

Looking back: Dress and fashion one hundred years ago in colonial Natal

by Adrian Koopman

WHETHER born in Natal, or recently arrived from Britain and other parts of Europe, all Natal colonials had to deal with the heat. One way of doing this was to buy light-weight clothing. A Payne Bros. advert¹ for men's suits says the following:

The Hot Summer Days will not Rob You of Comfort. Adapt yourselves to Natal conditions by buying clothes which will keep your temperature as normal and ensure the Sunny Jim smile which makes your own and the lives of others as much more pleasant even if the weather is tropical.

The suits on offer which will achieve this "Sunny Jim smile" are of pure silk, costing from 27 shillings and sixpence (27/6)² to 40 shillings; of tussore silk, cheaper at a flat price of 27/6; or of

tussore poplinette, much cheaper at 16/9 for a suit. Harvey Greenacres also pitched their advert³ for gents' suits at the "beat-the-heat" angle:

78, 79, 80, 78, 79, in the shade!
Didn't realise it.
Harvey Greenacres cool clothes helped me through so nicely.

The man in the picture accompanying the advert is obviously wearing the advertised "Popular Poplinette Suit" ("complete with pearl buttons and inside pockets") which cost him 21/-.⁴ To go with this suit, "fine mercerised shirts" are available at 5/9 each, but fine silk shirts are more expensive at a full 11/6 each.

Another advert in *The Natal Mercury*⁵ is simply headed "COOL CLOTHES" and the satisfied (if not actually smug)

expression of the man wearing “White Indian Drill” shows that he too is compensating for the January heat. His outfit is a lot more casual than the suit appearing in most pictures of well-dressed gentlemen – his jacket is open, his tie looks more like a casually knotted scarf, and he is wearing a cap rather than the customary hat. However, the lighthouse and the yacht just visible behind him suggest that he is wearing an outfit suitable for the beach, so perhaps he can be forgiven these minor sartorial errors. His jacket, we note, cost him seven shillings, and the trousers five-and-six.

Also trying to stay cool is the man in the Harvey Greenacre advert⁶ for a white “Gab” suit. He has a bit more of a problem though, because despite the cool white gabardine fabric, he is wearing a high stiff collar, and keeping his jacket firmly buttoned up. He is also wearing a waistcoat, assuming that “three garments, 42/-” does not mean three complete suits, but rather jacket, trousers and waistcoat. Note also that this well-dressed gentleman is wearing a hat and carrying a cane – both accessories *de rigueur* for a gentleman if we are to go by the advertisements of the time.

Zulu-speaking men too, if they are “clever”, will present themselves to the world in a full suit with hat and

NATAL MERCURY, MOUNTED
COOL CLOTHES.
 Correctly cut.
 Extra well made.
 Moderately priced.

WHITE INDIAN DRILL.
 Jacket 7/-; Trousers 5/6.
 Better quality, 2 or 3-button
 Coat 9/-; permanent turn-out

Harvey Greenacre & Co.

White "Gab" Suit, mens, 42/-.
 Better quality White Suit, 52/6.

cane. The National Supply Co. advert⁷ in *Ilanga laseNatali* begins with the heading *Ukuhlakanipa Izingubo* (“Being clever with clothes”) and goes on with the somewhat curious introduction (author’s translation):

Five feet of clothes and a few inches of face. This is what a person shows when [standing] in front of the nation. Your face is something you can never choose, but [as for] the clothes that you choose, if you are clever you will get this year’s clothes from the National Supply Co.

The advert goes on in a somewhat rambling fashion⁸ about the importance of good measurement to ensure a good fit, something the expert cutters at the National Supply Co. are very good at doing.

UKUHLAKANIPA IZINGUBO

Ama sidi ayishlana izingubo noma inbes ambawla ubuso. Iloko umuntu akubonisa pambi kweswe. Ubuso lwako azange ubukete, kodwa izingubo zako unoku zipaka; nxa ubhala nipile usoketa izingubo zalonyaka kwi NATIONAL SUPPLY Co.

NATIONAL Supply Co.,

Izingubo sena litatani ubhlopake, utandake ubekake esikundleni soku tenjwa ngoku hlansaka, seniswa silingane kahle abo siki abahlaka nipile boku lilinganisa kahle, kodwa noko babha inxeny eje, abalingani nabanye abasiki abangeiso.

AMA SUDI ALINGANISWA KAHLA.

AQALA KU **55/-**

INational Scientific Measurement (amako walabe umnate usilinganisa yeni ngeni sibelo sabo) futhi nilingane kahle ngamadi ubalinganiswa singaweti sabasiki.

Tumela amasampula, nawo kulinganisa wena nedinganiso, sethu bias loto ngako konke loko sokutunela ngasini.

LOBA NAMHLANJE
 NATIONAL SUPPLY Co.,
 PARKER'S BUILDINGS, BURG STREET, CAPE TOWN.

While the advertisements for men's clothing frequently mention how cool they are and how Payne Bros' poplinette suits or Greenacres' "gab" suits will help beat the heat and humidity of a Natal summer, the advertisements for women's clothing seem to be far more concerned with how fashionable the clothing they have on offer is.⁹ The store Bon Marché advertises¹⁰ its "New Blush-White Corset" as "The Latest Novelty", in a full-page advert headed "Always to the Front:¹¹ Another Fine Selection of Advanced Fashions arrived per mail steamer." In an advert¹² for Frank Steven's Great Boot Bazaar, the headline is "Every Mail the Newest Designs".

POLO BOOTS, TRAMP BOOTS,
Farmers & Mechanics Boots, Men's Dress & House Shoes

Visitors to our Town, before making their purchases, should visit

FRANK STEVENS'

GREAT BOOT BAZAAR.

ALL GOODS ARE
PLAIN MARKED

Every Mail the
Newest Designs.

SEE WINDOWS!
SEE PRICES!

WEST STREET
(CENTRAL),
DURBAN.

687 : B

The linking of high fashion to latest arrivals as well as to a certain sense of well-bred exclusivity can be seen in a front-page advertisement for Carter Holman's store, and it is worthwhile quoting their message to the colonial ladies of fashion in full:

The Natal Mercury

Saturday May 4 1916

ANNOUNCING "LES VOGUES"

Madam,

We beg to intimate the arrival of our Season's Shipments which are presently in process of unpacking. Beautiful Frocks and Rest Gowns, Pretty Blouses, Smart Costumes and Winter Coats figure prominently. There are also many Decollette Millinery Models, which, though not actually on Display, may be seen in the Salon, in all their Freshness and Beauty.... In the Silks and Piece Goods Section we are opening up Dainty Shadings in Taffetas and scores of Fresh Ideas in Printed Voile. We are also fortunate in being in the unique position of specialising in Gabarrette Suitings and Indigo (Navy) Coating Serges for Tailor-mades.... A Hearty Invitation is extended to every woman to become acquainted with the Newest and Best British and French Contemporary Style-ideas. In appreciation of your visit of inspection,

We remain

Respectfully Yours,

Carter-Holman's Shrine of Fashion.

There are a number of things about this "invitation" which invite comment, but I would like to emphasise the high-flown language and the way in which this lofty style is linked to the notion of exclusivity. Of particular interest are the ladies' hats which here are "Decollette Millinery Models",¹³ which are too exclusive just to be shown in the window, but can be viewed in the "salon". Note that Carter-Holman's is not just any shop or store, but a "Shrine of Fashion".

But what sort of “beautiful frock”, what sort of “rest gown” and what sort of “smart costume” was the lady

Another advert¹⁵ shows an equally elegant lady wearing a crepe-de-chene dress which cost 69/6. Strangely, for 1916, she appears to be talking on her cellphone. The store offering this dress for sale also suggests that ladies might like to have a dress made by their own seamstress, and for this purpose they offer the following fabrics: Cream Delaines, Chenille Corduroy, White Sponge Cloth, Smart Suiting, Cream Winceys, White Cotton Gabardine, Striped Wincey, and Crepe-de-Leon. Most of these fabrics are not around today but a few are recognisable: “cotton gabardine” would certainly have been a cool fabric, but even at this distance “chenille corduroy” sounds most unsuitable for the Natal climate. More fabrics appear in the John Orr’s advert¹⁶ giving notice of an “Advance Showing of the New Season’s Styles”.

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An interesting show of season's novelties, Model and Race Gowns, Coats and Blouses; also "Fashion by Post" novelties (Tenth Week). Get your holiday requirements here.

— YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED —

ASSAM FROCK First value in the Gown and Blouse sections this morning.

Illustration below shows a charming Assam Silk Frock in the new Russian military style (Gown description). They come in Women's sizes only. Beautiful quality, and perfect workmanship. In Russian shade only. **Special Price £24 19s. 6d. F.**

A New Coat Handmade, and at the same time very wearable. Coat in most striking "Russian Style". Has coat sleeves, round, full collar, and "detachable" three-quarter skirt, full style. Large patch pockets and novel shoulder belt. Back, Brown or Navy. **Special Value £22 19s. 6d. £24 19s. 6d.**

A new Silk Crepe Frock, with smart, Crocodile Buttons, in Navy, Navy, Tan, or Black. Women's size. **£22 19s. 6d.**

Double Coat in Current Frock, similar to sketch, but without the pockets. Full skirt, and round belt. In N.W. Women's, in Oct. size, at **£21 9s. 6d.**

John Orr & Co.
Durban's Fastest Growing Store

of fashion wearing in 1916 Natal? An idea may be seen in the John Orr’s advert¹⁴ for a “charming Assam Silk Frock in the new Russian military style”. These dresses “come in woman’s sizes only”. It is not clear why the advert wants to stress this point – there can hardly have been a number of male readers wishing to purchase a frock in Assam silk for themselves. The fabric would have been a relatively cool one, but the dress was expensive at £4 19s 6d. The picture shows an elegant lady with a hat (as in the elegant gentleman pictures) and a furled parasol in place of a cane.

DRESS FABRICS

NOT AN ITEM IN THIS ANNOUNCEMENT THAT DOES NOT REPRESENT THE BEST VALUE.—NOT A YARD OF THESE GOODS THAT IS NOT OF THE MOST DEPENDABLE QUALITY . . .

CREAM DELAINES. Double width. Fine washing qualities—2/6, 2/11, 3/3, & 3/6 yard

NEW CHENILLE CORDUROY is a novelty and a very dainty material. Double width, 3/3 yard

WHITE SPONGE CLOTH, 40in. wide, 2/11 yard.

SMART SUITING, 54in. wide. This has Navy ground with very narrow stripes. Most suitable for Skirts and Costumes . . . 8/6 yard

CREAM WINCEYS, 40in. wide. Nice soft washing qualities . . . 1/11, 2/3, 2/6, 2/9 yard

WHITE COTTON GABERDINE, 40in. wide. Washes and wears well. Nice soft make. 2/3 yard

STRIPED WINGEY, 40in. wide. A very good fabric for children's wear. Choice of Pink or Blue Stripes on a White ground. 1/9 yard

CREPE-DE-LEON is a new silky semi-transparent dress material, 40in. wide, and can be supplied in Ivory, Pink, Saxe, Sky, etc. Double width 2/11 yard

“MONITO” STOCKINGS

THESE ARE FAMOUS LISLE THREAD HOSE.

250 doz. of these famous “Monito” Lisle Thread Stockings. Well shaped, the weave being graduated very fine at the ankles. The heels and toes are specially reinforced with an interwoven linen thread. All sizes in Black or White. Henderson’s are sole Durban agents for this excellent make of Stockings.

69/6

1. PER PAIR—3 PAIRS for 2/10!

600 yards of 27in. wide Fine Swiss Embroid.

These include a “smart serge coat”, a “model satin gown”, a “new Eolienne Frock” and a “crepe-de-chene gown”.

Women who preferred to go the skirt-and-blouse route rather than purchasing frocks, dresses and gowns had plenty of choice. An advert in *The Natal Mercury* of 1 March 1916 (p. 9) offered (among others) the following:

- a “useful morning blouse” of “white hair cord voile”. The price of 3/11 included raglan sleeves and a low collar trimmed with pleated embroidery;
- a “Pretty White Swiss Lawn Blouse” which featured an embroidered front, pearl buttons and a “Smart Organdi Muslin Collar” at 7/11;
- a “well-proportioned Jap Silk Blouse” at 8/11; and (most expensive of the lot at 14/11 each);
- a “Very Stylish Crepe-de-Chene Blouse” high-buttoned in the neck with silk crochet buttons and a “pleated Organdi frill to collar”.

1916 skirts in black taffeta at 63/-, in cream gaberdine¹⁸ at 65/-, in cream caber-twill at 19/11, and in navy serge at 27/6. A “Maid’s¹⁹ Tweed Skirt in good quality Heather Mixture Tweed with belt of self” cost a mere 10/6 to 14/6.

What were men and women wearing under these cool poplinette gents’ suits and these fashionable cream delaines morning gowns? Adverts for men’s underwear are hard to find in the 1916 press, but there is no dearth of adverts for ladies’ undergarments. A good place to start, perhaps, is with a Bon Marché advert²⁰ of March 1916 for camisoles, corsets and hose. The camisoles “are all made of fine Cambric or Nainsook, and trimmed [with] very dainty embroidery insertions, threaded with bebe ribbon [?] and edged with pretty Valenciennes laces”. Bon Marché’s cash price for these was two shillings and three pence. The corsets on offer were of a “very delicate Pink colour” and “each pair [?]”

NEWEST BLOUSES Our special display this week will demonstrate the fact that excellent taste and good judgment have been displayed in the selection of the new styles now on view in our windows and showroom. VALUES AS KEEN AS EVER.



No. 1.—Useful Morning Blouse of **WHITE HAIR CORD VOILE**. Raglan sleeve and low collar trimmed pleated embroidery. Exact to sketch. In O.S. at 6/11 each—**WOMEN’S—EACH 3/11**

No. 2.—Pretty **WHITE SWISS LAWN BLOUSE**. Embroidered front, fastens with pearl buttons. Smart Organdi Muslin Collar. **CASH PRICE—EACH 7/11**

No. 3.—Neat **WHITE CREPE VOILE BLOUSE**, with Roll Collar. Trimmed hem-stitching, as illustrated—**CASH PRICE—EACH 7/11**

No. 4.—A special line in **WHITE VOILE BLOUSES**, front embroidered as sketch. Collar and Cuffs trimmed Peat edging—**CASH PRICE—EACH 4/11**

No. 5.—Ivory **JAP SILK BLOUSE** of good quality, with inserted Collar of fine Organdi Muslin; well proportioned and finished—**CASH PRICE—EACH 8/11**

No. 6.—Very stylish **CREPE-DE-CHENE BLOUSE**, buttons high in neck with silk crochet buttons, pleated Organdi frill to collar. Done in Ivory, Black, Sage, Pink, and Navy **EXCEPTIONAL VALUE—EACH 14/11**

In another shop, a blouse made of “New Jap Schappe” cost as much as 21/11 (more than a guinea!) but at least it was “finished with smart French veining”.

Skirts for ladies were available in all the major stores. Norman Armstrong was offering in its advert¹⁷ of 4 July

is charmingly perfumed”. They go on to say “all corsets are guaranteed rustless, and are fitted with four suspenders”. To go on the four suspenders of each corset [each *pair* of corsets, perhaps?] the discerning buyer had a choice between

- Ladies White Cashmere Hose with artificial silk ankles, at 3/3 per pair;

- English Lisle Hose, with “new design Lace Clox done in Black, White or Tan and soft spliced feet”, which cost 2/6 per pair; or
- Black Cashmere Hose with a Llama finish and seamless feet (cost not given).

Mentioning that the corsets are “guaranteed rustless” might seem somewhat curious until one remembers Durban’s humidity and the salt-laden sea air. Naturally the last thing a lady of quality wanted was to feel herself rusting away under her ivory-and-cream morning gown. Indeed, a Norman Armstrong advert²¹ for corsets begins with the heading “Warner’s Rust-proof Corsets – the World’s Best”. The advert goes on to offer a variety of corsets, such as the “strong, well-boned ‘Batiste’ corset”, a more lightly-boned Batiste corset with a low bust, and medium low-busted “Straight-fronted Corset in White Coutil”. The brassiere, we should note, had not yet made its appearance in colonial Natal, having only been granted a patent two years previously, when Mary Phelps Jacob received a US patent for “the first brassiere design that is recognised as the basis for modern bras”.²²

And what of the footwear of the 1916 colonial? We have already seen the high-buttoned boots, both for men and women, featured in the advert for Frank Stevens Boot Bazaar (see picture p. 10). The same advert also offers (presumably only for men) Polo Boots, Farmers’ & Mechanic Boots, and Men’s Dress and House Shoes. Even hoboos are catered for, with Frank Stevens offering “Tramp Boots”. Ladies’ shoes

were a lot more delicate (and no doubt considerably more expensive) than Mechanic’s Boots and Tramp Boots. An advert²³ from Arthurs’ Footwear headed “Fashion Footwear: Ladies ‘Ariel’ shoes” offers the following:

- Black Orient Oxford shoes, excellent walking style, low heel at 11/8 per pair;
- Black glace shoes, “Gibson”²⁴ type, fashionable Cuban heel, no cap at 13/6 per pair;
- “Gibson” Shoes Black Glace, Cuban heels, patent leather “Bull” toe-cap at 14/6;

Warner's Rust-Proof Corsets — THE WORLD'S BEST.

Model 211. A strong Batiste Corset for average figures, well boned, medium bust and skirt well over hips; sizes 19in. to 30in. ... PRICE **5/11**

Model 461. A lightly boned Batiste Corset for slender figures. Very low bust and long skirt; four hose supports; sizes 20in. to 26in. ... SPECIAL VALUE **8/11**

Model 533. New curved waist Corset with long skirt and low bust, suitable for medium and stout figures. Six hose supports; sizes 22in. to 32in. ... Special **17/11**

Model 1051. A straight fronted corset in White Coutil, suitable for slender and average figures; medium low bust and long over hips; four hose supports; sizes 20in. to 30in. ... Special Value **10/11**

Large Shipments of NEW MODELS JUST RECEIVED.

HAND - EMBROIDERED LORRAINE UNDERWEAR, made of fine quality Marseilles. Each garment is beautifully cut and finished, and can be thoroughly relied on to wash and iron up as good as new.

Nightdresses 11/6
Combinations 8/6
Chemises . . . 4/11
Knickers . . . 4/11
Camisoles . . . 4/6

- Black Glace two-button shoes, with smart toe-cap, at 14/6;
- The “Langtry shoe”,²⁵ Black Glace, buckle, smart toe, at 15/6;
- Three-button shoes, “with either fashionable ‘Bull’ toe-cap or normal” 15/6; and, most expensive of the lot,
- Black glace Lavalliere²⁶ shoes with a smart toe and a charming style. These are “fully-recommended” and go for 19/6 a pair.

42/8, 45/-

BOYS' AND YOUTHS' SUITS.
In Suffolk, Norfolk, and Rugby.

Norfolks, 8 to 12, 12/8, 13/6, 15/6, 16/6, 18/6 up.

Suffolk, 5 to 15, 13/6, 15/6, 17/6, 19/6 up.

Rugby, 6 to 15, 10/6, 14/6, 15/6, 17/6, 20/- up.

WASHING NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK SUITS.

In White Drills, Assamette, all at sale prices: 6/6, 7/6, 8/6, 10/6 up. Good clearing lines.

Navy Serge Suffolk and Norfolk Suits. A few at clearing prices.

BOYS' WASHING TUNIC SUITS

Fawn Poplin Tunic Suit, 000, 00, 0, 1, 5/-

Blue Linen Tunic Suit, 000, 00, 0, 1, 8/6

Drab Linen Tunic Suit, 000, 00, 0, 1, 5/-

150 Tunic Suits to clear, 000 to 1, 5/6, 6/6, 7/6, 8/6, 9/6 New goods.

This Store will be open




the “Suffolk”, “Norfolk” and “Rugby” suits shows a very military-looking jacket over riding breeches and what are either long socks or puttees. The boy is wearing a high, stiff collar with a tie, a cap, and carrying a cane. He is either off for a day’s pheasant shooting, or off to inspect the troops. The younger fellow conveys a different image altogether: that curly head, the wide lace collar, the puffed sleeves, and the low-belted tunic (more like a skirt), worn on top of knee-high socks and T-bar shoes all suggest to a viewer a hundred years later that the word “boy” in the advert is an error. But we should note that boys and girls of a hundred years ago, up to the age of about five, were dressed the same, mostly in a style that today we would regard as distinctly feminine. The picture below left is of U.S. President F.D. Roosevelt (1882 to 1945) at the age of five²⁸. Please note the large, ornate hat. And Janie Malherbe’s picture of children’s clothing of that time²⁷ (below right) shows this clearly.



The last three pictures are all echoed in the outfit worn by the younger girl in the picture from *The Natal Witness*²⁹ in an advert headed “Girls’ and Maid’s Garments for School and other wear”. The older girl is pictured wearing a “Gymnasium Costume in Navy Serge” and this is clearly the “gymslip” popularised by Ronald Searle’s illustrations of St Trinian’s girls.

Returning now to the issue of “beating the heat” with which this article opened, one way of dealing with the heat and the

For School Wear

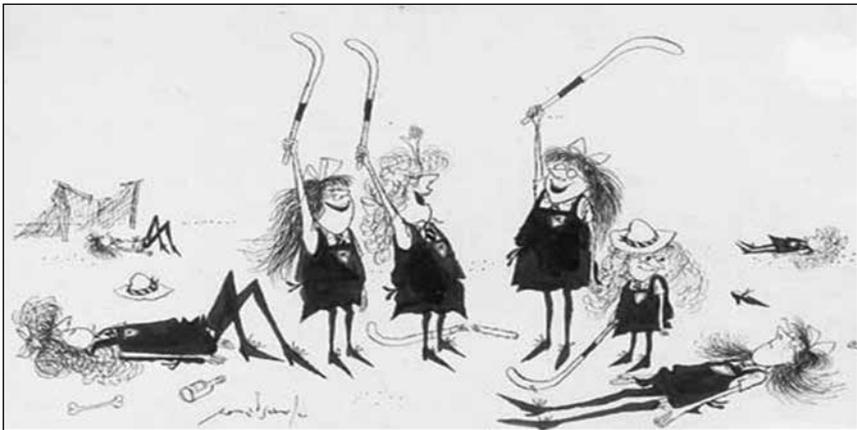
We are making a Complete Show of Girls' and Maids' Garments for School and other wear. Just Received. All Serviceable Goods At the Right Price.




Children's Washing Tunics and Overalls, sizes 18in. to 24in., at 1s 11d, 2s 3d, 2s 6d, 2s 11d, 3s 6d.
 Girls' School Washing Dresses, 27in. to 30in., 3s 11d, 4s 3d, 4s 9d, 4s 11d., 5s 6d.
 Maids' Washing Dresses, in Crepes, Piques, Cambric, Musin, Voiles.
 Gymnasium Costumes, in Navy Serges, a full range of sizes.
 Maids' Navy Serge Skirts, 30in., 10s 6d; 33in., 11s 9d; 36in., 13s 6d.
 Maids' White Pique Skirts, 28in., 7s 6d; 30in., 7s 11d; 32in., 8s 6d; 34in., 8s 11d; 36in., 9s 6d.
 Maids' Blouses, 2s 9d, 3s 3d, 4s 6d, 5s 6d, 6s 6d.
 Children's Bloomers, Vests, Knickers, Combinations, Night Dresses, Petticoats.
 School Hats, Untrimmed Javas, 2s 6d, 2s 11d. Double Brim Javas with Band, 4s 11d. Imitation Panamas. Straw Sailors.

Saville, Chapman & Co

MARITZBURG



tropical sun was to wear a hat. The colonial British believed very strongly in wearing a hat at all times, and indeed as Charles Allen points out,³⁰ British troops about to embark for India were warned

not to drink water outside the cantonment; not to go down to the brothel; and to wear a pith helmet or topee at all times of the day.

Pith helmets could also be slightly “feminised”, as seen in the “New French Helmet Hat” available at 6/11.



This hat came in three colours: navy, saxe and “nigger”.³¹ The girl in this picture is clearly a “Gibson girl” as is her sister in the picture advertising the “Becoming White Felt Hat...trimmed with smart Burberry mount and ribbon bow.”



Hats worn on a daily basis may have been a way of beating the heat, but truly big and highly ornate hats were worn for fashion only, and were *de rigueur* at race meetings, as they are today, a hundred years later. Below is an extract from a column by “Rita”³², writing about a meeting of the Durban Turf Club on New Year’s Day in 1915:

Mrs Becker...wore a black velvet hat with transparent tulle trim.... Mrs Barling wore a mushroom-shaped hat in white, trimmed with white tulle, black ribbon velvet, and bunches of shaded pansies.... Mrs Joel had a small black hat trimmed with white wings and her daughter Miss P. Joel...wore a Tuscan hat with crown of black taffeta trimmed with damask roses.

There was more such description, for example Miss Sykes, who wore a “charming dress of beige-coloured ninon with deep flounce of shadow lace” topped with a “purple velvet hat with brim of accordion-pleated ninon and a wreath of tiny gold-coloured roses”. This was to go with her “ceniture³³ of purple satin pointed with large gold roses and green foliage” and her purple sunshade. We read that Mrs Forsyth stuck to a simple Panama hat trimmed with “Roman striped ribbon” and Mrs Brock wore a sailor hat trimmed with small, brown, shaded roses. Mrs Black also favoured the floral theme with her white hat trimmed with a “mammoth pink velvet poppy”. And last but not least, “Rita” tells us that Mrs Britter was “impressive with her white silk poplin sailor hat, and a small pair of white wings resting on the brim”.

Two things strike one immediately about this detailed description of what can only have been “Decollette Millinery Models” rather than mere hats: one is that the whole throng must have

resembled nothing more than a walking garden exhibition, with tiny gold-coloured roses and shaded pansies on one side and giant pink velvet poppies on the other. The other striking point is the mention of wings on the hats. What can these have been? Were they winged helmets as popularised by Asterix the Gaul? Fortunately, we have a definite answer in the advert³⁴ for Millinery at Hendersons.

How do men's hats compare to the wonderfully varied hats worn by women? The felt hat advertised³⁵ by Ireland & Co. of 221-223 Church Street Pietermaritzburg is fairly typical of hats advertised elsewhere in the press of 1916. The Paynes Bros. advert headed "Stylish Hats for Smart Men" labels the hats variously as "Smart and Dressy", "The Very Latest", "Tweed Hat", "Maximum Comfort Hat" and so on, but there is in fact very little to choose between them. Pictured is the "smart and dressy" hat, and the only reason it has been chosen as an illustration here is that the price of 10/6 immediately brings to mind Tenniel's illustration of the Mad Hatter's Tea Party in Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where the

prominent price-tag stuck in the hatband reads “In this Style 10/6”.

Despite their rather humdrum appearance when compared to the confections worn by women, men may have treasured their hats. This is particularly well illustrated by the following headline in *The Natal Mercury* of 3 January 1915:

A WANDERING SCOT
Loses his Bowler Hat
And Smashes a Bioscope Window

NOTES

- 1 *The Natal Mercury*, 2 Mar. 1916, p. 8.
- 2 For those unfamiliar with the British monetary system of the time, there were twelve pennies (pence) in a shilling, and twenty shillings to a pound. A guinea was 21 shillings, and prices quoted in guineas were only for the wealthy elite. Prices consisting of pounds, shillings and pence were usually written like this: £5 12s 6d, i.e. One pound, twelve and six. Anything under a pound was written as 10/6 or 6/4, spoken out as “ten-and-six” or “six-and-fourpence”. Prices in excess of a pound were often given only in shillings: 70s (often as 70/-), rather than as £3 10s. For those wishing to cost the 1916 fashions in terms of rands and cents, the exchange rate at the time South Africa changed from the British system to a decimal system in 1961 was one shilling = 10 cents and one pound = two rands. At this exchange rate, a Payne Bros. suit of pure silk would have cost between R2.75 and R4.00, a tussore poplinette suit R1.70. Even at today’s exchange rate, this poplinette suit would only cost R61.80.
- 3 *The Natal Mercury*, 2 Jan. 1916, p. 1.
- 4 i.e. a guinea, but the price is too low to be quoted in guineas.
- 5 *The Natal Mercury*, 2 Mar. 1915.
- 6 *The Natal Mercury*, 2 Jan. 1915, p. 3.
- 7 *Ilanga laseNatali*, Jan. 1915.
- 8 I had some difficulty in translating this advert from Zulu into English. Phindi Dlamini on the *Natalia* Editorial Committee pointed out to me that the advert itself was a very bad translation from an English original.
- 9 Today, of course the word “cool” can be interpreted as meaning “in” or “fashionable”, especially when applied to clothing.
- 10 *The Natal Mercury*, 1 Mar. 1916, p. 6.
- 11 This phrase has the slightest suggestion of a link to the war situation in Europe. It is similar



to the phrasing “Join the ranks of well-dressed men” in an advert for men’s suits. Other adverts are much less subtle in linking their products to the war.

- 12 *The Natal Mercury*, 4 Mar. 1916, p.1.
- 13 The word *décolleté* is used of a low-cut dress which exposes much of the bosom. I cannot imagine what it means when applied to a hat.
- 14 *The Natal Mercury*, 4 Mar. 1916, p.1.
- 15 *The Natal Mercury*, 2 Mar. 1916, p. 3.
- 16 *The Natal Mercury*, 7 July 1916, p. 11.
- 17 *The Natal Mercury*, 4 July 1916, p. 9.
- 18 The spelling of this word varied between “gabardine” and “gaberidine”, just as “crepe-de-chene” appeared sometimes as “crepe-de-chine”. What today is known as “winceyette” manifested as “wincey” and “winceys”.
- 19 It is difficult to know what is meant by “maid” in this context. The use of the word in other adverts and other newspapers of the time suggests a young female between the age of “girl” and “woman”, perhaps what is a “teenager” today. It seems unlikely that the colonial ladies of the time would clothe their domestic servants in “good quality heather mixture tweed”.
- 20 *The Natal Mercury*, 1 Mar. 1916, p. 5.
- 21 *The Natal Mercury*, 4 July 1916, p. 9.
- 22 <https://www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/Bra>
- 23 *The Natal Mercury*, 1 Mar. 1916, p. 5.
- 24 The “Gibson Girls” were creations of American artist Charles Dana Gibson, who from the 1890s until well into the 1900s created pictures of the personification of feminine charm and beauty. The women who are wearing hats in several *Natal Mercury* adverts of 1916 are distinctly Gibson girls. (See pictures, p. 16.)

- 25 The reference here is to actress Lily Langtree, mistress of “Bertie”, the Prince of Wales, later to become Edward VII.
- 26 I have not been able to trace any person behind the name “Lavalliere”, but in 2016 you can still buy “Lavalliere shoes”, from Charles Louboutin, and they will set you back £245, approximately 250 times as much as Lavalliere shoes would have cost in 1916.
- 27 Malherbe, Janie, *Port Natal: A Pioneer Story* (Cape Town, Howard Timmins, 1965), p. 179.
- 28 President Roosevelt would have been five years old in 1893, thirteen years before 1916, but it is clear that this custom persisted well into the 20th century.
- 29 *The Natal Witness*, 19 Jan. 1916, p. 2.
- 30 Allen, Charles (ed.), *Plain Tales from the Raj* (London, Futura Publications, 1976), p. 45.
- 31 The use of this word as a colour term (or used at all) is startling from a 2016 perspective. It occurs again in an advert for a “Knock-About Hat” which is available in “Champagne, Vieux Rose and Nigger”. The colour is perhaps explained by a John Orr’s advert for “Exclusive Ladies Gowns” which offers an expensive gown in “Negra Brown”, a term no less offensive by today’s standards.
- 32 Rita’s name is given like this, under the headline, in double inverted commas, suggesting that this is a *nom-de-plume*.
- 33 This is presumably meant to be *ceinture*, a rather dated term for a belt or sash. “Rita” uses “ceniture” three times in her column.
- 34 *The Natal Mercury*, 17 Jan. 1916, p. 9.
- 35 *The Natal Witness*, 10 Jan. 1916, p. 4.