

# Glossary of Eighteenth-Century Clothing

## For Women

### 1. Shift

The shift was the basic eighteenth-century woman's undergarment, made of linen and edged with plain linen or lace at the neck and sleeves. The neck and sleeves are gathered with drawstrings, though the sleeves could also be cuffed and buttoned. In the eighteenth century, the shift was worn next to the skin. Its modern equivalent is underwear.

### 2. Stays

An eighteenth-century undergarment reinforced with narrow strips of whalebone, metal, or wood. In the eighteenth century, the ideal feminine form featured a conical shape. Stays embrace the chest and upper torso, creating this conical form. The main female outer garment, the gown, was actually fitted to the stays, not to the woman—therefore stays were a very important garment.

Stays were not worn by women in all social classes, or even at all times. Gentry women wore stays most often, and always wore them in public or for formal occasions. These women went “stayless” only in private chambers. Women with less leisure time, such as those of the middling and lower sorts wore them less frequently. Enslaved women generally did not wear stays when laboring.

The rough modern equivalents for stays are girdles, corsets and bras.

### 3. Pocket

In the eighteenth century, a pocket was a small, flat bag or pair of such bags attached to a strip of fabric tape. The pocket was tied or pinned around the waist, over the shift or stays and under the gown, and was reached through a slit in the gown.

Even though pockets were sometimes richly ornamented with colored needlework patterns, they were an undergarment and worn under petticoats. Pockets today are attached to the insides of garments.

### 4. Hoops

In the eighteenth century, hoops were elliptical, not round, and spread out toward the sides. Small side hoops called “pocket hoops” were worn from about 1720 to about 1775. They were used to create the illusion of a small waist by making the hips appear larger. A pair of pocket hoops was constructed separately with a casing at the top of each. A fabric tape was passed through the casing and tied around the waist, so that each hoop hung squarely over each hip. The hoops usually were made of bent wood or wire enclosed in cotton or linen. The openings in the top could be reached through slits in the gown and petticoat, providing additional space for pockets.

For many years, the fashionable gown was worn with fabric of the skirts draped over these side hoops. With the increasing use of soft muslins and cottons in the later eighteenth century, hoops fell out of fashion, and the side draperies moved farther to the back. This garment has no twenty-first-century equivalent.

### 5. Petticoat

The under-skirt of the gown. A petticoat was attached to a waistband made of narrow tapes tied at the sides. Some petticoats may also have been worn with a jacket or a short gown as outer

garments. Quilted petticoats were also worn for both warmth and fashion. Sometimes, for added warmth, women also wore under-petticoats of cotton, linen, or wool flannel.

## 6. Gown

A general term for a woman's dress. Generally consists of a separate petticoat and an outer piece that has a bodice and an open-front skirt.

- **robe a la française**—a style of gown originally from France. The essential feature was the loose flowing sack-back consisting of lengths of cloth forming two box-pleats, stitched down at the neckline and left loose to merge with the skirt below.
- **robe a l'anglaise**—an anglicized version of the robe a la française: the box-pleats were stitched down from neckline to waistline, forming a smooth fitting bodice.
- **polonaise**— a gown style with the overskirt looped up in the back to form three or more swags, partially uncovering the petticoat in the front.
- **stomacher**—some gowns included a long triangular-shaped panel that forms the front of an open, low-necked bodice. The stomacher descended to a sharp rounded point at the waist and the upper, horizontal border formed the top of the dress at the chest.

## 7. Sleeve Ruffles

The ruffles attached to the sleeve of the gown, to cover the elbows while allowing for movement of the arms.

## 8. Cap

This head covering was always worn by nearly all women—in public, often with a hat on top. For a woman to be seen capless was for her to be seen in a state of undress.

Caps protected the hair from dirt acquired through everyday activities—smoke from fireplaces, grease from cooking, dust from travel, and so on. It was generally thought to be unhealthy to wash hair too often—it was better to put on a clean cap instead.

- **plain cap**—a plain cap with gathered crown and frill. Mob caps varied in shape and size and with changing hair styles. They were usually made of fine linen or cotton. Pearl pins were used to keep the cap pinned in the hair.
- **wired cap**—caps that were wired in the brim to form a fashionable shape, such as an extended brim, a heart shapes, or circular shapes. These caps were more fashionable than functional. A hat could not be worn with the heart-shaped cap.
- **lappets**— streamers, either extending from the cap or attached to it, hanging down at the front or behind, or pinned up. Lappets on caps were popular in the early eighteenth century. Their popularity began to fade by the mid-eighteenth century, except for formal wear.

## 9. Hat

Straw hats, or silk-covered straw hats, were worn over caps. The angles at which the hat sat on the head were important—flat upon the head, or tilted forward with the front brim just above eye level. Sometimes the back brim was bent up to emphasize this fashionable tilt. Interior ribbons were tied under the chin or at the back of the head. Pins anchored the hat even more firmly.

## 10. Neck Ribbon

Some women accessorized by wearing a ribbon around the neck. The neck ribbon was appropriately worn in the area beneath the chin, but well above the base of the throat, and tied at the back. A neck-ribbon might be plain or decorated with rosettes or some other ornamentation.

## 11. Kerchief

Any square or triangle of linen or other fabric, folded around the neck and shoulders, worn for warmth or fashion. Many methods of folding and wearing kerchiefs existed in the eighteenth

century. Today some women accessorize with scarves.

### **12. Breast Knot**

Fresh flowers gathered in a small knot or bouquet and then pinned to the front of a gown. In the eighteenth century, a popular way to accessorize a gown, either with or without a kerchief. Can also be a gauze bow, pinned to the front of the gown.

### **13. Jacket**

Both men and women wore jackets, but of different styles. A woman's jacket fitted closely to the body and was worn with a petticoat as an alternative to the gown.

### **14. Fan**

An accessory which was both functional and fashionable, fans could be plain or highly decorated.

### **15. Mitts**

Fingerless, usually elbow-length gloves. The fingers emerged together through a single opening. The back was pointed or rounded to cover the back of the hand. Mitts usually had a decorative lining that was visible when the point was turned back. They were made of fabric or kidskin leather.

### **16. Apron**

An outer garment used to protect the clothing and as a decorative feature. An apron was gathered onto a waistband or featured ties or a drawstring. Some aprons had an attached bib that extended up from the waist to protect the bodice of the gown. Such a bib, pinned to the bodice with straight pins in each upper corner, was often called a pinner. ("Pinner" foreshadows the more modern term "pinafore".)

Decorative aprons were usually without bibs, and were made of fine materials and often embroidered. Some decorative aprons were worn with stomacher-front gowns, and tied under the point so the fashionable conical shape was visible.

### **17. Tucker**

A separate, frilled band of linen, muslin, or lace that edged the neck opening of a gown. To twenty-first-century eyes the tucker looks like a large, gathered collar. The expression "putting on your best bib and tucker" refers to donning one's finest apron and tucker.

### **18. Hairstyle**

Eighteenth-century hairstyles tended to be triangular, sweeping back from the face and off the neck. Hair was not always severely pulled back, and the effect was frequently softened with strategically placed side-curls and small curled tendrils of hair. In the eighteenth century, caps did not necessarily cover all hair in the eighteenth century, but certain styles could be used today to cover a modern hairstyle. Many other modern haircuts can be given an eighteenth-century appearance with hair care products.

### **19. Curls**

Extra hairpieces consisting of long, columnar curls were sometimes affixed to the back or side of the head. These side-curls fashionably trailed down one side of the neck.

### **20. Pearls**

Single or multiple strands of pearls constituted a fashion accessory in the eighteenth century just as today. The pearls fit closely to the neck in the area beneath the chin and above the collarbone, or base of the neck. The strands of pearls were tied with a ribbon at the back of the neck.

### **21. Cloak**

A loose outer garment of varying length, falling from the neck over the shoulders.

## **22. Cape**

An oversized turned-down collar extending slightly over the shoulder. This feature added an extra layer of warmth to the chest. Additionally, the cape helped deflect rain.

## **23. Hood**

A loose, soft covering shaped to fit over the head. Sometimes a hood was worn as a separate garment, but more often, the hood was attached to an outdoor garment such as a cloak.

## **For Men**

### **1. Cravat or Stock**

**Cravat:** a length of white linen, sometimes edged with lace, folded and tied loosely around the throat. The name is derived from the Croatian word *crabate*, and the fashion originated with Croatian soldiers serving with the French army (1645–1650).

**Stock:** a pleated or gathered neckcloth wrapped around the neck and fastened with a buckle or tie at the back.

### **2. Shirt**

In the eighteenth century, an undergarment covering the upper part of the body, worn next to the skin. The shirt served as both underwear and sleepwear. Wealthier men owned separate night shirts.

### **3. Breeches**

An outer garment covering a man's hips and legs to below the knee. . For dress wear, men wore breeches (rather than trousers) from the late sixteenth century until the late eighteenth century. Working men sometimes wore long trousers.

### **4. Stockings**

A knitted or woven covering for the leg and foot. During the eighteenth century, stockings were held up by leather garters fastened around the leg just below the knee.

### **5. Shoes and Buckles**

Men's shoes were usually made of black leather. A buckle fastening was the fashion until the 1790s; sizes and styles varied from small, jeweled buckles in the early years to the larger square, plain metal designs in the mid-eighteenth century. Shoes were also fastened with ties of string or leather tape.

### **6. Waistcoat or "Vest"**

A men's garment worn over the shirt, buttoned up the center front. Some waistcoats had sleeves while others were sleeveless. After about 1750, waistcoats got shorter until they reached the waist by 1800.

### **7. Hat**

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the huge periwigs then in fashion made it impractical for men to wear hats unless necessary, but custom dictated that the hat still be carried under the arm. The design gradually changed. The round crown became low and the wide brim turned back. This evolved into the three-cornered hat that became the chief design of the eighteenth century. In Britain, the turned-up brim was called a cock, so these hats were called cocked hats.

### **8. Kerchief**

A square or triangle of linen or other material folded and tied around the neck. Usually worn by middling-sort tradesmen or by enslaved men.

### **9. Spatterdashes or leggings**

Leggings of leather or cloth, buttoned on the outer side of the leg and worn to protect the stockings from being splashed while riding or walking.

### **10. Cap**

A workingman's head covering, usually of knitted wool with a turned up brim. This style of cap has been used by many peoples in different ages.

### **11. Hunting Frock**

An outer garment constructed of coarsely woven linen, worn by tradesmen and farmers, who formed the bulk of the militia. The garment was durable and comfortably warm for outdoor work, hunting, or fighting.

### **12. Carrying Bag**

In the eighteenth century, both men and women carried bags because clothing for both was too fitted and slender to feature deep pockets. Materials were leather, silk, wool and linen.

### **13. Greatcoat**

An outdoor coat worn over indoor attire for warmth or protection from the rain.

### **14. Coat**

A man's outer garment worn over the breeches and waistcoat. Gentry men always wore a coat in public. Laboring males occasionally laid the coat aside during their work.

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