

WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK (HTTPS://WOMENSHISTORYNETWORK.ORG)

For anyone with a passion for women's history

Women's History Network is an inclusive organisation that celebrates diversity

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The History of Hemlines

WHN ([Https://Womenshistorynetwork.Org/Author/Whnadmin/](https://womenshistorynetwork.org/author/whnadmin/)) / September 1, 2013

Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening. **(Coco Chanel)**



graphhemlines

(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/graphhemlines.jpg>)

The designers, the haute couture fashion houses and the ever changing seasons – they all have a high influence on fashion. But have you ever considered the historical impact on style trends? According to the 1927 Hemline Index, the length of our ancestors skirt or dress could actually indicate a country's wealth, prosperity and general wellbeing of the time. Here's a run through of the ups and downs of hemlines throughout the 20th and 21st century.



pre1920s

(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/pre1920s.jpg>)

The Prim & Proper Pre-1920s

For hundreds or even thousands of years, women's skirts and dresses conformed to one length: long and down to the floor. As things changed around the world with the onset of the First World War, Victorian-era prudishness began to unravel. Women gained more independence and importance in society and, as the world entered the decadent economy of the roaring '20s, hemlines began to rise.

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(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/roaring20s.jpg>)

The Roaring 1920s

With the recent film adaptation of F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, we all know the look of the classic '20s flapper: dropped waists, Mary-Jane shoes, long rope necklaces made of pearls and finger-wave short hair. This was a decade all about freedom and social progression and naturally, daring hem lengths followed suit. It's easy to overlook the hemlines of flapper dresses, but their above-the-knee length was considered shocking at the time, especially when coupled with the loose waist band instead of a rigid corset.

(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/1930shemlines.jpg>)

The crashing 1930s

After the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the Great Depression brought hemlines crashing back down to the floor with its grim psychological effect on the public. The lack of money and merriment meant the debauchery and risk taking of the '20s disappeared and was replaced by a return to a level of modesty – both economically and fashionably. The 1930s also saw the dawn of Hollywood's Golden Age. Whilst many other businesses collapsed, the film industry grew in popularity. Films offered a temporary escape from the harshness of reality. Hollywood made stars out of women such as Great Garbo, Jean Harlow and Bette Davis.

(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/postwar1.jpg>)

Post War 1940s ...

(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/postwar2.png>)

... & Fun Filled 1950s

The cautious post-war mood of the world was mirrored in the mid-length skirts and dresses popular throughout the '40s and '50s. Advances in social restraint meant that they weren't quite as prim as the floor length looks of decades past, but society still hadn't quite regained its momentous opulence from the '20s. The nipped in waists and flared-out skirts depicted femininity whilst pencil skirts represented elegance, class and sophistication. The 1950s saw the invention of the teenager and young adults gained more independence and freedom. Teenagers took a certain amount of control on their lives, including fashion. Girls and boys no longer wanted to look like miniature versions of their parents. They expressed their individuality through the clothes and hairstyles.

(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/swinging60s.jpg>)

Swinging 1960s

The '60s saw rising levels of fiscal prosperity and – with the invention of the teenager – young people began to rule the roost for the very first time. Short hemlines are unmistakably interwoven with this era, thanks to the arrival of the miniskirt (created by Mary Quant): the physical embodiment of a world daring to push new boundaries.

(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/1970s1.png>)

Disco Dancing 1970s

(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/1970s2.jpg>)

Disco Dancing 1970s

Social and economic discontent increased by the '70s, with the onset of the Vietnam War, unexpected inflation and the embargo on oil in 1973. Stock values began to slump and floor-length maxi skirts came back into fashion for the first time since the Depression. Laura Ashley was a popular designer with her peasant style smock dresses and tunics.

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(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/180s.jpg>)

Exciting 1980s & Generation X 1990s

The rising battle against sexism – with the ‘Girl Power’ of the Spice Girls and the underground feminist movement of Riot Grrrl – combined with a break away from fashions dictating only one stylish length, meant that skirt lengths differed for the first time and could be anything of your choice. Power-suited prosperity generally meant that skirts were short and accessorised with high heels they were laden with authority.

(<http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/2000s.jpg>)

Millennium 2000s

As the world saw in the Naughties it also saw a major dip in everything from jobs, money, morale and hemlines at the hands of the recession. With the world economy in the grip of uncertainty, the trend for skirt lengths mirrors this ambiguity – whether maxi, midi, mini or anything in-between, it seems anything is in vogue right now.

Nina Koo-Seen-Lin (c) August 2013

Tagged '20s flappers (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/20s-flappers/>), 'The Great Gatsby' (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/the-great-gatsby/>), 'the maxi' (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/the-maxi/>), 'the midi' (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/the-midi/>), 'the mini' (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/the-mini/>), Bette Davis (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/bette-davis/>), Coco Chanel (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/coco-chanel/>), F. Scott Fitzgerald (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/f-scott-fitzgerald/>), First World War (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/first-world-war/>), Greta Garbo (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/greta-garbo/>), haute couture fashion houses (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/haute-couture-fashion-houses/>), Hemline Index (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/hemline-index/>), hemlines (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/hemlines/>), Hollywood's Golden Age (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/hollywoods-golden-age/>), Jean Harlow (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/jean-harlow/>), Mary Quant (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/mary-quant/>), Mary-Jane shoes (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/mary-jane-shoes/>), Nina Koo-Seen-Lin (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/nina-koo-seen-lin/>), Roaring '20s (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/roaring-20s/>), The Great Depression (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/the-great-depression/>), Victorian-era (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/victorian-era/>), Wall Street Crash (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/wall-street-crash/>), women's fashion (<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/tag/womens-fashion/>)

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Women's History Network

WHN is an international forum for women's history, committed to inclusivity and diversity. We follow the Equality Act (2010) and reject all forms of discrimination. Join us in amplifying marginalized voices and celebrating all women's histories.
 #WomensHistory

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About

The Women's History Network is a national association and charity for the promotion of women's history and the encouragement of everyone interested in women's history.

(<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/about-page/>)

4/22/2025, 9:45:37 AM

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 **Women's History Network**

Joan Eardley was a pioneering Scottish artist who lived unapologetically as a lesbian in socially conservative mid-century Scotland. Her art was celebrated for its raw authenticity and captured the essence of communities.

womenshistorynetwork.org/see-her-when... #LesbianVisibilityWeek

(<https://bsky.app/profile/womenshistnet.bsky.social/post/3lnki6dlbx22c>)

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'See her when she is free...' Celebrating Joan Eardley for LGBT History Month – Kirsten MacQuarrie

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Image: Joan Eardley, by Kirsten MacQuarrie. In 2021, Scotland celebrated the centenary of one of our boldest, bravest and most innovative artists: Joan Eardley (1921–1963). Whether literally riskin...

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4/24/2025, 3:18:09 AM

0 12

Reposted from Women's History Network

 Victoria County History

We're delighted to be hosting @amalexathorn.bsky.social on 15 May for her exciting lecture, 'Women Making History in the Early Twentieth Century: Working for the VCH 'Big Red Books'.

Details in the link, we hope to see you there! #Skystorians 🇬🇧

4/24/2025, 1:58:05 AM

(https://bsky.app/profile/vchlondon.bsky.social/post/3lnkdpbm57s2d)

0 10

Reposted from Women's History Network

 Alexis Wolf

Lovely reading, especially in conjunction with today's news story on the discovery of a letter suggesting that Anne lived in London with her husband

www.theguardian.com/culture/2025...

4/23/2025, 1:59:57 AM

(https://bsky.app/profile/dralexiswolf.bsky.social/post/3lnhtdml4rc2s)

0 7

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April 8, 2025

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April 8, 2025

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When Women Champion Women: The Female Team Behind 'When Two of Us Meet' Musical – Emily Simonian, Alena Kutumian and Rebecka Webb (https://womenshistorynetwork.org/when-women-champion-women/)

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ABOUT

The Women's History Network is a national association and charity for the promotion of women's history and the encouragement of everyone interested in women's history. Following our establishment in 1991 we have grown year by year and today we are a UK national charity with members including working historians, researchers, independent scholars, teachers, librarians, and many other individuals both within academia and beyond. Indeed, the network reaches out to anyone...

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Codebreakers and Groundbreakers: Women's Work in the Second World War

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VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SOCIETY 8th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

(<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/voluntary-action-history-society-8th-international-conference/>)

WHN Annual Conference 2025, Call for Papers

(<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/whn-annual-conference-2025-call-for-papers/>)

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