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Sewing the Self:  
Needlework, Femininity and Domesticity  
In Interwar Britain

Carla Jeanne Cesare

April 2012

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## Abstract

This thesis looks at design practice as a method of investigating the relationship between design and identity in interwar Britain; in particular it considers design from the perspective of practice, not solely as the final object or the story of the maker. For it is in the process of making that the varied aspects of design as it is practiced are configured to create the greatest impact on everyday life. This research proposes that the quest to construct one's identity, in particular a feminine identity, can be demonstrated by the making of goods and objects through the traditionally feminine practice of sewing and needlework, specifically those made at home. It argues that home sewing, as an understudied everyday practice, was intrinsically bound up with ideas of who women were, how they imagined themselves, and how their feminine identities were represented. Between the wars, home-sewing was an integral daily practice for middle-class women that left indelible memories of not only the items made, but of specific types of sewing and design practice, who it was made for and how it was used. It also explores these specific practices during a period of enormous change- culturally, technologically and politically – and particularly important for this study are the themes of femininity and domesticity, as well as the boundaries of private and public life in relation to modernity. Methodologically it focuses on sewing practices by utilizing mass media, specific objects and oral histories to elucidate this. This thesis considers the breadth and extent of home sewing as an everyday practice aligning individual narratives, original source material and theoretical analysis.

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## Author's Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinion, ideas, and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the School Ethics Committee.

Carla Jeanne Cesare

April 2012

## **Introduction**

In 1933 a young Winifred Winslow walked from her home to her classes at university in Birmingham. On her way she would pass a boutique that had a white, off-the-shoulder embroidered evening gown she admired in the window. With an upcoming formal event of dancing coming up she needed a new dress, and while she had sewn her own day dresses, she did not feel skilled enough to make an evening gown. After several weeks of seeing the gown she bought it for the event. (Sheldon, 6/09) This memory, and her experiences with sewing and all that it entails, is at the core of this study. What sewing meant to a young woman in inter-war Britain is far more complex than mending clothes or a trip to the shops, it was and remained for many women a central part of how they constructed their ideas of themselves into a form of public presentation and self-identity, specifically femininity.

The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of home sewing as an everyday design practice on the construction of femininity in inter-war Britain. It examines what home sewing was and how it functioned as an everyday design practice. It defines design as practice based with a focus on the steps or process of design and making. In this deconstruction of practice it allows for a better comprehension of the complexity of daily life for middle-class women. Lastly, it investigates how femininity was constructed and understood in a time period of great change and contradiction by clarifying the middle class woman's practice of femininity as a balancing act between notions of tradition and the modern as a form of conservative modernism, allowing for a more timid approach to self definition.

In this introduction the main premise of this study will be presented along with the key elements and debates which will be examined in this thesis. Following an overview of the sources and rationale of the research will be explained. Lastly, the purpose and goals of each chapter will be outlined.

There are several core concepts that must be clarified in order to understand the study as it unfolds. Firstly, home sewing is at the centre of this thesis, it is the practice from which all perspectives are formed. Home sewing is not a monolithic activity that women blindly performed, it encompassed a variety of activities for a variety of purposes, requiring motivation and skill. 'Women have sewed curtains, knitted jumpers, embroidered household linen, made dresses, darned and re-darned, turned collars, mended and remodelled all manner of things for themselves and for their families, all within a range of domestic tasks deemed

part of the household economy'. (Burman, 1999, p.5) Whether it was a garment or a cushion, it required, at least in part, to be made at home. Sewing requires a host of materials and trips outside of the home for the necessity of buying materials or tools required for it, or, even having some parts made outside the home. Home is significant not only for identifying the objects being made at home, but also for being the primary site of personal development for the creator. Further it is these trips out of the home, the very act of leaving, which becomes central to our understanding of what identifies home sewing as such. Home sewing becomes a marker of place and meaning for the maker and the object made.

This investigation of home sewing as an everyday design practice, requires a comprehension of an important aspect of this study: the significance of understanding design as a practice and its relationship with everyday life. Design as a practice requires a conceptual grasp of design and the approach to its study as a process, a series of steps, which when deconstructed illustrates the depth of impact and the multiplicity of meanings created in the act of making. Design is used in this thesis as the approach to understanding the relationship between everyday practice, identity and the experience of modernity for middle-class women in Britain between the wars. 'To invoke everyday life can be to invoke precisely those practices and lives that have traditionally been left out of historical accounts, swept aside by the onslaught of events instigated by elites'. (Highmore, 2002, p.1) This thesis configures design as a way of being more than the final object or the story of the maker, but the process of making which incorporates the varied aspects of design as it is practiced.

The tradition of studying the object or the maker as the main point of meaning and meaning-making, is limited and does not recognize the complexity of design. The approach adopted in this thesis is to understand design by allowing each aspect of home sewing to speak for itself and be considered for its individual importance and influence on the whole. The act of viewing design as a whole process made up of smaller steps allows for new understanding of how design impacts everyday life and vice-versa. This study posits that everyday life is the context in which a design practice, such as home sewing is best studied. Its nature is that of repetition, habit, propriety, and an understanding of oneself and one's ways within the larger context of society. 'A practice is what is decisive for the *identity* of a dweller or a group insofar as this identity allows him or her to take up a position in the network of social relation inscribed in the environment. (de Certeau, 1998, p.9, italics in original) Just as design as a practice is broken down into steps, this study allows the daily life of the middle class woman to be understood as a unique response to the daily rhythms of life within a family, a job, a neighbourhood, and a culture. Decision-making was not isolated, and influences came from a

broad spectrum of sources. The decision made with each step, whether conscious or not, forms what one does and who one becomes.

The discussion of design as a practice infers a degree of knowledge and skill, which when conditions of mass popularity or education are referenced, then impacts our understanding of the meaning of amateur and professional. In this thesis the discussion of differences and concern over notions of amateur and professional work is found both in contemporary discussions in mass media, in the concern of the women interviewed and in historical reference of the dresses held in private and public collections. The comprehension of amateur has developed from a 'love' of a practice or study to being a marker for discerning the quality of an object and/or the skill of its maker. This has greater implications in interwar Britain where clothes, as a marker of class, could signify the difference between poor, working class, and where on the ever broadening spectrum of middle-class a women existed. An 'amateurish' outfit would look unfinished, shoddy and potentially inappropriate. Propriety within cultures has greater significance when the terrain of inclusion is shifting.

Identity as a constructed form of the self is laden with meaning. Home sewing, which was used for fashion and domestic designs, was linked both to the body and the home, not only by object use and place but by meaning. While identity to a certain extent is self-defined it is influenced also by external factors. For the middle-class woman in inter-war Britain ideas of femininity, what it meant to be female in an appropriate manner were in a state of flux, and the possibilities were growing. These ideas were developed and mediated through new channels of information: mass media, cinema, and the now more porous boundaries of the class structure. The possibility to become someone new, to work in a new industry, participate in new leisure activities, could be interpreted through home sewing. Clothing as the first public perception of self could be individualized and modern.

Identity however, does not stop at the body. For the inter-war middle class woman being modern was at times in conflict with the opposing force of tradition, which could be found most forcefully in ideas of domesticity. Indeed, in this study representations of the home are consistently, but not always, revealed to be traditional and labelled as gendered, feminine spaces. Boundaries of self continued to morph into the home and ideas of what home should be. Paradoxically, women at this time were being given greater opportunities for education and work, but were being equally cajoled to stay at home, and to allow family to be at the core of their identity. To create a comfortable home for a husband, to manage a family's health, were part of being feminine. The belief that in order to be feminine required the ability to sew was

not uncommon. This study considers the awareness of the sewing machine as being a mainstay of the home; therefore it is not difficult to locate femininity, domesticity and home sewing as interrelated aspects of design, identity and everyday practice.

If, as de Certeau states, that actions define who one is, then class is defined by one's behaviour. Class in this research is considered to be a socially constructed system used by individuals to identify themselves and others; it is defined by not only the lifestyle, i.e. employment, education, type of housing, of the person, but by their practices. Indeed education trains one for certain behaviours, employment has expectations and social interaction is guided by parameters and propriety. This relationship between objective and subjective definitions of class is found in the 'public' and the private/individual behaviours and expectations manifest in design practices. These practices are then assessed in relation to the aforementioned 'markers' of class. The interwar socio-cultural fluidity created a porous social barrier where one could 'move up' the social ladder, or even be perceived as different through everyday design practices. Utilizing design practices to signify one's place allowed for self-determination even within the broader structure of cultural norms. Importantly it is this ability to self-determine through design practices juxtaposed with cultural norms that creates a unique circumstance for interwar middle-class women in Britain. The historic restraints were loosening through major socio-cultural change creating openings for individual change and control.

As a gendered practice home sewing can be utilized as a marker of class, particularly, as argued in this research for the middle-class. The middle class are those most effected by socio-cultural changes in Britain between the wars, as a class of fluidity far greater than that of the working-class or aristocracy. The mix of opportunities and new social needs create a unique set of experiences from which this research investigates the role of everyday practices in defining feminine identities. To what extent did home sewing inculcate or subvert ideas of class? Could needlework, as both a necessity and a creative outlet circumvent class and reassert meanings of femininity as stronger than class for the middle-class woman of interwar Britain?

Just as one should not perceive women or the middle-class as a monolithic entity nor should one understand the interwar period as a 'block' of time. Indeed change is a significant aspect of understanding the interwar period. The 1920s had a separate set of events, which defined it starting with the social and economic shifts of post World War I. The 1930s started with the Depression, and its resulting unemployment, but with new industries emerging as well. These often had regional implications in terms of economic success. There are several different ways

to measure and mark change in the interwar period from economics to legislature to fashion. Factors such as the Marriage Bar, women's right to vote (1921/1928), the General Strike of 1926 and Jarrow March (1936), housing development and the Great Depression have all impacted women. Change in fashion is yet another measure, the invention and marketing of new synthetic silks, mass production, and the silhouette altering designs of Coco Chanel and Madame Vionnet are markers of both the significance and degree of change. However to link all of these aspects with the everyday practice of home-sewing is beyond the scope of this research. Importantly, while some of the women interviewed had recollections of the 1920s, the 1930s was a more significant period for them, which plays a large part in this research. Changes are referenced as they may have directly impacted home-sewing but to create a relational timeline of these is not a priority of this research.

### **Debates**

This thesis will discuss particular positions regarding the theoretical and methodological approaches and understandings in this research. An underlying theme is the role of gender in design practice. When any subject matter becomes gendered it requires an understanding of the impact that has on perceptions, both historical and contemporary. In *The Subversive Stitch* Rozsika Parker questions the art/craft hierarchy which exists with embroidery noting, 'that the real differences between them was in terms of where they are made and who makes them'. (1984, p.5) Home sewing is part of this dialogue as it is considered gendered by both its location and due to it being a practice that has been traditionally performed by women. The gendering of a subject may limit perceptions and understandings of its importance as it becomes layered with meaning. In this study, how the 'gendering' of home sewing has limited our understanding of it as a relevant practice historically is undertaken through research into how prevalent it was, along with the breadth of diversity found within home sewing as a practice. It also analyses the means by which it has become gendered and as a result overlooked. In doing so the study repositions home sewing as a vital part of design history and women's history.

Some of the debates around this study are located historically not only by the subject matter, but by methodologies. In part these ideas of gendered design have been inculcated by the tradition in which design history has been derived. This study will address, to an extent, how design history has been shaped. In two aspects the development of design history as a scholarly field has altered our views of design. With its origins in the history of art and the

history of the decorative arts, design history originally maintained the traditional stance of perceiving design from the role of the maker and the materiality of the object. By allowing for a broader and more nuanced study of design to be formulated, the network within which design histories are created is changing our understanding, in particular, of gendered design and everyday practices. According to Lou Taylor, 'From the early 1990s new inter-disciplinary methodologies were developed by both male and female researchers using ethnographic, material culture and consumption-based approaches'. (2002, p.70) The greatest impact has been with the influx of feminist historians particularly in design history. This is, in large part, due to the influence of material and cultural history theories and methodologies. Examples of this include the focus on technology, economics and consumption within design history. While these are relevant aspects this study seeks to step away from these often historically politicized debates, and return to the nature of design as a process of making. In doing so the maker, the material and other influences can be better understood both from a broader perspective and to allow for scholars to focus on a particular practice in a more articulate manner. In doing so, everyday design practices may be discovered, or rediscovered, with a more comprehensive interpretation.

The strong influence of feminist design historians is best understood through the discussion of feminist approaches toward class and history with a primary focus on how feminist art and design historians have approached art and design. This focus on the feminist design interpretation is in response to the saturation of design history by numerous other disciplines which frequently minimize the significance of design practices in relation to these other influential disciplines. It is the goal of this research to remain focused on design practice reasserting the importance of 'making' and all of its aspects underscoring the relevance of feminist arguments toward design history. In order to understand feminist perspective in the context of design history it is grounded in discussions through feminist writers who have a focus on art and design topics and identity such as Griselda Pollock, Janet Wolff, Victoria DeGrazia, Penny Sparke, Pat Kirkham, Cheryl Buckley, and Sally Alexander, their works are central to this study. As these writers have been influenced by the broader feminist theories it allows for a feminist perspective that is respectful of the importance of art and design as it has impacted women.

These broader perspectives have formed the theoretical foundation in this study that women are considered to be active participants in the construction of their identity by negotiating the everyday, willing to accept and refuse what does not suit their needs or evolving sense of self. This research considers femininity to be socially constructed and linked to the body/biology;

the body is also a site of practice. These are common understandings of late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminism and are considered to be the foundation of the position of this research.<sup>1</sup> However, it needs to focus on the interwar experience in Britain, filtered through design practices and issues of identity in order to create an understanding of the period and experience. The overarching ideas of feminism are distilled through art and design to create an understanding of the impact of everyday practices in interwar Britain. Further understanding of economic and historical concerns is considered in the writings of Susan Kingsley Kent and Pat Thane specifically focusing on the British interwar conditions. Joanna Bourke's work also assisted in keeping a focused perspective on the feminist approach to daily life in Britain.<sup>2</sup> Further, methodologically, it allows that magazines and retail shops, aspects of the design as practice approach, are part of a capitalist network, but they were not systemic dictators of a patriarchy isolating women.

Understudied topics and debates are often contentious due to their methodologies that some scholars believe to be inherently flawed. Specifically in this research the use of oral histories has traditionally been considered to be weakened by the fallibility of memories and the validity of the individual's story. In essence, of what importance is one person's memory when it cannot be fully verified? The idea that all objectivity is lost due to memory, or that one person's story cannot have any importance is addressed in this study. 'Reading back against the grain of what is actually said, checking it against other sources, recognizing the subject position of the source, paying attention to specific factual details and getting beyond personal myth and received ideas are all essential to assembling such interview and opinions into a more reliable historical record'. (Donnelly, 2006, p.291) Subjectivity and memory are validated through the balancing of the individual voices with the analysis of documentation – archival material, objects and mass media. By relating and supporting the voices of middle class women and their families with the material realities of everyday life, oral histories become a vital component of this study. It strengthens the argument that home sewing allowed the individual to be created, presented and performed through small gestures of design while bearing witness to broader social concerns and negotiations. Indeed, the use of oral histories has verified that certain experiences can be both common and unique, creating new angles of perception.

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<sup>1</sup> For further readings see *Feminist Social Thought*, Meyers (ed) 1997, *Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology 1999*, Hesse-Biber, et. al, *Feminist Theory and the Body*, Price and Schildrick, 1999. (see see Bartky, Deveneaux, Grozs)

<sup>2</sup> Further reading such as *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, Smith, 1990 and *British Feminist Thought*, Lovell, ed, 1990 are particularly insightful.

Choosing a place and period of time of great change requires a focus to create a specific understanding. Inter-war Britain was a place and period of time that was marked by great fluctuations in the economic and social climate. Commonly it is thought of as a time defined by the after effects of World War I, the Great Depression, poverty strikes and a loosening of morals; all functioning as precursors to World War II. However, there were also positive effects for women which included the right to vote, more industries being open to them for employment, exciting changes in fashion and social opportunities. Alongside these concerns were shifting barriers of class, particularly for the middle class. These circumstances were part of the conditions and characteristics of modernity. Historian Arthur Marwick states, ‘there can be no doubt as to the all pervasiveness, across classes and across nation, of the sense of “modernity”, many hating it, most (particularly among the “masses”) loving it. “Modernity” meant being in touch with the future.’ (2003, p.29) These changes impacted daily life and how it was managed.

The anxieties and changes that came with modernity; mass production, transport and communication, impacted the lives of middle class women in a very visceral way. In order to function new codes of behaviour were needed and new ways to negotiate everyday life. As these changes are indicators of modernity they have a historical precedence in the often considered idea of the *flâneur*, subsequently it is significant in this research. The concept of the *flâneur*, the gaze and the location of the ‘experience’ of modernity are of great importance in understanding the interwar period for middle-class women. This study considers design to be a method of negotiating modernity, it allows for various actions and representations to become part of the discourse of modernity. By considering the design process alongside modernity it allows for women’s lives to be more fully incorporated in the history of interwar Britain. The *flâneur* as a point of reference has historically been a measure of modernity, therefore it would not be possible to ignore it. However, one needs to interpret it and its conditions within the time period studied. It draws historical considerations of modernity from the 19<sup>th</sup> century *flâneur*-based theory into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by recognizing the diversity of daily life and its practices.

The *flâneur* as recognized by Charles Baudelaire in the nineteenth century is redefined in this research in relationship to the twentieth-century experience, specifically that of its positioning with women. Walter Benjamin provides an understanding of Baudelaire’s *flâneur* (only recognized as a male) that can be utilized best via the understanding that modernity is located in the street, more specifically the arcade, ‘the transformation of the boulevard into an interior’ (2006, Benjamin, p. 68) which, with its similarity to the department store is a place where the

gaze is practiced, 'the joy of watching prevails over all' (ibid., p.98) The department store is the last promenade for the *flanêur*. (ibid., p.98) For interwar women, as the new and pre-eminent consumers, the department store as the modern arcade becomes their site of modernity, and their practiced gaze allows them control over their circumstances. Benjamin notes that the flaneur '[is] on the threshold –of the metropolis and the middle class' (ibid., p.40) In this research middle class interwar women of Britain are poised to be understood through a contemporary understanding of their role in the experience of modernity.

Specifically, in interwar Britain, women were a great part of public life, participating in the 'street', and in being participants, were subjects of modernity, not just objects, hence the relationship to 'the gaze' is altered. To maintain a nineteenth century understanding of the *flâneur* in twentieth century studies is flawed. This does not negate the '*flâneur*' experience, but broadens and opens our understanding a woman's role in modernity, and acknowledges the depth of change which was occurring and how, as historians, this changed perception opens up our understanding of the time period and everyday life.

## **Sources**

The primary sources in this study reflect some of the contradictory conditions of the research. The lack of extant 'everyday' objects brought about the question of how to tell the story of those things about which much has been written about during its time, but not as historically relevant? It also questions why there were so few objects existing. Simultaneously concerns of what was lacking became the impetus to utilize oral histories alongside magazines and sewing manuals, designed objects of discourse, and to develop a focused search and understanding for collections of everyday life in fashion and domestic goods. There are three primary sources of research materials: oral histories, mass media, (specifically magazines and sewing manuals) and sewn/embroidered objects. Many of these were discovered in archives and collections, and as such are an important topic of discussion. Following is an overview of conditions and concerns of each source, and an introduction to the people who were interviewed for this research.

## Oral History

The specific methods of research and training for the oral histories include reading and experience interviewing. A number of books on methodologies were reviewed with the relevant practice based information through the Oral History Society of the UK. For specific experience volunteering was done at a local community centre, The Ouseburn Valley Trust in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The volunteering included training as part of its on-going project of gathering oral histories of people who lived in the valley while it was an active manufacturing area. The Ouseburn Valley is a former industrial zone based around a canal that housed a number of different industries including a kipper manufacturing plant. Local residents met at the centre to tell their history of the area. This experience was then applied to the oral histories undertaken for this research. Both the volunteer experience and research was supported by a review of methodologies from the oral history society as well as theoretical analysis, and applied to the interview process of this research.

There were four types of interviews undertaken for this research: first generation (those alive during the interwar period), second generation (those with immediate family members who actively sewed in that period), individual interviews, and a group interview done in partnership with the Embroiderers' Guild, at the Whitley Bay branch in the Northeast of England. The population interviewed for this research consisted of six women who are considered first generation, and one couple. There were an additional 6 individuals who were interviewed as second-generation interviewees, those with relatives who were able to relate family histories of sewing. Lastly, interviewees were met jointly with the oral history project of the National Embroiderers' Guild, interviewing seven additional women regarding the role of needlework in their lives.

The ageing, and limited population of possible interviewees for oral histories were a major methodological constraint. Initially a search was done through a local pensioners organization, however that proved unhelpful. However, through word-of-mouth references a diverse group of interviewees were found. They spanned both geographic and class boundaries. Participants were from the full range of 'middle-class' women and were from as far south as London to Newcastle, with the Midlands and Northwest of England also represented.

The use of oral histories is notably relevant, however more recent arguments and effective usage of oral histories by Lynn Abrams and Linda Sandino, amongst others has proven that an awareness of weaknesses can assist in creating a methods to lessen problems; and theoretically has proven that benefits outweigh the limitations. Indeed in this research oral histories were

supported by mass media research and object analysis; allowing for the validity of oral histories to be confirmed. A second logistical limitation was the closure of a number of archives and collections over the span of research. However, a diverse approach to materials and early research trips alleviated larger potential problems. The limited 'home-made' collections inspired more questions about our socio-cultural relationship to home-sewing and how it is approached by historians, museums and the commercial world.

An immediate concern was whether or not there would be a sizeable number of first generation participants to interview. This concern was offset by deciding to interview second-generation participants. Originally the first attempt was to find interviewees through the pensioners' organization Age Concern. This did not lead to any useful contacts. One woman was met through the local Methodist Church that hosts regular luncheons for its elderly members. Through professional contacts the names of the remaining interviewees were gathered. The process was initiated when the potential (first generation) narrator was contacted and told the nature of the interview. Once they had agreed to be interviewed it was arranged to meet them at their homes where our conversations would be recorded. On two occasions family members were present during the interview, the remainder of the women were interviewed by themselves. Most of the women had items (objects, photographs, etc.) to show what they or family members had made. The embroidery group interview was held at a local church hall with a member of the Embroidery Guild working on a history project.

To address the concern with the continuity of their stories they were informed that they would be asked 'general housekeeping' questions to make sure that dates and names were set at the beginning of the interview. These questions focused on facts: dates of birth, location, family names and types and dates of employment and education. On an organizational level the answer could be referred back to if questions were asked and assess the veracity of their memory. The questions also, in an unobtrusive way, located the narrator in a particular social setting, which assisted in developing a general picture of commonalities of experience with other women interviewed. Overall it was a successful method with quite good conversation; one woman was quite shy and another quite domineering. Relating to the fact that a foreigner was the interviewer, they occasionally mentioned concern about their accent and if they would be understood. It was not a problem even as they slipped out of their 'posh' accent and into their normal local dialect. The second generation interviews were similar in approach, with family history noted and generally more discussion about what was known or unknown, and some reflection of why or how family members or stories had been told or what was missing.

Following is a brief biography of each of the individual participants in alphabetical order, followed by second-generation interviewees then the Embroidery Guild members. All of these oral histories are used throughout the thesis, not being relied upon solely in any one chapter. Within the text of this thesis they are cited by the last name of the interviewee.

The first woman interviewed was met through the local Methodist Church pensioners luncheon programme. Mrs. Joan Peacock Alexander was born on December 12, 1916 in Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where she was interviewed at her home on June 3, 2009. She was the younger of two sisters, she noted her sister was quite frail. Mrs. Peacock attended school until the age of 16 when she went to work at the railway where her father was employed. Her mother was a housewife. Mrs. Peacock married in 1943, after meeting her husband while playing tennis. They had one son.

Mrs. Muriel Jones Bliss (1919-2011) was born on December 5, 1919 in Birmingham. She was interviewed on April 19, 2011 in Cleve, Bristol. She was the youngest of three children, with two older brothers. She finished grammar school at 15 years old and stated that beyond the basics of sewing that she had learnt at school she did not start sewing until she was 29 years old. After she was married and had two daughters she started taking night courses in sewing and needlework, becoming very proficient and active in working on ecclesiastical pieces for her church.

Mrs. Margaret Simons Crankshaw was born November 11, 1919 in Withington, Manchester. She was interviewed on July 11, 2010 in Heaton Park Manchester. Her father was a butcher and her mother a housewife, and they lived above the butcher's shop. As the youngest of four children (3 girls, 1 boy) she was able to stay in school until 16 where she trained as a secretary. She worked as a secretary at a mail order shirt company for nearly 40 years. She was very close to one of her sisters, who was also the subject of a second-generation interview through Mrs. Crankshaw's daughter. She married in 1941 and had one daughter, Linda Holden, another interviewee.

Mr. and Mrs. Vincent and Bernadette Goulding Lavell were interviewed in Liverpool on June 22, 2009. Mrs. Lavell was born on April 5, 1934, in Liverpool. She was the fourth of 5 girls, and finished school at 15 years old. Her grandmother (~1875-1945) was a tailoress who had apprenticed and worked for a Jewish tailor. She lived with Mrs. Lavell while she was growing up. Her mother born in 1900 did not do the sewing as that was the role of her grandmother, who also did alterations for neighbours who came to the house. Interestingly they did not

have a sewing machine at home. Mrs. Lavell's aunt lived with them as well, but was 'frail' and did some of the housework.

Mrs. Winifred Mary Winslow Sheldon (1915- 2012) was born August 3, 1915 in Darlaston, Staffordshire, but was raised in Walsaw, Birmingham. She was interviewed on June 22, 2009 in Liverpool. She was an only child, and after completing her university education, worked as secretary at Bakelite and other companies, eventually relocating to London. She was married and had two daughters.

Mrs. Margaret Ibbotson Thomas was born August 18, 1920 in Derby. She was interviewed in Scarborough, Yorkshire on June 12, 2009. She was the eldest of 5 children (3 boys, 2 girls). She completed university education and worked in the social work field. Interestingly, her younger sister was an artist, who did not do needlework. Mrs. Thomas married at age 22 and had two daughters and a son.

Second generation interviews were held with a family member who had a close relative who had some experience with sewing in their lives.

Linda Holden, and her daughter Charlotte of Burnley, Lancaster were interviewed on July 12, 2010 in regard to her aunt, Joan Simons Booth (elder sister of Mrs. Crankshaw). Mrs. Booth was born on May 3, 1915 in Withington, Manchester. Mrs. Booth had always had an avid interest in fashion and upon leaving school at 14 she trained as a milliner at Kendal Mills in Manchester (now House of Fraser). Throughout her life she made her own clothes and worked in retail shops. She taught Linda how to sew and was quite skilled. She was married, but did not have any children.

Mr. Grey Holden spoke of his parents Mr. and Mrs. Holden, born respectively in 1890/1909, in Bury, Lancashire. He was interviewed on July 12, 2010 in Burnley, Lancaster. His mother was the second wife of his father, and had worked as a machinist at a slipper/shoe factory. His father was originally a milliner, and he knew how to sew. His mother made some of her clothes, and after she had had children she took embroidery classes while working part-time.

Mrs. Diane Buie was interviewed October 2, 2009 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne about both her mother, Mrs. Audrey R. born in 1921 and her grandmother Daisy Dicks Howe (born 1880) South Shields, Tyne and Wear. Mrs. Howe trained as a tailoress, and at about age 20 she was married to a miner. She sewed at home for money. Mrs. R. did not have a career in sewing

even though she was regarded as quite skilled while learning at school; she chose to remain anonymous.

In a phone interview with Mrs. Helen Stead, on April, 20, 2011 she spoke of her grandmother, Mrs. Kathleen Dangerfield Knight, born in 1893 in Ramsbury, Wiltshire. She was the second of three daughters born of a father who had been a groom and a mother, who, prior to her marriage had worked in domestic service. Mrs. Knight worked in retail shops after her schooling at age 14. She learned how to sew at school and from her sisters. A dress she made is used as part of the research in this thesis.

The experiences of Mrs. Alice Florence Clark Stirling (December 29, 1905-2006) of North Islington, London were recalled by her son John Stirling, PhD when interviewed June 15, 2009 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Mrs. Stirling was the youngest of 10 children, and attended school until age 14, then was apprenticed as a machinist (sewing) then became a cutter. She worked as professional seamstress for C&A until World War II. She was married in 1934 and had two sons. After the war she worked at Woolworths, and always took in sewing at home for additional income.

Women of the Embroiderers' Guild of Whitley Bay, North Shields were interviewed jointly with a national member who was working on an oral history project. Questioning followed similar guidelines but interviews were shorter and included discussion of the role of the guild in their lives. All interviews took place on May 1, 2010 at St. Paul's Church Hall. The Embroiderer's Guild is a national organization with royal patronage founded in 1906. It has over 10,000 members in 238 branches throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Members meet monthly for lectures, sharing and discussion. ([www.embroiderersguild.com](http://www.embroiderersguild.com), no date) Not all women shared their full names.

Ann, age 73, had an aunt who was a tailor who could do needlework, and who was more skilled than her mother. She herself became more active with needlework post-retirement. She mentioned that her husband is an artist as well.

Mrs. Jean Brown, 83 was originally from Galashields, Scotland. She learned needlework and sewing from her grandmother who lived with her as well as at school. She sewed at home and did dressmaking. She was married with three sons.

Mrs. Christine Clark, 55 noted that her great-grandfather had been a tailor, and that while her father was in the army he sewed, but her mother did not. She learned how to sew from her

grandmother and aunts, while her mother made hooky mats. Mrs. Clark started dressmaking at age 11 while learning at school. She is married with daughters who have no interest in needlework.

Mrs. Nancy Heron, 76, was originally from Yorkshire. She was one of 5 sisters, and learned rug hooking from her mother. She attended a convent school where she learned needlework, and took dressmaking clothes at grammar school, and learned at home. Mrs. Heron had worked as a nursery school teacher, taking up embroidery in her retirement. She had 6 children for whom she made her children's clothes including coats.

Mrs. Vera Jensen, 70, was born in Shropshire and learned knitting at home and needlework at school. She recalled that her mother did embroidery. She has one older sister and a brother whom she taught to knit while he was ill, and she made things for her ill grandmother. While she is married and has children she did not mention how many.

Mrs. June M., aged 80, originally of Middlesborough, had learned to sew in school. While her mother could not sew, her aunts, two sisters and twin brother did. Her father was a journeyman tailor in the Co-op. She later worked as manageress of the Co-op notions department. She is married and has two daughters.

Anonymous, approximately in her 50s, noted that she was colour-blind and had learned to sew at home from her mother.

### **Mass Media**

Two types of mass media were employed for this research, popular women's magazines and sewing manuals. Magazines have been a common source of information but are not typically read alongside manuals for an analysis of discourse and technique about design. Magazines constructed the socio-cultural discourse and interrelationship between home sewing, fashion, domesticity and the retail world. According to Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde, 'the magazine became a ubiquitous object that played a central part in the flow of modern life and people's social and cultural identities'. (2007:1) Magazines took on a very informal, friendly tone of possibilities. Case studies of three magazines, *Home Chat*, *Mab's Weekly*, and *Modern Home* in particular give greater insight into the assumptions and methods of the editorial staff. Sewing manuals were technique specific, yet the commentary they were very assumptive of the concerns and solutions offered.

Magazines were found through a variety of means: private collections, libraries, and museum collections. Magazine collections are typically found in large library collections, and manuals in antiquarian bookshops and book fairs. Museums also typically had some magazines and books in their collection as general ephemera. Usually families and individuals only kept special or specific issues relating to important events. Reflecting the cheaper quality of many mass-produced goods, mass media from this period was not made of durable materials, nor was it meant to last. This study posits that its archival value and accessibility parallels that of the everyday dresses which were made; not necessarily being made of either expensive or rare materials or methods, nor by a known designer or manufacturer.

The types of magazines sourced were primarily women's fashion, household and needlework specific magazines, along with leisure magazines, which focused on hobbies and romantic literature. As a foil to the less 'high-brow' reading materials, *The Studio*, *Ideal Home* and *Radio Times* were also analyzed. To consider the commercial perspective of home sewing perspectives the trade journal, *The Draper's Record*, was reviewed.

The primary concern that arose in reading magazines was the lack of consistent runs of issues. This is due in part to the constant closure, merging and changes with magazines published in that era. As well, numerous inexpensive magazines were published which were not materially of lasting quality. Therefore, a strategic decision was to read, when possible, the focus months of September /October for the new fashion season and March for Mother's day coverage, of every other year of those available. When not feasible a breadth of a particular genre of magazine was found and read as consistently as possible to analyze for similar features, topics, how frequently they appeared solidifying the role of home sewing in the inter-war period.

Sewing manuals were also read for both their content and layout. These books included those that would have been used at home, and those used by teachers as instructional guides. Both allowed for an understanding of concerns and norms the inter-war reader would have been familiar with creating another level of understanding of home sewing and its role in creating meaning. Grace Lees-Maffei considers that,

'The use of advice in the writing of design history involves the negotiation of several issues: the positioning of advice at an appropriate point within or between the categories of production or consumption; the extent to which prescriptive material may be taken as indicative of practice; the status of advice as a genre between fact and fiction; the similarly contested status of historical discourse and the often nebulous border between advice and advertising; and the extent to which

published advice has been endowed with professional or amateur status'. (2003, p.1)

These are all concerns addressed in this study, and these 'how-to' sewing manuals bridge the space between the leisure role of magazines, with informative detailed guidance for the more serious sewer. In a book format they are more materially permanent, and in content focused on techniques.

### **Object Analysis**

Similar to the lack of continuity of extant magazines, and the limited number of people alive available for oral histories, was the lack (and variety) of existing middle-class dresses and domestic pieces. It seemed that only fragments of the story of home sewing could be found and much was missing: with these limitations came the query of how home sewing was manifest in inter-war Britain. Ultimately the lack of existing objects furthered the issue of design as a practice, hence home sewing became an even more appropriate realm for discussing practice as an approach to design history.

Two types of sewn/needlework items were analyzed for this study, embroidered domestic goods and dresses. 'As palpable material objects that communicate visually (and through tactile simulation), the meanings of fashion and textiles both span and reflect particular times and places'. (Burman, 2003, p.5) The domestic items were needlework pieces done by two of the women interviewed; the dresses came from the Beamish, the Living Museum of the North in Durham and from two private collections. This sourcing reflects the availability and interest in everyday, home sewn items in the museum/scholarly world. While the Beamish Museum collection is extensive, it is one of the few which has a focus on the everyday and holds home sewn dresses by anonymous makers, not special collections from the wealthy. The museum owned dresses were used as standards to analyze the two privately owned dresses, each with limited histories. In this way technical questions about the dresses could be assessed. The dresses were analyzed according to use and production method. Day and evening-wear were compared from the museum collection with the private collection. As well as modes of production including home sewn, ready-to-wear and dressmaker-made are assessed to consider issues of professionalization and craftsmanship. This study positions these dresses to ask how they reflect the values and assumptions assigned to the homemade and everyday. In doing so new understandings can be structured for future analysis and understanding of the everyday.

## Archives and Collections

Two types of archival collections were used in this research, libraries and museums. Libraries were researched primarily for their magazine collections and museums for dresses and household objects; however, they also held a great deal of ephemera including magazines, catalogues and miscellaneous information regarding fashion. Primary research was undertaken at Beamish, the Living Museum in Durham, the Bankfield Museum in Halifax and the Whitworth Gallery (The University of Manchester). Each museum held collections of sewn items/needlework along with ephemera. Materials reviewed included dresses, hats, embroidered goods, magazines and catalogues. One of the case study magazines came from the Bankfield Museum; and the Beamish Museum's ephemera and dress collections were equally impressive. Originally private photographs purchased at antique dealers were reviewed as a possible methodology for discussion of home sewing but the gaps of information and possibility of linking them to the other primary sources was decided to be too nebulous to be useful.

Magazines and how-to books came from private and library collections including The British Library at Colindale, the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, and the Victoria and Albert Museum's library, The Central Library of Manchester was especially important for the extent of its trade magazine collection, and Northumbria University holds several years worth of volumes of *Ideal Home* and *The Studio*. These collections confirm the great variety of magazines published, but not a consistency in the holdings of any one magazine in a collection covering the twenty-year period of the inter-war years. The Central Library of Manchester has an extensive listing of trade journals reflective of the region's manufacturing history, but the more commercial retail type magazine collections were similar to other libraries, varied but inconsistent.

The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne holds a great number of original texts from the interwar period which were invaluable, and the Newcastle City Library was useful for its holdings of directories, creating a micro-world view of issues of home sewing and daily life. And lastly, the Tyne-and-Wear archive in Newcastle-upon-Tyne was useful for its extensive collection of notes and minutes from local events and associations, helpful in developing a greater understanding of events at a local/regional level.

## Chapter Overview

In the literature review of this thesis, Chapter I, the canon of literature which has informed this study is highlighted. It sets the backdrop of understanding of the themes and progression of historical viewpoints. Readings from various fields of history including art, design, material culture, anthropology, cultural studies and British history develop the vocabulary and contemporary comprehension of themes in this study. It considers the impact of feminist historians, and the position of fashion and interior design history as gendered topics and how those histories inform a specific practice such as home sewing. This is particularly relevant, as the limited amount of writing concerning home sewing becomes an obvious concern throughout this chapter. It positions this study as relevant and timely in the purview of design history.

It is from the readings in the literature review that the conceptual framework is constructed and the methodologies applied using the primary source material. In Chapter II Constructing the Framework of Home Sewing: Theory and Methodology, core concepts are defined and examined to clarify how they are applied to the methodology. These include some of the aforementioned elements of home sewing, design as practice, everyday life, femininity, domesticity, and modernity. It locates them within the broader academic concepts focusing them on their relationship to design as a practice. Here too, design as practice is explicated in relation to the theoretical concepts and its methodological application. It explains the expansion of earlier models for interpreting design history. It gives a thorough review of the role of oral histories, mass media and object analysis as applied in this study.

In Chapter III, History: Contextualizing Women and Home Sewing, an understanding of how conditions particular to Britain during the inter-war period impacted women's lives and their relationship with design and modernity is considered. Life was in a state of socio-economic flux and the changes which went with it had an impact on women, and perceptions of them. The shifting, and growing world of the middle class meant new conditions and circumstances needed to be negotiated. This includes new technology –electricity, the wireless, mass transit–new housing with a higher standard of health and hygiene for women to uphold. The relationship with design is noted by Adrian Forty, 'there is no doubt that notions about it [cleanliness] have had as much effect upon design as have ideas of taste and beauty.' (2010, p.156) For middle class women these 'notions' and objects were impacting their lives. How these ideas infiltrated design practice is discussed in this chapter. All aspects of daily life were changing and home sewing as an everyday design practice was being altered with it. The vote,

and new industries meant a greater voice for women as well. Interestingly, this chapter will reveal how historians have perceived these changes has also been amended. The influence of various theoretical approaches to history have become more inclusive of women, but have yet to fully address gendered design practices, such as home sewing and all its implications in our understanding of daily life for the middle class women in interwar Britain.

The role of mass media is the focus of Chapter IV Making Meaning of Mass Media: Magazines and Manuals. Here the part media as a communication device plays in the mediation of femininity through design is elucidated. Through the analysis of women's magazines and sewing manuals the constancy of home sewing as an idea and ideal of femininity is investigated. As Cynthia White states, 'the new periodicals dedicated themselves to upholding the traditional sphere of feminine interest and were united in recommending a purely domestic role for women'. (1970, p.100) This chapter also treats mass media as an object of design itself. The dialogue created between image and text, reader and editor is part of the mediation and interpretation that women could control. The quantity of information being disseminated was going through a growth spurt. Mass production was taking advantage of the cheap materials and processes that allowed for numerous new magazines. This colluded with the informal nature of a society undergoing the loosening of its cultural mores to create a new sense of community and connection that was no longer limited to families or neighbourhoods but the bigger world of Britain. In this chapter magazines in particular are reviewed for both their role as mediators of discourse and mediated objects of design, bringing the discussion of the role of mass media to a focused conclusion.

In Chapters V Design as Practice: Aspects of Sewing, and Chapter VI Design as Practice; Inspiration and Making, a dissection of home sewing is undertaken. Chapter V examines four aspects of home sewing: location, technology, education and professionalization, all of which influence our understanding of home sewing, and the very practice itself. The four aspects reflect broader socio-cultural issues which are worked through everyday design practices. Location is a question of gender and valuation of the practice. Technology brings the impact of modernity to the forefront, and education and professionalization each recognize the role of femininity and perceptions of appropriateness for women whether in making or utilizing home sewing. Chapter V closes with an analysis of hand embroidered objects by two of the women, and an interpretation of design motifs which were prevalent though not necessarily admired by design historians.

In Chapter VI the making of an object is discussed from the perspective of motivation and inspiration. What motivated women to sew and how the process of making as it intersected with modernity created opportunities for self-presentation, is investigated. The role of consumption has a greater voice in this chapter but it does not drive our understanding of home sewing as an everyday design practice. While examining dresses for analysis this chapter takes into consideration what the actual process and skills level would have required, and how that affected the final product. It compares vetted collection pieces with those of little or no known provenance to discuss the issues of finish and professionalization. Lastly, this chapter creates insight into how and why a culture values (or does not value) the everyday object as relevant for collecting, creating the basis for further research questions.

In this study the lack of objects creates questions in regard to the role of rarity, provenance and questionable skill levels of the homemade; the everyday, homemade object then becomes the middle class of fashion scholarship. Without the rarity and skills value of the 'wealthy', nor the underdog status and narrative of the working class, the homemade, everyday middleclass object becomes lost in the story of design, femininity and domesticity. This research provides a new perspective and value to the everyday object; the middle class of the design world. De Certeau believes that it is in the ordinary that we find not the homogenous, but the variety of the individual. (1998, p. 256) Interpretations of the everyday are found in those individualized objects that allowed for a mix of the fashionable with the personal. Gathering and reviewing these collections of the ordinary reveals the diversity of everyday lives. These particular histories are of women and how they encountered design and were able to create their own individual identities, neither inappropriate for the new social order, nor 'mass-produced'. The opportunity to archive their practices, their responses to the period reveal the tension in the relationship between the individual and 'the masses'. This study hopes to elucidate the relationship between the various steps in the process of design, create a picture of how everyday design practices allowed a woman in inter-war Britain to construct her own idea of femininity through the overlooked design practice of home sewing.

## **Chapter I: Literature Review**

The aim of this chapter is to review key literature pertaining to the subject of this research. It discusses and assesses those texts that have made a contribution to the understanding of home sewing, and the idea of design as an everyday practice. In addition to considering the impact of this literature on design history, specifically fashion and interiors, it also reflects upon the critical dialogue that has developed between feminist, cultural, and postmodernist theories.

Significantly this literature review highlights the lack of discussion regarding home sewing as a design practice, in particular acknowledging women's perspectives during the inter-war period. By adding to the limited studies available this work challenges the concepts of how design history is studied, it reconsiders ideas of the construction of femininity and class, and it reconsiders ideas regarding the relationship between the process of making and the home and body. It further develops our understanding of everyday life in inter-war Britain. The focus on Britain with its unique socio-cultural conditions was chosen because it was a country which was directly affected by the First World War and the shifting cultural and economic concerns associated with it. This thesis is therefore set in an era which has been the subject of a number of different interpretations over the decades, an examination which reveals the extent to which perceptions of the period, particularly the role of women have changed.

In approaching an under-researched topic within the era, this thesis elucidates the difference between mass culture and ordinary culture. At the same time this thesis is not an overview of styles and design, but an interpretation of women's roles as creators of new, modern femininities in the midst of significant change. Importantly, this thesis notes that women were not a homogenous group neatly slotted into one structure or hierarchy. Their diverse lives revolved around family, work, social and economic needs, and a desire to be individuals. This research examines their attempts to design their individual selves.

One of the key texts on the subject of home sewing and the inter-war period is *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, (1999) edited by Barbara Burman; this particular collection of essays extends chronologically beyond the inter-war period. It addresses the lack of scholarly study of home sewing with its investigation into home sewing's role in identity formation, consumption practices, technology, economics and dissemination between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe and America; specifically in regard to its placement in the home. In so doing home sewing is integrated into theories of socio-cultural theory with a gendered focus. Scholars such as Cheryl

Buckley and Fiona Hackney, specifically, are particularly relevant in discussing ideas of identity and representation. As thorough as this collection is it does not approach home sewing as a design practice.

More recently there has been an increased interest in needlework (from sewing to knitting) as an academic topic but generally in regard to material culture, as seen in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950* (Goggin and Tobin, eds., 2009) in which they discuss the importance of the role of needlework historically, but nothing specifically about home sewing. In *Clothing as Material Culture* (Küchler and Miller, 2005) the relevance of clothing as having meaning within broader social systems is addressed, but not about the actual making of clothes. In the American focused study on sewing, *“Make it Yourself: Home Sewing, Gender and Culture, 1890-1930*, author Sarah Gordon focuses on the impact of sewing culturally on domesticity and gender. Again, the practice of sewing, the actual process, is of little importance.

The reprinting in 2010 of two seminal feminist/design history texts: *The Subversive Stitch* (1984) by Rozsika Parker and Penny Sparke’s *As Long as its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (1995) parallels the current cultural popularity of needlework<sup>3</sup>. Parker’s *The Subversive Stitch* evaluates the implication of embroidery in defining femininity, and how women used it historically. Parker states, ‘that embroiderers do transform materials to produce sense-whole ranges of meanings – is invariably entirely overlooked. Instead embroidery and a stereotype of femininity have become collapsed into one another’. (1984, p.6) While she does not approach the interwar period the precedent of relating embroidery with femininity was set. Sparke had set out to address what she perceived as the dominance of the ‘masculine’ determined values of design on the development of design history. For Sparke ‘gender lay at the heart of an understanding as a result of the gendered material world the we encounter and negotiate every day’. (1995, p. xvii) In this study, needlework as a feminine practice, an assumed practice of everyday life, is addressed for its ‘active’ role in the construction of femininity.

Needlework, including knitting and crocheting is being revived as consciously feminine craft projects; yet again its link between home, body and identity via practice is overlooked. Only a few articles specifically addressing the issues around these themes

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<sup>3</sup> Nationally oriented groups such as ‘Stitch ‘n Bitch’ and local varieties of needlework groups (similar to book clubs) have been increasing in popularity, and taking needlework away from the traditional concept of one’s grandmother making un-stylish garments, and reclaiming its gendered perception, but reconsidered as being feminine and feminist through the inclusion of non-traditional objects, themes, colors, etc.

have been written. Cheryl Buckley has written “On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home” (1999) and *Fashioning the Feminine* (2002) with Hilary Fawcett. Cheryl Buckley considers the link between fashion, modernity and femininity when she argues that ‘fashion, in particular, was influential in representing some of the changes which had shaped, and continued to shape women’s lives’. (2002, p.83) The relevance of home sewing linking in not just fashion and the body but fashion and the home as well, is supported by Buckley when she discusses ‘the place and significance of this type of design within women’s lives’. (1998, p.56) She argues that recognition of the relationship between place and identity via design is central to an understanding of a woman’s sense of her self, allowing the subjective standpoint to be a valid approach to design history. (1998)

Design historian Fiona Hackney has also written on the related themes of women, magazines and craft in the 1930s (*Making Modern Women*, 1999; *Use Your Hands for Happiness*, 2006; *They Opened Up a Whole New World*, 2007), where she examines the role magazines played in the representation and dissemination of ideas of femininity through the consumptive practices that could be found in home sewing, needlework and magazines. Consumption, much like identity is defined as being both modern and an option for women; they were not blindly participating in modernity but choosing to be a part of the experience. The majority of the literature about home sewing is found elsewhere, more from peripheral fields including material culture, cultural history and feminist studies. In fact, primary source materials such as magazines and how-to manuals have provided the most relevant sources for this thesis. This study therefore aims to provide a more in-depth examination of the subjects of home sewing, femininity and domesticity, specifically in the inter-war period, than the limited amount of extant materials and theoretical debate currently provides.

Elizabeth Wilson’s *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, (1985) another important text which was reprinted in 2010, 25 years after it was first published, explored the link between socio-cultural history and fashion specifically in relation to modernity; ‘Fashion is a branch of aesthetics, of the art of modern society. It is also a mass pastime...of popular culture...it is a kind performance art.’ (1985, p.60) Cheryl Buckley in her study of women in the North East of England (*Northumbrian Panorama*, 1996, p.241) states, ‘women’s engagement with modernism and modernity has been contradictory...the social changes and cultural changes which were characteristic of modernity in the inter-war years offered

both working-class and middle-class women new opportunities as workers and consumers, as well as the possibility of redefining dominant notions of femininity.’ (1996, p.241) Additional key texts linking fashion and modernity include those such as Buckley and Hillary Fawcett’s *Fashioning the Feminine* which looks at the broader aspects of fashion as it has formed femininity, and Buckley’s essay in *The Culture of Sewing*, ‘On the Margins’ (1999) which links the importance of home sewing as a practice with the meaning of home. All of these reflect the interaction between formation of the self and process in relation to fashion as a larger concept. With home and self-styling both being underrepresented as relevant to the development of self these are important texts in this research. This study considers home sewing as a method of negotiating modernity, evidenced in fashion and domestic goods.

This research argues that home sewing as an everyday practice is intrinsically bound up in the ideas of who women are, who they imagined themselves to be, and how these identities are represented. An important body of literature that has informed this thesis relates to the question of feminine identities in inter-war Britain. As philosopher Karen Hanson has argued that the ‘self is an object of imagination’ she suggests that we approach the study of the ‘imagination through its connection to behaviour and social interaction.’ (1986, pp.9-10) In so far as home sewing was a conduit for a young woman’s construction of her imagined self, this statement is supported by this research. Due to the physical proximity of dress, hence relationship, to the body it is arguable that in inter-war Britain, it was integral to a woman’s self-identification at an individual, personal level.

Approaching the idea of dress and identity from a literary background Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro propose ‘the idea that the body is both a *boundary* and *not a boundary*, that it is ambiguous and that this ambiguity produces a complex relationship between self and non-self’. (1998, xv, italics in original) The tension it creates is further clarified by Elizabeth Wilson, ‘Clothing marks an unclear boundary ambiguously...dress, which is an extension of the body but not yet part of it, not only links that body to the social world, but also more clearly separates the two. Dress is the frontier between the self and the notself.’ (1985, pp.2-3)

This aspect of the social world has traditionally been inculcated through language, as Beverly Gordon argues in her 1996 essay, ‘Women’s Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age’. Language has historically linked the body and the home, ‘The woman was seen as the embodiment of the home, and in turn

the home was seen as an extension of her – an extension of both her corporeal and spiritual self'. (1996, p.282) Although this is focused on a slightly earlier time period in America, 1875-1925, the use of language to link the body, home and femininity resonates in inter-war Britain.

Drawing on a feminist approach to visual culture this research contributes to an understanding of 'the relation of representation to the psychic economy of thought, fantasy and emotion', an awareness which informs the work of Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska in *Feminist Visual Culture* (2000, p.4). This link between the imagined self, the body, and visual representation does not end with the individual who made the objects, but continues with the way in which the objects and the women who made them are re-presented in the future to society, families and historians. A social link is created that requires analysis since identity does not end with the physical boundaries of the body, but persists in a way that it and its related practices are inscribed in the discourses of design history.

There is for example, a significant contrast between the works of more 'relatively' recent history and those of contemporary scholars. Renowned historians such as Eric Hobsbawm regard wars, particularly the First World War, as the fulcrum of history, as seen in *The Age of Catastrophes*, (1994) where there is focus on the effects of the war and the then impending Second World War; a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the era is evident in Martin Pugh's *We Danced All Night* (2010), which sees the role of women as intrinsic to modern British history. He successfully integrated women into history rather than as a topic to be treated separately. These histories are couched against the background of economic and political histories, which include those written relatively shortly after the inter-war period as well as more contemporary perspectives.

Readings of British history included works written nearer to the time period, such as the classic *The Long Weekend* (1945) by Graves & Hodge and John Montgomery *The Twenties: an Informal Social History* (1957), both of which offer a subjective view, but have informed this research by providing a useful picture of post-inter-war attitudes and beliefs. Charles Loch Mowat's *Between the Wars* (1955) offers a more detached analysis of the inter-war period, quite different from the moralizing tone adopted by historian AJP Taylor's *English History, 1914-1945*, (1965). In his discussion of the events and subsequent social changes, Taylor is dismissive of women and any ways in which they

might have impacted on and influenced history. Almost twenty years later David Aldcroft in *The British Economy Between the Wars* notes the way in which more recent scholarship altered perceptions of the inter-war period through the compilation of ‘comprehensive, aggregate data’ (1983, p.1), which revealed that there were numerous fluctuating factors defined by geography, industry and policies. Further, a concise assessment is given by Alan Milward in *The Economic Effects of the World Wars on Britain* (1984) which concludes that the earlier focus on the negative aspects of war on the economy overlooked its long-term impact. Both however, maintained the tradition of overlooking the role of sewing outside of the context of manufacturing; ignoring the arrival of the domestic sewing machine and electricity. Reading British history chronologically and understanding how perceptions have changed assists in comprehending the development of evolving stances in the inter-war period. This dearth of inclusion of women requires a closer look at how feminist historians have approached the subject of women in British history.

A rather different perspective, in particular of the domestic sphere and women, emerges from work influenced by contemporary feminist approaches by authors such as Pat Thane in *The Foundations of the Welfare State* (1982) and the essay ‘The Englishwoman’ (1986) (with Jane Mackay) which stresses the perceptions and role of women. At the same time Deborah Beddoes’ *Back to Home and Duty* has been a central text offering a concise and focused understanding of women’s history in the inter-war period. ‘It is a history which looks at women of all classes and which is as much concerned with women’s private lives at home as with their public lives in the realms of work and politics’. (1989, p.2) This study does not attempt to cover all classes and all aspects of women’s lives but does focus on a specific group, the middle class, and their participation in a practice that could link their private and public lives. In regard to issues of class both David Cannadine’s *Class in Britain* (1998) and Joanna Bourke’s *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (1994) offer different approaches to the issue of class. Cannadine’s belief that the, ‘Realization of one’s ‘class’ position emerged from routine activities of everyday life’ reinforces the role of practice in identity (1998, p.4). He was, however, dismissive of the need to discuss women and class as a subject, stating, ‘these pages do not specifically address what British women have thought about class...[further] for most of recorded history the social history and social identities of women have been

determined first by their fathers and then by their husbands (2000, p. xi)<sup>4</sup>. Whereas Bourke (1994), Thane (1982), and Beddoe (1989) thoroughly engage with the role of women in society. Bourke in particular recognizes that class not only had a familial historical precedent, ‘but says this historical construction of ‘class’ as it developed out of experience rooted in the intimate locale of the body, the home and the neighbourhood...[Further] the twentieth century was represented as a time swamped by a tide of moral uncertainties which muddied the relationship between the individual and the group, the body and the family’. (1994, pp. 25, 27) As a group therefore, whatever their individual differences, these later studies indicate that over the decades a significant shift in attitudes had taken place with respect to the role of women in society which has generated a better understanding of their position and the way they were affected by economic, social and cultural changes. This is why home sewing becomes more important as it was a significant part of women’s daily life. This change in awareness is registered even more strongly in recent developments in the literature of design history.

In order to create a full picture of design history, readings have considered broad overviews such as Jonathon Woodham’s *Design History* to Buckley’s nationally specific *Designing Modern Britain* (2007) which more directly addresses the inter-war period. Further, more specific studies focused on fashion and interior design. One such text is the essay ‘Fashion’ in *Feminist Visual Culture* (Carson, Pajaczkowska, ed, 2001) by Rebecca Arnold who suggests that, ‘The shifting discourse of femininity, of seeming to express or subvert ideals of femaleness, are constantly being explored in both garment design and style.’ (2001, p. 207) In this research home sewing is both a bodily and domestically based practice and, as such, is a topic of design history. As such this thesis owes much to the field of fashion and interior design history. As historically gendered fields, they have been much maligned and it is only in recent years that both have been considered valid topics of academic discussion. Addressing issues of gender and design history are seminal texts such as Penny Sparke’s *As Long As It’s Pink*, where she argues that it is gender, even more than class, which has shaped our understanding of material culture, for modernism has focused on production, not consumption, as a female priority. (1995, p. xvi) However, Sparke has conceived of production not in terms of the domestic, which is where both production and consumption are located in this research. Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham’s *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, has also proved relevant including several essays

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<sup>4</sup> Cannadine admits this is both a shortcoming of his book, that he is not ‘entirely happy about’, and he recognizes ‘that women visualize the social world, and their place in it, in some ways that are different from men’. (2000, p. xi) However, he believes it is a gap in history which someone else may address.

considering women's role in design production, in particular Suzette Wodden's 'Powerful Women: Electricity in the Home', and Pat Kirkham's 'Women and the Inter-war Handicrafts Revival'. Wodden examines the role women had, as professionals, and woman-to-woman, in promoting the modern technology of electricity and its subsequent materials, all in the name of being labour-saving. This study will discuss electricity and technology, specifically as it affected the home.

Methodologically, in regard to dress history, Lou Taylor's *A Study of Dress History*, in which she elucidated how the various approaches toward dress have informed our contemporary understanding of research into dress has informed this research. This relates through the use of object, literary and cultural theories applied in this research. In addition, Alexandra Palmer's *Couture & Commerce*, while focused on haute couture in Canada in the 1950s, has approached concerns of identity and fashion with similar questions. Palmer questions the 'power of clothing' and the 'layers of meaning embedded in clothing' through the user while working from a museum collection. (2001, p.3)

A useful review of how the history of fashion has evolved academically is found in the journal *Fashion Theory* (1998) where Christopher Breward, Lou Taylor, Valerie Steele and Alexandra Palmer unpacked and analysed the various perspectives of dress and fashion history's contentious evolution. Art historian Aileen Ribeiro's statement that the only purposefulness of the study of everyday dress was to be found through its relationship to couture, is indebted in part, to fashion history's early origins in the discipline of art history, which this research seeks to redress. (1998, p.319) For the types of aspirations this view of home sewing implies are only elements in the part fashion plays in the construction of identity. Historians would be remiss to only use one perspective as the axis of understanding. A parallel to the benefits of multiple angled perspectives is reiterated and demonstrated in Taylor's 'Doing the Laundry: A Reassessment of Object Based Dress History' (1998), where she discusses the historical conflict between curators and academics approaches to dress history. In the same issue Breward outlined the evolution of theoretical approaches of cultural, design and art history, noting, 'In direct opposition to traditional art and design history and literary criticism methods, cultural studies offers a way of studying objects as systems rather than as the simple product of authorship.' (1998, p.306) This study's approach reiterates how these relationships or systems are central to understanding any designed object, its maker and use, however it does so by focusing on a

specific practice which implicates those histories which are frequently gendered-fashion and home sewing.

Systems of consumption have been questioned by Angela McRobbie in *Second Hand Dresses and the Role of the Rag Market*, specifically how the actual act of shopping has been overlooked historically, in part due to its gendered nature. While her essay is on vintage shopping, and the focus on the act of shopping, its engagement with the idea of the authentic is most important to this study. It is relevant to this research in that shopping itself is not one specific 'act' but involves an engaged consumer. As well, shopping is just one form of consumption. This becomes more evident when it is recognized that ways of shopping changed during the inter-war period and it requires investigation. The Co-operative and the rarely discussed system of 'clothing clubs' was discovered in Barbara Redmile's, 'A Brief History of Cooperative Fashion' (1998), along with reference in Avram Taylor's *Working Class Credit and Community since 1918* (2002). These are all ways which some of the new middle-class (the lower middle classes) would have been familiar with as systems of consumption. Dressmakers and retail were discussed in Anthea Jarvis' *Liverpool Fashions, its Makers and Wearers* (1981) and the specific experience of archival research into retail shops by Amy de La Haye in *The Dissemination of Design from Haute Couture to Fashionable Ready-to-wear During the 1920s.* (1993) In this she examined a small boutique's inventory which had remained untouched for decades. De La Haye concluded that these were not the types of shops frequented by the working class, but catered to a wealthier clientele, possibly the middle-to-upper middle classes. In this research acknowledging the diversity of shopping opportunities available to women supports that shopping and consumption were a part of, but not the focus, of home sewing for women.

Any discussion of home sewing in inter-war Britain must include an assessment of domesticity; historically it has received little attention due to the nature of art and architecture being given primacy by art, design and architectural historians. Joan Rothschild in her book *Design and Feminism* (1999) covers many topics yet it is weighted heavily toward architectural subjects and women's role in architecture and design as a broader theme. In *Interior Design and Identity*, with a perspective the 'lived-in' interior, editors Penny Sparke and Susie McKellar focus more specifically on the subject of interiors and their role in identity formation with gender at the core, noting that the history of interiors typically leans toward the 'attractiveness and social cachet of the *ideal* interior'

(2004, p.1, italics in the original). Included in the collection of essays is Quentin Colville's 'The Role of the Interior in Constructing Class and Status: a Case Study of Britannia Royal Naval College, 1905-1939' and Emma Geiben Gamal's 'Feminine Spaces and Modern Experiences: the design and display strategies of British Hairdressing Salons in the 1920s and 1930s.' Both essays reveal how design creates a set of public experiences which alters women's responses and perception of who we are especially through the creation of a 'dialogue between class and gender identities'. (Sparke, 2004, p.6) This is particularly relevant as inter-war middle class women were participating in an increasing number of public activities along with shifting class boundaries. Importantly, this research will demonstrate how the home has been linked to the idea of interiority and the private self, and instances where the domestic has been appropriated by the public, dissolving spatial, fashion and identity boundaries.

A comprehensive overview of interior design history has been reviewed through Anne Massey's text *Interior Design of the Twentieth Century*, and a special issue of the 2008 *Journal of Design History* with the theme of interior design and professionalization, in which Penny Sparke discusses the historiographical parallels between the development of interior design and haute couture in France and the United States (both of which had an enormous impact on the British fashion and retail system). Mary Lynn Stewart acknowledges (in regard to the new masculine silhouette) that the French fashion system was one that incorporated its many components into new understandings of femininity and fashion. 'Far from abandoning class-and gender-specific clothing, producers, publishers and journalists preferred to expand public understanding of ladies' wear as visible markers of femininity and distinction'. (Stewart, 2004, p.91) In the inter-war period these markers were also visible in related disciplines. Addressing the tension between modernist architecture and fashion is Mark Wigley's *White Walls; Designer Dresses: the Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (2001). Wigley argues that architecture itself has been treated with the same logic as fashion, the white walls of modernism is not that different, regardless of the modernist arguments against ornament, transience or frivolity, 'its extreme simplification being the source of its considerable influence'. (2001, p. xxiv) Wigley assesses the various discussions of modernism asserting that architecture and fashion are formed through the same theories and discourses. The white wall is a layer, prone to faults; through this understanding structure and colour (or alleged neutrality) become linked. Architecture, the highest form of art could now be understood as being of the same substance as fashion, one of the least academically serious areas of the design world,

joining ideas of the modern space with the modern body. The language of fashion, space and body are identified as one in Beverly Gordon's aforementioned essay on the conflation of home and body, where she notes that this conflation 'functioned as a structural metaphor, a device for understanding or even experiencing one kind of thing as another' (1996, p.282). The body, the building, the clothing, the ornament had all become, whether consciously or unconsciously, one form. While situated just prior to the inter-war period it is easily argued that women's lives had continued to be viewed in particular ways, a judgement supported by an analysis of magazines of the inter-war period. Design forms and their discourses are part of the system of codification and dissemination which women were exposed to in inter-war Britain.

In Alison Light's *Forever England: femininity, literature, and conservatism between the wars* she also examines an understanding of women and modernity but through literature, recognizing that being modern in the inter-war period was not solely a 'radical' stance and that women had to find a balance. 'It is the women of an expanding middle class between the wars who were best able to represent Englishness in its most modern and reactionary forms'. (2001, pp.10-11) This thesis argues that acknowledging this diversity of experiences balances the perceptions of the inter-war period and allows for more than one idea of femininity to be constructed, not solely amongst women, but internally for a woman herself, indeed it does not need to be a binary formation but much more fluid construction of self.

This balance was also being defined in perceptions of domesticity. In 1990, in the introduction to *Household Objects*, Tim Putnam defines the home as a site of complex interactions of self, space, practice and objects. How this combination of aspects assists in defining domesticity is relevant in this research. In Christopher Reed's collection of essays *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* women's role as definer and controller of the modern brings to light issues of not only domesticity but authorship. The homeowner, a growing segment of the population, had a responsibility to the national cultural identity. Research by Peter MacNeil on the creation of art history in Australia notes the contradictory nature of the inter-war period in Australia, in part reflecting influences from both Britain and the US, as a tension between the purity of the past with the mass commercialism of the present (2010, pp.1-2) which is reflected in how we perceive the history of domesticity. With increasing home ownership, concepts of the construction of home and family were changing as identified by David Jeremiah in

*Architecture and Design for the Family* with ‘the image of the family in the context of home and as a consumer of products directs attention to the representation of social order and values’. (2000, p.39) Further, ‘the house was the last refuge for expression...informed by an exact understanding of the needs of everyday life’. (2000, p.71) It is evident that practices in the home were playing a part in the construction of identity while simultaneously reflecting outside influences.

The subject of home sewing is inevitably linked to debates concerning its relationship to craft. From the perspective of craft, home sewing performs a multitude of functions and has been interpreted as a leisure time activity, a chore or creative skill. Home sewing can be functional and decorative, be a brief task or time consuming project. Its purpose and utilization by women, their defining of it is central to this study. This research questions these roles, focusing on the purpose of homemade items along with their sources of inspiration. The defining and comprehension of craft plays a part in this discussion as inter-war leisure was evolving along with ideas of domesticity.

The debate between art and craft has a long-standing history, as elucidated in the essay by H. O. Mounce in ‘Art and Craft’ where he discusses Collingwood’s *Principle of Arts*, noting that, ‘Collingwood would have done better to ask not how art differs from craft but why people have wished to distinguish them’.<sup>5</sup> (1991, p.239) Of further interest is George Dickie’s response stance in a philosophical debate regarding the relevance of the intention of artists in their artworks value. While Dickie states a work should stand on its own, this value is discerned, in part, through the conversation between artist and ‘viewer’. (2006) Grace Lees-Maffei specifies the concerns between art, craft and design when she states,

‘the principles that distinguish design, craft and art and their respective histories vary in type and over time. The various principles applied to design, craft and art have produced different hierarchical models within which they have been situated. It is more appropriate then, to view these histories in the form of parallel tracks that have converged and diverged.’ (2004, p.209)

In this study if a woman’s sewing or needlework is valued by her intent and its interpretation by the public, it becomes part of the indistinguishable line between art and craft, private and public, as she chose to present it. Phyliss M. Platt in *Embroidery*,

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<sup>5</sup> Mounce goes further to state that it has not always been the case, the question of difference is a historical construct. (1991, p.91)

‘Wherefrom and Whereto?’ lamented the debate between art and craft in regard to embroidery when she noted, ‘embroidery has been so long out of touch with reality, because it has been in a state of transition from being mainly a craft, to being mainly an art. It has always been and must always be both an art and a craft’. (1933, p.8) By understanding this state of flux home sewing is best addressed as a practice where intent and purpose intersect with history. The status of the everyday can cause the complexity of design as a practice to easily be overlooked but this thesis will reconfigure our perceptions of the everyday, women, and home sewing in the inter-war period.

Peter Dormer investigated craft as a practice in *The Culture of Craft*, (2006) which, while a contemporary study, discusses the differences in experience that are derived when we look at design as a practice which is accessible through craft. Just as fashion and interiors have been areas of contention and dismissal by historians and contemporary movements, so too has craft. Tanya Harrod’s *The Crafts in Britain* (1999) gives not only an overview of the various crafts which have been part of arts movements in the twentieth century, but also examines the ways in which their relationship with modernism was part of their development. She notes that, ‘there was a shared desire to personalise modernism’ (1999, p.116) According to Harrod, the interwar period was a time when middle class women could actively participate in crafts, the crafts provided an important creative space and income for middle-class women in a time of social and economic stasis for women in general. The crafts in effect operated as a “third space” between the better-defined activities of fine art and design’. (1999, p.117) <sup>6</sup> This placement is relevant when examining the importance of craft and the way in which it has evolved as a voice of the vernacular while simultaneously crafts people have established themselves as a profession. This research questions whether the home, because of its relationship with craft and design, should not be considered as a site of the vernacular, inherently ‘modern’ for being ‘authentic’ to its creation. In Beegan and Atkinson (*Journal of Design History*, 2008) ‘Professionalism, Amateurism and the Boundaries of Design’ points to the shift in definition of the professional, amateur and location as part of an evolving dialogue which has altered our perceptions of craft. Indeed, the idea of a ‘finished look’, one that could be achieved at home, is an important one for women as this research will show, since it is meshed with the quality of their work, the potential professional position, location and importantly, in the relationship to time.

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<sup>6</sup> Harrod discerns a difference in the 1920s and 1930s response to craft practice due to the seriousness of the economic conditions of the 1930s. (1999, p.95)

The role of crafts in the inter-war period is also discussed in Pat Kirkham's 'Women and the Inter-war Crafts Revival' in *A View from the Interior* asking to what extent education and paid time figures into the differentiation in professional and amateur, work, art and craft. 'Many did not require long stretches of leisure time, nor were they expensive'. (1989, p.174) Crafts, which included needlework, could easily fit into a woman's busy day. Issues concerning the link between craft, home, and identity are further explored in the collection *Women and Craft* edited by Gillian Elinor, et. al. (1987) Here the variety of experiences which define craft and identity are examined through oral histories and traditional research methods to discover how women defined craft and lived with it themselves. The essays span the twentieth century, in particular 'Artist Craftswomen Between the Wars' by Roscoe Barley, which addresses the professionalization of crafts and how women (noting them as middle class) forged identities through their work. 'These emancipated middle-class women, having elected the crafts as a respectable occupation at which to earn a living (either as practitioner or entrepreneur), may often be regarded as pioneers within their chosen field'. (1987, p.139) This study addresses the variety of strata found within the middle class noting the porous nature not only of class boundaries but those between art and craft, but work and leisure, specifically filtered through time.

Analysis of the concepts of leisure in the inter-war period and its relationship to time and home have furthered the discussion of the development of needlework as a 'hobby'. Clare Langhamer's *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960* (2000) discusses the ambiguous position of leisure as it relates to home, and time and craft especially for women. 'Handicrafts...are more difficult to define as 'work' or 'leisure' with in women's lives, and their greater popularity amongst women from lower economic groups again reinforces the suspicion that these were often tasks performed out of necessity rather than personal choice.' (2000, p.178) If what they were making was not for themselves, or was not solely inspired by creative motivation, is it leisure, hence, a hobby? The question of the boundary between time, necessity, and a woman's own personal interest becomes evident. Fiona Hackney's '*Making Modern Women, Stitch by Stitch: Dressmaking and. Women's Magazines in Britain 1919-1939*' delves specifically into the idea of leisure time and the mediating role of women's magazines. This is evidenced in the number of magazines that existed focusing on them. While women's magazines typically had articles or columns on needlework, there was a whole genre of specialist needlework magazines published, including such titles as *Needlewoman* and *Fine Illustrated Needlework*. Other leisure

focused magazines had needlework references as well, such as film and ‘literature’ magazines. For example *Horner’s Stories*, included a pattern for an embroidered floral screen. *Hobbies*, typically a men’s magazine had highlighted a handloom which could be built. (1932, p.467) A year later in a feature article on Marlene Dietrich in *Film Pictorial* it noted how well she could sew. (Huber, 1933, p.9) Needlework and crafts were accessible and expected for everyone.

While women also spent time reading about domestic concerns and crafts they also went to the cinema and dancing. Cinema as leisure requires a unique relationship with the female as ‘other’, time, and a perceptive stance of the creation of one’s femininity. This research will position home sewing in a complex web of time, skill and money set against the reality of women who sewed both for need and pleasure. The importance of the cinema in terms of defining self cannot be undervalued as is noted in Jane Gaines’ chapter discussing the role of dress in defining identities, “Costume and Narrative: How Dress tells a Woman’s Story.’ Gaines argues that ‘primarily costumes are fitted to characters as a second skin, working in this capacity for the cause of narrative by relaying information to the viewer about a ‘person’. (1990, p.181) Further discussion of the importance of leisure time activity and its role in constructing the feminine is found in Mary Ann Doane’s ‘Film and Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator’ this analysis, while decidedly Freudian, importantly deciphers the link between the relationships created in leisure with other aspects of women’s lives and self-perceptions. But this relationship between leisure and activities goes beyond the women being the ‘object’ of time or consumerism. In *Star Gazing*, author Jackie Stacey has broadened our understanding of women and the cinema by a discussion not of how women were portrayed, but of how they themselves experienced the cinema; for femininity is an effort, and subject of objectivity-the gaze- and a matter of consumption. (1994, pp.7-9) This is also recognized through their fashion choices, often realized through home sewing. If the cinema is a site of all of these, how women perceived these constantly internalizing phenomena becomes a matter of comprehension for historians in understanding everyday life and the formation of self through design practices, as more than an image or reproduction of an image.

Magazines as tools of leisure, instruction, and dissemination are central to this research. In *Design and the Modern Magazine* (2007) Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde look at the magazine of the inter-war period both as an object for design analysis and social understanding, it is both a designed object and an object for design. This is supported by

Hackney's aforementioned essay, 'They Opened Up a Whole New World: Narrative, Text and Image in British Women's Magazines in the 1930s' where she considered them to be 'windows' to the world creating a textual and visual boundary between private and public worlds; and as creating a 'shared culture of looking'. (2007, p.1) Both aspects constitute facets of modernity in which women were taking control. This breaking of boundaries between the real and imagined and the everyday is supported in Aynsley and Ford's analogy of the magazine being a type of department store, as complex, designed and composite. (2007, p. intro) The magazine as a building, or site of femininity, within the home creates a new method of public participation through the experience of ephemeral interiority.

These tools of representation and communication can be seen as used for the codification of middle-class femininity to assist the new masses in the shifting socio-cultural world. This type of interpretation of the role of magazines are also seen in Janice Winship's comprehensive review of magazines in *Inside Women's Magazines*. The speed at which women's magazines were being created, merged and closing is reflective of their popularity and economic realities. Cynthia White's *Women's Magazine's 1693-1968* analyzed the socio-cultural influences on earlier magazines which had a direct impact on their content and message. For some magazines 'the new emphasis on domestic subjects was undoubtedly partly due to the servant shortage, aggravated by the need to economize with the onset of the Depression'. (1971, p.100) Margaret Beetham's, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914* was insightful in its interpretation of the nature of the relationship between magazines and femininity. Not only was 'the female body a product of the social expectations of femininity', but 'femininity is always represented in the magazines as fractured, not just because it is simultaneously assumed as a given as still to be achieved.' (1996, pp. 4,1) This idea of identity as both an on-going project to be created by the reader includes consumption and making as part of the process. This occurs while simultaneously creating an imagined community identity. Together these authors clarify the role of magazines in creating imagined communities and generating consumption while assessing their economic impact. This study examines the process of making and the magazines role in fostering design and identity as an expected and assumed practice of inter-war middle class women.

Magazines also play a role in an understanding of mediation and its processes. Not only is it media - a form of communication - but also as designed objects they becomes mediators of cultural mores. In *As Long as It's Pink*, Penny Sparke considered that we should extend

our understanding ‘of the idea of “media” beyond the obvious...to include design goods and the interior spaces we all inhabit on a daily basis.’ (1995, p. xx) Mediation becomes not only the object we utilize but the process of utilization, the ‘representations of idealized environments’ (2010, p.xx). Much like the woman who reflexively folds into ideas of herself at the cinema, the magazine becomes another site for an opportunity to create, consume and present oneself. As Grace Lees-Maffei notes, ‘to study the formation is to study the phenomena which exists between production and consumption, as being fundamentally important in inscribing meanings for objects.’ (2007, p.19) How these sites and opportunities created new vistas for self-identity is examined in this research. For the inter-war middle-class woman leisure time activities including home sewing and needlework allowed for the constant, everyday opportunity to understand and re-create oneself within socially appropriate and very modern ways.

All of these approaches are grounded in the idea of routine, ordinary practices as part of the everyday life of middle-class women in inter-war Britain. However, as yet, these lives have not been investigated via a specific design practice. This thesis aims to discuss everyday life as a mode of inquiry into the lives of women through home sewing. Indeed ‘to invoke everyday life can be to invoke precisely those practices and lives that have traditionally been left out of historical accounts, swept aside by the onslaught of events instigated by elites.’ (Highmore, 2002, p.1) There are several theorists for whom the study of the everyday has constituted a significant part of their *oeuvre*, this includes Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Benjamin Highmore and Jean Baudrillard, subsequently it has had an impact on those influenced by their work.

It is de Certeau’s 1998 work, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (with Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol), which is central to this research for, as de Certeau states, ‘a “practice” is what is decisive for the identity of a dweller or a group insofar as this identity allows him or her to take up a position in the network of social relations inscribed in the environment.’ (1998, p.8) Practice, the series of steps or processes used to negotiate the everyday, identifies one as part of a larger socio-cultural norm, and it is through belonging that one aspect of identity is defined. This insight is suggestive of ways in which the link between sewing, femininity and domesticity might be clarified, and permit an analysis of identity formation allowing for the object to be studied whilst understanding the impact of its making. It is in approaching the study of identity theoretically through the experience of practice, as a subject, and not solely as an object, that this research is based.

Elizabeth Shove in *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life* (Shove, Trentmann Wilk, 2009) focuses on the relationship between time, place and space and the ramifications of these relationships which correlate with this research's interest in the home, and how time is valued. Included in *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life* are essays by Ted Schatzki and Jukka Gronow, looking at the organization and fashion aspects of everyday life respectively; both reflect the interest in how process functions as well as why fashion is relevant to everyday life. 'Even though its [fashion's] standards are rapidly changing, fleeting and ephemeral, fashion creates social order by offering guidelines to orientation in a rapidly changing world'. (Gronow, 2009, p.131) Equally important for them is the idea that the everyday is informed by a sense of temporality which encompasses the banal, the ordinary through a sense of rhythm. 'Practices require active reproduction and performance'. (Shove, 2009, p.18) This repetition may simultaneously create the rhythm and the banality only broken by the marks of individuality presented in the final product of the practice, yet maintained through memory. In Seigworth's article, 'Banality for Cultural Studies' it is the sheer force of repetition which both creates and forces the banal to be acknowledged. Seigworth describes it as 'capable of infinite variations in its undulation'. (2000, p.230) This image brings to mind not just the needle and thread moving through fabric, but a woman negotiating city streets, sales in a store and the pages of a magazine. Further, Seigworth and Michael Gardiner, in 'Rethinking Everyday Life: and then nothing turns itself inside out' suggest that the everyday is, 'the wholeness of a single history arriving in each moment'. (2010, p.144) These essays emphasise the way that concepts such as time, space and practice, are integral to the everyday and are especially relevant to the understanding of modernity and home sewing. This study takes home sewing and places its process into the rhythm of this continuum allowing women to be part of the inter-war narrative.

In this study the narrative of home sewing and everyday practices questions truths which have been fostered, including the role of women and fashion in modernity. The question of myth and its relationship with modernity forefronts the possibility of multiplicity as being central to this concept as examined by Mike Featherstone in 'The Fate of Modernity: An Introduction' in *Theory, Culture and Society* (1985) As modernity has been linked to newness to what extent is novelty and reproduction its central problem? Fashion of the inter-war period (and in early design history) has been accused of being 'novelty' based and not a serious topic of academic discussion, and certainly this research investigates the

role of the individual in negotiating modernity through home sewing, allowing for a multiplicity of experiences, hence possible femininities. The question if there is anything inherently wrong with modernity being linked to the novelty and newness of the everyday as understood by Simmel, is discussed by David Frisby in 'Georg Simmel: First Sociologist of Modernity' in *Theory Culture & Society*. (1985, p.49) This implies then, that there must exist numerous possibilities for ways in which modernity is manifested. This is relevant for an understanding of the ways in which fashion, therefore home sewing, is practiced. For as Alan O'Shea in *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity* states, 'Modernity is not an ideal, but as the practical negotiation of one's life and one's identity with a complex and fast-changing world.' (1996, p.11) Design then becomes an active response to modernity, allowing identity to no longer be fixed either socially or privately, but a response to the changing conditions of society, creating a multiplicity of opportunities to be individualized, hence participated in. This then leads to further questions of class; understood in this research to be an ideological construction that was a much more fluid concept in the inter-war period, so that class becomes less of a condition of modernity, than a concept or a 'instrument' to be modern. In doing so it allows for a variety of femininities to exist and evolve grounded in a common practice. This research argues that design as negotiation of identity was an active response to modernity and home sewing was integral to the experience of everyday life.

What has been frequently lacking in many studies of modernity has been the failure to take into account the role of women. This research suggests that scepticism about the multiple aspects of modernity and novelty has weakened our understanding of women and modernity and the defining of the female experience of modernity. One possible reason for this gap is that the starting point for the conceptualisation of modernity has been based upon nineteenth-century critic Charles Baudelaire's concept of the '*flâneur*', a character that has always been represented as male; the result has been an interpretation of modernity as masculine. Janet Wolff has also questioned the historical construction of the *flâneur/flâneuse* in 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity,' however she still maintained the sphere of the private was woman's domain. Mica Nava has argued against this in 'Modernity's Disavowal' in *Modern Times: Reflections on A Century of British Modernity*. Women participated in modernity firstly through their role as the primary consumers, thus giving them primary access to many of the new experiences of modernity; Nava used shopping as the first site of modernity as it requires participation in the new urban centres, the opportunity to experience new goods and ways

of being. (1996, p.48) Co-editor O'Shea also believes that modernity, by its nature, allows for this multiplicity of experiences of which women's would be integral to our understanding of modernity, as well as being 'a practical negotiation of one's life'. (1996, pp.8, 11) These studies suggest that construction of femininity is largely socially constructed; this research suggests that a more nuanced understanding of femininity, as a practice of modernity, should be explored through everyday practices.

These ideas have been incorporated into a feminist understanding of design, modernity and the inter-war period. Victoria DeGrazia links femininity to reproduction, production and consumption (1996, p. 8) her writings links aspects of this design history focused paradigm. Sally Alexander's approach to femininity in terms of a biological divide in *Becoming a Woman* (1994) brings up issues of the social divisions and tensions which existed in the inter-war period. Feminist art historian Griselda Pollock argues that femininity is a socially contrived ideal (1988). In Rozsika Parker's *The Subversive Stitch* she defines the difference between femininity, the feminine ideal, and stereotype as the points where control has varying degrees of influence. 'Femininity is a lived identity for women either embraced or resisted. The feminine ideal is an historically changing concept of what women should be, while the feminine stereotype is a collection of attributes which is imputed to women and against which their every concern is measured.' (1984, p.4). The idea of practice and needlework as a mode of femininity is best comprehended when we understand needlework to be a practice of femininity which women could, and often did control, hence the use of stereotypes and ideals could have varying importance in the creation of oneself through home sewing. These studies point to the way that design practices, such as home sewing, can be best understood as ways of practicing femininity.

This research is structured to look at design practice as a process, or a series of steps taken to create a finite object, but, more importantly here, and the less concrete object, the construction of one's own femininity. These steps are reflected in the methodology employed. The earlier mentioned definition of mediation from Penny Sparke informs Grace Lee-Maffei's production-consumption-mediation paradigm (2009). This in turn re-introduces the role of mediation in design history from John Walker's earlier production-consumption model (1989) as she wrote in the article 'Production-Consumption-Mediation Design Paradigm' (2009, p.351) This research not only looks at PCM and 'mediation', as an aspect of dissemination and as objects which mediate, but looks at all steps of design: production, consumption, mediation; as parts of practice. This paradigm is integrated into the model utilized in this study of design as a practice which encompasses production,

consumption and mediation as parts of a larger process utilizing oral history as a binding methodology, supplemented by object analysis. As well this research is specifically about a design practice as an instrument of design history. Not only are traditional primary sources looked at, i.e. ephemera and objects, but, oral histories link these concepts. This allows personal narrative and memory to validate and be validated through the relationships of objects and the meaning of making.

The method of oral history has been valuable, if not controversial, for exploring subjective experiences, utilizing memory and the voice of the individual. Due to concerns surrounding issues of fallibility oral history has historically had a debatable role in research but Lynn Abram's in-depth and recent (2010) look at the role of theory in oral history in *Oral History Theory* debunks claims of invalidity, and places it well within the realm of solid research techniques. Luisa Passerini writing in *Fascism in Popular Memory* proposed that, 'The commonplace elements in the self-representation are taken to reveal cultural attitudes, visions of the work and interpretations of history, including the role of the individual in the historical process'. (1987, p.19) This approach allows the individual both a personal and collective role, and makes it possible in this research to examine and relate ideas of femininity and class-whether spoken or analysed. Linda Sandino's analysis of the use of oral histories in design history, 'Oral Histories and Design: Objects and Subjects' (2006) emphasizes the role of the *person's* story along with creating an understanding of the various strengths and weaknesses that are inherent to oral history as a methodology. Dominick LaCapra's 2004, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* provides a theoretical basis for a clear understanding of the role of memory in history, which is supported in Hackney's application of oral history techniques in the reading of magazines, 'They Opened Up a Whole New World: Narrative, Text and Image in British Women's Magazines in the 1930s' (2007) along with interviewing done in this research. Specific evidence of the usefulness and relevance of oral histories is also verified in Sally Alexander's *Becoming a Woman* (1994) in which she utilized real accounts of women's lives and the role of relationships which were relevant while meeting women of the era. Together with *Women and Craft* (1987) edited by Gillian Elinor et al., it demonstrated the value of applying oral histories as a methodology into the thesis. This research is part of the experience of using oral histories to place an emphasis on the possibilities of not only memory as an instrument, but a 'verifier' of the practices and extant materials.

While it has been mentioned that extant everyday objects are not prolific, the study of particular collections does allow for some discussion. What women made, and their experience of it is also reflected in the idea of collections and what has been preserved. While clothing may have been made or remade for economic purposes, this research will question why, if they were of great emotional value, were they not saved? The culturally acceptable practice of saving for economic purposes rather than sentimental, and preserving the rare of material and skills level rather than the everyday, forms statements about society. The importance of collections for the study of design history cannot be underestimated. Collections of goods are not particularly useful if not archived, for the archive reveals the detailed story behind the collection. Beatriz Colomina's text, *Modern Architecture as Mass Media* discusses the role of the archive and how it affects our understanding of both history and collections. Colomina notes that the 'archive is private, history is public' (1994, p.9)

One problem that surfaces is that because of the nature of the personal archive it is difficult to create the appropriate boundaries for how to approach and use the items. As they are subject to interpretation, they lose some sense of authenticity. Ben Highmore states that the use of the archive 'seems to linger between two extremes: on the one hand an unmanaged accumulation of singularities and on the other a constrictive order that transforms the wildness of the archive into tamed narratives'. (2002, p. 24) The way these objects resurface over time and are used, reveals questions about the self and the nature of the object's authenticity. In Raphael Samuel's *Theatre of Memory* he argued that 'history both splinters and divides what may have presented itself as a whole' yet it also 'creates a consecutive narrative out of fragments, imposing order on chaos'. (1996, p.1) It is not only the objects in the archives which play a role in this but the knowledge gained from the objects, as noted when Samuel also looks at historical 'revivals' or the vintage and retro phenomena and its role in defining identity. As Colomina states, 'we have all become 'experts' on our own representation'. (1994, p.8) This is particularly the case if what is collected is merely a few objects and stories, then these private archives do become history, and are recycled in later uses and appropriations. This study aims to utilize concepts of archive and personal narrative to analyse the meaning of authenticity and its subsequent implications.

In part the problem of preservation of individual objects and collections is linked to the analysis of the history of mass production in the inter-war period. The sheer quantity and availability of goods was behind the idea of 'modern', not hierarchy. Histories have been

constructed through hierarchies of understanding, and as such, understandings of ‘modern’ have evolved. If mass production is an aspect of inter-war modernity, the ‘masses’, both people and product, and the objects they have collected and preserved, are intrinsic to its perpetuation. Therefore it can be said that the popular, the masses, were driving modernity. This introduces the idea of the banal, something ordinary and lacking in originality. But the concept of mass and quantity that is found in the everyday, does not necessarily have to be equated with the idea of the banal. For, as de Certeau states,

‘Mass culture tends toward homogenization, the law of wide-scale production and distribution, even if it hides this fundamental tendency under certain superficial variations destined to establish the fiction of ‘new product’. Ordinary culture hides a fundamental diversity of situation, inters and contexts under the apparent repetition of objects that it uses’. (1998, p.256)

Walter Benjamin has discussed the way that repetition, a reproduction, might play a role in the breakdown of class barriers for as, ‘reproduction breaks down tradition. It brings the individual closer to the experience-less worshipful, no longer in a hierarchical position’. (2008, p.7) Further, he believed that, ‘Quantity has now become quality; the very much greater masses of participants have produced a changed kind of participation. (2008, p.33) This shift in thinking during the inter-war period requires cultural values to be reconsidered. Home sewing encompasses a number of practices, primarily but not solely based in the home, and importantly considered to be ordinary, or banal. For it is in this ordinariness that it has become overlooked, lost, or considered to be of little value in relation to a hierarchy of practices and events more important and more immediately life changing. But it is its practice, the making, where one can find a new value and uncover the value of the ‘ordinary’, the importance of the banal, and perhaps the underlying misconceptions. The interpretation of the mass-produced ‘ordinary’ in this study is more radical than banal.

In particular, in this research into home sewing, the concept of reproduction and practice is found in the reproduction of ideas from cinema or magazines. By the very nature of the ‘home-made’ copying it cannot be exactly the same, therefore remaining unique. To follow a pattern would take a degree of skill not all home sewers might have; by interpreting their individual ‘identity’ need for either home or body through design, women were making their own statement regarding their place in society. They altered reproductions, with ideas being translated through practice, within families, between

friends through magazines, stores, socializing and work. Buckley discerns the difference between dresses that were ‘designed’ or ‘made’ by her Aunt in ‘On the Margins’ (1999) where clearly various ideas are pulled together to create an individual look. There is a conscious understanding about design and the authentic self, as will be verified through oral histories in this research as well.

This saturation within a broader context does not lessen the uniqueness of the item, for in this research Benjamin’s thoughts on our relationship with objects are understood through the *reproduction through technology* that it is no more illusory than the sense of uniqueness each of us has with the original or genuine article. (2008, pp.5-8) For the relationship of desire is just as valid and unique as the relationship and response we have with any object. (Lacan, p.31) Desire, as manifest through design ultimately becomes part of the practice. Thus, desire, imagination and ideas of self are linked in design practice. The woman who sees an item in shop, a picture in a magazine, or an image in a film, who then returns home to create her own version of that is creating her desire for what she imagines she will experience (or re-experience) the first time she saw that object. ‘In making copies of the reproduction, it substitutes for its unique incidence a multiplicity of incidences. And in allowing the reproduction to come closer to whatever situation the person apprehending it is in, it actualizes what it reproduced’. (Benjamin, 2008, p.7) The banal of the mass is resisted in that fleeting, momentary, transient consumption of possibility, of the future which she could control, which she could create at home. It allows for more than one construction of femininity even if the practice was a commonly practiced method of femininity.

The questions which arise from the study of a design practice: how, how long, why, and what for, have to be woven together with questions of the construction of identity and the experience in a framework which interrelates practice, identity and location with the time period. The relationship of modernity becomes an underlying theme and guide to how the experience of the everyday, of practice and its influence on femininity is argued. Hindsight for a historian is both a burden and a blessing. However thoughtfully applying contemporary theories with individual narratives, interspersed with empirical evidence creates new understandings, approaches and definitions of design practice, the everyday, modernity, femininity and domesticity.

## **Chapter II: Constructing the Framework of Home Sewing: Theory & Methodology**

The aim of this chapter is to develop the theoretical framework for this thesis. Concepts central to the understanding of home sewing as a design practice including home sewing, practice, domesticity, modernity, and femininity will be identified and interrogated in order to clarify not only the terminology used, but explain how specific approaches and ideas intersect. These intersections provide the conceptual scaffolding upon which the primary research is based. Home sewing as a gendered practice requires an understanding of feminist perspectives of the link between design, identity, gender and class which will also be discussed in this chapter. It will also discuss the methodologies applied, most importantly the application of oral histories within the context of analysing design as a practice, the relevance of mass media, specifically magazines and how-to manuals, in inter-war Britain.

First this chapter will define home sewing as it was practiced during the inter-war period, along with the implications of the varied perceptions of sewing and the women who sewed which existed. Ideas of who sewed what and why have been either overlooked or considered from limited, myopic perspectives. How sewing was 'lived' by middle-class women, and will be analysed through the development of the theory of design as a practice. This theory analyses the model of design practice in order to evaluate the relevance of practice. In this study home sewing is interrogated as a process, or series of steps which involves an understanding of everyday life as it intersects with making, in particular the making of home sewn goods. Cheryl Buckley notes in *Designing Modern Britain* that, 'Defining design is not just about things but also as a matrix of independent practices'. (2007, p.7) As such this chapter will briefly discuss the evolution of various aspects of design practice including production, consumption and mediation as understood in design history. As design history has been born of the art historical tradition a clarification of these positions is also elucidated here including the role of consumption and its impact on mass production and its relevance to home sewing.

Importantly the study of home sewing in the inter-war period was marked by the perception of increased leisure time; what the implications were for women will be examined. Also considered is how increased consumer goods altered concepts of making and individuality through authorship; and the contemporary academic avoidance of objects deemed ordinary or banal (those objects that are not rare or perceived as unique or valuable) is a subject of discussion in this chapter. Why the making of the everyday in design history has been overlooked is investigated specifically as a reflection of

understandings of modernity. The fragmented nature of modernity can in part be understood through a woman's movement back and forth between the public and private worlds she lived in. Concepts of domesticity as gendered and private are investigated here to understand the dissolution of socio-cultural boundaries that were occurring and manifest through home sewing. The idea that to be feminine is defined by and linked to the home, and vice-versa, during a period of social changes must be questioned in order to create a more valid definition of not only what femininity was, but how varied it could be.

Home sewing, as its name implies is sewing that is done at home. Home itself is understood as the place where one lives with ones' family and learns all the social processes necessary to grow up and function in the wider world. Sewing in this research includes mending, dressmaking, and the making or ornamentation of domestic goods using needlework methods such as embroidery. Sewing however, is more complex to define. To say 'sewing' conjures up particular images of work, location, and the 'type' of person who might engage in sewing; for example a person may be imagined to be sewing with a needle and cloth while in an armchair, or sitting at a sewing machine. They might be mending clothes, making a dress or a craft item, sewing a button or doing embroidery. Almost certainly the person visualized is female, and secondly, they are at home while doing this work. This study argues that the image of a woman sewing is linked to sewing's identification as a gendered act of femininity and is assumed to be both domestic and a norm. Also asserted will be that there is little discussion of the diversity of types of sewing done by women. Consequently in failing to ask this question there is a failure to understand the practice of sewing, whether the difference between sewing a dress, mending or embroidering a piece of decorative needlework. Additional questions concern how home sewing has been recognized as a feminine practice by socio-cultural practices at different points of time in history. As Pollock has argued 'femininity [is] the behaviour expected and encouraged in women, though obviously related to the biological sex of the individual, is shaped by society'. (2010, p. 3) This study delves into the concept of a practice of identity, being supported by everyday practices, conflating one action with another, and examines how the diversity of design practices may influence a practice of identity such as femininity. Indeed, so ingrained is this as an everyday practice that in *Embroidery* magazine a girl is encouraged to embroider as it will, 'be a means of escape from boredom or bustle of her daily routine, a counter-action for strenuous physical exertion and an outlet for appreciation of beauty and design'. (1933, p. 38) Routine and boredom are aspects of

the everyday, more frequent physical exertion is typical of the inter-war period and beauty and design are part of the creative processes of home sewing.

These are important omissions that this study will redress through an examination of the process of sewing, all of the steps entailed: from the motivation to sew, the sources of inspiration, the learning process, shopping for materials, the actual making and, lastly, the preservation of the objects. Importantly concepts of the domesticity and femininity in the interwar period and the impact of inter-war modernity on society are at the core of understanding this thesis. The analysis of both design as a practice and these concepts provides the conceptual foundation for an investigation into home sewing as a design practice using primary sources, oral histories, and object analysis. Furthermore they allow for more comprehensive interpretation and understanding of current theories of design.

Elizabeth Shove in *The Design of Everyday Life* states that, ‘theories of practice emphasize tacit and unconscious forms of knowledge and experience through which shared ways of understanding and being in the world are established, through which purposes emerge as desirable, and norms as legitimate’. (2007, p.12) Further, ‘practice theories contend with and seek to account for the integration and reproduction of the diverse elements of social existence.’(Shove, 2007, p.13) A function of theory is that it helps us to understand why and how home sewing is interpreted. To construct a design as a practice theory requires a structure for understanding it. In this study it is fundamental to recognize that design practices are a process. To make or create anything requires a series of steps, and understandings of those steps. It is not a series of isolated events and cannot be understood as any one single step. Nothing is designed in a vacuum, and specific conditions impact both the outcomes and our interpretation of them. The question then arises is that if design practice is a process of steps, how does the relationship between those steps create meaning for the maker and the object and, what is the impact of those meanings in broader cultural terms?

Home sewing is an intersection of shared knowledge, understanding and experience which is both individually and socially occurring. In relating all of these steps through practice as theory, historians are able to conceive of design from a multitude of perspectives. Design as a practice theory does not create a hierarchical perspective nor is it solely linear, it is reflexive yet consciously aware of its social boundaries. Should one choose to focus on a particular aspect of the process it can be easily isolated without losing the overall perspective of the process of design.

Home sewing is an excellent opportunity to exercise this theory of design practice since sewing can easily be broken down into a number of different steps. It requires a location, skill, education, consumption, time and creativity to differing degrees depending on the person involved. It crosses the boundaries of public and private through the manipulation of the image of the body, the representation of the self, the introspection of inspiration. It also entails going from the private space of the home into the public domain of the retail world. Sewing has been considered to be a gendered activity, performed by women, which also needs to be analysed in terms of its socio-cultural aspects for examining the relationship between women, modernity and design.

In the article 'The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm' (2009, pp.351-376) Grace Lees-Maffei 'elaborates a production-consumption-mediation paradigm in design history, to examine both the development of design history over the past three decades and the current and future practice of design history'. (2009, p.351) She draws from an earlier structure introduced by historian John Walker in (Walker, 1989 cited in Lees-Maffei, 2009, p.351) developing it further through the inclusion of mediation as a third point of the paradigm. Lees-Maffei qualifies the tools of mass media as being on a continuum of consumption noting that:

'in mediating between producers and consumers and forming consumption practices and ideas about design; second, the mediation emphasis examines the extent to which mediating channels are themselves designed and therefore open to design historical analysis – indeed, these channels have increasingly constituted the design historian's object of study; third, the mediation emphasis investigates the role of designed goods themselves as mediating devices'. (2009, p.351)

This is supported by Penny Sparke when she interpreted media/mediation as 'the process of utilization' (1995, p. xx) found in the 'representations of idealized environments' (1995, p. xx). Aynsley and Ford also call for the analysis of magazines, mediation tools of design, as designed objects themselves. (2007, p.2) In broadening our understanding of media and mediation, along with a new comprehension of practice, design can shift its focus away from the retail-centric mode of consumption, and not 'underestimate the work, the skills and the social relations involved not just in "shopping", but in the practice-related activities of using, making and doing'. (Shove, 2007, p.14) It is in this inter-weaving of object, process and representation that the theory of design as a practice comes into focus.

It allows for an all-encompassing comprehension of the nature of practice to be utilized as a method of historical analysis.

As design history has evolved as a field of study from art history to decorative arts to design history it has focused on the social relations between artefacts and society. The search for meaning and relevance has caused historians to broaden their field of inquiry from the rare object to include 'ordinary' objects and artefacts, altering the idea of the norm being that of the highest skill level. However, too much focus on the object also leaves open the possibility of losing sight of the nature of design. To ignore the making is to ignore the meaning; while the meaning of the objects is important so too are the meanings attached to the practices in the making. This link to cultural studies aims to understand the impact of a practice; however, it is very specifically about the *varied* aspects of everyday design. There are a variety of approaches to everyday practice; a cultural studies search for meaning, and a material culture interest in the relationship between the object and society – maker and collector. Design history seeks to absorb these varying aspects into the practice of design. It does not focus solely on the consumptive practices, indeed consumption is only one part of the process, for this study examines the how and why of sewing at home in inter-war Britain when many options were available. Why did a woman choose (when and if choice was an option) to make a dress or embroider a cushion?

One of the questions in this research is why, if we know that women in inter-war Britain were sewing at home, has there been a lack of interest in this practice by historians? Possible reasons for this lack of regard include its location in the home, or, that sewing is traditionally a gendered activity, or, lastly, that it has been considered to have been performed infrequently, therefore not a relevant daily practice. This may be due in part to the belief that the increase in ready-to-wear production and sales is mistaken for an equal downturn in making and wearing home sewn clothing. While research such as Amy de la Haye's study 'The Dissemination of Design from Haute Couture to Fashionable Ready to wear during the 1920s' (1993, p.40) argues that the cheaper ready-to-wear market was a staple retail source for upper-to-middle class women, this study shows that it was one of a number of options open to women, and that home sewing was still actively pursued by the middle-class. It will also support the idea that home sewing was both varied and frequent as part of the mix of opportunities available to women. As such it was part of everyday design practices. In this study the everyday refers both to the frequency of practice, and,

the breadth of practice. Furthermore, home sewing encompasses a variety of practices, which are primarily but not solely based in the home, and importantly can and often are considered to be ordinary, or banal. It is in this ordinariness that it has become overlooked, lost or considered to be of little value in relation to a hierarchy of other practices, objects, and events which are regarded as more important and more immediately life changing. But it is in the actual practice, the making, where one can find a new understanding and discover the value and diversity of the 'ordinary', the importance of the banal, and uncover the underlying misconceptions which have looked to its neglect in design history.

The relationship between design and identity has been long standing. In the article 'Artefacts and Personal Identity' authors White and Beaudry note that, 'the concept of identity is complicated, paradoxical and culturally situated in time, place, and society. Identity is at once both imposed by others and self-imposed, and is continuously asserted and reasserted in ways that are fluid and fixed'. (2009, p.210) This self-imposition suggests a subjectivity that exists within identity that cannot ignore the importance of its cultural implications. This assertion and reassertion is reflected in fashion and the home; fashion and all its novelty being the more 'fluid', and the home (or ideas of it) more 'fixed'. Fashion is bound to the body, and for women who have been socially bound to the home, this blurring of boundaries and feminine identity has been solidified through a 'conceptual conflation...[where] body and interior space were often seen and treated as if they were the same thing, so much so that they became almost interchangeable; symbolically, one could stand for another'.(Gordon, 1996, p.281) Here, Beverly Gordon is reflecting on a trend which she states started in the industrial age, and, as evidenced in this research, continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century; while her work focuses on the United States, this conflation was not solely a condition of American culture. She argues that the body was decorated, as was an interior. (1996, p.283) This study posits that with fashion and interiors being a woman's purview this conflation while not necessarily valid or true, becomes an understandable shift in interpreting women's identity and defining femininity.

This socio-cultural identification of women and the home demonstrates it is just one of a number of ways in which women are differentiated. Sally Alexander states that it is 'through the division of masculinity and femininity that human identity is formed', and further, 'ideas of masculinity and femininity are found in labour divisions'. (1995, p.205) With women's labour being primarily prioritized and identified with the home, regardless of what type of work, paid or unpaid, was done outside the home. Sewing was one of these

forms of labour, yet it had a creative element that could allow a woman to have control over her interpretation of her femininity. With home sewing as a mode of femininity, women were able to utilize their imagination in the creation of their self.

It is this relationship between the imagination and the self that allows for its manifestation through the body. According to philosopher Karen Hanson 'Reflection can be shown characteristically to focus on what might reasonably be called corporeal, or at least public - on utterances, deeds, conduct, the movements and shapes and dispositions of the body'. (1986, p.9) This narrative, this voice of the self, is developed through the imagination, but visually represented through fashion and the home. As Jane Gaines in 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', notes that in film, 'costumes are fitted to characters as a second skin, working in this capacity for the cause of narrative by relaying information to the viewer about a "person" '. (1990, p.180) This correlation to film is relevant as women were going to the cinema and films were being used to promote fashion. This was a promotion not only of clothing but of glamour, excitement and desire. This link between the imagined world of Hollywood and the world of possibilities, was established with ideas of the self which could be manifest in clothing.

This creation of the self, the search for something new and different is a desire and as Lacan notes, 'Human desire is a desire for the Other'. (Levine, 2008, p.99) In this context the 'other' stands for that which is glamorous and exciting. Home sewing is a link in the construction of self-identity for, 'there is a notion of personhood in operation here which assumes a continuity between inner and outer rather than two discrepant parts...dress is a key to the personality of the wearer.' (Levine, 2008, p.183) This conflation of boundaries socially, physically and emotionally allows for subjectivity to play a greater part in the formation of identity. By allowing desire, an emotion, to play a greater part in forming the self it allows ideas of gender and identity to be determined by more than social structures; it looks at the relationships found in the home and the way that they are practiced both in public and private. Buckley argues that historically home sewing is placed in a similar position as being 'in the margins', she states that typically the 'subjective experience is placed at the edge of historical analysis'. (1999, p. 62) Allowing subjectivity to play a greater role in identity formation creates an opportunity for 'the practices of everyday life: of human experience formed through emotional relationships with others' to play a larger part in our understanding of identity formation and gender, as discussed by sociologist Michael Roper. (2005, p.62) By being more inclusive of subjectivity via the imagination

and the use of oral histories, we recognize the relevance of design history in history, both individual and collective.

“We use history to understand ourselves and we ought to use it to understand others”, states Margaret Macmillan in *The Uses and Abuses of History*. (2008, intro.) While women had been largely ignored or displaced from traditional interpretations of history, in recent decades more recent scholarship including work by feminist historians such as Deirdre Beddoe, Pat Thane, Joanna Bourke, and Martin Pugh have made room to equalize this inequity. But it is not just ‘women’ perceived as a collective that need to be understood, but the individual stories that can assist us in recognizing the diversities that can exist within a particular segment of society. Feminist design historians such as Judy Attfield, Pat Kirkham, Cheryl Buckley and Penny Sparke have also focused on the way that feminism has changed perceptions within design history. This is particularly significant for home sewing, which was primarily practiced by women, and as a signifier of femininity and domesticity, requires new perspectives other than those from the traditional hierarchy. In this research, design history utilizes gender and gendered practice in order to raise awareness of the daily life which defined women, and their responses to it.

As a growing and shifting class, the middle-class was part of a changing community and its women need to be recognized. Community is not defined only by geographical or even nationalistic boundaries. Community in inter-war Britain was developing in a more abstract sense of the magazine readers, women who might have moved away from their families to the new suburbs, and were part of this ‘new’ middle class. These were not the ‘flapper’ or ‘new woman’, two extremes of reality, but often the new housewife and mother, (who only worked if they were able to avoid the marriage bar) in an era when ‘homemaking was elevated to a science’ (Beddoe, 1989, pp.10,19). They needed guidance in being part of the changing world. These shared concerns can be seen in the imagined communities of the targeted readers who were being defined through the feminized spaces of the woman’s magazine. (Beetham, 2007 p.3) Class and community were therefore no longer solely rooted in the neighbourhood or by traditional definitions.

The concept of class, an ideological construction interpreted through social behaviours, was much more fluid in the inter-war period, becoming a less of a condition of modernity, than a concept or an ‘instrument’ to be modern. Class structure was constructed and maintained through behaviours of individuals, and the strict, codified nineteenth-century hierarchy was slipping away, both materially and visually. As David Cannadine notes in

*Class in Britain*, 'A Briton's place in this class hierarchy is also determined by such considerations as ancestry, accent, education, deportment, mode of dress, patterns of recreation, type of housing and style of life. All of these signs and signals help determine how anyone individual regards him /herself, and how he (or she) is regarded and categorized by others.' (1998, p.22) So fluid was this subject/object shift that one observer commented that he/she believed the middle class, 'never was anything more than a heterogeneous assemblage of very diverse and non-cohesive elements'. (Carr-Saunders, Caradog-Jones, 1927 cited in Cannadine, 1998, p.102) As Cannadine states that because the hierarchy was shifting, it created more layers of types of employment, access to material goods and perceptions of class – there were overlaps, not such sharp lines anymore. (1998, pp.117, 21, 27) Class, or self-perceptions of it, were becoming more porous and flexible, in part due to new opportunities. This becomes a greater difficulty when, as Joanna Bourke observes, using occupation, income and relationship to production as an indicator of class can be problematic for women and the marginalized. If you are only valued through your relationship with another your role is unclear, and you are not deciding who you are. (Bourke, 1994, p.4) Indeed, the mythologizing of the 'working class community' is subject to contention because of these social changes. Bourke notes that it is 'a retrospective construction...their choices were restrained not only by limited alternatives and restrictive resources, but also by cultural norms; but these norms are not so fixed [as with the middle class] as to constitute a shared 'identity. This flexibility was central to the struggle not only to "make ends meet" in the working class slums of the pre-war period, but also to the urge to 'keep up with the Joneses' in the housing estate of the post war years'. (Bourke, 1994, p.169) This movement of social boundaries influenced the shift of the working-class into the lower-middle class and the lower-middle class to the middle-class. This meant that along with the new 'communities' constructed through magazine readership and the new identities available to women, the middle-class, the 'new' masses were modern, even though they were on the most precarious shifting social terrain. In fact the tenuous, transitory circumstance of the middle class mirrors ideas of modernity, and parallels the place of fashion history in the broader art historical tenets.

Further arguments alongside class, could be made with concerns of rarity, provenance and the questionable skill levels of the homemade; the everyday, homemade object then becomes the middle-class of fashion scholarship. Without the scarcity and skilled workmanship value of the upper-classes, nor the underdog status and narrative of the working-class the homemade, everyday middle-class object becomes lost in the story of

design, femininity and domesticity. This study provides a new perspective and value to the everyday object; the middle class and the making of the middle class design world.

‘Ordinary culture hides a fundamental diversity of situations, inters, and contexts under the apparent repetition of objects that it uses’. (DeCerteau, 1987, p.256) Gathering and reviewing these collections of the ordinary reveals the diversity of everyday lives. These particular histories are of women and how they encountered design on an everyday level and were able to create their own individual identity, appropriate yet unique, simultaneously engaging with design as an everyday practice. The opportunity to archive their practices, their responses to the period reveal the tension in the relationship between the individual and ‘the masses’.

Design history has evolved out of the art history discipline, and has evolved to encompass material culture and cultural history. These three disciplines all take different approaches toward the study of objects and design. Indeed design history has upturned the traditional ideas of authorship, provenance and rarity, those arenas most commonly valued by art history. By uncovering the relationships and meanings between objects and the worlds in which they exist socio-cultural histories bring new information and questions to the foreground. This study in the history of fashion and interior design shifts the focus to relationships between design practice and the formation of identity and the questions these raise of gender and marginalization, by using objects to validate the links. The variety of methodologies available to research the objects must also address why these two areas of studies in particular have been disparaged.

Nearly 15 years ago fashion historian Lou Taylor in *The Study of Dress History* (1998) considered the divide between object based study by the curator/collector and that of the socio-cultural focus of the academic. Historically, one would not consider the others’ concerns, that is, scholars thought that understanding the structure of an object was not a valid concern, and curators did not typically value the use of broader methodologies in discerning an item’s cultural significance. (1998, pp.346, 348) Although these attitudes and approaches have mistakenly limited our understanding of women and fashion history, progress has been made. Home sewing as part of women’s history specifically located in the home also requires the challenge that, as Buckley has noted, it is not left in the margins, but given an equal voice, ‘how can one write about the place and significance of this type of design within women’s lives without merely replicating value systems that contribute to its marginalization?’ (1999, p.55) This research will examine not only what was made,

why it was made, but *how* and *where* it was made and the importance of the act of making in constructing an identity. Since the Eighties, the study of fashion history has evolved (thankfully) to the point where all of these conditions are considered valuable. Indeed the history of collecting textiles as made objects, and clothing as costume, has changed. This is in large part due to the increasing role of women in more prominent museum and academic positions which did not truly start to occur until the 1950s. (1998, pp.339,342) As Taylor states it was well into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that, ‘In the eyes of male museum staff, fashionable dress still only evoked notions of vulgar commerciality and valueless, ephemeral, feminine style’. (1998, p.331) As this research reveals, fashion, as seen in relation to home sewing, is not an ‘other’ for women, but a part of the everyday and deserves to be recognized as a valued norm of feminine identity.

Art historian Aileen Ribeiro’s statement that ‘home dressmaking is a worthy subject, but it would be much more illuminating if informed by an understanding of the part played by the great designers in establishing contemporary aesthetics and aspirational goals’. (1998, p.319) is an example of the attitudes formed by the earlier art historical approach to fashion that this study will redress; for the inspiration, the alleged aspirations of the middle class, are only part of the process of fashion and identity. The subject of consumption has had an important role in the discussion of design history, emerging out of material culture, sociological and cultural history theories. It has emphasized the role of capitalism in the definition of goods, gender and the creation of a ‘consumerist’ society. In particular, women have been disparaged as being objects of consumerism. Mica Nava believes it was the role of women as consumers that gave them a foothold in modernity, arguing that ‘Women played a crucial part in the development of these taxonomies of signification - in the acquisition of goods which conveyed symbolic meaning about their owners-since it was women who went to the department stores and did the shopping’. (1996, p.40) Indeed as the primary consumers of household goods their approval and use created much of the meaning behind the purchases.

In this study consumption is only one part of the processes, in fact, the choice to make rather than purchase, or to go to a small business (dressmaker) supports the view that women were not merciless victims of consumption but were informed and concerned consumers who were aware of their choices and questioned quality along with prices. More importantly this study seeks to show the link between consumption and women’s behaviour; how their more prominent role as consumers caused them to traverse more into

the 'public' world. The variety of ways in which they consumed - ideas, merchandise, materials - is as diverse as the women interviewed.

Consumption not only plays a role in capitalism and mass production, but also in the dissolving of social and cultural boundaries changing ideas of propriety and hence, behaviour. If the understanding that the concept of consumption includes more than shopping, then fashion and home sewing are not as narrowly defined. Given that home sewing involved the 'making' of goods, it also requires a degree of consumption which required that women had to leave their homes. Consumption need not only be from the focus of economic exchanges, but is the utilization of ideas, materials and services that could be repurposed, shared and possibly exchanged, all functions of home sewing. In order to do so most women were leaving their homes to go shopping. This back and forth of shopping, going between the private and public in order to be a consumer was not just about shopping. It allowed women to mix their leisure time with 'work' time; possibly to create goods for home, work and their new found leisure time.

This process has aspects of it that are seemingly 'passive': sitting and doing, however the overall process is quite involved. It required skill, time and imagination. Time, work and leisure for women were rarely ever separated, especially if they were spent, even partially, at home. Claire Langhamer, *In Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960* notes the ambiguous nature of needlework for women, in part due to the fact that sewing was an essential part of their daily work, but since it was the sedentary nature (sitting down) that made it appear as leisure. (2000, p. 42)<sup>7</sup> Again, while it may seem logical to assume a slower paced task is leisurely, home sewing was not a singular activity, nor a one-step process. Indeed, consumerism could be seen as a type of leisure as it could include a trip into town, 'window-shopping' and a break for tea. The trips outside the home to shop, were becoming a leisurely activity in the world of women. These very 'everyday' or ordinary activities are vital to understanding the experiences of middle-class women in inter-war Britain. 'In everyday life, our experience ranges daily from encounters with institutions that have more fixed and stable forms and are located usually in an identifiable geographical space, to more unstable and fluid experience of open and permeable relationships'. (Burkitt, 2004, p.220). The nature of home sewing as a practice was both fixed and fluid, reflecting the pace of life and changes occurring in Britain.

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<sup>7</sup> This observation was from the survey work of Spring Rice in 1939 of working-class women in the 1930s and from the Mass Observation project nearly 10 years later.

Understandably in the interwar period the growth in mass production along with the growth of the middle class along with shifts in consumer patterns cannot be ignored. However, this study will re-examine the significance of this for middle-class women. Indeed while department stores and franchises were expanding they were one of numerous options available to women. Given that mass production led to more choices the idea and implication of ‘mass’ and ‘quantity’ must be revisited. Quantity, ironically, is the one factor which becomes difficult to define in regard to historical importance. Mass production, by traditional understanding, does not reflect skill, and the materials used were not commonly rare. Ideas of mass consumption also assume that products were uniform, and broadly available. Unlike rarity, popular demand traditionally has not made products eligible for museum collections. Yet, the homemade, that which is also rare in quantity and may reflect contemporary design trends, is not commonly valued either, regardless of the level of skill. The home sewn good reveals how women responded to opportunities and design influences through home sewing. To ignore the homemade and its part in consumerism leads to a gap in design history.

In theorizing the everyday, it becomes, or has become, rife with questions: why, what is it, for whom, where, etc.. (Highmore, 2002) This study raises the question of ‘how’, by defining and developing the relationships, subsequently setting up the structures and scaffolding of inquiry. The problem of the everyday is not from a lack of questions, but of which questions are to be asked of whom. Everyday life has not been discussed as a mode of inquiry into the lives of women in interwar Britain via their relationship with design practice. As Baudrillard observes, ‘For all their multiplicity, objects are generally isolated as to either function, and it is the user who is responsible, as his needs dictate, for their coexistence in a functional context...’ (1996, p.8) Therefore the practice of everyday design is subjective by its very nature. As he suggests, ‘how objects are experienced, what needs other than functional ones they answer, what mental structures are interwoven with – and contradict - their functional structures, or what cultural, intracultural or transcultural system underpins their directly experienced everydayness.’ (1996, p.4) Here the link between sewing, femininity and domesticity is clarified; it is not the intent to ignore the object but to understand the impact of the relationship to its making at home. It is in approaching a woman’s feminine identity through practice, as a subject, not an object, that this research is based. This subjectivity is due in large part to the practice being home based.

In this research family is the locale for the primary relationships, home is the primary environment, and, for the women in this research, their new worlds of school, socializing and work expanded this network of locii and relationships. It is in these spaces, negotiated through practice in which home and body are constructed as the setting for everyday life. As women move between these architectural, physical and emotional boundaries it creates a dissolution or shift in the boundaries of private and public, paralleling the experiences of the inter-war period. New situations created new relationships, new places, new conditions and needs. These ceased to be unusual and had to become 'everyday' to be the norm, acceptable, to become a new structure. As Lefevbre notes, 'Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground'. (LeFevbre, 1958, in Highmore, 2002, p.128) The multi-faceted aspect of everyday life allows everyday practice to be a relevant part of modernity. As fragmentation is integral to the nature of modernity, to examine everyday practices, specifically home sewing, allows greater insight into the meaning of modernity to individuals, and the impact of design as an everyday practice on the construction of feminine identity.

In this research modernity and design practice are studied as an experience of everyday life and both are understood to be practised on an individual basis; the average person creates the modern. Referencing O'Shea's earlier statement of identifying modernity more with negotiation than an idealism; he further clarifies that this thinking diverges from Marshall Berman's more overarching ideas of modernity as a common experience of which we are subjects, and suggests that it is internally differentiated for different sections of the population. (1996, p.8) The speed at which change was occurring during the interwar period included the impact of mass culture and 'altering understanding of time, space and nature of the world order'. (Gilbert, p.3) This in turn gave the individual greater opportunities for control at a personal level. If the individual has greater access to means of participating in modernity, for example through mass media, and has the means to manipulate the outputs (i.e. through home sewing) it consequently allows design practices to be a route to being modern. Design becomes an active response to modernity, allowing identity to no longer be fixed either socially or privately, but in response to the changing conditions of society in interwar Britain.

This is seen particularly in fashion and the home especially as goods became more available, and women, as the purchasers could make the choices. As Mica Nava notes in *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, 'women were confirmed as

arbiters of tastes and interpreters of the new - the modern. It was women who first of all encountered the new fashions and domestic novelties and decided whether they were worth adopting.' (1996, p.48) These encounters are clearly evidenced in the process of home sewing as it frequently required trips to shops, dressmakers and family.

This public/private traverse from the domestic into an urban setting is at the heart of the historical understanding of modernity and femininity. It has long been associated with Baudelaire's concept of the street, the *'flâneur'* and the gaze. The idea of the *'flâneur'* is that of a mid-nineteenth century French male which has been used repeatedly as a marker for modernity. This study redefines the modern experience of the early twentieth-century and understands it to be less about the aimless wandering about the city streets than the daily, and usually purposeful experience of women's public lives, which included leisure time.

Feminist art historian Griselda Pollock argued that modernity was a matter of representations and myths. (1988, p.245) This study supports this theory especially since those representations and myths are the result of a limited gendered and historical perspective. Myths have been defined as 'a collective belief which is or was given the status of truth by a group of people'. (Flood, 1996, p.6) The traditional understanding of women as solely private beings and sequestered in the home will be dismantled in this research. When we apply 'women' to traditional views of modernity, it creates a partial and masculine viewpoint as the norm, and locates women as 'other' and subsidiary. (Pollock, 1988, p.248) Janet Wolff in the essay 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity' (1985) questions why women have been ignored (but not completely disregarded) in discussions of modernity using examples of literature. While men may have 'owned' the public forums of the 'rational factories' and urban settings, they too lived in a private, domestic world. Theorists and philosophers, she notes, have too often ignored this public/private divide and passed over women and modernity. It is the result of '1) the nature of sociological investigation, 2) the consequently partial conception of 'modernity' and 3) the reality of women's place in society' (1985, pp.37,41,43) This research investigates the depth of the divide of public/private, women and modernity, and the 'reality of women's place', especially as the twentieth century unfolds. Lynne Walker questioned the belief that women existed in completely separate spheres than men in her essay, 'Vistas of Pleasure Women Consumers of Urban Space in the West of London 1850-1900.' (1995) Walker looks at how in the Victorian era 'social relations in turn are changed by spatial divisions and material forms of representations'. (1995, p.71) She

argues it is a 'reflexive relationship' and, while not always straightforward, historians are remiss to believe that women functioned solely in the private sphere. (1995, p.71)

While their studies take place prior to the inter-war period they lay the groundwork for this study understanding of women's public lives and new understandings of the *flâneur/flâneuse*. This study investigates the reality of women's place in society and the extent to which both men's and women's lives in inter-war Britain consisted of a back and forth between the public and private spaces. The changing lifestyle brought new meaning to how they experienced the world. Understanding that a shift had occurred in women's everyday lives in inter-war Britain, requires that historians cannot analyze women's history, nor early twentieth-century history using theories which are no longer relevant. Women's positions, both objectively and subjectively had shifted.

In this study it is posited that the 'street' in the inter-war period, was a space of socialization, where shopping and work were naturally woven into a women's private life; and that more opportunities for a woman to look and be seen were altering the position of subject and object, becoming one and the same; the nineteenth century *flâneur* is merely one historical construction of modernity. 'Importantly, for women there cannot be a *flâneuse*', it was rendered impossible by the sexual division of the nineteenth century' (Wolff, 1995, p.45) and the city and lives had changed by the next century. Yet, as we enter the twentieth century woman had more options and purpose in the city but her time in the city was not spent aimlessly, it was a blend of work and leisure; she had more to look at, and through fashion revealed more of herself. The concept of the controlled, objectified gaze creates a limited understanding and access to these 'spaces' and their subsequent interpretation adds an air of the exotic to a woman's daily existence and experiences of modernity. This 'otherness', the result of being objectified does not allow women to be a normal part of history, but something on the edge, or as a comparison, not integral to history.

Logically it can then be argued that as long as women were becoming more active in the public world their accessibility to all that is modern was increasing, as they could go further distances in less time, to shop, to visit, to have a holiday. This compression of time and space was having an impact on the culture. Their understanding of the world was being changed, as was their public participation. The more marginalized were having a greater voice in their society. (Gilbert, 2003, p.3) This resulted in their ability to say who they were as they defined themselves. The pace at which life was changing, the new web of spaces and relationships required practice on an everyday level to negotiate the changes.

It is inappropriate and irrational to identify the early twentieth-century by modes of being, practice and circumstance in a setting nearly 100 years earlier. Modernity, whose very nature is change, should also be clarified and re-interpreted not only to fill the 'partial conception' but also to create a realistic setting for understanding the time period.

This fluctuating relationship of modernity and women is crucial to redefining what modernity means and how it has been interpreted. If, in the age of consumerism, women were controlling modernity, as epitomized by Mica Nava that 'women's *experience* can be interpreted as a quintessential constituent of modernity'. (1996, p.40, italics in original) Experience can best be understood as a series of behaviours to negotiate everyday life which, when described by Michel de Certeau links practice, location and memory to design:

'The everyday practices, the coherent and fluid assemblage of elements that are concrete and everyday ideological, traditional... are decisive for the identity of the dweller...to take up a position in the network of social relations...appearing in a partial, fragmented way in the way in which they consume space'. (1998, pp.7-9)

Women, as core participants in modernity, were both producers and consumers of their individual and group identity. This research will bear witness to Nava's idea that women's experiences can be interpreted as the aforementioned 'quintessential constituent of modernity'. (1996, p.40)

Discussion of woman's public life does not mean to disregard her private, or domestic life. In this research the home is equally a site of modernity as is the public sphere, evidenced specifically through design practices. The link between public and private life, spatially and representationally is the site of modernity for inter-war middle class women and starts in the home. If modernity was manifest through the negotiation of daily life and all its changes, and home sewing fashions represented the physical and public embodiment of modernity, accordingly then modernity would be experienced in the home. Therefore, home, specifically through design practices, becomes a site of modernity, equally valid as the experience of modernity in public spaces. The conflation of ideologies of femininity: the home, the body, the self; are unified through the practice of being modern in creating representations of one's self.

Judy Giles states in *The Parlour and the Suburb*, 'For millions of women the parlour and the suburb rather than the city were the physical spaces in which they experienced the effects of modernization. These were also the spaces that shaped the imagination from

which came their expression of modernity'. (2004, p.11) This is also evidenced in the rise of technology and the professionalization of homemaking, these ideas transformed the home into a site of modernity. In 'A Citizen as well as Housewife': New Spaces of Domesticity in 1930s London', Elizabeth Darling notes, 'the re-forming of the private sphere was seen not simply as a device through which women could be transformed into efficient housewives and mothers...the increase in leisure and time which resulted from a labour saving dwelling would free women [they] would be enabled to bring their insights and housewives and mothers into the public realm'. (2005, p. 53) The modern girl, one of the new 'business girls' working as clerks and in retail were also part of modern life, 'reworked notions of modernity and femininity. For contemporaries the Modern Girl was a harbinger of both the possibilities and dangers of modern life'. (Mitchell, 1995 cited in *The Modern Girl*, 2008, p.8) Regardless of the threat to domestic ideologies her existence may have signalled, sewing was a part of her training in being feminine.

The idea of a home sewer is inextricably linked to the idea of femininity; whether by practice, by location, or by production, work with a needle or sewing machine was for women. Support for this argument can be found in Victoria DeGrazia's argument that, 'The construction of femininity and the home are tied through three functions: reproduction, production, and consumption'. (DeGrazia, 1996, p. 8) *In Becoming a Woman*, Sally Alexander believes the division between men and women and the development and potential problems of femininity, starts at the biological/psychological level, 'It is through the division into masculinity and femininity that human identity is formed...any disturbance of that division will provoke anxiety'. (1994, p.205) De Grazia and Alexander, both create a compartmentalized and spatial perspective to femininity; however feminist art historian Griselda Pollock states that,

'femininity is not a natural condition of the female person. It is a historically variable ideological construction of meaning for a sign, woman, which is produced by and for another social group, which derives its identity and imagined superiority by manufacturing the spectre of this fantastic Other. Woman is both an idol and nothing but a word'. (1988, p.255)

While DeGrazia and Alexander are offering a more singular perspective, Pollock takes a more extreme position where not only does a woman not have any control over her own ideas and formation of identity that they are completely formed through the viewpoint of society. (1988, pp.255,259) This study posits that while social and historical variables may have influenced contemporary ideas of what is deemed appropriate behaviour, and biology

might also restrict or minimize various opportunities, women did have control over how they defined their ideas of who they are and had a variety of tools and methods to do so. This study understands femininity as a way of being, manifest in a set of behaviours constructed by socio-cultural mores and ideologies, influenced by biological differences.

In the inter-war period home sewing in particular became one of those tools where a woman could both collude and resist tradition or 'being modern' as she wished using both her body and home. Pollock goes on to say that 'Femininity should thus be understood not as a condition of women but as the ideological form of the regulation of female sexuality in a familial, heterosexual domesticity ultimately organized by the law'. (1988, p.259) Again, femininity may not be a 'fixed' condition of women, but it is a mode of being female; and traditionally it has been understood in familial, heterosexual and domestic terms as a constructed idea limited to a certain extent by laws; but to conclude from this that women were mere passive objects in the construction of their self-identity, only being seen and not actively viewing themselves is misguided. In this research even if a women's viewpoint is restricted, she still has one, and she still has the choice to resist or concur with the way she is being seen. In regard to this study, the question more specifically asked is how, and to what extent did she use home sewing as a tool in this process? A young woman in inter-war Britain could use both her body and home to exercise these ideas, and while these could be easily influenced by the various cultural discourses, they could also be interpreted as products of her own desires and personal goals.

### **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES**

This study organizes an analysis of design as practice through the everyday practice of home sewing. This section outlines and discusses the methodologies used in this research. In particular it will focus on the application of the design as a practice interrelating the theoretical foundation to create the methodological structure. It reviews the use and analysis of oral histories, mass media and objects. While oral histories are interspersed throughout the study, in-depth case studies/analyses of objects and magazines are utilized to further comprehend design as a practice in inter-war Britain, in the Chapters IV – VI, the Mass Media and the Design as Practice chapters. This research will clarify why these particular methodologies have been chosen, and how each one was deployed.

The initial interest in this topic is based upon a curiosity about the relationship between design and identity, with an aim to understand the role and relevance of design practices in

everyday life and how design historians have approached it. Home sewing in inter-war Britain allows for a very specific, gendered, understudied design practice, home sewing, to be telescoped in on, through the experiences of a demographic that has been largely overlooked, the middle-class woman. Methodological interests lie in what was made, why it was made and what the process entailed.

In order to create a picture of the time period and the design process of home sewing a structure for this study had to be created that connects the theoretical framework with the process of design and their points of intersection. These 'points' are the methodological process: the use of oral histories, the analysis of mass media and object analysis as case studies. Oral histories give a voice (literally) to the women and families who experienced the influence of home sewing in the inter-war period. An analysis of mass media, in this study, women's magazines and 'how-to' sewing manuals, sheds light upon how home sewing and ideas of femininity were being mediated in inter-war Britain, and also allows for the dialogue between the oral histories and media to be analyzed. Lastly, by reviewing objects, magazines and dresses, from museum and private collections, questions of authenticity and socio-cultural values can be addressed.

#### *Design as Practice Model*

The design as practice model references the aforementioned production-consumption-mediation paradigm of Lees-Maffei. It is deconstructed and expanded to work within the design as practice model, where practice is understood to be a series of steps found in the process of making. This dissection of home sewing, a design practice, through its process (production) includes modes of consumption and mediation (magazines/how-to manuals), is narrated through the oral histories of middle-class women. In doing so this research uncovers what DeCerteau has referred to as the inters where individuality is discovered amongst the homogenous, mundane and banal. "Ordinary culture is a *practical science of the singular*". (1987, p.256, italics in original) These inters reference the blank space of Foucault's grid of order, 'it is only in the blank space of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression'. (1970, p. xix) It is here, in the blank spaces, that the unseen-the hidden histories of middle class women-can be uncovered and told through the oral histories of those who created. Analysis of the text, image and form of mass media is used to derive meaning from the point where objects intersect with oral histories.

To find these ‘points’ one must first understand how the steps are defined. The design as practice process consists of six steps: motivation, inspiration, skills/education, shopping, making and preservation. Each of these intersects with a methodology applied in this study. To understand motivation one must be aware of the time period and the perceptions of social situations which were arising due to socio-economic conditions. These can be derived from historical research, magazine analysis and oral histories. The inspiration for home sewing is understood from an analysis of magazines, and family life (oral histories). Skills/education are about the early experiences of learning through school, family and how-to sewing manuals. Shopping, a consumptive practice, is comprehended through an analysis of magazine features, advertisements and women’s personal stories. The actual making of an object is understood through the oral histories and object analysis. Lastly preservation, reflecting socio-cultural values, is best observed through object analysis, in this study from collections, and oral histories.

Interpreting these intersections as the spaces where process intersects as methodology, are where this research finds the history of home sewing, the construction of femininity and new understandings of inter-war Britain. Meanings, derived from experience of the making process, such as femininity, domesticity, and modernity, are intertwined with new sensibilities of private and public identity and location, along with temporality. Methodologically these in turn are affected by memory and imagination. Through discussion and analysis the ‘making’ and the made, practical skills are learned along with the objects, dresses and domestic goods - all real, haptic structures of history; importantly with these comes the role of imagination and memories. This research utilizes these inters where language, structure, objects, and memory meet-as methodologies of understanding – creating the grid of the individual history which speaks of broader histories and practices, that have been so mundane, so banal that they no longer register in our understanding of everyday life. In this study the relationship between memory, experience, and object are central to creating a new understanding of production, consumption and mediation as methodologies bound by oral histories.

The gap between word and object, whether a dress or magazine for analysis, both lend themselves to a reading and understanding of the relationship which exists between them— abstract or concrete – that needs to be understood as parts of one overall narrative. Had this research been initiated through solely an object or a theory, for their own sake, it would have been more isolated in its understandings and conclusions. The deconstruction of the

experience of practice allows for a holistic development and understanding of how all of these aspects work together to create an understanding of design history.

It was in researching magazines that the potential role of oral histories was discovered and fostered; extant magazines were found to be limited in number of any one particular magazine, and in a search of museum collections it became clear that the homemade was not a priority for preservation. However, by piecing together the real-life stories of women of the period along with looking at the breadth of type of magazines available (as opposed to just one magazine) the analysis of private and museum collection pieces, a holistic understanding of the impact of sewing at home is constructed.

Together these chapters uncover individual stories revealing both newfound and known commonalities, explore sewing as a practice, give a broader reading of cultural discourse through everyday literature, and, lastly, an interpretation of contemporary values and perceptions of the time period. Woven together they create a broad picture of an everyday design practice in inter-war Britain that primarily impacted women; telescoping in on particular stories, readings and collections to illuminate the 'bigger picture'. Following is a discussion of the three methods used in this study, oral histories, mass media and object analysis. It will develop a clear picture of the issues which arise from each individual process.

### **Oral Histories**

Oral histories are the thread which connects the design as practice process, they link empirical evidence with theoretical concepts and real-life experiences, reflecting how women developed their self-identity through home sewing. This construction of self involves an interaction between the individual's bodily and material experience on the one hand, and the individual experience of culture as the discourses which we negotiate everyday. (Abrams, 2010, p.36) These invisible, unspoken or unrecorded aspects of design were often popular or common activities that were a part of a process, a part of daily life, regardless of their existing physical evidence today. Oral histories have been woven throughout the research highlighting their relevance and support of theories and primary source materials.

Integral to this research is the understanding that experience creates memories which oftentimes last longer than objects, and may have a longer lasting impact on an

individual's formation. As Raphael Samuel states, 'memory, so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force'. (1994, p. x) The experience of home sewing by those who have sewed at home during inter-war Britain will be evidenced in the oral histories applied to this study.

Memories, the invisible, are occasionally captured in diaries and journals of the famous and well-known of the era such as feminist writers Vera Brittain, Virginia Woolf, and Anais Nin. Sewing, as a common practice, was not often referred to or discussed. However, if you ask a woman about her needlework skills a host of memories rise to the surface. In using oral histories as a research methodology, there are strengths and weaknesses. One of oral history's greatest strengths is its ability to give a voice to women who would normally go unheard. They are able to speak in their own words of their own experiences and tell a story not as objects of a story, but as the story itself. Oral history, 'focuses on people in order to understand them as subjects in the socio-historical contexts of the immediate past or present'. (Sandino, 2006, p.275) Ordinary woman are not lost to history when their experiences are utilized and can be used with the other sources available to historians.

Questions of memory, subjectivity and language come into play with the use of oral histories, however a consciousness of these issues can assist in making these a strength, not a weakness. As Lynn Abram states, 'oral sources derive from subjectivity - they are not static recollection of the past but are memories reworked in the context of the respondent's own experience and politic'. (2010, p.7) It is essential to approach history from both a subjective and objective standpoint for when we encounter a topic it allows the voice of the individual to either support or subvert the collective histories with which we have traditionally been presented in histories. Particularly for women, these collective histories are rarely an individual woman's voice or those of the average person. Yet the average person's experience is what creates a common history. Myths of history may be upturned or reveal varying understandings through oral history. (Sangster, 1998, p.91) This subjectivity is an essential component of identity, as Dominick LaCapra notes:

'subject positions are crucial for both experience and identity, and...among the standard subject positions that one has to take into account in any discussion of identity are the following (which may themselves be multiple or internally divided): sexuality , gender, family , language, nationality , ethnicity , class, "race," religion or secular ideology, occupation...Debates, about identity and identity formation often concern the actual and desirable prioritizing or , more generally, the

relation and possible coordination or integration of subject positions'.  
(2004, pp.59-60)

A person's consciousness of these positions, or willingness to identify with them is revealed in the interview process, and as will be shown, can be set against the societal norms or practices. Memories allow the historian to fill in gaps, and make connections between what is studied and what was experienced. (Sandino, 2006, p.278) Just as they tell the individual experience as opposed to the collective, the way in which a person tells their story, the language used, the subjects revealed or avoided, can expose aspects of experience. Memories have us ask 'why people remember or forget things the warping and mistakes they made, and asks "why"?' (Abrams, 2010, p.23) That a person may choose how and if they tell their story makes them a participant in history, not an object. As the oral histories reveal home sewing encompasses the telling and the making of history, as well as the object.

The story of shopping is part of the home sewing experience. Mica Nava relates that the consumer experience has been gendered female:

'women played a crucial part...in the acquisition of goods which conveyed symbolic meaning on their owners-since it was women who went to the department stores and did the shopping...women were the confirmed as arbiters of tastes and interpreters of the new modern. It was women who first of all encountered new fashions and domestic novelties and decided whether they were worth adopting'. (1996, p.48)

With this understanding the role of home sewing in consumption is central to this study. The shopping experience, as revealed through oral histories, creates the broad range of possibilities for women, and speaks of the active process of design in home sewing. It involved public forays and design practices to construct a private self. Memories of those trips and that process were quite strong, as much as the development of the ideas for their dresses or home goods, regardless if they were saved, the experience is still germane.

As Abrams notes, 'subjectivities are produced from a particular standpoint and identifying that standpoint aids one's interpretation of the sources'. (2010, p.22) Identifying the person interviewed by name, occupation, age, birth order, family information is part of creating a picture of the person as well. In the actual process of gathering oral histories for this study all participants were given an option to remain anonymous, which only one took. They were then asked to tell their story, using some guiding questions in case the interview went off topic or it became confusing.

Through individual stories the responses tell the collective story of a group of women, unrelated yet sharing a common set of experiences. They are women who were neither extremely wealthy, nor extremely poor. Sewing in their lives was both functional, and for most, recreational. It was a method of creating their own self-image and being economical.

### *Mass Media*

Where oral histories can tell us of individual experiences they are of even more interest when set against the reality of contemporaneous information. In this study two types of print material are used to mediate the experience of home sewing, magazines and needlework/sewing manuals. The inter-war period was one of growth in mass produced goods which includes an increase in mass media. Magazines, one form of mass media, are a useful tool in examining women's lives; this research uses magazines of the inter-war period as a primary research source. An analysis through a reading of inter-war magazines and needlework manuals which were popular during the inter-war period will broach the cultural discourse within which women lived, looking at not only the text, but the design aspects of the magazines for greater comprehension of how home sewing was 'read'.

There were a variety of magazines published for women including; domestic, fashion and leisure, which were prolific and inter-war Britain was subjected to an influx of magazines for the growing population of literate and upwardly mobile citizens. While these do not chronicle daily events, they do chronicle trends and attitudes towards daily life. They were useful both as a voice and a foil for the diverse populations for which they were created. Magazines acted as a voice not only through their stated concerns and opinions, but for the chatty, informal tone which many of them used stylistically. Magazines were not, however, created by their 'target' population, hence highlighting what the ruling/upper class understood to be the lower classes aspirations and appropriate behaviour. Mary Grieve, editor of *Woman* magazine, believed that it was important that readers should be able to identify with the women portrayed in the magazines and that the image should not be of richer, luckier woman than the readers. (Beddoe, 1989, p.15) This was not a formula reserved for the British alone, for in France, the international fashion centre was where 'the weeklies and supplements targeted provincial readers who wanted to follow Parisian fashion, they could do so and at the same time remain respectable'. (Stewart, 2004, p.91).

Historian Martin Pugh notes that while middle class women were the target market, the working-class made up a large portion of the readers. He further states the editors attempts at balancing 'feminism and femininity [is] doubtful. For they printed what the market

wanted in their magazines, though in practice this often meant they tried to avoid offending anyone'. (Pugh, 2008, pp.175-177) When set against the reality of, in this case, women's lives, the success of such socio-cultural control can be measured. As Fiona Hackney's research supports that for the readers, 'magazines, many insisted, gave them 'ideas' that could be adopted, adapted, or rejected'. (Hackney, 2007, p.10) Magazines were also less regional than newspapers and could simultaneously capture and join their audience on a broader scale than a newspaper might, creating a larger community, and a more common generational and national identity, thus codifying behaviour and creating broader acceptance.

Using magazines as a resource is not without its hazards. It is the historian's role to discover the consistencies and variables that existed and create an understanding of both the time and the media and its impact on research. To counter this concern the original research dates of just the 1920s were extended to the entire inter-war period with a focus in the mid-range years of 1924-1934. Reflecting these conditions this study looked primarily at women's magazines which covered topics of home and fashion along with magazines specifically for needlework. It also reviews the trade journal, *The Draper's Record* and leisure magazines such as *Radio Times*, *The Studio*, film, dance and hobby magazines. The advantage of this approach, using a variety of magazines available, is that it reveals how extensive, common and assumptive all forms of sewing were in women's lives. When a contiguous selection of magazines was available the September/October issues were focused on for the seasonal fashion focus, and the second half of March for the Mother's Day focus.

As mentioned, this thesis does not exclusively use magazines, but also accesses sewing /needlework manuals; these were commonly published by newspaper publishers and included dressmaking, needlework and domestic sewing as topics. Typically they were reprinted frequently, and were authored (if at all acknowledged) by several people, oftentimes noted for their role in domestic science training or editorial work in magazines.

In the text 'Introduction Studying Advice: Historiography, Methodology, Commentary, Bibliography,' design historian Grace Lees-Maffei gives an overview of the use of advice manuals noting that [much like oral histories] 'advice manuals have held a precarious place in academia. [However,] in design history, advice can be used to chart ideals as a corrective to existing chronologies of taste...it has an aspirational readership and by consulting ephemeral sources aimed at a mass, amateur audience, and centred on populist

taste, it lags behind that of the avant-garde and the design profession'. (2003, p.7) This however is placing these manuals in a hierarchy where the rare, the '*avant-garde*' are more valued (i.e. they do not lag behind stylistically or had influence) than those marketed to the masses. Aside from the opportunity to compare photographs of the wealthy and the middle class it is difficult to judge how influential they were or for how many. It is true that the audiences were, to an extent, aspirational, mass, populist and amateur, but this does assure that they did not use the advice. In fact, most of the manuals used in this thesis were more 'how-to' books with actual hands-on advice than extensive commentary. Indeed most comments would have been affirmations of what was known, derived from how brief 'advice' statements made were in comparison to the amount of technical information. As such those social commentary segments typically found as a general statement introducing a topic were most likely less relevant for the reader, but important for a historian. The structure of the manuals reveals a possible prioritizing of concerns or the popularity of topics, as will be uncovered in this research. Being books they would not have been as inexpensive as magazines but were acquired for technical knowledge, making them a less widespread form of information, but nonetheless a relevant source working alongside magazines and oral histories.

As a form of evaluation these magazines bring together design and social issues in a format that was as ubiquitous as sewing itself. They entered the home, assisted the reader in defining herself and her home and connected her with other women of her generation and class. Simultaneously dichotomous and binary, magazines were a guide to women's lives for themselves and historians. This study strengthens our understanding of the visual and textual influences that (in)formed daily life in inter-war Britain. This analysis cites specific examples of how it did so in tandem with women's real life experiences, allowing individual voices to support and connect collective knowledge.

### **Design as a practice**

This subject area is covered over two chapters, discussing aspects of design practice related to home sewing. The first chapter looks at conditions that influenced the experience of sewing, the second chapter examines the actual making and preservation of a home-sewn object. Specific conditions affected the experience of home sewing, that is, the actual process of making and the later preservation of the home sewn. As part of a greater design skill set, home sewing has had an impact and influence on a variety of aspects of daily life,

such as the location of the machine in the home, how the sewing machine was considered as a technological innovation, how girls were educated about sewing, and the impact of increasing concerns around professionalization, will be examined. Chapter VI, Design as Practice: Inspiration and Making, is focused on the sources of inspiration and subsequent retail process and choices made. Object analysis of everyday items made both at home, from a dressmaker and mass-produced are reviewed to consider issues of technique, value and preservation.

Home sewing cannot be discussed without an understanding of its taking place in the home. A central theme to this study is that the boundaries of home, the body and ideas of the self are often conflated and the implications of home sewing are an example of this condition. A concrete reflection of this includes the actual location of the sewing machine as a signifier of its importance and value in the family. Women brought up the memory of the sound of the machine as part of the experience as well, the distant and ever present sound of daily life. (Alexander, 6/09; Buie,10/09)

A contradictory element was discerned through the lack of acknowledgement of the sewing machine as an electrified home appliance. While domestic electric sewing machines were not common, they were available for retail sale. This dichotomy in the discourse between reality and history speaks to our understanding of the role of technology in home sewing and domesticity. This study specifically examines the differing experience between how women experienced the sewing machine and how popular discourse considered the sewing machine. As an every day object which was vital in performing an everyday task it required proper care, as evidenced in a review of manuals, yet as this research reveals it was a domestic technology overlooked by those outside of the home discussing the modern home.

A review of its status as 'technology' and 'modern' during the inter-war period creates a curious relationship between home sewing and modernity. An examination of the promotion of and increase in use of electricity as part of the 'modern' home reveals the lack of discussion, even mention in media materials, of the sewing machine as a domestic appliance. Juxtaposing the frequency of articles about sewing in magazines, with the ubiquity of the sewing machine in the home creates an unusual picture reflecting the contradictory nature of the interwar period. This is further complicated by the educational experience, which in analysis strongly supports sewing education for girls, but overlooks the lack of sewing machines (hand or foot treadle, as electric was out of the question)

actually being used in schools. A machine which by narrative accounts was a common piece of 'furniture' seems to have been overlooked unless in terms of its sales. As a mass-produced, everyday technology this study considers its paradoxical treatment. Its parallel to women in history is unmistakable.

An education in sewing would be required if it was to come to fruition. Here discussion of family roles and schooling was central to the research. That one generation taught another as a necessary skill for being female places the importance of home, practice and identity in a more prominent light. This subject required a review of British schooling and what was considered acceptable for the various classes of society. A textual analysis and overview of the design of sewing manuals supports this research. A number of these were used for school education, where sewing was done by hand, whereas sewing machines were most frequently used at home and had a different type of manual available to the 'lay' person.

Lastly, several factors are impacted by the role of professionalization. It was not only what was considered appropriate educationally which raised questions of social class, but the professional 'look' of the item. Concerns of finish were reiterated along with quality of items, as the ready-to-wear market was growing, but quality did not necessarily coincide with that growth. The rise of domestic science as a form of professionalizing the home did not leave home sewing unscathed. These factors were apparent in an analysis of the oral histories, the government funded educational reports, mass media discourse and a review of the manuals. As well the new public forums were creating the need for more public participation and one's appearance was a marker of status and respect.

This study looks at not only what was used in the practice, but the decision making process of home sewing, revealing the relationships and practices of that process through memory. Each of these broader issues underscores both the process and the experience of home sewing. Chapter VI considers what the sewing experience was like from inspiration to making, and closes with an in-depth look at objects that were made. It considers the process and awareness of inspiration, shopping and the actual items created. These are found in the final section of the chapter, the object analysis of two different embroidered items made by two the women interviewed.

The subject of inspiration in the process of practice encompasses ideas of the self and how one then fulfils the need to create one's self-representation. It is an integral part of making, and found through daily experiences such as magazines, shopping and cultural activities. It

is inherent to creativity which for many varieties of home sewing is vital. In discussions with the interviewees they were questioned in regard to their reading and shopping habits not only for purchases per se, but the types of shopping done, including the types of shops, and the variety of decisions made. Social events were a part of the inspiration as well, the possibility of going to a dance could spur on imaginings, reading and shopping. Here questioning was simultaneous with reviewing reading materials and discussion of then current events.

### **Object Analysis**

As Baudrillard questions in *The System of Objects*, ‘How can we hope to classify a world of objects that change before our eyes and arrive at an adequate system of description? Size, functionality, gesture, form, duration, its presence, its transformative qualities, its exclusivity?’ (1988, p.3) In this thesis the relationship between object, memory, and experience are central to creating a new understanding of production, consumption and mediation as methodologies bound by oral histories. These, unto themselves are methods of creating the self, crossing the boundaries of body, object and space. This study utilizes object analysis of magazines, embroidered objects and dresses, in order to examine the relationship of mediation and making with the veracity of the middle-class women’s experience of everyday life and home. Dress historian Lou Taylor in *The Study of Dress History* approaches dress history through the object, with the use of collections and object analysis, and various theoretical approaches: socio-economic, cultural and material, including the use of literary sources, oral histories and the link between textual and visual imagery.<sup>8</sup> This study makes use of the theoretical contexts through practice and femininity, the use and analysis of literary sources and theory through magazines and ephemera, and in this section, collections, observation and object analysis.

In the Mass Media chapter three women’s magazines are developed as case studies: *Home Chat*, *Mab’s Magazine* and *Modern Home*. Their particular structure and related analyses reveal the role of home sewing in specific formats. They were chosen for their commonality/popular reference, condition and availability, spanning a ten-year period of the inter-war years. They are discussed in relation to two other magazines, *Ideal Home* and *The Studio*, both of which were marketed toward the domestic design concerns of the upper-middle classes. *The Studio* in particular with a focus on determining an arts

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<sup>8</sup> She also discusses display and interpretation and ethnography, but that has not been a major part of this research.

perspective of contemporary design. These relate the difference between magazines with a gendered position in relation to a more domestic/artistic purview for both men and women. The case studies reveal the depth of conflation of textual and graphic discourse with women's bodies, femininity and domesticity, along with the tension that existed in greater social discourses of these topics.

The objects – embroidered domestic goods, magazines and dresses - are analyzed as examples of design ideas. Two embroidered pieces are discerned for the type of work done, including skill, and design motifs used. Three different women's magazines over a ten year period are analyzed for stylistic and textual relationships. Two types of dresses, evening and day made by dressmakers, individuals and manufacturers, are used as tools for identification (the known from a museum collection, alongside the unknown factors of family and private collections), and discussion of methods and skills as starting points for questions of collecting and vintage value. In analysing the sewing techniques and materials between the 'known' accessed collection pieces, with the private pieces with less provenance information, the 'unknowns' could be vetted and valued more knowledgeably, highlighting the importance of museums collecting and archiving the everyday. Together these objects create a well-rounded picture of the concerns of this research, couched in the narratives of oral history. Lastly, a brief consideration of what happens over time to the objects made, the dresses and household items found and preserved in regard to collection, and their preservation and value in the current public systems of museums and retail.

In summation, the methodologies used in this research expand upon previous paradigms and definitions of production, consumption and mediation. It applies a new model and approach of design as a practice to understand the breadth of variety found in the everyday design practice of home sewing for middle class women. The use of a variety of magazines and how-to manuals reveals the contemporary discourse and how design was both an object and tool of socio-cultural mediation of femininity. It also reveals that the message of femininity was a consistent voice in the everyday lives of women. This study has used oral histories to not only state the relevance of home sewing, but link the steps in the process to everyday life. These are further elucidated through case studies looking at both the making of objects and the preservation of them.

### **Chapter III - History: contextualizing women and home sewing**

This chapter will consider the changes to the economic and socio-cultural conditions that impacted women in Britain between the wars. It argues that the growth in the middle-class from the upwardly mobile lower-classes and the downward slide of some of the upper classes redefined social and cultural mores; including new modes of leisure and consumption for middle class women. It proposes that as a result of these conditions home sewing played a distinctive role in middle-class women's lives, and that while the period is typically perceived as a period of great changes, for women these changes were realized at a more everyday level. This chapter also considers the awareness of these conditions by looking at the impact that they had on women. Specifically it will examine historical considerations of the war and its relevance for women. In particular, it will examine how the role of women changed during that time due to new legislation, different employment opportunities, and social responses to the end of the war. This was in tandem with technological advances and shifts in housing, education, and mass media. These areas of change in particular altered a woman's everyday experience, as will be addressed in this chapter. Importantly, this chapter reflects on how historical shifts were altering the role of the design practice, home sewing, and how that would bear upon a middle-class woman's perceptions of her self-identity and femininity. How women through design, negotiated these changes at this time is the core interest of this research.

The period from 1918-1939 is commonly referred to as 'inter-war' or 'between the wars' locating its 'place' in history between two world wars. It can only have been named such in hindsight, for post-World War I, no one knew that there would be another 'Great War'. Alison Light states, 'as the nomenclature suggests, the 'inter-war' years are easily seen, from the masculine point of view, as a kind of hiatus in history, an interval sandwiched between the more dramatic, and more historically significant acts'. (1991, p.9) But for many alive at the time, the years following the World War I were characterised by change, hope, anxiety and excitement. While Britain had undergone great trauma with the tremendous losses of the war, the influenza epidemic of 1918, and the ups and downs of the economy, it had also seen change of an optimistic nature: modern times had brought material progress from new technology and the faster flow of information and goods to more people. (O'Shea, 1996, pp. 14-15) (Mowat, 1957, p.233) Further, 'Not only had the war reduced the gap between the classes and even brought into existence a system of taxation the effect of whose operation would be to continue to reduce the gap, but its events and the involvement of so large a part of the population in them, had changed the

general outlook of society. (Milward, 1984, p.8) Historian Derek Aldcroft notes that, 'Real incomes rose steadily, the new industries, house building and the service trades expanded significantly and the rate of growth of the economy was quite respectable compared with past standards while there were substantial gains in social welfare'. (1983, p.1) While fluctuations occurred over the 20 years, the key issues were that the variables which did occur, affected specific populations and geographic areas and industries. However, these changes, especially those in housing, education and employment had a bearing on the daily lives of middle-class women in particular, as evidenced in this study. Change, especially for some women, moved them into more public and independent roles than ever before.

The historian Eric Hobsbawm in his book *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, defined this early part of the century as the 'age of catastrophe' (1994, pp.6-7) this research seeks to consider what this meant for the ordinary, middle class English woman. In his book, *We Danced All Night* (2008) Martin Pugh takes a balanced approach to the inter-war period as he outlined the contradictions and fluctuations of the period; pointing to the opportunities for leisure that existed alongside the economic and political strife. At the same time he adopts an even-handed assessment of the lives of women. (Pugh, 2008, pp. vii -ix) Arguably everyday lives were not (typically) defined by catastrophic events, and while it is important to acknowledge the larger society, the history of ordinary lives was not shaped solely by worldwide events. In this research, the use of oral histories allows for an understanding of individual responses to these changes. For many women coming of age in the 1920s and 1930s there was a sense of optimism that could be manifest in the everyday life practices that created their world. These new ways of living, changing fashions, technology, media and social situations are the criteria for this research's investigation of the interwar period. It was a period of flux, which started with a need and desire for renewal.

How women's lives were shaped by the war goes beyond consideration of decreased opportunities to marry and raise a family. Pat Thane in *The Foundations of the Welfare State* notes the impact on family incomes when women moved from the domestic sector to manufacturing from the later 1920s. (1982, p.166) In *The Economic Effects of the World Wars on Britain*, Alan Milward discusses the idea that there was an inherent connection between the extent to which war involved the total population and the extent of social change. (1984, p.24) During the war men had fought side-by-side, breaking down existing

class barriers.<sup>9</sup> ‘The losses had been felt by the upper classes, the land holders, with the loss of heirs, “death duties” and property was often sold off to those who had profited during the war; creating a shift in the landholding wealthy’. (Branson,1975, p.92) These changes carried over into post-war society, when the changes in industry post World War I directly impacted women and work.

For middle class women their role change during the war had been both economic and public; they had moved out of the home and into the male work arena; during the war they had been needed to work in the factories, transport, and in more clerical positions. ‘New iron and steel products and new textiles, such as rayon were made by old industries. The service sector grew fast. However, many of the expanding industries were lighter than those in decline, employing a higher proportion of women’. (Thane, 1982, p.163) This was a more public hence undeniable role for women. Partially as a result of this in 1918, women (a householder or wife of one<sup>10</sup>) over the age of 30 were granted the right to vote (Branson,1975, p.203) and in 1928 all men and women over the age of 21 had the right to vote. Women still rarely earned more than half the pay of men (Thane, 1982, p.167). This is evident in notes from the Executive Committee of the Women’s Section of the Northeast Coast Exhibition of Art, Industry and Science in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1929, where even in the Women’s Section did this disparity hold as evidenced that it was agreed that men would be paid 45 s per week (48 hour with uniform) and girls 27/6d (48 hours).<sup>11</sup> Regardless of larger social changes, on an everyday level women still had to fight for their jobs, wages and benefits.

After the war Britain was reeling from the number of men lost in World War I and the need to acclimatise to having the returning soldiers back, which included the desire to move women from the work front to the domestic front. Women had slightly outnumbered men in England even before the war killed off one eligible man in every seven and seriously injured another, so that the problem of the ‘surplus’ woman was much debated.

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<sup>9</sup> By no means did this disintegrate class boundaries or strife, as economic depression and socio-cultural differences continued. However there was a discernible blurring of who belonged in which ‘class’, how those class boundaries were defined, and who was affected most severely by economic slumps.

<sup>10</sup> This excluded resident domestic servants, widows who lived with married children, sisters keeping house for their brothers, and women living in furnished lettings.

<sup>11</sup> Tyne and Wear Archives, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: MD NC 295/2:11-12; Minutes, Women’s Section, Executive committee, p.163. Annual Wages would be approx 75.20 pounds for men 62 for women ( 2538.25/2072 respectively in 2005 equivalency) [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

(Graves, Hodge, 1940, p.45). As John Montgomery states in his book, *The Twenties: an Informal Social History*, 'People wanted the good old days to return; there was a general feeling of moral and mental fatigue' (1957, p.15). This return was met with mixed success from different aspects of society. While a war certainly takes its toll on society, 'the good old days' may have been good for only certain parts of the population, and it may have been defined differently by various populations in society. As a class-dominated society, the poor and the working-class certainly may have questioned the definition of 'good', and women, from the working and middle classes, now had the opportunity to redefine 'good'. Legally, 'when the war ended women [middle-class and working-class] were dismissed from the labour force and expected to re-enter traditional women's employment or, better still, to return to the home, "their proper place"'. (Beddoe, 1989, p.48) This was despite the 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act which did not allow for discrimination by sex or marriage in the appointment or holding of any 'civil or judicial office or post, from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation.' (Branson, 1975, p.209) However, in 1931, a regulation under the same act, commonly known as the marriage bar, was enacted for women who were higher civil servants, forcing them to give up work on marriage. (Branson, 1975, pp.209-210) In doing so marriage becomes the defining facet of a woman, and her role as a breadwinner was not considered valid. This particularly had an impact on the lower-middle class women who were effectively pushed out of government, civil, office and teaching positions. (Glucksmann, 1990, p. 223) The Tyne and Wear Archives compendium *Wor Lass* notes that 'Female teachers were paid less, and were expected to give up their jobs if they married and were largely excluded from top jobs, except amongst infants'. (1988, p.31) A contradictory set of conditions were being created: where women were once necessary and proven capable, during the war, they were now being told they were not; while new types of jobs were available, working class women were being pushed back into the home both as wives, mothers and domestic help. As Beddoe notes, 'the immediate post-war period was confusing for women...and nowhere was it more sharply demonstrated than in attitudes to unemployed women in the period following the Armistice'. (1989, p.50)

This employment restriction was not just for a woman's social status, i.e. single or married, but the type of work she 'should' do. Working class women were being pushed to return to 'service', or domestic work, or give up their benefits. (Beddoe, 1989, p.5) With job opportunities available in new industries many women had no desire to work as a live-in domestic servant. These new skills and new types of employment resulted in fewer women

working in domestic service. From 1907 to 1924 the domestic service sector share in the GNP dropped from 3.8 % to 3.4 % (remaining there through 1935). (Aldcroft, 1983, p.30) This shortage created a problem for the upper class women and anecdotally it was a source of some bewilderment. In the magazine *Domestic Help* of November 1929 an article titled 'The Servant Problem, Why the Scarcity' recognized:

'The average young woman of today likes freedom. She seems to prefer one room and even semi-starvations to the comfortable home and good food usually received by domestic employees; however, the author also recognizes that, employers should endeavour to give their employees some opportunities of realizing that their lives are their own'. (1929, p.4)

This concern went so far that when a means test for unemployment benefits was devised, 'the debate about women's unemployment in the 1930s was dominated by upper-class conviction that women could use any means to avoid redressing the shortage of domestic servants...from the end of the war the Ministry made it very clear that if a woman had ever done service it was still suitable for her; if domestic vacancies existed, she could not receive benefits'. (Thane,1982, p.174) By not fulfilling her socially determined role, as supported by government policies, a woman was being restricted in defining her identity, and her potential.

Glucksmann brings up an interesting point, that, theoretically, women in non-manual occupations were likely to be better off financially and in a better position to afford labour saving domestic appliances...or employ other women as domestic help. 'In their situation then, waged or salaried employment was potentially more compatible with domestic responsibility. Hence the need for a formal marriage bar...'(1990, p.223) Women went from being an independent and contributing part of society, giving to the war effort to being removed for men returning to their rightful, i.e. traditional, place. Yet the domestic front had also altered, with fewer men available to marry due to the physical and psychological damage done to them. So not only were women being displaced from their 'new' jobs, they now had a smaller pool of men to marry. However, they were now functioning in a new, faster moving world with the vote, new skills and a new attitude toward work and the future. This contradictory and fluctuating experience of daily life is central to understanding the development of femininity in this research.

Some of the new employment opportunities for women which did remain stable or grew occurred in the new retail stores. Consumption was not just about the purchasing of goods

for women, but the selling as they now worked on both sides of the counter. Changes in shopping habits for the middle classes went from the options of delivery to the door, and going to the corner shop to trips into town to the department store, specialty shops and new multiples or franchises. According to Aldcroft, estimated retail sales rose in real terms by nearly 38% between 1920 and 1938 and much of this increase went to the larger retailers. (1983, p.67) There were three main types of large-scale retailers; the cooperative society, the department stores and the multiples, or variety stores as they were also known. Before World War I large units accounted for less than 20% of all sales, but by 1939 they were responsible for one third or more of the total and in some cases, such as footwear, women's clothing, and food stuffs...they accounted for more than 40% of the total sales in each group. As this research demonstrates women took part in some aspect of the retail experience including those less commonly researched, the dressmaker and local draper's shop. Options in lifestyle were part of a modern woman's life, and questions of quality, choice, and individuality played a role. According to Aldcroft it was the 'emergence of the variety chain store' that had the greatest impact; with a growth from 300 to 1200 stores between 1920-1930, sales by multiples went from 3 to 20% of total sales, which includes Marks & Spencers, Woolworths, etc., representing a considerable change for the middle-class consumer. (Aldcroft,1983, p.68) Mowat suggests that this was facilitated by the fact that shop goods reached the villages in greater amounts, at a greater speed giving more women more access. (1957, p.233) This along with increased wages and constantly changing fashions would have increased retail sales.

Taking advantage of these changes in particular, was the chain store, Marks & Spencer. The interwar period saw the greatest changes in their early history; between the years 1918-1926 through the reformatting in store design, pricing policies, shift in consumer goods and central organization of its expanding number of stores. (Rees,1969, pp.73-76). Profits rose from 64576 in1922 to 100,089 in 1926. (1969, p.86) Between 1926-1930 fifty-six new or rebuilt stores were opened and nearly forty stores extended. (1969, p.98) Further, Marks & Spencer disposed of the middleman and introduced their own 'line' of clothing, taking advantage of mass production possibilities, and narrowed their merchandise lines to be more focused. (Rees, 1969, pp.126, 140) Strongly influenced by American retail methodologies and growing competition Marks & Spencer aggressively wooed their customer with mass production appeal, from pricing to service.

These shops would frequently require trips into town from the newer, middle-class homes built following World War I. The slogan “Homes built for Heroes’ (Taylor, 1940, p.147) was realized through Addison’s Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 and this enabled the government to address the shortage of homes and the dire need for more modern and hygienic conditions for the new types of workers, and to alleviate the degree of poverty which had plagued Britain prior to World War I. (Marwick, 2000, p.87) Government programmes were developed to support the development of homes to a high standard, increasing employment. Builders of houses had to conform to certain specifications of size, airiness and convenience before they could earn the subsidy, and the sites had to be approved by the district surveyor; the result was a great improvement in the general health of the nation. (Graves & Hodge, 1940, p.171) Included in the 1944 government issued *Design of Dwellings* are excerpts from the 1919, 1923, 1931 and 1936 housing reports: in 1919 it stated the most general class of house should contain living-room, scullery, larder, fuel store, WC, bath in separate chamber and three bedrooms. (1940, p.47) By 1936 the government suggested that, ‘The three-bedroom non-parlour type of house with a superficial area of 760 sq. ft. or thereabouts and containing bedrooms of about 150, 100 and 80 sq ft. and a living-room of 180 sq. ft, affords adequate accommodation for a working-class family consisting of not more than five persons’. (1940, p. 48) Mowat notes that there was a recommendation of a density of no more than 12 houses per acre. This created a new standard of working class housing came to be accepted: the three-bedroom house, with kitchen, bath, usually a parlour, electric lighting, and gas or electricity for cooking.<sup>12</sup> (1957, p.228) This ‘inter-war state housing policy first helped the lower-middle and better off working-class and only belatedly poorer manual worker; also, although there was closer government involvement with housing than ever before, much of the initiative lay with local authorities’. (Thane, 1982, p. 206) Indeed, as seen in the chart below according to Montgomery<sup>13</sup> over a 14-year period the number of units built more than tripled:

<u>Years</u>	<u>Units Built</u>
1920-24	369, 446
1925-29:	1,009,903
1930-34	1,147,297

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<sup>12</sup> Marwick (2000:91) mentions that in the 1923 Housing Act which maintained the principle of subsidies favoring private builders over councils, could sell for less, but not have a subsidized rent and were as small as 850 square feet but no more than 950, thus possibly losing the space for a parlour.

<sup>13</sup> The following table of housing information is from Montgomery, 1957, p. 30)

However, the rooms were small and ceilings low; furniture became smaller...(1957, p.30). According to Aldcroft these numbers are actually much higher, 'with the building of over four million new houses during the interwar years', (1983, p.122) According to government accounts in 1918 the Tudor Walters committee assumed that the total number of houses built by local authorities would probably not exceed two hundred thousand. In fact, however, local authorities had already built five times the number of houses contemplated by the Tudor Walters Committee'. (1944, p.9)<sup>14</sup> This building boom accounted for 30% of the increase in employment between 1932 and 1935 (Taylor, 1940, p.344). While the government may have been setting some standards and allotting some subsidies the majority of new builds were private. 'Between 1931 and 1939, 2.5 million new homes were built in Great Britain, under 600 thousand of them by local authorities, aided not at all by a further cut in subsidies in 1938'.<sup>15</sup> This supports Pat Thane's assertion that the private building industry benefitted from the government housing acts. (1982, p.207)

One of the styles of these new developments was a variation on the earlier garden cities built on the outskirts of cities creating the new suburbs. They were often mortgage-built estates dominated by the 'Tudor' vernacular, (Hawkins, 1986, p.75), consisting of a detached or semi-detached house, with the front door on ground level, and a bit of garden – these were the low-rise, low-density 'garden' estates of the interwar period. (Thane,1982, p.213) They were some distance from central work places, thus raising their resident's travelling costs. (1982, p.207) Overall, in the inter-war years the range of new housing had a higher standard of material conditions than were available to a broader range of people. Those who benefitted most were from the working classes to the lower-middle to middle classes, 'the better off, skilled or white-collared worker whose need for better housing was real and whose capacity to demand it was more effective than that of the very poor'. (1982, p.207) Branson notes, 'The upper classes also had had a shift in housing needs, now with fewer servants the multi-level homes with numerous staircases were not as efficient'. (1975, p.104) The difference being the upper classes could afford the new technologies

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<sup>14</sup> In total they had built 4 million homes over twenty years, approximately 3 million by private enterprise and one million by local authorities. (p.9)

<sup>15</sup> In 1917 a decision was made as to how many homes would be needed under the guise of the local authorities. The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919 (Addison's Act) 'had been conceived in the belief that, unless working-class aspirations were quickly met after the war, Britain might experience a revolution similar to that in Russia. By 1920 that fear was beginning to recede and Addison's policy was being regarded as extravagant. (ref. 29)' There continued over the interwar period, a constant fluctuation of support for government subsidies to private builders and housing societies. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=46467#s2>

available to make adjustments to their older homes. The aristocracy had lost homes to a combination of the new taxation system, expensive upkeep and a loss of heirs. (1975, p.104)

These newly built houses were able to take advantage of the new technologies of which the greatest was electricity. This did not exclude the new housing that some of the middle classes were able to access. The demand for many of these household goods was likewise stimulated by the house building programme'. (Aldcroft,1983, p.48) 'Since most of the new houses were wired for electricity it generated a demand for a wide range of new consumer durables based on the new form of power. By 1939 there were already in use from 1.6 million electric cookers, 2.3 million vacuum cleaners, 6.5 million electric irons and nearly .5 million electric water heaters'.<sup>16</sup> This world of professionalization and rational thinking brought these more 'masculine' modes of thinking, into the home. As Peter MacNeil notes, 'the gendering of spaces and practice played their part in producing the idea of "woman"/ opposing female intuition to male rationality within a binary system of gender'. (1994, p.631)

The Electrical Development Association did its best to promote the use of electricity, [it] 'was held to promise a bright, clean, efficient, cheerful, toil-free world...the industry did its utmost, through advertising, exhibitions and show houses to convince the public that electricity was indeed the fuel of the future. (Forty, 1986,p.190) The Electrical Association of Women which had groups active around Britain often held talks about the benefits of electricity, on one occasion bringing in a maid, Mary, to discuss her positive experiences with electricity. (TWA, EWA, 2119) However, Taylor notes that it was chaotic, 'voltage varied widely, even in the same town, and there were twenty three different types of plug for an electric fire'. (1940, p. 183) It also meant that women had greater expectations set upon them for levels of hygiene in the home, creating more work, with less help, while supposedly the speed of the technology left them with more time. According to Sue Bowden and Avner Offer in 'The Technological Revolution That Never Was' electricity was used primarily for illumination and access to the radio; women's domestic labour (unpaid time) was not a priority, time saving was not an issue compared to costs and value; but the number of people who could afford the items was very slow growing. (1996, pp.245,250) This concept of women's time and its value is part of the broader system of

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<sup>16</sup> Note that sewing machines, of which electric models had been manufactured for at least 10 years, were not included in the listing of 'modern' appliances.

understanding women's everyday life; for women work and leisure were commonly the same. (Glucksmann, p.116) 'Free' time was neither free of cost nor labour; if women were not earning money for their time it was not a logical step to spend money on goods to save time.

Part of this alleged free time could also be spent listening to the 'wireless', another electricity based commodity. The wireless, or radio, was an important technological innovation which transformed home life. 'It was a particular boon to women as a form of leisure because it allowed them to do other things at the same time...women listened far more than men, largely because they were at home in the day'. (Beddoe,1989, p.129) In fact, now that women had electricity in the home and the help of electricity to (supposedly) complete their housework earlier they must have had time for more hobbies, or so it was thought. Considering the number of radios sold, theoretically, this would not be unfounded. It was a 'symbol of the inter-war period, especially towards the end of it when nine million sets were licensed; in other words in nine homes out of ten'. (Taylor,1940, p.307) This is a remarkable accomplishment as the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) received its charter in November 1922, funded through licensing fees. Various ideas for funding were proposed – including advertising and taxes on sets. The tax on the sets would have excluded 'experimenters' or hobbyists, those who bought the parts and built them themselves (Graves, 1940, pp.89-91). 'Professor A.M. Low, the scientist, considered that this hobby might have considerable educational value, especially for women. He urged women to buy for thirty shillings<sup>17</sup> the parts of a crystal set and a booklet on how to put them together; it would amuse them in their homes and teach them a handicraft'. (1940, p.91) The January twenty-third issue of *Hobbies* magazine was special 'all wireless' issue, featuring, amongst others, 'How to build this fine Radio Gram cabinet' (1932, pp.420-421) showing the integration of the gramophone with the wireless into a piece of furniture. More likely though was its purchase as a piece of furniture for the home.

According to Forty its assimilation from a piece of technology to a piece of furniture, encased in cabinetry, helped to ease its way into the home. 'A cabinet which harmonised with the domestic furnishings at least helped to make the monstrous unreality of radio seem part of everyday life'. (1985, p.202) This unreality of the seemingly ever-changing world could be normalized through the domestication of the new technology both formally,

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<sup>17</sup> This is approximately £66 in 2005 currency ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)) which was the equivalent of 5 days work for a tradesman in 1930.

as furniture, and through its programming. As it was air-time programming was allocated so that meal-time and evening hours could be allocated to the low-brow or general public, the morning to housewives, and mid-afternoon and late-night hours to the leisured. (Graves & Hodge, 1940, p.237) However in a review of the *Radio Times* scheduling for the 'Women's Hour on local stations was more likely to be anywhere from 3-5 pm - and sometimes only a half-hour program, while the national programme would be at 10:45, and commonly on a Saturday. For example in the *Radio Times*, March 1924 schedule the Woman's Hour was listed at either 16:45 or 17:00 lasting a half hour. On March 14<sup>th</sup>, the 17:00 'Woman's Hour' topic was 'Furnishing a Flat on Nothing' by Yvonne Cloud out of London. The Bournemouth station on Sept 12<sup>th</sup> was broadcasting, 'Talking to Women' at 3:45 – 5:15 on the topic of 'Buying a Car' by Capt. Simpson. On Monday, March 29, in Cardiff women could find out about 'The Pleasures of Spring Cleaning,' by Iris Lllewlllyn. On March 21, 1930 at 10:45 Mrs. Robert Noble, had 'Ideas for curtains and Floor Coverings' as the topic.

In the following September, again, at 10:45 'Bedspread Designs' were sure to entice women to listen; with 'Modern Mending' to follow on Saturday, Sept 27<sup>th</sup> at 10:45 -11, by Ms. Ethel R. Hambridge. In 1924 Mrs. Belloc Lowndes wrote an article for the *Radio Times*, 'If I Planned the Women's Hour: the programmes I would choose' advising for more general and broader topics, as 'It seems to me far more difficult to provide good talks about dress than about any other subject... what is wanted is something far more practical and definite than what is generally offered'. (September 1924, p.23) Hopefully she had missed the earlier programme on September 12, 1924 by Londoners Misses Isitt and Stewart, that the advantages of education are grossly overrated. However, in the article 'Women and the Wireless' Robert MacGill strikes a sympathetic note with his commentary:

'There is no doubt that wireless has filled a gap in the housewife's life. Few men can realize the true loneliness a woman has to face most of the day, with not a soul to speak to, and an endless round of trivial tasks to be performed. But now she has somebody to talk to her, and her secret hope is that someday it will be possible for her to talk back to Uncle Rex and the others'. (September 1924, p.462)

In *Women and the Machine: Representations from the Spinning Wheel to the Electronic Age* Julie Wosk discusses the evolution of the relationship of representation between women and electricity. In the early days of electricity woman was used to personify electricity, mysterious and exciting, by the early twentieth century woman was a consumer

of electricity. 'Women had gone from being portrayed as goddesses of electricity, exotic androids, and seductive advertising lures, but during the early decades of the twentieth century manufacturers also asked women to envision themselves differently: as consumers of new electrical products of industry'. (2001, p.83) Theoretically, the assistance of electricity in the homes was meant to free women's time; making both her and her home more modern: electricity was cleaner than gas and the use of vacuums and refrigerators meant cleaning took less time whilst maintaining a higher standard of hygiene, hence leisure time for women, which could be spent listening to the wireless. Modern middle-class women were able to consume modernity via technology or information, both while working and at 'leisure'.

Leisure time, for some, was part of the new post war era. With the enactment of the eight-hour day movement in 1919 the working week dropped from 53 or 54 hours to 48 hours, an 11% reduction in time. In 1937 only 4 million of a total working population of 18.5 had paid annual leave. (Aldcroft, 1983, p.119) By the middle of 1939 some 11 million were covered by various agreements through the Holidays with Pay Act of 1938. (1983, p.119) This time, along with smaller family sizes (from 4.35 to 3.59 between 1911 to 1939) meant more resources, both time and money, to spend on leisure activities, for the growing middle classes. (1983, p.21) Leisure time for women was often ambiguous by nature, especially when focused on needlework. Claire Langhamer notes that needlework 'reflected the fragmented nature of women's time, and constituted an activity which could be fitted around the activities of other family members'. (2000, p.41) This ambivalence, found in needlework, between home necessity, pleasure and time, 'allowed personal creativity [to] melt seamlessly into necessary work, handicraft activities did constitute a much-valued form of personal pleasure for many adult women...' (2000, p.179)<sup>18</sup> As this thesis will show there was some variety depending upon the age of the women, and their responsibilities.

The wireless also introduced jazz and other forms of music throughout the country, which was promoted even more through the popularity of dance halls and the new dances being created. 'Between 1918-1925 some 11,000 dance halls and night clubs opened, it appealed to young people of all classes, especially those women stooped over a factory bench or typewriter all day'. (Beddoe, 1989, pp.117-118) Jazz, the newest form of music was not just the music but became part of the youth culture, 'it was associated with unharnessed

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<sup>18</sup> Langhamer's research extends from 1920-1960.

energy, revolt against convention and youth'. (Ross, 2003, p.28) The glamour of the dance hall could be found in the 'real life story' in *Popular Music Weekly* when a girl went from the 'Fatigue and drudgery of being a blouse hand' to the 'paid dancer in one of London "Halls of Pleasure" a "glittering place with the stuttering electric sign about it" with its evening gowns and secrets'. (*Popular Dance Weekly*, February 1924, p.24) The relaxation of moral codes of behaviour, the revolution in women's attire, and the 'explosion of high spirits' following the war led to a boom in mixed gathering at dance halls. (Aldcroft, 1983, p.126) The boundaries of class and social propriety were being tested and women were very much part of this evolving social order.

Along with dance another popular pastime was the cinema. Similar to dance in that all classes could (and did) take part in 'picture-going', it was unlike dance in that it was also a family leisure time activity though its biggest patrons were women. In Liverpool the number of cinemas increased from 32 in 1913 to 69 in 1932. (Mowat, 1955, p.250) In London the number increased from 94 in 1911 to 266 in 1921. (1955, p. 250) It was estimated that 40% of Liverpool's populace went to the cinema in any given week and 25% of the population went twice a week (1955, p.250) This was another area where women were involved on both sides of change, they were both the cinema-goers, and the entertainment employees in these new industries. This is relevant when considering that during the interwar period Hollywood cinema has been a key source of idealised images of femininity. (Stacey, 1994, p.9) How women participated with film, and why they chose to, speaks of the relevance of their leisure time priorities and how it influenced their ideas of their feminine selves as they wished to be perceived.

The influence of America and new potential social mores was often found in films. In regard to film content, the British film industry never proved to be as popular as the Hollywood films. In 1927 (the year of the 'talkie') the Cinematograph Film Acts established a quota of British Films which must be presented; as they were not of good quality they would typically be shown at unpopular hours. (Mowat:1955, p.246) The glamour of film was undeniable, 'As one commentator announced, the cinema was calculated to draw crowds and unsettle moral certainties: "Torrid Turns! Glamorous Girls! Smashing Bands! As a 21 year old shorthand typist confessed, "Films I think have made me more receptive to love making, sometimes I feel like kissing a stranger, but I have never done this" '. (Bourke, 1994, p.35) This would have shocked historians Graves and Hodge fifty years earlier who believed that 'few learnt their morals, good or bad, from the

cinema; fewer still followed the stars in the morality of their private lives'. (1940, p.314) Their greater concern was that the cinema strengthened the illusion of a special relationship with the United States. (ibid., p.314) The American system of consumption, retail and entertainment was encroaching British life, and being British was already under threat from domestic issues.

Unlike America, Britain has been defined to a greater extent by its class structure and the maintenance of the divide between wealthy and poor, rural and urban, educated and uneducated, North and South, resting upon the imagined ideals of what it actually means to be British. The upheaval of society and tradition meant that, 'Englishness has had to be made and re-made in and through history, within available practices and relationships, and existing symbols and ideas'. (Colls and Dodd, 1986, preface) Post World War I new industries created new jobs and new ways of living. 'The remaking of class, gender and national identity was undertaken at such a variety of social locations by such various groups that is it difficult to talk of a common intention'. (Colls and Dodd, 1986, p.2) This lifestyle, of a caste system of officers and enlisted men, the wealthy and the working class had been upheld by the institution of the aristocracy; who believed themselves to have and to live by higher ideals, cultivated and maintained the hierarchy of the British class system. While these elitists of the day still fostered the idea of 'us and them' the reality of daily life was breaking down the imagined world into one of possibility by the ability of the individual to create their own sense of modernity. In *The Intellectual and the Masses* John Carey posits that, 'The early twentieth century saw a determined effort, on the part of the European intelligentsia, to exclude the masses from culture. In England this moment has become known as modernism'. (1992, p.17) Even if this is true, this development of further elitism was not part of the new 'masses', but the *avant-garde* of modernism. The change in society that was occurring was affecting all sectors of society from the working class to the aristocracy, men and women, young and old, their private lives and their public lives.

This is significant in realizing that new types of communities were forming. Mass communication was creating a mode for redefining and mediating appropriate behaviour and mores for new social circumstances. The discussion of the broadening middle-class, and these new communities during the interwar period has been through the use of the word 'mass'; mass production, mass media, mass transport, the masses. However, it was not only the word, but the idea of the 'mass' that perpetuated the idea of 'us and them';

instead of the reality which was developing in the interwar era of ‘a lot of us’. The shifting of class boundaries were more than material changes but attitudes and how the everyday was experienced.

Indeed, as argued earlier large numbers of people had more access to a similar standard of housing and there were more non-manual labour based jobs, the middle class became a larger population. The new masses were not the poor as much as a much more loosely, or broadly defined, middle-class.<sup>19</sup> This gap that was narrowing between the masses and the elite, was being manifest in visual culture. ‘People could no longer be judged by their clothes, which were more uniform. Clerks were now well dressed there was more choice of clothes...’ (Montgomery, 1957, p.51) (Buckley, 2007) This destruction of the old way of life was being fuelled by the growth (and demands) of the new masses, a more literate mass. Education reform of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had created a larger literate public, ‘the difference between the nineteenth-century mob and the twentieth-century mass is literacy’. (Carey, 1992, p.5) Two forms of ‘mass literature’ were popular in early twentieth century Britain, the newspaper and the magazine. ‘There was a profusion of reading material available, including popular newspapers, magazines and new novels’. (Aldcroft, 1983, p.124) According to Graves and Hodge (1940, p.50) ‘The low brow public read monthly story magazines and “pulp-fiction” that is to say the light, amorous and melodramatic sort, printed on wood-pulp paper, like newspaper, and not intended to last’. While this variety did exist for women, there were other offers as well that focused on home and fashion. This research focuses primarily on such magazines, specifically those targeted toward women, for, as this research notes, leisure and education would go hand-in-hand for women. It supported, and expanded new ideas of femininity and domesticity to a broader audience.

In order for ‘the masses’ to read they would have needed an appropriate education. While conditions improved over the interwar period it was still difficult. The Fisher Act of 1918 raised the school leaving age to 14, (Taylor, p.308) but by the end of 1939 there were still two thousand children with over 40 classmates and questionable classroom conditions. (Thane, 1982, p.206) Selective examinations were initiated along with the abolishment of fees. By 1938, 46.9% of pupils in secondary schools paid no fees. (Thane, 1982, p.206) But school required more than fees, there were uniforms and supplies that were needed as well.

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<sup>19</sup> This does not deny the degree or level of poverty in Great Britain especially as the Depression occurred, but the overall standard of living had risen.

By the mid-1930s on .4% of school-leavers went on to university. (1982, p.202) There were three new universities opened during the interwar period, (Swansea, Leicester, and Hull) and women could now attend university.

This new system did not affect everyone; while education had changed, the class divide still existed. For the wealthier students, they placed a greater stress on academic subjects recognizing that colleges and universities were slowly accepting female students. (Tyne and Wear Archive Service, 1988, p.31) Typically, schools were divided by what was taught to whom. For the majority of women however, university was not an option, but there were training opportunities, though they were primarily in the domestic sciences. The curriculum for most girls emphasized their role at home. Cookery, needlework, housekeeping and childcare were central. Girls should become good providers and supporters of their husbands and families. For the lower class girls the curriculum was still domestically based to train them for their roles as good wives and mothers. Such topics were also sound preparation for domestic service. (1988, p.31) The idea was to keep women tied to the home through domestic skills in order to be good wives, and for the lower-class women to work as the much 'needed' domestic cleaner. Either way women of the working and middle classes were tied to the traditional idea of the home.

This however, did not mean that women were only able to work as domestics but that there were opportunities for women to run their own businesses. Evidence of this can be seen from data from directories of the time period listing businesses for the northern region of Northumberland<sup>20</sup> (including the largest city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne) [see table #1] where it had had one secondary school, as well as the Northern Counties Training College in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, there was a private school of dressmaking, which was run by a Miss Cranston, along with a number of women-owned draper's and dressmaking businesses. The largest decline came between 1929 and 1934, yet the number of 'schools' increased from 1 to 3 including one government funded, and two privately owned (by Miss Cranston and Miss Dryden). This most likely reflected the impact of the Depression. Analysis of the data suggests that women were more active as dressmakers than as drapers – of which there were a variety of specialities: linen, wool, travelling and fancy. An

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<sup>20</sup> Two directories were consulted, *Ward's* and *Kelly's*. In *Kelly's Northumberland*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne was included along with all the regional towns and villages. *Ward's* had two sections, Newcastle & Wallsend, Newcastle covering what would now be considered the core of the city, Wallsend neighbourhoods to the East.

interesting fact revealed is the higher number of single women self-employed as dressmakers than drapers.

**Table 1.**

<i>Kelly's Directories Northumberland</i>									
	Female Owners			Married			Single		
Business/Year	1925	1929	1934	1925	1929	1934	1925	1929	1934
<b>Draper's</b>	609	538	373	74	74	59	79	73	54
<b>Dressmakers</b>	134	113	81	32	20	7	92	79	61
<b>Schools</b>	1	1	3						
<b>Interior Designer</b>	1	0	0						

A professional career had become almost respectable by the 1920s. (Tyne and Wear Archive Service, 1988, p.31) ‘Women working as teachers were still common, but their role in clerical positions had also increased: [by using the new classification and coming in under] the categories of public administration commercial, financial and insurance occupations, and clerks and typists...the number of women employed was 149 million in 1921, 1.153 million in 1931’. (Milward,1970, p.32)

How valued these women were, and the expectation of the length of their ‘career’ must not have been extremely high, as evidenced in an article about a woman who had an unusual career. In the Nov 17, 1934 issue of the trade journal *The Draper's Record* it was announced that Mrs. William Kemble was to retire; with an article entitled, “The First Woman Traveller?” Starting in 1925 she had worked for 10 years as a travelling sales representative for a wholesale drapers in the west of England – the first woman not only there, but possibly the first woman in the country. She later joined her husband in a retail venture, working for 40 years total in the drapery trade. (*The Draper's Record*, November 1934, p.42) It was obviously shocking for a woman to not only have such a public role, but to have had such a long career. Considering the number of women who were working at drapers, as evidenced in *Kelly's Directory*, it seems unusual, and she may have been one of the earliest travelling drapers. These more educated, employed women had new roles to engage in, along with their domestic responsibilities. As they entered this new world, different from that of their parents, they wanted to be a part of that change. As can be

evidenced in the earlier table, and further in this research, home sewing was often a way to do so for women.

All of these circumstances: the shifting classes, increased media, social and educational opportunities, new technology, meant women had new social territory to navigate. Women had more options than ever before. According to historian Charles Loch Mowat:

‘the greatest changes were those in the material conditions of life. These changes of a materialistic sort tended to bring about a greater equality between the classes in the conditions of life; they suggested a more rapid and complete advance towards equality in general than was actually the case. The tendency of society was equalitarian; the practice was not. Any analysis of the condition of Britain in the twenties must take account of these two characteristics: stability, more evident in some parts of the national scene than others, but never absent; and change, intruding everywhere, particularly in material conditions, but never all triumphant’. (Mowat,1955, p.202)

For women the most readily available tool for change was through design, specifically home sewing that could be used for their homes and their bodies. The new suburbia and hygiene standards meant more public display of home and family; while new jobs, and shopping methods meant more public displays of their bodies. What to wear when were issues of propriety that were partially a result of the new social structures and socializing. But the variables of the economy and unknown social mores were both a source of freedom and stress, which could be solved creatively. Women’s magazines, the mass outlet for the masses of new modern women, offered ways to resolve fashion and domestic conundrums. In doing so these provided a means by which women could construct their own idea of femininity – within certain constraints – in relation to themselves, both real and imagined. Much like women’s lives and visual representation of their bodies, ‘magazines [were] a place of contestation of meaning and making of meaning’. (Hackney, 1999, p.19) The solutions found through design practices allowed for great variety in individual design as seen in home sewing; approaches to design were focused on usability and pragmatic solutions. Creative use of resources was a means of being ‘forward-thinking’. Women were interested in being modern, as is evidenced from the influx of women’s magazines at the time,<sup>21</sup> but how she decided what was modern for her made the difference. (White,1970, pp.309-316)

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<sup>21</sup> Cynthia White, *Women’s Magazines 1633-1968*, over [50] new titles from 1920-1939, pp. 309-316.

For Britain in the inter-war period change was at the centre of its condition. Arguably it was not as much the story of two great catastrophic events but the everyday shifts which occurred over time. These conditions were witnessed in the everyday lives of women moving slowly but inexorably to more varied social and personal freedoms. Fluctuations and a pull between the past and the future were the norm. Though subtle in their pace, they were contentious and powerful freedoms displayed in a public setting, for example the performative act of dressing oneself and one's home may have been private and aspirational, but its repercussions were public. For women managing their new lives was both exciting and stressful. Fashion and the home had new requirements and took on a new importance. This crossing over of private and public was a microcosmic display of greater societal change, one with risky and moral implications. A woman's decision to change was not just a reflection of herself but of her family and her future. Whilst claims exist that products of the interwar period were merely superficial and cheap due to the nature of mass production, and the rise of the 'masses' were in part responsible for the breakdown of traditional culture, Britain was moving forward and women were taking the necessary steps to be modern, both as collectively and individually through the forums available to them. Women however, were changing in a way, and at a pace, that was becoming difficult to hold back.

## **Chapter IV Making Meaning of Mass Media: Magazines and Manuals**

In the inter-war period the creation of home sewn goods was promoted through magazines and manuals that were prolific at the time. As this thesis demonstrates the women interviewed used magazines as a source of inspiration, information and support. Their widespread use makes them an important source of socio-cultural discourse, in terms of textual and visual analysis. 'As research material, magazines are also appealing, lest we forget, because they are about the experience of consumption, which was - and is - mainly pleasurable, at least for those with some disposable income'. (Aynsley, 2007, p.3) Grace Lees-Maffei supports this with her interpretation that designed goods, such as magazines, also mediate identity, between individuals, hence 'the world is mediated through objects which are designed'. (2007, p.6) As more opportunities to shop arose magazines became an outlet for information, sales and instructional aids.

This chapter will review the role of mass media, specifically magazines and how-to manuals, in the creation of femininity through home sewing by understanding their dual position as of being both visual objects and textual messages. It looks at the types of magazines read, and analyzes three magazines deconstructing their visual, design and textual information, examining the three in accordance with their market focus. In doing so magazines are conceived of as designed objects, semiotically, and as readers used them – specifically the women interviewed. For a more in-depth understanding of the scope of magazines and their make-up this research reviews three different magazines and the tools they utilized to codify femininity, with a specific focus on the role of home sewing. This chapter will argue that while ephemeral, everyday, and rare in quantity, the information distilled was indicative of their role as part of the everyday practice and experience of home sewing in inter-war Britain.

Utilising semiotic theory, the visual and textual narratives of these magazines and manuals are deconstructed to create a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the inter-war period and the role of mass media. While semiotic theorist Roland Barthes believes that the individual and society are permanently at odds magazines as semiological tools are central to the construction of femininity, sending out signals, cues and messages that could be confusing, but ultimately gave women the means to define themselves. (Rylance, 1994:xx) As Aynsley and Ford argue, 'the advantage of the semiological method is that it offers ways to interpret encoded meaning in magazines and understand desire and pleasure of the text. It has been applied most successfully to systems of representation that deal with fashion, style and sexuality'. (2007, p.12) While theorists may believe that the mainstream

stifles the individual individuals, can, through design, maintain their individuality, negotiate tradition (a larger system itself, than semiotics) while functioning in society. (Rylance, 1994, p. xx) While semiotics uses language as an overarching structure, it ignores the more individualized use of language and what happens to meaning when it is altered by an individual's use and creativity. So while language as an overall structure is a sound starting point it should not stifle the understanding that is altered through everyday, individual interpretation. As Rylance suggests, 'Barthes is struck by the complicity of "the mass" in their own cultural impoverishment. But he fails to distinguish between the commercial and the popular, and between what is sold and what people do with it. He further fails to recognize what people do apart from buying'. (1994, p.41) Women bought magazines, fashion, and the materials needed to make and alter goods for their home; but more importantly is how, what and why they made their choices in relation to making the homemade.

There were a surprising number of these inexpensive magazines available to women during this period, from more feminist tracts to cinema fan magazines, i.e. *Time and Tide*, *Eve*, *Popular Dance Weekly*. These were being published cheaply at an astonishing rate and available via subscription and at a newsagent's stand. The market was following the growth in the shifting middle class for as Janice Winship notes, 'there was an increase in the number of magazines which focused on the growing working/lower and middle classes'. (1980, p.93) But their economic viability may be questioned through the frequency and number of mergers. The domestic/fashion magazines tended to merge more frequently with one another than the other genres. Price per issue ranged anywhere from 2 to 6d for a weekly.<sup>22</sup> In 1926 the *Woman's Weekly* cost 2d (approximately 25 pence in 2005) and the larger format, monthly glossy *The Play Pictorial* cost 1 shilling (approximately £1.50 converted). As late as 1933 *Film Pictorial* was only 2d as a weekly (29p in 2005). While they were inexpensive even by today's standards they were commonly shared amongst neighbours and family.

The less expensive magazines were made of a cheaper newsprint and utilized two tone illustrations rather than photographs. Covers may have been in more than two colours. (image 1) The cheaper weeklies were smaller and the needlework magazines slightly larger. Free gift with purchase promotions such as patterns for embroidery were common.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default0.asp> each year was not given, but an average between the closest two years, i.e. 1929 and 1932, was used to calculate an average current value, the closest year value calculated is 2005.

These patterns were found in a variety of magazines not just the specific needlework magazines. *Hobby* magazine, a weekly, occasionally featured items of interest for women. In its February 1932 issue (only 2d) included plans for a tabletop-weaving loom. (image 2) This easy availability was meant to fill the new leisure time that women had in an industrious and creative way.

From a historian's perspective the use of magazines adds another level of research that allows for a system of checks and balances to be created by looking at what was being said, how it was said, and how it was being interpreted by whom. Did the broader issues and attitudes addressed in magazines influence their readers and real events? The great number of publications issued may seem to be a boon for research, but the nature of the publishing industry's growth creates a unique set of problems. While thirteen magazines were created over a near twenty-year period, nearly as many either failed or merged with another. (Hackney, 2007, Winship, 1980) Magazines often carried the stigma of being not 'serious' literature and therefore were not valued and kept. In "*They Opened up A Whole New World*": *Narrative, Text and Image in British Women's Magazines in the 1930s*, Fiona Hackney described a mother who found magazines to be 'common and mundane'. (2007, p.23). She likened the experience of magazines to that of the popular cinema in that they were a common, gender-specific, visual experience that crossed social barriers requiring a fixed gaze. (Hackney, 2007, pp.10, 11) As several have argued, the time spent with either medium became a transformative experience that broke the monotony of everyday life and was a shared a public experience of modernity. (Hackney, 2007, pp.10-11). This fixed gaze was actually subjected to a barrage of moving images, much like Baudelaire's *flâneur's* experience of the city. Magazines, for women, were akin to this medium that exists somewhere between the speed of the film and the wandering of the city; and importantly women could control their gaze observing what they wanted to see, when and for how long. This was a new experience of modernity, the picking up and putting down, the flipping through the pages reading the images and articles at their own pace. Where the city was solely a public place to be modern, the magazine allowed for the home to be modern as well.

Although this research into home sewing covers a number of topics: needlework, fashion, interiors, and domesticity, they were not always perceived as different, or separate, by the publishing industry in interwar Britain. Each of the these topics was divided into different target markets based upon social class, which was demarcated, sometimes superficially, by

the price of the magazine, the technology used in its printing and the breakdown of the topics. Furthermore, the role of retail, art and leisure as aspects of design were a vital extension to developing and understanding home sewing. As Winship noted, 'magazines were a fulcrum for this mix of associated industries: retail, fashion and domestic. Astute businessmen, particularly in the fashion and cosmetic trades, soon realized the benefits to be gained from co-operating with magazine publishers. The fashion industry, which was enjoying a post-war boom, allied itself still more closely to the women's journals and increased its consumption of advertising space'. (1980, p.113)

For these reasons the primary source of information for this research is found in women's magazines. Magazines typically consisted of: fashion editorials, home editorials, tips on how to be up-to-date, agony aunt columns, letters to the editor, (commonly just responses were printed), recipes, needlework patterns, short stories (serial or complete) and childcare concerns. It did not matter what the given title or topic of the magazine was, women were always being advised on how to be women. These could be weekly or monthly magazines, some being solely for fashion, others for the home, but the majority crossed-over thematically. Included are titles such as *Mab's Magazine*, *Home Chat*, *Woman*, and *Woman's Weekly*. Amongst these existed a class divide: *Home Chat* was physically a smaller magazine filled primarily with illustrations, whereas *Woman* had photographs and a larger format. More expensive magazines, such as *Woman*, were more likely to be multi-coloured and primarily priced to be available to the wealthy. This difference could be seen in other areas as well such as art, with *The Studio*, the lifestyle oriented *Ideal Home*, and fashion with *Eve*. Needlework magazines also had different markets - *Embroidery* magazine differed from *Needlewoman* by being more concerned with contemporary issues and historic provenance than techniques and patterns which were the focus of *Needlewoman* or *Fancy Needlework Illustrated*. According to White, all stratas of magazines were transforming. Existing publications were also adapting to the new trends. (1970, p.100) In the 1920s *The Lady* drastically cut its employment features (though the problem of surplus women was still serious), and substituted several new home-making articles, including a guide to dressmaking, with patterns, and columns on the 'nursery school and school-room'. (White, 1970, p.100) Leisure magazines (such as *Film Pictorial*, *Horner's Stories* and *Popular Dance Weekly*) included dance, cinema, literature and crafts in their contents, but they were also concerned with home sewing for diverse yet connected reasons – cinema influenced fashion, dances required new dresses, and serial romance magazines also included other ways for a reader to pass time. Hobby magazines such as,

*Hobbies*, while typically marketed to men could also be found to include sewing or needlework projects. Even the *Radio Times* was concerned with domestic matters through its programming and letters to the editor. In September 1924 Mrs. Belloc Lowndes wrote in with suggestions for the ‘Woman’s Hour’ programming, specifically that it should ‘Be practical about concrete realities such as health, food, dress, housewifery’. (*Radio Times*, 1924, p.23) The BBC took note and by September 1930 women could listen to a national programme by a Miss Ethel R. Hambridge on ‘Modern Mending’. (*Radio Times*, 1930, p.647) The cross-over interest in home sewing between magazines and media, regardless of class or subject matter, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how home sewing formed women’s lives.

A parallel source to magazines was the sewing or needlework manual, which were often published by magazines or newspapers. In 1931 *Woman’s Friend* published *The Book of Embroidery Stitches* as a supplement and a version for girls, *Marjorie Hazeldene’s Book of Needlework: Notions new and novel in dainty stitchery to appeal to all nimble-fingered needlewomen*. As mentioned in an earlier chapter they often functioned both as advice and how-to books. Using the same chatty tone as magazines they acted as a friend guiding the reader through her task. There was an assumption of understanding of the importance of sewing, and its role. Topically, they included everything from dressmaking to gift projects. Some included chapters on upholstery and slipcovers, curtains and window treatments. While editions were reprinted they could not keep up with the increased demand for novelty. According to William Amsden in *The Draper’s Record* novelties satisfied ‘the craving for something new’ and ‘gave fresh impetus to home dressmaking’. (1933, p.48)

Trends which were constantly changing could be easily approached by magazines but could also be the magazine’s weakness. Novelty connoted a lack of seriousness, a reader who might be perceived as someone fickle and flighty, not very well grounded; Mrs. Thomas mentioned how her mother did not want her reading magazines, and she would often read those shared by a neighbour. (Thomas, 6/09) It may be that material permanence of books, their sense of longevity that added to the air of seriousness. Mrs. Sheldon’s mother, who had been a teacher before marriage, did not read magazines but books and newspapers. (Sheldon, 6/09) Books were also available at libraries, which were free, meaning there was no ‘waste’ of money. The Lavells of Liverpool distinctly remember having library cards (paid for) and trips to the library as children. (Lavell, 6/09) Books, however lacked the sense of community that a magazine could enhance. Magazines

were shared amongst friends and family in a more direct and geographically connected way as noted. Their content and style are more abstract forms of community building.

Anysley and Ford note the design of a magazine being 'composite rather than singular' and they were a visual parallel to the department store and all of its composite parts. (2007, p.2) In fact the French word for department store is *magasin*, adding a semantic parallel. (2007, p. 2) This experience of 'walking' through a magazine, was similar to a shopping experience, and the other readers were also there through voice and shared interests. The physical sharing of the magazine became a part of that experience. By connecting women across towns and regions with common interests, along with the inclusion of letters to the editor they allowed a reader to eavesdrop on these private conversations. Letters to the editor columns were often responses to reader's queries, the letters themselves would not be included. This added an almost cryptic air to them. Great pleasure could be taken in reading them as well. Mrs. Thomas remembered enjoying reading them with an almost furtive interest. It may very well have been that part of the teenage joy came from disobeying, as her mother did not want her reading magazines; but she also described herself as being a 'serious' girl. (Thomas, 6/09)

The time and place for any such guilty pleasures was commonly done only after housework. Deirdre Beddoe notes that for working class women, 'reading...a woman's magazine at the kitchen table in the evening, was one of the few breaks from domestic routine available to the working class woman'. (1989, pp.126-127) Arguably the fact that many of the magazines discussed housekeeping consistently would almost make those times less leisure time and more of a continuation of work. This could place women's domestic magazines in a position of being more valuable in terms of historic relevance than the film or dance magazines of the time. A girl who moved from reading film magazines to a domestic women's magazine would be fulfilling her feminine domestic role in a visual and educational way. Magazines, however, much like home sewing, which crosses the lines of work and leisure, art and craft, were constructed with this dual role, and were both instructional and entertaining in content. Simultaneously, then, in the midst of learning new techniques for being economical and thrifty for the family, a woman could sneak in the reading of a short story or the 'agony aunt' column.

Magazines were as contradictory in their advice as in their suggestions of femininity. Women had to continually cross the line between being a traditional wife and mother, and the adventurous modern woman trying the variety of new goods and technologies available

to her. The new career opportunities could allow her more independence, but her true goal was to have a husband and family. This push and pull between being modern and being traditional is reflective of the anxiety of modernity of the time and what women had to negotiate. The business girl had the freedom to go on a holiday, but was also advised to use that time to earn extra money and help others. 'Business girls have few responsibilities, if any, so there's plenty of time to make a little money in all kinds of practical ways...if she likes mending and will do it for a small price - and lots of people look at her like a godsend and thankfully hand over anything that could do with a darn or a stitch inline'. (*Home Chat*, 1924, p. 440) Independence, as defined by magazines, was not necessarily a freedom of self, but a delay in fulfilment. Adventures were for the heroines in the magazine story serials; it was more likely that the business girl may go to dances and the cinema but to risk her future on anything further was discouraged. In the February issue of *Popular Dance Weekly* is the story "Confessions of a Dance Partner", where a 'blouse hand' dared to become a dance hall girl. However, the glamour of the modern world - lights, dancing, and dresses - also came with a sordid afterglow, someone had paid to dance with her, not even her dress was her own. This heroine's problems were resolved when the man who came back to dance with her regularly not only married her, but they opened up a dance school together. (*Popular Dance Weekly*, 1924, p.19) She was not only saved by marriage but had new respectability in her new economic independence. She had clearly identified her social position and value through her clothing and her relationships with the external world.

Magazines function, analytically, both visually and textually creating two narratives which are read simultaneously, but not necessarily consciously. As Aynsley and Ford state, 'design decisions about the appearance of a magazine layout can be informed by a number of aesthetic, economic, political and social forces'. (2007, p.17) It is its role as both a 'physical object and...its role as a commodity as well as a cultural artefact'. (Bowallius, 2007, p.18) Both magazines and women have been analysed as objects of design, have had their form and appearances layered with meaning, which denotes a particular relationship with language. Women, as physical beings have historically also been linked to the home through language. Traditionally, a home must not only reflect a woman's personality and her nature, but embody it. As Beverly Gordon notes 'The woman was seen as an embodiment of the home, and in turn it was an extension of her – an extension of both her corporeal and spiritual self'. (1996, p. 282)<sup>23</sup> Fashion, having the closest relationship to

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<sup>23</sup> While Gordon's study focuses on the period of 1875 -1925 in America many of her arguments can be applied in the UK and past 1925.

the body (physically and emotionally) was allowed to be modern – for it was in the body that women went into the public and must conform the most. The interior was the private, and more ‘domestic’ aspect of a woman and would remain traditional, fulfilling expectations of a safe, non-threatening femininity located in the private space of the home. Furniture was skirted, ruffled, had arms and legs and could be painted. Women were also ‘skirted’, and wore make-up; both required notions of being appropriate.

Just as homes were changing in accordance with contemporary concerns of hygiene and management women had more opportunities to be ‘modern’. Advertisements further support that while a woman may dress modern her home should be traditional, a comforting respite for her husband. (image 3) This fine line espouses what Gordon refers to as ‘self-conscious modernism’ (1998, p. 164) a parallel with Alison Light’s conservative modernism who defined it as, ‘Janus faced, it could simultaneously look backwards and forwards; it could accommodate the past in the new forms of the present.’ (1991, p.10) This chapter proposes that it was not necessarily what Light refers to as a ‘deferral of modernity’, as a cultural self-consciousness that, in attempting to strike a socially appropriate balance between tradition and the *moderne*, was manifesting itself as a timidly opportunistic way of approaching femininity. (ibid., p.10) The pages of the magazines reaffirm the allowance of the duality and of the inter-war middle class woman’s home and body straddling not just wars, but her history and her future.

In an advertisement for embroidery trace needlework kits in *Needlework Magazine* the modern girl can be domestic, business or sports minded, none of these ‘personalities’ excluded her from doing embroidery, in fact it would still work perfectly with her ‘Louis or Chippendale’. (image 4) Here she is portrayed in four possible roles, domestic, at work in a business setting, healthy and sporty playing golf, and enjoying her newfound leisure time with embroidery. According to the advertisement regardless of how a woman might spend her time, needlework was part of her identity. The style of the advertisement is modern as well, an uncluttered box with a block of text, and cartoonish renderings of a woman aligned vertically to the left of the copy. In addition the traditional method of using illustration to portray women in soft tones has been abandoned for the tension of a line rendering of a figure that can spring into action. As well, the line drawing allows for a degree of anonymity of character permitting women to imagine themselves as that diverse, action-oriented young woman. Magazines and manuals reinforced these ideas with interpretations of modern that accepted more traditional styles and inherited pieces as those that should be ‘up-dated’. Being ‘modernistic,’ as modern was referred to, was for the

realm of the truly wealthy, objects were not mass-produced and crossed the line of tradition in a way that was not acceptable. For those with personal provenance fashion could be flighty, but the domestic arena as the foundation of the family should remain solidly traditional. This divide between home and body, where fashion is modern but interiors are traditional creates yet another set of contradictions that a woman must negotiate.

Magazines were not only a venue for being ‘modern’, but for being feminine. They are unique in their breadth of theme and circulation. The number of outlets for women to learn ‘how to be feminine’ through magazines was diverse in the magazine subject area, but homogenous in its methodology. Unlike newspapers’ women’s sections, or women’s programmes on the radio, magazines could disseminate femininity as an on-going, all encompassing practice of daily life. As Aynsley notes, often through handing down and other kinds of informal dispersal, it meant that the magazine became a ubiquitous object that played a central part in the flow of modern life and people’s social and cultural identities. (2007, intro.)

As such, magazines were in a position to reinforce the multiplicity of a woman’s life. Their multiple roles as wife, mother, and worker were not going to be ignored or stop them from thinking about their femininity. Being a woman in inter-war Britain meant being continually working at fulfilling at least one of those roles – or building toward them. This on-going practice and overlap can be seen in the romance ‘literature’ magazine *Horner’s Stories* of 1933, which included a pattern for a fire screen to be embroidered with foxgloves. It also included fashion, and beauty and problem columns. How a woman would be able to read and embroider simultaneously would be a curious challenge so one would have to assume that the educational aspect of the embroidery helped her maintain her image of industriousness. A busy woman could not be a flighty woman, she would be spending her time creating her home, or if young enough, her future. Magazines were the opportune medium for needlework to be promoted; needlework was an act of pleasure and labour, and magazines were a source and location of pleasure and labour. As evidenced, many of the magazines crossed the line between home and fashion with their content.

It was not just the editorial content that would promote the learning and usefulness of home sewing. Advertisements for home sewing classes, primarily through the Women’s Institute, were a mainstay. Women were offered dress forms and free patterns to assist them in their progress. (image 5) The placement of the combined editorials and

advertisements for 'necessary' products (called "Advertorials" by Fiona Hackney) meant that the boundaries between advertising, and editorial became harder to sustain, (Hackney, 2007, p.21) and more easily promoted the consumption of these tools of femininity.<sup>24</sup>

While consumption was promoted the intention was for it to be both affordable and meaningful. It helped that magazines were relatively inexpensive, and, similar to fashion, constantly changing. Keeping up-to-date did not have to be expensive, and women could take control of their femininity by participating in it on a daily level through fashion. By altering clothes a woman could be economical and fashionable, but still be a consumer.

Influences on femininity were changing in the inter-war period. One aspect that became challenged was the focus on the aristocracy, especially in the magazines targeted at the lower- to-middle class reader. In the period from pre-World War I onward into the early 1920s magazines would often feature a member of the aristocracy in their homes or wearing the latest styles, even with their children. With the advent of film these became less frequent, especially in the more domestic magazines marketed for the lower to middle classes as they were replaced with cinema stars. Regardless of their celebrity roots, they too were featured as 'normal' people with middle class concerns. This did not mean that royalty did not have an influence, as evidenced by Mrs. Thomas' experience who, in referencing a family photograph, could recollect why the dress was that style and colour: 'that dress it was a sort of, it was in taffeta, blue and green, and it was a colour that was fashionable because the Duke of York had married a Greek Princess called Princess Rubina and that was her colour'. She had chosen the style and colour but her mother had made the dress. (image 6) She also recalled a penchant for florals and gingham. (Thomas, 6/09) However, a shift had occurred and royalty were now competing for influence with the new, 'modern' royalty of film and radio.

The use of these various features throughout this broad range of magazines was creating a codification of femininity. Through the discussion of an assumed system of norms, shared concerns, values and practices, middle class women were continually informed of how to behave. The new anxieties of the changing world, and the shifting economic means created continual moving social circumstances on an individual and collective basis. Society maintains order through shared, or common, ideas of appropriateness and understood responses. Yet, as historian Joanna Bourke suggests, the concept of 'community' based on reciprocal rights and obligation is the need for its members to share a set of moral values. It

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<sup>24</sup> This is a change from the 1920s when, according to White editors were not so closely bound to their sponsors, but felt a responsibility to save their readers money. (1970, p.114)

is doubtful whether any consensus existed. (Bourke, 1994, p.150) This is in part true when fashion not only attempts to confine social definitions while suggesting itself as a form of individuality. The traditional modes of class, along with the infiltration of mass systems of 'social' change (production, information, etc.) were constantly being subverted by informing women they could make their individual stamp on their lives through home sewing. By making unique changes with their own hands they could face the tide of mass production and control who they were becoming regardless of their changing circumstances. Glamour and possibility could be their choice, if they followed traditional means – sewing.

For the middle classes this self-styling could not take the route of the alleged ubiquitous flapper. She was generally of an upper-class background who could afford the expensively beaded and embroidered dresses, could drive, have a car and had the money to flaunt society's rules. With the upper-class security of family heritage behind her the young flapper could afford to break the rules and not worry about her social standing. Her social status allowed her freedom to change, to be daring. The majority of women did not have the security where they could risk their future by being scandalous. Religion and church going played an important part in their lives, and in order to be more secure they needed to have a good education and employment. For both Mmes. Alexander, Sheldon and Thomas all clearly recalled the role of the church whether through going to services, charitable works or bible reading. (Alexander, 6/09; Sheldon, 6/09; Thomas, 6/09) Mrs. Crankshaw met her first boyfriend through the church choir. (Crankshaw, 7/10) The middle class could subvert the system through modified self-styling of clothing and the home, making individual decisions while maintaining the security they needed. Indeed, girls who went to dancehalls were flighty and not serious, and flappers were functioning in another social world altogether. Wearing short hair and stylish clothes allowed women to enter into that world without having to participate in a risky manner. It gave them an opportunity to be modern timidly.

This duality of the domestic and its subversive counterpart, the 'modern' style, was played out in the promotion of the pastoral themes found in the embroidery patterns, the promotion of the 'economics' of home sewing, and its ability to fulfil the womanly role of taking care of home and body. A woman had few means of escaping modern life, and they should not take it too far as to get lost in the fantasy of it, hence individualism through traditional modes and themes was acceptable. The dream of being modern and independent was tempered through a more timid, controlled approach to being their own person. While

family and education may have set certain boundaries, sewing was a structure that allowed for possibilities. Magazines did their part to cross these boundaries, they promoted modern life through design and consumption possibilities, and simultaneously offered women more traditional means of being modern.

### **Case Studies**

The three magazines chosen as case studies are *Home Chat* from 1923, *Modern Home* from October, 1931 and *Mab's Magazine* September, 1933. They were chosen as they typify the variety of magazines popular at the time targeted to middle-class women, who could range from lower-middle class to upper-middle class. Needlework-specific magazines were not chosen, as they were typically more technique based and subject specific. Both *Home Chat* and *Mab's Magazine* are weeklies of a small and medium sized format, (16.5 x 23 cm/19 x 27.5 cm respectively) printed on a cheaper newsprint paper, and illustrated black and white images. Photographs and multi-tones were reserved for the cover. Each cost 2d (approx.. 21p -29p respectively in 2005). *Modern Home* is a large format, (21.2 x 30 cm) multi-toned magazine sold monthly for 6d (84p in 2005).

The magazines were also chosen for specific reasons. *Home Chat* was a popular magazine of the time with a long publication life. It was very common, and this particular issue has a focus on hairstyles, not a typical topic,<sup>25</sup> but fashion specific. *Mab's Magazine* is specifically fashion focused, and has a very practical feel. It was referenced in a dance magazine as a good source of patterns and fashion advice. When looking at other magazines including *Popular Dance Weekly* "Mab" had a specific dress column. The fact that this grew into another magazine and that it was referenced speaks to its importance. However, because it was an inexpensive magazine of poor quality printing, few copies remain.<sup>26</sup> *Modern Home* was a popular magazine, for a more upper-middle class market. It is an interesting study of the issues of duality and contradictions in magazines with regard to the conflation of home and body. It is a 'home' magazine that features a stylish and elegant couple on its cover, with the woman holding a needlework handbag. That handbag is the featured gift with the magazine.<sup>27</sup>

The magazines will be analysed by their formal qualities and their content, both textual and illustrative. The relationship between the image and text will be interpreted referencing the

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<sup>25</sup> Advertisements for hair care products though, were common.

<sup>26</sup> This issue is part of the Bankfield Museum in Halifax

<sup>27</sup> These are both part of the Bankfield Museum collection in Halifax

use of ‘advertorials’ and the various columns. In regard to *Modern Home*, it is an unusual opportunity to actually see the needlework that was being promoted, and to analyse the context in which such an item was being promoted. Further, due to its higher-end demographic it will be read along with the art oriented *The Studio*, and the design and lifestyle oriented *Ideal Home*.

### ***Home Chat*** (image 7)

In November 1923 *Home Chat (& Mother & Home)* magazine enticed its readers with the ‘Beauty Secrets of Famous Actresses’ feature issue. The multi-tone cover featured a woman dressed for an evening out in a long sleeveless dress with a stylized Asian themed floral pattern, and a large band and bow creating a drop waistline around her hips. She is seated at a dressing table with her back to the reader, looking at her reflection in the round bevelled-framed mirror above the table. This allowed the reader to have a full 360 degree view of her hair, and as this is the ‘Hairdressing Number’, it suited the contents of the magazine. The round ottoman is covered in a black fabric with an ‘embroidered-look’ pattern of stylized sunflowers and leaves which coordinate with the drapes which frame the binding edge of the magazine. The dressing table, mirror and ottoman are all orange with black detailing, as well as the perfume bottles, creams and hairbrushes. The woman is holding a powder puff in her hand, and is clearly not planning for an evening at home with her issue of *Home Chat*. The luxury of such a private space and elegant surroundings were most likely not the norm of the average *Home Chat* reader. However, just as the cover girl is reflecting upon her image the reader is privy to that intimate moment when a woman creates her identity for the public world. This moment of self-reflection was most likely brief and fleeting for its readers, and as is the nature of magazines, it allowed for a voyeuristic pleasure. As Hackney states, ‘their focus on the home and the personal aspects of readers’ lives meant that the window [the voyeuristic view of the reader] doubled as a mirror, reflecting readers back upon themselves and offering them new ways to imagine themselves and their lives’. (2007, p.2)

*Home Chat* was a serialized magazine and this issue starts at page 225 with the cover feature story “What I Do with My Hair” giving readers the opportunity to have access to the hair beauty tips and secrets of well-known actresses of the day. While actresses may have been given several pages to focus on their hairstyles, royalty had a 2 page feature article on their activities, and aristocratic debutantes an opportunity to reveal their hairstyle

secrets. This is followed by a series of columns regarding women's daily lives and the dilemma of being a modern woman whether married or single. If you are married you no longer had to become 'fat, fair and forty' advises Berta Ruck in "The 'Chum' Age", (1923, p. 28) in fact one of the concerns was that school-age girls were raiding their mother's wardrobes for party attire. Shortly thereafter, (1923, p. 230) Daphne Lee suggests in 'Fate? – Fiddlesticks' that an effort must be made to go out and socialize since, 'love and marriage is still the most important thing in life to quite a number of women'. For the *Home Chat* reader, (possibly an older daughter) it does not have to be left to fate, women are in control of their futures. Opposite this article is the conveniently located feature "The Bargain-Counter Trousseau" for when she is ready to marry. (1923, p.231) Not to be forgotten is the business girl who on page 238 is advised to 'ruthlessly scrap her pretties-for office wear', the 'rustle of silk should never be heard in the prosaic daily round of business life'. Nor should she apply makeup at the office, lest she appear frivolous and not efficient. Oddly, this was featured between the column 'Wash-Day Made Easy' and an advertisement for a rose-scented perfume. Clearly a business girl had to balance the realities of daily life, the washing, with the possibility of romance found in perfume; but she should not permit either to be part of her business persona, she would not want to be perceived as either too serious or not serious enough.

An incongruity exists between the editorial topics and advertising. While the majority of feature topics concern beauty, fashion and the status of women, the advertising is overwhelmingly concerned with food. The glamorous cover belies the mundane promotions for suet, raisins, flour, barley kernels and Vitmar Vitamine pills. These were offset by advertisement for healthy underwear and corsets, wool and linen and various beauty creams. Pepsodent toothpaste was forward thinking in creating a full page advertisement which reads as an advice column on beauty – for your teeth, and goes so far as to include a free offer, which are two of the techniques used by magazines themselves.

Also in this issue of *Home Chat* is the announcement of the availability of Mab's designs as patterns due to reader popularity. Throughout the issue are several reminders that the next month's issue would be a special evening gown issue featuring Mab's designs and patterns. In the November issue was a section on Winter coats, which quite unusually, offered patterns to the readers. Oral histories such as those of Mrs. Lavell and Mrs. Sheldon (Lavell, Sheldon, 6/09) reveals that most women bought coats, as home sewing machines were not appropriate for making them.

As an inexpensive weekly (2d) (approximately 20p in 2005), which came out every Monday, it was marketed to women concerned with the home. It includes articles and advertisements focused on children, but fashion advice was focused more on the single woman or business woman. Caring for the household was not to disavow a woman's concern for her looks. Indeed it was her responsibility to take care of herself. In the "Letting off Steam" column (1923, p.271) women were admonished for setting too high a standard for themselves and told to look toward the male attitude toward 'doing it all', in other words, not asking too much of themselves. While the advertisements in the February 1932 *Hobby* magazine marketed to men, only one advertisement concerned appearance (for assistance in being taller), while the overwhelming majority were for hobby needs. Advertisements in *Home Chat* focused on household chores and family needs. Both magazines were meant for leisure time, but for women leisure and work were rarely separated. As a popular weekly the advertisements are a good marker of the concerns of lower to middle class women, and the feature articles were meant to fulfil aspirational needs. Fulfilment for women could be found in magazines' advice for new hairstyles, clothing changes and serving the family via time spent absorbed in the world of the magazine.

### ***Mab's Magazine*** (image 8)

*Mab's Magazine* was another inexpensive weekly which grew out of the popular columns of *Home Chat*, and other magazines. According to Fiona Hackney in 'Making Modern Women, Stitch by Stitch', 'Mab's developed out of a competition for the "ideal modern type".' (1924, cited in Hackney, 1999, p.80) 'In 1924 *Home Chat* ran a competition using innovative strategies to bind dressmaking to notions of the modern and the feminine...'<sup>28</sup> (1999, p.80) It is quite plausible that the popularity of the column, and the idea of Mab led to its evolution from a competition to a column to a separate magazine, both were published by Amalgamated Press. While best known for its dressmaking columns it also included other topics of interest, including a regular fiction series. In an April, 1933 issue featured a short story, 'Pocket Money Jobs' (1933, p.9) and an article written by 'The Head Sales Girl', 'Secrets of a Famous Dress House' (1933, p.5) weight and cooking interests were also noted; however 6 of the 14 articles were about fashion. (Stephenson-Payne, www.philslp.com, (30-1-2010) ) It was of a small format; while the issue being studied had a dual toned cover earlier issues had multi-coloured covers. This may be a result of the

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<sup>28</sup> According to Hackney the competition was run by the fashion and dressmaking editor (1999, p. 81)

depression and a choice to make the magazine more profitable. The magazine covers also went from being purely fashion illustrative to featuring a fashion illustration, a photo of a contributing author or model and a fiction highlight. This may have been the influence of not only economic concerns but a new editorial approach by Florence Taft, the editor. The magazine cover does not exoticize fashion but makes it accessible at an everyday level. The photograph of an actual woman, not an illustration on the cover, reinforces this. *Mab's Weekly* made contemporary fashion more real and approachable from both a skill and style perspective.

While *Mab's Weekly* was one of many inexpensive weeklies published at the time, and according to Breward it was not one of the influential magazines, it actually was much more significant and influential in the world of middle-class women. (2003, p.126) Breward lists only 3 magazines for the inter-war years (*Apparel Arts-GQ*, *Esquire* and *Glamour*) ignoring the influx of inexpensive magazines. (Breward, 2003, p.122) Arguably while *Home Chat* et al. may not have been influential in *setting* style but they were influential in *disseminating* style. In particular *Mab's Magazine* was referenced in other magazines (*Home Chat*, *Popular Dance Weekly*), and reflecting its diverse readership: it had a long publishing run (approximately 10 years from 1924 -1935). In 1924 (March 5) *Popular Dance Weekly* featured an article, "All on Her Own" introducing *Mab's Magazine* as she (Mab) started her own magazine.

*Mab's Weekly* is also documented as the magazine of choice for two sisters, Louise and Ida Cook, opera aficionados who created their own clothes. (Carpenter, 2007) These two sisters exemplify a typical reader, employed with a limited income, but with outside interests which required specific clothing. There is also evidence of its usage for sewing. For a trip to New York they had made outfits for their opera visits, 'which Ida had run up from patterns published in *Mab's Fashions*...edited by Miss Florence Taft'. (Carpenter, 2007) The approach the Cook sisters used – to use an inexpensive style guide to create exotic outfits-is reflective of the nature of such magazines: affordable opportunities for glamour and individuality for the average woman.

Ida Cook went from being a civil servant typist at the Board of Education in London in the 1920s to a popular romance novelist (pseudonym Mary Burchell) in the 1930s. The change started with an article she had written about the trip to New York to hear an opera performance for which she and her sister had saved. She was then spurred on to write more, eventually writing serial novels for *Mab's Weekly*. While others who have written

about her, picture her life as a near destitute, working-class woman, in her own autobiography, she defines herself as decidedly 'middle-class'. (Cook, 2008)

She and her sister had both worked after attending the Duchess School in Alnwick, Northumberland. While they remained unmarried, they too had roles in the family, Ida being the seamstress making the outfits they wore to the operas of which they were fond. They were comfortable with their interest and ability to attend the opera, which was considered to be a non-working class interest. What they owned, a gramophone, in this case, and how they lived, working and going to the opera, was purely their own choice, and they were very comfortable with it.

While it is easy to consider price alone as a factor for determining the class of the reader, these other factors mentioned suggest that the audience was more educated, and employed in the new fields available to women, as clerks, etc. These women, such as the Cook sisters, had the opportunities to participate in society, but were conscious of expenses. This is more reflective of the shifting economic times than a permanent state. They, just like many others of the inter-war period, were moving in a shifting class structure. Their interests and opportunities in new social activities required mobility in a number of ways, economically, fashionably and socially.

While *Mab's Magazine* had a similar audience to *Home Chat*, it had a greater fashion focus. Dressmaking was its core, not homemaking. It did not avoid domesticity as much as let it be the 'extra' segment, whereas in other domestic or women's magazine fashion was the decoration. Indeed, fashion itself could be the 'ornament' of women's magazines, paralleling the experience of women as being a wife or mother, the domestic centre rather than a woman first and domestic second.

Another aspect of fashion as a side to women's life, can be seen in the role of romantic fiction. *Mab's Weekly* was published by Amalgamated Press (now the API), which was owned by Alfred Harmsworth, who would eventually become Lord Northcliffe, publisher of the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*. But Almagamated at the time also published comic adventure strips as well. ('A Short History of Fleet Street', no date)

In this particular issue *Mab's Weekly* features a story by Ruby Ayres,<sup>29</sup> a popular novelist who also published in the *Daily Mail*. An earlier example of her work is *Beggar Man*,

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<sup>29</sup> According to Pugh, Ayres had been advised by an editor to only let heroines have the lure of romance, but no sex. (2008, p.338)

published in 1920. Numerous references are made to not just the state of the protagonist's clothes, but her emotional being, directly linking the experience of clothing to the person. She is introduced as having 'a certain daintiness of person that singled her out for attention in spite of the shabbiness of her clothes.' (1920, p. 9) And, 'For the first time she realized how pale and thin she was, and how poor her clothes'. (1920, p.24). The link between clothing and personal being, particularly health is clear.

As the daughter of a 'mixed' social class family, a gentleman father and working class mother, the protagonist, Faith, had worked as a blouse hand since the death of her father to assist her mother. Her father's family had cast them aside upon his marriage, and now they struggled to survive. (1920, p.18) This shift in classes of the family, along with her eventual rise above the working class related to the circumstances of the period for the lower middle classes to middle classes. The 'status' of working class was a real possibility (especially in a romantic novel). Similar to the readers of *Mab's Weekly* their fortunes were linked to their economy and personal history. Opportunity for advancement was linked to their work ethic, frugality, but set against the increasing opportunities for social interests. Amalgamated Press (now IPC Media) was also publishing film magazines, and other contemporary magazines such as *Woman's Weekly*, *Ideal Home*, *Homes and Gardens*, *Woman and Home*, *Woman's Own* and *Woman*. It did not feature *Mab's Weekly* or any of its dress patterns. It did offer a feature on crocheting and dressmaking tips. Similar to *Home Chat*, the focus was on the domestic at the centre and home sewing as an extension of the domestic.

The titles signify a difference in focus – *Mab*, a woman, writing for women – whereas *Home Chat* and *Woman's Weekly* were about the domestic – a womanly focus. *Mab*, of the title *Mab's Weekly*, most likely was not an actual person, but the personal touch of having a named woman created a more familiar tone to the magazine. Why *Mab* was chosen as a name, if 'she' was not real is also curious. The most renowned *Mab*, is Queen *Mab* of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, a fairy who brought about people's dreams. Dreams of being fashionable and glamorous were certainly important to the readers.<sup>30</sup> Regardless, the title does not bring up connotations of home and family but of a good friend entering your home like a dream or aspiration for casual, friendly conversation. It was a more personal

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<sup>30</sup> *Mab*, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century was also slang for being a slattern; this certainly is not the reference being made. (Partridge, p. 558)

way of approaching problem solving with sewing and transferring new ideas for the individual, not the family.

These differences again are significant in identifying the broader demographic of the middle class and the role of home sewing for the varying types of women who existed. It is also significant when read along with the knowledge that often in a larger family one woman did the major sewing projects, such as dressmaking. This was more common in larger families where the opportunity for diversity or delegation of the workload was possible. The results of this research suggest that as more women were living independently they had less time for dressmaking and would purchase clothes more often. However, while living with the family they could take on the home sewing work to alleviate both the labour and time burden of other women in the house. Mrs. Stirling's experience of taking in sewing for 'business girls' over the years of her career in sewing would support this. (Stirling, 6/09) As a wife and mother she had her mending, which she was required to do, and her dressmaking skills to utilize to earn additional income. Had she been single, she may have worked longer hours outside the home and had less time for her own attire and might have purchased blouses and coats, etc. Mrs. Lavell's grandmother, a professional tailor, also made clothes for local business girls. (Lavell, 6/09) Much like the Cook sisters, known readers of *Mab's Weekly*, women would divide the domestic chores between them allowing time for, in the Cook sister's case, Ida to sew outfits.

This idea of the business girl having less time to sew, works with the increase in affordable ready to wear, but the concern was about the quality of the store-bought goods. Amy de la Haye's research supports the assertion that it was in the 1920s that there was an increase in ready-to-wear clothing, but this study also supports that women also continued to make their own. (1993, pp. 40,44) This research would agree that clothes made by a family member or dressmaker could ensure both quality and price, as Mrs. Alexander asserted that her mother would often go shopping for goods but reject them on the basis of quality or workmanship. (Alexander, 6/09) But there was an increase in specific items purchased. It was more likely as the inter-war period progressed that a woman saw ready to wear as a viable option, i.e. coats or evening gowns, as cited by Mrs. Sheldon and her experience of purchasing evening gowns but making her own day dresses. (Sheldon, 6/09) Or, as in Mrs. Stirling's experience where 'business girls' would have certain items made or altered, but purchased others. (Stirling, 6/09)

*Mab's Weekly* is an example of the level of complexity of both women's lives and the class structure in which they functioned. When read alongside *Home Chat* and *Woman's Weekly* it is relevant that the reader may have had similar concerns and interests but diverged on the area of home sewing. For the *Mab's Weekly* reader, dressmaking was of greater interest and she had the time to practice it. Aspirations and reality were a different mix, slightly more possible than the aspirations of glamour for the housewife as portrayed on the cover of *Home Chat*. It also related to its readers regarding their 'station' in life through its content, including editorials and advertisements. The price was reflective of being an affordable weekly, a 'usable' magazine that much like fashion could be shared and handed-down. It remained steady at that price over the years remaining affordable for its readers who may have suffered the consequences of the economic downturns but remained hopeful that they would improve.

### ***Modern Home*** (image 9)

For the wealthier reader, the middle-class to upper middle class, a glossier magazine would have been another option for reading material. It could allow them to be even more 'modern' as they could afford the new looks and objects being promoted. Like the others it portrays the woman as a little of everything: wife, mother, homemaker and business girl. One such magazine was *Modern Home*, which blended these roles with their physical environment even more so than *Home Chat* or *Mab's Weekly*. While many magazine titles (such as *Ideal Home*) and covers complement each other, this particular issue of *Modern Home* works otherwise. The title, *Modern Home*, would suggest a magazine about interiors - furniture, window treatments and decorating. However, illustrated on this cover is a glamorous couple at an evening event. She is wearing a red evening gown, and he is dressed in a tuxedo, depicted lighting his cigarette. The woman is standing in front of him angled toward the viewer holding a needlework evening bag and wearing a jewel-encrusted bracelet. They are at an evening event as evidenced by the glamorously dressed people in the background. It is the entire cover page with the title across the top, and above it is the copy, "Free Gift Bag Inside" and across the bottom of the cover "New Colour Schemes and Furnishing Ideas". The price of 6d (84 pence in 2005) was clearly printed in a large font on the cover. This price is three times the cost of *Home Chat* or *Mab's Weekly*. It was a larger format with a full-colour cover. The fascinating aspect of this issue is the cover

interest on fashion and socializing, not the home. The free gift bag offered is also featured on the cover.<sup>31</sup>

The unfinished bag (image 10 a-c) is in the collection of the Bankfield Museum in Halifax, and is a rare opportunity to see the type of product which was offered at the time. The bag itself is not ‘modern’ in design as one might imagine for the inter-war period. The floral pattern of a circle of six roses, two yellow and four red, is interwoven with leaves set against an off-white ground. The purse itself had a brass or gold-look frame and clasp across the top with a short chain handle. The handbag was meant to be worn on the forearm, not up around one’s shoulder. This is an interesting twist on the standard treatment of the body as modern and the home as traditional. Here, in *Modern Home*, a woman’s accessory was more traditional, while her lifestyle is clearly opulent and glamorous. Her gown is stylish and somewhat revealing with its low-cut neckline and shoulder-baring sleevelessness. Yet her handbag, the one she could make herself, has a traditional floral pattern in traditional colours; there is nothing tellingly modern about it.

This mix of home, body, and tradition is further confused by the image used on the contents page. (image 11) A modern home is a thatched roof cottage nestled in a hill with a stone chimney and stone path leading to the foreground. Home, it can be said, still had to convey warmth, respite and privacy – small windows and small rooms, not the larger, more open spaces and glass walls of ‘modern’ homes. The back cover advertisement for Clark’s threads (see image 4) did show a more traditional message – a woman, dressed stylishly, sewing an outfit for her young daughter, welcoming the husband home, a space decorated with an oriental carpet.

The content itself is a mix of home design articles and features, fiction, craft and ‘miscellaneous’. The craft section features the gift bag offer, ‘smart jackets’ and crocus cloth and napkins. (pp.69-72) ‘Miscellaneous’ includes both poetry and dressmaking, as well as photography. Tellingly the two feature articles are about a London flat and a country home. (pp. 27, 54, 83) The *Modern Home* reader may have been more concerned about options and how to create the complete lifestyle between home and body. This may explain why there exists this conflation of home and body. By willingly promoting the idea of the home and body as being methods of accessing a new (wealthier) lifestyle, *Modern Home* could choose to show a couple out for an evening at a formal affair on their cover. A

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31 This issue is in the collection of the Bankfield Museum in Halifax along with the kit, including the pattern and embroidery thread, and an actual unfinished bag.

modern home would create the space for a woman to fulfil her traditional roles and stay home stitching a handbag, which she would use to wear on glamorous evenings out. A woman could control the degree of modernity that existed in her life via her home and body. Home though, was a shared communal space, which, as the earlier advertisement reveals had to welcome home the husband and be amenable to the children. Dress gave a woman more private control than the home, but she still maintained primary control over the modernity of the home.

In contrast, the question of modern was not in conflict with the role of tradition in *Ideal Home* magazine. It was clearly focused on the upper-middle class to wealthy reader with the assumption of car ownership and economic choice of homes. This assumption of tradition as part of the contemporary home and 'moderne' was one of the choices of the *Ideal Home* reader. Indeed, it was created to compete against *Homes and Gardens*. (ipc media, (no date)) 'Its first editor, Captain GC Clarke, wanted it to strive against "the erection of hideous houses which go to mar the beauty of what would under any other circumstances be the most ideal and beautiful environment," referring to the government's promise in 1921 to build 100,000 houses as part of its post-war planning.' (ipc media, no date)<sup>32</sup> In its January 1928 issue a feature article included 'Give Modern a Chance' (p.2) along side 'Avoiding Conventionality' (p.15), and 'Thatch, Brick and Timber' (p.23). One could be modern, one could also be unconventionally rustic. (image 12, 13) Clothing, outside of practical attire, such as motoring accessories, (image 14) was not a concern, but lifestyle was. These readers had needs based upon the freedom to move about both geographically and materially. The ideal home would contain furniture and decorative objects made of 'new' woods and alabaster, (pp.5,10) and have a garage for their car. (p.60) They could afford to be new and modern, but still dabble with the traditions of their grandmother such as quilting, (pp.52). But being modern should not be confused with 'fashion' for it had an 'interfering finger' in linen as in everything else. (*Ideal Home*, March 1928, p.194) Further, being modern was not just for adults, as seen in the promotion of modern design in the cubist nursery (March, 1928, p.212). Home buying was also promoted, (January, 1928, p.51) and both men and women were perceived to be on a more equal footing in the decision making aspects of the home in *Ideal Home* and its aesthetic counterpart *The Studio*.

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<sup>32</sup> 'Press Office, IPC History', (no date) [www.ipcmedia.com/about/companyhistory/#1920](http://www.ipcmedia.com/about/companyhistory/#1920) (accessed: November 1, 2010)

While focused on the arts *The Studio* had a similar audience, educated, aspiring, and arts savvy. These readers were meant to develop their role not just as consumers but as critics. *The Studio*, however, was not without its own conflicts about being ‘modern’. As art historian David Peters Corbett suggests in *The Modernity of English Art* modernity was approached timidly and it took nearly 10 years post-World War I for it to even be approached as a topic. (Corbett, 1997, p.60) He argues that for the British culture in general it was not until there was an ‘outpouring of books, film, and memoirs around 1928 [that indicated] a new willingness to assess an experience which had hitherto been too traumatic to contemplate directly. In the visual arts it is signalled too by a new confidence in approaching the possibility of modernism as a public idiom’. (1997, p.60) As he notes, by 1928 the editors had developed their ‘policy’ towards being modern which was more a position of accepting that modern is here so it could not be ignored:

‘*The Studio* presents its position as self-consciously modern, but defines ‘modern’ as restraint: ‘we wish to avoid freaks and freakishness, and only to include those works which are the object of general interest and may contribute to progress in some form of art’; “the studio will, therefore, be neither ‘modern’ nor ‘old-fashion’...it is much more concerned, as the artist himself must be, with actual values. We are not the servants to any ‘movement,’ nor do we lend adherence to what is mere propaganda for other than artistic ends. We want to provide a guiding line’. (“What is Modern?” *The Studio*, 1928 cited in Corbett, p.85)

Corbett further suggests that for the editors of *The Studio* modern was more acceptable as a design form than a fine art form. In the 1929 editorial ‘Art in the Machine Age’ they further specify that:

‘It is ‘architecture, furniture, details, pottery, woodwork, metalwork, fine books, stage design,’ which will most appropriately benefit from modernist experimentation; ‘one result of modern paintings commentary on the age has been to give us the basis of a new constructional treatment “for the applied and decorative arts”.’ (*The Studio*, 1928, p.79 in Corbett, p.84)

For the editors of *The Studio*, and hence their readers, modern could be acceptable and accessible through designed objects. Modern art was not the appropriate method of expressing the anxieties of modernity, ‘Excessive stylisation in painting is unsatisfactory because it subjects the emotional aim entirely in the interest of decoration, whereas, of course the essential of this form of art is that it should give decorative substance to an emotional idea; it should translate some interesting visual experience into plastic form’.

(*The Studio*, 1928, in Corbett, p. 83) The decision to promote modern design as the medium through which to achieve this provides a means by which the threat could be taken out of the fraught question of ‘modern’. (Corbett, p.84) The appropriate plastic forms then would be those of the decorative arts. This negotiation allowed for the modern to be expressed within the traditions of the home. For readers, aesthetic negotiations had to be balanced with the realities of the everyday.

*The Studio*, much like other magazines of the time referenced here, had letters to the editors columns and the chatty informal style and features. Included in this was a series of articles written by ‘The Lay Figure’, chatty conversations overheard by the reader. These were people who acknowledged the place of the arts in the home, but were also concerned about the costs of such participation. As reader, Mr. Chesire of Liverpool, notes there should be more financial accessibility to the goods promoted in *The Studio Yearbook* including the use of commercial firms to sell the objects promoted. (1925, p.304) Whether or not this became a reality is unknown, but readers clearly did want to be modern and knowledgeable with their new investment in home ownership.

The titles, *Ideal Home* and *The Studio*, both create images where the reader controls the environment. They are active participants in their development, and this is reinforced by the content that is extremely focused, and does not try to bridge home and body in the way that *Modern Home* does. It does struggle with the home as a site of modernity or tradition as seen in the features focusing on both the modern and traditional. For *Ideal Home* readers options were available, but their topic was focused on the designed and decorative object alone; for *The Studio* the question of modern returned to the struggle between art and craft - aesthetics or functionality. By placing the modern in a functional form these concerns could be lessened, allowing the reader a non-contentious method of being modern. Accessibility becomes the solution for the modern magazine reader.

This chapter has reviewed the role of mass media, specifically magazines and how-to manuals, in the creation of femininity through its discussion and inclusion of home sewing as a regular topic. It has deconstructed mass media in three ways: semiotically, as designed objects, and as they were used by readers – specifically the women interviewed. This chapter looked at the types of magazines read, and analyzed three magazines, deconstructing their visual, design and textual information, examining the three in accordance with their market focus and similar magazines.

As evidenced in this research the women interviewed used magazines as a source of inspiration, information and support. Topics were varied within the realm of the domestic, touching upon the new roles and social situations available to women. The cross-over interest in home sewing between magazines and media, regardless of class or subject matter, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how home sewing formed women's lives. It quelled their anxieties and gave them the tools to negotiate modernity as the readers were experiencing it. This degree of freedom allowed for a multiplicity of femininities to exist as long as the correct methods were used, i.e. the domestic, and specifically home sewing. A young woman could move forward, then retreat if she so chose, using some aspects of the modern, mixed with some more traditional modes. This parallels the contradictory or dual nature of magazines and their concept of femininity. This relationship between reader and object, the discourse of femininity and domesticity, was unconsciously creating a form of conservative modernism one that allowed women to approach the new, the modern, the unknown, with a degree of timidity, edging into the future via traditional methodologies.

## **Chapter V: Design as Practice: Aspects of Design**



The aims of this chapter are to argue that home sewing in inter-war Britain was a specific design practice, secondly it will demonstrate the nature of this practice as determined by conditions particular to the period, and lastly it will show how home sewing determined the middle class woman's feminine identity. This study has proposed that design is first and foremost a practice, a series of processes, and as earlier chapters have argued design history can benefit from an approach that does not focus on an isolated group of objects, or a select few individuals in history. Rather it has proposed approaching design as a process, defined by specific practices, which were directly influenced by and altered by conditions of the period. Following a brief discussion of home sewing as a specific design practice, this chapter will cover the topics of location, technology, education and professionalization for their larger roles in practice, using examples from the oral histories taken. Due to the relevance of subjectivity and the relationship between the individual and collective histories it utilizes the oral histories of women and their families to analyze and understand the experience. Indeed, home sewing in interwar Britain was a design practice that cut across class and status to evoke a more subjective, yet collectively affirming, experience of femininity and domesticity. The personal stamp of one's style and the memory of its making create a less objectified history, yet simultaneously does not deny its role in collective history.

The act of creating is an on-going process, paralleling that of the creation of one's own identity. This link between design as a practice and identity is best studied through home sewing. Home sewing intrinsically includes references and relationships to the body, home, ideas of the self, and the boundaries and meanings of private and public space. The term sewing connotes a variety of meanings from mending and hemming, dressmaking and draperies to a variety of needlework methods, including embroidery. The very phrase 'home sewing' locates the practice at a site of domestic relationships and the foundation of our social formation. Home is the site of all primary relationships and as such it is the principal place in the personal development of a person, thus the activities of the home become central to the development of one's identity. Lastly, the relationship between femininity and domesticity is central to women's everyday experience in inter-war Britain, hence the role of home sewing in women's history cannot be overlooked.

Lost to history in the anonymity of its 'everydayness', home sewing was a marker of adulthood; it was impossible for a woman in the inter-war period to disavow sewing whether she chose to make it herself, have a family member involved, or go to a

dressmaker or shop. Home sewing allowed a woman to individualize her representation, and as such, becomes a tool for defining and understanding the construction of femininity in inter-war Britain. This study also considers home not solely as an oppressive place, but as a starting point; it is not the other to the public life, but a tandem perspective. It supports the evidence that home sewing was an everyday practice.

As de Certeau argued, ‘Culture is judged by its operations, not by the possession of products’. (1998, p.254) These operations, these practices of everyday life, were key to the negotiations of self, family and community. With family at the core of our identity, the home became the centre, or starting point, of relevant practices. As a home-based practice, sewing works beyond the guise of being solely a domestic chore, for it allows the individual to have a voice, to manipulate body and space, and become their idea of themselves.

When historians understand design solely as an object, and overlook the process of making, it loses a large part of its relevance. Everyday objects are used, worn out, recycled and disposed of. The practice of design, the process of creating, is re-used as a skill, manifest in objects, and preserved as a memory. One must go back to the skills learned and repeat them, and, in doing so return to the memory of the experience. As Roszika Parker in *The Subversive Stitch* suggests, women were taught to embroider as an extension of themselves. (1984, p.14) The importance of inspiration and creativity in that process of creating themselves is linked with Sally Alexander’s concept of the role of day-dreams:

“Day-dreams and reverie impose continuities across different sorts of activity as well as past and present. Day-dreams —a blend of inner imago or memory-trace with everyday life-gives fantasy its repetitive pull, and gives each of us our sense of self as surely as class position, relation of kin, ethnic identity, or religious or political affiliation.” (Alexander, 1994, p.215)

As a lived experience the practice of sewing then becomes more than a task and a chore, it is that ‘pull’ that creates who we hope to be, who we are, and who we choose to become.

In images the dutiful wife, (image 15) mother, or daughter sewing intently was usually depicted mending or embroidering, not dressmaking. The differences of these types of sewing cannot be ignored. They conjure up images of two different types of women with very different purposes, but the idea and the images are often confused with each other. Sewing suffers from the same confusion due to the nature of its diversity. Home sewing for

the purposes of this study refers to the variety of types of work done in the home, whether for work or leisure, functional or decorative purposes; along with its frequency. Certain types of sewing such as mending or darning would be done more frequently, while dressmaking, alterations and embellishments might not be done daily, but frequently, requiring more time to complete; and lastly needlework – that done for decorative, non-functional purposes, (or non-necessity) might be done for either a specific purpose, i.e. a gift, or as a leisurely pursuit. All types are significant in the skills and construction of the ideal middle class woman. While chore related sewing may have served a function in maintaining the home, leisurely needlework was more of an adornment, perhaps the ‘frivolous’ side of sewing. Both created and promoted an idea of what it meant to be a woman, from being responsible and family oriented to ornamented (surface-wise) and superficial within the safe confines of the domestic arena.

Importantly sewing was done both for the body and for the home in inter-war Britain. While both are functional, i.e. both clothes and home protect, they both also serve a more individualized purpose, both a body and building can be ornamented, allowing for the use of unique decorative aspects unique to them; in home sewing this would typically occur through embroidery. While it may be considered to be ‘elite’ and leisurely, it was also significant in crossing the boundary of home and body, and applying the decorative to the functional. Embroidery individualized the home and body, allowing for the conflation of home and body to materialize in a personal and creative manner. (image 16)

In the March 1925 issue of *Eve*, the article, ‘The Vogue for Embroidery,’ mentions that, ‘never has there been a time when embroidery has occupied a more prominent position; it is inexpensive to buy and women who are clever with their needles are able to make it for themselves’. (1925, p. iii) While typically defined as an upper-class activity embroidery could cross the blurring inter-war class lines, it was affordable and women were actively encouraged to embroider. It was one form of sewing that was left to the woman to do herself. Embroidery was typically done as ornamental, leisurely work. It was a ‘post-housework’ practice that could be done while listening to the radio. Yet a woman could not be overzealous with her handiwork. In *Embroidery* magazine it was advised that, ‘modern embroidery is a ‘suggestion’ rather than a full statement’. (1933, p.13) As this chapter demonstrates, the items women kept were small embroidered domestic pieces, traditional in design, suggestions of who they were as opposed to the dresses they made, their version of modern with strong memories of their making, which were rarely kept.

When studying home sewing as a practice we must ask what the process of sewing consists of. The imagined simplicity of home sewing belies the intricacy of the meaning and process of sewing. Before a dress was worn or a cushion leaned against, several steps were part of the process. As noted earlier home sewing was not just one ‘type’ and it had different meanings – work or leisure, the amount of time invested, etc. By the very nature of its multiplicity sewing was more than sewing a button, buying a pattern and sewing a dress, or embroidering an item. Home sewing required: the space to work in, a sewing machine, and the skills to read a pattern, cut, sew, and embellish. It would require the fabric and notions, the time to make it, and, from the start, the idea.

It was not solely about consumption either, for the role of creativity in sewing was an important aspect of the process and it cannot be overlooked. Inspiration could come from a variety of sources, and it was one of the earliest motivations along with need. The home sewer first required a need – whether ‘real’ or desired. This could be found in the new social activities which women could take part in, dances, sports, charitable events; an inspiration to work from typically could be found in magazines and cinema. After knowing what she wanted/needed a home sewer would need the materials, fabric and notions for which she would have to go to town to go shopping. Lastly, the ability to make the item, would require knowledge, space and potentially a sewing machine. All of these steps were part of the back and forth dialogue and motion that occurred both internally and with those she encountered in the process of making.

In the inter-war period in Britain home sewing and dressmaking were a part of the shifting culture, with the constant fashion modifications that affected daily life. Attempting to maintain these rapidly changing inter-war fashions could be expensive, but sewing would allow one to participate on a regular basis. The ability to change a hemline, waistline or add a collar or cuff could be enough to renew a dress without spending a great deal of money. (image 17) Dresses could also be purchased more inexpensively at stores such as Marks & Spencer or the CO-OP, and the use of professional and non-professional dressmakers was an additional option. All of these required certain sets of ‘operations’; just as design is not a single object, the practice of design is multi-stepped. It is this process of making, from inspiration to made-object where practice is seen to encompass and define the actions of daily life.

If, as aforementioned, that de Certeau states, ‘a culture is defined by its operations’, (1998, p.254) then location defines the actions taken, and identity is defined equally by location

and propriety, the rules of negotiating that space. Propriety is about the relationship between a person and their community and is linked to the practices of performance. Where becomes not just a question of locus but of how we perform in that space at that time, and it is this link between place and practice that creates a new understanding of location. Place is then defined by practices and relationships between objects, individuals and larger social groups; creating not only a physical location but a way of managing one's world, via identity, the temporal, memory and the negotiation of real and imagined boundaries. This link, between action and self, between physical locations and the body, parallels the concrete and abstract realities of home, fashion and the body. The new boundaries of the changing public and private worlds and selves of inter-war Britain required new negotiation skills.

Home sewing was not just about the product but how it happened, where it occurred, the shopping and the memory of all of these parts. As Buckley proposed, 'Clothes made by women for consumption in the home by their families, or for consumption in their local communities, had only limited value, both in terms of exchange value and aesthetic value'. (Buckley, 1999, p.65) If this is true, how much of this was related to where it was made? The paradox of the homemade is whether or not it was its being a *home* made item that made it lose its appeal, compared to the newness (in terms of being modern) of the store bought. If home was a woman's pride, why then should what she made there, not be an object of pride? The possibility exists, as Burman mentions, that, 'Whilst it spoke of respectable thrift or neighbourly generosity, it was also an unwelcome badge of poverty. The period is marked by frequent reference to everyday efforts to evade or disguise the visible effects of poverty'. (1999, p.37) Or, was a less modern space, a vernacular space, not a suitably modern one for the formation of one's identity as you were becoming independent? If home is the site of the vernacular all that is made there would lack the novelty, the 'modern-ness' and the professionalization that modernity was seeking.

When speaking of their memories of sewing women remember where the sewing machine was located, when sewing was done and what was made. Home is where the strongest memories of sewing are located, but it is not the sole site of making, when making is understood to be a multi-step process. It is an activity that by its very nature crosses the lines of public and private place both through practice and product. Ironically, while the image of a woman sewing is often one of an intent, purposeful, and dutiful person, however, design itself is a proactive process, and concentration and duty are only a small

part of it. More public activities that occurred outside the family realm often required more or different outfits. Commuter travel to a new job, longer trips to visit family in other suburbs or old neighbourhoods were all part of this back and forth that puts one in new locations, and new opportunities to be seen, and see new ideas materialized. Trips into town could range from being ‘shopping trips’, to a daily route taken that would allow for more visual interaction with objects one might be able to buy or create with. This push and pull, between need and desire worked simultaneously with the dichotomy between the privacy, tradition and comfort of home and the revealing nature, modernity and anxiety of the public world. Home sewing functioned through both this more abstract sense and the more pragmatic aspect of the back and forth between home and town. Private and public was relevant not only in the making but in the initial need identified. For some this could mean a trip to the dressmakers for special occasion dresses, or to a relative’s home where they might be the ‘designated’ seamstress of the family.

Location also references the more static status of the actual workspace, and the materials and technology used. Sewing machines could be portable or located in a wooden cabinet; stored away or in a place of ‘status’; or, logically located for the best access to light. All of these require consideration in the overall experience and accessibility of participating in a practice. The location of the sewing machine was both prominent and functional usually being kept near a window for light. This does not mean that the newer electric machines did not have lights, in *The Big Book of Needlecraft* it mentions a Singer machine which had a ‘Singerlight’, ‘an ingenious little electric light fixed to the arm of the Sewing Machine in such a way as to throw a pleasant light just on the right part of the work being sewn’. (1932, p.163) It also needed to be ‘ready at hand’ and their built-in cabinetry allowed for that. (1932, p.164) Mrs. Alexander remembers her mother’s hand machine located in the front room of the house to take advantage of the light, and the treadle machine owned by her Aunt Sarah, “Sally”. She had found both machines difficult to use as a child. (Alexander, 6/09) Mrs. Sheldon remembered her mother’s Singer hand sewing machine that was a wedding present in 1913, which she kept in the kitchen on a shelf under the table to be taken out as needed. While her grandmother’s sewing machine, which was a foot treadle, was located under the window in the sitting room. (Sheldon, 6/09)

Technology was another aspect of practice that reflected the contradictory nature of home sewing. The long history of the sewing machine, hence sewing, as an essential part of the home has caused it to be taken for granted somewhat, a tradition and object passed down

through generations, a literal part of the furniture as it became encased in cabinetry, and lacking the novelty of the new appliances that required electricity. The types of technology available to women and what they reveal about inter-war Britain are significant. As skills levels varied a woman had options for 'running up' a dress at home if she had the skills or confidence, or to go to a draper's shop or department store where they would occasionally run special sales where you could purchase fabric and the pattern and the shop would cut it and sew it up for you, but you could add the embellishments, which was an option Mrs. Sheldon recalled. (Sheldon, 6/09) Both options would require a sewing machine at home.

By the 1930s the sewing machine of the inter-war period could range from a hand machine or a foot treadle to the new electric type. The sewing machine, if a hand machine, was portable and could be stored away or was part of a cabinet/case and could be hidden from view. When in use it was always near a window or lighting. For the women interviewed it was commonly 'inherited' from another family member. Yet, it was still necessary and most women still had one at home. Of the people interviewed only one woman, Mrs. Lavell of Liverpool, who recalled all the work being done by hand by her grandmother who had been trained as a tailoress.<sup>33</sup> (Lavell, 6/09) Oddly, for all its aesthetic and design concerns, the sewing machine has primarily been considered a piece of technology for historians, its design aspects and concerns ignored. (Oddy, 1999, p.286) However, as will be noted, it is not referenced or studied in technology materials of the time period as a piece of modern technology either. Much like home sewing, the sewing machine itself has been placed on the outskirts of the annals of history, both design and otherwise.

In sewing and needlework handbook, *The Big Book of Needlecraft*, it mentions that, 'Many people are strangely conservative when it comes to buying a sewing machine and "what was good enough for mother is good enough for me" seems often to be the guiding principle and because "it was my mother's" is often the excuse for putting up with some old machine which has done some 30,40, 50, or more years of good stitching service'. (1932, p.162) Mrs. Thomas' mother received a hand sewing machine at the age of 21, which she kept until she was in her late seventies before giving it to her daughter-in-law. She then purchased a small electric one, which she did not like as much. (Thomas, 6/09) As evidenced in the interviews this was a common attitude.

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<sup>33</sup> She noted that a tailoress was someone trained who only did hand sewing, this could be understood in relation to 'machinists' who worked on sewing machines doing more piece work, such as the oft referred blousehand.

One of the most significant memories for women was the sound of the sewing machine as their mothers worked at them. Mrs. Buie's mother, Mrs. R.<sup>34</sup> remembers well the sound of her mother's treadle machine 'going through the night'. (Buie, 10/09) Sewing machines were unusual in that they were the only form of domestic labour technology which was typically seen, in fact, often prominently positioned in the household. The shift from the hand machine to the treadle encased in wood cabinetry made it more than technology but a piece of furniture to be admired, and placed in a status room such as the sitting or front room.

The sewing machine was an important part of the home and a major investment in the household. Sewing machines were not only an investment of money, but of strength. During the inter-war years the hand sewing machine was still common, though the foot treadle, which left your hands free, would have been of increasing popularity. The hand sewing machine was a tabletop machine with a wheel on the right which the user would have to continually turn to move the needle up and down. The foot treadle sewing machine was encased and set on a metal frame with the pedal at the base and a pulley system attached to the flywheel at the machine on the right hand side. As the operator pushed the pedal it moved the flywheel allowing the (former hand) wheel to move so the operator could now use two hands to manipulate the fabric and do more complex stitching much faster. (image 18)

By the 1930s the electric sewing machine was more common and increased the speed at which a woman could work. However, these would have been out of the price range for most women at the time. Electrical domestic appliances were still quite new. In the booklet, *The Willing Servants: a History of Electricity in the Home* published by the Electricity Council in 1981, the sewing machine is not included in the history of domestic appliances. Mrs. Sheldon from Birmingham did recall her mother being able to purchase an electric vacuum via a door-to-door salesman, but she did not have an electric sewing machine. (Sheldon, 6/09) Clearly floor sweeping, a daily task, was more onerous than mending, or 'running-up' a dress. It could also be the novelty of a new 'machine' as opposed to the sewing machine, which was a common household item. As late as 1929 the new magazine, *Domestic Aids and Appliances*, failed to mention the sewing machine in its article 'The Age of Gadgets', 'Think of what we deal with: Electric fire cookers, vacuum cleaners, kettles, toasters, water boilers, washing machines, ironing machines, ultraviolet

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<sup>34</sup> Mrs. Audrey R., the mother of D. Buie, and daughter of Mrs. Daisy Dicks Howe, chose to remain anonymous.

ray machines, hair curlers, hot platts, thermal rugs, irons, adaptors, fans, refrigerating machines.” (1929, p.13) The fourth edition of *The Electric Guide*, published in the 1920s<sup>35</sup> also failed to mention the electric sewing machine but did include the electric hairdryer. (Golding, 1937, p.69) This highlights that, for women home sewing was just something that women ‘did’, and as a sometimes creative or leisurely pursuit it could be confused with a hobby.

While electric sewing machines have existed since the late nineteenth century oral histories support the assertion that many women in Britain did not have one until the 1950s. Mrs. Thomas purchased her electric sewing machine when she was in her 40s, and her mother only purchased an electric sewing machine when she was in her 70s. (Thomas, 6/09) In addition, by the time electric sewing machines were common in Britain not as many women were making clothes at home. According to Barbara Burman there is a contradiction in the knowledge of the amount of home sewing done, particularly in the 1920s: ‘some research on consumer expenditure in Britain between 1920 and 1938 suggested a decline’. Yet there is a parallel argument that due to the more simple styling and profusion of magazines promoting home dressmaking, it was on the rise. (Burman, 1999, p.6) The affordability of an electric sewing machine, along with its physical ease may not have coincided with the affordability and rise of quality of mass-produced ready-to-wear until the post-war era. This study investigates the differences between types of sewing, and in particular what the role of the sewing machine was as mending and small repairs would have been done by hand, and the extent of dressmaking may have altered. Regardless, home sewing may have been in a state of flux, but it was still considered part of the norm of everyday life. The very nature of needlework’s crossover between leisure and necessity were (and still are) seen as the norm.

Needlework handbooks and manuals of the period covered a number of varieties of sewing from needlework to dressmaking.<sup>36</sup> Importantly they also included guides on how to operate and repair your sewing machine. Manuals referenced include: *The Art of Needlecraft*, *The Big Book of Needlecraft*, *Modern Needlework in 600 Pictures*, *Needlework Practical and Decorative* and *The Normal Guide to Cutting Out*; these often assumed women would have an electric sewing machine although they also included

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<sup>35</sup> This is again another book that has no publication date. However online research found a third edition dated as 1935. While images illustrated seem to be no later than the early 1930s it is possible they were re-used in later editions.

<sup>36</sup> They would also have sections on pattern cutting and mending as well as embroidery, knitting and crocheting

information for the hand and treadle machines. The manuals also reveal a change in attitude toward dressmaking.<sup>37</sup> The earlier published *The Big Book of Needlecraft's* (1932) first chapter is regarding simple needlework stitches and continues immediately into dressmaking, with sections on embroidery following, it then goes into practical applications of other needlework, including household needs, ending with toys and washing hints. The slightly later *The Art of Needlecraft* (1935) lists dressmaking first on its cover, yet starts with embroidery and it is nearly four hundred pages later before it approaches home dressmaking (which is oddly followed by Indian basketry and ends with sections on working with furs, lace making and miscellany). In *The Big Book of Needlecraft* a chapter is dedicated to 'How to use Your Sewing Machine', where the author, A.H. Tugwell states, 'It is taken for granted to-day that every household possesses a Sewing Machine of some sort, and whatever may be urged in criticism of modern woman and her lack of domesticity (which is probably exaggerated), her interest in Needlecraft and love of making and wearing pretty things remain constant'. (1932, p.160)<sup>38</sup>

By 1935 in *The Art of Needlecraft* advice for the care and maintenance of the sewing machine is found a final section, entitled 'miscellany'. It considered the hand treadle not only manageable, but also convenient for its portability. The author does not compare the sewing machine to another household appliance such as the vacuum or refrigerator, but to a car or bicycle, noting it should last a lifetime. 'Many people are very neglectful of their machines. They would not dream of using a motor-car or a bicycle knowing that it had not been oiled for several months, yet they will light-heartedly leave their sewing machine unoiled and expect it to serve them just as well.' (1935, p.610) Yet in speaking with women, the sewing machine was a prominent part of the household's daily life, so it is surprising that sewing should have such low regard.

In Marguerite Connolly's exploration of the loss of status of the domestic sewing machine in America, she notes that what began its life as a status enhancing piece of technology that was considered as valuable and useful (if not more so) as the household furniture; in fact, with its drophead cabinet it often served as a table as well, it became a covered, portable appliance stored away out of sight. (1999, pp.31, 41-42) This displacement was similar to the role of home sewing where ready-to-wear was encroaching upon the homemade. Just

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<sup>37</sup> Neither book has a publication date; by reviewing all the materials, images and content I have determined "The Art of Needlecraft" to be published no earlier than 1935, and "The Big Book of Needlecraft" to be published between 1930-1932. A third book, "Modern Needlework in 600 Pictures" is also undated, but I believe it is from 1936.

<sup>38</sup> Author's parentheses.

as the sewing machine existed before electricity, sewing, in whatever variety of forms, had always been done.

A question which arises is whether or not the demand by the lower classes caused the shift, or if they were targeted. In Nicholas Oddy's essay, 'A Beautiful Ornament for the Parlor or Boudoir' he believes that the domestic machine seems to have been targeted to the lower middle classes rather than the affluent. (1999, p.298) Connolly suggests otherwise, that it was the ubiquity of the machine through the manufacturing of cheap models at affordable prices that availed it to the working classes that created a drop in status. (1999, pp.35, 36) So what was once a status symbol dropped in esteem once 'the masses' could have one as well. This becomes slightly convoluted in the inter-war period as the internal shifts in the middle-class (from working to lower, upper to middle) create much more unclear delineations. From a business history perspective, or one looking solely at the history of sewing machines, it is an interesting question, but this research does not look at how women were approaching its purchase. Regardless of why they had a sewing machine, they did own one. The women this research encountered cover a spectrum of the middle classes (with two working class and two upper middle class), but a similar attitude was held by all, they kept what they had and did not buy anything new until absolutely necessary, and passed along their old machine.

It was not just sewing machines that were reflective of technology. In the inter-war period fabric was inexpensive and a greater variety was available. The affordability of the new fabrics was reflective of the new synthetic materials that were being produced. These reflected the more active lives that women led from sports<sup>39</sup> to new jobs in retail and businesses. They would wear well and not wrinkle as easily. There were concerns about shrinking but the biggest impact was the greater range and affordability. The variety of these new fabrics such as Celanese (image 19) are seen in the advertisements women would have read in magazines, such as *Tricolene*, and as promoted in the trade journal *The Draper's Record*. Fabrics, while important in being fashionable were just one factor of dress style.

Mrs. Sheldon was able to recall one fabric from 1932 in particular, Tobralco, a new cotton blend available in a variety of patterns and colours. (Sheldon, 6/09) It was promoted in 1927 as a 'sports' fabric, presumably for the modern woman reflecting all her new activities. (image 20 a-c) On the cover of this booklet-shaped promotional material is an

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<sup>39</sup> Interestingly two women mentioned that they met their husbands while playing tennis.

illustration of two children washing up with the clothes on the line labeled to show all the various uses for the material. When it is opened vertically the silhouette of a woman playing tennis is set against the name Tobralco: the tennis favourite. On the lower flap are three sets of swatches, two narrow (3.5 x 9.8cm) on top of a wider set of swatches (7.3 x 9.8 cm). It seems to be a finished cotton blend with a variety of patterns from the solid tennis white, small floral prints, polka dots, abstracted patterns and geometrics. This marketing is an interesting reflection of the versatility and flexibility that was required for life at the time. The fabric came in a large variety of patterns and could be used for both sport and everyday needs. These needs were reflected in the images on the packaging, both a female tennis player and the domestic idyll and charm of a young toddler hanging out the wash. Women could be both sporting and domestic and new technological advances would allow them to fulfil these opportunities.

Sewing machines, a technology which had an industrial start moved into the home, found its place as a tool for the practice of femininity as a learned skill epitomized in home sewing, just as had sewing by hand. For all the women interviewed home sewing was integral to a woman's family life, and even more so in the development of her femininity. It required a domestic technology that was an expensive investment, and its location was reflective of both its status and function. This research reveals that the ability to participate in family life through sewing was integral to a woman's development if not for function, then creative satisfaction and the ability to control one's identity.

Knowledge of the variety of sewing practices was an integral part of a girl's education in inter-war Britain. Not only was the education about domestic practicalities but it was about class and femininity as well. Learning how to sew was the norm for the majority of women, and it occurred through two primary channels, home and school.<sup>40</sup> Often in a (larger) family there was one person who did the majority of the sewing, depending on the larger skill pool or work responsibilities, usually a mother, grandmother, sister or aunt. Girls were taught at home by their mothers or grandmothers, but also learned the basics at school. Since schools did not have sewing machines from which to teach everything taught was for hand sewing. This might account for the number of pinafores and knickers that were made, as they were of lighter material and required more basic skills. All the women interviewed felt what they had learned in school was useless and very dull. This very basic

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<sup>40</sup> Only one woman insisted she did not know how to sew as a child, but this is such an anomaly that I believe it has more to do with her perception of what 'sewing' is, as she later went on to become an accomplished dressmaker and embroiderer, therefore, the 'basics' were most likely not considered to be real sewing to her.

education could vary from fundamental needlework to actual dressmaking, depending on their age and the type of school they attended. Girls intended for university would have learned needlework, such as embroidery and some hand-sewing, but this would not have been an intensive education and would have been finished by the age of thirteen or fourteen. Mrs. Sheldon and Mrs. Thomas experienced this, (Sheldon, 6/09, Thomas, 6/09) while Mrs. Simons went on to train in millinery and learned more dressmaking skills. (Holden, 7/10) For girls on the non-university track they would learn more domestic skills under the guise of the new domestic science programs.

As noted in this research, in the inter-war period the expectation was that all girls would know how to sew and do needlework regardless of their education, but it was deemed more of a necessity for working-class or lower middle-class girls who would be more likely to need it. Since 1875 needlework had been an obligatory subject for girls in elementary school. (D. Gillard, 2011, Chpt.3) This continued in 1906 with *The Report of the Consultative Committee: Questions affecting higher elementary schools*, which included domestic training for girls. (Gillard, 2011, Chpt. 4) In the 1926 Hadow Report it notes:

‘In Modern Schools for girls with an ‘industrial’ bent in the direction of dressmaking, millinery, artistic embroidery and the like, needlecraft of various kinds would form the most important element in the course. The other housecraft subjects would not be neglected, but less time would necessarily be given to them. This would be the case, also, in schools with a “commercial” bias’. (Hadow Report, 1926, p.236)

There is no definition of what an ‘industrial’ bent is, however, from the oral histories undertaken, it was not the direction determined for upper middle class students, it was typically the lower middle class girls who were pushed in that direction. Neither Mrs. Thomas nor Mrs. Sheldon, both of whom went to university, were expected to take needlework courses in the upper level classes. (Sheldon 6/09, Thomas 6/09) Further reference to the education of teachers in needlework in a 1930s edition of a needlework teacher’s book, *The Normal Guide to Cutting Out*, where author M. Lester notes that, ‘The importance of this subject is obvious, not only for the intrinsic value which a thorough knowledge of it should possess for every woman, but on account of its being one of the Government requirements in the education of Teachers.’, (1930s:preface) this statement supports the continuing importance of needlework education in schools. The girls were to be taught ‘needlecraft of different kinds-the designing, cutting out and making of garments, mending, and embroidery,’ along with, ‘various artistic crafts, such as leatherwork, bookbinding...stencilling, [etc.] (Hadow,1926, p.233) While the committee did not want to

differentiate greatly between boys and girls interests, for girls needlecraft would be a greater focus. (1926, p.233) Interestingly, in only one needlework book, *Needlework: Practical and Decorative* was any reference made to boys being taught and why it was worthwhile, 'there is no reason why boys should not share the instruction given.' (Strachan, 1921, p.3) However, the author goes on to say, 'Except in very elementary classes, boys would spend less time on the subject than girls, their stronger muscles suggesting the suitability of other forms of exercise. On the whole, the practical rather than the imaginative or purely decorative would be emphasized in boys' work, and the aim would be to give them some facility in handling needle and whereas, rather than to induce them to make the practice of needlework a regular occupation.' (1921, p.3) Included is an image of a mat sewn and embroidered by a seven year-old boy. (image 21) When seen next to the girl's work she has chosen 'Little Bo-peep' as her design focus, and the boy, 'Jack and the Beanstalk'- gender appropriate subject matter. Importantly this is a book aimed at teachers, and it leaves us with an early example of the sociological understanding of the division of labour based upon biology at an early stage. There was a certain timidity toward allowing boys to learn how to sew, and no concern about the necessity for girls to learn. As stated by Sally Alexander in *Becoming a Woman*, 'In the 1920s and 1930s the sexual division of labour and women's sense of themselves – indeed what it meant to be a woman - were changing in significant ways.' (1995, p.2005) Certainly the children they were teaching were growing up in a changing world.

This crossover between home and educational community is also evident in why women learned how to sew and its changes. As Rozsika Parker states, 'Embroidery connotes not only home but a socially advantaged home, securely placed in the upper reaches of the class structure. It is not only home and family that embroidery signifies but, specifically, mothers and daughters.' (1984, p.2) Needlework had been a part of a wealthy girl's education for centuries, slowly moving into the middle classes by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the greatest change occurred in the early twentieth century. The Victorian concern for sanitation and public health eventually evolved into interest in the hygienic home and by the 1920s these concerns and the skills required to manage them had been codified under the name of domestic science. It was important that you did not appear dirty, hence unhealthy. In conversation with the Lavells a sartorial reference highlighted this when used by Mrs. Lavell, that, 'We weren't poor, we were tidy,' to distinguish between the poor and the slightly wealthier. (Lavell, 6/09) It was her mother and grandmother's responsibility that the family looked healthy and respectable no matter what the circumstances. (Lavell,

6/09) By keeping up appearances via clothing they were fulfilling both a feminine and societal responsibility that was growing more demanding.

By the early twentieth century women were clearly the domestic managers of the health and hygiene of their families. The cleanliness and orderliness of their clothes and home went beyond decorative ornamentation to specific skills. Though domestic science classes, as they were known, included cooking and housekeeping lessons, more relevant to this research are the basic sewing and needlework skills taught, and for some women, dressmaking classes. This was usually taught up until the age of 14, after which girls either went into an apprenticeship (such as Joan Simons at Kendall Mills) or onto higher education that would not include any form of domestic science course work. The new burgeoning 'business girl' also fit into this scope as Mrs. Crankshaw supports that she passed the exam for the girls grammar school (ages 14-16), then continued onto Lawburn College, where her studies included shorthand and typing and she went on to spend over 50 years working as the secretary to the owner of a mail order shirt company.<sup>41</sup> (Crankshaw, 7/10) As Mrs. Sheldon notes, 'At my school you either did Latin or domestic science. If you did domestic science you did do some sewing, but I am afraid I took the Latin you see'. (Sheldon, 6/09) Mrs. Sheldon went on to university, and as other accounts attest, highly educated women would not be likely to need sewing skills, for they would go on to be able to purchase their goods or services. This was a shift from only forty to fifty years earlier when wealthier women would have had in-house servants. The mothers of this generation typically had someone to come in and help with the household chores either several days a week or daily, but did not live in, as was evidenced by both Mrs. Sheldon and Mrs. Crankshaw. (Sheldon, 6/09, Crankshaw, 7/10)

The primary memory of classroom sewing education that most women have is of making either 'pinnies' (pinafores) or underwear. The general sentiment was that it was not very useful or in-depth sewing. June M. of the Embroiderer's Guild recalled making aprons, knickers and pajamas, but nothing utilizing anything beyond a few stitches at school. (June M., 5/10) When Mrs. Thomas recalled her lessons at school she didn't really learn 'anything useful', but did have more difficult skills taught at home. (Thomas, 6/09) Only one woman, Mrs. Brown, 83, from the Embroiderer's Guild had recollected learning just

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<sup>41</sup> Her daughter, Linda Holden, mentioned that she was listed on company stationary as a Director of the Company but her mother would say no it was only so there was a less 'Jewish-sounding' name than the owner. However, she held the second highest position at the company.

the very basics at school, but did learn everything at home from her grandmother, doing not just the standard pinny, but more intricate work. (Brown, 5/10)

Typically the students were expected to supply all their materials to work on the projects, and lessons were one afternoon per week, often alternating with cooking lessons. Mrs. Buie told how her mother recalled that while her domestic science teacher had admired her sewing work, because they could not pay for the materials she was not allowed to take her dress home.<sup>42</sup> When the teacher recommended that she take up sewing as a trade her mother said no, because she felt she would just be taken advantage of by people, as had been her experience. (Buie, 10/09)

Mrs. Sheldon, who had had the least school education in needlework (as she was going on to university) did recall how they were taught to create designs in art and drawing class. While she did not have a lot of sewing practice at school they did practice how to create the designs. The designs were built upon the square, which is where cross-stitch comes from, so only the suggestion of a curve could be made. At the age of 14 she had to 'compose a geometric picture, no flowers or creatures...just a pattern...she did an internal theme and a border'. At home she designed her own small purse in various colours that fastened over the top, and her grandmother gave her brown silk orican to line it. In her education, art was applied to a craft enabling young girls to continue their practices of femininity. (Sheldon, 6/09) Needlework as a craft allowed for the transfer of art skills, but dressmaking would require the sewing machine.

Lessons were taught through a mother, grandmother or aunt and typically resulted in handtowels, tray towels and duchess sets. Mrs. Crankshaw recalled choosing on her own, a net cloth with a pattern of a lady in crinoline which she finished when she was sixteen years old. (Crankshaw, 7/10) Mrs. Lavell's mother, who had seven daughters, did not have time to do needlework or sew. (Lavell, 6/09) Nor did Mrs. Crankshaw's mother, whom she recollects as always doing housework. (Crankshaw, 7/10) Typically these women would have had another family member to do the sewing, such as Mrs. Lavell's seamstress grandmother, or one of Mrs. Crankshaw's aunts. Significant to an era of shifting class, and more clothing options and needs, it may also be the experience as that of Mrs. Buie's grandmother, where needlework such as embroidery was a luxury. 'The richer women who

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<sup>42</sup> It's not clear what was not paid for, or if the school had some supplies available to learn from but you couldn't then take it home with you. It clearly had made a strong impression on her mother.

belonged to our family, the ones who didn't have to work, they did beautiful embroidery and things like that.' (Buie, 10/09)

Not all clothing could be altered so easily. Coats were one area of specialization. They were only made or altered at home if a woman was a dressmaker or trained seamstress, working outside the home. This was the case of Mrs. Lavell's grandmother who had been trained and worked for a tailor in Liverpool. She was the household seamstress and could make the coats. She would commonly turn coats (much like collars) inside out and redo them so they could be worn longer. (Lavell, 6/09) Mrs. Stirling, another professional seamstress and trained cutter however, would leave coats to her sister who had specialized in them. (Stirling, 6/09) Typically, for the average home sewer coats were bought from a shop.

However, one item which was made at home was undergarments. As has been referenced this tradition was continued through education in the schools which most women found to be not very practical. Mrs. Thomas recalled making French knickers at school and its commonality is witnessed in the pattern given in one of the needlework books. (Thomas, 6/09) In two of the three needlework books it was a topic, though one referred to it specifically as 'dainty' lingerie. This is a change from just a few years earlier in 1921 when the Women's Institute of Domestic Arts & Sciences of Scranton, Pennsylvania<sup>43</sup> had as part of their dressmaking coursework an entire book on Underwear and Lingerie. The 1921 *Needlework, Practical and Decorative* also had a number of sections on teaching how to make undergarments. In 1936 *Modern Needlework*, had an entire chapter, 'Lingerie, Underwear, Etc., Etc.' on making lingerie from corsets to knickers to nightdresses. It is the third longest chapter out of seven, 20 pages long, found after Basic Sewing and Home Dressmaking. On the page entitled, 'To be Well Dressed Means-' the author notes two aspects of being well dressed, 'To know oneself - to be mercilessly critical before the mirror - to note every fault and blemish of the figure, no matter how trifling. This is the only way in which one can attain that "personal style" which is so necessary if one is to be regarded as well dressed'. (1936, p.74) Self-awareness and skill were clearly the finishing touches to proper presentation.

Statements demanding a critical eye were, to a certain extent, creating a demand for a 'professional' look from the home-sewer. The rational and efficient planning of the

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<sup>43</sup> This coursebook was out of Pennsylvania but published by the International Education Publishing, Co, and copyrighted in Great Britain. While unable to be verified, but it may have been the coursebook used by the WI dressmaking course that was frequently advertised.

domestic world - specifically the kitchen and bathroom - were no longer enough, the body and its presentation must also be 'finished'. This idea of the home being the vernacular and speaking of one's personal provenance had to be subverted through the small details of one's personal style, in a socially appropriate manner. The time of a middle-class woman in inter-war Britain needed to be well spent and thought out, whether at work or leisure.

The question of professionalization for middle-class women in Britain touched upon the role of needlework and leisure and their employment status, and reflected the professionalization of home management. The rise of mass production manufacturing created a change in the perception of professionalism in the nineteenth century; it had been in a constant conflict with the arts and crafts movement's concern with manufacturing's threat to creativity. Now that design and ornament were more of a conscious concern, higher standards for manufacturers then led to higher standards for individuals. This condition, coupled with the rise of leisure time, allowed room for amateurs to become more skilled and knowledgeable via books and coursework. In 1939 Mrs. Muriel Bliss (who mentioned that her mother never sewed) enrolled in a night course for sewing as part of her new married life, it was a one year commitment of once a week and started her on a lifetime of dressmaking and needlework. (Bliss, 4/11) Groups such as the Women's Institute offered programmes on dressmaking. (image 22) There were also opportunities to learn via post, as seen in this advertisement for the Paris Academy of Dressmaking and Millinery. (image 23) One could also find local schools such as one in Newcastle, Rodmure School of Dressmaking run by a Miss Grace Cranston from at least 1925-1934. (*Ward's Directory*, Newcastle, *Kelly's Directory*, Newcastle)<sup>44</sup> Here the full range of dressmaking skills could be learned from pattern cutting to corsets and finishing. There was also the Northern Counties Training College in Newcastle, which offered courses in domestic science. (*Ward's Northumberland Directory*, 1934) These increased opportunities were also reflected in the number of women working as dressmakers.<sup>45</sup> There was still a steady supply of dressmakers and boutiques available to women so women could improve upon their skills while still having access to affordable clothing.

Whether creating goods as a leisure time pastime for home or body the question of productive leisure time also reveals the issues of value and quality. In the age of professionalization of the home even sewing was an arena for concern. Most women

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<sup>44</sup> It seems that Miss Cranston was the original teacher then sometime around 1930 Miss Dryden was the teacher. Miss Cranston continued offering her own private lessons.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 3 History p.99.

interviewed were primarily concerned about the finish of their work, and this is supported by articles in magazines about the difference between a professionally and a home sewn item. In *Modern Needlework* the author clarifies that a ‘faultless fit [is] achieved by first-class work, which forms the basis of a perfect turn-out.’ (1936, p.74) It was not just about the work done at home, but the quality as well. It must not look homemade. This reveals another division and change in women’s lives in regard to homecrafts. The quality of the productivity of one’s leisure time is now up to the standard of the professional. To be an amateur no longer had the same resonance that it did in the nineteenth century. One had to be a professional even in one’s free time; or in the case for women their daily life where ‘work’ and ‘pleasure’ were conflated. Leisure and professionalism are woven into the same time for women.

Confusion can be found in how hobbies, homecraft and handicraft and home making are defined and used especially in relation to its value as being amateur or professional quality work. The amateur status has best been defined as a practice that is not limited or confined by the demands of the marketplace. (Beegan, Atkinson, 2008, p.310) Pat Kirkham promotes the stance that the division is to be found in whether or not one is paid; in fact she argues in ‘Women and the Inter-war Handicrafts Revival’ that, ‘the acceptability of amateur handicraft work was based on a change in attitude towards craft as *leisure* as opposed to craft as *work* and also on a breaking down of the hegemonic hold on notions of professional training and individual genius’. (Kirkham, 1995, p.174, italics in original) The types of activities now labelled crafts also create a change in viewpoint. Kirkham argues that Arts & Crafts leader W.R. Lethaby and the National Federation of Women’s Institute played a role in the change in attitude with their promotion of British Domestic Crafts. (1995, pp.175-177) Lethaby’s philosophy concerned concepts of genius and ‘the common things of life...for him art was simply “all worthy handicraft”, which included not only hand-weaving and basket-making but also cooking, bread-making and “laying the table nicely”.’ (Lethaby, 1923, cited in Kirkham, 1995, p.177) In fact, ‘he went so far as to argue that plain sewing was an art’. (Lethaby, 1923, cited in Kirkham, 1995, p.178). His influence is seen in the NFWI’s work where the coursework offered had a gender divide. ‘In general, men were concerned with metal work, woodwork and furniture, whereas women were concerned with all the sewing crafts, knitting, weaving, rug-making, upholstery and leatherwork’. (1995, p.179) Instruction was a booming enterprise, and the concern for standards was no less real, which is reflected in the increase in the number of how-to manuals published at the time. (1995, p.181) All of these conditions lead to a more

complex understanding of education and professionalization and its link to understanding home sewing. Popularity only, however, cannot define its role, for when a craft requires skill, is home-based by its very nature, and is both a necessity and a pleasure, understanding its place in the traditional hierarchy becomes more complex.

In Hackney's article 'Make Do and Mend' she attempts to clarify the relationship between homecraft and handicraft with the relationship to housework. She states that homecraft was concerned with creating decorative and functional objects for the home and involved skills that were traditionally perceived as feminine. (Hackney, 2008, p.12) Handicraft required more skill and individual creativity and was not dependent upon mass produced kits or patterns. (Hackney, 2008, p.25) <sup>46</sup> Domestic scientists considered home crafts to be the pleasurable side of housework. (Hackney, 2008, p.32) The government published Hadow Report refers to housecraft as a form of household management, with 'the various household duties which devolve on most women' and upon 'efficient care and management of the home depend the health, happiness and prosperity of the nation'. (Great Britain, *The Education of the Adolescent*, 1926, p.234) And lastly, on a more local level, 'greater efficiency in the housewife would go far to raise her status in the estimation of the community.' (Hadow, 1926, p.234) Earlier references are to 'handcraft' which would include sewing, needlework and hobbies. (Hadow, 1926, p.233) All of them were to be taught with the idea of pleasure as part of the increasing leisure time available, and the increasing importance of hygiene. Home sewing straddles the fine line between requiring skill and being a necessity, while shifting into the world of leisure, where being expressive was a priority, yet not enough to allow one to bring it up to the level of art. The lack of professionalism meant that it could not be bound by ideas of genius; or valued as 'serious' work.

While craft/hobbies and professionalism have a contentious relationship, it has simultaneously been as porous as the social structures which were changing during the inter-war years. The idea of the 'hand' and the handmade was not completely congruent. As Beegan and Atkinson (2008, p.308) note the vernacular has been used in architectural work done by professionals. This application of personal taste and desires, or local requirements, was filtering into home sewing. When a woman in inter-war Britain could, and was encouraged to make her own additions and alterations to create her own personal

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<sup>46</sup> Kirkham notes that Leicester School of Art encouraged its students to make their own designs. (1995, p.180)

style, the real concern became the finish, where the skill of the amateur could be revealed. If we define the details, that were, supposedly, encouraged to be unique, as reflection of *their* vernacular, since home is the region, then one has to question to what extent does professionalism have any bearing. The boundaries of skill do not have to overtake the vernacular of the amateur, home based sewer to make it acceptable; for that is what makes it part of her identity. The detail, the finish become the markers of both professionalism and individuality, as much as the line between domestic work and leisure were overlapping in daily life as well.

Again for women the attention to detail, and the pressure to be ‘professional’ in their handiwork created an ill-defined boundary between work and leisure. The very fact that the work may be for themselves, as opposed to their family members meant that the issue of vanity may be inescapable. As stated earlier, Rozsika Parker argues that women were taught to embroider as an extension of themselves...urged to embroider clothing and furniture, encouraged to see it as the natural expression of their nature, women were still accused of vanity when they embroidered for themselves. (1984, p.14) Homemaking and all its various modes had to be both useful and for others.

The idea of professionalization of work and its mix with time is also reflected in the decision to go outside the home to have any dressmaking done. This may or may not have been necessary for frequently in larger households, or within extended family, there was a family member who had been trained. A number of women also mentioned relations who were tailors as well. Interestingly, it was not uncommon for a father to sew. Mr. Stirling’s father did so because he had been taught during his military service as rehabilitation from a related injury. (Stirling, 6/09) Mr. Holden’s father had been a milliner, and his mother was first a machinist at a slipper and shoe factory then at a mattress factory in Bury, Lancashire. He believed that most likely because his mother was at a sewing machine all day his father did the mending at home, but his mother ‘turned collars’ and made clippy mats. Mr. Holden recalled that later, when she was older she did take an embroidery class at a local college. (Holden, 7/10) Linda Holden recalled her father making curtains and plush toys for her as well, but it was her aunt who sewed clothes. (Booth, 7/10) In all of these families both parents worked; clearly, under these conditions, certain tasks were non-gendered due to the workload.

While the majority of the memories were happy or innocuous, some brought up societal shifts that could divide a family. Mrs. Buie’s maternal grandmother had been trained as a

seamstress, but stopped 'officially' working when she had children with her husband, a miner. She continued to take in sewing at home and would work through the night. She had two sisters who had married wealthier men who would bring over clothing to be altered or fabric for new dresses to be made, but did not intend to pay for the work. If her sisters had gone to a dressmaking shop or tailors they would have had to have paid a deposit upon ordering. This lack of compensation for her time and skills created bad feelings and led her to not want her daughter to go into sewing as a profession. (Newcastle 10/09) There are two possible factors which could have contributed to the lack of payment. One that she was fulfilling her family role of the seamstress, or two since it was located in a home it was not a serious 'business'. In fact, Mrs. Buie herself said it wasn't a business, she was just 'providing' for her family. (Buie, 10/09) Mrs. Stirling, who would later only work part-time, still continued to take in sewing but according to her son her payment system was very informal, 'oh, a bob for this would be fine'. Not surprisingly, Mr. Stirling referred to his mother's work at home as not 'formal work'. (Stirling, 6/09) This lack of seriousness given to a woman who worked from home is reflected in the language that one uses even today.

None of the women interviewed had trained as professional seamstresses, but several did have relatives who either trained in dressmaking or worked in a related field such as retail. Ads for home dressmaking supplies were common, as were the aforementioned schools and classes. According to Kirkham these students, if daytime were primarily married, non-workers, if evening students they worked during the day. (1995, p.180) Students still would have had opportunities for apprenticeships, such as Joan Simons. (Booth, 7/10) Some were taken up at department stores and through Domestic Science courses such as those at the Domestic Subject Centre in Darlington, York. (*Ward's Directory*, Darlington, 1931-32). Mrs. Bliss took her first classes as an evening course while her husband could stay at home with their children. (Bliss, 4/11) The combination of traditional socially-imposed feminine interest, household management needs, and educational opportunities from the growing interest in domestic science meant that for most women home sewing was an inevitable part of their daily development into young women.

The press was somewhat more concerned about this quality of work than the women interviewed. However, in an article in the upscale magazine for women, *Eve*, it was strongly recommended (rather judgmentally) that women had to be careful in their choice of professional dressmaker or trying to make something on their own, 'nothing affects my sympathy more quickly, or rouses my ire (it depends on the person) than to see pathetic

attempts at fashion by women who cannot afford the right sort of dressmaker. If they are wise, these women of straitened means they will buy ready – made clothes, and not pay too much for them. Let the little dressmakers keep to what it is known as ‘flou’ which they do very well, but when it’s a coat and skirt or a long coat there is nothing for it but the big shops or a very good tailor-dressmaker’. (1925, p.27) If this was an issue, none of the interviewees mentioned a concern about quality, indeed most mentioned how busy the dressmaker was.

One woman who was a professional in the trade was Mrs. Stirling of North Islington. She had started off as a cutter then moved onto retail work at Woolworth’s. She also continued to do piece work at home as well as dressmaking and alterations for local women – primarily the young business girls. Another service she offered was to buy fabric for women, she would collect a certain amount of money per week for so many weeks then buy the fabric at a discount or commission. Due to her trained background she was also able to create and alter patterns. (Stirling, 6/09) These (both dress and embroidery) would often come free with magazines and could be bought through magazines or at the local draper’s or department store.

Patterns for both dressmaking and needlework were ubiquitous. Commonly purchased at the draper’s, one could also find them at department stores and free with the purchase of a magazine. In the March 1928 issue of *Radio Times* a listener could order a pattern for boys knickers, to coincide with a March 15<sup>th</sup> airing of “Clothes for a Small Boy” part of the series programme, “Something Old, Something New”. (1928, p.440) Patterns for embroidery could include flowers, geometric designs and the more unusual monkeys and floral swastikas. Women were not limited to purchasing patterns either. The booklet *501 Yorkshire Home Hints* (1930s, p.72) included a recipe for making one’s own transfer ink, and instructions on how to use it. This followed hint no. 489 for how to remove transfer print from fabric. Girls were admonished for not being creative if they solely used pre-printed patterns.

‘It is only from ignorance that so many people rely on the transfer designs supplied by needlework shops. Where is the fun in working someone else’s ideas? Half the interest is lost and frequently the character of the design also. The finished work lacks individuality, for hardly two people will express a design in the same way. The design and stitches, therefore, cannot successfully be separated in this way, as one helps to make the other’. (Elsie Mochrie, *Simple Embroidery*, 1937, p.1)

Needlework was not just about the stitching but the overall design process and the satisfaction one could achieve in creating something unique. Along with the creative satisfaction, other motivations included the increasing number of new diversions such as the cinema, sports and dancing. But these required a greater variety of clothes, and the opportunity to individualize. Nor did it diminish the creative aspects of sewing for women.

The ideas of a perfect fit and finish were paramount to the idea of professionalization and how the outfit was perceived. ‘The latest fashion in the cut of a garment should be avoided; try to achieve the same effect with small details, such as collar, cuffs, belt, and so on.’ (1935, p.382) This was common advice for the inter-war home-sewer. As women were continually reminded details and finish were the difference between a home sewn dress and a professional one. Perhaps it was the details that made Mrs. Thomas long for a shop dress, for she thought they were better than homemade. (Thomas, 6/09) It was precisely in the details of the collars and cuffs where women did the most alterations. The *Big Book of Needlecraft* has an entire chapter entitled ‘New collars for old dresses’ where they state, ‘Collars have played a very important part in the drama of fashion throughout the ages and to-day command the attention of dress-designers of repute and of makers of simple dresses. Each knows the scope given by their use of the expression of individuality.’ (1932, p.145) To turn a collar or alter cuffs was a common occurrence. It was common in children’s, men’s and women’s clothes due to the wear and washability issues.

‘Two dainty waistbands that will make your frock’ was the enticing article for girls in 1925. *The Girls Favourite* magazine encouraged its readers to ‘relieve [their simple and plain evening frocks] from absolute severity...and one of the best places in which to introduce this touch of trimming is in the waist belt’. (1925, p.556) Ideas for creative and homemade solutions to fashion conundrums were being introduced to young girls as well. Young teenage girls were also encouraged to start working on their wardrobe through needlework. *Marjorie Hazeldene’s Book of Needlework* suggests that, ‘A new set of dainty collar and cuffs would brighten up that winter frock of yours wonderfully’. She suggests that you use an old set for a pattern and embroider the edges, and, if you make it [the embroidery] multi-coloured you can use up the old bits of thread which accumulate in your work bag. (1933, p.14) The economics of even a common leisure time activity were espoused and one could not start too young.

These four aspects of design as a practice, location, technology, education and professionalization are all reflected in home sewing. Location changes perceptions of

quality and impacts the practice through the actual work-space and how it is used. Technology in home sewing is focused on two areas, the sewing machine and textiles. Changes in both allowed for more accessibility, though the change was not often rapid. Questions of expense, in regard to the new electric machine, and quality, in textiles, were sometimes questioned. Interestingly, the ubiquity of the sewing machine as a piece of household equipment meant it has been overlooked by various histories, not considered a valuable part of history. Learning a skill meant achieving a certain level or standard of competence and being adequately prepared for future needs. How women were taught through both home and school was also relevant in creating both ideas of what was appropriate and necessary for women at the time, while enhancing relationships within families. Higher educational expectations also parlayed itself into new ideas of professionalism. In any practice professionalism sets a standard by which all quality of work is set. The increasing pressure for professionalization of the home in the inter-war period was also seen in the expectation of quality home workmanship. The media was quite adamant about a professional look, yet also promoted the idea of individual creativity - if you had the skill. This back and forth of demands, pressures and changes were reflective of the era and seen in the practice of home sewing.

## **Chapter VI: Design as Practice: Inspiration & Making**

This chapter continues the discussion of design as practice, specifically the role of inspiration and making in home sewing. It includes the part of consumption in the act of creating, as a specific operation of design. This will then be examined further through an analysis of the work of two women, and a collection of dresses found in both public and private collections. These works will be analysed in relation to their design elements and as reflections of both individual and collective history. Through the analysis of these specific dresses our understanding of their production will assist in their further identification and evaluation. How these objects, embroidered domestic linens and dresses, have been accessed and preserved will also be investigated to better understand the actual process of sewing and the options women had, along with the impact the historical preservation and access has had on our understanding of design as a practice and inter-war history in Britain.

For all the daily sewing expected of women the most significant memory for most women interviewed was the first dress where they had input into the design themselves. It was in astonishing detail that women remembered their dresses, from the style to the shopping experience, and how it made them feel and what influenced their decisions. The dresses were typically made at about age 18 and for a special occasion. The opportunity to choose one's clothes and dressmaking for yourself was an important step for young women.

From the oral histories of Mrs. Sheldon and Mrs. Alexander it was common that up until their late teens mothers made the clothing and girls may have had some input as to fabric or style. (Sheldon, 6/09, Alexander, 6/09) However, the first dress they made meant that they made the decisions such as style and fabric, and while they did not vary greatly from their mother's ideas, the sources for their ideas may have come from more varied options.

Mrs. Alexander remembered taking trips into town to window shop and compare quality of fabrics and ready-made wear, notably her mother was generally concerned with the quality of many goods. (Alexander, 6/09) Many of these ideas found their way coming from contemporary cultural discourse and of which magazines was a large part. Mrs. Sheldon remembered the excitement at the age of 16 of going to a local shop to purchase material and have it cut for her to sew herself,

'I suddenly thought that I would like to do some and I was in Walsaw and there was a very nice shop there that sold materials and, of course, it was the depression about 1932 or 3, and there was an

offer on in the shop that if you bought material for a dress, you picked out a dress from the pattern book from McCall's or somebody, you know, and they would cut it all out for you. ...I picked out a pattern at Richmond's, the shop duly cut it out and they said call back tomorrow and I took it home and I set about it and really, you know, the instructions, that was my first dress so that got me, that was a success and it looked rather nice and the materials are rather pretty, you know, that was just before the war that was about '32'. (Sheldon, 6/09)

The fabric for the dress Mrs. Sheldon made she described as 'a white ground with little flowers on it...blues and pinks and things, you know, not too cottagey but rather nice'. The waist was at the natural waistline, a belt with a ring buckle that the fabric looped through, and a wide collar which was white on one side, and the dress fabric on the other side and down the band, and little white turned-back cuffs, and a slightly flared, mid-calf length skirt. (Sheldon, 6/09)

Mrs. Alexander had vivid memories of one of her first fancy dresses that her mother made for her when she was about 20 years old. It was pink with straight sleeves, with additional decorative fabric over the shoulder and a round neckline decorated with sequins, and a large bow in the back and three frills around the skirt. She had chosen the pattern specifically for the occasion. (Alexander, 6/09) Mrs. Sheldon also recalled one particular evening gown that was her first backless dress, coming to a V in the back; it had an apple green base, lime underneath and at the bottom it all came out in green net. She purchased that at Lewis' department store in Birmingham.<sup>47</sup> From a privately owned boutique she once bought an off the shoulder white gown with a white taffeta lining with embroidered pinks and mauves in a band in the middle of the long shirt, and little shoulder straps with a ruffle that went along the band to the shoulder straps. She had seen it in the shop window as she went home everyday before she purchased it. This experience for a young woman; going back and forth from home to town, passing shops on the way to university, finding a dress for a large social event, is a quintessentially modern experience. She was able to have these experiences and make these decisions in a very modern way, one that would eventually evoke the idea she has of herself in a public setting. (Sheldon, 6/09) Much like Sally Alexander's aforementioned role of daydreams and imagination, it is this pull between reality and imagination that drew women into the idea of themselves, and their ability to 'make' themselves.

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<sup>47</sup> This is not related to today's John Lewis' chain.

Regardless of which option women chose to work with – homemade by themselves or family member, store-bought or dressmaker made, something inspired them to make the decisions they made. An idea has to generate from somewhere, and in the inter-war period, magazines and the cinema would have been two very common starting points. Magazines, however, were a fast-growing option for home-sewers and had a unique place in the home. They were a less expensive option to books, and had a potentially daily influence which one could use in the privacy and comfort of one's own home, and be shared with family and friends. It could be picked up and put down again, read repeatedly and disposed of, allowing the reader to move in and out of the home without leaving it - paralleling the increase in movement and repetition found in the era. This sense of the temporality of making a dress also suggests a closer relationship to the reading of a magazine than a newspaper. A magazine could be picked up and put down at the same pace, whereas a daily newspaper was constant change of focus. Magazines reflected modernity through their availability, frequency and affordability. They were able to encompass a broad range of topics, which paralleled that of home sewing's breadth of involvement in daily life.

Fashion means many things to people, and those that may disregard it, on one level may actually have a fascination with the fashion system. For Mrs. Crankshaw, as the youngest of four children (three girls) one of her earliest memories of her first new, not hand-me-down, skirt and jumper, which were purchased when she was thirteen, is that she thought they were 'ever so smart'. (Crankshaw, 7/10) Her earlier memories were of special Christmas events. Her father, a butcher, was also a Freemason, and he would take her every year to the party with a new party dress that was made at a dressmakers. This same woman made her costume for school plays and concerts, including her role as Peter Pan and as a fairy. But she remembered in greater detail her first dance dress at sixteen years old, as a full-length blue chiffon with a v-neck, which flowed from a natural waist, with draped sleeves. It was plain with no decoration but the colour complemented her deep auburn hair; 'very posh', in her words. (Manchester, 7/10) For Mrs. Crankshaw everyday dress was not as important, a skirt, a blouse a jumper, and later while she worked a jacket, but her fondness for imagination and the ability for clothes to make an event special are evident<sup>48</sup>. Her daughter, Linda, noted that she had a much more conservative style than her sister Joan, frequently wearing neutrals and occasionally pastels. Joan, however, who was

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<sup>48</sup> She shared the 'fairy' costume memory while remembering that as her father walked home with her a group of people passed by, and he asked her if she had heard them. She said no, and he replied well they said that she had been their favorite fairy of them all. This memory probably also helped her remember the outfit as well.

very fashion conscious, saw every day as a fashion opportunity. She read magazines, wore lipstick and high heels. Though trained as a milliner she could cut her own patterns and regularly made alterations. She also went on to teach Mrs. Crankshaw's daughter, Linda, her niece, who recalled her love of details and novelties. (Holden, 7/10)

As evidenced in this research home sewing covered many types of need; it could concern itself with the everyday mending, as well as revised outfits and objects to newly made items. Alongside the space to create were skill, desire, and companionship. It was in these spaces that memories of events and objects were created. There was not a clear-cut system to home sewing, for patterned objects would typically require a purchased pattern, the fabric, and the notions. A 're-done' item would only need minimal new materials or notions, and some items needed to be brought to a dressmaker, either a professional or someone similar to Mrs. Buie's grandmother Mrs. Howe, or Mrs. Stirling – someone trained - who whether working in the field or not 'took in' work at home. All of these would require a motivation and varying degrees of time spent in and out of the home with the decision-maker, the purchaser and perhaps the professional retailer or dressmaker.

Once the need was identified and idea had been formed, the shopping trip came next, representing a foray from the private (home) and the imagination to the retail and public world. If a pattern was chosen from a magazine it would still require the material and notions. When Mrs. Sheldon recollected the first dress she made and the trip to the shops, it included the special sales where you could pick out the fabric and pattern and the store would sew it up for you. (Sheldon, 6/09) As well, these retail sites had living room like salesrooms (image 24) where women could read magazines and pattern books in a home-like setting as they chose their fabrics and patterns. These types of home based settings could allay fears women had of the new intermingling classes, and it promoted consumption and the public world by creating a familiar 'domestic' setting through the very feminine activity of sewing. Cafes were built into draper's and department stores, and, according to a Mr. Schofield of Leeds, specifically as an attraction for the top floor, which it is always difficult to get customers to visit as buyers in the ordinary way. (*The Drapers Record*, 1934, p.31) Shopping patterns were a concern that did not go unnoticed by the retail trade. (*The Draper's Record*, 1934, p.31)

The influx of multiples and new retail methods were seen as a real threat to the traditional drapers outlet. In the Oct 15, 1932 issue of the trade journal, *The Draper's Record*, they noted the new forms of competition to the general drapers, which were co-operative

society trading, chain stores, specialty and fixed price shops, coupon trading and discount societies. (*The Draper's Record*, 1932, p.21) These new forms of stores had cast off old traditions and customs disregarding the amenities and services, which had been considered indispensable. These concerns prompted changes in all the stores. Fenwick's department store in Newcastle upon Tyne introduced cafes for customers to gather at and relax while shopping and was so successful it doubled in size. The café's location on the top floor drew shoppers into areas they normally would not go to. (*The Draper's Record*, 1934, p. 31) The most exciting addition though was in September 1932 when Messrs. Hammond, Drapers in Hull installed an escalator to the roof, now converted to a glass covered Dance Hall. (*The Draper's Record*, 1932, p.33) Home sewing took women out of the home, and those public spaces were now offering more opportunities to be 'modern'.

While franchise department stores may have been growing for the women interviewed, most kept their business practices local. In advertisements and listings in *The Draper's Record* the women's dressmaking department was growing. In October 1, 1932 the 'New Shops and Extensions' page noted the growth of a number of shops, including extensions to Holbrook's of Derby (draper's and children's outfitters), and 'Modiste' a ladies outfitting shop (in a renovated pub) and the second branch of a shop run by a Mr. A. Harris, who first opened in 1924, with the first branch opened in 1927. (*The Draper's Record*, 1932, p.24) The directories of Newcastle and regional towns and cities list a large variety of shops available to men and women, with far greater specialization than is seen today. Draper's shops, which sold fabric, were subdivided into linen, woollen, fancy and travelling. Alongside dressmakers there were ladies tailors, gown shops, outfitters and clothiers, milliners, hosiers and haberdashers and blouse makers. Not as common were the Singer sewing machine representatives, fancy needlework shops, corset makers, and a sole pattern maker. These existed alongside the department stores and new franchise stores such as Marks & Spencer's and Woolworths. (*Kelly's Directory*, Northumberland, 1925) An interesting difference to note is that few women owned 'travelling' draper's shops, but the majority of dressmakers were listed as single women. There was also an increase in stores with French names such as *Madame Lucie* and *Josephine et Cie*, both of these were located in central Newcastle. (*Kelly's Directory*, Northumberland, 1929) Jean Brown of the Embroiderer's Guild would go to a local factory to buy the off-cuts of material. (Brown, 5/10) Mrs. Alexander had a friend whose grandmother would sell second hand clothes out of her home in Low Fell, Gateshead, and she apparently did quite well. (Alexander, 6/09)

Women had a wide variety of store types to choose from and from the oral histories taken they reveal that other options would typically remain unrecorded.

Mrs. Sheldon's university friends did not do as much sewing themselves, but they did frequent dressmakers and specialty shops to find appropriate dresses for balls, socials and carnivals that the various university departments held. (Sheldon, 6/09) Church events were also an important social occasion. For these events specialist shops or departments were a common resource. In a 1933 programme for the Newcastle University Students "Rag Revue" (which also promoted an evening of dancing) draper's shops were one of the most prevalent advertisers. Of the thirty-five advertisements, five were for dress fabric shops, one for household fabric, and two were for laundry services, and one for women's toiletries. There was also the inside cover for Bainbridge's department store. (image 25) Mrs. Sheldon also mentioned that, 'there was not a great difference in cost between day and evening dresses, and a good ordinary summer frock would have cost about 1 guinea or approximately 1 pound 1 shilling and that the finish was always good'. (Sheldon, 6/09) As can be seen in this advertisement a frock would cost approximately 1 guinea. (image 26) Her experience is in keeping with Amy de La Haye's assertion that, 'It was the small, individually owned dress shop, which was the major outlet for fashionable womenswear during the inter-war years and especially during the 1920s...'. (1993, p.41) Options for women were numerous, but quality was still an issue whether it was with the finished product, or the material. The fact that Mrs. Sheldon remembered the name of a particular fabric in an era of many new fabrics is notable. (Sheldon, 6/09, see earlier Tobralco ref.) Frequently the newer materials such as rayon had trouble with washability and shrinkage, leaving them to be used for special events. (De La Haye, 1993, p.46). The increasing options for styles, fabrics, shopping and means of production meant women were negotiating a multitude of ways of determining their lives.

Going to the department store was a different experience. One could go to the store, choose a pattern and fabric and they would make it for you. Or there would be occasional specials where you could choose a pattern and fabric and they would sew it for you, leaving the cuffs and collars for you to finish. The women interviewed primarily remembered large local department stores such as Lewis' or Richmond's in Walsaw (near Birmingham) or Midland Drapery in Derby. (Sheldon, Thomas, 6/09) Special trips might be made for sales to Bainbridge's (now John Lewis) or Fenwick's in the Newcastle area. (Alexander, 6/09) The department stores tried to draw customers in with a more home-like atmosphere. The dressmaking department would have easy chairs for reading pattern books and magazines

in a lounge like setting. Later, after making your purchases you could go to the in-store café for a cup of tea. In the early 1930s a number of northern draper's and department stores had also seen the benefit of a café in the store. As Mr. C. Whitaker, publicity manager of Lewis's in Leeds, states, 'It has always been part of our policy to encourage people to "make a day of it" at Yorkshire's biggest store'. (*The Draper's Record*, 1932, p.33)

Specialty items were purchased in department stores, as mentioned by Mrs. Crankshaw who, along with her sister Joan, would go into Manchester to purchase tennis outfits at Kendal Mills (now House of Fraser). (image 27) It was a very modern store and would have carried specialty items. (Crankshaw, 7/10) When Mrs. Alexander reached her late teens her mother would more frequently suggest they buy a dress in a shop, rather than her making it. As she stated, 'Sometimes we would come back without anything'. This was often a question of whether or not they could alter the dress later. They were just as likely to spend a day shopping for fabrics that her mother would then sew into dresses, 'lovely' skirts or blouses. (Alexander, 6/09) The economics of how long one could wear a dress had to be considered in relation to the quality of shop goods, and individual taste.

Shops were not the only option for dresses; the dressmaker was also commonly used. Both were used for specific reasons but had slightly varying processes. As girls became young women their first 'special' dress was usually made by a dressmaker. Dressmakers were always local, usually (but not always) home-based, and had training. Typically, you would go to their shop, which could be the front room of their house or a specific shop front, and choose a pattern. The dressmaker would then tell you how much fabric to purchase, which you would purchase at a draper's. Some dressmakers would occasionally have fabric in their shop as well. You would return for two fittings and have a dress within two to three weeks. For something more basic or alterations you could frequent the dressmaker or you could go to a neighbour who might do the work in the evenings as well. Mrs. Buie's grandmother is an example of a neighbourhood dressmaker who trained and worked as a seamstress, then once married took in work to do at home. (Buie, 10/09) Less frequent as time went on was a woman who would come to your house.

Sewing, however, was not just about clothing. Objects for the home were of equal importance and required the same sense of purpose. Frequently embroidery patterns for dress and furniture were the same, (image 28) bringing the conflation of individual and family, body and space, home and homemaker together through sewing. The use of florals

further the breakdown of the outdoors entering the interior. (images 29) Whereas pattern had no clear interior/exterior delineation within the home the details were important. The style dividing line for the home was clearly marked. Bedrooms and living rooms were traditional, kitchens and bathrooms, the technology centres, were modern. Occasionally bedrooms were modern or they could be designed for men taking a much more masculine tone. This tone was often set by clean lines and dark woods. Embroidered design elements were limited.

The question then arises that if embroidery was not modern, what was the role of sewing in the home, and how were women defining modern or traditional? Magazines were filled with articles and design patterns defining themselves as modern preceded or followed by traditional featured items. As well the economic question of buying new furniture, or inheriting old furniture but making it 'yours' brought up another set of concerns. One of the ways to address this was through slipcovers. Women could be both economical – working with inherited pieces and doing the work themselves and modern - using new fabrics to create a new silhouette for the furniture. (image 30) Some of the benefits included their protection of expensive furniture, comfort, easily cleaned and enabling change to be introduced according to season or decorative innovations. (Rothery, 1923, pp. 207-208) They were also advised that, 'a fine antique will often look far lovelier when placed in a simple and dignified modern setting'. (Patmore, 1933, p.23) More common items would be tablecloths, doilies, duchess and tea service sets, tea towels, and decorative images. (image 31) Cushion covers were considered to be a perfect backdrop for a woman to apply both her time and talents, as long as she avoided trimming them with lace, fringe or tassels. (Rothery,1923, p.208) Much like a woman's life a degree of restraint and propriety had to be maintained.

On a broader scale bedspreads, draperies and portieres were still being used and were available surface to embellish. (image 32) However, the earlier overmantles were advised not to be used, 'in the winter they are dangerous and always look misplaced'. (Rothery,1923, p.205) As well there were new styles of window treatments to manage, including casement windows and picture windows. (image 33) Here, it was the fabric pattern that was more modern than the form. The new approach to the form was the lack of fringes, tassels and lace trimmings. However, homeowners were warned to not make decisions solely on pattern but on what suits the room. Women were warned from 'This tendency to choose the pattern rather than the curtain' it was important that like a

professional she must think of them as flexible, moveable walls. (Carrington, 1933, p.179)  
Window treatment fixtures as technology were new. This included curtain rods on brackets and flexible metal rod runners. (Rothery,1923, p.201)

Dressmaking and embroidery were not the only home sewing tasks women had to manage. The majority of women made their own curtains, or at least were able to hem them if needed. Draperies much like all furnishing was no longer heavy and ornate, ‘The modern tendency is to reduce draperies in furnishing to a minimum. Less is used...This, no doubt, is partly due to hygienic considerations, to desire for more air, and partly owing to the fact that it lessens labour.’ (Rothery,1926, p.198)

While the mother of one Embroiderer’s Guild member may have been slightly out of style, she was very economical by making her own velvet curtains by hand. An interesting divide in home sewing subject matter in magazines is that curtains were mentioned to be embroidered objects, but rarely touched upon were slipcovers or upholstery, whereas manuals treated upholstery as a hobby-level skill. Guidebooks on interior decorating also considered slipcovers and upholstery to be the norm. Cushion covers were a very common item for embellishment and the patterns were easily transferable to other items. Magazines frequently featured editorials on the versatility of embroidery patterns.

Important to the promotion of sewing and modern life was not only a simplified setting - clean lines, clean living- but a unified one. This included the use of a single embroidery pattern throughout a room - firescreens, anti-macassars, and cushions. In the bedroom, ‘Bedstead draperies should, of course, correspond with the window and other draperies’. (Rothery,1923, p.205) While modern may have meant clean lines and uniformity it seems it still allowed for individualization through textiles which could be personalized and updated to go with the changing fashions. Critic and design authority John Gloag agreed – writing a few years later he proposed that a certain amount of restraint is required, that brightness in rooms should come not from the walls but by the introduction of appropriate textiles, curtains, chair coverings, carpets and rugs. (Gloag and Mansfield, 1923, p.139)  
Textiles, a gendered medium, still had a place in the modern home.

Dresses may have been the first object girls made for themselves, and their homes may have been decorated per individual taste but there was no difference when it came to children’s clothes, all mothers made clothes for their children. This is also evidenced in the guidebooks and magazines. *The Big Book of Needlecraft* has sections on embroidery for

children, millinery for children and layettes. A number of magazines regularly had sections focusing on children's needs. Mrs. Thomas shared a story of children's clothing and embroidery when she had started school 'at age eleven at the grammar school - I had two friends who were only children and both their mothers made them lovely clothes. And we were given this picture of a school uniform and these two mothers thought the blouses rather plain, so they embroidered little flowers and things on the collars and that wasn't approved of. The teacher told them that that would have to come off'. (Thomas, 6/09)

Mrs. Alexander mentioned that both she and her mother continued to make clothes for her son when he was born. (Alexander, 6/09) When asked if her mother had made her clothes Mrs. Sheldon replied, 'Oh she did, she made me a lot of clothes and one year when I was about seven-ish we were going away. We always went away in the summer for a fortnight and she made me, she made me fourteen little dresses'. These all had matching panties, and she continued to note that fabric then was quite inexpensive, which is a recollection a number of women had. (Sheldon, 6/09)

### **OBJECT ANALYSIS**

The spectrum of response to home sewing from the boredom of learning how to sew in school to the excitement of being able to create one's own dress parallels the varied experience of sewing. While ubiquitous, sewing had a role within the family and each family responded differently. This section begins with a discussion of the variety of experiences women had with home sewing and the family. Following is an analysis of the work of two women who had kept and shared some of their needlework. Both were quite modest in regard to their skill level and did not speak of a fondness of it, but both women kept their work. They are interesting examples of the mix of stitches, subject matter and pattern design. Seemingly simplistic, both pieces actually apply fairly abstract design techniques. creating more complex analysis.

Sewing was a family affair, and the memories are strong, creating self-perceptions of skill, talent and familial roles. Needlework, of the non-exertive type, such as embroidery, would often be left to the ill, while the more physically intensive sewing of using a treadle or hand sewing machine would be left to another family member. Mrs. Alexander also had a sister who was in ill health and was the more 'talented' of the two. She noted that while she learned to sew and do needlework it was really her sister's *forte*. (Alexander, 6/09)

One member of the embroiderer's guild would vacation with an aunt who was a tailor in South Shields and she taught her how to sew and embroider. She revealed that she,

‘couldn’t draw or paint, but could do anything with a thread’. (Whitley Bay, 5/10)

However, artistic talent was not always conveyed into needlework, for example Mrs. Thomas’s younger sister was an artist, and she did not ‘do needlework’. (Thomas, 6/09)

Workloads and responsibilities would result in the sewing be meted out. Mrs. Lavell’s grandmother was a trained tailoress who worked for a Jewish tailor in Liverpool. She took on the role as the main seamstress in her daughter’s family, with whom she lived, of which there were 7 daughters (her grandchildren), while her other daughter, who was in poor health, helped with the housework. (Lavell, 6/09) One woman did not mention that her mother had passed away while she was a child, yet she has vivid memories of her mother teaching her various needlework skills.<sup>49</sup> Mrs. Brown, 80, of the Embroidery Guild had a grandmother who lived with them who taught her, but later had a neighbour who was a professional and would, ‘show you how to do something with dressmaking, but not do it for you’. (Brown, 5/10) Another member had an aunt who had been a manageress at the Co-op in the department which sold notions and thread, and, while her mother did not sew, two of her aunts did. (Whitley Bay, 5/10)

The pride or insecurity women had about their work was evident. The resulting sense of satisfaction played a large part in their participation with sewing later in life. Mr. Stirling’s mother, Florence, of North Islington, London, was one of 10 children and had a sister who sewed coats, a highly skilled job which she admired, even though her own position as a cutter was one of the highest in the clothing industry and dominated by men. (Stirling, 6/09) Mrs. Thomas remained doubtful of her skills, yet had retained a number of finely done pieces. (Thomas, 6/09) Mrs. Crankshaw was very close to her older sister Joan, but it was Joan who was the ‘fashionable’ one in the family. Joan had apprenticed at Kendal Mills department store (now the House of Fraser) as a milliner at the age of fourteen and would later work at various boutiques around the upscale towns of Cheadle and Chester. (Booth, 7/10) Teaching her niece Linda Holden how to sew, Linda has distinct memories of the great pleasure her aunt took not only in making clothes, but also in fashion and trends in general. (Booth, 7/10) Yet even Mrs. Crankshaw, who did not place a great deal of importance on sewing, kept a number of her pieces as well. (Crankshaw, 7/10)

Shown here (image 34) is an example of Mrs. Thomas’ handiwork. It is a tray cloth (40 x 25 cm) of white cotton, with a linen-like weave embellished with a border that is both a

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<sup>49</sup> This information was told to me by the colleague who introduced us, and in reviewing the interview, this woman was able to tell her story and avoid what was obviously a painful memory.

geometric and a stylized floral pattern. The placement of the flower resting on the leaves creates an image of an abstracted bowl shape leaf, one where an entire flower (perhaps a lotus?) would have been placed singularly in the bowl. Excluding the actual flower it is embroidered in three shades of green, a dark green for the geometric, a pale green for the leaves and stem, and a slightly paler green for a decorative stitch which the flower 'rests' in. Around the flower are six small abstracted leaves in the same dark green of the geometric border. The flower itself is embroidered in different shades of orange: dark, light and medium orange, in no particular pattern. There are three rounded outer, base petals, interspaced by three overlapping, smaller double row, petals, almost horseshoe shaped. There are three flowers per border band. Each flower is set above the decorative pale scrolls in pale green, which rest against the stems of the leaf branches. Each of these consists of three leaves and a spiral at the end of the stem. These curved leaf branches interrupt the geometric dark green border. Overall all the stitches seem to be stem or satin stitches, except for the small abstracted leaves, which are done in a fern stitch. While at first glance this may be mistaken for a fairly commonplace design, its simplicity belies an interesting combination of design tools. There are two primary colours – green and orange, but there are three tones of each used. A realistic leaf design set against a geometric border with an abstract flower above it. The design is not simply of three individual elements, but creates a flower in a vase image, offset by a dark border. The interlacing of the leaf border and geometric border in contrasting tones of green creates an undulating movement, that softens the geometry and acts as a foil for the leaves, creating more movement to the overall design. While the stitchwork is not complex in nature it is quite small and would require dexterity to do well.

Mrs. Crankshaw's tablecloth (image 35 a-c) is much more complex in design and skill, but more traditional in pattern. It is a white cotton tablecloth with a round centre and four projecting ovals in each corner (70 cm at the widest point, 52 cm for the body of the tablecloth). The centre consists of two circles, the innermost plain, unembellished (~20 cm) which was appliquéd onto thinner cotton, creating a narrow band around the inner circle. This is surrounded by another circular band that has been embroidered with a taupe-coloured honeycomb or pebble pattern interspersed with small floral flowerbuds. This is surrounded by yet another narrow band of thinner cotton. The four circles, from the outside: a narrow circle of thin cotton, wider embroidered pattern circle, narrow circle of thin cotton, and a final inner circle of plain cotton are all appliquéd on with a pale pink thread around each circle. The inner circle is slightly offset.

In each rounded side of the tablecloth is a floral garden scene consisting of daisy like flowers in a variety of colours: pink, orange, yellow, blue, purple and white. The flowers in the centre are on long visible stalks while the flowers on the edge of the border are low to the 'ground'. The ground and the stalks are embroidered in a mid-tone green, all the flowers have contrasting or dark stigma. The oval or ellipticized corners are decorated with a 'lady-in-crinoline' image. A mid-Victorian era dressed woman with a hoop skirt, large puffed, short sleeves and a bowed bodice carrying a bouquet of flowers is also featured. She strikes a demure pose with a bent head covered by a flower embellished hat and long, brown wavy hair. Her pale pink dress is appliquéd on the cloth with the outline of the figure and the folds of her dress and pale blue flowers embroidered. Her hair is embroidered outside of the appliqué. The bouquet in her right hand consists of a yellow flower with green leaves and a white, lace pattern border. Her left hand is lifting part of her large skirt, and the bodice has four small darker blue bows. In the very bottom corner is a cluster of two small flowers and leaves, much like the side border decoration.

Overall there is an appliquéd centre, decorative piece consisting of a plain inner circle and a narrower band of simply embroidered honeycomb pattern; each is surrounded by a circle of thinner, more transparent cotton. Each is bordered by pink stitching. This has been sewn into the centre of the tablecloth, which was cut away. There are four side panels of a flower garden with each corner of the tablecloth elongated into an oval or ellipse and embellished with an appliqué of a Victorian woman. The entire tablecloth is embroidered in a pale pink stitch creating a slight ruffle effect.

The unusual shape and use of appliqué and embroidery belie the traditional patterns and colours. There is a greater variety of stitchwork involved, including a satin, stem and bullion as well as the appliqué. The entire border is embroidered as well. The colours are naturalistic, and the material thin, giving the tablecloth a 'dainty' and 'feminine' feel to it. There are abstractions found in the honeycomb or pebble pattern in the second circular inner band, creating a stone path or wall around which one might find the flowers growing or a woman walking. From its smaller dimension it can be concluded that it was not designed for a dining table but a smaller occasional table upon which an object such as a vase or lamp might have been placed on the plain inner circle.

Similar type design options were found in the embroidery transfer patterns, magazine inserts and in the collection at the Beamish Museum. (image 36) The lady-in-crinoline motif is also seen the ad from the June 1926 issue of *Ideal Home* (image 37) where she is

seen doing the very feminine domestic task of doing the laundry. In the Whitworth Gallery collection is a cushion case embroidered with small beads in a design of a lady-in-crinoline walking in a lush flower garden, flower basket in hand, a billowing cloud in the background. (image 38) It is a densely embroidered pattern with equally strong design in the pattern of her dress. Her face, which is turned away from the viewer and further hidden by her green bonnet. The large puff sleeves and the body of her skirt are embroidered in brow with the same stylized white blossom pattern found in the garden flower. The bodice of her dress is in gold with a panel for what may be buttons down the centre. The full skirt, which fills two-thirds of the image, has a centre panel with a green ground and brown blossoms to counter the rest of the skirt. The bottom ruffle is punctuated with upside-down triangles of green outlined in gold. Her arms are seemingly covered in full-length gloves. In the same collection is *Embroidery* magazine in which Elizabeth F. Monk admonishes readers in 'Our Daughters Are Not Taught Embroidery' in regard to the use of the 'crinoline lady' as a design motif, for it was not only the skill but also the appropriate message that was being disseminated through embroidery that they need to be aware of:

'the inevitable crinoline lady, strolling leisurely through a garden of gaudy flowers, when women were sufficiently modest and demure to hide their faces beneath poke bonnets and wandered aimlessly about within their own homes gardens. It breathed the spirit of the age, and if for no other reason should be abandoned because it is as out of date as the crinoline itself'. (1933, p.37)

This should be of concern because, 'the modern girl is the product of an age of motion and activity, speed and travel, enterprise and adventure...there is a wide scope for the girl of artistic taste to express in embroidery the spirit of her own time'. (1933, p.37) Clearly for the serious embroiderer it was not just the skill but also the meaning behind the work that should be relevant to women. Not only should girls be taught to embroider but in doing so be true to themselves and their modern experience. The crinoline lady, while appropriate for her time, was not relevant to the inter-war embroiderer.

An additional image is found in previously discussed *Home Chat* (image 39) in a feature for Mab's Patterns, where a woman in a stylized crinoline dress, is dancing with a man in a tuxedo, specifically advertising patterns for 'frocks for dances, dinners, restaurants and theatres designed by Mabs.' (1923, p.258) Cynthia Ross in *Twenties London* discusses the portrayal of women in the marketing character from a 1920s cigarette ad, a marionette-type woman in a large crinoline style dress, a 'master-puppeteer manipulating small men on

strings'. (2003, p.48) She was meant to promote a brand of cigarettes, Ardath, to women, aligning smoking with their new independence. (2003, p.48) (image 40)

The lady-in-crinoline, feminine, delicate, immobilized by her awkward and unnatural dress, was a symbol of the conflicted views of inter-war middle class women, modernity, and good taste, all themes frequently meeting in needlework. She was a revivalist symbol of domesticity and femininity in an age when women's dress which was meant to be freeing and a marker of modernity, but was oddly, somewhat androgynous. The cigarette company used a variation of her for the very (traditionally) unfeminine act of smoking and dominating men. The use of the crinoline lady linked the feminine with nature, the outdoors, as she was typically located in a garden or with flowers. She captured an aspect of challenge of modern femininity; linking her assumed daintiness and fragility with nature, trapping her in historic dress in a garden setting (walking not actually gardening and becoming dirty). Both her dress and location captured the tension of possible immobility that was found between the choice of domestic revivalism and fast-paced modernity found in the inter-war period in Britain.

The usage of the crinoline lady as a motif also raises the question of taste in the inter-war crafts revival as evidenced when Pat Kirkham notes the anger of local members when a Nottinghamshire NFWI exhibition organizer refused to display a paper nightdress case in the form of a crinoline lady made by a local member. (Goodenough, 1977, cited in 1995, p.179) The national organizer was not shown a warm welcome for '[conforming] to contemporary notions of "good" straightforward design represented by the Design and Industries Association, which often used contrasting photographs of objects to show "good" and "bad" design'. (Kirkham and Plummer, 1985 cited in 1995, p.178) The young woman embroidering and encountering this image of a feminine 'ideal' had no relationship to the image being sewn, her life was different, yet they were both, to a certain extent, encumbered by expectations of idealized femininity and the social expectations of their time. Their relationship through needlework was bound by more than a needle pulling thread, but by ideas of who they were meant to be – historicized, traditional, and idealized. Just as magazines captured young women sitting on an ottoman with their head down working away at their femininity so did these women capture the past feminine ideals in their domestic, hand-made objects.

Both Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Crankshaw had been modest about their abilities but kept these items (amongst others). Clearly a degree of pride is involved, not only in the

aesthetics, but in their abilities. They were continuing with the tradition of women spending their free time being creative, being domestic and in doing so, ultimately, being feminine in a socially appropriate way. Embroidering domestic items for their future was a common activity, based upon the tradition of building a dowry. For middle class women it was both socially appropriate and promoted through various discourses. They were educated at school, at home and through the public: print media, radio, and the retail world. It is not surprising with conditioning of this kind that to discard such items would be difficult. Time, talent and aspirations were sewn into the teatray cloths, tablecloths and handkerchiefs.

The discovery of two dresses<sup>50</sup>, one from a family, the other from an on-line auction site has made it possible to initiate an investigation of home sewing from the perspectives of collection practice: archiving, preservation and access. How the dresses came to be discovered and their stories reveal as much about them as it does the cultural status of home sewing and the conditions that affect its value. This chapter will look at dresses from public and private collections relating them through their formal qualities and how and why they have been made, preserved and accessed. Placing museum collection pieces alongside 'private' dresses for analysis allows three different processes of making - homemade, dressmaker and manufacturer - to be highlighted and questioned and to approach broader scholarship issues of women's history and the role of fashion in it. Earlier mention of how fashion scholars have approached fashion historically is a part of this evolution and part of feminist history as well. An understanding of this relationship strengthens our understanding of why the everyday may have been forgotten, or mislaid.

This research analyses the homemade, dressmaker-made, and manufactured dresses from across the two decades of the inter-war period. By comparing 'vetted' collection pieces, those acknowledged by professionals, with privately acquired and kept dresses, a knowledgeable analysis can be made in assessing the private dresses. It is also an opportunity to analyse the methods of sewing; one can discern the differences and highlight the validity of the concerns of 'finish' that women had in the inter-war period. In this section two types of dresses from three different processes of making will be reviewed/discussed for their production process and for their purpose in relation to broader scholarship issues and in comparison to each other. They include day and eveningwear

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<sup>50</sup> A sample of two dresses, not from recognized collections, is reflective of the state of the availability of vintage everyday clothing in regard to research availability. 'Dance' dresses and eveningwear are much more readily available.

made by home-sewers, professional dressmakers and retail manufacturers. A review of the collecting experience as evidenced in this research will lead to more specific questions of how they have come to be collected, archived, and lastly, how we can access them today.

When a search of museum collections for the homemade unearthed primarily a wealth of couture dresses or evening gowns, typically those made for the wealthy, it was the homemade dresses that became the rare and precious items. Visits were made to the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester, The Bankfield Museum, Halifax and the Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, County Durham. Of these three, only the Beamish Museum had collected and maintained a broad collection of everyday wear from the inter-war period.<sup>51</sup> While this research does not comparatively assess why collections have been formed, it can and does question how a culture values the everyday and its impact on contemporary culture. In particular, with fashion, it asks how to address value in a culture when the popularity of 'vintage' clothing has been increasing. Just as the women who sewed were searching for their authentic selves so too were the vintage shoppers; searching for the authentic in the act of creating themselves. A new understanding of ideas of authenticity and cultural validity can inform collectors. What is the professional stance on the value of these goods, and how are they to be assessed? In the desire to attain the (or be) authentic the current confusion of the terms 'vintage' with 'retro' must be addressed, along with the resultant risks for the private collector or consumer.

Museums are typically the first place to look for historical items being collected and archived. Depending upon the collections policy of the museum at any given time in its history it may come into a vast array of goods, which have little to no known provenance. When this is coupled with the shortage of staff to manage all the items, archiving and preservation of the unknown are not typically a priority. In a written query of Kate Reeder, the Keeper of Social History and Collections Administration at the Beamish Living Museum, she states that the museum does have a focus on 'representing the clothing of the working and middle class people of the Northeast in order to 'represent the history of the North'. (2011) Reeder believes problems have arisen from a lack of active collection leading to gaps in the collection, especially as costume rarely survives. Current collection policies include concerns of provenance, condition and perceived gaps within the collection. These issues include the under-used and properly focused as rationalized

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<sup>51</sup> Other collections were looked at but had negligible quantity of everyday wear including the Bowes Museum and Bath Museum of Costume. The Platt Hall Museum, Manchester has inter-war clothing but not a great deal of everyday dresses. Furthermore, it was closed for the majority of time this research was being done.

according to the museum's mission. According to Reeder the everyday wear and homemade, which are represented, are considered to be essential to representing the people of the northeast. (2011) It does have an extensive collection of materials relating to the everyday, from clothing, domestic objects to print material. The costume collection is broad, including wedding gowns, hats, shoes, gloves, and clothing for adults and children. Household objects holdings are also extensive, including overmantles, tablecloths, doilies, and curtains. This is supplemented with a wide-ranging collection of ephemera including catalogues and magazines. As such it gives an excellent overview of clothing issues from the late eighteenth century onward.

This concern with preservation and access is a particular interest for historians and collectors. It becomes relevant in this research specifically because the early dressmaking memories for women were so significant, yet the dresses were not saved. While families *occasionally* keep hold of dresses, they only rarely become available outside the family. Unfortunately the lack of knowledge of materials and appropriate preservation by family members too often leave the items in poor condition. While they may languish in attics and cupboards, (at worst used as dress-up clothes for children) they are still however considered sentimentally valuable. Stories are passed down and facts occasionally confused, but the object is kept. Dresses were frequently recycled, passed along as hand-me-downs, or re-configured; they were not kept. The transitory nature of fashion was assisted with the continuous printing of articles on how to re-work one's clothing from season to season.

Fabrics have a lifespan, and the re-use and constant handling of them diminishes it. However, as evidenced in this research, domestic objects were more likely to be preserved. Perhaps the size or functionality of the object lent itself to easier preservation or more long-term usefulness. As noted, no stories were retold of the repurposing of a tablecloth, whereas dresses were more frequently re-worked.

Following is a review of these issues through six dresses, four of which, coming from the Beamish collection, fulfilled the criteria of a collection of middle-class wear. It is in this collection that four dresses were found: two day and two evening; two store bought, one homemade and one dressmaker-made. As a museum has a body of knowledge about their collection they are used to identify the 'unknown' factors and all dresses will be utilized to answer questions about one another. Using these dresses as the 'control' sample, they are

analysed alongside a homemade evening gown from a family collection, and a 'vintage' day dress assumed to be dressmaker-made, purchased through an on-line auction. It is an opportunity to look at dresses from the point of manufacture, and to compare and contrast dresses which were professionally done with the homemade, as well as look at dresses from three different types of 'making'; manufactured, dressmaker, home-sewn. This creates a well-rounded picture of the experience of daily life and the options women had to choose from in inter-war Britain.

Following is a formal analysis of the dresses by type detailing their methods of production along with what provenance may be known about them.

## THE EVENING GOWNS

The first evening gown (1985.138.3) (image 41) is from the Beamish collection and made in 1935, attached to the inside of the back of the gown is the label 'Romney Model'. It is a gold taffeta with slightly paler cream-coloured polka dots, creating a tone-on-tone effect. It has a v-neck with a Shirred bodice and wide sleeves, cut on the bias; the back is also v-shaped which squares off with pleats downward to a gathered 'bustle-style' bow. A 3.8cm wide belt of the same taffeta material wraps around at the natural waist. There is a 24.76 cm zipper on the left side of the bodice 3.8 cm under the arm. The skirt flares out, made of three triangular panels of increasing heights from right to left creating a wide sweep of the skirt. It is labelled a size 42. In contemporary sizing this would be a British size 16 but in centimetres it is only 81.2cm waist, 94cm bust, 99cm hip. Accounting for a flowing cut in the hip, the dress by contemporary standards is closer to a size 10 not 16. The bias cut verifies the dating of the year of manufacture, along with the overall style of the dress. It has many of the trademark features of the 1930s, with a V-cut back, bias cut, and natural waist.

The second evening gown in the Beamish collection is a dress (1978.685) (image 42) from the early half of the 1920s in a dark navy artificial silk. It is a densely woven fabric giving it a heavy weight used with a laces or 'filet' lace (net lace with a pattern in it) and beadwork for decorative effect. The decorative pattern on the lace is not easily discernible but blockish in style. The dress is comprised of two parts: the dress which has a beige cotton muslin vest attached to the navy skirt, and second part of an 'over-jacket' of blue artificial silk and lace with a decorative belt at the waist. The front and back of the top of the dress are similar, v-neck with lace insets and a gathered belt which is wider at the centre than at the ends (7.62/4.45cm) and gathers at the sides with fabric rosettes. On the

right side of the bodice are four snaps from under the arm to the rosette where there is a hook and eye fastener. This is different from other dresses analyzed where the fasteners are on the left side of the bodice. At the shoulders is a narrow band sewn made of the fabric that matches that found on the v-neck. Also along the edge of the v-neck is a band of six to seven four-petalled flowers consisting of round and long iridescent black beads. The same style band of six beaded flowers adorn the wide end (6.25" 15.875 cm) of the full length sleeve. The bodice is worn over the aforementioned muslin vest which is attached to the skirt. The skirt is made up of side panels of the lacin lace and beaded artificial silk. The hem is scalloped with side panels of the lacin lace and inverted upward angled pleats of the silk with beading on the outermost section of the fold. The beadwork includes not only the same flower but also a more geometric, stylized pattern dropping downward toward the flower of lines, arrowheads, a large oval and small circles. The style, quality of needlework, beadwork and the customization of the fasteners would suggest this to be made by a dressmaker for a left-handed customer for a winter event.

The third dress, (image 43) from a family collection, is a homemade evening gown made by Mrs. Kathleen Dangerfield Knight, born in 1893 in Ramsbury, Wiltshire. She made her own clothes and her wedding dress, which was not saved. According to her granddaughter she loved to go out dancing. She had a hand treadle sewing machine with a wooden cover, which was portable and used in the dining room. The dress has been stored in a plastic dry cleaners bag in a wardrobe. Mrs. Stead wore it to a party at a university in the early 1970s, and it has occasionally been worn around the house, to just try it on. The primary concern is how to clean and maintain it to preserve it.

The dress is a two-piece evening ensemble. It is a pale pink full-length evening gown of satin and cotton tulle with a matching quilted satin bolero jacket. The gown is made with a centre bodice piece creating a drop waist and two side gore panels creating a slightly flared skirt. The lower third of the dress is made of two layers of cotton tulle over satin with an upper border of gathered or swagged satin. The neckline leads to cap sleeves of cotton tulle, which may have been starched to maintain their fullness.<sup>52</sup> A band of gathered satin runs from the front of the shoulder to the back under the tulle. There are two snaps along the left side of the bodice under the arm. The matching bolero jacket is of the same pale pink satin material that has horizontal quilted double lines every 2cm, with cap sleeves 15cm long. The small pointed collar has contrasting zigzag quilting. There are four

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<sup>52</sup> In conversation with Barbara W., pattern cutting technician at NU fashion department. (May, 2011)

covered buttons and the bottom of the jacket curves upward toward the buttons. It is lined with a slightly lighter coloured satin. The quantity of hand stitching and quality of machine sewing confirm the family story of the dress being home sewn by the grandmother.

Aside from stylistic differences, the navy evening dress is clearly from the early 1920s, and the two others are from the 1930s. Each dress shows a great deal of detail work that would not have been used on a day dress, nor could the average home sewer have made it. The complexity of design and decorative detail would make it a more expensive item. The Romney dress is clearly marked with a store label and has finely finished hems and complex details - Shirred bodice, bustle, and multi-panel skirt. The homemade dress is simpler in design; cut on the bias as was popular in the 1930s, as was the Romney, but upon looking at the inside seams the lack of finish shows the clear mark of handmade work. (image 44) The seamstress knew how to sew, but there is less detailing and less finish to edges along with more handsewn sections. Both the Romney and the blue dress are in excellent condition, showing little wear, preserved by the family shows signs of wear with stains on the bodice and tears in the tulle, and needs to be cleaned.

## DAY DRESSES

There are two day dresses reviewed from the Beamish collection and one from a private collection. The first of these dresses is from the Beamish collection (1970.148), (image 45) it is made of an artificial silk crepe with multi-coloured floral print on a white ground. The colours include lime green, yellow, red, dusty blue, and taupe. The dress has a natural waistline with three snaps down the left side of the waist, cap sleeves (10.25cm), and a round neckline, which would lie just below the collarbone. At the centre of the neckline are three vertically placed bows made in the shape of multi-petalled flowers in the same print fabric as the dress. A thin belt was originally at the waist but is now missing. The dress falls at about mid-calf length, and has a detail of a *godet*-like panel of fabric (21.59cm wide at the base/30.48 cm long) along the seam, of the same dress fabric. A traditional *godet* would be set into the skirt of the dress; this is a panel of fabric sewed into the seam that would create the same movement effect of 'fluttering' out as the wearer moved. The bust is 86.36 cm, the waist is 76.2cm and the hip 96.52cm. There is no sizing or labels and from the stitchwork one can see evidence of hand-finishing of average quality work. The museum has it labelled from 1940 but this assessment would reassess it to be from the mid-1930s, as a later dress would have slightly more structured silhouette, and the use of

movement, as would have been emphasized by the godet-like panels, were a feature of an earlier style dress.

The second day dress (1976.57) (image 46) is from the Beamish collection and purchased from a store. It is a green crepe de chine with a label marked Marlbeck, from between 1925-1929. The dress has a v-neck front placket with an appliquéd band that criss-crosses into a diamond at the bottom. It has a drop waist with a band across the front of the dress and inverted pleats around the entire dress. The front pleats have decorative embroidery, creating an arrowhead design at the top. The cuffs at the bottom of the full-length sleeves have snaps at the narrow bands. The overlock stitch is found along the edges of the fabric, but is not as tightly stitched as found on the earlier discussed blue dress.

The last of the day dresses is from a private collection (image 47) and is made from a crêpe material and in the styles of a mid-1920s day dress. It has a drop waist with pleated skirt and short sleeves. It has a navy blue ground with a cream print of alternating double and single rows of floral stripes. It is fabric that was printed then creped, as evidenced by the lack of breaks in the print. The pattern of the fabric is very unusual to have been manufactured more recently, indeed it is strongly reminiscent of that of a pattern made in the Wiener Werkstätte workshop in the early 1920s. (image 48) While it is unusual for fabric to maintain its qualities over so many decades it is not impossible. But material and stitching from a dress worn or stored for that long would not last.

While the sewing evidences that it is home made by a skilled sewer there is also handstitching. Questions arise from the use of nylon interface at the collar, and nylon thread along hemlines. Due to these conditions and the lack of wear that would normally be found on clothing of this era a question arises to the authenticity of the dress. It is believed that the fabric is original, the pattern may have been original, but the period when it was made was much more recent. The use of nylon and the lack of wear are the primary reasons for this conclusion.

One question that arises comes from the overlock stitch found on the edge of the fabric. Used to keep fabric from fraying, it is commonly believed that this stitch was not used in the inter-war period. While this was most likely done in the making up of the dress it was not unknown in the inter-war period. However, upon inspection of a dress in the Beamish collection we find that a very similar stitch was used – not as tightly stitched but extremely similar to the overlock. This overlock stitch is also seen in the olive green silk day dress

that was store bought and in the Beamish collection. This can also be seen in this handmade coin purse of the period. (image 49)

From the analysis of these dresses it is evident that detail and finish were the key differences between a homesewn dress and one made by a dressmaker or manufacturer. A competent seamstress as Mrs. Knight or the maker of the print day dress could add detail while maintaining a simple form. Day dresses were typically more modest, with less overt detail. Typically, as seen by these dresses, due to the importance of the occasion, when more of a woman was on public display, evening wear would be bought or custom made. This is not only evidenced by the museum collections but in the narratives of Mrs. Crankshaw and Sheldon. However, a confident home sewer such as Mrs. Knight could successfully produce a more simplified design such as the pink evening gown. The amount of detailing is where the variation can be seen. Day dresses could be quite simple to more detailed and inexpensively made. The increase in inexpensive materials and simple lines made home sewing a possibility and an easy learning tool. Dressmakers still played a role, as evidenced by collections and oral histories. The increase in detail or complexity of the dress would be the mark of a dressmaker.

If one were to attempt to purchase any of these dresses today using the aforementioned definitions, all of these dresses, excluding one, would fall under the label of vintage. They are between 50-100 years old of all original materials and construction, with no alterations. The only dress of indeterminate labelling – at best retro – is the blue print day dress bought at an on-line auction site. The conclusion would have to be it is a retro 1920s dress. The difficulty is in identifying if the material is original or a reproduction. A reproduction of this style would be unusual, but for an original material to be preserved this well is even more unusual. Other than the fabric, the use of nylon thread and a viscose facing material also invalidate its authenticity. Material questions aside, it has been made with an authentic mid-twenties pattern, and the construction is either homemade by a very competent sewer or professionally made, and is early twenty-first century.

This dress speaks to the contemporary interest in historic clothing or costume but also to the concerns of authenticity and being sure we have a clear understanding of everyday fashion. Homemade does not mean it did not have parameters, and the broadening world of accessibility to goods requires more information. Women had options in the inter-war period, for social events, shopping and making of clothing. There were concerns of quality, appearance and wearability. These same questions affect scholars, collectors and

consumers today. How does one assess any material good? How do we acknowledge our history through the known or the unknown? When the known objects, are placed next to items with gaps of information or with possible multiple interpretations the information can create a history in its entirety. Home sewing, with its gaps in quality, authorship, collections and narratives can piece together not only individual but collective knowledge when looked at alongside more standardized forms of history, skills and collections. Greater accessibility to this information will allow us to understand not only private lives but also public history.

The problems which arise in handling the home sewn from all three sources: museums, families and the web, are similar; a vague history, a lack of cataloguing, and a certain degree of disdain for its value. Without a 'known' maker value can only come from the skill discerned, market demand or what little history may have been passed down. These reflect larger concerns of collecting, archiving and access. From a research perspective these have an impact on why home sewn objects have not been valued and researched. This goes further to indicate academic and cultural positions toward authorship, class and the everyday. Why we choose to collect and preserve objects, how they are archived and the overall public access to them reflect both personal and broader value systems within a culture.

Home sewing allows an individual to create their own private perception of a public view of themselves. When individuals or families start to keep these home sewn items they become collections. These are no longer just objects, but objects that create a narrative unto themselves as a 'group' of goods. Museums may also do the same. But their 'fractured and partial' manner leaves questions behind, the points which historians must connect to create a whole. The role of the archive and home sewing as an archive is worthy of a more in-depth analysis. How the anonymous, homemade object figures into the matrix of value and knowledge can be an unknown, and risks being slotted as less than valuable when the hierarchies of knowledge and collection are assessed.

Quantity, ironically, is the one factor that becomes difficult to define. Mass production, by traditional standards, does not show skill, and the material is not commonly rare. Along with these factors, popular demand is not always a qualifier for museum collections. Yet, the homemade, that which is rare in quantity, and may reflect design trends, is not commonly valued either, regardless of the level of skill. Authorship, in terms of creation, as we can assume that the wearer and creator are the same, at least through a majority of

the process; is the missing factor. Historians today must ask why is the everyday woman's life not a valid historic experience? The ability to place a name, event and material together to create a narrative is important in authenticating the everyday, so why are the experiences of the Mrs. Sheldon's, Crankshaw's and Thomas' not worth remembering and archiving? These items and stories can create an archive which, as Colomina states allows, 'the scholar to wander through the material as the *flâneur* wanders through the arcades of Paris, which are neither interior nor exterior'. (1994, pp.11-12) Their stories are both public and private, that of an individual and a society and their relationship. Does their specificity lose the charm of the unknown instead of revealing their worlds more clearly? In the world of vintage is the buyer's role of taking the next step in creating history more important and more authentic than its past? Or does the gap of knowledge of 'whom' create an aura of mystery and unknown that exoticizes or mythologizes the everyday? Museum collections being the basis of our knowledge of an object's history, then, are directly impacted by the personal taste and interests of the wealthy who had the time and financial resources to collect. Immediately, issues of class are evident in the development of fashion history.

By approaching design as a practice, its initial and most necessary step, the making, along with particular periods of time, particular lives and objects can be analyzed and assessed, bringing to light new information. Historians can then understand design as a 'whole' practice not isolated from its inspiration or materials, or maker/user. Designs link to identity and representations of self are an avenue of research that highlights the broader social impact of design. This is evident when we investigate how the process of making creates demands on space, technology (and vice-versa) daily habits and value. We see that it requires the individual to respond to their socio-cultural environment in a thoughtful and considered way. Discovering these objects and goods and the stories behind them, through both makers and scholars allows for a more complete understanding of the role of home sewing in the lives of middle-class women in inter-war Britain. It aligns concepts of femininity and identity and possibility within the home, on the bodies and in the ephemera, the designed stuff, of everyday life.

## **Conclusion**

In design history the topic of home sewing is rarely discussed. This is particularly the case in the interwar period in Britain where an interest in home sewing has been superseded by the appeal of studying the new retail shops, mass production and the constant changing fashion and new ideas of domesticity. The story of how an everyday design practice evolved and altered with these changes has become lost. As a traditional practice it was not commonly perceived as modern, or having a role in modernity. As Burman suggests, 'The ordinariness and domesticity of home dressmaking would seem to have contributed to its invisibility and the lack of analytical purchase on the part of historians in related fields'. (1999, p.3) Solely and mistakenly defined as mundane by its nature of being everyday, as one of a number of chores for women to fulfil in her daily life, home sewing has been overlooked as an equally creative practice which played a role in helping a young woman define her femininity.

The aim of this thesis has been to bring to light the role of home sewing as an everyday practice in the construction of femininity in inter-war Britain. It has reviewed the conditions of the interwar period to identify factors which have made the role home sewing unique in a period of constant change. It has highlighted the on-going relevance of home sewing, despite these changes, and the actual role it had not only in daily life, but in that of an individual creating their public identity. These have all been related through the extensive use of both primary source material and oral histories, grounded in contemporary theoretical concepts and new understandings, which have successfully supported each other throughout this thesis.

This research contributes to the knowledge of an everyday design practice, specifically home-sewing. Whereas Burman overviews sewing, and Buckley theorizes its role this research deconstructs home sewing, understanding it as a significant practice which impacted femininity. It is distinctive in its focus on the practice of design as the integral and most significant aspect of design for both the individual and the historian analyzing the relevance of design. Furthermore, it uniquely assesses design as a process, a series of steps telescoping in on those steps to create a full picture of what design is through practice. It has taken earlier studies such as Grace Lee-Maffei and John A. Walker production-consumption-mediation paradigms and expanded their potential with original insight into how to research design history. In deconstructing an understudied topic such as home-sewing it allows for the relevance of design as an everyday practice to be reinforced which then impacts identity formation and our understanding of specific periods of time, along with particular demographics. It creates new comprehension of how women used design, and all of its processes, to develop their sense of themselves. For design history in particular it allows us to

reassess how a society values people, practices and objects through its collecting practices both through individuals and institutions. This research is a comprehensive and original approach to recognizing design history practices without excluding the variety of approaches which make it relevant, whether it is the object, maker, or methodology. The opportunity to focus on a specific design practice and assessing it as an everyday practice, allows for the impact design has on individuals and society to create a new perspective and understanding of both the history of design and a culture.

From the perspective of a historian, home sewing allows design as a practice to become a core theoretical and methodological approach in design history, not solely from the tradition of production and/or consumption but to broaden it to include the role of mass media as a disseminator and mediator; and further, to distil production to the actual steps of the process of making; specifically a making that is done by an individual. The purpose is, as de Certeau suggests, 'to trace the interlacings of a concrete sense of everyday life, to allow them to appear within the space of a memory'. (1998, p.3) The role of the individual then highlights not only the dialogue created by the dual role of creator/user but also utilizes oral histories within the matrix of the inspiration, created object and memory.

Despite the historical lack of extensive research into home sewing a conceptual framework was developed around theories of everyday practice. These theories, many based in social relations and location, two themes integral to home sewing, address issues of process allowing the individual experience to come to the forefront. This is clearly seen through the integration of oral histories into this research. The use of mass media to disseminate ideas of femininity and sewing practices is equally linked to oral histories creating the public dimension of what is often considered to be a very private practice. This has been a historical evolution, the link between home, mass media and its stories. 'Like the middle class home, the women's magazine evolved during the last [19<sup>th</sup>] century as a "feminized space" '. (Beetham, 1996, p.3) This space becomes a conduit of the experience of modernity for middle class women best captured through oral histories. By addressing media as not only a source of dissemination but as an object of design, the role of design in consumption and mediation is reinforced. Women were addressing design not only through ideas but how the ideas were presented visually. Lastly, the rarity of the home sewn everyday item has raised questions of social value and contemporary collection practices by institutions and individuals.

The inter-war period has received due attention in terms of 'high' design movements such as modernism and art deco, economic catastrophes such as the depression and the hunger

strikes; all with good reason, they had an impact. Similar to these highs and lows of culture, historians have commonly focused on either the aristocracy or the working class. However, the middle class, especially in the interwar years, was a growing demographic and has largely been overlooked. The term middle-class covered a broad span of people and conditions that were constantly shifting, much like the hemlines of the period. These shifts required new means of negotiation for many involved. This research focused on that middle ground; the everyday lives and design practices of the middle class who used a very specific method to find their place and identity in those often tenuous conditions. Not only were their needs changing but so was the role of home sewing. These parallels strengthen the rationale behind linking these topics and themes in this research.

It is the defining of practice as a process that impacted the methodology. First the establishment of the theoretical and historical context of home sewing in the interwar period has been considered, followed by a more detailed analysis of the actual design experience. This breaking down of practice into steps created a basis for the methodology. It has gone beyond the traditional production-consumption link, and furthered the newer theory of production-consumption-mediation into a model where design as a practice is the basis for critically analysing mass media, both as a form of dissemination/mediation and an object, along with home sewn, dressmaker and manufactured objects created in the interwar period. All of these, practice, media and object, are linked through the use of oral histories, testimonials of how widespread the practice of home sewing was amongst middle-class women in interwar Britain. Home sewing has been accessed through the memory and writings of its experience and what inspired it, and in doing so the process. Hence the act of making by an everyday individual becomes the focal point of history.

A vital feature of this research has been the use of oral histories; the biographies of the women whose lives are interwoven throughout the text are presented in the Introduction, along with the other sources accessed, including museums and libraries. The strategy of this thesis has been to create an understanding of current academic viewpoints toward home sewing and everyday practice within the field of design history. It has done so in the literature review in Chapter I. Here underlying themes and topics were defined, including modernity, femininity, and domesticity. A conceptual framework is structured in Chapter II through the links between theory and methodology. Once the academic standpoint was established the historical context was addressed in Chapter III focusing on issues that affected women, home sewing, design and everyday life, including new forms of employment, leisure, technology and media.

How home sewing as a practice was mediated through a public forum was the focus of Chapter IV, mass media. Magazines and sewing manuals were analysed to create a well-rounded picture of how the role of home sewing as an everyday practice was codified. In reading these a better understanding of the relationship between the public perception and private realization of design and femininity was linked. As designed objects themselves, magazines and manuals functioned both as the designed and the mediator of design between consumer and practice. Three magazines are treated as case studies of being designed objects and how they codified femininity.

It was in Chapter V, *Design as Practice: Aspects of Sewing*, that the importance of understanding what practice means was defined in regard to being a process. Home sewing itself had to be not only defined and categorized but understood as it was known by women in the interwar period. Indeed it is here that the significance of home as a location is apparent along with the importance of technology. Further it includes how they were educated both in schools and through family, as well as the impact. The impact of the rise of professionalization elucidates the link between education and the changing retail environment. Lastly, home sewn and museum items are analysed not just for stylistic reasons but for analysis and an introduction to understanding the rationale behind that which is kept, collected, and preserved by individuals and institutions. Notably it is in this chapter and the next that the reader became more thoroughly engaged with the people interviewed, as the oral histories are woven throughout the thesis.

The theme of design as practice continues in Chapter VI *Design as Practice: Inspiration and Making*. Here the interplay between what motivated women and specific steps in the process of making are examined. This includes consumption specifically as it intersects with the experience of shopping and the variety of options available, reflecting upon women's specific experiences of making. Concerns of finish and quality which are an overriding theme in regard to clothing in particular for women are investigated through the analysis of a sample of dresses from the Beamish, the Living Museum of the North with dresses found in private collections. This diversity of sources, museums, family and on-line purchases along with the home made, dressmaker made and manufactured creates an opportunity to discern the validity behind these concerns as well as understanding stylistic evolution of dresses. It brings to light how everyday fashion has been valued and interpreted while developing questions for further study.

This thesis is unique in that it addresses the rarely researched topic of home sewing, as a practice, not solely as object based, or as an act of consumption, or social codification/mediation. By using practice as the starting point, all of those perspectives have been addressed and linked through the individual experience of an everyday design practice. In doing so new interpretations and understandings of the experience of modernity, femininity and domesticity are elicited from the actual every day experiences of individuals and the materials that existed during the interwar period.

Further, this research reveals the breadth and extent of home sewing as an everyday practice through the oral histories, discussion of it in mass media and how women used it to create their identities, all reinforced by the strength of the memories of home sewing in their daily lives. It looks at home sewing as in-depth practice, which was part of the formation of their identities through family life, education and participation in the broader community through the use of mass media and consumption practices. This methodology successfully applies the use of oral histories while simultaneously supporting it through primary source materials and contemporary theoretical interpretations. Home sewing in the interwar period was an integral daily practice for middle class women that informed their identities leaving indelible memories of not only the items made but of the practice and their families.

A surprising discovery was how consistent the experience was for all the women across social barriers. The boredom of the school lessons, the link to family members, the roles played by various family members, the importance and location of the sewing machine, and the experience of utilizing the dressmaker, all were commonalities. While they may not have all had the same extensive school education, or may have different ideas of price/value, the excitement of a new dress, of making one's own material self was significant. Most importantly, the assumption that one did sew, whether you liked it, or were obligated to, or considered yourself skilled, was presumed as a norm of feminine behaviour. No one considered it an anomaly to learn how to sew and then do it. Most importantly, it is these memories of making which last often far longer than the objects. In essence, the value of the memory of the practice outweighs the value of the object made. The material is immaterial in light of what has been gained through the making. The back and forth of learning, shopping, of engaging with the public and private, family and social, the turning and returning to a magazine for ideas, parallels the very act of sewing - the repeated drawing needle and thread through fabric, creating a pattern of identity over time. As Sally Alexander states, 'Day-dreams-a blend of inner imago or memory-trace with everyday life-gives fantasy its repetitive pull, and gives each of us our sense of self as surely as class position, relation of kin, ethnic

identity, or religious or political affiliation'. (1994, p.215) The memory of making oneself becomes the strongest and most vivid design over time.

Also uncovered in this research is the importance of religion and illness, as major influencing factors in social and family life. Religious expectations were a modifier of behaviour for middle class women; and illness in the family was often a condition of who did what type of work. Needlework such as embroidery was often a more common pastime for the 'frail' whereas sport was more common for the healthier – along with their sewing requirements. While women may not have been conscious of the conditions of modern life as 'modernity' per say, they were conscious of the excitement of coming of age at that time, and the concerns which arose from the constant change – social, economic, cultural and its subsequent needs.

This research successfully develops an understanding of how important home sewing was to women in the interwar period. It was not just a chore, but an expectation of everyday life. It was not an exercise of femininity or design 'in the margins' but a very consistent part of everyday life. Whether it was used to define themselves, a role within the family or a function within society, home sewing was integral to who they were becoming. This research is an opportunity to discover more about everyday design, everyday life and its true impact. It completes a picture of a design practice whose relevance has only been partially revealed. Further it takes Mica Nava's theory of modernity's relationship to femininity, 'women's experience can be interpreted as a quintessential constituent of modernity' (1996, p.7) to a much more specific level of comprehension.

While de Certeau's theories are a primary source of the conceptual foundation of this study, this research differs with de Certeau's belief that there is a degree of subversion to the acts of practice – in particular its role in being part of society – this study suggests that home sewing as an everyday practice is less about subversion than young women using the space allowed to create their own ideas of femininity. Picking and choosing in a pro-active manner what they believed to be both correct and appropriate for themselves in a time period when while public options were many, private choices were more limited. 'Feminine subjectivities are produced not only from the physical spaces inhabited by women but also from the social spaces in which they find themselves, and the imaginary spaces they create for themselves'. (Giles, 2004, p.16) This practice of self-definition is less about being either conservative/traditional or modern, but the ways which in women went sometimes timorously back and forth between these two dichotomous points using 'feminine' practices such as home sewing. Familial influence and a general nervousness about what to do in the face of these choices and change

was less about a full submersion or anxious withdrawal but the ability to make changes at a pace they felt comfortable with. They controlled how they wanted to be seen at a pace they chose.

This research opens up avenues of discussion about what and how society values certain practices, people and objects. In this current atmosphere with the popularity of 'vintage' and 'retro' designs, historians must question concepts of authenticity, novelty and self. What is the role of the past in fashion and domestic design history? How is the concept of do-it-yourself and the handmade altering these topics both culturally and economically? Will the idea of value alter because of economics or environmental awareness? How does the cyber world impact retail markets and museums? Will museums reassess their collecting habits, will families value the ordinary not out of an ironic kitsch factor but because it is aesthetically and historically relevant? These are questions linked to the legacy of everyday design; our understanding of design, design history, socio-cultural history and economics. As an everyday design practice, home sewing leaves a trail for us to follow that goes outside of the home and into the public domain of archives if we choose to address it.

Home sewing was a design practice that allowed women to negotiate the socio-cultural change that was occurring in a socially appropriate method, starting from the private confines of their home to the more public forums of magazines and stores. This public/private negotiation through design to create one's identity existed across the broad spectrum of the breadth of middle class women who existed in Britain between the wars. The oral histories supported evidence found in magazines and manuals, along with other earlier research clarifying the role of home sewing and its importance in not only negotiating modernity but in creating one's identity.

The variety of women interviewed was reflective of the middle class in the inter-war period and their experiences were consistent as reflections of and responses to contemporary materials. This research gives a more detailed perspective of a specific design practice that all women participated in to varying degrees; the expectation of its practice as a part of their feminine training was standard regardless of where on the class spectrum they lived or to what extent they chose to participate. This research reveals the commonality of sewing as a design practice, its extensive role in the formation of individual ideas of femininity formed as part of everyday private and public life and its expectations across the social spectrum.

The story of Winifred Winslow and her telling of going back and forth past a dress boutique everyday for several weeks on her way to and from her university classes reveals the

relationship between the individual and the everyday. Each day she saw the same dress in the window and each day she thought more and more about that dress, one she needed for an upcoming dance. This memory of movement, desire, need and resolution encapsulates the experience of modernity and home sewing for a young woman in the interwar period. The strength of the memory reflects the importance of the role of oral histories in history.

Winifred's experience of travelling back and forth, attending a dance social, and needing a specific type of dress for it, and having options to fulfil the need are iconic of the experience of modernity, especially for women. It places her, as a young woman, at the centre of the experience of creating her identity, having choices, and balancing her role between public and private identities. It takes the design experience of home sewing in inter-war Britain beyond consumption, beyond the object, to encompass a full understanding of daily life, everyday practice and its role in constructing femininity.

APPENDIX : IMAGES



Image 1 Multi-coloured magazine cover, Bankfield Museum, (2009.250)

THE ONLY ALL - HOBBY WEEKLY!

HOME  
CRAFTS  
WOOD  
WORKING  
MODEL  
MAKING  
AMATEUR  
MECHANICS  
ETC.ETC.

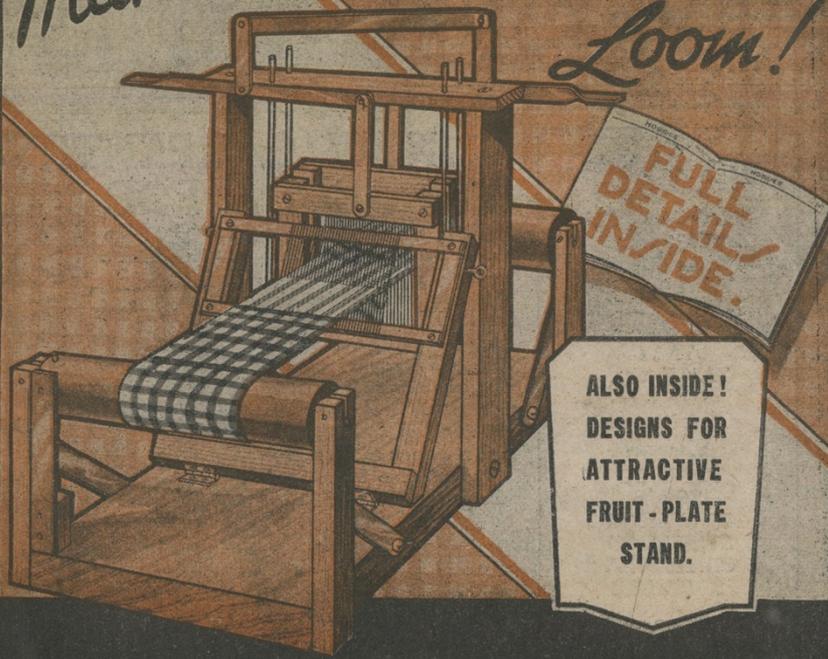
**Hobbies**

2<sup>d</sup>

February 6th,  
1932.  
No. 1931.

Published every  
Wednesday.  
Registered at the  
G.P.O. for Trans-  
mission by Cana-  
dian Mail as a Post

*Make this Real Hand Loom!*



Published by GEO. NEWNES, Ltd., 8-11, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

Image 2 *Hobbies* magazine, 1932, women's craft feature, private collection

# For Embroidering Children's Clothes Clark's "Anchor" Coton à Broder

*Use "Anchor" Bleached Cotton "Anchor" Fine for all designs "Anchor" Finesse for crocheted hosiery "Anchor" Ultra-fine for mending "Anchor" & "Knots" for knitting & fringing*

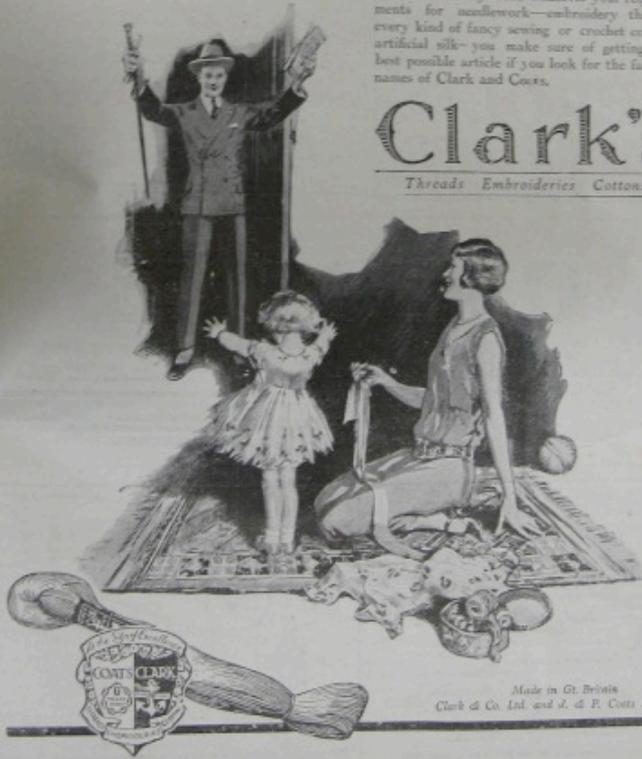
For embroidery that will wear and wear—that can be boiled, rubbed, wrung out and still come up gay and fresh as the day it was new—use Clark's "Anchor" Coton à Broder. It is a cotton thread with a delightfully glossy finish. It is made in an amazing range of exquisite shades, guaranteed fast.

Use Coton à Broder to give charm to children's clothes, lingerie, tub frocks, table linen. Obtainable in skeins in various "grists" or grades of thickness.

Remember always that whatever your requirements for needlework—embroidery thread, every kind of fancy sewing or crochet cotton, artificial silk—you make sure of getting the best possible article if you look for the famous names of Clark and Coats.

## Clark's

*Threads Embroideries Cottons*



Made in Gt. Britain  
Clark & Co. Ltd. and J. & P. Coats Ltd. Paisley

© 29

Image 3 Woman's Pictorial, 1929



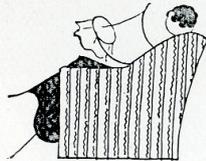
The "Home" Girl.



The "Business" Girl.



The "Sports" Girl.



They're all "Embroidery" Girls.

## NEEDLE-MINDED MODERNS

Embroidery is not only a thing of the past but of the future. That is why **Penelope** has a soft spot for the Modern Miss and her ideas. Make no mistake about it, Modern Misses do embroider and very expertly, too.

Think of two of the most recent **Penelope** brain-waves—first the various series of Needle-Etchings that have captured everybody's fancy, and next the new designs for Modern Tapestry to be worked with M.S.E. Embroidery Wool.

Without being faithless to your Louis or your Chippendale, you will admit that these do fill a long-felt want in Tapestry work.

**Penelope Traced Needlework** never stands still. Every season brings forward something for every type of embroidery—something different, something new.

If you would like to know the address of the nearest shop stocking **Penelope Traced Needlework**, write to: —

WM. BRIGGS & Co. Ltd.,  
34<sup>N</sup>, CANNON STREET,  
MANCHESTER, 4.

Children's and Maids' Washing Frocks

# Your figure-EXACTLY

The perfect  
**DRESS STAND**  
for the  
HOME  
DRESS-  
MAKER



**MY DOUBLE** is the most ingenious dress stand ever contrived, for it can be rapidly adjusted to reproduce perfectly your own or any other figure, enabling accurate fittings to be carried out with ease and garments practically completed on the stand.

Imagine the advantage of it! Whether you, your friends or your clients are slim, stout, tall or short, the pliable Wire Meshes of **MY DOUBLE** can be pinched and squeezed to exactly the same proportions—retaining the shape indefinitely or until required to be re-adjusted for another figure.

It is perfectly simple to use, very easily adjustable and quickly packed away into its box at any time. Order **MY DOUBLE** to be sent to your home—or come along and see it demonstrated at 291a, Oxford Street, London, W.1.

# My Double DRESS STAND

**PRICES :**

Size No. 1 (up to 40" bust or 45" waist)	Size No. 2 (up to 40" bust or 50" waist)
Normal length ... .. 25 pence	Normal length ... .. 25 pence
Special longer length ... .. 30 pence	Special longer length ... .. 30 pence

Wooden Tripod Stand 5/- each. Package and packing free.  
Normal length is about 28 inches. Special length is about 34 inches.

These prices are inclusive of :

Bones tubes, central stick with end-caps and ribbons for pinning the dress on the mannequin.

Clearance should be made possible in "Bestway" and covered (if possible).  
These items are available in order to do "Bestway" take from Five Shillings and Overseas orders add also 4/- for carriage and import duties.

Obtainable from

**"BESTWAY," 291a, Oxford Street, London, W.1**

Image 5 Dress stand advertisement, *Coming Fashions and Ideal Woman*, July 1932, Bankfield Museum, (2009.24)



Image 6 Mrs. Thomas (2<sup>nd</sup> from left) in a royalty inspired coloured dress, 1934



Image 7 *Home Chat* cover, Nov. 3, 1923, private collection

A ROMANTIC NEW SERIAL BY RUBY M. AYKES STARTS TO-DAY!

# Mab's WEEKLY

2<sup>d</sup>

Every Tuesday

Vol. IV, No. 104,  
September 23, 1933.

## This Pattern Free!



How we do it in  
**BOND STREET**  
by  
Madeleine Baert  
the Exclusive Dressmaker



A NEW SERIES STARTS Inside

Image 8 Mab's Weekly cover, September 26, 1933, Bankfield Museum (2009.242)



Image 9 *Modern Home*, October 1931, The Bankfield Museum (2009.252)

## OUR FREE GIFT BAG



**O**UR Gift Bag, in all the charm of its Victorian colours, expresses the new spirit of feminine elegance to perfection. Carry it with any afternoon or evening frock—white, black, or coloured, and it will look exquisite. As the illustrations show, the whole design is worked in petit point, the stitch used for all exclusive baggy bags. You will find it fascinating to shade, on your colour-stamped canvas, the petals of roses, so delicately set off by the glow background in antique parchment colour. A young wife or close friend and a pretty present for the finishing touches to your handiwork.

**A** BAG like this would be expensive to buy ready made, but, using our Free Gift Bag, the entire material for making will cost you only a few shillings. The coloured thread and chart illustrated in an attractive form in plain antique gilt finish is obtainable, together with instructions for embroidery, through "Modern Home" (Linen Department) for details and making instructions, turn to page 70.

Embroidered in Petit Point—a Perfect Accessory for the New Dresses



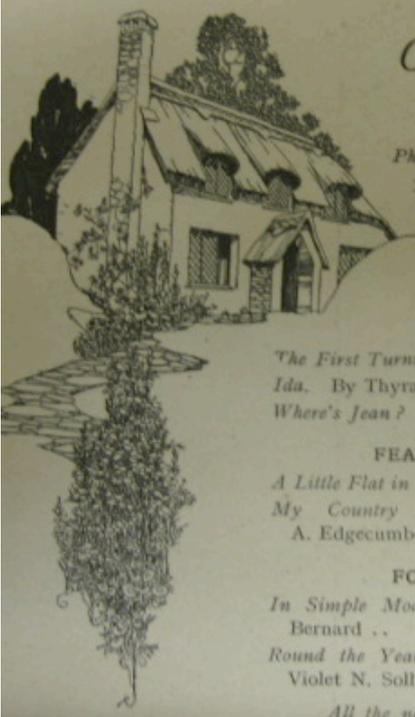
**NOTE**—Always use the petit point stitch and work through and over the fabric, and the fastening, showing of the front.



Image 10 a-c Unfinished needlework kit bag, The Bankfield Museum (2009.252)

MODERN HOME. No. 37

*Contents* *October, 1931*



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*All the names and characters mentioned in the stories in MODERN HOME are purely imaginary.*

Image 11 Content page, *Modern Home*, October 1931, The Bankfield Museum, (2009.252)

by permission of the Werkbund Ausstellung of Stuttgart.

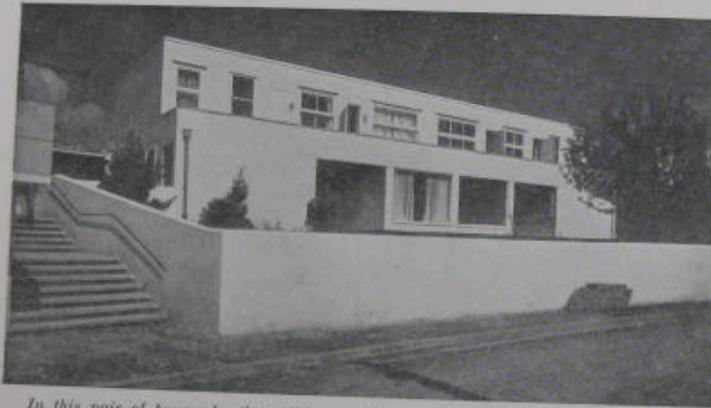
# Give the Moderns a Chance

by W. J. BASSETT-LOWKE.

*The designing, furnishing, and decorating of the home are progressing by leaps and bounds. With the aftermath of war, changed ideas of living have given a vast stimulus to the creation of harmony in our homes. These examples of extremely modern architecture are an expression of To-day.*

**S**ITUATED on the hillside, in the charming suburb of Weisenhof, about three miles from the centre of Stuttgart, is one of the most striking collections of modern houses that the world has yet seen.

The combination of circumstances which produced this result was the co-operation of the German Werkbund, the town of Stuttgart, and a number of leading architects of international reputation.



*In this pair of houses by the well-known Viennese architect, Professor Dr. Joseph Frank, note how all bedrooms have access to a flat roof over kitchen and back apartments. Both houses are identical in plan and elevation, but one is entirely fitted with electricity for all purposes and the other with gas except for lighting.*

2

Since the war almost every country has had subsidy schemes for the production of dwellings, and the results in some cases have been most appalling. The city of Stuttgart has not sinned much in this respect, but they are anxious to try and do something altogether different and to give the "Moderns" a chance of seeing what they can produce.

A delightful strip of land on the hillside overlooking the beautiful town of Stuttgart was allotted by the town for the experiment. The architect, Mies van der Rohe, head of the Werkbund, was responsible for the lay-out and the organisation for the participation of the architects.

The plan of this area comprises a number of houses, thirty-three buildings in all. Some take the form of flats, some are fully detached and some semi-detached houses.

The whole collection formed a basis for the Housing Exhibition held in Stuttgart from July 23rd to October 9th, 1927.

Apart from the features of individual houses, perhaps it would be better first to deal with the exhibition from a general point of view. The whole lay-

Image 12 *Ideal Home*, January 1928, article, Northumbria University

# Avoiding Conventionality

by THE ARCHITECTURAL EDITOR.

The creation of an artistic home which accords harmoniously with its setting need not be hampered by excessive cost. In the case of the house illustrated, a charming and original home was created at practically the same cost as a conventional suburban house.

THE charming little house illustrated is an excellent example of the opportunities which exist for avoiding the conventional villa type of residence at little, if any, additional cost. The characteristics of the environment—often disregarded—were taken into account in preparing the external design of the house.

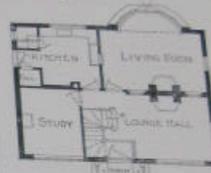
Private grounds extend for some distance beyond the garden and cedar trees and oaks provide a woodland view. A long willow fringed lake, spanned by two rustic bridges, lends variety to the scene.

In these circumstances it was realized that the erection of a commonplace "double-fronted" house would be justly regarded as a blot upon the landscape. The



The unassuming, cottage-like appearance of the house is essentially in keeping with its surroundings. (Plans by F. W. Goswami.)

surroundings called for something rustic and quite unconventional.



The plan of the ground floor is simple and practical.

The facilities for improved designs and plans are now so obvious that the owner can adhere to a fifty-year-old plan would be unreasonable.

Mr. George W. Smith, F.R.I.B.A., was entrusted with the preparation of plans for a dwelling which would harmonize with its environment and afford the desired accommodation.

It will be seen from the plan and illustrations that he has succeeded in combining an artistic treatment with a practical solution of the problem.

It must always be remembered that it is essential when designing any home, whatever the dimensions, that the combination of plan, elevation, and the lay-out of site should go to make one successful harmonious ensemble.

The unassuming, cottage-like appearance of the house is essentially in keeping with the surroundings. The "bunnetts" are an interesting feature and, with the porch, give a pleasing effect, besides tending to break up the area of the colour-washed walls. Already the tiled roof has a time-worn appearance.

It will be seen that a stereotyped basement and landing plan has been ignored in the treatment of the parties, as it was considered that the resultant severity and dimness would not be in accord with the nature of the surroundings.

The squared treillage is a pleasant feature of the terrace above the sunk garden, while an internal rockery extends the full length of one wall. Even the choice of flowers and shrubs has been designed to preserve an old-world and tranquil atmosphere, and moss and small rock plants already grow thickly between the stone flags of the path.

In the front of the house the flagged patio and rose-bed of irregular shape preserve the nature, old-world atmosphere, and the sunken garden at the back is appropriate for a position which is considerably overshadowed by an aged cedar tree, under which



The lounge hall has several features of interest. It strikes a note of welcome and comfort. The frieze is original and effective.

Image 13 Ideal Home, January 1928, Northumbria University

Below: Here is a comfortable winter-riding seat in this hat (model) lined with goose feather and wool, and lined throughout with thick cape-fur-ette. (Dunlop 112.)



Below: This delightful seat and seat cover is made of French sheep wool with a warm blanket in back. It can be made to measure in any color, with or without fur. (Dunlop 113.)



This sheepskin rug has been christened the "Sungrey." It does practically everything that a rug can be called upon to do. It cushions in one piece the front-end and rear-end sections. It is presented in three forms to suit individual needs: allusion of bear and lamb, leopard and lamb, or Maltese cloth lined with black lamb. (Dunlop 114.)



## CAR "Cozeries"

The latest Novelties



The hot-water foot warmer, in spite of intense electrical competition, has still a great deal to recommend it. It continues to maintain a reputation for comfort and reliability against some new-comers in the auto field. This one is of heavily flannel cloth covered with plain carpet, and sporting brass ends. (Goway.)



Below: A really good fur-suit is one of the simplest and most convenient ways of keeping the feet warm. They are so easy to slip in and out of at a moment's notice. This one is made of dyed goatskin, lined with wool and finished with a rubber cloth sole. (Goway.)

Why not have a foot-warmer on each foot? These chilkie-resisters can be had in high or low pattern. Lined with lamb's wool, they are made of cloth with rubber soles. The patent fastener is another feature and a great time-saver. (Goway.)



This fox-head cannot be mistaken. The suggestion is extraordinarily fitting, and is a very fine example of modern wood-carving. (Good Form.)

Image 14 Car Clothing Accessories, *Ideal Home*, January 1928, Northumbria University

At the Sign of Excellence

COATS CLARK

EMBOIDRIES

For beautiful embroideries that glow with glorious lasting colours use Clark's Embroidery Threads

CLARK & CO. LTD. AND J. & P. COATS LTD. PAISLEY

C102

Printed and Published by Tillotsons (Bolton), Ltd., Mealhouse Lane, Bolton, and 23, Fleet Street, London, E.C., for the Proprietors.

Image 15 Woman embroidering, advertisement, *The Needlewoman*, August 1928, private collection

# "This is my PERSONAL MOTIF"

Isn't it nice? Personal Motifs are so simple to embroider and so very useful as a laundry mark, especially when combined with an initial, that I embroider them on everything, including my clothes. I find you can get little booklets for 1d. giving heaps of transfer designs and telling you how to embroider them in 5 different ways with Clark's ANCHOR Stranded cotton—the fast color embroidery thread. As you see, I have chosen the Bird of Paradise for my Motif

...what is yours?"

Choose your copy from the series of 8 Personal Motif Booklets containing lots of transfer designs. Obtainable for 1d. wherever you see the sign below

Image 16 Monogram advertisement, *Needlewoman*, December, 1933, private collection

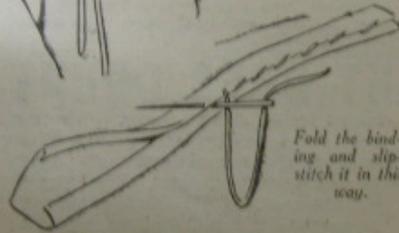
was as she had expected it would be; perhaps her imagination had been all wrong, and perhaps already Geoffrey was just beginning to treat her in the way that other husbands she knew treated other wives. She

on the hill where the old ruins stood up with forlorn dignity in the greyness, and then back to the hotel. It was a quarter to ten then, and there was an air of sleepiness everywhere.

"I'm going to bed," Judy said quietly.

*Please turn overleaf*

## Collars With Character



*Fold the binding and slip-stitch it in this way.*

tie patterning. When you have made the rouleaux from crossway strips of material or from bias binding, cut out a simple Peter Pan collar in brown paper. Now tack short lengths of the binding on to this to make the U-shaped loops, and then thread longer strips through these, "weaving" them as I have shown. Stitch a small strip at each end of the collar to hide the raw edges of the rouleaux; and, finally, take your collar off the brown paper, and bind the top edge to make a neck-band. Finish the collar with a bow of bias binding.

**C**OLLAR capelets are new! And on the right I have pictured a dainty version of this charming fashion which you can copy in next to no time. Made of dull white crepe and trimmed with faggot-stitching in white or a contrasting colour, it would be a delightful finishing touch for a dark blue or brown frock. To achieve the "sun-ray" effect, cut slits in your collar where my sketch suggests, then turn in the edges on to a strip of brown paper, and work your faggoting in the usual way



*Here you see how to work faggot-stitching.*

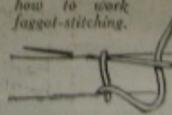


Fig. No. 201  
Price 4d.

Image 17 Collars with Character, *Mab's Weekly*, September, 1933, Bankfield Museum, Halifax (2009.242)

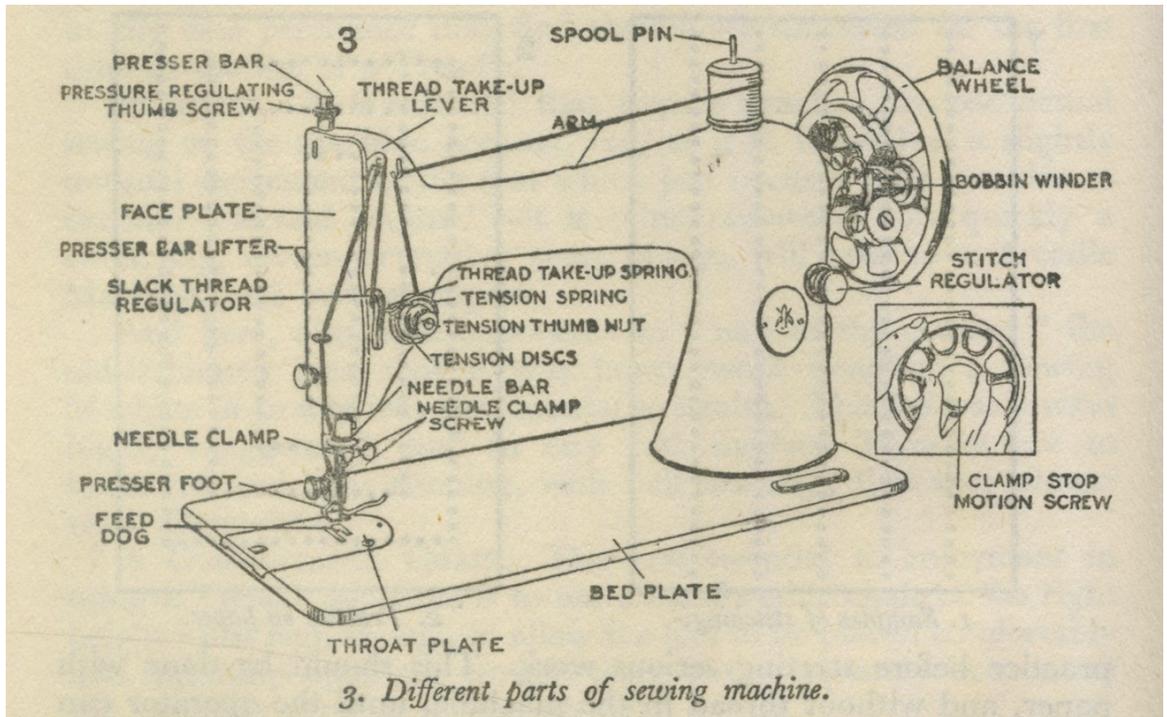
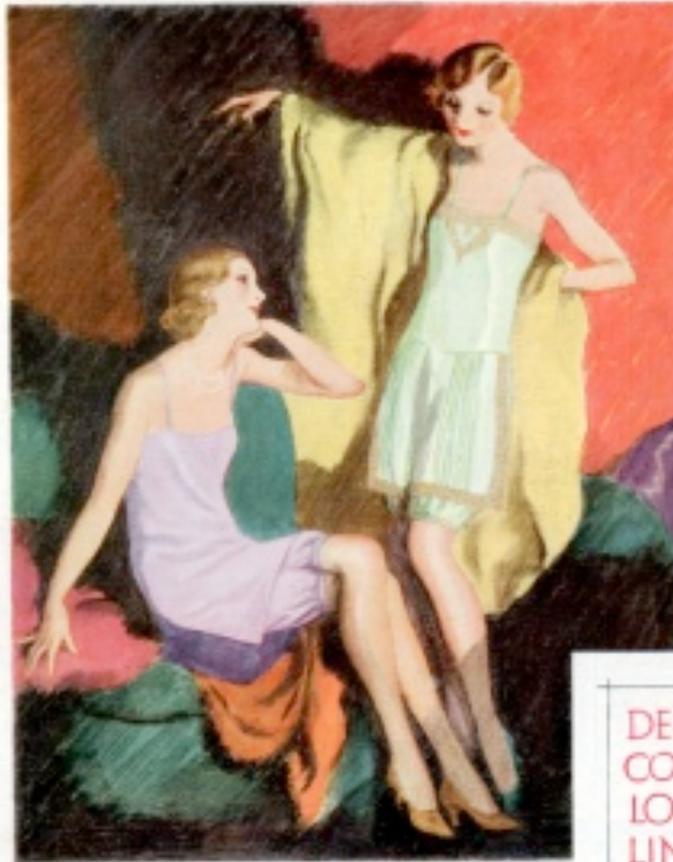


Image 18 Sewing Machine Diagram, *The Big Book of Needlecraft*, 1932, private collection



DELICATE  
COLOURFUL  
LOVABLE  
LINGERIE

TRADE MARK

# 'CELANESE' LINGERIE

YOU fall in love at first sight with 'Celanese' Lingerie. Then as you examine the fineness, the perfect finish, the tailored cut of each garment, your love of beauty is more than satisfied. But it is in the wear and tear of every day that you really appreciate your 'Celanese' lingerie . . . . when 'Celanese' comes back again and again from the laundry glowing with undimmed colour and unspoiled vitality — when the garments protect you from outdoor cold, keep you cool and comfortable in overheated rooms. Leading Stores everywhere show a wide range of 'Celanese' Products.

Sole Manufacturers: THE CELANESE LINGERIE LIMITED, CELANESE HOUSE, HANOVER SQUARE, LONDON, W.1.

Printed and Published by Tulkyns (Shelton), Ltd., Moulton Lane, Sutton, and 21, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4, for the Proprietors, "Needlewoman" Limited.

Image 19 Synthetic fabric advertisement, *The Needlewoman*, February 1929, private collection

# TOBRALCO



**SO EASY TO WASH—  
SO HARD TO WEAR OUT**

Image 20 a Tobralco fabric Sample, 1927, private collection

Greatly Reduced  
Price for 1927

In a wide range of  
fascinating designs, also  
good plain shades, and  
the famous white hair-  
cord for tennis. All  
colours guaranteed  
absolutely indelible.

NOW ONLY

2/1  $\frac{1}{2}$

PER YARD  
38 inches wide.



**TOBRALCO**

THE TENNIS FAVOURITE

See the name Tobralco on selvedge.



Image 20 b Tobralco fabric sample card

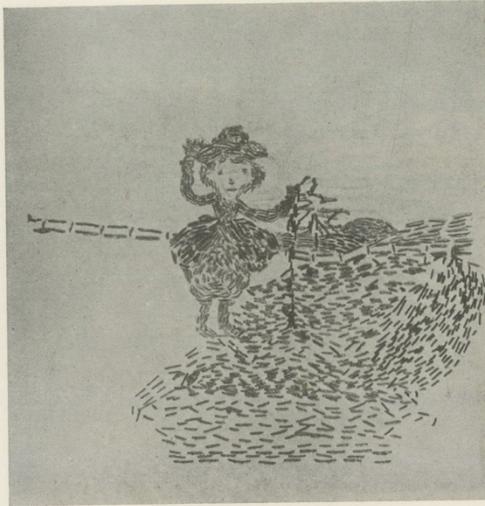
# Greatly Reduced Price for 1927

In a wide range of  
fascinating designs, also  
good plain shades, and  
the famous white hair-  
cord for tennis. All  
colours guaranteed  
absolutely indelible.

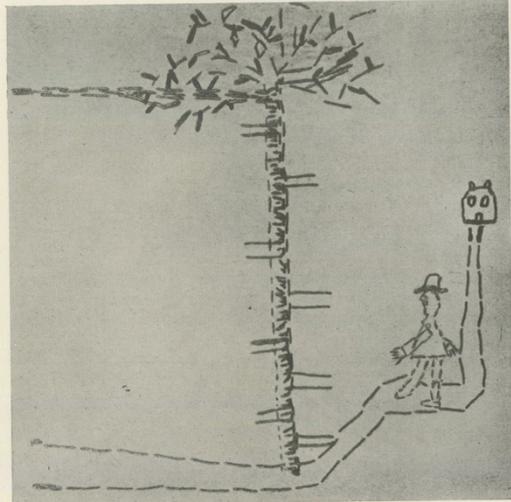
NOW ONLY



Image 20 c, Tobralco fabric sample, interior



“Little Bo-Peep”  
Work done by girl of seven years



“Jack and the Bean-Stalk”  
Work done by boy of seven years

Image 21 Girl's and boy's work sample. *Needlework: Practical and Decorative, 1921*

22

# You can make ALL your own and your children's clothes



You can learn quickly and easily in your own home, during spare time, by the wonderfully simple and practical new method of the Woman's Institute, how to plan and make all your own and your children's dresses, costumes, lingerie and hats and save half or more on everything.

There is nothing amateurish about the work of those who have studied and applied our system. The "home-made" look is not there.

The student can, if she wishes, take up high-class professional work with every prospect of success.

You owe it to yourself, to your children, perhaps also to your husband, at least to find out what a Woman's Institute Course of Instruction can do for you.



Write to-day for your copy of

## "DRESSMAKING & MILLINERY MADE EASY"

YOU MAY USE THIS COUPON

Woman's Institute of Domestic Arts & Sciences, Ltd. (Dept. 132), 71, Kingsway, London, W.C.2

Please send me, without cost or obligation, a copy of one of your booklets and tell me how I can learn the subject which I have marked below:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home Dressmaking         | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Millinery         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Millinery |

Name .....

(Please specify whether Mr. or Miss)

Address .....

Image 22 Women's Institute advertisement, *Mab's Children's Fashions*, May 1926, Beamish collection

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# POSTAL or PERSONAL LESSONS in CUTTING



Under the supervision of skilful French experts you can learn quickly and simply the art of Dress Designing (not fashion drawing), Cutting, Dressmaking and Millinery at the Paris Academy.

Whether you are a beginner requiring tuition from the simplest rudiments or whether you have a natural aptitude and seek only to learn those professional touches which give chic and finesse, there is a Postal Course or a Personal Attendance Course to suit you. All instruction is individual and the lessons can be taken at times to suit the convenience of the student. The instruction by post is identical with that given in the Academy and is thoroughly practical and easy to learn.

*Call personally or write for prospectus  
"B.K." to*

**Mme. J. TROIS FONTAINES**

**PARIS  
ACADEMY OF  
DRESSMAKING & MILLINERY  
24 OLD BOND STREET, W.1**

*Corner of Burlington Gardens*

*Phone : Regent 0776*

*When replying to advertisements please*

Image 23 Paris Academy of Dressmaking advertisement, *Sewing Secrets*, 1927

Chapter VI



**Image 24** Modern Salon, *The Draper's Record*, Sept. 1933, Manchester Central Library

Meet me under the  
**BAINBRIDGE  
CLOCK**  
in MARKET STREET and  
we'll walk round this  
interesting Store together.



We must see :—

- The "Times" Book Club**, a branch of the famous London "Times" Library, which gives subscribers the very latest publications.
  - The Ladies' Hairdressing Salons** adjoining, with their superlative service in the most up-to-date Hairdressing Styles, Manicure, and Chiropody.
  - The Ladies' Rest Room**, where we may read the magazines or write our letters.
  - The Bureau**, to leave our Coats or parcels, 'phone, or send telegrams, or buy stamps.
  - The Furnished Rooms** on second floor for helpful suggestions in furnishing.
  - The "Liberty" Department**, which is a branch of the famous Regent Street Shop, with the same London prices.
  - The "Man's Shop"** and the Men's Hairdressing Saloon, probably the largest and best equipped outside London.
  - The Grocery and Provision Store**, with its entrance from Bigg Market.
- And then have Tea in the fine Tea Rooms above.

But don't forget—under the Clock  
in Market Street.

**BAINBRIDGE & CO., LTD. NEWCASTLE.**  
Market Street.                      Grainger Street.                      Bigg Market.

Image 25 Bainbridge advertisement, *Rag Revue*, 1933, private collection

"This Pretty  
Frock  
cost me  
only a  
Guinea"



It is a day frock of Paris design in a beautiful quality of all-silk taffeta. It may also be procured in an all-wool crepe m racain. It is one of the many models from "COMING FASHIONS" "Ready-for Making" Department. They will supply the material and have it cut by Court Dressmaker. Then, if you are handy at making up, you will find the job quite simple.

Do get a copy of April "COMING FASHIONS" and do the same as I did. You will save pounds.

Non-crush taffetas—chintz patterned crepe de chinos—three-toned tuts—sleeveless sports frocks... there are so many lovely things to see in "COMING FASHIONS." Get your copy to-day, and if you are wise you will order the May number (out April 30), at the same time.

# COMING FASHIONS

The supreme authority on Women's Dress  
ONE SHILLING

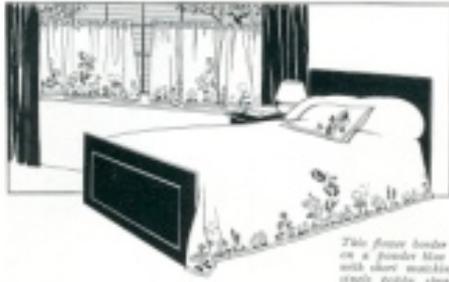
Image 26 One Guinea dress ad, *Ideal Home*, May 1926, Northumbria University



**Image 27 Original Kendal Mills Building, Manchester**



Image 28 embroidery patterns for home and body, *Fancy Needlework Illustrated*, no 98, Manchester Central Library



This flower border can be arranged on a fender line from *Redwood* with short matching *Curtains*. A single poppy spray is worked on the *Nighties*.

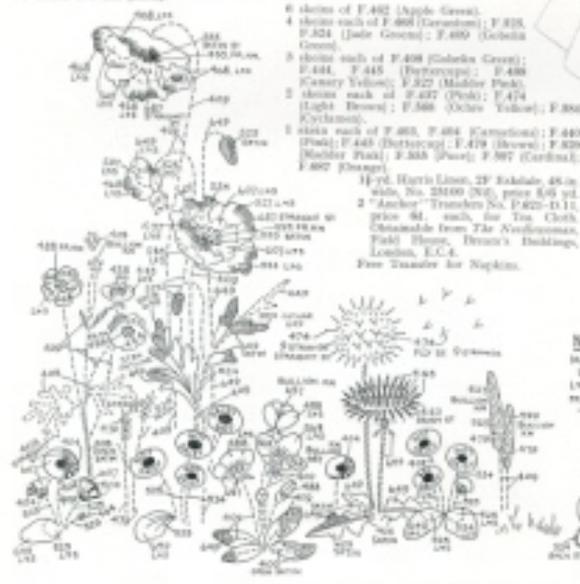
## POPPIES AND FIELD FLOWERS

### A GARDEN TEA CLOTH

The lovely Garden Tea Set shown in the Colour Picture opposite will make tea in the garden even jollier than it usually is, whilst for those who do not care for a fancy table, the design is equally delightful if worked on a pastel-coloured linen for indoor use. The Cushion design shown opposite is also shown on the cover of this issue, whilst the *Little Daisy* motif for the *Napkins* are given on the *Free Transfer* (see page 36). Instructions follow for working the Tea Cloth and Napkins, whilst those for the Cushion are given on page 28 and for the *Cozy* and *Chair Back* on page 26.

**Materials required for Tea Cloth and Six Napkins:**  
 12 skeins "Anchor" Brand Cotton No. F.648 (Green).  
 7 skeins of F.687 (Rose).

Continued on page 31



- 6 skeins of F.492 (Apple Green);
- 4 skeins each of F.468 (Cassidown); F.515, F.524 (Jade Green); F.659 (Cobalt Green);
- 3 skeins each of F.498 (Cobalt Green); F.444, F.445 (Bittersweet); F.488 (Candy Yellow); F.527 (Madder Pink);
- 2 skeins each of F.437 (Pink); F.474 (Light Brown); F.566 (Ocher Yellow); F.884 (Cockatoo);
- 2 skeins each of F.465, F.464 (Carnation); F.443 (Pink); F.449 (Buttercup); F.479 (Shower); F.829 (Madder Pink); F.345 (Peach); F.397 (Carnation); F.497 (Orange).

1 1/2 yds. Harris Emos, 28 Eekdale, 46 in. wide, No. 25100 (No), price 5/6 yd.  
 2 "Anchor" Transfer No. F.422-D-11, price 4d. each, for Tea Cloth. Obtainable from The Needlewoman, Field House, Brown's Buildings, London, E.C.4.  
 Free Transfer for Napkins.



Summer Wrap (Patented Pattern No. 4997, price 11. 6d.) of pink cotton with the same flower border worked on the front edge and sleeves.

Sketch and Colour Chart for working the flower border. This design is repeated at the four corners of the jolly garden Tea Cloth opposite.

Image 29 Embroidery for indoors, outdoors and body, *The Needlewoman*, July 1934, private collection

LOOSE COVERS, KNITTING AND CROCHET



Loose covers: method of measuring chair for quantities of materials needed.

[See page 512]



Easy-chair in cretonne loose cover.

Image 30 Pre and Post slipcovering , *The Art of Needlecraft*, 1935, private collection



Image 31 Hand embroidery, Beamish , The Living Museum of the North collection



Image 32 Portiere and cushion, *Fancy Needlework*, v 131 n 11



Single Window Drapery.  
199

Image 33 Window Treatment, Rothery, 1923



Image 34 Mrs. Thomas' tea tray towel, private collection



Unages 35 a-c Mrs. Crankshaw's tablecloth, private collection



Image 36 Hand-embroidered cloth, Beamish, the Living Museum of the North collection



### The Maid was in the Garden

The wind has a lot of fun with the clothes—on a good drying day! What a cracking—like whips. What a swelling—like balloons. The only thing that spoils the fun is when the wind wraps something round the line and loses a playmate, But the wind is doing the things a lot of good, after which, if they've been starched with Robin, the ironing will be smooth and speedy, and the finish they will take will be most silvery. Robin is a powder starch and complete in itself. Use it for everything—big things and little things too.

# ROBIN

## *Starch*

RECKITT & SONS, Ltd. HULL & LONDON

Image 37 'Crinoline Lady' advertisement, *Ideal Home*, June 1926, Northumbria University collection



Image 38 embroidered cushion case, Whitworth Gallery, University of Manchester (7726.1991)



J. W.

## MABS' PATTERNS AGAIN !

*Frocks for dances, dinners, restaurants and theatres, designed by Mabs. You can choose your design and get the Mabs' pattern free. See next week's*

**EVENING-DRESS NUMBER.**

Image 39 Mab's Pattern offer, *Home Chat*, Sept 1923, private collection



Image 40, Ardath Cigarette box, *Twenties London*, Cynthia Ross, 2003, p. 48



Image 41 Evening Gown, Store bought, Beamish, The Living Museum of the North collection, (1985.138.3)



Image 42 Evening Dress, dressmaker; Beamish, the Living Museum of the North collection, (1978.685)



Image 43 Home sewn evening gown by Mrs. Knight, 1930-32, private collection

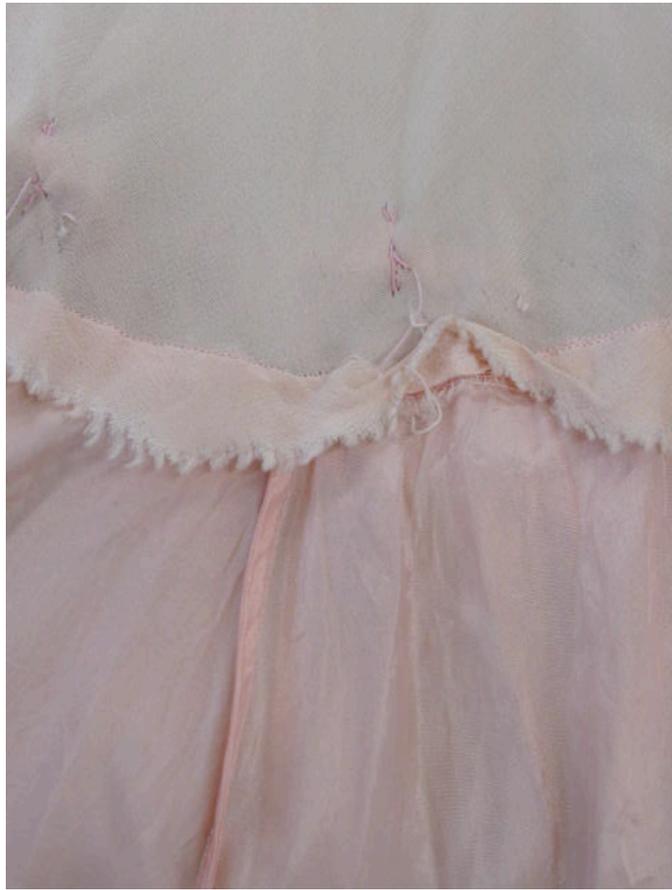


Image 44 Detail of hand stitching



Image 45 Day Dress, home sewn, Beamish, the Living Museum of the North collection, (1970.148)



Image 46, Daydress, Beamish , the Living Museum of the North collection, (1976.57)



Image 47 Day Dress, dressmaker made, private collection



Image 48 Wiener Werkstaette, sample book, Cooper-Hewitt collection



Image 49 Needlework purse, 1920s, private collection

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*House and Garden* (1923) July, September, December

*House and Garden* (1924) January, February

**Whitworth, University of Manchester**

*Embroidery* (1935) March, June, December

**Private Collection**

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### **Oral Histories**

Alexander, J

Bliss, M.

Buie, D.

Crankshaw, M.

Holden, G.

Holden, L.

Lavell, V & B.

Sheldon, W.

Stead, H.

Stirling, J.

Thomas, M

Whitley Bay Embroiderers' Guild