

They wore *what*?!

Whether passing fads or iconic styles that stand the test of time, the fashions of times gone by can tell us a lot about the society of a particular era. Here we look back at some of history's more unusual trends.

Hobble skirts

In early 20th century England, women could be seen wearing skirts that were so narrow they could hardly walk – in fact, they could only hobble. Edwardian society was very strict and women were expected to fulfil the traditional roles of wife and mother. The hobble skirt, which **restricted** women's movements to very small steps, reflected this. Some people thought it **encouraged** women to behave in a more ladylike way, but in fact this item of clothing was quite dangerous – reports of tumbles down the stairs were not uncommon.

Crinolines

Crinolines also made it difficult for women to move around, but for the opposite reason. They were giant hoops made of wood or steel that women in the mid-1800s wore underneath their gowns to give the appearance of a small waist and large hips. Crinolines were so big and heavy that they made it difficult to walk and sit down, and their weight could damage the hip bones. There were also incidences of women getting stuck in doorways and even blown off bridges!

Chopines

If you think today's stiletto shoes are difficult to walk in, be thankful you didn't live in 16th century Venice. Chopines were wooden platform shoes originally designed to keep the wearer's feet clean and dry while walking through muddy streets. Some of them were as much as 24 inches high! Over time, they became a statement of wealth and status. The chopines themselves were not supposed to be visible and women therefore had to wear long dresses to hide them. Textiles were expensive at the time, so the higher your chopines and the longer your dress, the greater your wealth.

Crackows

The crackow was a type of shoe with a very long, pointy toe. It came into fashion in Europe during the Middle Ages and was worn mainly by men. Some crackows were so long that their tips had to be tied to the knees in order to make walking possible! The length of your crackow **indicated** your position in society – the king of England **banned** commoners from wearing any that exceeded six inches, while landowners were **permitted** a foot, and knights a foot-and-a-half. Royalty, meanwhile, could wear crackows as long as they liked.

1 Read the text and check the sentences True (T) or False (F).

- a Wearing a hobble skirt was a sign of one's wealth. T ☐ F ☐
- b Venetian women were careful to make sure their chopines were not seen by other people. T ☐ F ☐
- c Women wore crinolines to make their bodies a more fashionable and desirable shape. T ☐ F ☐
- d Only members of the royal family could wear crackows as long as they liked. T ☐ F ☐
- e Chopines and crackows are examples of fashions closely linked to social status. T ☐ F ☐

2 Look at the key words in bold in the text and match them to their synonyms.

- a helped _____
- b limited _____
- c allowed _____
- d showed _____
- e forbade _____

3 Which of the fashions in the text do you think are best described by the following words? Why? Talk to a partner.

- a ridiculous
- b dangerous
- c uncomfortable