

# Following the Thread

## A Self-guided Dress & Textile Trail

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York Castle Museum has one of the largest regional dress and textile collections in Britain.

Use this guide to help you discover more about the fascinating examples on display.

*Turn left from the entrance concourse and enter:*

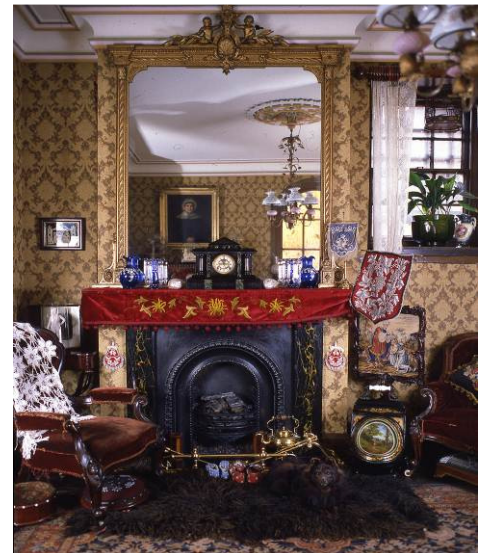
### THE FEMALE PRISON ('NORTH SIDE')

#### PERIOD ROOMS

##### 1870s VICTORIAN PARLOUR

Textiles form an important part of this interior. The well-off Victorian woman could demonstrate her domestic role, good taste and embroidery skills by creating textiles to decorate her home.

The embroidered **lambrequin** in red plush fabric with a bobble fringe decorating the mantelpiece draws attention to the fireplace. The two pairs of **beadwork slippers** in front of the fire could have been made following a pattern given in one of the popular ladies' magazines. Needlepoint designs worked in wool on canvas have been used to cover the **piano stool** and the **footstools** below the table and the sofa. The **firescreen** has a rather sentimental embroidered picture.



One of the **cushions** on the sofa has a swastika design which was then a symbol of good luck. An embroidered **sampler** hangs on the far wall.

The importance of white textiles can be seen in the whitework **table cloth** and the white **antimacassars** on the chair backs. These protect the upholstery fabric against the popular hair oil called macassar.

## 1850s MOORLAND COTTAGE

Textiles were just as important in rural households but were often less luxurious.

The **spinning wheel** shows the importance of making textiles in the home; the spun yarn could have been sold commercially to supplement the family's income.



A **linen press** with a single drawer stands in the near left-hand corner.

Damp linen, such as sheets and tablecloths, was placed on the flat base and pressure was applied by the tightening the large wooden screw. This flattened the linen and gave it a light sheen as well as emphasising the folds, a sign of good housekeeping. A **glass linen smoother**, used for 'ironing' flat textiles, stands on top of the press. Both show the time and energy required to care domestic textiles.

The **rag rug** beneath the dog was a thrifty way of making a colourful, warm floor covering from old textiles. The hexagon **patchwork bedcover** with regularly repeating bright red patches might also include re-used fabrics as could the blue and white **patchwork cushion** in log cabin type design on the chair. White **knitted lace** covers the wooden crib.

**SAMPLERS** hang on the walls near the Victorian Parlour and the Moorland Cottage. These include samplers worked by several pairs of sisters. Several samplers feature hymns.

## FIFTIES ROOM



made at home from a commercial kit.

Some of the same textiles which appeared in the Victorian parlour appear in the Fifties Room but updated in design and materials. The **patchwork cushion** is now made in leather. The Second World War (1939-1945) meant that many people were unable to update their furnishings so the **carpet** here is in an early 'deco' style. The **hearth rug** was probably

## SPOTLESS: KEEPING CLEAN IN THE PAST



Producing white, spotless and faultlessly ironed shirts, blouses, aprons and caps was a time-consuming task which required hot, hard work and specialist tools, particularly when frills and ruffles were involved.

The section devoted to **laundry and ironing** includes:

A **tally iron**. Dampened frills and ruffles were curled around this heated tube to set them in place and smooth the fabric.

A **Norwegian mangling board** (1770): this long flat board was used to roll out wrinkles from damp linen which had been wound onto a pole. Elaborately carved examples may have been used as betrothal gifts – or even as a way of making a marriage proposal.

**Crimping irons**: these were used for smoothing collars and cuffs and fixing pleats and frills.

Long handled egg-shaped **sleeve irons**: used, as the name implies, when smoothing sleeves; similar smaller irons were made for ironing cuffs.

**Cap irons**: specially shaped small irons used to smooth caps which might be placed on a metal 'mushroom' mount during ironing to ensure they kept their shape.

## FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

This exhibition shows the clothes and textiles important to us at different stages of our lives.

*Christening* on left side, immediately after entering:

**Baby's clothes** including a mid-eighteenth century set of swaddling clothes, an eighteenth century quilted silk robe (1740-70), elaborately embroidered, frilled and tucked nineteenth and early twentieth century robes, a 1943 christening robe made from nylon re-used from a parachute, a 1950s nylon gown, a 1980s machine-knitted christening outfit and a twentieth century 'baby-gro'.



**Layette pincushions** made to commemorate the birth of baby with messages such as 'Welcome Sweet Babe' in pins. The earliest is dated 1741. Safety pins were not invented until the 1870s so these pins could have been used to fasten a baby's clothes. However, these cushions were clearly valued too much for the pins to be taken out so the elaborate patterns remain.

*Mourning* on right side:

One way in which Victorians expressed grief was through clothing, wearing sombre black for deep mourning for close relatives graduating to lighter but still subdued greys and mauves as time passed. It was important that full mourning was not only dark in colour but also non-reflective so glittering beads and trims were not acceptable. Mourning garments and accessories displayed here include:



A woman's **black silk mourning dress** trimmed with crêpe (1864).

A child's **purple wool dress** (1860s).

A **doll** dressed in 'widow's weeds'.

Black **gloves**, a black lace **fan**, mourning **jewellery** and a **cap** with long black crepe streamers.

*Marriage* further down on left side includes:

A **Quaker wedding dress** in shot 'silk' (different coloured silk threads in either direction of the woven fabric) and **bonnet** (1856). The simple style, subdued colour and deep bonnet brim are all suitable for the modest dress worn by members of the Society of Friends.

A fashionably-cut cream satin **wedding dress** (1878).

A medieval-style silver brocade **wedding dress** bought in Schofields Department Store, Leeds (1939).

A wool and rayon crêpe dress and jacket bought in Marshall & Snelgrove, York (1941)

A yellow satin home-made **bridesmaid's dress**, worn at two different weddings because of the restrictions of rationing and the bride's '**going-away**' outfit, a '**Rhona Roy**' dress in wool crepe bought in Leader's, York and for which precious dress coupons were needed as rationing was then in force (1947/1948).



## KITCHEN GALLERY

As you walk through the Kitchen Gallery, don't miss the **stockings** and **corset** hanging up on the clothes drying rack in the 1940s kitchen.



## KIRKGATE



Several shops display clothing and shoes, both new and second-hand, fashionable and military, as well as sewing and embroidery equipment.

If you were short of money, it was possible to pawn your clothes for cash. The pawnbroker **Henry**

**Hardcastle** took in shoes, hats, caps and adult and children's clothes. For the wealthier lady with the time and money to spend on embroidery, needlework tools and materials could be bought in the **Fancy Repository**.

## THE DEBTORS' PRISON (SOUTH SIDE)

*To enter the second part of the museum, cross the entrance concourse, past the café and the shop.*

### Top Floor

#### MILITARY GALLERY

After the displays of early metal armour, you will find the **buff coat** belonging to Sir Thomas Fairfax of York (1612-1671).

Although the Fairfax family had loyally served King Charles I, Thomas Fairfax believed in the importance of parliament and became Lord General in Cromwell's New Model Army. He won a major victory for the Parliamentarians at the Battle of Marston Moor in 1644 during the English Civil War. These thick leather buff coats were worn by cavalymen and officers to buffer the pressure of their heavy armour and protect against sword cuts. They were also worn off the battlefield and became fashionable dress for both Royalists and Parliamentarians, demonstrating their patriotic heroism. Fairfax's buff coat has elaborate sleeves decorated with silver-gilt braids.



## SEEING IT THROUGH: YORK IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-1945

*Women at War* shows typical **1940s dresses**, **quilted fabric house shoes** (economising on the use of leather) and a rag rug. Parachute material was greatly prized as it could be used to make **nylon underwear**. Women's contribution to the war effort in factory work is shown by a pair of **Utility factory overalls**.

**Second World War women's uniforms** include those of the Women's Land Army, the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the Queen Alexandra's Military Nursing Service (QAMNS), the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) and the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY).

**Men's uniforms** include the flying kit of a Royal Air Force (RAF) fighter pilot, and an RAF uniform tunic, the uniform and equipment of an Infantry Officer, jungle-green tropical uniform and the uniform and kit of soldiers fighting in Europe. The international effort required to clothe Allied soldiers is evident: the trousers came from Canada, the greatcoat from America while the battledress blouson was made in Leeds.



The need to protect civilians from the threat of air strikes is shown by the **Air Raid Precautions (ARP) warden's uniform**. This was copied in miniature in a home-made **knitted ARP warden doll**. Clothing displayed in *Children at War* shows the importance of 'make-do-and-mend' with the turned-down hems of the home-made **romper suit**. Post-war clothing remained in short supply and was not always of the best quality as is shown by the **de-mob suit** issued to soldiers when they left the army.

Take the stairs down to the **Middle Floor** and turn right into the

## COSTUME GALLERY

The Costume Gallery display start with two **bed covers** coming from very different traditions. The first, shown in the setting of a seventeenth century bedroom, is an **embroidered crewel work bedspread**. The undyed ground fabric is embroidered in coloured 'crewel' wool using textured stitches. The design of floral motifs with large leaves was influenced by the fashionable Indian embroideries then being imported into Britain by the East India

Company. This contrasts with the technique used for the unfinished **Tumbling Blocks patchwork** (1880-1890). The small square blocks were precisely pieced together to create a geometric pattern which gives the illusion of three-dimensional cubes.

The display of early nineteenth-century dresses includes a white muslin **day dress** (1816-1820), worn with a purple **spencer** (1815-1820). This is a tightly fitting, high-waisted jacket, the female version of a man's short double-breasted coat without tails. The **day dress** (1808-1812) is made in muslin, a soft light cotton fabric, here printed in a small floral design. The **pelisse** (1815) is in 'shot' silk (different coloured silk threads in either direction of the woven fabric). Pelisses were fairly close-fitting coats or coat-dresses, fastening down the front and cut on similar lines to the fashionable high-waisted dresses. A fashionable **Kashmir shawl** is draped over the chair. Men's dress is represented by the closely fitting **uniform** of the Leeds Local Militia.

**STYLE AND THE SILVER SCREEN** explores the influence of cinema on clothing.



Pre-war luxury is represented by the gold **brocade dress** trimmed with velvet (1931-1934). The gold **lamé dress** (1934-1936) is home-made while the **diamanté trimmed dress** (1932-1935) in blue rayon velvet was doubtless much more expensive, being purchased from Marie Adaire, a dress shop in Regent Street, London. Despite its glamorous look, the green rayon crêpe **Lee Delman dress** is actually a Utility garment and has a Super Utility label (1942-1946).

**BATHING COSTUMES** shows changing attitudes to concealing and displaying the human body when swimming in public as well as the growth of overseas holidays.

Despite the fact that it stretches easily when wet, wool has long been used for swimming costumes. It appears here in a woman's **grey serge costume** (1890-1900), decorated with coloured wool braid, and a **purple wool jersey costume** (1910-1911) with white cotton trim which offered respectable cover for the legs. Wool was still used in a pair of 1950s men's **trunks** made by Summersea of Jersey.

*Continue down to the **Ground Floor** to the **SIXTIES** exhibition. Here you will find outfits by iconic designers from the 'swinging' decade when women's skirts rose dramatically.*

You can see:

A green cotton and black lace **mini dress** (1965) by Mary Quant.

A Courrèges **coat** (1966) in pink wool made for Harrods, London. Echoing his training as an engineer, this coat is made in a characteristically firm fabric with top-stitched seams, applied pockets and big buttons which emphasise the geometric cut.

Ossie Clark's **trouser suit** (1969). Clark showed how trousers could be both feminine and sexy by using fluid ruffles below the knee and tightly fitting upper legs.

The orange daisy print **cotton dress with matching coat** (1969) was worn by a bride as her 'going-way' outfit. The high-waisted **nylon mini dress** (1960s) with angel sleeves features a psychedelic print. Man-made materials feature strongly, for example in the red and white 'patent' look **sling-back platform shoes**, the Courrèges-style white **PVC boots**, **nylon tights** and floral-printed **nylon knickers**.



The clothes belonging to the **Sindy Doll** (1963) sum up the change in clothing for young women – denim jeans, tights and a mini skirt.

*Exit the museum via the prison cells ...* and remember, as you pass the cell in which he passed his final night, that Dick Turpin ordered a new coat of fustian (then a cloth made from linen and cotton) before his execution on the Knavesmire in York in 1739.

This trail was prepared in July 2011 by Dr Mary M Brooks, Monument Fellow, York Castle Museum 2010-2011



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