum in London.

This item is a Victorian variation of the chains which medieval women wore around their waist and on which keys were hung. Such chatelaines became popular in the mid-nineteenth century, although most of them didn't actually include keys. This example has, from left to right, a magnifying glass, a pair of scissors, a pencil, a tape measure inside a ball, an ivory thimble in a bucket and a snake-skin purse. Other examples have letter-openers, pin-cushions, pen-knives and even small bottles of smelling salts.

Chatelaines went out of fashion in 1860s, but made a come-back in the 1890s when the Princess of Wales is said to have worn one. The cartoons below make fun of the fashion for wearing chatelaines. They appeared in the humorous magazine *Punch* in 1840s.



HOW TO MAKE A CHATELAINE A REAL BLESSING TO MOTHERS.



THE CHATELAINE; A REALLY USEFUL PRESENT.

Laura. "OH, LOOK, MA' DEAR; SEE WHAT A LOVE OF A CHATELAINE EDWARD HAS GIVEN ME."

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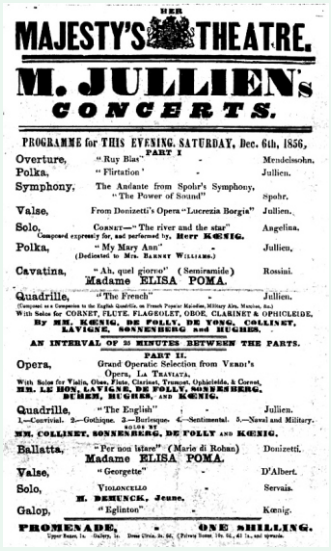
VICTORIAN LADY H311

Sheet Music

In the days before television families made their own entertainment. An ability to play a musical instrument was common across all social classes. This song, 'Minnie', published in 1855, is typical of the sentimental songs of the mid-century. Anna Thillon was an English soprano who married, aged 15, her voice teacher, Claude Thomas Thillon, conductor of the Le Havre Philharmonic Society and also first violinist at Jullien's Concerts. Her singing debut in 1838 took place in Paris and she retired in 1855. She is said to have introduced to England the fashion of wearing hair in a thick cluster of short ringlets on each side of the head. The composer George Linley produced many similar songs. He was born in 1798 and died in 1865. He composed some songs in collaboration with Claude Thomas Thillon.



'Minnie' was published by Messrs Jullien. Louis Jullien (1812 **to** 1860) was a Frenchman who was based in England between 1838 and 1859. He effectively created the promenade concert in England. His concert programmes mingled classical fare - overtures and movements from symphonies, at times entire symphonies - with operatic selections, instrumental solos and dances, quadrilles, gallops and waltzes. Jullien composed, compiled or arranged many of the popular items himself. He was **a** great showman and conducted Beethoven with **a** jewelled baton. Miscalculations and bad luck led Jullien to bankruptcy several times, and ultimately to mental instability, but his mix of lighter music with the classics, coupled with his low admission charges, in particular for his promenaders, helped to bring orchestral music to a wider audience.


HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.
M. JULLIEN'S CONCERTS.
PROGRAMME for THIS EVENING, SATURDAY, Dec. 6th, 1856,
PART I
Overture, "Ruy Blas" - Mendelsohn.
Polka, "Flirtation" - Jullien.
Symphony, The Andante from Spohr's Symphony, "The Power of Sound" Spohr.
Valse, From Donizetti's Opera "Lucrezia Borgia" Jullien.
Solo, Cornet—"The river and the star" Angelina.
Polka, "My Mary Ann" - Jullien.
Cavatina, "Ah, quel giorno" (Semiramide) Rossini.
Madame ELISA POMA.
Quadrille, "The French" - Jullien.
By MR. KŒNIG, DE FOLLY, DE TONG, COLLINET, LAVIGNE, SONNENBERG and HUGHES.
AN INTERVAL OF 20 MINUTES BETWEEN THE PARTS.
PART II.
Opera, Grand Operatic Selection from VERDI'S Opera, LA TRAVIATA;
MR. LE HON, LAVIGNE, DE FOLLY, SONNENBERG, HUGHES, and KŒNIG.
Quadrille, "The English" - Jullien.
1.—Convivial. 2.—Gothique. 3.—Burlesque. 4.—Sentimental. 5.—Naval and Military.
MM. COLLINET, SONNENBERG, DE FOLLY and KŒNIG.
Ballatta, "Per non istare" (Marie di Rohan) Donizetti.
Madame ELISA POMA.
Valse, "Georgette" - D'Albert.
Solo, Violoncello - Servais.
M. BERWICK, Jeune.
Galop, "Eglinton" - Kœnig.
PROMENADE, - ONE SHILLING.



Above right: a poster for a Louis Julien concert.
Below right: the cover of another song by Louis Julien, 'Say Yes'