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LATE VICTORIAN/ EDWARDIAN CLOTHING H92/A

Clothing styles changed dramatically between 1850 and 1910.

In the 1850s women's skirts were very wide, being supported by crinolines - stiffened petticoats or rigid skirt-shaped structures of steel designed to maintain the dress in the required shape. Skirts were made even fuller by means of flounces usually in tiers of three, gathered tightly at the top and stiffened with horsehair braid at the bottom. Outdoors cape-like jackets were worn and deep bonnets with wide ribbon bows tied under the chin.

By 1910 dresses had a much narrower silhouette with a thicker waist, flatter bust and narrower hips. By the end of the decade the most fashionable skirts cleared the floor and approached the ankle. The overall silhouette narrowed and straightened, beginning a trend that would continue into the years leading up to the First World War. Hats were broad.

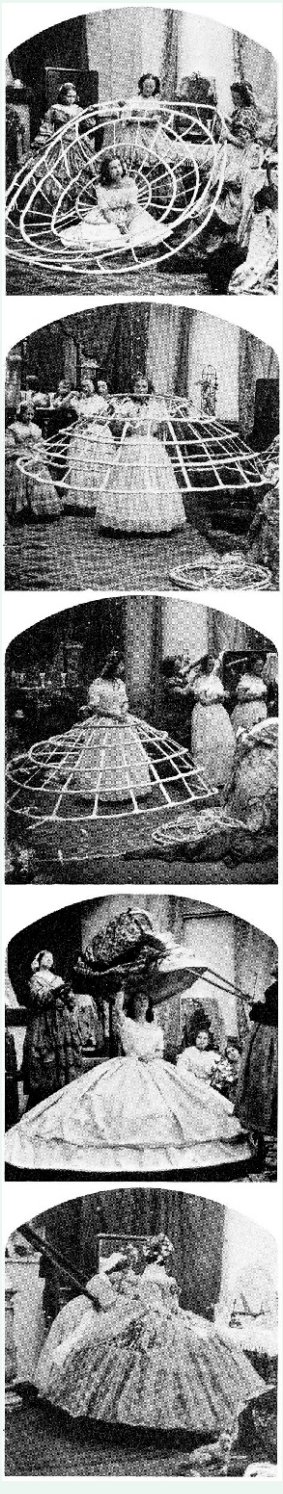
Since then styles have become progressively less layered and bulky - and more of the body is exposed to view.



Dresses in about 1850.



Dresses in about 1910.



Right: The fashion for large crinolines was often mocked. This sequence of photographs, taken about 1860, makes fun of the elaborate procedures necessary to put on such huge contraptions.

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Lady's Cap

From the Anglo-Saxon Period it was expected that a respectable woman would wear a head-covering whenever she was in public. Women also often wore their hair covered in their own homes.





In the second half of the eighteenth century the mob-cap, originally a lower-class style, became a high-fashion item as part of the craze for simple 'country' clothing. It was an indoor fashion, and was worn under a hat for outdoor wear. The portrait on the left, for example, shows a lady wearing such a cap in 1793.

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In the nineteenth century caps fell from favour, although light muslin ones continued to be worn indoors into the second half of the nineteenth century. The lady's cap in this box is believed to date from the 1860s. The painting on the right was painted in 1856 by Domenique Ingres and shows a grand French lady with a similar light cap on her head.



During the course of the century muslin caps became confined to servants and rural ladies who lived far from centres of fashion. By the end of the century photographic studio portraits seldom show women wearing them. In some rural areas the fashion lingered on into the twentieth century. The photograph on the left shows a lacemaker in Maids Moreton, Buckinghamshire, wearing a linen cap. It was taken in 1912.

Petticoat with a Broderie Anglaise Border



At the beginning of the Victorian era, all clothing was handmade. Dresses were expensive, and only the wealthy could afford a large wardrobe. The less fortunate wore cast-offs, clothing from second-hand shops, or sewed their own. After the invention of the sewing machine in 1851, the industry began to change. Not only was clothing less expensive to produce, it was mass-produced, and by the end of the century, ready-made dresses were available to the general public at department stores. The broderie anglaise border on this petticoat is attractive, but machine made. Broderie anglaise is an embroidery technique which involves piercing a pattern of round or oval holes in the material, which are then finished off with button-hole stitches.

This petticoat, which probably dates from around the turn of the century, is an example from the mass-produced end of the market. It would probably have been worn with a pair of drawers and a long overskirt. Drawers reached to just below the knee with a frill; a fashion for drawers of scarlet flannel occurred around 1855-60. Fashionable Victorian ladies wore very elaborate costumes, but this everyday item could have been worn by a young woman at work.



A petticoat and corset cover from an 1896 catalogue.

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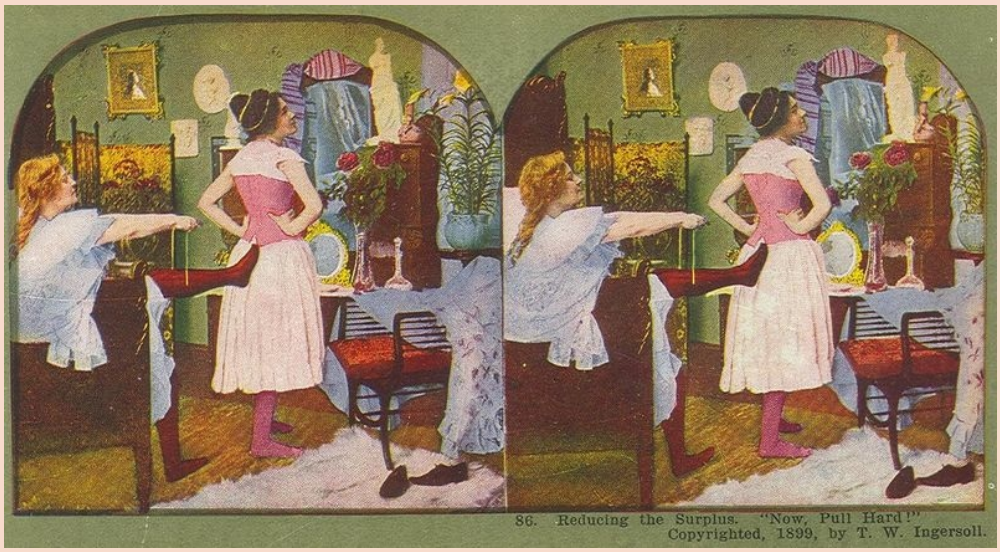
Corset-Cover with Broderie Anglaise Decoration



The main item of women's underclothing for the top half of the body was the corset - the stiff, boned contraption which was used to mould and shape the upper body into the desired shape. The picture below is a comic stereoscope of 1905 and shows a lady being fastened into her corset. Her petticoat can also be seen. The corset was usually worn over a garment called a chemise or shift, a sleeveless low-necked gown made of washable material, usually cotton or linen, which absorbed perspiration and kept the corset clean.

The corset cover was, as the name suggests, worn over the corset. It was, in effect, a sort of vest. It also provided added modesty with gauzy summer and evening dress bodices, preventing the corset from showing at the neckline of the dress or through a sheer bodice fabric. During the course of the nineteenth century corset-covers became more elaborately decorated. The broderie anglaise work on this example, although machine-made, is too pretty to be hidden. Corset covers were often designed to match the petticoat on the lower half of the body and eventually began to be combined with the petticoat to form an all-in-one petticoat. Corset cover style garments are more usually referred to today as camisoles.



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LATE VICTORIAN/ EDWARDIAN CLOTHING H92/A

Baby's Nightdress & Flannel Head Shawl



Babies' dresses changed very little in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Typically they were long and decorated with frills and embroidery. This was probably a nightdress, although a baby might have worn a gown like this for their christening. The head shawl is made of flannel, a heavy woollen cloth, which would have kept the baby warm.

Two Children's Coatdresses



Coatdresses like these were worn by both young boys and young girls. Such coatdresses often gave small Victorian boys a girlish appearance in modern eyes. The photograph on the left, for example, shows a young boy in a coatdress. Generally the coatdress had deep embroidered hems and yokes. A yoke is another word for a large collar.



Boys might wear coatdresses until they were 'breeched' - given their first outfit which included breeches or trousers. A formal ceremony might take place to mark this progress from babyhood to boyhood, and sometimes a first haircut was also included. This happened between about four and eight years old, varying with different eras and families. This lack of agreement could cause embarrassment and dispute. The cartoon on the right shows a tall young boy still wearing a coatdress and a much younger child in breeches - the two parents are arguing over which of them has done the proper thing!



Right: Cartoon by John Leech, published in Punch in 1849.

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Black Shawl



Victorian dresses were often very colourful. WP Frith's painting *A Private View at the Royal Academy*, 1881 (below, right), shows something of the range of bright colours that could be seen at a social occasion at this date. Darker clothing seems to have been worn about the house for everyday wear and black clothing was usually worn as a sign of mourning, but also as a fashion choice. Black is a very dramatic colour, particularly when set against a flash of brighter material, as in Renoir's 1871 picture *Woman With a Parrot* (left).



This shawl appears to have been cut from a larger piece of clothing. It is decorated with imitation jet beadwork. Jet is a form of coal. The Romans carved it to create necklaces and decorations. In the nineteenth century jewellery made from jet from around Whitby, North Yorkshire, became fashionable particularly after Whitby jet was exhibited in the Great Exhibition of 1851. 1,500 people were employed in Whitby by 1872 making jet jewellery, but by 1884 there were only 300, partly because of the production of imitation jet such as the beads on this dress.



Broderie Anglaise Panel

This is a clear illustration of the broderie anglaise technique. It may have been used as a decorative panel on a cot.

