

Lingerie Timeline

Providing secret support since 1926



White cotton and rayon bra, c1928

1926

We opened our Drapery department which included clothing as well as lingerie. Our first bras were designed to provide the flatter chest and boyish figure popular at the time. Our lingerie range included garters, directoire knickers, sanitary belts and free-run bodices.

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

1930s

The most popular fabric for lingerie during the 1930s and 1940s was artificial silk, or rayon as it was known - 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.



Artificial silk lingerie window display, 1937



Corsetry advert, 1932

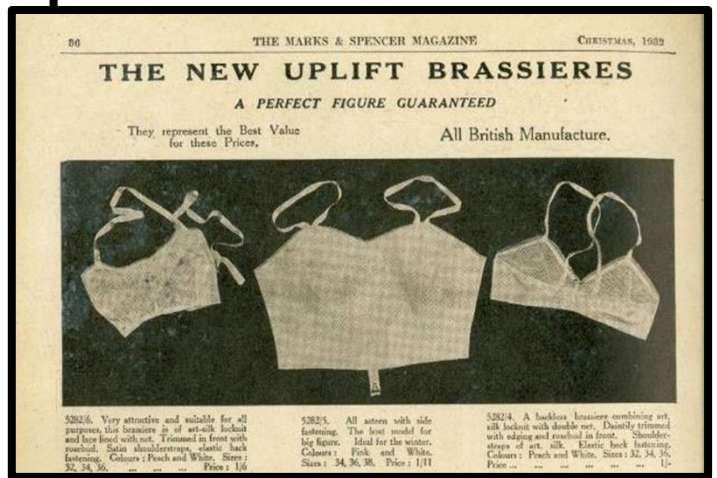
1932

We sold corsetry and uplifting brassieres advertised with the slogan, 'A perfect figure guaranteed'. These new styles suited the changing trend for 'lift and separation'.

Hook-sided girdles gave 'that slim silhouette demanded by present fashions'.

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.



Brassieres advert, 1932

1941-1945

During the war, austerity measures and the Utility Scheme meant designers had to work harder to continue making attractive yet practical garments. Despite this, we were still able to produce glamorous lingerie.

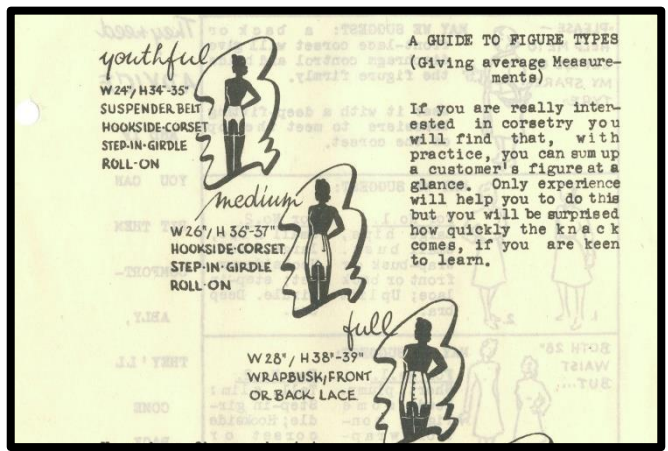
Many Head Office departments were moved out of London. Both the Corsetry and the Woven Underwear buying departments were relocated to Leicester.



CC41 bra, 1940s

1947

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



Guide to figure types, 1947



Marble Arch store, 1947

1947

We trialed 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.

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 brassieres per week.

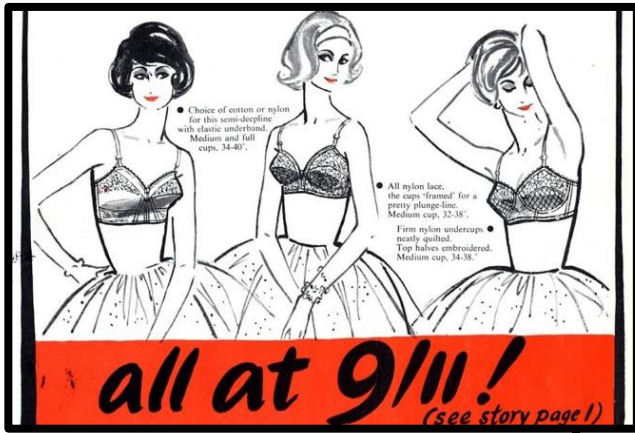


Strapless bra, 1953

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'.

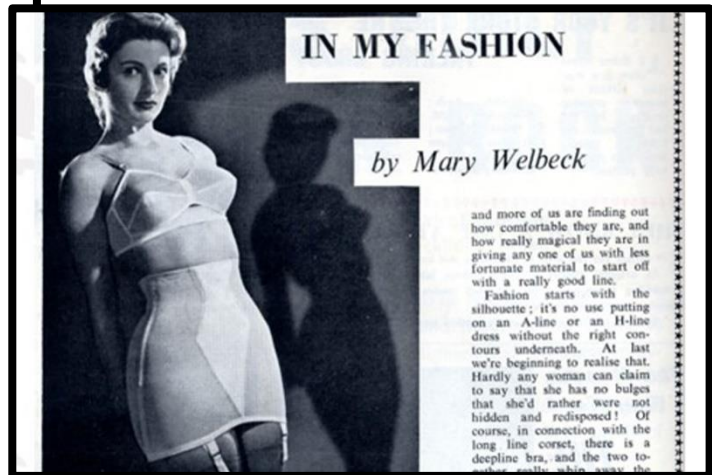
We saw an increase in customer interest in lingerie in the 1950s. Post-war, customers had more disposable income and would have seen glamorous representations of boudoir style in Hollywood films, influencing their spending habits.



St Michael News, September 1958

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 much more comfortable than earlier designs.



High line girdles, 1955



Corselette, 1957

1957

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

1958

Following successful trials, we started selling an American-inspired bra with moulded foam cups.



Moulded foam cups, c1964



St Michael News, September 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.

1961

Panty girdles were available in three leg lengths. They offered support and a smooth silhouette under trousers.

The same year, bra and suspender belt sets offering lighter support were promoted to teenagers.



St Michael News, October 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.

We first began using Lycra in 1961 when it was introduced into our girdles. It was promoted as soft to touch, easy to wash and light to wear whilst still offering firm control.



**Here it is at last—
the tailored slip**

From Mary Welbeck

HOW often had you longed for someone to produce a perfectly plain, well-tailored no-frills waist slip to wear under straight skirts for that protection against stretching that such a skirt must have.

How pleased you must have been when you found that someone—Marks & Spencer in fact—were doing just that!

But did you know how much thought and planning had to go into that seemingly plain foundation waist slip, now selling at only 14s. 11d.?

Having realised the tremendous potential they had in the line, the department mustered the help of manufacturers, designers and even the engineering services department, to plan a new design on blueprint lines.

Special techniques were developed to give these waist slips a

reaching stores during the early Spring will have a 9 in. zip to make them even easier to get in and out of.

The material—nylon sharkskin has been tailored with the same care and precision that normally only goes into a skirt—in fact as far as the lingerie department are aware, no lingerie manufacturer has ever before worked to such a closely detailed making-up specification on any waist slip!

The result, in black or white, in waist sizes 24 in., 26 in. and 28 in., in fashionable 25 in. length, is the perfect answer to the problem of what to wear under a straight skirt.

**Competition
Winners 1**

Tailored slip, 1961

1962

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.



Still from 'In Form for Tomorrow', 1962



★Above: The Bra section in fine Leaver's lace, the back and side panels are all elastic and the stretch shoulder straps are adjustable.

★Below: St. Michael fine cotton Broadcloth lined bra has stitched undercup and closed end shoulder straps.

St Michael News, 1964

1964

Our lingerie designers were constantly working to improve comfort and support. In 1964 we promoted bras with elastic adjustable straps, and elastic back and side panels.

1965

In 1965 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.



Panty girdle, 1973



St Michael News, Spring 1966

1965

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

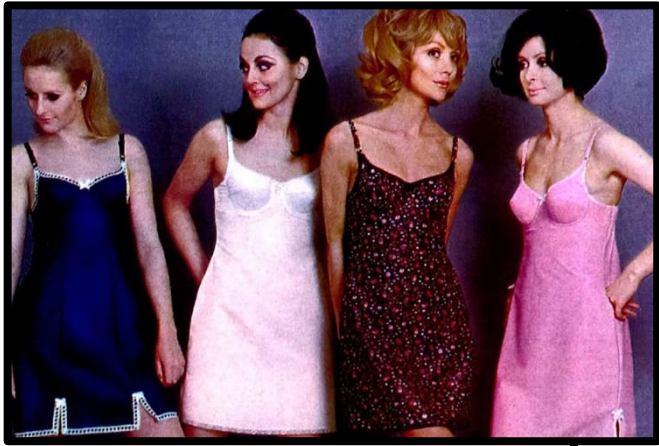
The same year, stretch lace was introduced to girdles and panty girdles.

1965

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.



St Michael News, 1966



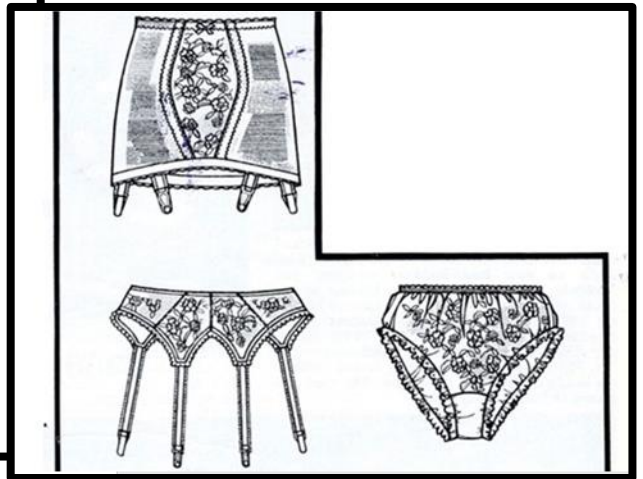
Bra slip, 1966

1966

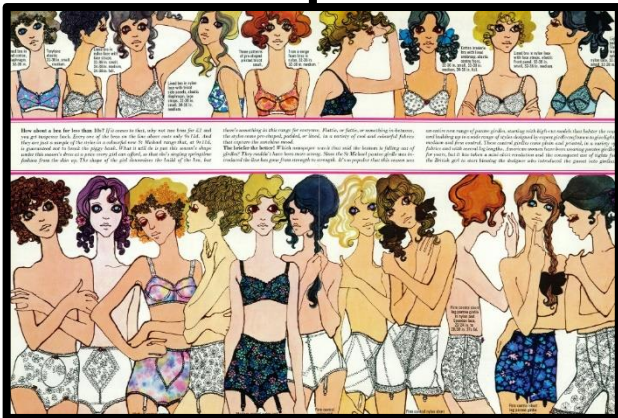
In 1966 we trialed the bra slip. Influenced by Parisian styles, the M&S bra slip became one of the fastest selling lines of the 1960s. Customers enjoyed the practicality of wearing one garment instead of two, and the shorter length suited the mini-skirt fashions of the time.

1966

We introduced mix and match all-over lace bras, briefs, slips and girdles, made with Nottingham lace.



Nottingham lace lingerie, 1966



St Michael News, March 1968

1968

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

1968

In the 1960s, our bra-fit technique didn't differ from that of earlier decades - staff continued to be trained to measure bra size on the shop floor under customers' coats.

* Facts about
BRASSIERES


St. Michael brassieres are made from the finest quality materials and trimmings to ensure comfort and fit for the wearer.

When a customer wants advice it is to the Sales Assistant she puts her questions. The first thing you need to know is:-

MEASURING Measure under customer's coat or cardigan holding measure firmly to allow for clothes

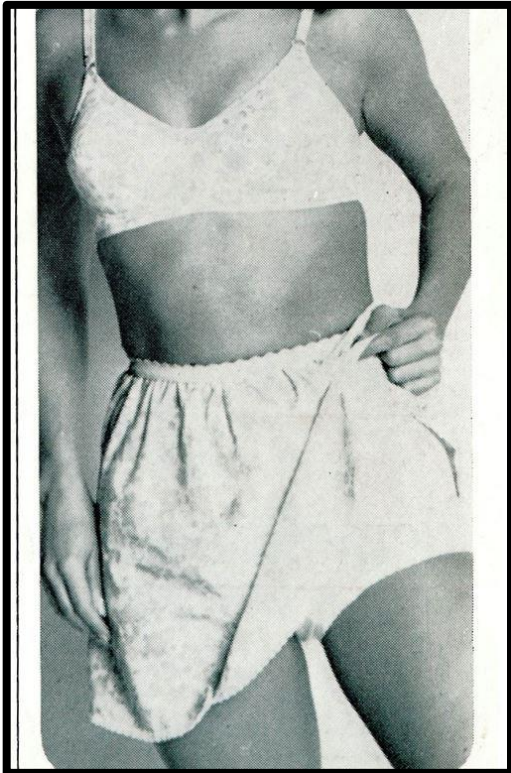
TO FIND BRASSIERE SIZE Measure underbust add 5" e.g. underbust 29" + 5" = 34".

TO FIND CUP FITTING Measure overbust (fullest part); make sure tape isn't sagging at back. If it is same as bra size advise small cup.



Measure
OVERBUST
UNDERBUST

Brassieres training guide, 1970



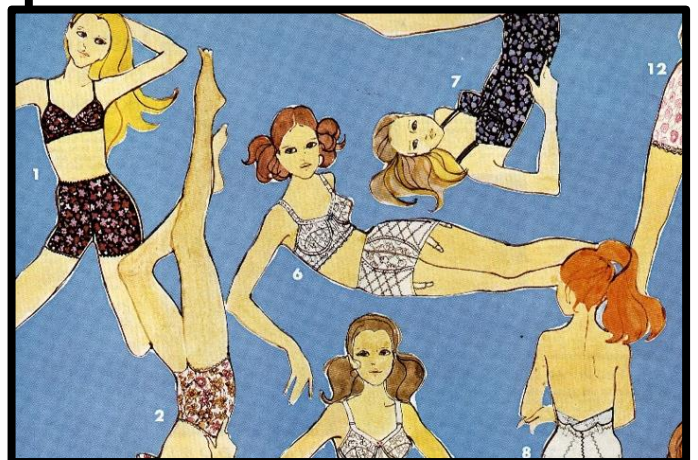
All-in-one panty girdle and slip

1969

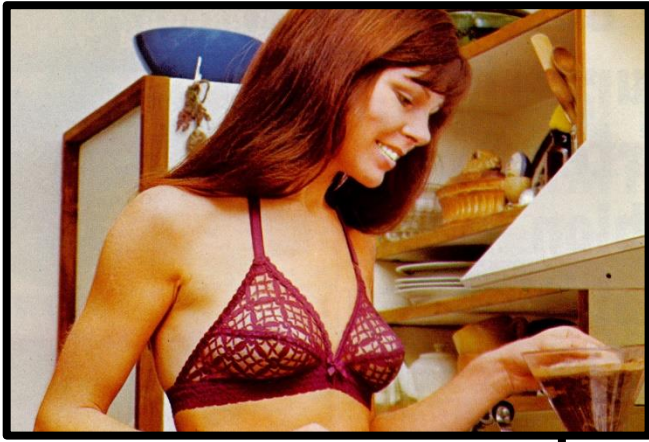
The all-in-one panty girdle and slip was introduced. The new shorter length slip was designed to be worn with a mini skirt and to provide better fit for women under 5' 2".

1969

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



St Michael News, February 1969



Scanlace bra, 1972

1972

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.

1977

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

By 1977 knickers were our largest export – nearly 4 million pairs a year were sold internationally.



St Michael News, 1977

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.'

Alongside this we developed a luxurious lingerie range which featured satin camisoles, bras, French knickers and slips.



Bandeau bra ideal for wearing under summer tops.

Bandeau bra, February 1983

1984

The keep-fit boom of the 1980s influenced our lingerie ranges. In 1984 we launched a sports-inspired range. By the mid 1980s we were selling bras specifically intended for sports, and by 1992 sales assistants were trained to advise customers which bras were most suitable for exercise.

In 1984 we began to display and sell lingerie on hangers rather than packaged in boxes. By doing this we were able to display items from the same ranges together more easily.



St Michael News, 1980s



St Michael News, March 1992

1992

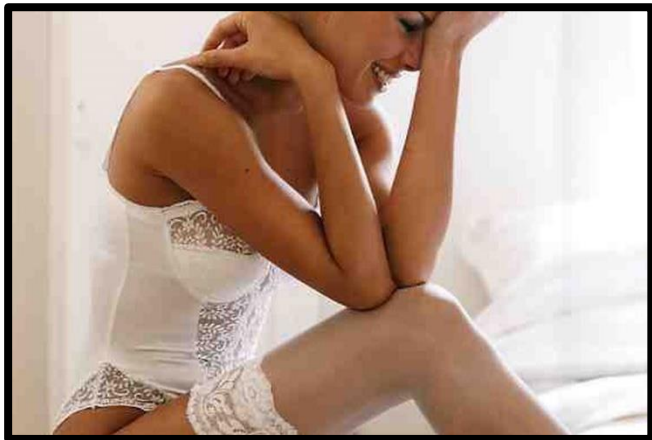
Triumph International was named as the maker of M&S's new balcony bra.

1994

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



Training for bra fitting service, 1994



Bridal underwear, 1998

1994

We introduced 'Mum to be' and bridal underwear collections. The bridal range was created after researchers surveyed 500 brides – the collection was feminine and pretty, but with no fussy detailing.

1997

Research was undertaken to make our lingerie departments more appealing to customers.

As a result, new look lingerie departments were trialed, with new fixtures and fittings, and merchandise separated into customer types – glamour, modern and classic.



New look lingerie department, 1997



Salon Rose, 1999

1999-2001

The Salon Rose range from Agent Provocateur was launched in store in 1999, including 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.

2005

Two collections of per una lingerie launched in 48 stores across the country.

The logo for Per Una Lingerie, featuring the text "per una" in a light pink, lowercase, sans-serif font, followed by three heart symbols in a light pink color, and the word "lingerie" in a dark pink, lowercase, cursive font.

Per Una Lingerie logo

2006

Post-surgery bras were introduced at the start of the 2000s, but customer feedback that the bras were too utilitarian resulted in an overhaul of the range in 2006. The new range was 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.



Breast Cancer Now campaign, 2015

2006

The Autograph lingerie range was launched. The first colour palette was rich chocolate and ivory.



Autograph Lingerie, 2006



2009

We introduced a waist and thigh slimmer with vitamin E, Aloe vera and caffeine, which visibly reduced signs of cellulite.

Anti-cellulite waist and thigh slimmer

2011

We launched a carbon neutral bra, and also developed Heatgen™ - a ladies thermal underwear range.

The same year we presented our new bridal lingerie range at The Goring Hotel, London. The range was inspired by prints and techniques from the M&S Archive.



Carbon neutral bra, 2011



Perfect Poise range

2012

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

2012

Rosie Huntington-Whiteley launched her first range of lingerie, showcasing French-designed lace, luxurious silks and soft feminine prints. Since 2012 the range has broken sales records.



Rosie for Autograph lingerie, 2012



Trellis lace bra, 2016

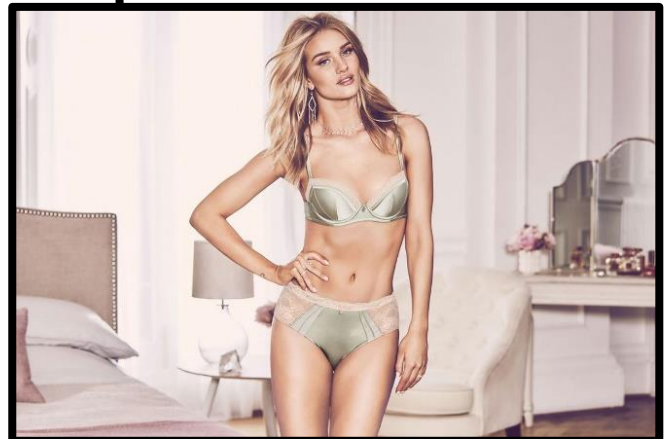
2016

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

2017

We celebrated five years of our Rosie for Autograph lingerie range. Over five years, 11 million items from the range were sold. We estimated that one in every 50 women in the UK owns a Rosie bra.

The 2017 anniversary range included the popular Pistachio colourway from the original 2012 range.



Rosie for Autograph lingerie, 2017



DD+ bralet

2017-18

With an emphasis on comfort and a softer, more natural silhouette, our range of bralets expanded. Starting at £9.50 and including DD+ options, our bralets were a hit with customers.

2019

We updated our popular Smoothlines™ range with a glossy new material. The design smoothed underarms and back, and the non-slip strap adjusters kept straps in place.



Smoothlines bra

2020

In October 2020 we launched Boutique. Soozie Jenkinson, Head of Lingerie Design said: 'Boutique is an exciting new lingerie sub-brand, thoughtfully designed by our talented in-house design team. We've loved creating this brand which is designed to add a contemporary, playful and fun aesthetic to our lingerie collections.'



Boutique, 2020

2020-2021

Following the restrictions put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2021 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 then sent a follow up email with links to suitable products, style tips and ideas.



Virtual Bra-Fit



Archive Embroidery bra. 2021

2021

To mark 95 years of M&S lingerie, a special Archive Embroidery range was created. The embroidery designs were all inspired by items held in the M&S Archive.

2021

New products to hit our stores in 2021 included our Flexifit Sleep Bra and period knickers.

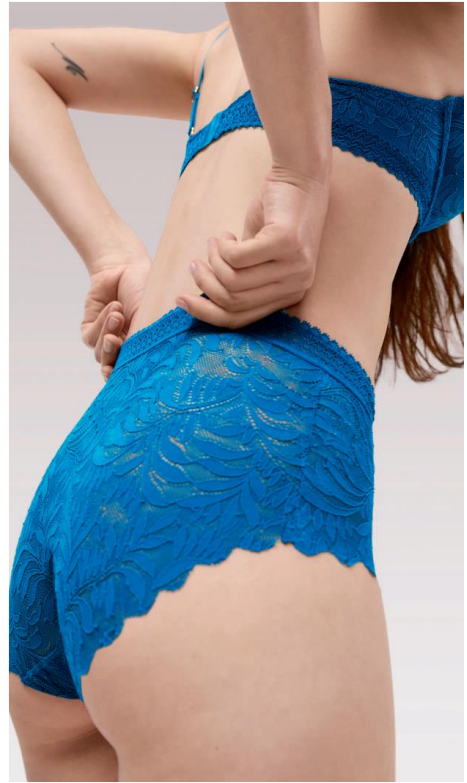
The Sleep Bra provides a soft, natural fit with gentle support throughout the night, while our period knickers use our 'Confidence' technology and a three-layer gusset to provide high absorbency and comfort.



Period knickers, 2021

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, the technology is used in both bras and knickers.



Flexifit lace bra and knickers, 2023

Today, one in three British women buy their bras from M&S, 45 bras are sold every minute in store and two pairs of knickers fly through the tills each second.