FEATHERS, FRILLS AND FANCY GOODS

THE BRITISH MILLINERY TRADE FROM THE 17TH TO THE 19TH CENTURIES

PAM INDER

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In memory of my husband, Patrick John Boylan, 1939–2024

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Note on Money, Measurements and Place Names

Pre-decimal currency and measurements will be used throughout because those are the values and measurements used in account books and on bills for the period under review.

'Old money' consisted of pounds (£), shillings (s.) and pence (d.). There were twenty shillings in a pound and twelve pence in a shilling; there were also halfpennies (½d.) and farthings (¼d.) and guineas (£1 1s.). Sometimes sums were rendered in shillings only, rather than pounds and shillings (e.g. 42s. rather than £2 2s.) or in pence only (e.g. 14d. rather than 1s. 2d.). Converting money to its present-day value is fairly meaningless because relative prices have changed so much; it is the differences between the prices of goods and services at the same date that are significant.

Millinery goods were luxury items. To provide some context for the various prices given in the text, the two tables below give an indication of wages and of the price of bread *c*. 1600–1900. They are of necessity much simplified as wages varied across the country and the price of bread fluctuated year on year according to the harvest. Nonetheless, it is salutary to recognize that, for example, in the 1630s the Countess of Middlesex spent more on a single yard of lace than a farm labourer earned in a week, that in 1799 nineteen-year-old Lucretia Grace Blois paid more for one muslin dress than a schoolteacher received in a month and that a complete set of clothes to equip teenager Hannah Horton to go into service in 1789 cost the officials at the Ashford workhouse in Kent just £2 2s.,[1] less than Lady Walsingham spent on a single dress cap at around the same date. Even the frugal Jane Austen paid more for what she considered a cheap straw hat in 1811 than a building labourer would have taken home at the end of a week's hard labour; and in the 1860s two yards of ribbon cost the same as a quartern loaf that would feed one person for a week.

Figure 1 lists examples of average wages between 1600 and 1900. There will no doubt be many examples of workers earning more or less than the sums given, but the aim here is to set expenditure on millinery in context by giving some idea of average incomes and this is not straightforward. Information about wages is patchy, particularly for the earlier periods. Some workers, like farm labourers, servants and some artisans had part or all of their wages in kind in the

form of meals or accommodation. Workers might be paid by the day, the week, the quarter or the year. Many people, particularly those paid by the day, did not work full time. Also, conditions were different in different parts of the country and changed season by season as well as over time.[2]

Figure 1 Wages, 1600–1900

Job	Early C17th	Late C17th	Early C18th	Late C18th	Early C19th	Late C19th
Farm labourer	8d.–10d. a day	9d.–10d. a day	£18pa	£30pa	10s. per week	14s. per week
Skilled artisan	1s. 6d. a day	1s. 9d. a day	£35pa	£50pa	25s.–30s. per week	Little change. It was reckoned that £1 a week was the minimum on which a man could keep a wife and three children. Many, many workers earned far less.
Clerks			£45pa	£60pa	£60+pa	£100+pa
Clergymen	£20–£100pa	Little change from earlier in the century	£90pa	£183pa	£70–£80 for a curate. More for a parish priest, but salaries varied widely from parish to parish, from £100 to £500+	£100 for a curate. Ditto.
Teachers			£16pa	£43pa	£15–£40	£60–£200
Lawyers		£100+pa	£113pa	£165pa	£1,200 for a senior lawyer	£2,000 ditto
Servants (female)	+/- £3pa	Ditto	£5–£20pa (laundry maid/ house-keeper)	Little change from earlier in the century	£12–£30pa depending on their role	£12–£45 Ditto
Servants (male)	+/- £5pa		£4–£60pa (gardener/ French chef)	Ditto	£15–£120pa depending on their role	£16–£130pa depending on their role

Figure 2 relates to the price of a quartern (4lbs = 1.8 kilos) loaf in London. It was reckoned that, with other foodstuffs, a quartern loaf would feed one person for a week, though as bread was far and away the largest part of working people's diets up to the end of the nineteenth century, that is probably something of an underestimate.[3]

Many British readers are still familiar with the Imperial measurement system of yards, feet and inches. There were three feet in a yard (91.44 centimetres) and twelve inches (12 × 2.54 centimetres) in a foot (30.48 centimetres). There were also ells, quarters and nails. The English ell was usually forty-five inches (a yard and a quarter or 114.3 centimetres) while the Scottish one was usually thirty-seven inches (93.98 centimetres) but it was a measure that could vary from district to district as well as from country to country. A quarter was a quarter of a yard or nine inches (22.86 centimetres) and a nail was two-and-a-quarter inches (roughly 5.715 centimetres).

Some millinery goods, notably thread and buttons, were often listed by weight using the Imperial measurement system of pounds (lb) and ounces (oz). One ounce weighed 28.349 grams and there were sixteen ounces in a pound which weighed 453.592 grams.

I am aware that I reference a large number of places in the text, some of them little more than villages, and I realize this may be confusing. I therefore include a map showing the nineteenth-century county boundaries and, where I reference a place in the text, I include its county, e.g. Dunglass (East Lothian). Any place *not* so referenced will be in London, e.g. Bishopsgate Street.

Figure 2 The price of bread in London, 1600–1900

	Early C17th	**Late C17th**	**Early C18th**	**Late C18th**	**Early C19th**	**Late C19th**
Price in pence	3d.–4d.	5d.–7d.	5d.–7d.	6d.–8d.	9d.–14d.	5d.–7d.
Increase in years when the harvest was bad	5d. in 1613–14 and 1623–4	8d. in 1693, 1696 and 1698	9d. in 1709–10	11d. in 1795	Between 1800 and 1830 the price was over 10d. in fifteen of those years	8d. in 1873 and 1877

Figure 3 UK county boundaries in the mid-nineteenth century.

Introduction

'Of course, we'll be there, Pam, but . . . do I have to wear a *hat*?'

As a non-churchgoer, organizing my Catholic husband's funeral was throwing up endless unexpected questions and this was one of them. I realized I knew nothing about the present-day etiquette of wearing hats at funerals. Of course, when I was a child, women always wore hats in church and the Catholic Church was very strict about it. I remembered that in our student days, my friend and I were turned away from the Duomo in Florence because, in the heat of an Italian summer afternoon, we had forgotten to bring scarves to cover our hair. But surely things had changed?

'Sorry, Jenny, I don't know, but I'll ask.'

In fact, at the funeral, held in Leicester in March 2024, with over a hundred people present, not a single woman was wearing a hat. Times really have changed. Indeed, so few women routinely wear hats nowadays that milliner's shops have all but disappeared and today's milliners are usually celebrity designers who provide hats for women of the royal family and extravagant creations for the rich and famous to wear on formal occasions. Hat-wearing has declined to such an extent that in 2012 the organizers of Royal Ascot found it necessary to issue a *Style Guide* explaining that attendees in the Royal Enclosure and Grandstand were expected to wear some form of headgear, and information for attendees at Buckingham Palace garden parties now states that women 'usually' wear hats. (Plate 1) Hats may still be worn at weddings, but for most people, most of the time, hats are now practical items, worn as protection from the summer sun or winter cold, or, like football supporters' woolly hats in team colours or the MAGA baseball caps sported by followers of Donald Trump, to denote membership of a tribe.

Nonetheless, most people still know what a milliner is, or at least they think they do. However, it is actually only in the last couple of centuries that milliners have specialized in hats and headgear; prior to 1820 a trip to the milliner's shop did not necessarily involve the purchase of a new cap, hat or bonnet. This work

Plate 1 Racegoer at Royal Ascot racecourse in 2013. There is a tradition there of wearing extraordinary hats.

will look at the evolution of millinery, from its origins as an offshoot of the haberdashery trade in the late fifteenth century, through the milliners' role as purveyors of upmarket fancy goods and accessories in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to their reincarnation as high-class dressmakers and hat sellers in the early nineteenth century. It will, however, concentrate on the period *c*. 1600 to *c*. 1900 with only a brief introduction to the origins of the trade.

As with my previous books in this series,[1] I rely very heavily on original documents, many of which are bills and inventories. Inevitably, quotations from these contain lists of items with prices or valuations and little else. I make no apology for this because much of this material is being brought into the public domain for the first time and is therefore of considerable value, even though it does not always make for easy reading.

Since Lou Taylor published *The Study of Dress History* in 2002,[2] dress historians have seen the value of a multidisciplinary approach to the subject, and this approach is, of course, equally valuable in document-based research. Knowing what items in an inventory or on a bill actually looked like, appreciating the complexities of their manufacture and how they would have been used or worn by their buyers adds an important dimension to this study, which, as a former museum curator, I am well-placed to present. Chapters one and six therefore focus on describing millinery goods.

For a clearer picture of how millinery goods really looked in wear, or what the shops looked like in which they were sold, we have to turn to images, fashion

plates, cartoons, book illustrations and paintings, all of which, in their different ways, present pictures that are idealized, exaggerated or in some way manipulated. Furthermore, to appreciate what millinery items and their purchase meant to their sellers, makers, owners and wearers we have to turn to other sources, like letters, diaries and memoirs, and also to contemporary literature. No single source can provide a complete or entirely reliable history on its own, but by drawing on a range of material I try to present a coherent, and I hope reasonably accurate, picture of the millinery trade over three centuries. The objective is not to provide a completely new narrative but to support, expand and enrich the existing narrative with a wide range of source material, much of which is being published here for the first time.

The Trade before 1600

When Hotspur (in *Henry IV Part 1*) mocked the 'neat and trimly dressed' courtier who came to him to negotiate the release of prisoners as being 'perfumed like a milliner' and holding an effeminate 'pouncet box' filled with sweet smelling herbs 'twixt his finger and his thumb',[3] he was belittling an entire category of tradesmen. These were merchants who served wealthy men and their wives. Shakespeare knew his audience and it may well be that many of them shared Hotspur's contempt for such men. The play was written in 1597 and the term 'milliner' was then still comparatively new; according to the Oxford English Dictionary the word was first recorded in the 1490s but was little used before the mid-sixteenth century. Milliners then were still usually men, but many of the goods they sold, like laces, ribbons, trimmings, belts, purses and dress accessories, were associated with women.

Of course, such goods had been available for centuries prior to 1597, but they had originally been sold by mercers whose main trade was in fabrics. However, in the fourteenth century a new trade, known as 'haberdashery', began to emerge to sell dress accessories, fastenings and trimmings alongside some fancy textiles. Only one 'aberdassher' was admitted to the Freedom of London in the early fourteenth century, William Official in 1312[4] but more merchants describing themselves as 'haberdashers' appear in the records as the century progressed. The development of their trade seems to have been driven by changes in fashion.

Firstly, in the fourteenth century garments worn by the well-to-do became more fitted as methods of cutting out changed. Sleeves were narrower, cut

separately and fastened into the armhole, allowing freedom of movement; women's bodices were often shaped and fitted at the waist; many men wore short tunics which were also fitted at the waist and were worn over close-fitting stockings or something akin to tights. Unlike the loose robes worn by both men and women in earlier periods, these new fashions needed fastenings like cords, 'point laces', pins and buttons to hold them in place. Secondly, court fashion, at least in Northern Europe, became more and more elaborate and heavily decorated. Dresses, robes and tunics were often trimmed at neck and hem with embroidery, braid, lace or strips of fur; both men and women wore decorative girdles at the waist; women's headdresses came in a variety of extraordinary forms and were embellished with jewels, embroidery and trimmings. (Colour Plate I)

Contemporaries were eager to mock these excesses.[5] Jean de Venette, a Carmelite friar writing in the 1360s in Paris, claimed that from around 1340 noblemen, their servants and some citizens were wearing ludicrously short tunics 'so short that both their buttocks and their private parts' were on show. Giovanni Villani, writing in 1342 to his uncle by marriage, King Robert of Naples, claimed that young Florentine men were wearing tunics that were ridiculously short and tight, 'decorated with buckles and points and hung about with pouches'. The liripipes of their hoods were so long that they trailed on the ground, while young women chose to wear floor-length hanging sleeve-pieces. He blamed Walter de Brienne, Duke of Athens, heir to vast estates in Italy and France and King Robert's *protegé* as the newly appointed 'signore' of the commune of Florence, because he had abolished the local sumptuary laws in an attempt to encourage trade. In England, John of Reading, a monk in Westminster, writing in the 1360s, blamed the Hainaulters (the entourage of Edward III's wife, Philippa of Hainault) for introducing these fashions to England some eighteen years earlier, claiming men:

> have abandoned the old, decent style of long, full garments for clothes which are short, tight, impractically slashed, every part laced, strapped or buttoned up, with sleeves of the gowns and the tippits of the hoods hanging down to absurd lengths . . . Women flowed with the tides of fashion in this and other things even more eagerly, wearing clothes that were so tight that they wore a fox tail hanging down inside their skirts at the back, to hide their arses.[6]

Soon chroniclers were attributing all sorts of catastrophes to the immorality of the new fashions. In England one of the writers of the *Brut Chronicle* suggested that they had caused the Black Death; in France the defeat at Crécy in 1346 was seen as God's judgement on the nobility. Nonetheless, away from court versions

of these supposedly immodest fashions were imitated by the wealthy as far as, and often further than, local sumptuary laws would allow and they continued, albeit usually in less extreme forms, throughout the 1400s.

The fashion-conscious could buy haberdashery from a range of traders. There was in the 1300s still a considerable overlap between the goods sold by mercers and those sold by haberdashers, and there were also specialist makers/sellers of the various accessories they both retailed. By the mid-fourteenth century many of these manufacturers had their own guilds – the hurers (cappers) acquired ordinances in the late thirteenth century, the pursers in 1327, the pouch-makers in 1339, the hatters in 1347; the broderers (embroiderers) had to wait until 1561, though they had existed as a craft group since at least the thirteenth century.[7] However, grocers also often sold haberdashery and many mercers sold dried fruit and spices. Polly Hamilton[8] identified a whole range of other haberdashery sellers, ranging from traders who sold fabrics and garments, like glovers, hosiers, weavers and bodice makers, to sellers of apparently totally unrelated wares like chandlers and ironmongers.[9] Similarly, haberdashers and mercers sold, and continued to sell, goods other than fabrics and trimmings. For example, Agnes Swynscoe in Warwickshire identified as a mercer, but sold haberdashery – threads, 'great' pins, points, hooks and various types of clasps – alongside dried fruit, spices, fine textiles, some accessories and odds and ends like purses and wash balls. Half-a-pound of London ribbons at fourteen shillings was her most expensive stock item when an inventory of her goods was compiled in 1543.[10]

Thus, it is clear that the haberdashers never had a monopoly of their trade and, in addition, they were dependent on the work of tradesmen in a range of different guilds. The girdlers, for example, received their ordinances in 1327 and originally incorporated the pinners and 'wyredrawers', but the pinners became independent in 1636 as English pin-making techniques improved. The gold and silver wire drawers, who supplied the haberdashers with gold and silver thread and spangles, existed as a separate guild by 1461 and remained independent, but over time many of the smaller craft guilds were incorporated into larger guilds. For example, the glover-pursers joined the leather-sellers in 1502 and the pouch-makers joined in 1517, though the glovers split away and formed a new, more prestigious company of their own in 1636, by which time the finest gloves were works of art, seen as appropriate gifts for royalty and costing two pounds or more a pair. (See Colour Plate IVb.) The haberdashers themselves absorbed the hatters, and then the hurers in 1447–8.[11]

Haberdashers were mainly retailers and were happy to stock items made abroad if the price was right. The native maker-retailers had different priorities;

they were keen that foreign-made goods did not undercut their prices and were equally anxious to safeguard their own, supposedly superior, methods of production, so relations between local suppliers and retailers were not always smooth. This seems to have been a particular problem with the hurers who appear to have exerted an extraordinary amount of influence on parliament. As early as 1318 they had received an ordinance stating that all caps should be made from pure wool and, as a result, on occasion they took it upon themselves to destroy cheaper caps, imported from Germany and the Netherlands, which were made of flock and were stocked by many haberdashers. They also insisted that caps be fulled (beaten and felted) by hand with clubs rather than by foot or fulling mill, in accordance with an ordinance of 1376 which they had persuaded parliament to implement. The haberdashers and the hurers clashed about this in 1417 when the haberdashers pointed out, perfectly reasonably, that 'caps, hures and hats, both in England and also abroad, were fulled both by mills and by foot at less cost, and equally as well as those fulled by hand'. The dispute rumbled on for thirty years with the hurers seeking, unsuccessfully, to gain the right of search to ensure all their members were complying with their rulings, and the haberdashers insisting that, as there were fewer than 3,000 people in the city of London and its environs making bonnets, hures and caps, if they all had to abide by the hurers' rules, insufficient numbers of caps would be produced to satisfy demand and prices would rise exponentially.[12]

The Haberdashers' Guild received its own ordinances in 1371, though it had to wait till 1448 for its charter, at which point it also absorbed the guilds of the hatters and hurers. It then became one of the 'big twelve' livery companies of the City of London and came eighth in the order of guild precedence which was established some sixty years later in the reign of Henry VIII. (The mercers and the grocers, both of whom also sold haberdashery, came first and second in this hierarchy.) However, by 1371 many merchants had probably already been trading as haberdashers for some time. The 1377 inventory of John Coggeshall, a 'citizen and haberdasher of London', for example, listed five dozen white girdles, ten dozen points, twelve purses, women's clothing, sheets, coverlets, bed-hangings, quilts and skins.[13] Similarly, in 1378 Thomas Trewe died in the parish of St Ewen in London. He sold a whole range of caps for men, women and children, points, purses, thread, beads and other sundries alongside wooden boxes, gaming 'tables', whistles, paper, spurs and iron chains.[14] Both men were established traders who had probably been in business for some years prior to 1371. Mercers sold similar ranges of goods; one such was John Bussheye, whose stock in 1394 included beads, handkerchiefs, silk garters, laces and threads

alongside lengths of fabric.[15] The trades would continue to run in parallel for at least the next two centuries. Edward White was a mercer in Winchester and clearly a successful tradesman; in 1581 his shop goods were valued at £529, including haberdashery wares, laces and trimmings, threads and inkles, points and pins worth around £200 and included buttons worth £4 14s. with three dozen 'garnishes' (sets) of gold and silver buttons at eighteen shillings.[16]

From the time the hatters and hurers finally amalgamated with the haberdashers in 1447/8 the guild acknowledged two main branches – the Hat Haberdashers and the Haberdashers of Small Wares, who, by the end of the century, sometimes described themselves as milliners. These terms appear in wills and formal documents, though, as Polly Hamilton points out, traders themselves did not always draw a distinction between the various branches of the trade. 'Small wares' seems to have had a pejorative, or at least a comic meaning, as we shall see in Chapter 8, and was less used than 'haberdasher of hats', though both appellations were in use well into the eighteenth century.

Working from surviving inventories, it seems that most haberdashers of small wares/milliners in the period *c*. 1350 until 1600 would have sold a range of types of thread, pins and needles, buttons, buckles and 'points' or laces, and trimmings like ferrets, inkles, lace, ribbons and galloons. Some also sold fabrics, some sold small items of clothing like caps, stockings, gloves and handkerchiefs, some sold necklaces, belts, bags and purses, spurs and chains, while others, like Thomas Trewe, diversified into selling decorative items like wooden boxes and board games.

Many of the items haberdashers sold must have been bought from suppliers, but some traders seem to have made at least some of their own wares, for one seventeenth-century apprentice actually complained to the Haberdashers' Company that his master had not taught him properly because the only thing he had learnt how to make were points.[17] It is not clear whether he meant simply attaching chapes to the ends of strips of fabric or leather or whether he had also learnt to make braided points[18] but, either way, he felt he had cause for complaint. We cannot be sure what other items he expected his master to have taught him to make but there are a range of possibilities.

Some hurers/cappers may have diversified into making and selling other haberdashery wares, though the ongoing hostility between the two trade groups makes it unlikely that this happened very often prior to the amalgamation of the two guilds. Similarly, some haberdashers may also have been glove-makers; some haberdasher's wives or daughters may have made some of the collars, coifs and other linen goods they sold; and some families may also have knitted

stockings. Certainly, we know that in the later periods some haberdashers did make goods for sale. For example, Hugh Ball, trading as a haberdasher in the parish of St Giles, Cripplegate, died in 1665 and the inventory of his goods included '6 twisting wheels in the shed' which suggests that either members of his staff or members of his family were actually spinning some of the thread that he sold.[19] The inventory of William Farr, in the same parish, taken two years later, details 'all manner of tools' including a bar and head, hammers and anvils in a work shed used for the 'disgrossing' of gold and silver, in other words, for the making of gold and silver thread and spangles.[20] But, while haberdashers may indeed have made some of the goods they sold, the evidence does seem to suggest that the majority were retailers, selling goods bought in from a range of suppliers both at home and abroad.

Within fifty years of the establishment of the Haberdashers' Guild, haberdashers were buying from merchants from northern Italy who travelled to fairs across Europe bringing with them soft leathers, gloves, belts, bags, silks, ribbons, braids, trimmings and bonnets made of fine Italian straw, along with goods from the Orient, imported through Venice and other Italian ports. Many of these traders came from or through Milan and the surrounding area and thus they became known as milan-ers, a name that was corrupted into 'milliners' and was eventually used by some haberdashers who sold the milan-ers' goods. However, the adoption of the term seems to have been a matter of personal choice, and though, for the most part, this work will deal with tradesmen who *chose* to call themselves milliners, and who were in business after 1600, it is important to remember that the goods they sold were also available from merchants who might be trading as mercers, haberdashers, grocers or any one of a range of other trades. This is especially true of the period prior to 1650; thereafter the term 'milliner' usually suggested someone who was selling, or aspired to be seen to be selling, luxury haberdashery.

According to an unidentified contemporary quoted by Norah Waugh, 'Milliner' was:

> [A]n appellation derived from their dealing in merchandize, chiefly imported from the city of Milan in Italy, such as ouches, broches, agglets,[21] spurs, capes, glasses, etc. Amongst other wares which constituted a part of the haberdashery of that period were pins. There were few of these milliners' shops in the reign of Edward VI [1537–53], not more than a dozen in all London . . .[22]

The 'not more than a dozen' London milliners must have included William Bolton of the parish of St Olave in Southwark, who made his will in 1540 and died in

1561, and Arche Hoope in the parish of St Clement Danes who died in 1560,[23] also leaving a will, along, probably, with Christopher Carcano, who supplied millinery goods to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in 1557.[24] The numbers of milliners certainly increased as the century wore on. 'George Naylar, mellenar at the courte' supplied goods to a Mr Bartlet at Hampton Court in 1575[25] and a bill from Anthony Pagan 'mylloner' to Robert Dudley is dated 1565.[26] Court fashion in the sixteenth century was extravagant, designed to demonstrate the wearers' wealth and prestige; milliners working for courtiers were onto a good thing.

By the end of the century there were men describing themselves in their wills as milliners in parts of the country away from London: John Barker at Radford in Nottinghamshire (1563), Henry Crane in Cambridgeshire (1577), William Gosnolde in Suffolk (1587), John Ewer in Buckinghamshire (1581), Roger Woodowes, Michael Newton and John ap Rees in Shropshire (1583 and 1597), Humfrey Flan in Worcestershire (1590), John Rogers at Dartford in Kent (1599);[27] and, no doubt, many others whose records do not survive or have escaped listing on the National Register of Archives.

Some of these men had made a good living and most owned or leased property. William Bolton held land from the priory of Marlow and the abbot of 'Barmondsay', which he passed on to his wife for her lifetime; William Gosnolde owned a house called Maggets Hall at Brantham in Suffolk; John Rogers leased a mill in Dartford. Like John Rogers, several of the other milliners had additional sources of income. Humfrey Flan seems to have been a farmer and left a heifer to his nephew and a bushel of wheat to be distributed to the poor of his parish at the next harvest after his death; Henry Crane left a house and a windmill at Morden, and ewes and lambs to his daughter and grandchildren. Most of them left bequests of ten or twenty shillings to the poor of their local parishes. John Rogers was the most generous, and probably one of the most successful. He left forty shillings to the poor of Dartford and five shillings apiece to each of the servants living with him at the time of his death, along with quite substantial cash bequests to his family – four pounds to his sister, eight pounds to her son, his godson, five pounds to his wife's brothers, five shillings apiece to his nieces and a whole twenty pounds to the brother who was to act as his executor. Either the mill or the millinery had made him a wealthy man.

However, we have comparatively little evidence about what millinery items actually cost customers. Prior to 1600 most of the information we do have comes from inventories and this is somewhat unreliable as appraisers tended to undervalue goods, record cost rather than retail prices, and to group items in batches by type. In Thomas Trewe's inventory, for example, red leather points

were valued at 18d. for a gross or 1½d. a dozen, red and green caps were 2¾d. apiece (or 2s. 8d. a dozen), blue and russet ones were expensive at fivepence each, and one particularly fine russet one was valued at sevenpence, while nightcaps were just 2¼d. Purses varied in price from one penny to sixpence, spurs were sixpence as was a 'wooden gaming table with the men', a wooden whistle was twopence, a necklace of wooden beads was a penny, combs were threepence, linen thread was one shilling a pound, a black girdle was twopence and wooden boxes were fourpence each. No doubt they sold for slightly more but we have no way of knowing what the mark-up was. Nor do we know at what stage in his career Mr Trewe found himself at the time his inventory was made. By later standards his stock was quite small; apart from two dozen laces, a gross of points and just over six dozen adults' caps of various colours and types, most other items came in ones and twos. Was this a typical small shop or had he run the stock down because he was old and ill? How many customers did he have and how wide an area did he serve? We have no way of answering these questions.

The inventory of Edward White, a mercer in Winchester, taken in 1581, recorded haberdashery worth around £200 but is no more informative. We learn that inkles were cheap, as were points, together those in his shop amounted to just two pounds. Lace and fringes were valued at £163 and clearly he had a lot of them, but unfortunately the inventory does not often give quantities – though we do know that his stock included twenty shirts 'at various prices', totalling £2 2s. 8d., or an average of 2s. 1d. apiece, and silk buttons were listed at around sixpence for a 'garnish' or set for a coat or waistcoat.[28] However, it is reasonable to assume that White's shop, in a wealthy city and county town, was considerably better stocked than Thomas Trewe's had been two centuries earlier and that it catered for a reasonably well-to-do clientele.

A few sixteenth-century bills do survive for wealthy customers, though they almost certainly record prices at the most expensive end of the spectrum. Robert Dudley (1532–88), first Earl of Leicester, was Elizabeth I's favourite and long-time suitor, a prominent statesman both at home and abroad and one of the most important men in the kingdom. He had a position to maintain and he spent lavishly. (Colour Plate II) In 1557 he paid Christopher Carcano five shillings for a velvet purse and almost three pounds for one of gold and crimson silk. His perfumed gloves cost him thirty shillings and thirty-five shillings a pair, white silk garters were five shillings and he paid twelve shillings and thirteen shillings apiece for a number of velvet caps. A black velvet 'gown' cost him £3 6s. 6d., another with gilt 'studdes' set him back £6 13s. 3d. Gilt spurs cost six shillings and silver stirrups were twenty-four shillings but 'aglasse pomatt' (pomatum for

his hair) cost just thirteen pence. He also spent over £100 with Anthony Pagan, another 'mylloner', though unfortunately much of that bill is virtually illegible.

In 1575 George Naylar, 'mellenar', sold Mr Bartlet a pair of French gloves for four shillings, other gloves for tenpence and a pair of yellow Spanish garters for 4s. 8d., while in 1584 he sold him gloves at two shillings a pair, a piece of 'poynte' (point lace) also for two shillings, spurs (price illegible) and a pair of something else illegible 'fringed with silk' for six shillings. In all, six items cost Bartlet 18s. 8d.[29] Compared to Sir Robert Dudley his purchases were modest, though he, too, was a courtier, or at least the 1575 bill is addressed to him at Hampton Court and a second, dated 1584, is addressed to Whitehall, but we know nothing else about Mr Bartlet.

A bill of 1590 from William Hancockes survives in the Shakespeare's Birthplace collection and is mostly for fabrics. Black satin cost four shillings a yard, white fustian was one shilling, 'golland' (Holland) seems to have been two shillings an ell and 'flaxen cloth' was around 1s. 1d. A dozen buttons and an unspecified quantity of silk thread cost sixteen pence and fine woollen stockings were seven shillings, though it is not clear how many pairs were bought. The total was five pounds and the recipient is believed to have been Arthur Gregory of Stivichall (Warwickshire), a prominent local lawyer.[30]

At the other end of the social scale were the pedlars and chapmen who carried millinery and other wares door to door, some of whom have left wills, inventories and probate records. These have been analysed in some depth by Spufford and Mee[31] and show that chapmen/pedlars carried fabrics, inkles, tapes, thread, trimmings, laces, ribbons, combs, caps, cheap jewellery, buckles, buttons and pins and needles as well as hardware, books and ballads. Some travelled on foot, some on horseback, some had stalls at fairs and markets, others had shops as well as being itinerant salesmen. And some were female.

Even poor women decorated their clothes insofar as they were able. William Davis, chapman and shopkeeper of Winslow in Buckinghamshire, had two pounds of fringe, valued at sixpence, when his inventory was made in 1558,[32] while William Harrison of Lowestoft (Suffolk) had six shillings' worth of it in 1573. Fringe was one of the most common, and cheapest, forms of trimming for women's dress. In 1572 at Great Mongeham in Kent, Millicent Crayforde had a gown trimmed with 'billiment' (edging) lace and fourteen yards of fringe, for example, while ten years later Marion Chapman had a gown of frieze and fringe. Also in Kent at around the same time, Anne Deale had a black frieze gown trimmed with black worsted fringe and black ribbon.[33] In 1594 in Herefordshire, Katherine Lorde of Norton had a green stuff gown trimmed with lace and

fringe.[34] Millicent, Marion, Anne and Katherine were not the poorest of the poor; Millicent's father described himself as 'esquire' and Anne's was a yeoman farmer, but they were village girls from relatively ordinary families who may well have bought their trimmings from pedlars rather than milliners.

Spufford and Mee also examined probate records of the clothing of 'the common sort', ordinary people who died and were sufficiently well-off to leave a will. The valuations of clothing, albeit second-hand, in these records give some indication of what retail prices might have been, though comparatively few list individual items. In the late sixteenth century, for example, Millicent Crayforde had a bongrace (a type of cap) worth five shillings, a caul (also a type of headdress) worth two shillings and a fancy hat valued at an enormous thirty-eight shillings.[35] In rural Berkshire, Richard Smith's wife had five 'ruff bands' valued at ten shillings and Elizabeth Hullard at Arundel in Sussex had a partlet valued at 2s. 7d. and an 'insett' worth fifteen pence.[36] Numerous records refer to neck-cloths and neckerchiefs, which were all goods that milliners sold even if many of these purchases had actually been made from chapmen.

However, we know virtually nothing about how much any of the milliners and chapmen had paid for the goods they bought in. So, although it is clear that the trade could be profitable, it is almost impossible to analyse exactly how that profit was achieved. Nor do we know how many people a successful milliner like John Rogers or a court milliner like Christopher Carcano would have employed or what they would have been paid, or what sort of profit a chapman/shopkeeper like William Harrison could hope to make. Not until the seventeenth century does a little more information begin to become available, as we shall see in Chapter 2.

1

‘As many etceteras . . .’

Many of the items milliners sold are still familiar to us today but others are less so. This chapter examines various types of millinery wares that were on sale between *c*. 1600 and *c*. 1850. Names for items of dress go in and out of fashion and, where possible, I shall use terms that are familiar to the modern reader, ‘sleeve frills’ rather than ‘engageantes’, ‘cap’ rather than ‘commode’ or ‘pultney’, for example.

Before the mid-eighteenth century virtually everything milliners sold was made either by an individual craftsman or in a small workshop using basic tools and simple machinery. Shops therefore tended to have relatively small quantities of most stock items, and even big city stores patronized by the extremely wealthy were more likely to supply top-of-the-range goods to order rather than carry quantities of, for example, fine bobbin laces. Not until the late eighteenth century were millinery goods – or some of them – produced industrially and in quantity.

Aprons

Decorative aprons were an eighteenth-century fashion that carried through into the following century. The eighteenth-century versions were long, only slightly shorter than the skirts of the dresses over which they were worn. Some were of silk, often heavily embroidered, sometimes with metal thread and spangles, others were of muslin or fine lawn with white-work embroidery. They were fashionable for dress wear, but not everyone liked them. One of the rules of the Derby Assembly Rooms in the mid-eighteenth century was ‘No lady shall be allowed to dance in a long white apron.’ It was a ruling of which Beau Nash, master of ceremonies at Bath from 1704 to 1762, would have approved; on one occasion, it is said, he stripped a white apron off the Duchess of Queensberry and threw it on one of the benches saying, ‘Only abigails wear aprons.’[1] The story

is much repeated and is probably apocryphal, but it makes a point: white aprons, no matter how decorative, were associated with maidservants.

In the nineteenth century dress aprons became shorter, and the muslin and lawn ones were replaced by silk, often black silk, heavily embroidered with coloured flowers. While women of all ages had worn decorative aprons in the eighteenth century, in the nineteenth it became a fashion mainly for older women.

Bags and Purses

Throughout history, bags and purses have been an essential accessory for both men and women, especially so in the periods before garments had pockets.

In the Middle Ages, drawstring pouches, or flat envelope-shaped bags, were worn suspended from the belt or girdle or sewn onto it for security. Utilitarian bags were made of plain leather or cloth, but others were beautifully embroidered or woven and combined with precious metals and these were not the exclusive preserve of the gentry. Writing in the late fourteenth century, in the *Miller's Tale* Chaucer described 'Alison', the carpenter's pretty young wife:

> And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether
> Tasseled with silk, and perled with latoun.

She was the wife of a tradesman but rich enough to afford a decorative bag. Thomas Trewe's inventory[2] dates from much the same period, but it is unlikely that his purses, priced at between a penny and sixpence each, were as fancy.

By the early sixteenth century some men's garments had pockets but men continued to carry bags suspended from their belts, made of knitted wool, leather or even silk and metal thread. In 1557 Sir Robert Dudley's milliner sold him a velvet purse for five shillings and one of gold and crimson silk for just under three pounds.[3] For women, tiny embroidered bags suspended on extra-long strings were fashionable, as were 'swete bags' filled with a sweet-smelling powder and carried like a pomander or used like modern lavender bags. Seventeenth-century purses were similar. For everyday use they might be plain, but numbers of small embroidered or beadwork bags and bags of rich fabrics, either with drawstrings or attached to a frame with a clasp, survive. Some were probably gifts; bags containing coins were considered a suitable engagement