

DRESSING IN THE 18TH CENTURY

PART 1: Elements of Women's Middle/Upper Middle Class Dress in Britain ca. 1750-60 (In order of dressing)

- 1) **Shift:** Always worn, made of linen, the finer and whiter the more expensive. The very first item put on, worn against the skin. Often with sleeve and neck ruffles of lace or lawn, visible beyond gown sleeves.

Shown at right: Ca. 1760-70 linen shift and reproduction ca. 1750-60 shift in white linen



- 2) **Stockings:** Wool or silk (more expensive), knitted or sewn. Later (1775+) cotton. Often with "clocks" (decorative design or embroidery); Held up with garters tied around the legs above the knee.

Shown at right: Ca. 1750-70 blue silk stockings with gold embroidery (MET museum collection); Light blue silk knitted stockings (Nürnberg National Museum)



- 3) **Stays:** Many types existed, in different qualities. The best were silk on the outside, with 3 or 4 layers of linen inside, boned with baleen (whalebone, more expensive) or cane (lower sorts).

Shown at right: Examples of stays ca. 1750-70 (French illustration and example of extant ca. 1750 silk and linen stays)



- 4) **Under-petticoat:** Not always worn. Made of linen or sometimes silk (more expensive)
Reproduction under-petticoat in linen shown, over reproduction ca. 1750 silk and linen stays and linen shift.



- 5) **Pockets:** Usually linen or silk, often beautifully embroidered, large, suspended on a tape or cord tied around the waist
Shown – Embroidered silk pockets ca. 1730-60 (British origin, MET Museum)



- 6) **Side Hoops, Hoop Petticoat, or Panniers:** Silk or linen; Stiffened with cane, rarely Or metal (iron or steel). Moderately wide for daytime, very wide for formal or court dress; various types & styles.
Shown: Ca. 1750-60 linen and cane side hoops mounted with stays and shift of the era, and a ca. 1750-60 linen and cane hoop-petticoat



7) **Petticoat:** Usually silk in ca.1750-60. Could either match the gown fabric or be of a separate silk fabric (normally solid colour), sometimes quilted.

Shown: A ca. 1750 silk brocade petticoat made to match a gown of the same fabric;

At right: A ca. 1740-60 silk satin quilted petticoat.



8) **Stomacher:** Usually of fabric matching the gown; but also often embroidered on solid silk or linen.

Shown: The bodice of a ca. 1750 silk gown with matching stomacher (gown used as the basis for a replica);
An embroidered stomacher, ca. 1740-60



9) **Gown:** English style or French (*robe à la française* – with flowing back pleats). Most often made of silk, but also wool, or linen, depending on social status and occasion. The gown in this demonstration is a *robe à la française*, called a “*sacque*” or “*sack*” in English at the time. Shown is the original antique ca. 1750 gown on which the replica was based (privately sold)



10) **Fichu (Handkerchief/Kerchief):** Not always worn, but usually of the best material the wearer could afford: lace, silk gauze, or finest linen or Indian mull (sheer cotton).
Shown: Portrait by Gainsborough of a Mrs. Durbin, ca.1750, wearing a fine sheer fichu with lace edging (National Trust, U.K.)



11) **Apron:** Optional accessory, but often worn. Ideally made of fine, sheer fabrics, usually in white or ivory tones; or embroidered silk.
Shown: (1) A fine embroidered cotton mull apron, ca. 1740-60; (2) An embroidered silk apron, ca.1730-60



12) **Jewellery & Adornments:** Pearl earrings, and pearl, lace, or ribbon chokers and bracelets were fashionable. Semi-precious stone chokers, bracelets & earrings; neckatees (ruffled narrow "scarves"); A watch was sometimes worn on a chain or ribbon suspended from waist.
Shown: (1) Pearl choker and earrings (Nürnberg National Museum); (2) Portrait of a lady in a typical ensemble of ca. 1745-55, wearing pearl necklace, earrings, and fichu.



13) **Fans** frequently carried, even outdoors, made of silk or paper, often beautifully with beautifully painted scenes. Shown: Two examples of mid-18thC. painted fans of French origin (MET Museum)



14) **Gloves (or Fingerless “Mitts”)**: A common accessory, but not always worn. Depends on occasion. Gloves of kid leather or silk – gloves often worn with a fine silk gown, rather than mitts; Mitts of silk or linen, sometimes wool.

Shown: (a) Ca. 1730-60 silk embroidered “mitts” (MET Museum); (b) Portrait of Mrs. Allen by Copley, ca.1750-60. She has a pair of what appear to be fine kid gloves.



15) **Shoes**: Finest kid leather, silk brocade, or embroidered “pumps” or “mules” worn with silk gowns, usually “Louis” style heel; Or good quality leather shoes with buckled (latchet) closing. Shoes (rarely) might be worn with pattens to prevent damage. Shown are two examples of typical shoes of the mid 18th century (British origin, MET Museum collection).



16) **Cap:** In ca. 1750-60, usually small and dainty, sometimes not worn at all, but worn by all social levels. Could be worn under a hat. Made of fine lawn, linen, lace, often with frill around edge, depending on quality. Various styles, some with lappets (extensions that tied under the chin).
Shown are two mid-18th century portraits of women wearing fine lace-edged caps.



17) **Hat:** The dominant hat style ca. 1750-60 was the "bergère" (shepherdess) type, a simple, wide-brimmed hat with a low crown, usually of straw, with limited decoration. Most often tied at back with ribbon. Not for indoors or evenings. Similarly shaped hats in silk and even feathers also existed.
Shown: Two typical examples of mid-18th century "bergère" style hats from museum collections



18) **Cape, Cloak, or Mantelet:** Various styles, short and long, wool or silk, lined/unlined, sometimes lace in warm weather. Type depended on season, often worn with a muff. Shown: Portrait (by A. Ramsay, ca. 1750) of a lady wearing a black lace mantelet over her pink gown.

