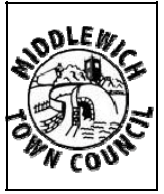


## A Short Guide to Outfits of the 1930's and 1940's



**Utility designs** followed the square shouldered and short skirted fashions of the war era whilst sticking to the strict regulations for minimal cloth usage. Buttons were limited and turn back cuffs were eliminated. Skirts some 19 inches from the ground were usual.

Fashion items that became popular were the **wedge sole shoe**, the **turban**, the **siren suit** and the **kangaroo cloak**. The turban equalised people of all sorts. It began as a simple safety device to prevent the wearer's hair entangling in factory machinery. It doubled as a disguise for unkempt hair which women had less time to attend to being so busy running homes, jobs and giving extra help wherever they could.



**Children's wear** were often hand me downs or made by relatives and mothers to patterns printed in the magazines and newspapers of the day. Girls often wore print dresses with hair tied back, quite often accompanied with a homemade cardigan. Boys wore shorts up to the teenage years and had a shirt with a woollen waistcoat or jacket.

### Day Clothes in 1938

In 1938 outfits had become square at the shoulder, with a fairly tight, natural waist and full, flaring skirt. Styles were varied and inspired by French designers like Elisa Schiaparelli and Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel, and by what the film stars wore. **Hats** were still small and worn tilted over the eye.

**Men's suits** had become much broader and more padded at the shoulder, with a long jacket and wide straight trousers. Narrow 'pin'-striped materials were popular. The soft felt hat generally replaced the bowler.



## Clothes Rationing

The Second World War made the importation of cloth for clothing virtually impossible and so clothes rationing was introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1941. Rationing books were distributed to every man, woman and child in Britain.

Clothing was rationed on a points system. Initially the allowance was for approximately one new outfit per year; as the war progressed, the points were reduced to the point where the purchase of a coat constituted almost an entire year's clothing allowance.

Inevitably styles and fashion were affected by the clothing shortages. Fewer colours were used by clothing companies, allowing chemicals usually used for dyeing to be used for explosives and other much needed resources for the war effort. Materials became scarce. Silk, nylon, elastic, and even metal used for buttons and clasps were difficult to find.

**The turban and the siren suit** became very popular during the war. The turban began life as a simple safety device but caught on as everyday wear. Siren suits, an all-enveloping boiler suit type garment, was the original jumpsuit. With a zip up the front, people could wear the suit over pyjamas making it ideal for the quick dash to the air raid shelter.

**The lady's suit** was designed in 1941 when materials were restricted because of war. Modelled on the soldier's battledress, the jacket is waist length with flapped pockets. The line is still pre-war with its square shoulders, natural waist and flaring skirt. Hair was worn curled, sometimes in a long, eye covering style. For comfort and warmth many wore 'slacks' and headscarves.

**The man's suit** has a new longer waist and fits more loosely. Sports jackets with contrasting trousers gave variety and economised on the 'coupons' that were issued to everybody when clothes were rationed.

