

Website Spotlight

Women in Trousers: A Visual Archive

From bloomers to Land Girls, this new online archive celebrates women wearing trousers.

A new online archive chronicles the development of bifurcated or divided garments worn by women. The visual gallery tells the story of women in trousers via an online gallery of images through galleries of digital images that span more than a century, from the 1850s to the 1960s.

“Women in Trousers: A Visual Archive” is a work in progress developed by Cardiff (Wales) University’s Special Collections and Archives to provide a visual record of the way women wore trousers during different periods. It offers a visual account of the complex and sometimes contradictory meanings assigned to and by trouser-wearing women in public space.

Images have been drawn from a range of sources, including newspapers, periodicals, photographs, illustrations and drawings. While “trousers and other bifurcated garments” provide the main focus, the archive is also home to images that illuminate the general history of women and dress reform in Britain, Europe and America.

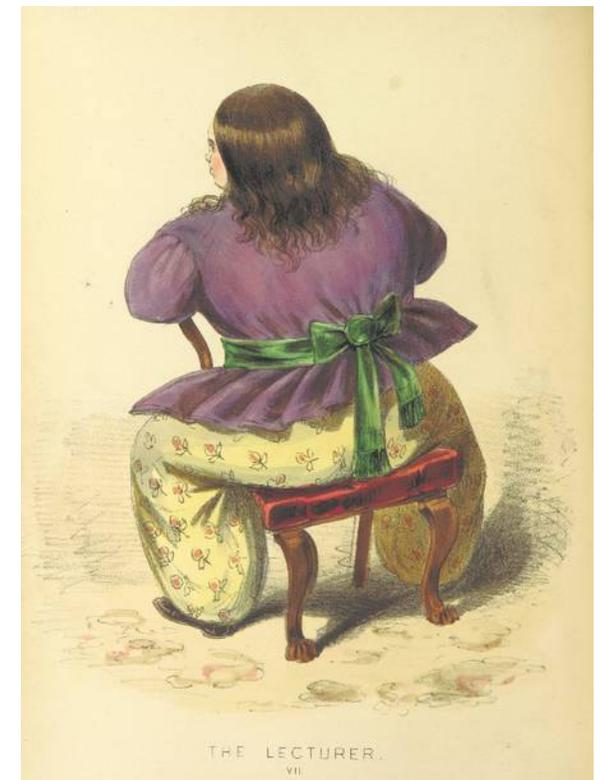


AMELIA BLOOMER, ORIGINATOR OF THE NEW DRESS.—FROM A DAGUERROTYPE BY T. W. BROWN.—(SEE PRECEDING PAGE.)

‘Bloomerism. – New Costume for Ladies’, in *Illustrated London News*, Vol. 19, September 27th 1851, p. 396. Special Collections and Archives, Cardiff University.

A number of the images included in the archive are drawn from Special Collections and Archives at Cardiff University.

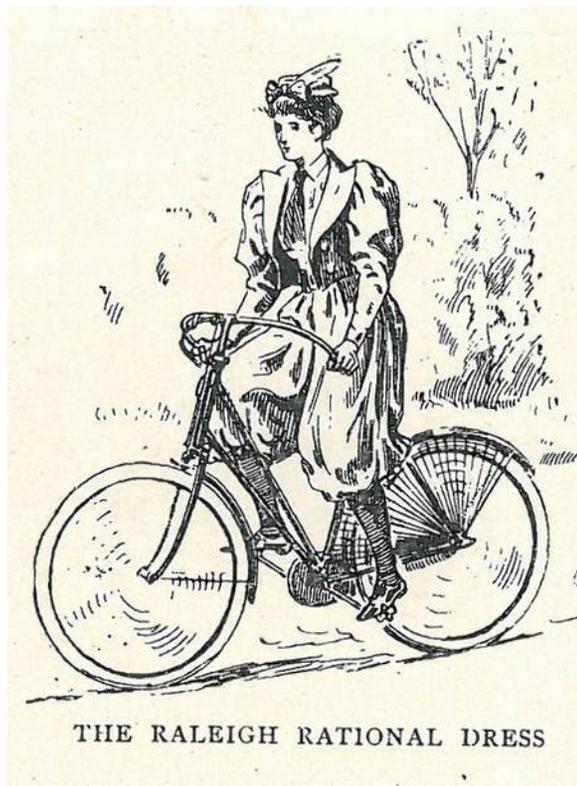
The project was developed by Dr. Becky Munford, Reader in English Literature at Cardiff University’s School of English, Communication and Philosophy. According to Dr. Munford, “trouser-wearing women have been associated with periods of



Deborah Dreadnought (pseud.), *The Beauties of Bloomerism* [in verse]. Edited ... by D. D. Illustrated with twelve ... coloured likenesses ... from designs by W. S. Reed (London, 1852), p. 36. Illustration Archive.

social and political upheaval, women's liberation, radical thought, aesthetic innovation and erotic freedom."

The archive will be adding images over time, and also invites users to contribute their own personal images and photographs to the 'Who wore the trousers?' section of the archive. "The response has already been fantastic," said Dr. Munford. "With several moving stories emerging from these photographs, this is one of the most exciting and valuable parts of the project. We would



'The National Cycle Show', in *The Graphic*, December 15th 1894, p. 682. Special Collections and Archives, Cardiff University



Cabinet photograph by H Wragg. of Mary Harrison aged 16 taken, late 1800s. [Wigan World](#).

love to hear from anyone who has a photo to share or a story to tell".

The archive documents significant cultural, historical and political changes that impacted women's lives across the period via sections covering sport, the military, cycling, work, war and the Women's Land Army. It is divided into sections with the following titles:

- Bloomers and rationals
- Free-wheeling feminism
- Wearing the trousers at work and play
- Sports, leisure, fashion
- Work and war
- Land girls and lumber Jills



Postcard (front) of Dorothy Frances Curtis of Cardiff (1918), on war work and dressed in protective clothing, including trousers, as a supervisor in a munitions factory where girls packed explosives into shell cases, in Birmingham. Glamorgan Archives Ref. DXFX/19.

The website also includes an Exhibitions section that will present online exhibits. There is also a section that features an online exhibition of original works by Anne Thalheim, [Astride Two Worlds](#), inspired by Dr Munford's project.



J.E. Russell, 'Women's Royal Naval Service: Sport and Leisure during the Second World War' undated. Admiralty Official Collection, Imperial War Museum, London. Used for non-commercial purposes under IMW Non-Commercial License © IWM ([A 18796](#)).



VE Day Post: Land Girls Celebrating VE Day, 8th May 1945. Women's Land Army. Land girls section. Stuart Antrobus. Used for non-commercial purposes.

Dr Munford teaches and researches in the fields of modern and contemporary women's writing, gender studies and dress and fashion history. Currently writing her latest book, *Making Strides: a Literary and Cultural History of Women in Trousers*, she



Doris Williams in fancy dress, Merthyr Tydfil c.1919. Submitted by Verity Kalcev. "Who wore the trousers?" section.

is author of *Decadent Daughters* and *Monstrous Mothers: Angela Carter and European Gothic* and co-author of *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique*.

For the latest "Women in Trousers" updates visit the [archive](#), and follow the archive on [Twitter](#) using the hashtag #archivecatwalk.



"My beautiful great aunt Dorothy when she was a Land Girl during WW2." Submitted by Janet Jones. "Who wore the trousers?" section.