Uniforms and fashion in the clothing industry before 1914

Flyer for spring fashions, registered by printers Clements Newling in 1892
Copy 1, TNA

Dr Clare Rose
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- Boys’ suits with military braiding
- L. Hyam & Co., London The Gentleman’s Illustrated Album of Fashion for 1850

John Johnson Collection MC 4 (9) © The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford
Sailor suits as fashion items for children

- 1870, Prince of Wales’ children were portrayed in sailor suits
- Sailor suit variants became a staple of ready-to-wear manufacturers’ ranges

The children of the Prince of Wales, 1875, by Bassano NPG x96036
A poster advertising a season’s range of ready-to-wear boys’ clothes including 8 variants of sailor suits, 1886 (Copy 1/74 folio 355)
Sailor suits as clothing for very young

Mixed infants at Holden St School, London, 1897
Sailor suits dominant but NOT uniforms
Sailor suits and fashionable variations

Copyrighted design for sailor suit trimming by John Barran and Son, Leeds 1892
BT 50/ 194700, TNA
Uniforms as a means of attracting recruits

• Recruiting sergeants at the ‘Mitre and Dove’, Westminster
• ‘here may be seen every day representatives of our picked regiments. No modest lines-man [foot soldier] is allowed on this beat; and, though nearly all the recruiting is for the infantry, the sergeants themselves belong to the cavalry’
• Thomson and Smith, Street Life, p12
The decorative uniform

- Hussars: ‘with their fur-lined coats, jackets, skin-tight breeches in showy colours, in many hues: sky blue, maroon, silver-grey, light green, royal blue, dark green; adorned with tresses, embroidery, braids, stripes, fourragères; their silk belts in lively shades, coiffed with their colbacks…these young men well-cinched in their fashionable uniforms had a truly proud air’

Making military uniforms

• It will, of course, be understood that we are here treating of the dress of officers only, the uniform of the rank and file being provided for them by the Government, and is made for them, either at the Royal Army Clothing Factory, Pimlico, or by some of the various contractors, who make a speciality of this kind of dress...

• [at] the War Office, the sealed garments for nearly every rank and variety of service may be inspected. This is arranged by Government to facilitate uniformity in the garments of the officers, consequently the attendant in charge will, as a rule, do all in his power to give the information necessary, and even allow a rubbing to be taken of any particular section of braiding or embroidery

• Vincent, *The Cutting of Military Garments*, pp.1-2
• Designs for small boys' jackets registered by the manufacturer John Barran & Son, Leeds, 1882 BT 43/390813-31, TNA
Military designs as boys’ fashions

- Boys’ suit, registered by manufacturers Buckley & Sons of Leeds, 1880
- BT 43/12 317683, TNA
Military designs for ladies

- ‘Royal Horse Artillery’ braided costume, price £6-15s
The great variety of ornamental braiding, and tracing, now so popular on almost all descriptions of ladies’ garments, has suggested the advisability of including in this work a few suggestions for such decoration.

This department of the business is one in which the tailor of artistic tastes as a splendid opportunity to indicate his ability.

He is not tied down to any stereotyped features like his fellow-craftsmen engaged in the gentlemen’s department, whose most extravagant essay in ornamentation is the introduction of flat braid and silk breast facings.

He can introduce colours into his trimming from the most subdued to those whose tones are as brazen as a Salvation Army brass band.

He can select any form or character of design, ranging from the hieroglyphics on Cleopatra’s needle to the crow’s toes on a militiaman’s jumper.

Thornton, *Sectional System*, p.282
Designs in semi-military braiding

- Cuirass braiding (diagram 2)
- "this design, at first sight, appears – as it really is – rather heavy, but tastes are very divergent, and as an ornamentation to a winter jacket for a lady of the "dashing" type it may be described as appropriate; the lady who may select this style of trimming will doubtless think more of a dragoon or a lion-tamer than or a curate or – we say it with all due respect – a tailor.
- Thornton, *Sectional System*, p.284
• Publicity leaflet for fashion retailers by Clements Newling Ltd, 1892
• Registered in Copy 1, TNA
• ‘Falka’, jersey jacket with military braid trim, advertising image drawn by Adelaide Claxton Turner and registered by Hilder and Godbold, London 1883 Copy 1 Box 63/93, TNA
Military style braiding as a product

- Military style trimmings sold by G. Rushbrooke, Dressmakers’ Supply Stores, Aldersgate London, 1900. Note prices in code, referring to separate price list; this was for trade use
- Registered publicity leaflet, Copy 1 978-19920, TNA
• Passementerie ‘is excessively widely-used. In addition to the delicate ornaments it makes for women’s dress…this industry - produced very great quantities of braid in silk and wool for edging men’s garments. In military uniforms it is for epaulettes, frogging, stripes, stars, which mark the ranks; gold braid plays a very important role’

1899: khaki fashions

Sketch of Vesta Tilley, male impersonator, in World War I uniform
S.3100-2009, V&A

Label for khaki fabric marketed to civilians, 1900
Copy1 162/17, TNA
Uniforms and the counter-culture

Peter Blake, artwork for ‘Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band’ (Beatles, 1967)
Primary Sources


• TNA Board of Trade (BT) garment designs registered by manufacturers.

• TNA Stationers’ Hall (Copy 1) publicity materials registered by printers, publishers, advertising agents, retailers and manufacturers.
Secondary sources

• Jennifer Craik, *Uniforms Exposed, from Conformity to Transgression* (Oxford: Berg, 2005)
• Francesco Bonami, Maria Luisa Frisa, and Stefano Tonchi, eds. *Uniform: Order and Disorder* (Milan: Charta, 2000)
• *Making, Selling and Wearing Boys’ Clothes in Late-Victorian England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
• ‘What was uniform about the fin-de-siècle sailor suit?’ *Journal of Design History* 24/2 (2011), pp.105-124
• ‘Maternal Consumption: a view from the past’, *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2013 13/2: 178-198
Civilian bandsmen in uniform, Jodphur, 2012