



Main picture: That apron and headscarf may well have been yesterday's summer dress or curtains. Above, clockwise from top: Hats were big (and often ludicrously small) with spare cloth used to trim. Sensible service shoes. Straps use less leather. Wool of many colours.

enabled mothers to exchange clothes as their children grew. Dressmaking fabrics also required coupons, offering a cheaper alternative to ready to wear and more possibilities to poorer families.

The two piece suit became the wardrobe staple for middle class women as magazine articles praised its advantages, illustrating its three way mix and match combinations.

For many the joy of owning a smart suit wasn't always achievable as mothers struggled to feed and clothe their families on limited resources. Sewing circles were set up which taught basic skills in machining and pattern cutting. Recycling was key as teams of enthusiastic ladies would remodel dresses as mixing textiles became fashionable.

During this period, ladies would often be seen walking out in dresses which were combinations of several garments put together. This didn't just include dresses and children's clothes but extended to suits too as every little square inch of fabric was used up. As a result outfits often had contrasting sleeves, collars and cuffs.

As dresses wore out, the cheerful

textiles from the previous decade were often cut down into aprons and scarf turbans for work wear. Trimmings from these dresses were also re-used as 1930s buttons and belt buckles became a valuable resource. Rick rack trimming was often used not only on children's clothes but on ladies dresses, adding a vital splash of colour to an otherwise dull frock. Creativity flourished while idle hands were kept busy in shelters sewing accessories from fabric scraps.

Women's magazines published an endless supply of Handy Hints articles which encouraged ladies to sew, knit and crochet, making use of whatever they were able to salvage.

Despite the austerity, women took a great pride in their appearance and craved to look like their film idols. Stockings were in short supply and most had to make do with the darned Lyle variety or gravy browning if they wanted something which resembled American tan.


Trousers or "slacks" were the practical answer and as fathers and husbands marched away to war they left behind an Aladdin's cave of possibilities which their

female relatives quickly recycled into casual wear.

Slacks were often worn with jumpers as knitwear became fashionable. Many girls wanted to look like Lana Turner whose style was to wear tight short-sleeved sweaters, This was easy to reproduce on a limited budget. Many knitting patterns incorporated V for victory designs and lots of colours, enabling knitters to use up their scraps of wool mixing old with new.

Cinema offered escapism and although many of the outfits the Hollywood stars wore were unachievable for the British public, elements did make their way into mainstream fashion. Vivien Leigh's snoods as seen in the 1939 block buster film *Gone With the Wind* could be easily crocheted and offered a very practical solution to working women who needed to keep their shoulder length hair at bay.

Hats became smaller and were the only fashion item which wasn't rationed during the war years. Ladies went to town creating styles which were similar to the hats worn by their grandmothers 70 years before. Many styles were doll-like and perched on top of hair styles which featured waves of barrel curls and victory rolls.

Shoes needed to be practical and women swapped their glamorous heels for service dress and sensible lace ups. For those who had the money and could afford the coupons, ankle straps and sling back styles were extremely desirable, along with peep toes and two tone court shoes as they used less leather. Even service shoes were modified to accept the demands on leather shortages as the Waaf adopted an apron fronted design which looked smarter and used smaller pieces of leather in its manufacture. 

To see more fashion styles of the 1940s click on Fiona's website at www.fionaharrison.biz, where you can read up about her many shows and see her in 1940s costume.