

Womenswear Timeline

How M&S has dressed generations of women from head to toe



Collar support advertisement
1913-1914

1910s

We sold haberdashery including buttons, thread and elastic by the yard for customers who wanted to make their own clothes at home.

Accessories such as gloves and jewellery were sold in our early stores.



Women's drapery and hosiery, 1929

1920s

The 1920s saw the introduction of womenswear, with the opening of our Drapery Department in 1926. In 1927, products sold included poplin jumpers, winceyette petticoats and tennis pullovers.

1930s

By the 1930s we were selling smart separates and overalls for busy housewives along with glamorous, dressing gowns, party frocks and knitted swimming suits.

Stock control documents from 1939 included embroidered Hungarian blouses, sports skirts, Directoire knickers and Indiana capes.



The Marks & Spencer Magazine,
Christmas 1932



Textile Design department, 1930s

1936

A central Design department was established to keep up to date with fashion trends, employing Parisian designers as consultants.



Store window display, 1937

1938

We began buying printed fabric designs from Paris studios – described by M&S director Harry Sacher as ‘Really genuine designs, produced by a Paris artist’.



Blouse with Utility label, c1945

1941

We helped the Government develop the Utility scheme, a set of rules for clothing manufacturers to ensure garment quality remained high.

We produced a range of Utility clothing that was not only practical but stylish, all bearing the CC41 label.

1940s

Bestsellers at this time included women's trousers, or slacks as they were known, and heavy wool dressing gowns – both were considered ideal shelter-wear.



Window display, 1945



M&S textile laboratory, 1940s

1946

After the war our technologists worked on developing new fabrics to help make good design available to everyone.

A new textile laboratory opened to explore nylons, plastics and other synthetic materials, resulting in fabrics that were easy-wash, easy-care and fade-resistant.



Nylon dress, 1950s

1950s

Christian Dior had introduced the 'New Look' (as it was dubbed) in 1947 on the Parisian catwalk, featuring full skirts and narrow waists. Our customers wanted to replicate this high fashion look, so we produced full-skirted dresses in bright fabrics.

As demand for parachutes decreased following the war and nylon became more available, we began making garments with nylon fabric.

St Michael News
No. 1. MARKS & SPENCER LTD. JUNE 1953

SHORTER WOMAN SPECIAL

NOW M & S REMEMBERS THE SHORTER WOMAN

NEW SIZE RANGES FOR HER IN MARSPUN at 27s. 11d.

DETAILS of the new Shorter Woman size range, given in this issue, show it to be a line of eminently healthy and sporty, yet considerably more feminine, than the 'Petticoat' line. It is a line of eminently healthy and sporty, yet considerably more feminine, than the 'Petticoat' line. It is a line of eminently healthy and sporty, yet considerably more feminine, than the 'Petticoat' line.

you can win five guineas

KEEPING IN THE PICTURE

Shorter Woman Special, 1953

1953

We launched our first petite range: 'For the Shorter Woman'. M&S colleagues were asked to come up with a name for the new range, with a chance to win 5 guineas!

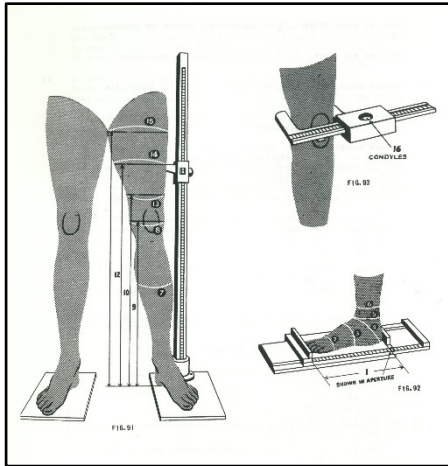


Marspun dresses, 1956

1955

Marspun was a spun rayon fabric developed during the war, originally known as Utility Schedule 1005.

Following the war it was rebranded, and by 1955 we were selling Marspun dresses in 2000 different colour combinations.



Diagrams from the 1956 report

1956

Following complaints that our stockings weren't satisfactory, our Research Department undertook a huge survey.

The team measured the legs of 600 sales assistants, taking 17 measurements on each leg. Following the survey, a new range of stockings was launched, which proved very popular with customers.



Orlon cardigan, 1960

1958

In 1958 Chairman Simon Marks stressed the importance of synthetic fabrics: 'Not only do they provide attractive garments, but they also have the advantage of easing the housewife's daily burden'.

Fabrics such as Terylene, Orlon and Tricel were introduced to create drip-dry, easy-care garments that were hardwearing yet fashionable.



Suits, 1960

1960s

An increasing number of women were now going out to work. We produced stylish yet comfortable clothes to wear at the office.

An emerging teen market resulted in ranges 'designed to suit the tastes and figures of the in-betweens'. Ranges included 1962's 'Young Fashions' and a 'Junior Miss' range introduced in 1965.

In 1966 Twiggy made her first appearance modelling for M&S in a dress with a hemline 'well above the knee for the young go-ahead'.



Michael Donnellan and Hans Schneider, 1967

1962

Womenswear in the 1960s was heavily influenced by our consultant – Michael Donnellan, employed by Head of Design Hans Schneider in 1962.

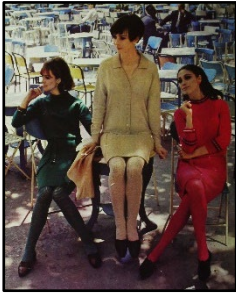
Michael was seen by The Times as the most 'perfectionist of London designers'.



Packet of tights, 1960s, T60/11

1963

The changing fashion for shorter hemlines contributed to the successful trialling of tights by M&S. By the end of the 1960s, the Hosiery department reported sales were 80% tights to 20% stockings.



Coordinated outfits, 1966

1966

The trend for colour coordinates was made possible by the in-house Colour Council's work to standardise colours. They discovered, for example, that we were selling garments in 44 different shades of navy!



Machine washable wool, 1972

1972

At the start of the 1970s synthetic fabrics made up over half of M&S textiles sales, however we saw a resurgence of demand for natural fibres such as wool, denim and cheesecloth. In 1972, we launched our first machine-washable lambswool and Shetland wool garments.



Polo neck jumper, 1975

1975

The highest selling woman's garment in Britain, as reported in The Times, was our black polo-neck jumper, which sold for £2.50.



Miss Michelle, 1979

1979

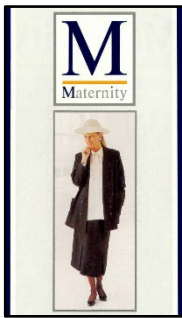
We launched Miss Michelle, a range aimed at 'the fashion conscious 18-25 age group'. The collection included dungarees, jackets, skirts, dresses and a velour jogging suit.



Garments designed by RCA student, 1984

1983

Through supplier Peter Blond, students from RCA designed clothing for M&S. The students designed a range of clothing from which M&S selected designs to put into production. The collaboration continued into 1984.



Maternity leaflet, 1987

1987

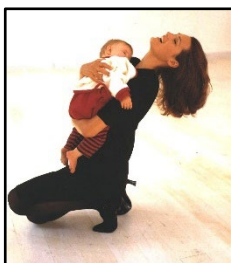
We launched a dedicated Plus range for women up to size 24, later 28, and a Maternity range offering both a formal working wardrobe as well as casual garments and nightwear.



Bruce Oldfield with the design team, 1988

1988

Designer Bruce Oldfield was enlisted as consultant to develop our womenswear ranges.



Yasmin Le Bon for M&S, 1995

1990

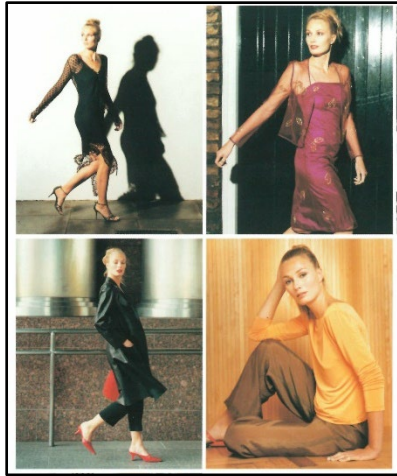
The first model of superstar status – Claudia Schiffer – is introduced to our print advertising campaigns. Later campaigns include Linda Evangelista and Yasmin Le Bon.



Julien MacDonald, 1998

1990s

We began working with Betty Jackson as consultant in the early 1990s, to advise on major trends. In 1998 designer Julien MacDonald worked with us on our knitwear collection, advising suppliers on yarns and production techniques.



Autograph, 2000

2000

We phased out the St Michael brand name, and introduced new sub-brands to help customers find a style that suited their taste and budget.

The Autograph range was launched in 2000, with contributions from designers such as Katherine Hamnett and Julien Macdonald. 2001 saw the launch of the per una collection.



Patricia Field, 2008

2008

We collaborated with designer and stylist Patricia Field on what would become a sell-out collection of womenswear and matching accessories, grouped together under the banner 'Destination New York'.



125th anniversary range, 2009

2009

We celebrated our 125th anniversary with vintage-inspired limited-edition pieces, including a 1940s style grey spotted dress and a 1950s-inspired party dress.



Zandra Rhodes 2009

2009

We collaborated with Zandra Rhodes on two collections featuring the vibrant colourful prints the designer is known for.



Twiggy sequin jacket, 2012

2012

After first modelling for us in the 1960s, Twiggy designed her first collection for M&S. This silver sequin jacket sold out within two hours of going on sale.



Pink duster coat, 2013

2013

This pink coat became a sell-out hit - before the coat was launched, our Marble Arch store had a waiting list of 100 customers.



Best of British, 2013

The Best of British range was launched in 2013 combining M&S's heritage with modern styling and British manufacturing. Garments were made with premium fabrics from Scottish cashmere to Yorkshire woollen cloth.



Leading Ladies, 2014

2013-2014

2013 saw the launch of the Leading Ladies advertising campaign, featuring 12 inspirational British women photographed by Annie Leibovitz. The campaign ran again, with a new group of subjects, in 2014.



Alexa at the Archive, 2016

2016-2017

We collaborated with author, presenter and model Alexa Chung who explored the archive and reinterpreted her favourite pieces. The range was inspired by garments including a 1930s dressing gown and a 1990s blazer.



M&S Insider Nicola, 2019

2019

The launch of the M&S Insiders project - specially selected colleagues from across the business share the latest trends on their social media channels. By 2025 we had insiders across kidswear, menswear, home and beauty as well as womenswear.



@edwigealamode in the Forever sweatshirt, 2020

2020

As a result of the pandemic, more customers began working from home. The demand for casual clothing increased, and we expanded our loungewear and sleepwear ranges



Jaeger, SS2022

2021

We launched Brands at M&S, selling guest brands on M&S.com including Hobbs, Joules and Phase Eight.

Following the purchase of the Jaeger brand by M&S, we now offer a Jaeger womenswear collection of premium pieces that the iconic heritage brand is known for.



Sienna Miller, Autumn 2023

2023-2024

Sienna Miller was announced as the face of the M&S Autumn womenswear campaign. In 2024 we collaborated with Sienna on two limited edition capsule collections, inspired by her love of vintage fashion.



Bella Freud, 2024

2024

We joined forces with designer Bella Freud to create an exclusive collection. Inspired by the M&S Archive, the range included her signature knits, playful phrases and exquisite tailoring.



M&S X 16Arlington, 2025

2025

16Arlington brought its couture-like craftsmanship to a collaboration with M&S, creating special staples to elevate the everyday.



M&S X Aries, 2026

2026

M&S X Aries arrived. We teamed up with the luxury streetwear brand for a truly iconic limited-edition collection. Inspired by the M&S Archive, the collaboration used elements from our design heritage to form the backbone of the collection.

