

March 16, 2018

This afternoon we welcomed back Paul Harding from Discover History. His presentation was, "What did we wear in the 1950's"

Paul set the scene by explaining what brought about the changes in the 1950's and why the decade was so exciting in many social ways.

Fashions for men and women really hadn't changed much since the 1900's. The beginning of the 1950's was a period still of austerity, families were still scrimping and saving as they had been since before the war began.

The country was still paying for the cost of war, temporary housing was urgently needed, so that prompted the building of prefabs, rationing of clothes and cloth had just finished. Factories were made to get the manufacturing and exporting of goods a priority, in order to bring money into the country and to increase the availability of much needed jobs in industry.

The clothing industry heralded "The New Look for the New Modern World", by developing newer lighter materials and designers came forward with new ideas.

But ordinary families carried on with the make do and mend mentality, darning socks, re-using knitted woollen garments. Fair Isle patterns were popular, which used up wool oddments of different colours, that could go with any outfit. Handbags were made from sandbag material. Materials that had been saved and stored during the war years were still being used, parachute silk, blackout curtains made a change from stamped CC41 government utility clothing. Paper patterns were made available through the introduction of the Woman's Weekly magazine. Shops introduced saving stamps to help families budget, modern materials were developed to cut down on ironing, material colours, blues and pinks appeared to break away from the austere black, navy and grey.

The Festival of Britain in 1951 was to show the world that Britain had returned to be a manufacturing centre again. The pipe and cigarette industry flourished alongside the stocking factories.

As the 50's went on, clothing became more relaxed with the introduction of more casual wear for both sexes, using the more modern lightweight fabrics.

The advertising of modern new laundry techniques did much to revolutionise the washing day. Out went the copper boilers and heavy mangles, in came twin tubs, spin dryers, and drying of clothes outside and more choice of washing powders. Adverts changed with the likes of the Coop producing adverts of women's underwear, girdles and bras to encourage ladies to leave the austere times behind.

Dress styles changed, with lighter fabrics easier to wear, hems got shorter, and the wearing of hats and gloves everyday prompted a clothing boom. Ladies wanted the pinched in waist look and flared starched skirts made from materials of more colours and patterns. Men's styles changed, higher waisted trousers meant shorter ties, heavy woollen suit cloth was replaced by the modern lightweight materials. Double breasted jackets, more casual trousers with zip flies became the norm. But the trilby hat lasted throughout the 1950's. All of us have seen photographs taken on the beach with dad sat on a deckchair wearing a suit and a trilby hat! The styles of both sexes were following their favourite screen idols of the 1950's films.

During the ten years of the 1950's which started off in austere times, the end gave birth to the next fashion generation. The birth of teenage clothes, much younger looking styles.

The 1950's without doubt saw the most changes in family life of clothing, transport, housing, prosperity, jobs, the taking of holidays and the attitudes of people following the war years.