

Lingerie Timeline

Providing secret support since 1926

1926

We opened our Drapery department which included clothing and lingerie. Early ranges included garters, directoire knickers, sanitary belts and free-run bodices.



Bra, 1920s

The oldest bra in the archive collection dates from the late 1920s – it offered light support whilst giving the wearer a smooth silhouette.

1930s

Many of our early lingerie products were made from artificial silk, or rayon - an early synthetic fibre made with cellulose from wood pulp. The fabric was seen as a more affordable alternative to silk, and a more luxurious option than cotton, linen or wool.



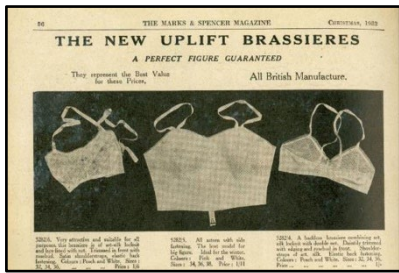
Window display, 1937

1932

We sold corsetry and brassieres advertised with the slogan, 'A perfect figure guaranteed'. Hook-sided girdles gave 'that slim silhouette demanded by present fashions'.



Corsetry advert, 1932



Advert, 1932

1939

Stock control documents show that by 1939 we were selling at least 30 styles of bra – most were available in white or peach, sometimes blue. Styles included ‘rubber reducing brassieres’ and an ‘Outsize’ range.

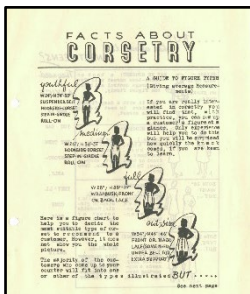


Bra, 1940s

1941

During the war, austerity measures and the Utility Scheme meant designers had to work harder to continue making attractive yet practical garments.

Many Head Office departments were temporarily moved out of London. Both the Corsetry and the Woven Underwear buying departments were relocated to Leicester.



Guide to figure types, 1947

1940s

We’ve always helped our customers choose the right size underwear. Before fitting rooms were introduced in the 1970s, sales assistants were trained to measure customers for girdles, bras and corsets on the shop floor.



Marble Arch store, 1947

1947

We trialled a new way of selling lingerie to help customers feel more relaxed. At Marble Arch store, specially designed counters were arranged to give a secluded space where customers felt at ease discussing their ‘corseting problems’. Takings went up as a result of the trial and exchanges reduced..



Strapless bra, 1953

1951-1953

During the 1930s and 1940s, our bras were sold by chest size only. In the early 1950s we began using three cup sizes; small, medium and large, inspired by American retailers. This made it easier for customers to find a bra to fit.

By 1953 we were selling 125,000 bras a week.



St Michael News, September 1958

1953

We started selling bras aimed at teenagers and younger women. Light, simple styles such as the brief brassiere were designed for the more 'youthful figure'.

We saw an increase in customer interest in lingerie in the 1950s. Post-war, customers had more disposable income and would have seen glamorous representations of boudoir style in Hollywood films, influencing their spending habits.



High line girdle, 1955

1955

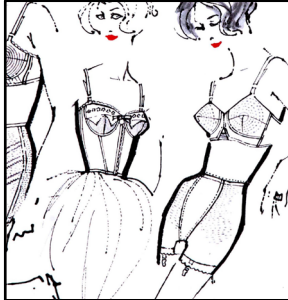
We sold elastic high line girdles, which provided more support, and ensured 'spare tyres, [and] ungainly bulges are eliminated'. The girdles had very little boning, so were more comfortable than earlier designs.



Corselette, 1953

1957

Full body-shaping lingerie was trialled. This all-nylon corselette, which combined a bra and girdle, was popular with customers who wanted more control.



Pantee girdle, 1959

1959

By 1959 we were selling 'pantee' girdles – this new garment gave more freedom than a girdle and was suitable for wearing under trousers. Early versions came with two detachable gussets.



Girdle with stretch net, 1960

1960

Two-way stretch net was developed by firms such as John Heathcoat & Co, an M&S supplier. This new fabric allowed for comfort and ease of movement.



Tailored slip, 1961

1961

In Spring 1961 we launched our first tailored slip. Special techniques were developed to ensure that the slip took the strain, rather than the skirt.



Still from 'In Form for Tomorrow', c1962

1962

We began using Lycra in 1962 when it was introduced into our girdles. It was promoted as soft to touch, easy to wash and wear whilst still offering firm control.

To promote the use of new synthetic fibres, we produced cinema adverts. 'In Form for Tomorrow' showcased the benefits of Lycra in St Michael lingerie.



Stretch bra, 1964

1964

Our lingerie designers were constantly working to improve comfort and support. By 1964 we were selling bras with adjustable stretch straps.

1965

We were the first retailer in the UK to sell pre-shrunk cotton underwear.

The same year, stretch lace was introduced to girdles and panty girdles.

The girdle range of 1965 focused on the 'rounded rear.' The American-inspired range gave a gentle uplift and was recommended for wearing beneath trousers.



Coordinating bras and girdles, 1966

1966

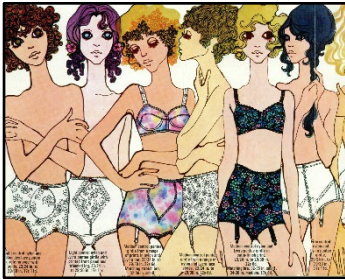
In 1966 we became the first major retailer to introduce a range of coordinating bras and girdles. From light to firm control, the girdles came in lace and fabric to match the bras.



Bra slips, 1967

1966

We trialled the bra slip. Influenced by Parisian styles, the M&S bra slip became one of the fastest selling lines of the 1960s. Customers enjoyed the practicality of wearing one garment instead of two, and the shorter length suited the mini-skirt fashions of the time.



Bras and girdles, 1968

1968

We launched a new range of panty girdles which included high cut styles that 'bolster the rear'. The girdles were available in light, medium and firm control and came in a variety of fabrics, in plain and printed designs.



Lingerie advert, 1969

1969

We introduced cup sizes to our bras (A-D) which replaced the small/medium/large sizes.

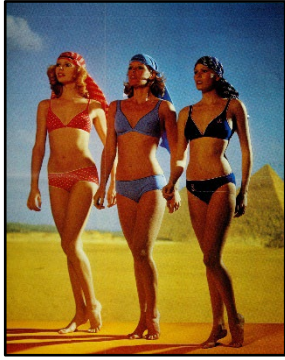


Scanlace bra, 1973

1971

The Scanlace bra was introduced in 1971 for 73p, and 18 months later M&S had sold a million – it became the bestselling bra in Britain in 1972.

It was our first unlined bra, described as 'less bra doing the same job as before'. The bra was seen as a prototype for a new style of bra aimed at a younger market.



Lingerie advert, 1976

1976

As well as supplying the British market, we exported lingerie around the world to concessions in chain stores and St Michael shops.

By 1976 knickers were our largest export – nearly 4 million pairs a year were sold internationally.



Bra campaign, 1983

1983

An in-store campaign, 'Bras for Today's Woman' encouraged women to buy into a wardrobe of different bras. 'Ladies need at least three styles: a good softly shaped day bra, a seamless bra for the 'natural' look to wear under t-shirts and a deeply plunging glamour bra for evenings.'



Sports-inspired lingerie, 1984

1984

The keep-fit boom of the 1980s influenced our lingerie ranges. In 1984 we launched a sports-inspired range.

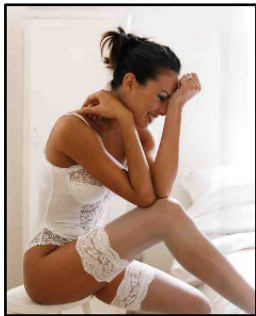
We'd been selling sports bras since the early 1980s, and sales assistants were trained to advise customers which bras were most suitable for exercise.



Bra fit training, 1994

1994

In 1994 we developed a new bra fitting service involving more thorough measurements than had been used previously. Staff underwent two days of rigorous training and assessment to ensure they were giving customers the best service.



Bridal lingerie, 1998

1994

Nursing bras were introduced in 1991 but we expanded our range in 1994 to include slips and briefs.

We launched a new bridal range after researchers surveyed 500 brides – the collection was feminine and pretty, but with no fussy detailing.



New look lingerie department, 1997

1997

Research into our lingerie customers, resulted in a trial of new look lingerie departments with new fixtures and fittings, and merchandise separated into customer types – glamour, modern and classic.



Salon Rose, 1999

1999-2001

The Salon Rose collection from Agent Provocateur was launched in store in 1999, and included bridal and maternity collections.

In 2001, Australian designer Collette Dinnigan designed the first Wild Hearts range – a partnership that expanded to include swimwear and hosiery.



MW, 2003

2003

We launched the MW collection, which brought together lingerie and menswear.



Autograph lingerie, 2006

2005-2006

Two collections of per una lingerie launched in 48 stores across the country in 2005. The following year saw the launch of the Autograph lingerie range. The first colour palette was rich chocolate and ivory.

MORE THAN JUST BRAS
Feminine, flattering and comfortable, the M&S post-surgery lingerie range will be available in selected stores (see p135) from June, and online at www.marksandspencer.com.

<p>Embroidered bra, in sizes 32-40B-D, 34-36A-D, £12, and briefs, £4 (T81/1208/15).</p>	<p>Body smooth bra, in sizes 32-40B-D, 34-36A-D, £14, and shorts, £6 for a pack of two (T81/1203/2662).</p>
<p>Adored non-wired lace bra, in sizes 32-40B-D, 34-36A-D, £18, and shorts, £12 (T81/1205/5134).</p>	<p>Truly You underwired balcony bra, in sizes 32-40B-D, 34-36A-D, £18, and Brazilian briefs, £12 (T81/1207/7055).</p>

Post-surgery range, 2006

2006

We've been recommending bras suitable for post-surgery since the 1990s and by 2003 we were selling 'Maximum Support' bras. In 2006 we launched a new range of bras with prosthesis pockets, designed in consultation with women who had had partial or full mastectomies.

A 10% donation from the sale of each bra went to the charity Breakthrough Breast Cancer, now known as Breast Cancer Now, a charity that M&S continues to support.

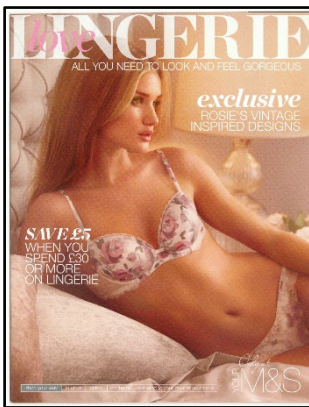


Carbon neutral bra, 2011

2011

We launched a carbon neutral bra, part of the Autograph leaves collection.

The same year we developed Heatgen™ - a thermal underwear range.



Rosie collection, 2012

2012

The Perfect Poise range was designed to increase awareness of correct posture by providing support to the shoulders, back and bust.

The same year Rosie Huntington-Whiteley launched her first range of lingerie, showcasing French-designed lace, luxurious silks and soft feminine prints.



Archive inspired lingerie, 2016

2016

We celebrated 90 years of lingerie at M&S by redesigning the bestselling 1970s Scanlace bra. The bra was available in three colours, underwired and non-wired and with matching knickers.



Boutique collection, 2020

2020

We launched the Boutique collection. Soozie Jenkinson, Head of Lingerie Design said: 'We've loved creating this brand which is designed to add a contemporary, playful and fun aesthetic to our lingerie collections.'



Virtual bra-fit, 2021

2021

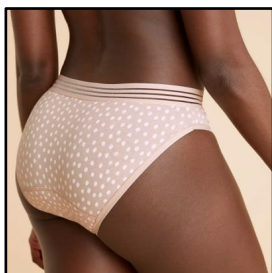
Following the restrictions put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, we introduced remote bra-fitting. The virtual appointments with a bra fit expert followed the same instore process and cup size was assessed visually. Customers were sent a follow up email with links to suitable products and style tips.



Archive-inspired embroidery, 2021

2021

To mark 95 years of M&S lingerie, a special Archive Embroidery range was created, inspired by embroidery found in the M&S Archive.



Period knickers, 2021

2021

We launched period knickers. The three-layer gusset provides high absorbency and comfort.



10th anniversary range, 2022

2022

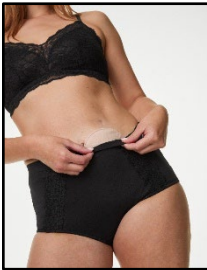
To celebrate the 10th anniversary of her collections for M&S, Rosie Huntington-Whiteley reimagined our customers' favourite pieces – resulting in ten designs in her most-loved shapes and styles.



Flexifit™ lace, 2023

2023

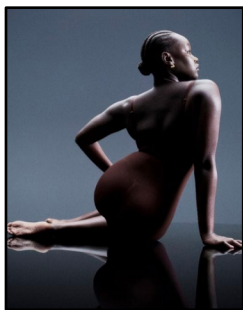
We launched the Flexifit™ lace range – modern, botanical inspired lace with Flexifit™ 360° stretch technology. The fabric is sustainably sourced with no-VPL free-cut finishes.



Stoma knickers, 2024

2024

We became the first UK high street retailer to introduce stoma knickers to our lingerie collection. The knickers are designed with an internal pocket to support individuals living with a stoma.



Lingerie campaign, 2025

2026

We launched Body - a 300 piece collection of bras, briefs, shapewear and essentials pairing a contemporary aesthetic with advanced fabric innovation and comfort first engineering.