

Marking Moments

Notes for Carers

November 2022

From flares and huge collars, to tank tops and kipper ties, this issue we take a look back at the 1970s – a decade of style!

From the Archive...

Young St Michael for Men, 1970

In the 1970s many men were feeling more confident to wear brighter colours and bolder prints. The Young St Michael range was trialled in March 1970 in six stores and in October 1970 it was rolled out to 15 stores. The range included deep collared shirts with matching scarf ties, slim fitting knitwear and velvet look or jacquard flared trousers. Outerwear included midi trenches and formal tailored raincoats all paired with wet look shoes. The photo on the right is taken from a marketing leaflet promoting the range, the photo shoot took place at Silverstone and features a Formula Ford car in the background.

Did you ever wear flares?

Where did you buy your clothes in the 1970s?

Young St Michael for Women, 1970

The Young St Michael range also included a collection for women. These pinafore dresses cost £5 10s each, the knitted cotton blouse on the right cost £2 10s. The mini-skirt trend of the 1960s was less popular into the 1970s, customers at M&S were buying midi and maxi length skirts and dresses instead. The shift in skirt length was so significant it was even featured on News at 10!

Would you wear a maxi dress?

Which skirt length do you prefer – mini, midi, or maxi

White Suit, 1977

The range of menswear sold in store increased with the establishment of our suit department in 1972. The success of the suit department was helped by the employment of Italian designer Angelo Vitucci as a consultant in 1970. Vitucci had worked for the luxury men's tailors Brioni until he set up his own business in 1963, his clients included Roger Moore and Henry Fonda. This photo shoot was shot on board RRS Discovery in 1977 and the white suit pre-empted the release of Saturday Night Fever by a year!

Where did you buy your first suit?

What do you think to the large collar on this brown shirt?

Men's Swimwear, 1971

Just like the rest of the menswear ranges at M&S, in the 1970s swimwear started to feature brighter colours and bolder patterns. The photo shoots to promote swimwear often took place in exotic locations and holiday destinations. At the start of the decade more people were taking package holidays overseas, so these adverts would have given shoppers ideas for their holiday wardrobe!

Where is your favourite place to go on holiday?

Do you enjoy swimming?

Womenswear, 1970

This advert featured in the M&S staff magazine, St Michael News. The magazine regularly commissioned work by artists and illustrators, and this design is by popular 1970s artist Jil Shipley. The figure on the left wears a dress with a dog-ear collar, the dress second from the right has a keyhole neckline with a tie detail. The article alongside the article quoted fashion designer Sonia Rykiel who said "women are more intelligent now. They can please themselves. We are not all the same shape why should we wear the same length".

Which is your favourite outfit in the picture?

Do you prefer skirts or trousers?

Partywear, 1970s

Dinner parties and entertaining at home were gaining in popularity during the 1970s. Our collections of partywear and evening wear grew to reflect this, as did our food, beer and wine ranges. Films such as Abigail's Party, and TV programmes like The Good Life showed glamorous hostesses wearing floaty maxi dresses like these. The dress on the right sold for £8.99 in 1977.

What would you wear to a dinner party at home?

What is your favourite food to cook?

Knitwear, 1972

Ever since M&S set up a textile testing laboratory in the 1930s, textile technology has been an important part of product development, helping to keep quality high, as well as creating easy-care, easy-wear garments. In 1972 we developed a process to mass produce machine washable wool - the wool was given a shrink-proof coating. The coating had the added benefit of being very hard-wearing and more colour-fast.

Did you have a stripey tank top? Would you still wear it?

Mountaineering in St Michael, 1970

Mountaineer Michael Thompson visited M&S in early 1970 to select clothing for himself and the rest of his team. They were due to embark on an expedition to the top of Annapurna, the 10th highest mountain in the world. The expedition team would wear specialist outer clothing, but their underwear and knitwear all came from M&S. Michael chose three lightweight jumpers for each team member, which would be warmer and more comfortable than wearing one thick jumper. The expedition was led by mountaineer Chris Bonington.

Have you ever climbed a mountain?

Do you have a favourite jumper?

Decimalisation, 1971

Decimalisation was announced in the 1960s, but didn't take place until February 1971. Retailers including Marks & Spencer had to re-price all their merchandise, install new tills, and help customers understand the new currency. The night before the change-over, TV cameras filmed M&S teams working through the night at Edgware Road store, replacing price tickets, installing 49 new tills, and filling them with the new money. The same changeover operation took place at each of the company's 246 stores across the country.

Have you ever worked in a shop?

Embroidery, 1970s

These embroidered motifs were popular on clothing in the 1970s. M&S developed a technique where these patches could be heat-pressed onto clothing, rather than sewn on. Many of the designs for these embroidered motifs were overseen by a lady called Margaret Nash. Margaret worked for the design team through the late 60s and into the early 70s, and we now have a large collection of her work at the archive.

Do you enjoy sewing or embroidery?

What jobs have you had?

Frozen Food, 1972

Convenience was all the rage in the 1970s. Lifestyles were changing and customers wanted quick-to-prepare food without sacrificing quality and flavour. We trialled frozen foods in one London store in 1971, extending to 100 stores by 1974. Products ranged from staples like peas and fish to prepared meals like lasagne, fisherman's pie and savoury pancakes.

What is your favourite meal?

Do you enjoy cooking?

Homeware, 1973

In the 1880s, customers at our market stalls could purchase household essentials including kitchen utensils, candles and metal tacks. By the 1920s our home department had expanded, including alarm clocks, fireguards and elegant teaset. Supply challenges during the Second World War saw us remove Homeware departments, but they returned at the end of the 1960s. By the 1970s we were selling bright soft furnishings including bold, floral bedding and trendy towels. The ranges soon expanded to include everything customers needed to equip and decorate their homes.

Would you like this pattern in your kitchen?

Have a Go...

Colouring Pages

The colouring pages could be completed using coloured pencils, pens or paint. You could try collage with tissue paper or cut out shapes from magazines.

1970s Quiz

The quiz could be used individually or with a group. You could plan a small prize for the person who gets the most correct answers, or encourage participants to work in groups.

Wordsearch

You'll need: pens or pencils

Print out a copy for each of your participants. Ask them to find the 1970s-related words in the list. Some words go diagonally, and some might go backwards!