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LATE VICTORIAN/ EDWARDIAN CLOTHING H92/B

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.

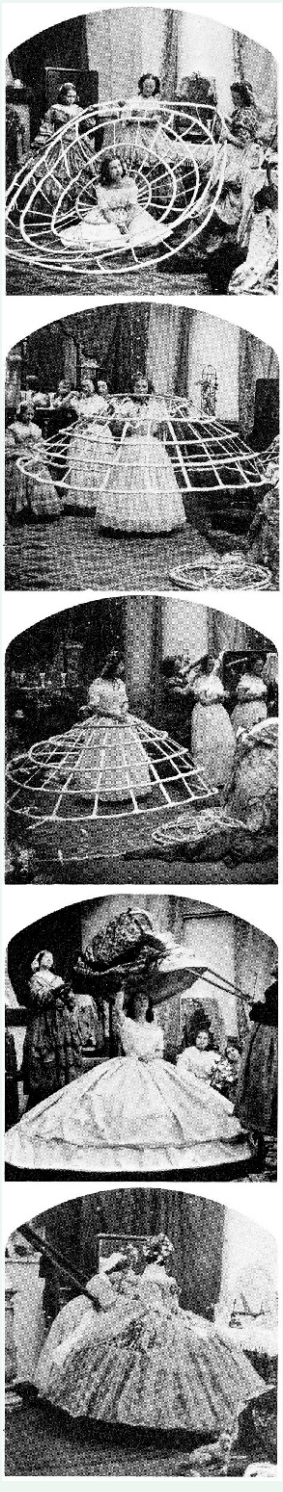
Since then styles have become progressively less layered and bulky - and more of the body is exposed to view.



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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Baby's Nightdress

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.



Child's Coatdress

Coatdresses like this one were worn by both young boys and young girls. This 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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Shift 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 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. 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.

This shift is decorated with broderie anglaise work, which was very popular in the nineteenth century. 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. The broderie anglaise border on this petticoat is finely done, but machine made.



Below: An advert showing the corset and shift beneath the outer dress.



At the beginning of the Victorian Era, all clothing was handmade and dresses were expensive. 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.

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'Pouter Pigeon' Silk Blouse



During the Edwardian Period beautiful ornate blouses, embellished with fine pin tucks, fine embroidery, appliqué, insertions of lace, faggoting, pleats and lace trim were very popular. This example, with its lacework and pleating, is a good example of the style.

These blouses were worn with a corset tightly laced at the waist which forced the hips back and the so-called monobosom was thrust forward creating an S-shaped figure. In the early 1890s leg o'mutton sleeves and narrow wrists started to become popular and these, along with the top-heavy and ornate body of the blouse, created the 'pouter pigeon' effect.





Pouter pigeons are fancy birds which puff out their breast feathers when mating and they certainly have a similar look to an Edwardian female in full fashionable attire, as can be seen from the two pictures on the left.

The fashion icon for women in this period was the Gibson Girl, the creation of American artist Charles Dana Gibson. The Gibson Girl was tall, slender yet had an ample bosom and bottom. Her neck was thin and her hair piled high upon her head in the 'waterfall of curls' fashion. The most famous real-life Gibson Girl was probably the Danish-American stage actress Camille Clifford (near right), whose towering coiffure and long, elegant gowns wrapped around her hourglass figure and tightly corseted wasp waist defined the style. The three ladies shown in the photograph on the far right show how this style was realised in ordinary life.





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Black Shawl

Dresses in the Victorian Period 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 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 is plain, the only decoration being its fringe. Some black dresses though, could be elaborately decorated with 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.

The picture on the left is called *A Widow* (by James Tissot, 1868). It illustrates both the severity of the colour scheme expected of those in mourning and the opulence of some black Victorian dresses.

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Pair of Child's Gaiters



In the nineteenth and early twentieth century various devices were worn to stop the lower trouser leg being spattered with mud. These are a pair of child's gaiters. They were buttoned over the lower trousers and the leather strap at the bottom was fastened under the insole of the shoe. In this way they both protected the trousers and stopped mud and grit soiling the upper shoe.



Spats (left) served a similar purpose, although they didn't extend as far up the leg. They were more commonly used in towns, while gaiters were used in the country. Some were white and polished and, in the early twentieth century, formed part of the stereotype dress of a wealthy young man of the era, along with a top hat and a cane. The word spat is derived from spatterdash, which was used in the eighteenth century to describe the protective covers worn by soldiers, farmers and others whose occupation involved regular exposure to rain and mud. Soldiers used puttees - long strips of cloth - to do the same job.

Women, of course, didn't need such items as they were expected always to wear dresses and skirts. When bicycling became popular among women in the 1890s special bicycle suits with gaitered leggings were developed for them. The cartoon on the right, which shows such a costume, was published in *Punch* in 1895. Bicycling became a rallying point for late nineteenth century feminists. One campaigner for women's rights said: 'Let me tell you what I think of bicycling. I think it has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a wheel...the picture of free, untrammelled womanhood.' In 1897 male students who objected to women being admitted to Oxford University hung up an effigy of a woman on a bike!



Gertrude. "My dear Jessie, what on earth is that Bicycle Suit for?"
Jessie. "Why, to wear, of course." Gertrude. "But you haven't got a Bicycle!"
Jessie. "No; but I've got a Sewing Machine!"