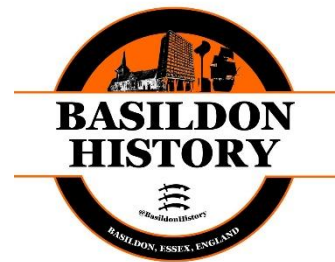


By Sarah Smith

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The Codpiece (15th-16th century, Europe)

Ah, the codpiece... fashion's most flamboyant answer to a very specific problem. This curious piece of historical menswear came about in the 15th century, mostly during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. What started it off? Well, to be frank, back then, men's pants were just a bit *too* open.

What you have to remember is, in those days, blokes were strutting about in hose, which were basically thick medieval tights.

These were often made up of two separate legs tied to a doublet (a kind of short jacket). This left a bit of an awkward 'no man's land' around the crotch area.



At first, they just threw a flap of fabric over it and hoped no one would notice, but you know how these things go, some bright spark thought "hey, why don't we make this a statement" and the codpiece was born, the humble flap of material evolving to a heavily padded jewel encrusted thing that screamed "LOOK AT ME". Think of it as a medieval equivalent of having a bright red sports car, except it's strapped to your groin.

Men like Henry VIII wore enormous, decorative codpieces, possibly to show off their wealth and virility, or maybe just to make eye contact a real challenge at court.

So, in a nutshell, the codpiece started as a medieval wardrobe fix but went from practical coverage to full on Renaissance peacocking.

The codpiece was phased out in the late 16th century as fashion shifted towards longer doublets and trunk hose (those big puffy breeches) and as modesty crept back into fashion and clothing became more streamlined, the codpiece went from a bold power move to a "what were we *thinking?*" moment.

By the 17th century the codpiece was firmly out of style, no doubt to the collective relief of tailors everywhere.

The Crakow (14th-15th century, Poland/Europe)

These medieval marvels popped up in the 14th century and were originally imported from Kraków, Poland (hence the name).

At first the pointed toe was just a snazzy bit of style, but then, as often happens in fashion, someone said “what if, now hear me out, the toe was *even longer*?”

Before long, men were going about their day in shoes with toes so long they had to be tied to their knees just to avoid faceplanting on cobblestones. Clearly nothing says “I’m rich and powerful” like wearing something that makes it near on impossible to walk.

As ridiculous as it sounds, the pointiness soon became something of a status symbol – the longer your crakow, the higher your social rank. There are rumours of some lords with toes stretching up to 24 inches - mental.

By the 15th century, presumably after somebody tripped over a cat, the fashion started to fade and was replaced with more practical shoes – but crakows remain a glorious reminder that humans have always been willing to suffer for style.



The Chopine (15th-17th century, Venice)

The Chopine, history's most impractical high-heel and a strong contender for the title of 'least walkable shoe ever invented'. These platform shoes were worn mostly in 15th to 17th century Venice, and they weren't just tall, we're talking *elevator-shoes-on-steroids* tall – sometimes over 20 inches high. You can't even call that a shoe, that's a ladder with straps attached.



So why on *earth* were they invented? Well, apparently the initial idea was to keep ladies dresses from dragging through the mud and questionable puddles that covered the streets of Venice.. makes sense. But then someone said “What if we made them *taller* to show the world how elegant and important I am?” and it spiralled from there.

At the height of this ridiculous fashion (yes, that pun was intended), women needed two servants to help them walk because if you stumbled in chopines, you didn't just trip, you faceplanted like a Renaissance Jenga tower. Naturally too, the higher the chopine, the more elite the wearer.

Eventually the invention of sidewalks and common sense killed the trend, but it just goes to show how far humans will go to avoid dirtying their hemline, while simultaneously risking a fractured ankle.



The Ruff (16th-17th century, Europe)

This frilly, overcooked pancake of Elizabethan fashion was the accessory that screamed “I have money, status and absolutely zero interest in peripheral vision.”

Ruffs showed up in the mid-16th century when someone evidently looked at a frilly shirt collar and thought, “you know what this needs? *More drama.*” The ruff started out as a modest little neck ruffle, but you know how these things go, that modest little ruffle quickly evolved into a full-blown neck doughnut, sometimes up to a foot wide. I imagine it would have been like wearing a satellite dish round your face, or one of those thingys the vet sticks on your dog after he’s had his bits chopped off (the dog, not the vet).



As well as looking absolutely ludicrous, the ruff would not have been at all comfy.



Starved to within an inch of its life and so wide you probably had to turn sideways to walk through the door, you could forget eating while wearing one, or even turning your head, unless you wanted to risk knocking over a candle and possibly a servant.

They were worn by both men and women and yes – you’ve got it, the richer the wearer, the bigger the ruff. Clearly nothing says wealth like a collar that requires its own scaffolding.

By the 17th century, people realized that wearing what was essentially a decorative neck frisbee wasn’t exactly practical (or comfortable) and the ruff was replaced by softer collars and cravats.

The 'Rib Removing' Corset (19th century, Victorian era)

Ah yes, the infamous *rib-removing corset* legend. Is there any truth in this piece of fashion folklore?

The short answer is 'no'. Corsets were certainly the go-to body shaping tool for women (and sometimes men!) from the 16th century through to the early 20th century and were designed to cinch the waist while supporting the bust. But somewhere along the way whispers began to circulate that some ladies actually had ribs *removed* in order to achieve that tiny waist.



Let's be clear: This is 99.9% myth. Corsets did indeed shape the body, sometimes quite dramatically, but they didn't require *actual* surgery. Granted some women laced their corsets tight enough to displace a few organs, but a full-on rib removal? Not likely. Remember this was before YouTube tutorials were a thing, so to undertake such a procedure would require a medical degree, anaesthesia and sterile tools. Not to mention the fact that the chances of surviving Victorian surgery were about as good as finding a wi-fi signal in 1892.

The myth probably stuck because corsets, when tightly laced, were capable of producing shockingly tiny waists, we're talking 16 to 18 inches – but it came with side effects like shortness of breath and fainting spells.

So no, all in all, corsets did not go hand in hand with surgery, they were just really tight, very structured and occasionally responsible for some Victorian women flopping over as if they were doing an impression of a fainting goat.

Hats Featuring Dead Birds (Late 19th, early 20th century, Europe and the US)

Welcome to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where women didn't just wear hats – they wore avian crime scenes on their heads. Women's hats just weren't complete unless they were adorned with a dead bird or two.

Why did this happen? While it's hard to pinpoint a single person who woke up one day and said "You know what this hat needs? A dead bird," the trend really took flight (yes that pun is absolutely intended) in the mid to late 1800s and was driven by Parisian fashion, although it quickly spread to Britain and the United States.

The main culprits behind this madness were a whole *flock* of Parisian milliners (fancy hat designers) who basically were just trying to outdo one another in a game of "hat Jenga". As fashion houses tried to one-up each other, simple feathers turned into full on stuffed birds, nests and occasionally even birds in "action poses".

One notorious name in the business was Madame Caroline Reboux, a French milliner considered one of the greats. While she didn't invent the bird-on-hat trend herself, she certainly helped to push the art of hat making into high drama, normalizing the idea that a hat just wasn't *couture* unless it looked like you ransacked an aviary.



Socialites and royals also helped fan the feathery flames. Queen Alexandra of England (wife of Edward VII) was known for her fashion influence, so naturally when she started strutting around with feathers on her head, everyone else did too.

It got so out of hand that by the 1880s, milliners were reportedly using millions of birds a year. The fancier the hat, the more exotic (and often endangered) the bird. We're talking egrets, herons, hummingbirds – basically if it flew, it could be glue-gunned to a hat.

Eventually this sparked outrage – not just from conservationists but other women. Enter the Audubon Society and other bird defenders like Harriet Hemenway who basically said “enough with the bird butchery!”. They led protests, tea parties and social boycotts of feathered fashion.

The movement helped to kick start the first wave of wildlife conservation laws, including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. So in the end, hats got a little less... *murder*y and birds got to keep their feathers *on* their bodies.



Safety-Pin Face Jewellery (Ancient Tribes & Modern Punk)

This trend started in mid-1970s London when bored teenagers decided that actual earrings were *so last season* and that safety-pins, being cheap, sharp and vaguely dangerous were way more on brand.

Imagine Sid Vicious swaggering down King's Road, clutching a beer and thinking "My face needs a little something extra." Plop a safety-pin through your nostril or cheek and bam – you've gone from "just woke up" to "ready to overthrow the monarchy" in two seconds flat.

What's even more brilliant about safety-pin face jewellery is the fact it's a total do-it-yourself job. No waiting for an appointment, no babying your new piercing with saline dips, just grab your nearest box of pins, stab – and voila!

This idea of sticking sharp things into your face wasn't new though. Many ancient tribes and cultures used metal, bone, shell or literal sticks to pierce noses, lips, ears and eyebrows as markers of identity, spiritual beliefs, beauty or toughness. For example, The Nez Perce tribe practiced nose piercings long before Europeans came poking around and tribes in Africa and South America have long histories of elaborate facial piercings and jewellery to symbolise maturity, rank or belonging.



This modern safety-pin-through-the-face trend wasn't *directly* inspired by any single tribe, punks weren't necessarily sitting around reading anthropological journals when they decided to jam a safety-pin through their cheek, but the trend certainly does echo those ancient vibes: using the body as a canvas, ornamented with metal and meaning.

Over the decades the trend popped up every time someone wanted to look unexpectedly gritty. In the 90s it was quite popular in grunge circles, because nothing says “I don’t care” like a bloody pin dangling from your eyebrow. Even if you fast forward to today you’ll still see runway models rocking glittering, oversized safety-pins like they’re the latest Tiffany piece.

So next time you want to embrace your inner punk without committing to a permanent piercing, consider a safety pin on your face. (disclaimer – I wouldn’t actually recommend sticking a safety pin in your face, I mean, you can – just don’t blame me if it gets infected or whatever)

The Macaroni (18th century, England)



The macaroni trend wasn't about pasta (at least not directly), though the name *did* come from young, upper-class British men who returned from their Grand Tours of Europe raving about – among other things – Italian pasta.

They started calling anything stylish or European “macaroni” and before long they were known as *macaronis*. Basically the word macaroni meant *extra*.

These guys were the original fashion influencers, prancing around London in wildly flamboyant outfits that would frighten a chandelier. Picture this:

- Wigs so tall and powdered they probably had their own weather systems with tiny hats perched on top.
- Coats covered in embroidery, gold trim and enough buttons to open a haberdashery.
- Breeches so tight they made members of the public deeply uncomfortable.

This was *camp* before camp was cool. They didn't just dress for attention – they invented the attention.

Their over-the-top style became such a thing it actually made it into “Yankee Doodle” – yes, the American Revolutionary War song. When the Brits sang the line “Yankee Doodle went to town, riding on a pony, stuck a feather in his cap and called it *macaroni*,” they were basically mocking Americans for thinking that sticking a *single* feather in a cap could make them fashionable. One feather? Amateur.

Inevitably people soon got tired of having to duck through doorways and spending more on waistcoats than rent and the trend eventually fizzled out. But their legacy lives on in every peacocky red-carpet outfit, every over accessorised runway model and every time someone looks in the mirror and thinks “*maybe this is too much, but I'm doing it anyway.*”