

Hats, caps and bonnets



A quick look at the story of the hats in our collection.

The 1800s were a time of great change for women with increasing numbers working outside the home in factories as well as being domestic servants.

Nowadays, apart from religious requirements, most women do not wear anything on their heads except for 'high days', holidays and sun protection. This was not the case in the 19th century where women wore day-caps even in the home.

We have a few objects in the museum that tell the story of headwear after the 1860s, enhanced recently by the addition of an album of portrait photographs which include some wonderful examples of hats, caps or bonnets.

Before the advent of photography, images of women's clothes and hats were depicted in portraits or in magazines and mostly they featured those with money to spend on fashionable items such as these from an 1824 edition of the Ladies Pocket Magazine.



Working women if shown at all in pictures, were usually portrayed in the uniform of a domestic servant, complete with mob cap. It was usual for most women to wear caps, even when inside the house. One reason for this may have been that washing your hair was not common until late in the 1800s, so hiding your hair away under a cap was a good plan. In a domestic setting it kept the hair (and possibly head lice) under control, and it also protected your head from dirt and dust if you were outside the

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Three images from the Ladies Pocket Magazine, 1824, Vol 1 and 2. J.Robins & Co, London.

home,². Caps could range from the plain mob caps made from a circle of fabric gathered along the outside edge, to the dressy day caps with lace or velvet trimmings and lappets such as the ones in our collection. Those living in our cottages which are now part of the museum would have probably worn the simplest styles at home as they may not have had spare money for any ribbons.

At the Museum we have a woman's hat, a few caps or bonnets and some ornate hat pins. Taken with the collection of portrait photographs they provide us with a glimpse of the headwear worn in mid-Wales after about 1860. These pictures were mostly taken by Newtown photographer John Owen who had a studio in Broad Street, and they feature both local women and their visitors.

So how do you define the different types of head wear? Broadly you can say that a bonnet covers the crown of the head, often with a brim, and is tied under the chin. A hat is worn perched on top of the head, and held in place with a hat pin, the shapes changing to accommodate the variety of hair styles underneath; and a cap only covers the crown of the head and is mostly worn indoors but is sometimes covered with a hat for going outside. It can range from the very plain to the overly ornate, as shown below.



Our hat is part of a Welsh traditional costume, worn by Jeannie Lewis Lewis³ of Newtown around 1895. These hats were often worn over a cap, as in the next, more recent, photo of Jeannie's niece Medina, but

² For example, in 1833 40% of the workforce in the woollen industry were women. Report from Dr. James Mitchell to the Central Board of Commissioners, respecting the Returns made from the Factories, and the Results obtained from them." *British Parliamentary Papers*, 1834 (167) XIX.

³ Jeannie Lewis Lewis was the owner of the Princess Album of portraits given to the Museum in 2022. Her portrait dated 1880 heads this article.

these costumes were not worn every day, being kept for special occasions such as St David's Day. Details relating to our Welsh costume are in another article which will be available on our Collections page shortly.

The caps in our collection include these two white caps or bonnets which form part of the Welsh costume from Newtown. They are made of cotton and lace with a frilled edge which framed the face, and one has ribbons for tying under the chin.



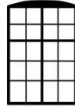
White caps from the Welsh costume

The other day-caps seem to have been made to wear on their own and the black one was probably worn during a period of mourning. They were given to the Museum by a local donor, and they may well have been supplied by Amelia Ray or her competitor Pryce Jones, or made locally from items purchased from her draper's shop in High Street as she dealt with several hat manufacturers around the country⁴.



⁴

Amelia Ray was featured in our 2022 Exhibition; details can still be seen on our History page.



Ornate hat pins from our collection

A quick glance at some of the portraits in this Newtown album shows how hard it is to define the head wear. The first three could be described as bonnets as they are tied under the chin. In one or two pictures the women are shown in hats, but most seem to be imaginative caps worn to impress in the home – or the photographic studio They demonstrate the skills of the milliner and show the lengths that women went to when it came to covering their heads.⁵



Ann Lewis Lewis nee Peters c
1878 J Owen photo



Newtown lady
c 1870 J Owen photo



Ann Lewis Lewis
c 1863 J Owen photo



Jane Lewis Lewis c 1890
J Owen photo



Liverpool visitor
C Ferranti photo



Newtown lady c 1869
J Owen photo



Newtown lady c1869
J Owen photo



Norwich visitor Lawyer
& Bird photo



Beatrice Wodley's hat 1880
J Owen photo

⁵ Images taken from Princess Album (N.2022.26.1) Dates calculated from J Owen imprint on reverse of image.

