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**Unpacking Mrs Wood's Suitcases:  
The Signifying Potential of Unsewn Cloth**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirement  
for the degree of

Master of Philosophy

at Massey University

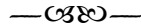
Wellington

New Zealand

**Lilian Mutsaers**

**2009**

# Abstract



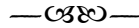
This thesis examines unsewn cloth pieces which once belonged to Victoria Wood and places them into their social and historical context. It uses the biography of Victoria Wood and her fabrics to argue for the importance of fabric collecting and dressmaking for New Zealand women from 1935 to 1955. It questions why ubiquitous fabrics bought for dress making are not represented in historical accounts of women, or in more general accounts of historical clothing and dress.

Aspects of material culture theories are employed to analyse the material properties of the fabric pieces. These are situated within a wider domestic context to demonstrate that there were intrinsic qualities of fabric that influenced and were imagined by many women in this period. Oral histories and other documentary research add to the wider account and provide evidence of the way that dressmaking fabrics reflected the shifting notions of domesticity.

The thesis suggests that fabrics bought for the creation of clothing can represent the past or a person. It also demonstrates how dressmaking fabrics

simultaneously embody personal and social narratives which reflect the emotional and cultural values of a particular period. In this thesis I construct narratives which are based on the social and historical findings to highlight the importance of fabric collecting and dressmaking as an everyday domestic practice.

## Acknowledgements



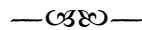
I would like to thank all those that have given me assistance, support and encouragement to keep going with what at times seemed like an impossible task.

Special thanks to my supervisors Bronwyn Labrum and Patrick Laviolette.

Thank you to the Fashion Department in the College of Creative Arts for providing me with financial support, also, to my colleagues and friends for their encouragement. Thank you also to my husband Rick Wilkinson and my children Ellie and Lou. I would like to thank them for their love, support and occasional editing, especially the assistance given by Lou to guide his poor mother through the mysteries of Photoshop.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Marilyn Doak, the granddaughter of Victoria Wood for generously sharing with me memories of her nana and the six women who shared stories of their lives to add to the thesis content.

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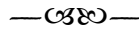
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# Introduction



## *Framing the Question*

My introduction to Victoria Wood took place in August 2005 when two suitcases were delivered to the Fashion Department at Massey University in Wellington where I teach. The suitcases contained fabrics, sewing notions, the odd sewing pattern, and tools of craft, clothing and other items of memorabilia. At the time they were offered to me I was about to embark on another project concerned with fabric collecting, so the ownership of these two additional cases seemed significant.

My interest in the female tradition of collecting fabrics stems from my childhood love of playing with fabrics and making clothes. I have long been inspired by old pieces of cloth, their drape, colours and prints. I have also been influenced by clothing styles from the first half of the twentieth century - particularly the beautiful methods of patternmaking and construction. I cannot count the many hours that I have spent fossicking through second hand shops; buying unused bits of fabric and finding clothes from that era to wear as is, or to recut the fabric pieces and sew into something else. My fascination with their making has had significant bearing on my career choice, in particular, the art of patternmaking. This is a skill that is almost

misunderstood in today's mass consumption of clothing, but nevertheless, it is one which propelled me into the industry of clothing manufacture, and then to teach in a fashion school.

I took the two suitcases home and in the front room of my house, which is my sewing room, I documented their unpacking by filming the process. I

experienced an incredible sense of excitement and anticipation as I opened each suitcase. I sat on the floor and lifted out each item, surrounding myself and the floor around me with pieces of vintage textiles and other interesting bits of braiding and notions used in home sewing. As I moved through the task, I found I began to construct a story about a woman that I had never met. It was almost as if parts of her life revealed themselves to me through the aesthetics of her fabric collection and other bits that she had chosen to keep.

The fabrics were of particular interest as quite a few of them had been folded in a way to suggest that some form of preparation had taken place: laying the fabrics with right sides together as one would expect if the fabrics were to be sewn into a garment at home. This too sparked my imagination and I couldn't help but speculate about why she had chosen to carefully pack and save each particular piece of fabric and what garment styles the fabrics were intended for. I also found my imaginative responses curious and wondered why her personality resonated so strongly with me.

This experience sparked the idea for this study. I wanted to explore why I could respond to fabric pieces in such a way that related so powerfully to the past and what I knew about clothing from certain eras. I questioned why scholarly discussions had never really situated fabrics in a way that integrated them into the history of fashion and dress. I was interested to know why historians could use clothing to represent the past and a person, yet fail to locate fabrics in the same way. It appeared to me that fabrics had a peripheral existence in theories and histories of clothing and were noted more by their absence. In this study I set about to rectify the imbalance.

As a result, this thesis make a case for the existence and importance of untold stories in cut lengths of fabric, which were bought but never made into garments and instead collected and saved. In particular, this thesis unpacks the fabrics from Mrs Wood's suitcases and layers them into a social history about the fabric collecting and home dressmaking of New Zealand women from 1935 – 1955. I demonstrate that fabrics have the potential to simultaneously embody personal and social narratives and show how fabrics can reflect the cultural values from a particular period. I use the biography of Mrs Victoria Wood, the original owner of the suitcases, to situate her fabrics within the wider historical account.

The material properties of the fabrics are also considered, for the reason that they too provide a context for the social narrative I construct. The types of fabrics available over the period are symptomatic of shifting consumer aspirations for 'domestic bliss' and 'modernity'. There are recognised convergences between fabrics, clothing and fashion which make clear the intrinsic qualities of fabric such as visual appeal, drape, weight, and hand,<sup>1</sup> all of which are linked to the way clothing is discussed and imagined. I therefore argue that fabrics in this instance appealed to the senses and were experienced in a palpable way.

The project also explores domesticity as a key theme and within this delineates the notion of the 'romantic domestic'. This concept defines the tensions experienced through manifestations of internal and external domesticity and locates the role that fabrics played within this. The internal role is characterised by the private domestic sphere, where a woman's desire to fulfil feminine obligations for the family and the home were important. The external role alludes to the romantic values that the internal role creates and sustains. Thus, the feminine desire to dress the body and furnish the home makes analysis of textiles critical. By underlining their pervading influence within the domestic sphere, the genuine relationship that some women had with fabrics comes to the fore. There is a particular language that positions,

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Humphries, *Fabric Reference*, Third ed. (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 6. (appendix A1, p 175)

embraces and romanticises the understanding of fabrics within any social framework. This thesis suggests that recognition should be given to the position that fabric had within the social framework and how fabrics provided an alternative set of values to the widely held notion of domesticity.

## Part One: Theoretical Framework

### *Clothing and Identity*

Clothing is a primary source through which historical and social changes are read and understood. Fashion historians have for a long time used garments to represent the shifting fashion styles displayed through cut, silhouette and vogue.<sup>2</sup> Yet cultural representations – and often garments – were limited to those which were owned by people of social standing. Fashion analyses therefore only related to certain individuals and their social connections. They provided few accounts of the everyday person who also followed fashion but did so with fewer available resources.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James Laver, *Costume and Fashion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995); Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago Press, 1985); Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Bronwyn Labrum, "Hand-Me-Downs and Respectability: Clothing and the Needy," in *Looking Flash: Clothing in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Bronwyn Labrum, Fiona McKergow, and Stephanie Gibson (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007); Jacqueline M Atkins, "Introduction," in *Wearing Propaganda: Textiles on the Homefront in Japan, Britain and the United States 1931-1945*, ed. Jacqueline M. Atkins (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Pat Kirkham, "Keeping up the Home Front: Morale "Beauty and Duty" in Wartime Britain," in *Wearing Propaganda: Textiles on the Home Front in Japan Britain and the United States 1931-1945*, ed. Jacqueline M Atkins (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

Clothing has also provided historians with an identifiable medium through which to represent the biography of individuals or groups. In this way displays of clothing were often reliant on supporting evidence such as journals and archived photographs to give credence to the garments in representing the person. But frequently this also reinforced the notion of hierarchical ranking of clothing. The quality of cloth and high culture aesthetics therefore only ever represented those that had existed in the public eye already.<sup>4</sup>

Yet clothing may also divulge how people are positioned by gender and race, as well as class.<sup>5</sup> The most obvious example exists in the silhouette which signals the difference between men's and women's clothing, the age of the wearer and what the garment may be worn for. Race can also be defined by silhouette, as clothing differences between western and non-western dress reveals what is known and understood in each culture about dress.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the superficiality often associated with fashion can defy social and

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<sup>4</sup> Atkins, "Introduction."; Kirkham, "Keeping up the Home Front: Morale "Beauty and Duty" in Wartime Britain."; Labrum, "Hand-Me-Downs and Respectability: Clothing and the Needy."; Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*.

<sup>5</sup> Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*; Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press., 2000); Laver, *Costume and Fashion*; Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Fiona McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s," in *Fragments: New Zealand Social and Cultural History*, ed. Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000), 164; Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*.



cultural boundaries, especially when trends are visible across social structures. However, indicators in clothing that can convey class relate more closely to the quality of cloth, the quality of the making and the amount of wear a garment endures.

This project draws on the theories and frameworks of material cultural studies to examine the fabrics from Mrs Wood's suitcases and place them in a social context. The fabrics, I will go on to show, therefore shift from being simple 'objects' to being examples of 'cultural residue'. Drawing on the work of Henry Glassie and Ian Woodward, objects are defined as texts that simultaneously convey personal, emotional and cultural meanings.<sup>7</sup> When clothing and textiles are the objects in question, I believe that 'objects' and 'cultural residue' can occupy the same place and provide identifiable junctures through which to reconstruct and read a variety of social and historical experiences.

Objects and the way they are used provide insights into society and are often a catalyst through which people can share values, communicate, create and interact.<sup>8</sup> Debate seems endless as to whether objects should be examined as products and commodities or embraced as social accessories, adding

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Ian Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture* (London: Sage, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Tim Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World* (Buckingham: Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999).

meaning to the self. The potential duality of an object creates an apparently endless argument among scholars. Yet the multiple features of an object allow for a process-based understanding.<sup>9</sup>

As our notion of the 'cultural circuit' suggests, meaning making is an ongoing process. It does not just end at a pre-ordained point. While producers attempt to encode products with particular meanings and associations, this is not the end of the story or the 'biography' of a product, because this tells us nothing about what those products may come to mean for those using them.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the notion of 'cultural circuit' suggests something else. It negates the objectives of academics who want to quantify personal possessions into a recognised format of transactional experience. Instead 'cultural residue' as a concept suggests that the object, whatever its makeup, is loaded with personal intention and emotion.

The recent edited volume, *Clothing as Material Culture*, examines clothing, dress and textiles as cultural commodities. The essays draw from a range of disciplines, including fashion and textile history, anthropology, and social, cultural and design studies. Combinations of these are used to interpret the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid; Paul. [et al.] du Gay, *Doing Cultural Studies : The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London Sage, 1997); Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*.

<sup>10</sup> du Gay, *Doing Cultural Studies : The Story of the Sony Walkman*, 5.

agency of clothing and textiles in modern and contemporary societies.<sup>11</sup> The essays urge us to consider how clothing offers insight into the way that individuals negotiate their various identities and give meaning to “shared cultural experiences”.<sup>12</sup> Through specialised examination, clothing offers insight into how individuals align themselves to others; and of how individuals negotiate the self within a personal and public environment.<sup>13</sup>

Judy Attfield also addresses experiences of individuality in a chapter devoted to the materiality of clothing and textiles. As she argues “Clothing and textiles have a particular intimate quality because they lie next to the skin and inhabit the spaces of private life helping to negotiate the inner self with the outside world”.<sup>14</sup> She claims that because clothing has a direct relationship with the body, it has the propensity to signify something greater than the ephemeral qualities traditionally associated with it. Individuality in this context is seen as “a social process”.<sup>15</sup> This means that experiences of individuality occur in a wider context and relate directly to the broader social structure widely perceived as fashion.

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Miller, "Introduction," in *Clothing as Material Culture*, ed. Susanne Kuchler; Daniel Miller (New York: Berg, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s," 164.

<sup>13</sup> Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-34.

Fashion systems often render clothing in a 'temporal sequence' which manifest through ever present rotation of style 'ideals'. Socialisation of the 'ideal' situates clothing as a recognised form of consumption,<sup>16</sup> and yet, the act of dressing is undeniably commonplace. This makes it difficult to define the differences between the 'ideal' and the demarcation points that distinguish how the language of clothing is an all encompassing thing.<sup>17</sup>

However, this can shift if clothing is representative of sentimental values related to personal past experiences or loved ones.<sup>18</sup> I believe that the emotional links between clothing and the individual are not captured if clothing is considered as an object: to objectify a garment is to disembodify its form. For a garment to retain its true potency, consideration must be given to the cultural residue which Attfield aptly argues exists through personal connections.<sup>19</sup> Attfield's argument embraces the emotional richness of textiles and to utilise her theory into this study, acknowledgement must be made of the significant choices that Victoria Wood made about what to keep and what was important to her, thus creating emotional connections between her past and her future.

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<sup>16</sup> Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World*, 86.

<sup>17</sup> Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid; Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World*, Juliet Ash, "Memory and Objects," in *The Gendered Object*, ed. Pat Kirkham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*.

Historical studies also provide important insights for this thesis. Fiona McKergow describes how clothing can provide a comprehensive picture of history if treated in a way that engages with the material qualities of the artefact.<sup>20</sup> Artefacts are defined as objects that have been part of some human activity.<sup>21</sup> McKergow interprets clothing by combining what is known about the wearer and their historical situation as well as examining garment details such as fabric and making, all of which contribute to a greater understanding of the nature of clothing. She argues that previous methods of representation have not always engaged with the garment as “tangible proofs”.<sup>22</sup>

McKergow also makes a persuasive case for the inclusion of a wider historical framework that embraces the ordinary and the everyday. However, to do this, I believe consideration must also be given to the speculative in the construction of historical narratives. This sits between the material qualities of the object and the social representation. It involves the creation of a “flexible contract”<sup>23</sup> where interpretation cannot exclude the personal involvement of the researcher. Clothing is an obvious focus for this type of research. Jo

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<sup>20</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s."

<sup>21</sup> Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*.

<sup>22</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s," 165.

<sup>23</sup> Bronwyn Dalley, "The Cultural Remains of Elsie Walker," in *Fragments; New Zealand Social and Cultural History*, ed. Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000), 156.

Turney's study of the floral printed dress works within a similar framework. She poses the question of how "to initiate dialogue between fashion and textile design".<sup>24</sup> Through exploring what seems like an obvious relationship, she is able to emphasise aspects of everyday dress through her research interests in design history.<sup>25</sup> The words of women who wore floral print dresses provide an additional method through which Turney makes evident the intentional and significant emotional qualities of wearing floral print dresses. These aspects would otherwise be difficult to capture. Turney's project highlights the interrelated values between cloth and clothing. The design of the cloth in this case shares a common cause with my project because it identifies the overt relationship between the two. However, Turney's concerns focuses on the surface design of the fabric rather than the integrity of the making process, which is what my project examines.

Rosemary McLeod addresses a similar set of concerns.<sup>26</sup> Her book pays homage to the craft practices of New Zealand women and presents examples which convey how women expressed their identity and social situations collectively through domestic activities. The theme of each chapter relates to shared social experiences of women such as marriage and the home and

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<sup>24</sup> Jo Turney, "(Ad) Dressing the Century; Fashionability and the Floral Frocks" (paper presented at the Textiles and text : re-establishing the links between archival and object-based research : postprints, University of Southampton, 2006), 59.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Rosemary McLeod, *Thrift to Fantasy: Home Textile Crafts of the 1930s - 1950s* (Auckland: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2005).

through her family anecdotes she dovetails descriptions of hand-crafted textiles with wider historical narratives. Her personal reading of the material embeds the dialogue with her own insights into how New Zealand women coped with shortages of vital supplies such as fabric, wool and yarn during the Depression, war and post-war periods. The functional application of crafting embroidery, knitting and crochet provides us with, in McKergow's words, "tangible proof"<sup>27</sup> of activities that were functional domestic activities but also infused with an emotional and social intent.

### *Home Dressmaking*

It has been ten years since Barbara Burman edited a collection of essays on *The Culture of Sewing*. This pioneering publication focused on the history of home sewing and explored the social and cultural aspects of domestic clothing production by women. As well as the undeniable relationship between sewing and clothing, Burman makes a distinction between sewing and clothing which is important for my research. She argues that it is most difficult to elucidate women's identities and experiences through domestic narratives, making it difficult to account for many of the ordinary and everyday aspects of activities such as sewing.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, home sewing has

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<sup>27</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s."

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Burman, "Introduction," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

remained largely absent from historical discussion. Yet it is exactly this reason that makes it an important subject for enquiry.<sup>29</sup>

The sewing machine was a desirable commodity for countless women and it became a common appliance in many homes.<sup>30</sup> The ability to create garments was an asset if not a necessity. It was a skill that enabled women to contribute to their families and communities in a quiet but consequential way. Cheryl Buckley's essay explores the creativity of home sewing. The processes of making and designing clothes often took place in shared spaces such as the kitchen or bedroom. Sewing was therefore situated in such a way that made the domestic sphere an adaptable space.

Although women from across class boundaries made and designed things throughout their lives, this particular activity remains in the margins. This is compounded by the fact that the 'things' are clothes and they were made locally, mostly at home. The 'home' in which these clothes were made and designed was subject to change and its meaning was shaped and renegotiated over time, rather than remaining an

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Fernandez, Page, "Creating Consumers: Gender, Class and the Family Sewing Machine," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Rosemary Harden and Jo Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors Club, 2007); Richard Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2001); Cheryl Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999).



idealized 'haven' in which essentialist notions of feminine identity were fixed.<sup>31</sup>

A comparable scene is set for New Zealand women in Heather Nicholson's book *The Loving Stitch*.<sup>32</sup> The craft of knitting is easily understood within the same historical context and is akin to sewing; knitting essentially shared the same domestic domain. The simplicity and convenience of knitting meant that it could be picked up at any time without the need of additional machinery or space in the home. This meant that knitting was easily negotiated in and around other household chores. The skill of the activity was also easily passed on to younger family members because it was an endeavour that could be carried out while sitting and relaxing with family or friends and it resulted in the creation of garments. This provides an example of how functional domestic activities shifted in their meaning because of the emotional pleasure associated with creation.

The ability to create, provide and maintain clothing in their own and their family's wardrobes afforded many women considerable esteem within their communities. Although garments were produced in the private domestic world, the garments when worn could "reveal aspects of the women's

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<sup>31</sup> Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home," 57.

<sup>32</sup> Heather Nicholson, *The Loving Stitch: A History of Knitting and Spinning in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1998).

identities".<sup>33</sup> Carol Tulloch demonstrates the creativity expressed through the dressmaking skills of Jamaican immigrant women in the mid twentieth century, in a similar way to the work of Buckley and Nicholson.<sup>34</sup> Tulloch's discussion focuses on the fusion of Jamaican styling that evolved through design appropriation which incorporated adaptation of their unique aesthetics into clothing that they created for themselves and for their clients.

Tulloch's essay makes effective use of recorded conversations with her two informants. She is so intent to address the theme of dressmaking that she misses a key point put forward by one of them.

If a person asks you to make them a nice dress, they would normally give you no idea of what style, I would look at that person and think, this material would be nice in a lovely square neck, or this material would be nice in a lovely V-neck or off the shoulder style. (James 1996)<sup>35</sup>

Buckley and Tulloch provide interesting insights into what, in some respects is easy to undervalue about the creative activities of women. Both authors recognise the intrinsic familiarity that pervades the lives of the women they

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<sup>33</sup> Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home," 55.

<sup>34</sup> Carol Tulloch, "There's No Place Like Home: Home Dressmaking and Creativity in the Jamaican Community of the 1940s to the 1960s," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

write about. They both also acknowledge the particular language of sewing embedded in their own consciousness. However both are still intent on the garment as the end result and do not take into account the role that fabric has played in the design process. Tulloch's interviewees obviously drew creative inspiration from the fabrics that they worked with. It appears that in thinking about the client, James transposed the two: person/object into fabric/object. The importance of the fabrics in the creative process is inadvertently missed in the discussion.

The women discussed in each of these essays display characteristics of the collective cultural values of their time. Through the process of creation, they could assert an 'ideal self' in order to negotiate the identity and individuality of their social spheres. Garment attributes consistently appear as a common theme and remain the central focus of both discussions. The fabric components are therefore assumed.

Yet, without fabrics there are no garments and it is the fabric (colour, print and drape) that provide cues as to how these women communicated their sense of being. There are no historical records to calculate the amount of cloth bought by home dressmakers,<sup>36</sup> yet the widespread participation of women who made clothing at home would suggest that purchasing and collecting fabric was an inseparable part of the sewing process. For this reason, the

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<sup>36</sup> Burman, "Introduction," 6.

language associated with fabrics is found to be aligned to the way that clothing was classified and understood.<sup>37</sup> It is enticing to think that through fabrics women who sewed could extend their past and their heritage into their present and on to the future.

### *Textiles*

A powerful connection has existed between women and textiles for hundreds of years. Although there are obvious differences specific to textile production and consumption between the centuries, they also appear to share a common thread. In this way textiles provide cultural and social markers for the recording of history.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich observes that the industrial revolution had a significant bearing on shifting the relationship women had with cloth. She reveals that the evolution of home fabric creation into factory production transformed and grew the association to the extent that: "Far from being in opposition to one another, 'store bought' and 'home made fabrics' developed together".<sup>38</sup>

Essentially Ulrich is suggesting that the relationship women built with commoditised fabrics stemmed from a domestic relationship with ordinary

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<sup>37</sup> Sarah. A Gordon, ""Make It Yourself": Home Sewing, Gender, and Culture, 1890-1930," Columbia University Press, <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/gordon>. Chapter 4, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Random House, 2001), 5.

household textiles such as “sheets, [...] handkerchiefs, coverlets and more”.<sup>39</sup>

The cultural value of textiles in this instance is also specifically underlined as a gendered form of heritage. “Cupboards and textiles belonged to a category of household goods called ‘moveables’. Unlike real estate, which was typically transmitted from father to son, moveables formed the core of female inheritance”.<sup>40</sup>

Conversely Jacqueline Atkins claims that widespread availability of materials contributed to the diluted interest in the historical significance of twentieth century textiles.<sup>41</sup> Yet she argues that mass-produced textiles still provide a cultural reading into historical events. Atkins is referring to the use of textiles to engage in a historical discussion. In this case the markers relate to the evocative textiles produced during the war that instilled patriotism. There is a natural association with women in her discussion and she touches on the declining interest in home sewing which coincided with the increased availability of readymade clothing.<sup>42</sup> However, she is also highlighting the feminine relationship with textiles and how they evoke memory and tell a story.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>41</sup> Atkins, "Introduction."

<sup>42</sup> Ibid; Jacqueline Field, "Dyes, Chemistry and Clothing: The Influence of World War I on Fabrics, Fashion and Silk," *Dress* 28(2001).

It is important to note that both authors provide two markedly different accounts of textiles in history. However, I believe that there are fundamental similarities in what both women are arguing. Both authors engage in a common theme which relates to the relationship that women have with textiles. They both acknowledge societal shifts, which in some respects can be attributed to the general consumption of textile and clothing in the evolving production systems.<sup>43</sup> They also both draw into their discussions the domestic association between women and textiles, such as the widespread practice of furnishing the home and dressing the body.

Jane Schneider and Annette Weiner remind us that the versatility of cloth lends itself to unlimited potential:

Malleable and soft, cloth can take many shapes, especially if pieces are cut for architectural assembly. Cloth also lends itself to an extraordinary range of decorative variations, whether through the patterned weaving of colored warps and wefts, or through the embroidery, staining, painting or dyeing of the whole. These broad possibilities of construction, color, and patterning give cloth an almost limitless potential for communication.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*.

<sup>44</sup> Jane Schneider and Annette B. Weiner, "Introduction," in *Cloth and Human Experience*, ed. Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 1.

Depending on cultural and social positions, the value of fabric is perceived in a variety of ways. Fabric in this instance is ubiquitous through mass production and easily purchased through retail outlets. The question is how one negotiates individuality, when the availability of fabric intended for clothing creation is made ordinary by mass-produced systems. However, the above quotation links the discussion back to one of the initial questions at the heart of this research. It asks how fabric can embody the essence of what it was intended for, and how fabric operates as a medium to connect the senses to imaginary responses when envisaging what type of garment to create? I suggest that the emotional experience of the garment exists before it is even created and worn. This experience is, I believe simultaneously emotional and singular for everyone who has a love of fabric.

### *Collecting*

There is a plethora of literature to cover the subject of collecting.

In spite of this, I have found no studies that examine women's experiences of fabric collecting developed through their relationship to sewing in an everyday domestic context.<sup>45</sup> However, there are several threads of collecting theory that are useful to the concerns of this study. Firstly the literature demonstrates how textiles follow a similar pathway to the historical importance of clothing in terms of cultural representation. Second, the act of

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<sup>45</sup> Burman, "Introduction."

collecting follows a similar pattern much in the way that sewing and clothing creations are understood by women. Finally, it is recognised that women are indeed sentimental collectors of keepsakes heavily embedded with personal meaning.

Like clothing, textiles have long been a source of collecting currency for historians and curators: "Everyday scraps are treasured for the stories that they can tell only by quilters or textile historians".<sup>46</sup> Collections in a curatorial sense often reflect aspects of national identity, a person of social significance or culturally valued objects.<sup>47</sup> Museum collections provide important and measurable readings of 'classic or high, culture' for historians to disseminate in the public arena. In this field, what is deemed crucial and of recognised collectable value is often dependent on certain endorsements from a social group. Therefore, collecting in this environment focuses more on the "meanings of individual items or groups of collected material rather than upon the significance of the collecting process".<sup>48</sup>

Atkins provides an example of this. In her earlier claim she alludes to the diminishing importance of everyday textiles. Yet, they were obviously

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<sup>46</sup> Atkins, "Introduction," 22.

<sup>47</sup> Labrum, "Hand-Me-Downs and Respectability: Clothing and the Needy.;" Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, Paul Martin, *Popular Collecting and the Everyday Self: The Reinvention of the Museum* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999); Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, 6.



collected and saved by many women throughout the war time period she discusses. In effect, Atkin's essay is attempting to draw the reader's attention to the importance of mass produced textiles. Yet, she is singling out textiles that depict the war as an event through their printed surfaces and still excludes the relevance of collecting mass-produced fabrics of the everyday variety.

The concept of private collecting centres on a concentration of similar objects meant for display.<sup>49</sup> According to Susan Pearce, objects in this scenario give intent and meaning to the shifting values of "social change".<sup>50</sup> Even the amateur collector loosely follows these guidelines as Paul Martin notes:

The collection is the realization of dream-time. This dream-time is what collectors have over museums, the indulgences of oneself in one's own specific collection, as opposed to the curators' need to rationalize and inform through the museums' many collections.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Martin, *Popular Collecting and the Everyday Self: The Reinvention of the Museum*, Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1994); Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, Werner Muensterberger, "The Quest for Possessions," in *Pictures, Patents, Monkeys and More: On Collecting*, ed. Ingrid Schaffner (New York: Independent Curators International (ICI), 2001).

<sup>50</sup> Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Martin, *Popular Collecting and the Everyday Self: The Reinvention of the Museum*, 19-20.

Women collect and save objects for a variety of reasons. Grant McCracken makes an interesting case study of a woman who takes on the family responsibility to keep alive the family lineage by honouring heirlooms from past generations of her family.<sup>52</sup>

Lois and her collection are, in a sense, merely different versions of the family. Both are the issue of a family enterprise that stretches over seven generations. Both are historical artifacts of a sort. These objects are so densely vested with the memory of human beings, and the human beings so densely vested with the meaning of these grand old pieces of furniture, that the two appear as different moments in a historical process that endlessly converts ancestors into objects and objects in descendents. Lois is a participant in the process that has almost entirely vanished. She is, to this extent, not only the curator of her family's past but also of a much broader one.<sup>53</sup>

Kathleen Cairns and Elaine Silverman address women collectors in much the same way. However their discussion places more emphasis on the emotional meanings that are often embedded in personal possessions. The 'treasures' of their analysis are particular to how women recreate the self through heritage and object attachment. "Possessions tell of friendships that have

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<sup>52</sup> Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

been central to a woman's developing sense of herself, make connections across generations, allow her to revisit her childhood self, and reassure her by confirming who she is".<sup>54</sup> I draw upon these arguments for this study because of their emphasis on the subjective approach which reveals much more of the emotional importance that women place on sentimental keepsakes. In this way Cairns and Silverman demonstrate a personal involvement in their discussion.

Martin outlines the concept of "showing and hiding"<sup>55</sup> which is interesting, primarily because it relates to the way in which collectors can derive emotional harmony from collected objects.

The collected object represents the compilation of the collectors 'greatest hits'. The collector packs his selected experiences and memories into the suitcases of the collected. Made manifest and portable, we feel we can always look to the collection to lift our spirits.<sup>56</sup>

While this comment is not necessarily entirely characteristic of women who collect dressmaking fabrics, it is clear that, along with Cairns and Silverman, Martin describes the mutual embodiment of future prospects that a piece of

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<sup>54</sup> Kathleen V. Cairns and Elaine Leslau Silverman, *Treasures : The Stories Women Tell About the Things They Keep* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>55</sup> Martin, *Popular Collecting and the Everyday Self: The Reinvention of the Museum*, 24.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

fabric ripe for the making can hold. However, Martin does not really address the general nature of this activity that has made fabrics so important historically to a majority of women, who steadfastly sewed and created for themselves and their families.

### *The Individual and the Ephemeral*

Attfield questions the obvious contradiction of individuality within a social context, especially when individuality can be regarded as a social process.<sup>57</sup>

This is a similar quandary to my attempt to construct a broader social narrative through the life of one woman. What is the link that allows this study to connect the life of Victoria Wood to others of a similar generation, class and cultural systems? There are several possibilities.

Attfield suggests that perceptions of shared identity are more evident across a generation rather existing within a family scenario.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, when she discusses the generation who live through the austerity years, she reveals that variables to the 'waste not, want not' ethos was more likely to exist in a group of similarly aged people. The climate of opinion at the time suggests that there were obvious social values associated with this. Yet, she suggests that the function of the clothing shifted because of emotional attachment to it.

Many retained garments because "they could not bear to part with them";

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<sup>57</sup> Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life*, 133.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

defying the collective notions of thrift and economy that dominated thinking of the times.<sup>59</sup>

Because clothing is a recognised object that relates to personal feelings, Attfield feels that any relationship with consumption negates the individual and ephemeral aspects that are so important when considering this relationship.

It is the nature of material that makes cloth so receptive to the nuances of meaning associated with the materialisation of identity. Its accessibility, adaptability, fluidity and infinite possibilities of variation that renders it so amenable to matters of individuality, also make it easily disposed of, whether by folding it away and allowing it to lie forgotten in the attic, turning it into another use, passing it on or throwing it out.<sup>60</sup>

I believe that the notion of 'infinite possibilities' evokes a similar intent to Paul Martin's earlier quote describing the collection as something that can lift the spirits. This resonates with the narratives of women who buy and save fabrics for the creation of clothes. I also suggest that because they are easily stored, fabric lends itself to revisiting associated emotions simply because the cloth has the propensity to resonate with the past and the future.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 148.

The suitcase represents many things, but in its conventional context it signifies movement and travel.<sup>61</sup> For this reason Peter Greenaway has used the suitcase in his artwork to comment on the mass movement of people, mobility and identity. “[T]he suitcase should be seen as a truly representative symbol for the twentieth century”.<sup>62</sup> The suitcase can also resonate with past associations as Olivia Daste recounts. In her story the suitcase is the container which she quickly packs with selected possessions of her grandmother after her death.<sup>63</sup> The suitcase becomes a sentimental signifier that allows her to stay connected to her grandmother. She packs into it her grandmother’s clothes, letters and everyday objects such as a tea cup that still has the imprint of lipstick. The container in this instance is transformed into a biographical memorial.

Collective pasts can also be revealed through what is left in suitcases, as Darby Penney and Peter Stastny show. They examine the remnants of individuals’ lives that were contained in abandoned suitcases found occupying an attic in 1999 of a state mental hospital in New York.<sup>64</sup> Their evocative account tells of the discovery of an attic full of suitcases packed with

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<sup>61</sup> Olivia Daste, "The Suitcase," in *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, ed. Sherry Turkle (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007); Nick Hackworth, "Exhibition Review: Case Study 2," *Fashion Theory* 12, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>62</sup> Hackworth, "Exhibition Review: Case Study 2," 267.

<sup>63</sup> Daste, "The Suitcase."

<sup>64</sup> Darby Penney and Peter Stastny, *The Lives They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2009).

possessions and separated from their owners. Much like Burman's pocket project discussed in the second part of this chapter, they make use of official records to augment the meanings. However, their social narrative is an analogy constructed to question the systems that care for people with psychiatric disabilities. And so in this case the analogy becomes a suggestive metaphor for neglect.

Greenaway's comment also make reference to the unwanted, however the suitcase also provides supplementary storage space which when packed can be pushed into a receding space somewhere, under a bed or on top of a wardrobe.

### *Conclusion*

As the literature review has shown, the domestic activity of sewing has, until a decade ago, received little scholarly attention.<sup>65</sup> Yet, I would suggest that the topic to date has been inhibited by an emphasis on quantifiable facts, such as domestic education, the evolving use of sewing machines and dress pattern sales, and the historical development of garment and fashion representation. All of these are important but are limited when trying to reconstruct an activity from a subjective and emotional perspective.

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<sup>65</sup> Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home."; Burman, "Introduction."

There are some gaps between textile and dress history as often they are seen through differing scholarly lenses.<sup>66</sup> The two often seem to develop in parallel directions claiming contexts such as identity, social change, and biography as being particular to their own field of study. Yet, my study cannot move forward without utilising both, as there are inseparable connections between cloth and clothing essential in locating the importance of fabric bought for the purpose of dressmaking.

I hope that this study will contribute a new thread of knowledge to these chains of research. Just like clothing, cut lengths of fabric intended for clothing creation can also “link the biological body to the social being”.<sup>67</sup> The fabric lengths can provide insight into what the garment or final creation could have been. Just like the garment, the fabric resonates and evokes an essence of the potential and imagined occasion. Therefore, I will argue that, just like the garment, the unsewn fabric can link us to the past, socially and culturally.

## **Part Two: Methodological Approach**

This study brings together a variety of methods to examine the relationship between women, fabric, home sewing and domesticity. The research design

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<sup>66</sup> Atkins, "Introduction."

<sup>67</sup> Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, 2.



includes close examination of the object and the suitcases, oral history and biography.

### *Physical and Cultural Properties*

Barbara Burman's *Pockets of History* project provided a model for the examination of the fabrics and content of the suitcases.<sup>68</sup> Burman's study examined pocket collections from British museums. She employed a variety of interpretive methods which "compared textiles, texts and visual imagery, mindful of the different treatment of interpretation they each required".<sup>69</sup> The pockets themselves provided a source of material evidence of physical properties, such as the types of fabrics used and how they were sewn.

The social aspects of Burman's pocket project were examined through understanding how these pockets were made and used and by whom. With this Burman utilised information from court proceedings to gain insight of what these pockets had contained, in particular, through records of theft. The court proceedings provided insight by revealing the objects stolen from the pockets. Textural sources included art, letters and diaries, inventories and court records. She integrated all of the data to determine the symbolic nature of the pockets and thus the textural and cultural meaning.

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<sup>68</sup> Barbara Burman, "'A Linnen Pockett a Prayer Book and Five Keys': Approaches to a History of Women's Tie-on Pockets" (paper presented at the Textile and Text: Re-establishing the links between archival and object-based research: postprints, University of Southampton, 2006).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

For this study, the material qualities of the fabrics are first established. Textile science methods are employed to establish the fibre content of each piece of cloth. Traditional approaches of microscope examination and fibre burning provide sufficient analysis to relate the fibre content and yarn and weave structure to important aesthetic and intrinsic qualities particular to fabric.<sup>70</sup> (appendix A1 pg 175) Each specific component of fabric makeup influences the final quality: weight, drape and hand. Primarily this is understood through the relationship between their fibre content and their handle and therefore their suitability to a particular garment styles. Descriptions of colourations and prints link to the ubiquitous ways in which fabric, fashion, clothing and home sewing were discussed simultaneously.

Further documentation of piece lengths and widths supply measurable references to the amount of fabric required to realise the type of garment the fabric would be best suited for.

### ***Cataloguing the Collection***

Using Burman's method as a starting point, I first created a code for every item in the suitcases. (Appendix A3 pp 176 - 202) The first part of the code indicates whether the piece came out of the first or second suitcase. I then gave each item a coded number based on the numerical sequence of their

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<sup>70</sup> Humphries, *Fabric Reference*.

unpacking. The final part of the code was determined by the object themselves. For this I created the following categories and assigned the initial letter to each item: 'Fabrics', 'Notions', 'Patterns', 'Containers', 'Tools' and 'Memorabilia'.

In total, the two suitcases contained 45 pieces of fabric, 14 separate packages or containers of notions which were predominantly buttons, braiding and lace; seven commercial sewing patterns and one home-made sewing pattern; eight containers including the suitcases and the various boxes and containers that held other objects. There were six tools of production and nine items of memorabilia which included any saved items, such as clothing which had been worn. A more detailed breakdown of the contents is included in the Appendices. In the examination of material evidence, the fabric lengths provide the main focus of the discussion, however the material aspects of all the objects, in particular the historical era and function, provides an overall picture of the collecting habits of Mrs Wood.

The fabric pieces or 'unsewn cloth' as I have now referred to them were then categorised in the following ways: 'garment lengths' 'remnants' and 'off cuts'. A garment length measures over 2.5 yards (or approximately 2.3 metres). To fit the criteria of remnant, the piece must display supporting ephemera such as sales tags, or end of roll evidence. For the final category the piece is to

shows signs of previous use, such as having obvious sections cut from it, or be shorter than 1 yard (or 1 metre). Imperial measurements are used because the majority of fabrics were purchased prior to New Zealand's shift to decimal currency which took place in 1967.<sup>71</sup> Using these measurements provides a direct link to the way the fabrics were sold and information about yardage provided on commercial patterns at the time, or in editorial publications such as the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* and the *Australian Home Journal* which included dressmaking patterns in every issue.

In the final part of this process, I give the fabric pieces a name that personalises them in a way that anchors them in a social and historical syntax. The naming is particular to each piece in that I attempt to reflect something about the era which I hope signifies the imagined responses experienced on an individual level; but also it is a name recognisably associated with the era.

### ***Primary and Secondary Sources***

The social aspects for this study are researched through a mixture of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are contemporary newspapers and women's magazines which show how fashion, fabrics and domesticity were represented to women from 1935 - 1955. Secondary sources on the

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<sup>71</sup> Decimal currency was introduced in New Zealand on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1967.

social history of New Zealand provide a wider structure for the thesis topic. These include studies that examine historical events such as the Great Depression and World War II and the prevailing climate that endorsed the ideology of domesticity. How these discussions situate women's experiences and domesticity are particularly important because they provide additional material through which to consider the way that the lives of women at this time can be viewed.

Media publications provides contextual information for this study because of the way that they reflect popular culture and are therefore open to a certain amount of interpretive analysis. Bronwyn Dalley's essay in *Fragments: New Zealand Social and Cultural History* provides an example of this approach. She examines newspaper stories surrounding the mysterious death of a girl in 1929. The media's propagation of the whole affair portrays the way that the media "shape and disseminate public opinion".<sup>72</sup> Positioning the visual information within the social historical context initiates an interesting dialogue, particularly, how fabrics, clothing and fashion are reflective of social values and are therefore part of the cultural narrative.

### *Oral History Sources*

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<sup>72</sup> Dalley, "The Cultural Remains of Elsie Walker," 155.

Oral history stories are layered into the methodology because they add depth and clarity to subjective aspects of this research. Many scholars have demonstrated that the use of oral history is a useful and invaluable tool for documenting everyday lives and experiences. In particular, oral histories dovetail the discrete and private realm associated with home and family into the broader social context to reveal stories that give particular textural qualities to the questions that underpin this research.<sup>73</sup>

Victoria Wood's granddaughter shared her memories of her nana with me. This account is woven into the first hand experiences of six women who infuse the discussion with memories of their lives. Their accounts provide additional material to historical discourses around domesticity from a New Zealand perspective and provide key dates for understanding the everyday importance of fabric in domestic traditions. Ethics approval was gained and a letter explaining the project with consent forms were given to all that participated in the study. The privacy of the six candidates is addressed by using their first and last name initials.

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<sup>73</sup> Sherna Gluck, "What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History," *Frontiers; A Journal of Women Studies* 2, no. 2 (1977); Anna Green, "Oral History and History," in *Remembering: Writing Oral History*, ed. Anna Green and Megan Hutching (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2004); Bronwyn Labrum, *Women's History: A Short Guide to Researching and Writing Women's History in New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams, 1993); Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home."; Burman, "Introduction."; Megan Hutching, *Talking History: A Short Guide to Oral History* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited, 1993); Turney, "(Ad) Dressing the Century; Fashionability and the Floral Frocks".

In the preliminary stages of talking to these women, it became obvious that creating clothes and collecting fabrics were so intrinsically woven into their lives and their everyday experiences and their relationships with other people and the outside world, that one part of the story could not exist without the other. It was then decided that the interviews would be recorded as life stories. Life stories are defined as a collection of accounts based on common theme.<sup>74</sup> As an interview style it allows expression of memories and feelings to unfold the subject in a way that gives voice to the emotional qualities of the research. In this respect, the inclusion of life stories widened the scope of the findings and connected personal experiences to what would not generally be found in traditional historical accounts, based on written and often public sources.<sup>75</sup>

A group of six women aged from their mid 80s to 90s contributed to this study by sharing their life stories. The candidates were contacted through personal networks such as extended family and friends. The criterion for their inclusion was determined firstly by their age and then their personal current – and past - interest in the creation of clothing and craft. Taking into account that the ‘city experience’ could vary from the ‘rural experience’, it was important that the interviewees came from several parts of New Zealand. Consequently the

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<sup>74</sup> Hutching, *Talking History: A Short Guide to Oral History*.

<sup>75</sup> Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home."; Labrum, *Women's History: A Short Guide to Researching and Writing Women's History in New Zealand*.

research included women from the city as well as rural and provincial areas of country. Through their experiences, they provide this study with crucial information from which to construct a portrait of particular feminine habits of clothing creation and fabric collecting in New Zealand's social landscape.

These women have generously shared their life stories to contribute to the broader picture and timeline I am concerned with. In particular, they have contributed their experiences of sewing for themselves and their families, their fabric collecting habits and stories and their domestic activities against the backdrop of World War II and into New Zealand's post-war period.

### ***Speculative Approaches***

The final ingredient in the overall methodology draws on my personal love, knowledge and interest in fabrics and fashion from this period. I engage in a speculative approach to give voice to my intuitive and imaginative responses to the fabric pieces and their original owner. In this way I acknowledge my "personal involvement" with the project much like Cheryl Buckley did in her essay *On the Margins*.<sup>76</sup> Because of my career experience I understand certain cues particular to clothing and fabric. For example, the name of a fabric weave is immediately transacted through my knowledge into its suitability for a garment design. Likewise a visual and tactile encounter with

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<sup>76</sup> Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home."



fabric draws an immediate response as to its possibilities. In this I allow my love of fabrics and knowledge of fashion styles from the era and my technical background as a patternmaker to add to the thesis content.

The thesis is organised into three chapters and begins with an examination of the domestic lives of women in the first half of twentieth century New Zealand.

“Stuff from Which Dreams Are Made” considers the construction of domestic ideologies and the relationship that women formed with fabric through this.

The chapter argues that women were able to find autonomy within their domestic world through an implicit relationship with fabric. It reveals the existence of a specific language that pervaded fabric and home dressmaking knowledge and situates the importance of fabrics themselves within this.

Chapter Two, “Material Unfolding: reconstructing the life of a woman and the contents of her suitcases” unpacks the suitcases and chronicles parts of Victoria Wood’s life; the chapter is infused with the story of finding her family.

This chapter also focuses on home sewing experiences obtained from six women interviewed for this study. These women lived through the war and post-war periods and reveal similar themes through their recounted experiences, all of which contribute to the broader social narrative woven into the overall project.

In the concluding chapter, “Fabricating Stories”, a selection of five significant fabric pieces are examined. They are taken from the wider historical context and the particular stages of Victoria Wood’s life and her sewing interests. The selection takes into account the various locations in New Zealand where she lived and tells the story of her acquiring the fabric lengths and what I believe she could have visualised for each piece. In this chapter I allow my training as a patternmaker and my love of all things to do with the era to have a voice.

It is not the intention of this study to attempt to critique previous accounts of historical narratives. More importantly it is felt that this thesis is attempting to put into words the individual and collective experiences of women, who were, and still are passionate about fabric.

The connection between Mrs Wood and her fabrics in essence offers a reading of her life. This relationship also provides entry into a broader spectrum of lives lived by everyday New Zealand women of the post war period. In the words of Henry Glassie:

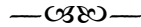
We have things to study, and we must record them dutifully and examine them lovingly if the abstraction called culture is to be compassed, if the striving of the human actor is to be met with fellow feeling.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Glassie, *Material Culture*, 41.

## Chapter One

### Stuff from Which Dreams Are Made



This chapter sets out to provide an historical context for this study focusing on the period 1935 – 1955, the era which relates directly to Mrs Woods' biography and the contents of her suitcases. Most of the significant fabric pieces date from the 1940s, necessitating emphasis on the war period and the years that directly followed. It is important to note how particular behaviours of New Zealand women such as their making, sewing and textile collecting habits evolved over time through domestic experiences. This chapter includes discussion of domestic ideologies from the late colonial period and the earlier decades of the twentieth century because they provide a broader context for these evolving habits and the broader contours of New Zealand society. Additionally, loyalty to England plays a role in this scene-setting because of the influential cultural and economic connections for New Zealand as a colonial outpost and throughout the twentieth century.

The first part of the chapter explores the notion of 'romantic domesticity' throughout this period. It examines the tensions that existed for women in their domestic lives and comments on the role of fabrics and home

dressmaking in this. The discussion highlights the autonomy that many women developed through collecting textiles and dress making. It reveals the pervasive influence that fabrics and home dressmaking had in domestic situations and how they were an accepted part of the social framework. This section places particular emphasis on aspects of the domestic inner world experienced by women in New Zealand.

The second part of the chapter looks more specifically at the developing relationship of women with fabric in a consumer-driven society. It explores how this relationship was built upon as part of domestic ideologies and how this was exploited and promoted by the retail environment and the media. It alludes to the existence of a vernacular kind of knowledge around fabrics and home dress making which explains why there is a lack of empirical studies of this activity in existing scholarship.

## **Part One: Romantic Domesticity**

### ***Colonial Culture: late 1890s – late 1920s***

As a British colony, New Zealand's Pakeha population was founded through immigration. Individuals who made the journey from the United Kingdom came with the anticipation of starting a new life, new opportunities and prospects. Immigrants arrived with perceived notions about land accessibility

and the chance to be their 'own man' in a "workingman's paradise".<sup>78</sup> Their beliefs were integral in establishing a more egalitarian society where they were "eager to find a separate identity from Britain",<sup>79</sup> leaving behind the British conventions and restrictions from their homeland.<sup>80</sup> Additionally it is suggested that the isolation of living in New Zealand encouraged change to the existing class structure brought from home.<sup>81</sup>

Yet well into the first four decades of the twentieth century, New Zealanders remained "extremely proud of their British nationality".<sup>82</sup> Evidence of this allegiance is readily found in historical accounts of events such as New Zealand's involvement in the two World Wars or the continuing necessity of major trade links with British Governments.<sup>83</sup> However, W. David McIntyre suggests a paradox was created through loyalties to England as it created a duality that, to some extent gave New Zealanders a collective identity.<sup>84</sup> Thus while the majority of New Zealanders still looked to England as home, they

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<sup>78</sup> Philippa Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 106.

<sup>79</sup> Ruth Laugesen, "Past Tense," *Listener*, July 11 -17 2009, 20.

<sup>80</sup> P.J Gibbons, "The Climate of Opinion," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand: Second Edition*, ed. Geoffrey W. Rice (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p 308

<sup>82</sup> Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), 51.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*; W. David McIntyre, "Imperialism and Nationalism," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand: Second Edition* ed. Geoffrey W. Rice (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992); Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand*.

<sup>84</sup> McIntyre, "Imperialism and Nationalism."

also had developed a national identity that saw themselves as their own people (Kiwis).

Geographical isolation instilled the need for creative approaches to practical tasks and often meant that unconventional methods were used to get the job done. The 'making do' mindset is something that pervaded local culture and is considered 'classic' when discussing iconic Kiwi values. Versatility and self-sufficiency were considered necessary traits, and New Zealanders prided themselves on their ability to turn their hands to a variety of tasks.

Resourcefulness and an ability to make the best use of everything were ingrained.<sup>85</sup> From their domestic realm, women also contributed. As Jock Phillips contends, "A wife who spent time bottling, dressmaking or gardening, not to mention assisting with farm work, was an essential contributor to the household".<sup>86</sup> Making the best of what one had was a New Zealander's way of life. Limited resources, isolation and ascribed gender roles all contributed to this.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male - a History* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987); Eve Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, 1981).

<sup>86</sup> Phillips, *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male - a History*, 51.

<sup>87</sup> Gibbons, "The Climate of Opinion."; Erik Olssen, "Towards a New Society," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand: Second Edition*, ed. Geoffrey W. Rice (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992); Phillips, *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male - a History*.

In their part of the family dynamics, early twentieth century New Zealand women typically occupied the traditional domestic role.<sup>88</sup> While the everyday tasks women participated in are not usually recorded, men are easily located: they built roads, established farming land and took part in the country's economic and urban growth.<sup>89</sup> In the early stages of colonisation, the genuine shortage of domestic help in a land dominated demographically by men was a problem. The Government sponsored the arrival of single women into the country to address this.<sup>90</sup> Figures were kept to monitor the population's growth. Male to female ratios remained under constant scrutiny and women were expected to marry and have children, so that the increased birth rates would entail less reliance on immigration to build the colonial society.<sup>91</sup> As a result, most women found themselves firmly in a domestic situation and just as busy as men. They were relied upon to keep the home fires burning, the children clothed and fed and dinner on the table when the men came home from work.

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<sup>88</sup> Sandra Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of Women since They Won the Vote* (Auckland: Viking, 1993).

<sup>89</sup> Tom Brooking, "Economic Transformation," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand: Second Edition*, ed. Geoffrey W. Rice (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992); Labrum, *Women's History: A Short Guide to Researching and Writing Women's History in New Zealand*; Phillips, *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male - a History*.

<sup>90</sup> Charlotte Macdonald, "Collective Biography," in *Biography in New Zealand*, ed. Jock Phillips (Wellington: Allen & Unwin New Zealand Ltd, 1985).

<sup>91</sup> Ruth Fry, *It's Different for Girls: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900 - 1975* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1985); Gibbons, "The Climate of Opinion."; Melanie Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000); Olssen, "Towards a New Society."; Phillips, *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male - a History*.

Because of this, Melanie Nolan suggests that domesticity had a greater bearing on New Zealand's society than perhaps any other society in the world.<sup>92</sup> Women expected to marry and make their contribution primarily in the domestic realm. The establishment of wage-related policies only helped to reinforce the ideology of domesticity, and the state focused on ensuring that men were able to support a wife and family as the "breadwinner".<sup>93</sup> The same policies recognised women only as dependants. Additionally, children were only recognised as the dependents of the father and not the mother. Quoting Jan McLeod, Nolan suggests that the "glorification of motherhood then boosted the 'cult of domesticity'".<sup>94</sup> These paradigms are seen as integral to shrouding the ideals of home and marriage with idyllic, if not romantic, values. Ruth Fry describes how a young woman raised in this environment grew to accept it and hope for a future that included a loving husband, children and a home.

The bearing of babies, the nurturing of children and the support of a husband, however remote and mysterious the experience, would have

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<sup>92</sup> Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



appeared to her as a noble calling and patriotic duty if not a romantic destiny.<sup>95</sup>

### ***A Domestic Curriculum for Girls***

Western education of young women in the early part of the twentieth century entailed a compulsory curriculum of domestic vocation. Home sewing was taught as part of this so that young women were educated with the necessary skills. Domestic skills were promoted to instil the sense of usefulness, thus equipping young women with the ability to contribute in a worthwhile way to the conventional family. In the United States this involved “the ideology of progress, self-reliance, social acceptance and mobility and a better life”.<sup>96</sup>

Sandra Coney shows that similar ideas were current in New Zealand. Young Pakeha females were also educated with the intent of creating women who could run resourceful homes, thus lessening the need for servants.<sup>97</sup>

Girls’ education in Britain was organised predominantly through social class structures and Annmarie Turnbull describes how publicly-funded schools

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<sup>95</sup> Fry, *It's Different for Girls: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900 - 1975*, 95.

<sup>96</sup> Sally. I Helvenston and Margaret. M Bubolz, "Home Economics and Home Sewing in the United States 1870 - 1940," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 303.

<sup>97</sup> Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of Women since They Won the Vote*, 202.

sanctioned gender directives in school curriculum delivery.<sup>98</sup> These presumed that girls born into the lower working classes could naturally progress from school into employment or 'service', but were also well equipped to run their own home.<sup>99</sup> The inclusion of sewing in the curriculum centred more on imparting practical skills of plain needlework for the creation of clothing. Further, Turnbull reveals that the curriculum included sewing for local dignitaries within the community which meant that the provision of free materials made sewing lessons a self-supporting enterprise.<sup>100</sup> Yet she goes on to argue that a contradiction existed in the curriculum structure, especially when it emphasised the teaching of intricate skills to those who were obviously destined for a more productive life.

The realities of a working-class home, where time and space would often be considerably restricted, were rarely acknowledged; the emphasis on the production of minutely –stitched white shirts, impractical underclothes or useless 'samples' continued until the end of the period, while the intention to produce sensible industrious women, resigned to their appointed station in life meant that a class could dress a doll in the most

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<sup>98</sup> Annmarie Turnbull, "Learning Her Womanly Work: The Elementary School Curriculum, 1870 - 1914," in *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950*, ed. Felicity Hunt (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-92.

intricately detailed finery to demonstrate their skills, but were discouraged from adding the simplest of decorations to their own garments.<sup>101</sup>

The educational experiences of young women in the United States were similar. Sarah Gordon also believes that basic sewing skills were most often started in the home, passed on to young girls from their mothers. When taught outside the home, she suggests that the level of sewing education was often dependant on the social surroundings of the educational institution.

Gordon's underlying premise argues that the class structure shifted the intention of vocational outcomes: "Some educators, sensitive to or prejudiced by differences of race class and region, tailored their curricula to particular populations and their supposed features".<sup>102</sup> Accordingly, young women left the education syllabus equipped for suitable transition into industry work, domestic service, or leisure pursuits depending on their family status.

Regardless, "no girl could be considered properly educated who could not sew".<sup>103</sup>

The issue of the education of girls created heated debate in the early twentieth century in New Zealand.<sup>104</sup> Earlier settlers had been forced to survive with few domestic servants; it was therefore argued that a shift in

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>102</sup> Gordon, ""Make It Yourself": Home Sewing, Gender, and Culture, 1890-1930." Chapter 3, 1

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. Chapter 3. p.4

<sup>104</sup> Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*.

vocational direction would put an end to this type of labour shortage.<sup>105</sup>

Other considerations in this debate revolved around the values of motherhood and marriage. It was expected that young women would require less education than young men and it was therefore considered that they would need a different set of courses and outcomes through the education syllabus. In 1917 a regulation was passed by the University of New Zealand Senate stating that all girls entering secondary education were required to study domestic science.

The course was to have three aspects: general science of the home; household economics and hygiene; and at least one of the following practical skills: 'plain cookery, laundry work, needlework, garment-making, home nursing'.<sup>106</sup>

In comparison, young boys followed an educational course that included woodwork, arithmetic and sciences. Both girls and boys from this period were expected to take part in the Certificate of Proficiency. This examination, if passed, allowed a child's education to advance beyond the primary school level. Passing this examination was also considered a major milestone for how young people progressed beyond the schooling system and into

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p106

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p 109 quoting from Regulations- Manual and Technical Instructions, *New Zealand Gazette*, 1917, vol 2, p 3030.

occupations.<sup>107</sup> Erik Olssen describes how young boys who did not achieve good examination results often “went farming or labouring”.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, girls would either go into gender-specific employment such as domestic service or secretarial work or they would return home to assist with the running of her parents’ household. Returning home often meant taking care of a younger sibling and relieving a ‘sick’ mother from some of the household chores.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, upon marriage these situations invariably changed and young women would most likely cease employment, or leave her family home to begin her own domestic life.

Perceptions of New Zealand’s egalitarian society suggest that “No-one was denied the rights to advancement”.<sup>110</sup> However, a social class structure did exist in New Zealand’s educational system. Schools that taught a technical syllabus often had an inferior status to those that delivered academic training in fields such as languages and science.<sup>111</sup> Streaming was often a way that New Zealand schools could integrate the variety of curricula between scholastic subjects and vocational needs.<sup>112</sup> Technical education was considered more suitable for the children of the less well-off, yet the numbers

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<sup>107</sup> Fry, *It's Different for Girls: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900 - 1975*; Olssen, "Towards a New Society."

<sup>108</sup> Olssen, "Towards a New Society," 277.

<sup>109</sup> Fry, *It's Different for Girls: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900 - 1975*.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>111</sup> Olssen, "Towards a New Society."

<sup>112</sup> Fry, *It's Different for Girls: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900 - 1975*.

receiving vocational training grew into the early part of the twentieth century. Contemporary thought suggested that preparing children for the workforce would assist in the country's productivity. As Olssen writes, "The system was designed to produce not only economically useful skills, however, but also sound morals and loyalty to the British Empire".<sup>113</sup>



Image 1

Girls receiving sewing lessons c. 1930s  
Alexander Turnbull Library 1/1-004537-G

Ideals of productivity also influenced the delivery of manual skills and the principles of fine needle-work became less important around this time. Fry

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<sup>113</sup> Olssen, "Towards a New Society," 277.

also suggests that the increased popularity of plain sewing coincided with the introduction of the sewing machine into schools and marked the decline of fancywork. In this way, New Zealand followed the British mode of national efficiency, which was underpinned by the idea of independence and meant that schools embraced more functional and practical outcomes for their students.<sup>114</sup> “Nothing a girl learns in the whole of her school career would be as useful to her as the lessons she learns on sewing day”.<sup>115</sup>

McCabes Dressmaking Academy placed advertisements regularly in the country's newspapers, and magazines such as *The Listener*, *Woman's Weekly* and *The New Zealand Home Journal*. The following advertisement in the *Evening Post* on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1937, targets mothers imploring them to encourage their daughters to realise the value of sewing from home. The text implies that the study of dressmaking will reward a young woman with independence. It boldly claims that their curriculum provides entry into a lucrative and progressive profession. However the image communicates something quite different. For what we see are four fashionably aware women standing over what could be a dining table in a domestic space. The fabric is folded in half (selvedge to selvedge) and the pattern is most certainly a domestic pattern, placed on the fold as a home sewer would.

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<sup>114</sup> Fry, *It's Different for Girls: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900 - 1975*, 20.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.



# The Right Profession for Your Daughter

**—HER LIFELONG INDEPENDENCE!**

No profession has more appeal or is better suited to modern young women than Dresscutting, Designing, Dressmaking, and Fashion Styling. Nor is there to-day a more lucrative, progressive profession. The demand for those **TRAINED IN FASHION** far exceeds the supply, and in this profession, as with all others, the selection of the **MOST SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL** IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE TO SUCCESS. Individual Tuition by experts, day and evening lessons. Fees are from 30/- and Success is Guaranteed. No Charts or Complicated Measurements.

**GET THE BEST TUITION AT McCABE ACADEMY.**

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Learn at home to make your own patterns and perfect fitting clothes. Our illustrated mail courses teach you thoroughly.

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Please send me without obligation your Free Booklet about Dresscutting and Dressmaking. I enclose 2d. in stamps for postage.

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CALL, WRITE OR PHONE 42-323 for full particulars.

## McCabe Academy of Dressmaking

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(Established 1913.)

4th Floor, D.I.C. Buildings, PANAMA STREET, WELLINGTON.  
And at Auckland, Sydney, Melbourne, London, Paris, and New York.

Image 2

Advertisement for McCabe's Academy of Dressmaking c.1937

"The Right Profession for Your Daughter"

*Evening Post*, January 16, 1937. p.19

There is little discussion in the historical literature about the sharing of domestic sewing and craft skills through female family members. However,



an oral history informant involved in Otago's *The Stitch of History* project spoke of learning sewing and embroidery skills from her mother, grandmother and aunts.<sup>116</sup> To her the domestic nature of creating and maintaining clothing was in some respects so ordinary in its everyday nature that it seemed of little consequence, and no more significant than other weekly chores such as laundry. She discusses how these activities were 'normal' and therefore easily taken for granted as an assumed routine household activity for women of most families. The informant did, however, also express the pleasure achieved through the creation of clothes and the art of embroidery. The purpose of this interview was to create an oral history archive for the Otago Embroiderers Guild. The respondent, Laura Shaw, talked excitedly about how the progression of her childhood skills were rewarded by the types of fabrics she was allowed to use for her creations. She enthused: "first you started on flour bags, then went on to casement, then Britway, then fugue [sic] silk and organdie. Linen was the last".<sup>117</sup> This final comment clearly demonstrating the hierarchy associated with the quality of cloth and her appreciation of them. The incentive that those fabrics had for her creative relationship with fabric and her developing skills are clearly expressed in her words.

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<sup>116</sup> Laura Shaw, interviewed by Janice Wilson, 19 March 2002, for *The Stitch in History Oral History Archive*, held in the Oral History centre. Alexander Turnbull Library. OHInt-0727/03

<sup>117</sup> Laura Shaw, interviewed by Janice Wilson, 19 March 2002, for *The Stitch in History Oral History Archive*, held in the Oral History Centre, Alexander Turnbull Library, OHInt-0727/03

## *The Great Depression and World War II*

Much like the earlier period, 'making do' continued as an integral part of the New Zealander's mindset. This was especially significant in times of hardship when basic living requirements were affected by world events such as the Great Depression and War. Regardless of its quality or obvious usefulness, objects were saved 'just in case' and given an even greater significance than previously. Tony Simpson describes how New Zealand was already feeling a slump prior to the Wall Street Crash in 1929, as the country was struggling with diminishing wool and butterfat prices and unemployment was on the rise.<sup>118</sup> By 1932 the number of unemployed men had risen to a staggering 100 000, which at that time equalled 12 per cent of the workforce.<sup>119</sup> The majority of those who remained in employment had to contend with a significant drop in income.<sup>120</sup> Margaret McClure details how unemployment became a central point of discussion for the Government. The Government initiated work schemes and while these provided work for many in exchange for money, the jobs were sometimes situated in other areas of the country so men would have to leave their homes and their families.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Tony Simpson, *The Sugarbag Years* (Wellington: Alister Taylor Publishing Ltd, 1974), 10.

<sup>119</sup> Margaret McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898 - 1998* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1998), 49.

<sup>120</sup> Simpson, *The Sugarbag Years*.

<sup>121</sup> Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*; McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898 - 1998*.

Women were also affected by unemployment but their plight was a different story. Sandra Coney and Eve Ebbett describe how women in this instance were often at the mercy of Government directives. It could be that they were married and left alone while their husbands worked away from home. Or, it could be that they were single, or they no longer had a husband to support them. They would then have to find employment or rely on families or charities. Government agencies did not officially recognise women as needing financial support; this rendered them as virtually invisible in unemployment records.<sup>122</sup>

The Great Depression placed additional strains on women's domestic activities. The hardship they experienced intensified the need to find ways of providing for the family. Women became well versed in the use of sewing and knitting to help supplement the family income, or mending to lengthen the life of textile objects such as clothing and household linen.<sup>123</sup> The following image displays the variety of textile goods that were created by women during the Depression. They were sold through this Willis Street shop in Wellington to support women with no income. The creation of textiles goods provided many with a sense of hope in times of hardship. They made it possible to earn money and they provided a medium through which to demonstrate

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<sup>122</sup> Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of Women since They Won the Vote*, 230; Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

valued skills of creation. The creation of textile objects took place largely in the home, so they were also imbued with their association with the domestic realm.

Helen May's thesis discusses the aspirations and disappointments felt by many women through the Depression years. By her account hardship and adversity seem, at best, to amplify the lacking and longing and the ironic consequences women experienced. Women continued to place great emphasis on finding the ideal husband, although often because of the Depression, they might be separated for long periods of time. Women were often the silent sufferers in this situation, faced with uncertainty and the unexpected and all the while dreaming that their lives were meant for better things. Coney's portrayal of the difficulty women experienced reveals key ideals of domesticity and marriage. It was often assumed that all women, would have somewhere a man "who could support her, and failing that, there was always domestic service".<sup>124</sup>



Image 3  
Shop window display of textile good created  
by unemployed women during the Depression. June 24 1932  
Alexander Turnbull Library 1/2-084162-G

There were debates on the merits of employment for women throughout the Depression. Historian Tim Frank illustrates the contemporary perception from that time: “At worst, women in paid work accentuated male unemployment by taking men’s jobs, lowering the status and remuneration rates of some jobs and jeopardising the nation’s health by fatiguing themselves in the workforce.”<sup>125</sup> There was an ongoing evolution of domestic ideologies where, even in times of hardship, when there was often little to feed a family, a woman’s place was firmly in the home. The viewpoint highlights two things, firstly the interrelation of male provision for the family and the pride associated with it and second, the sense of duty that impelled women to continue their domestic duties and contribute in growing the nation’s population. The drive for thrift and frugality was even more essential in the Depression’s economic climate and Ebbett claims that this period was the most prevalent in New Zealand’s history of ‘making do’.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Tim Frank, "Bread Queues and Breadwinners: Gender in the 1930s," in *The Gendered Kiwi*, ed. Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999), 119.

<sup>126</sup> Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*, 1.

Regardless of doing without, the focus on an efficiently run home continued.<sup>127</sup> Promotion of hygiene in the home and the emergence of electrical appliances to help with domestic work were both part of message about how women should care for their families in a responsible way. Often appliances were promoted in such a way as to suggest they gave women more freedom from the drudgery of household chores.<sup>128</sup> Essentially appliances enabled women to pursue suitable activities that centred in and around the home. Tom Brooking notes that “even in the worst years of the Depression” the overall demand for household appliances such as electric stoves and water heaters continued to grow.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Sandra Coney observes that “Housework was redefined as an expression of love for one’s family”.<sup>130</sup> Yet the promotion for household appliances and caring for the family simultaneously held tensions for many women, especially if they did not achieve the ideal standard which was happiness, with a providing husband, a loving family and a beautiful home. The conflict between a woman’s notion of domestic values and desire for a better life is evident.

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<sup>127</sup> Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of Women since They Won the Vote*; Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*.

<sup>128</sup> Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of Women since They Won the Vote*; Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*.

<sup>129</sup> Brooking, "Economic Transformation," 251.

<sup>130</sup> Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of Women since They Won the Vote*, 274.

Rosemary McLeod and Fiona Hackney both allude to a similar aspect of romantic desire which pervaded feminine experiences of domesticity.<sup>131</sup> In particular, they refer to experiences that the creation of clothing and crafts had in creating the self. McLeod believes that despite hard times, New Zealand women “continued sewing for their glory boxes”.<sup>132</sup> This comment demonstrates how women transferred their hopes towards the traditional rites of passages such as marriage and motherhood, and placed an emotional value on textile objects, especially those that had been created by their own handiwork. Both authors argue that women’s magazines contributed to the ‘longing’ by sharing pages of romantic fiction with sensible ‘how to’ advice, possible fashion and craft creations, and advertisements for products all associated with the self or the home.

Towards the end of the 1930s the New Zealand’s economy improved. The Labour Party were victorious in the 1935 elections and promised major changes to legislation as well as a vision of greater equality for all New Zealanders. It passed the Social Security Act in 1938 which was put into

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<sup>131</sup> Fiona Hackney, "Making Modern Women, Stitch by Stitch: Dressmaking and Women's Magazines in Britain 1919 - 1939," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999); ———, "'Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-Do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006); McLeod, *Thrift to Fantasy: Home Textile Crafts of the 1930s - 1950s*.

<sup>132</sup> McLeod, *Thrift to Fantasy: Home Textile Crafts of the 1930s - 1950s*, 68; Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*.

effect in April the following year.<sup>133</sup> It was intended that the implementation of these new policies would bring an end to poverty and provide a reasonable standard of living for all New Zealanders. "The government claimed that it hoped that social security benefits would 'be reflected in every household'"<sup>134</sup> The changes ensured wider availability Government assistance for women.<sup>135</sup> Victoria Wood was one of the many women who benefitted from this policy shift as she received the widows' benefit after the death of her husband in 1939. Changes were also made to the family allowance schemes which meant that money was now paid directly to the woman.<sup>136</sup> The provision of free dental care, education and doctor's visits were some of the other strategies implemented. These were all significant for women in their domestic roles but these policies upheld the ideologies of women and children supported by a male 'breadwinner'.

Different historians make different points about the values of this period. Erik Olssen observes that "The value of consumption began to replace those of thrift and production".<sup>137</sup> Yet discussing the same period, Jan Hamon asserts that "the philosophy of 'making do' and 'making ends meet' was still deeply

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<sup>133</sup> McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898 - 1998*; Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*.

<sup>134</sup> McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898 - 1998*, 83.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid; Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*.

<sup>136</sup> Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*.

<sup>137</sup> Olssen, "Towards a New Society," 280.



ingrained".<sup>138</sup> Depending on what is being considered, consideration must therefore be given to the way that the two values, consumerism and domestic values, existed simultaneously.

During the 1930s, Ebbett describes that marriage continued as one of the important milestone for women. She refers to the articles reporting engagements and weddings that regularly appeared in newspapers and women's magazines. Photographs of the bridal parties and announcements of the wedded couples' names only helped to glorify marriage. The reports included descriptive details of the clothes worn by the wedding party. As Ebbett observes:

Not only were the bride's and bridesmaids' outfits eulogised, but the report included details of the clothes worn by the bride's mother, her new mother-in-law, her grandmother, her cousins and some of the guests.<sup>139</sup>

The descriptions of fabrics and clothing details worn at wedding parties and read in women's columns, only strengthened the 'romantic desire' many women associated with the ideals of marriage and domesticity. The evocative portrayal of fabrics in this context bolstered, and in many respects succeeded,

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<sup>138</sup> Jan Hamon, "The New Zealand Dressmaker: Experiences, Practices and Contribution to Fashionability, 1940 - 1980" (Doctor of Philosophy, RMIT, 2007), 158.

<sup>139</sup> Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*, 102.

in connecting the feminine imagination to her desires. Silks, satins and lace were traditionally associated with marriage. All of these materials have a certain tactile quality and arguably provided a threshold into a certain dreamscape and into the romantic ideal of domesticity.

As Ebbett notes, the alternative was not an attractive prospect:

Marriage was of particular importance. It was the only real security, the only life style within which one could raise a family, the only relationship with a man that gave the woman legal protection – and for some it was the only alternative to becoming a maiden aunt, living year after year at home caring for aging parents.<sup>140</sup>

### *World War II*

Along with Britain, New Zealand and other allied countries declared war on Germany on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939. The New Zealand government introduced conscription in the middle of 1940 and out of a population of 1,630,000 people 140,000 men and women were sent overseas to fight.<sup>141</sup> In addition to reserves of men, New Zealand also sent provisions of locally produced foodstuffs to supply the British Isles and war zone areas of the Pacific.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>141</sup> Helen May, "Postwar Women 1945 - 1960 and Their Daughters 1970 - 1985: An Analysis of Continuity, Contradiction, and Change in Two Generations of Pakeha Women as Mother, Wives and Workers" (Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology, Victoria, 1988), 56.

The new emergency of war meant that women were left at home while their men lived away from the family. After Japan's 1941 entry into the war, the New Zealand Government introduced industrial conscription and gained power to move civilians into war work and essential services.<sup>142</sup> Women made up the large portion of civilians who took up employment to cover shortages created by the absence of men and by September 1942, approximately 36,000 women were employed in war work.<sup>143</sup>

Initially accepting women into work positions normally held by men created a level of public resistance, especially if the woman was already married.<sup>144</sup> However physical shortages of men made this directive necessary. Ebbett reveals the displeasure many women felt to be directed into work they disliked. Once they had been conscripted or 'manpowered', it was very hard for them to leave and they were often committed to hold the position for the duration of the war. Some have suggested that war work for women signified shifting values to the perceived domestic role.<sup>145</sup> However Deborah Montgomerie argues that women's mobilisation into the workforce did not change the overarching domestic ideologies:

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<sup>142</sup> Eve Ebbett, *When the Boys Were Away: New Zealand Women in World War I* (Wellington: A.H. &A.W. Reed, 1984), 47.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>144</sup> Deborah Montgomerie, *The Women's War: New Zealand Woman 1939 - 1945* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001).

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

The war might allow some changes in women's public roles, but it did not encourage a parallel reassessment of their domestic responsibilities or of men's privileges. Men were widely believed to be making great sacrifices in the pursuit of victory over fascism; in return they were entitled to expect stability in the gender order.<sup>146</sup>

In comparison, the absorption of British and American women into jobs normally considered 'men's work' was more prevalent and according to Montgomerie, the experiences of New Zealand women were notably different. Consequently, war-time employment for local women revolved around already understood domestic associations of producing food and clothing.<sup>147</sup> For example:

[C]lothing and footwear industries were the biggest beneficiaries of the 'manpowering' of women. Together with catering enterprises and hospitals, these two industries accounted for more than fifty per cent of direction orders. Large numbers of women were also directed into horticulture, harvesting and producing vegetables to feed the Allies armies in the Pacific.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>148</sup> ———, "Reassessing Rosie: World War II, New Zealand Women and the Iconography of Femininity," *Gender and History* 8, no. 1 (1996): 111.

THE NEW ZEALAND

# Woman's Weekly

Oct. 28, 1943

Vol. 11 No. 1

Registered at G.P.O.,  
Wellington, for trans-  
mission by post as a  
newspaper.

Postage 1d.

Temporarily  
Published  
Fortnightly

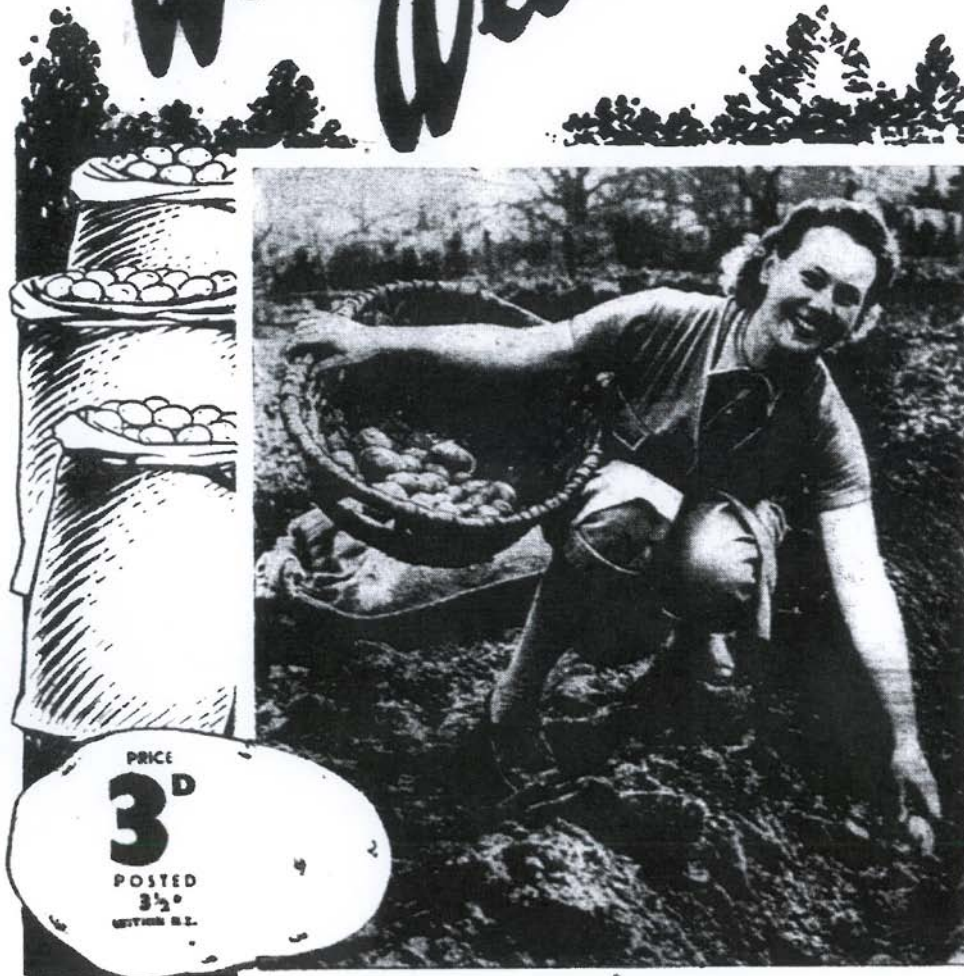


Image 4

A New Zealand land girl featured on the  
cover of *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* c. 1943

Alexander Turnbull Library ZP11 3331/398

Women also contributed to the war effort through voluntary work, including domestic assistance and child care for those involved in war work. Other contributions were through the creation of sewn and knitted goods which were sent overseas to soldier and prisoners through various organisations such as The New Zealand Red Cross Society. Unpaid work was often undertaken on top of war-time employment and the continued running of the household. Voluntary involvement was encouraged and Heather Nicholson provides an account of a competition run by the New Zealand Navy League War Council. The competition was to create a regulation navy woollen jersey, aptly called "*since you went away*" and named to coincide with the 1945 release of a movie with the same name.<sup>149</sup> Given the context of war, naming the competition was obviously and invariably loaded with romantic and nostalgic references, thus linking desire to male absence, textiles and domesticity. Some 234 jerseys were entered and were presumably sent off to naval recipients who regularly received "woollen comforts" from volunteer knitters.<sup>150</sup>

Some scholars suggest that despite significant contributions to the war effort, many New Zealand women experienced a feeling of worthlessness. They lived with an overriding sense of guilt generated by a perception that they

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<sup>149</sup> Nicholson, *The Loving Stitch: A History of Knitting and Spinning in New Zealand*, 150.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

were not really contributing in a real and worthwhile way.<sup>151</sup> To this Montgomerie adds that contributions made by women were mostly seen as secondary to those of the male population and “they were also seen as involving less ‘sacrifice’ than those of women in other parts of the empire”.<sup>152</sup> In contrast, the efforts and experiences of British women were heralded through contemporary magazines and seen as setting a precedent. Unlike New Zealand women, British women were liable for conscription into national service. British women lived close at hand to real devastation and British women were – well British! For New Zealand women, geographical isolation meant that their war experience could never have comparable meaning.<sup>153</sup>

British women were encouraged to ensure support for continuing as normal war-time. According to Pat Kirkham, women were ostensibly encouraged to manifest ‘normality’ through their everyday dress and activities to downplay the uncertainty. “British propaganda (both official and commercial) relating to civilian dress was geared towards keeping up appearances of normality and downplaying the instabilities and paradoxes thrown up by changing definitions

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<sup>151</sup> Helen May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited 1992), 37; Montgomerie, *The Women's War: New Zealand Woman 1939 - 1945*.

<sup>152</sup> Montgomerie, *The Women's War: New Zealand Woman 1939 - 1945*, 28.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

of 'women' at personal and public levels". As she concludes, "British women were asked to make enormous sacrifice while appearing as if they had not".<sup>154</sup>

Media messages of the time were firmly built on the ideologies of domesticity and reinforced long-standing beliefs in feminine duty. Continuing support for the fighting men folk was perceived by many as very real and an important task. The messages to New Zealand women to uphold their responsibility to maintain morale were much the same as those to British women. Evidence of this is readily seen in advertisements for fashion and beauty products of the time. While it fell to them to "keep the home fires burning",<sup>155</sup> they also faced additional pressure on their day-to-day existence. How could they conform to social expectations in times when products associated with beauty and dress were often difficult to obtain? Examination of newspapers from the time reveals clear evidence of the layering of fashion imagery and the body conscious self situated next to and near reports and images of war. The text which supported the images used military inspired references and underlined the obligations women had to maintain their feminine beauty regardless of any direct product shortages created by war.

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<sup>154</sup> Kirkham, "Keeping up the Home Front: Morale "Beauty and Duty" in Wartime Britain," 206.

<sup>155</sup> May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women*, 36.





Image 5

Advertisement for Berlei c.1942

“Beauty, badge of courage”

*Evening Post* May 1942

Consequently for many women the way they dressed and their appearance remained important. In the midst of a consensus around sensible dress, clothing remained a way through which women could assert their self-respect and identity. The majority of war-time dress followed the protocol of simplicity, yet dressing up remained an important aspect of war-time and opportunities to dress up for occasions were always welcome: “evening dresses and the fabric

to make formal wear remained in demand".<sup>156</sup> In comparison, male attire remained fairly sober. Military wear was the common mode for male civilians and they wore sombre colours.<sup>157</sup>

### ***Austerity and Making Do***

Rationing was introduced into New Zealand on May 28 1942. Initially the country was less affected than other parts of the world, but for a period that extended beyond the war, the country had to operate with restrictions on essential items such as food, petrol and clothing. Richard Wolfe comments that New Zealanders generally fared better in the rationing system than their British counterparts.

The New Zealand man, for example, received sufficient clothing coupons each year to buy an overcoat, suit, cardigan, shirt, collar, pyjamas, undergarments, socks, shoes and felt hat. By comparison, in Great Britain more than two years' supply of coupons were necessary to accumulate the same wardrobe.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Deborah Montgomerie, "Dressing for War: Glamour and Duty in Women's Lives During the Second World War," in *Looking Flash: Clothing in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Bronwyn Labrum, Fiona McKergow, and Stephanie Gibson (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), 171.

<sup>157</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s."; Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*.

<sup>158</sup> Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*, 9.

The notion of 'making do' was a familiar prospect for many New Zealand families and with the nation focused on the crisis of war, women often found ingenious and economical ways to manage and live within the restrictions. Magazines provided readers with sensible suggestions of how to reuse fabrics which were meant for one purpose but to be used for another. For example, a *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* feature suggested the use of everyday dishcloth squares which, when sewn together and with a touch of embroidery, made a very attractive bedspread.<sup>159</sup> Similar clever tactics were used to extend the life of clothing. For example, adult garments could be cut down and remade into children's clothes, sleeves removed from a dress transformed it into a pinafore, and thrifty use of several fabrics could create garments with colours of two tones or more.<sup>160</sup>

There were also many who "struggle[d] to dress well through the war years".<sup>161</sup> If poverty had hit hard in the Depression, the likelihood was that very little existed in their wardrobes. McKergow, Wolfe and Nicholson all describe the unconventional efforts that were made by New Zealand women to maintain a sense of decency.<sup>162</sup> The 'make do and mend' campaign

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<sup>159</sup> "A Very Attractive Bedspread," *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, November 25 1943.

<sup>160</sup> Ebbett, *When the Boys Were Away: New Zealand Women in World War I*; McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s."

<sup>161</sup> Ebbett, *When the Boys Were Away: New Zealand Women in World War I*, 92.

<sup>162</sup> Nicholson, *The Loving Stitch: A History of Knitting and Spinning in New Zealand*; McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s."; Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*.

pervaded everybody's consciousness and frugal reuse of garments and other textile sources such as curtains were transformed into wearable garb.

Evidence suggests that the ability to construct and maintain clothing for the self and family (sewing, knitting and mending) contributed to the wider notion of pride associated with clothing and dress. This contributed to shifting attachments to clothing, but also it contributed to the importance placed on the creations and the provenance of their textiles. "She determinedly bought dozens of tiny hanks of unrationed white mending wool, spliced all the little lengths together and knitted complete layette".<sup>163</sup>

In comparison to northern hemisphere fashion, New Zealanders were noted as relatively plain in their dress styles. Richard Wolfe suggests that their tastes often reflected the lifestyle and isolation from the fashion centres of the world.<sup>164</sup> However, McKergow makes a contrary case. She suggests that in times of shortages many women evolved their sewing techniques in ways to offset the plainness. Simple clothes were often enhanced through an emphasis on sewing techniques and details to improve the style. In this way, garments that at first glance were plain could contain attractive details such as pintucks, pleats, "topstitching and raised needlework" to make an otherwise

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<sup>163</sup> Nicholson, *The Loving Stitch: A History of Knitting and Spinning in New Zealand*. 135.

<sup>164</sup> Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*.

simple garment pleasing to the eye.<sup>165</sup> This evidence alludes to the pride women took in the creation of clothing and their appreciation of the skills to fulfil this. It also demonstrates the autonomy embedded in the process of creation and the importance of the fabrics and other the textiles in clothing.

### *Utility and Making Do*

To combat the problem of diminishing textile resources, the British Government introduced the utility clothing scheme in the latter part of 1941. Fashion designers (Hartnell, Amies, Molyneux, Morton and Steibel) were employed to endorse this.<sup>166</sup> With severe limitations were placed on clothing production, the designers created styles and patterns to supply clothing manufacturers with designs that met these limitations. Restrictions were placed on the amount of fabric that could be used to make a garment. There were also limits place on the total amount of stitches used to construct a garment, the number of buttons, pleats and pockets and the banning of embellishments and fabric excesses such as turn back cuffs.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s," 168.

<sup>166</sup> Kirkham, "Keeping up the Home Front: Morale "Beauty and Duty" in Wartime Britain."; James Laver, *Taste and Fashion* (London: George G Harrap and Company Ltd, 1948).

<sup>167</sup> Kirkham, "Keeping up the Home Front: Morale "Beauty and Duty" in Wartime Britain."; Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*; Laver, *Taste and Fashion*.

The objectives of utility literally meant to direct civilian thoughts collectively towards the idea of usefulness, resourcefulness and standardisation. It was formulated in a way that communicated to civilians the importance of 'going without' for the war effort. Fashion was therefore sensible and clothing designs often referenced the military styling of the uniform. Several authors observe that occupation of Paris by German forces hindered the evolution of couture fashion and slowed any subsequent shifts in fashion's silhouette for the duration of the war.<sup>168</sup> This suggests that fashion stood still. However, for many women, the situation provided for them an opportunity to display their individuality through their dress. Women were justifiably able to use alternative means to keep up appearances.

New Zealand was not limited by utility in the same way, but followed the British directive and fashioned their clothing styles accordingly.<sup>169</sup> Likewise, initial shortages experienced here were not to the same level as those which impacted so heavily on Britain. But New Zealand's alliance to the war deemed that requisitioning of local resources should contribute to the war effort and textile mills and garment manufacturers all focused their main

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<sup>168</sup> Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*; Wade Laboissonniere, *Blueprints of Fashion: Home Sewing Patterns of the 1940s*, 2nd ed. (Atglen: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2009); Laver, *Taste and Fashion*; Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*.

<sup>169</sup> Ebbett, *When the Boys Were Away: New Zealand Women in World War II*; Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*.

production to war time necessities.<sup>170</sup> The *Woman's Weekly* kept New Zealand woman abreast of fashion news from London:

Utility models are growing in favour. Being Government sponsored, they have to reach a certain standard of excellence and from undies to top-coat they are obviously the best possible value for coupons and money.<sup>171</sup>

New Zealand women became very adept in evolving the ethos of 'making do'.<sup>172</sup> As Rosemary McLeod recounts:

Because women worked with textiles they naturally turned to using them in thrifty and ingenious ways as a response to the need to economise. [T]he careful way they made use of these fragments of cloth, making sure that attractive details of the pattern in even very small pieces were used to decorative advantage. If there was resentment at having to scrimp and save, pride at the result was still uppermost.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> G. J McLean, *Spinning Yarns: A Centennial History of Alliance Textiles and Its Predecessors* (Dunedin: Alliance Textiles Limited, 1981); Felicity Price, *Lane Walker Rudkin: 100 Years in the Making* (Christchurch: Hazard Press Limited, 2005).

<sup>171</sup> Ellie Bailey, "Latest London Fashions," *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, October 28 1943.

<sup>172</sup> Atkins, "Introduction."; Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*, McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s."; McLeod, *Thrift to Fantasy: Home Textile Crafts of the 1930s - 1950s*; Nicholson, *The Loving Stitch: A History of Knitting and Spinning in New Zealand*.

<sup>173</sup> McLeod, *Thrift to Fantasy: Home Textile Crafts of the 1930s - 1950s*, 219.

## *War Brides*

The value of marriage remained high but war imposed distinct disruptions to the progress of courtship, engagement and marriage. Yet to some extent marriage became more important in times of uncertainty.<sup>174</sup> Accounts of weddings continued to appear in the newspapers and Ebbett notes that "The media obviously appreciated this adherence to a tradition which even war could not upset".<sup>175</sup> War time weddings often happened at whirlwind speed and clothing compromises were inevitably made to fit out the wedding party for the event.<sup>176</sup>

You couldn't get anything, girls had dresses made out of taffeta lining. I finally got a ring one lunch time to say that Kirks had one dress length of magnolia satin and they would keep it for me because I was next on the list. When my mother and I went to the shop the girl asked, 'Do you like it?' I said, 'Have you got anything else?' She said 'No'. It was made up with a sweetheart neckline, long close-fitting sleeves with peak over the wrist and buttons, gathers at the neckline and a dropped waistline.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Ebbett, *When the Boys Were Away: New Zealand Women in World War I*; May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women*; Montgomerie, "Dressing for War: Glamour and Duty in Women's Lives During the Second World War."

<sup>175</sup> Ebbett, *When the Boys Were Away: New Zealand Women in World War I*, 91.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid; May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women*; Julie Millen, *Kirkaldie & Stains: A Wellington Story* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2000); Montgomerie, "Dressing for War: Glamour and Duty in Women's Lives During the Second World War."

<sup>177</sup> Millen, *Kirkaldie & Stains: A Wellington Story*, 147.



Once again we see the interrelationship between fabric and the garment. The garment details described in this case evoke a wedding dress, in the cut and the fit.

### ***Post War Years***

Shortages of some essential goods continued in the years that followed directly after the war. Rationing of clothing continued until 1947 and petrol remained in short supply until 1950.<sup>178</sup> May aptly describes the “consciousness of scarcity” that remained with many women who had lived through the Great Depression and World War II.<sup>179</sup> The post war experience for many New Zealanders was seen as a break from past suffering into a time of prosperity. Yet many retained their ability to ‘make do’ and for women this included maintaining their skills such as sewing and craft. Although these skills had often been necessary to stretch out the family economy, the creative aspect was also embedded in their everyday consciousness.<sup>180</sup>

In 1945, the Labour Government provided returning soldiers with financial assistance through a repatriation scheme. It was designed to facilitate a

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<sup>178</sup> Ebbett, *When the Boys Were Away: New Zealand Women in World War I*; Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*.

<sup>179</sup> May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women*, 335.

<sup>180</sup> McLeod, *Thrift to Fantasy: Home Textile Crafts of the 1930s - 1950s*; Nicholson, *The Loving Stitch: A History of Knitting and Spinning in New Zealand*.

speedy return to an “ordered world”.<sup>181</sup> Men were supported in reconstituting their lives and finding or retraining for suitable civilian careers. At the same time, the Government put financial measures in place to provide a universal family benefit payable to all families with children aged between birth and 16. The incentive underlined the need to provide for children who were recognised as being silent sufferers of poverty in the past.<sup>182</sup> Once again the initiative fed into domestic ideologies through the intention to provide for the “education and maintenance of children” with the mother of the family receiving the benefit.<sup>183</sup> Free maternity care was also introduced supporting the assumption that women would return to their natural role of motherhood and supporting the ideology of regrowth for the nation.<sup>184</sup>

Published material at the same time contributed to restoring family values. The *Woman's Weekly* pages reflected the ideology of family values in their layout. I observed these changes in the weekly spread which now included the wellbeing of children in a way that had not existed before. Upon opening, children's pages now replaced the romance fiction that had previously occupied the first few pages of the magazine layout.

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<sup>181</sup> May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women*; McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898 - 1998*, 104.

<sup>182</sup> McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898 - 1998*.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 105; May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women*.

<sup>184</sup> May, *Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women*.

There was a need for a return to normality and for many the dream was a return to family values which restored a woman's place in the home with a loving husband and children.<sup>185</sup> Helen May suggests that while the added responsibilities of war time had helped women mature, they were now expected to return to their primary role and assume the task of "adapting their own needs to those of their men". Motherhood remained a symbol of contentment in the domestic environment.<sup>186</sup>

Rationing and restrictions continued to hinder readjustment for all concerned. New Zealanders continued their allegiance to Britain and sacrificed food coupons for Britain's recovery. Newspapers and magazines publicised the need for continued contributions and ran a campaign to encourage New Zealanders to donate their meat and butter coupons to the cause.<sup>187</sup> This would suggest that New Zealanders continued to be aware of the lesser sacrifices that they had had to make for the war.

However fashion always provided a distraction and after years of enforced austerity, there was a "yearning for femininity and conspicuous luxury"<sup>188</sup> In 1945, Paris flew the flag for fashion once more staging the first couture

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>187</sup> "How You Can Save Food for Britain," *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, April 24 1946.

<sup>188</sup> Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*, 17.

showing since the onset of war. The event took place with an accompanying exhibition which travelled to several cities of the world to help raise money for the French war relief.<sup>189</sup> For New Zealand women, fashion commentary continued to be situated on the pages next to the wedding and engagement announcements retaining the language associations of fabric and clothing to the symbolism of love.

The United States experienced a decline in the sale of dressmaking patterns in the years that followed the war. Wade Laboissonniere suggests there are two possible reasons for this. Firstly, the complete change in the fashion silhouette as dress styling became more complex for the home sewer.

Second, he explains that the desire to return to normal alluded to a shift away from the 'make do and mend' psyche. This he claims was reinforced through the media.<sup>190</sup> Fabrics also remained in short supply over the same period.<sup>191</sup>

This contradicts the stereotype of the changing fashion silhouette which used an excessive amount of fabric. While fashion continued to grace the pages of newspapers and magazines, advertisements for the latest fabric arrivals were notably smaller. This was also true of fabric representation in the sale advertisements.

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<sup>189</sup> Laboissonniere, *Blueprints of Fashion: Home Sewing Patterns of the 1940s*, 65; Laver, *Costume and Fashion*, 256.

<sup>190</sup> Laboissonniere, *Blueprints of Fashion: Home Sewing Patterns of the 1940s*.

<sup>191</sup> Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*.

In 1948 the editor of the *Woman's Weekly* addressed the issue of wage inequality.<sup>192</sup> In arguing the unjustness of it she was compelled to use related costs and needs of clothing as a way to support her argument. Her examples reinforced the notion of fashion cycles and the need to have a well stocked wardrobe to keep up appearances. For example:

Men's suits cost less and last longer, and need not be renewed so often as the style stays very much the same for long periods. Women's frocks are out of date from year to year and do not wear so well.<sup>193</sup>

By 1950, wartime restrictions were completely lifted and the average New Zealander benefitted from an awakened prosperity where "doing without seemed less relevant".<sup>194</sup> Less seems to have been written about sewing from this period. Perhaps the skill association shifted to become something more specialised, used only by dressmakers to make a living.<sup>195</sup> Either that or it retreated back into the privacy of the home to resume its status as a normal domestic activity. Certainly there was a greater availability of ready-made clothing, which would suggest that fewer women sewed for themselves.

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<sup>192</sup> Elizabeth Dyson, "The Double Standard, It's Still a Man's World," *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, December 2 1948, 1.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design* (Auckland: Random House, 2004), 123.

<sup>195</sup> Hamon, "The New Zealand Dressmaker: Experiences, Practices and Contribution to Fashionability, 1940 - 1980".

However women's magazines continued to include dressmaking patterns in their publications. Nylon fabric became popular over this period and was reputed to be of easy care because it was "easily washed and dried, and did not require ironing".<sup>196</sup> This rewarded women by reducing their workload from associated domestic chores. The 1950s exemplify consumerism and prosperity. The men moved back into the workforce, once again providing for his family and through fashion pages, magazines portrayed the ideal woman as a homemaker who was happy and contented. "[T]he silhouette of the ideal woman was curvaceous, her well fed appearance was full busted with round hips."<sup>197</sup>

The bride replaced the working woman. She was used to sell soap, stockings, soap powders, aspirin and tea. By the 1950s her 'dewy loveliness' was also selling crockery, lingerie and linen. As newly-wed she supervised a modern home equipped with the latest devices of electric servants, which made her 'a home manager instead of a home slave'.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s," 183.

<sup>197</sup> Laurie Schulze, "On the Muscle," in *Fabrication: Costume and the Female Body*, ed. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (London: Routledge, 1990), 60.

<sup>198</sup> Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*, 51.

## *Summary*

An exploration of domestic ideologies from New Zealand's historical landscape has been discussed for the purpose of defining the 'romantic domestic'. For this study, 'romantic domestic' suggests that (for some women) through imagination, future expectations were packaged into romanticised notions of being a wife and a mother. Through this, women encountered experiences with the internal and the external parts of their role which often played out as part of the domestic sphere and were often expressed through objects associated with domesticity. For that reason, the role of domesticity also suggests that tensions existed within these expectations. Textiles and fabrics are in this instance seen as a critical part of this as they provided a form of expression without stepping outside of the ideologies of the time.

Autonomy is defined through the creative role that fabric and the creation of clothing, craft and furnishings play in the domestic scenario. For this study, autonomy underlines the belief that fabric for clothing and domestic creations existed as an acceptable part of domestic and social structures. This then also conveys the nuances and subtleties of choices that women had in their lives and how fabric that held future possibilities such as garments, crafts or furnishings provided them with a cultural expression rather than a cultural response.

## Part Two: The Importance of Fabric

### *Clothing and Craft Creations*

The starting point for any craft or item of clothing often revolved around the purchase of fabric. The early history of clothing and fabric retail provides the genesis for the developing relationship between women and fabric in a consumer-driven society, which comes to fruition in the period of this study. Department stores and draperies provided the typical location to buy fabrics and all items of clothing. They also stocked accessories such as hats and gloves and other household goods such as carpets, furniture and home appliances. From New Zealand's earliest colonial beginnings, Fiona McKergow observes how purchases of fabrics and clothing were similarly aligned.<sup>199</sup> Her discussion details the blurred relationship between shopping for clothing and fabrics, a particular habit which was characterized by the need for women to either sew their own or have the majority of their clothing made.

Ready-made garments were more widely available for men. Large scale production of men's clothing started in the latter part of the nineteenth century

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<sup>199</sup> Fiona McKergow, "'Just the Thing': Shopping for Clothes in Palmerston North," in *Looking Flash: Clothing in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Bronwyn Labrum, Fiona McKergow, and Stephanie Gibson (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007).



because menswear was easier to translate into simple functional attire.<sup>200</sup>

Women's garments, on the other hand proved more difficult to fit appropriately, so their 'ready-mades' were often limited to simple garments such as undergarments, reputed to be of poorer quality.<sup>201</sup>

The same stores that sold fabrics also provided the services of dressmakers and milliners who were situated in work rooms in other parts of the building.

These women were employed by the store and provided essential services to women who were not equipped with the resources or skills to make their own clothes. Department stores also offered for sale additional equipment for home creation thus capturing and encouraging the pursuits of dressmaking and craft production. Sewing machines and other sewing equipment such as needles and pins, threads, embroidery and woollen yarns, and paper patterns were readily available in other parts of the store.<sup>202</sup>

### ***The Therapy of Shopping***

Women were society's new consumers. Both Bill Lancaster and Gail Reekie discuss the tension created by and through advertising directed at British,

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<sup>200</sup> Helen. B Laurensen, *Going up Going Down: The Rise and Fall of the Department Store* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2005); Barbara Burman, "Made at Home by Clever Fingers," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999); McKergow, "'Just the Thing': Shopping for Clothes in Palmerston North."

<sup>201</sup> Burman, "Made at Home by Clever Fingers," 39.

<sup>202</sup> Field, "Dyes, Chemistry and Clothing: The Influence of World War I on Fabrics, Fashion and Silk."; McKergow, "'Just the Thing': Shopping for Clothes in Palmerston North."; Laurensen, *Going up Going Down: The Rise and Fall of the Department Store*; Millen, *Kirkaldie & Stains: A Wellington Story*.

American and Australian women throughout the 1920s. Both show that the growing availability of mass-produced products heightened women's presence in public spaces.<sup>203</sup> Yet, at the same time, women continued in their domestic roles, creating an emerging contradiction between the internal and external roles played out in the domestic world. Thus the focus on the home and the modern drive to have new things added to the expectant nature of women in their desires for themselves and their families.<sup>204</sup> As a result it reveals that textiles act as an intermediary object through which external desires could be achieved.

Fiona McKergow and Helen Laurenson have both written about the evolution of New Zealand's department stores. They discuss the presence of women in public spaces and recognise that domestic attributes were concerned with much more than simple notions of domestic ideology. Women, if situated in the home and if married, usually relied on a husband for financial support.<sup>205</sup> The principle was that a wife would run the household with the provision of a housekeeping allowance from her spouse. This made possible the purchase of food, clothing and other household essentials to run the home. "Fabric and

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<sup>203</sup> Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995); Gail Reekie, *Temptations: Sex Selling and the Department Store* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1993).

<sup>204</sup> Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History*, Reekie, *Temptations: Sex Selling and the Department Store*.

<sup>205</sup> Reekie, *Temptations: Sex Selling and the Department Store*; Nolan, *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*; Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A History of Women since They Won the Vote*.

related sewing goods were considered normal household expenditure”.<sup>206</sup> A woman’s responsibility for household money did not necessarily mean that she had “complete freedom” to spend any of these allowances on “personal needs and desires”.<sup>207</sup> However, given that fabric and sewing goods sat in the ‘normal’ realm of domestic responsibilities, they could easily cross the boundaries between acceptable or non acceptable purchases.

Overseas fashion trends were slow to arrive into New Zealand stores.

However, in their shopping habits, women here followed worldwide trends and geographical isolation did not slow their interest in the ‘latest thing’.<sup>208</sup>

Newspapers and magazine articles provided access to news of the fashion styles coming out of the Northern Hemisphere. In that way New Zealand women could be regarded as fairly typical of women from the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>209</sup> Around the same time, electrical appliances entered the household contributing to the modern notion of household efficiency and, more importantly generating a greater amount of leisure time with which she could dwell on her personal aspirations.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Gordon, ""Make It Yourself": Home Sewing, Gender, and Culture, 1890-1930."Chapter 4, 4

<sup>207</sup> Reekie, *Temptations: Sex Selling and the Department Store*, 29.

<sup>208</sup> Laurenson, *Going up Going Down: The Rise and Fall of the Department Store*.

<sup>209</sup> Hackney, ""Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-Do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s."; Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History*; Laurenson, *Going up Going Down: The Rise and Fall of the Department Store*.

<sup>210</sup> Hackney, ""Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-Do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s."

Along with supplies such as china, textiles and the latest fashion styles, many of these appliances were imported. The importing of commodities from the Empire was integral in expanding the British ideals of culture to its colonies.<sup>211</sup> Laurensen describes the excitement generated by new arrivals at the department store, which was for New Zealand women, a way of keeping pace with the latest styles from the other side of the world. As she notes:

There were those who, having seen the children off to school, might leave the sweeping, vacuuming, dusting and washing, and head to town on tram or bus. They could catch up on the latest exciting arrivals at as many department stores as possible, and still be home by 3 p.m.<sup>212</sup>

The sense of expectation portrayed in this quotation is important for my research. It demonstrates the pulling together of the two different domestic values – the internal and the external. There is a sense of excited anticipation, but domestic responsibilities are also recognised and could not be avoided. Victoria Wood too, shared a love for shopping and regularly visited the department stores in whatever town she lived in.

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<sup>211</sup> Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design*; Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History*.

<sup>212</sup> Laurensen, *Going up Going Down: The Rise and Fall of the Department Store*, 51.

Women were perceived as an important consumer group and advertisers targeted women's magazines to communicate to them products available to realise the domestic dream.<sup>213</sup> They emphasised the creation of textiles or craft for the home. Fiona Hackney discusses the perception that women from this period had little control over their creative destiny. The home was central to symbolizing the modern woman yet the associated skills that were realised through domestic creation were regarded as insignificant. In this way retailers played to the feminine roles and aligned with ideologies of domesticity. Promotions of goods were directed at women in a way that played on their traditional domestic values. Magazines "mediated the modern through a feminine interior aesthetic that prioritized comfort, creativity and cleanliness, combining new ideals of progressive living with desires for intimacy".<sup>214</sup>

### *Fabric Displays*

Every department store had an area set aside for the sale of fabrics which was either known as the mercery or piece goods department. It was usually stocked with dress weight fabrics such as silks, linens, cottons, woollens and rayons.<sup>215</sup> The department also supplied additional materials such as trims and notions for clothing and craft creations. In New Zealand, the majority of

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<sup>213</sup> Hackney, "'Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-Do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s."; ———, "Making Modern Women, Stitch by Stitch: Dressmaking and Women's Magazines in Britain 1919 - 1939."

<sup>214</sup> Hackney, "'Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-Do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s," 30-31.

<sup>215</sup> Laurenson, *Going up Going Down: The Rise and Fall of the Department Store*.

fabrics were imported from countries as far afield as England, France, Japan and America, however as a British Colony there was particular emphasis on the sale of goods produced in the British Isles.<sup>216</sup>

The additional woollen fabrics available in stores were largely produced by New Zealand textile manufacturers. From the late nineteenth century, a large amount of the 'wool clip' stayed in the country and was manufactured into fabrics, knitting yarns and knitted garments.<sup>217</sup> The woollen industry provided an economic framework for New Zealand and produced goods for both local and export markets.<sup>218</sup> Ebbett describes how the payouts that wool growers received were severely affected by falling export prices during the Depression. As a result, there were larger quantities of woollen products available in the local market. Ebbett suggests that many benefitted from this as knitting yarns and knitted garments were more "readily available", indicating that this influenced the increased interest in knitting at the time.<sup>219</sup> This suggests that the creation of clothes and the value of woollen fabrics and yarns were embedded into the consciousness of many New Zealander

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<sup>216</sup> McKergow, "'Just the Thing': Shopping for Clothes in Palmerston North."; Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design*.

<sup>217</sup> McLean, *Spinning Yarns: A Centennial History of Alliance Textiles and Its Predecessors*.

<sup>218</sup> Valerie Carson, March 2nd 2009; Brooking, "Economic Transformation."; Nicholson, *The Loving Stitch: A History of Knitting and Spinning in New Zealand*; Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*; Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*.

<sup>219</sup> Ebbett, *Victoria's Daughters: New Zealand Women of the Thirties*, 83.

women. The image below demonstrates the variety of mills that produced woollen fabrics for sale to home dressmakers.



Image 6

Display of woollen fabrics at DIC store in Christchurch c. 1912

Alexander Turnbull Library

1/1-003992-G

The speed of industrialisation assisted in lowering the costs associated with development, production and importation of fabrics. Thus textiles such as silks and rayons which had previously been seen as enviable luxury goods

were now more available for women to purchase for everyday uses.<sup>220</sup> Julia Millen describes how the dress fabric department in Wellington's Kirkaldie and Stains Department Store was positioned in a prime location on the ground floor.<sup>221</sup> Fabrics were typically displayed and sold from a flat board or card which meant that the fabrics were folded in half – selvedge to selvedge with the wrong sides together – and rolled onto the boards so that they were easily slipped into shelving.

Shelves could be up to twelve feet high creating vertically stacked layers of colours, patterns and textures. Or the fabric rolls would sit propped in an upright position, partially unrolled with the loosened end draped back upon itself then situated in a location where they were easily touched and examined by women shoppers who frequented the stores.

Other selling strategies focused around the fabric displays suggested fashion possibilities. Jacqueline Field describes the marketing tactics employed by U.S. fabric promoters in 1916. The department managers realised that to increase dress weight fabric sales, they needed to instil in customers a belief that they could easily recreate the garment designs on display. Because of this, they displayed made up dress models sewn with fabric and patterns

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<sup>220</sup> Susannah Handley, *Nylon: The Manmade Fashion Revolution; a Celebration of Design from Art Silk to Nylon and Thinking Fibres* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 25.

<sup>221</sup> Millen, *Kirkaldie & Stains: A Wellington Story*, 125.



available in the store: “of course we have been careful to keep away from designs likely to be found in cheap stores, [sic] and [to] make our display exclusive as well as practical”.<sup>222</sup>



Image 7

Wellington's Kirkaldie and Stains Dress Fabric Department c. 1935

F.G. Barker, Kirkaldie and Stains.

Similarly, shop window displays would utilise long drapes of fabric as a ploy to entice women into the fabric department. The suspended fabric would sit in the shop window desirably positioned next to the latest arrival of garment accessories. The following image portrays a millinery display promoting the

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<sup>222</sup> Field, "Dyes, Chemistry and Clothing: The Influence of World War I on Fabrics, Fashion and Silk," 85.

latest in store spring fashion arrivals at James Smith's in Wellington. The fabric that drapes behind them is matched in colour to the hats and supports the display in a way to suggest what could be worn with the hats, thus demonstrating the potential of the cloth. The obvious association made through fabric display and dressing adds to the picture of imagining the self in the hat, the dress that goes with it and the occasion that it might be.

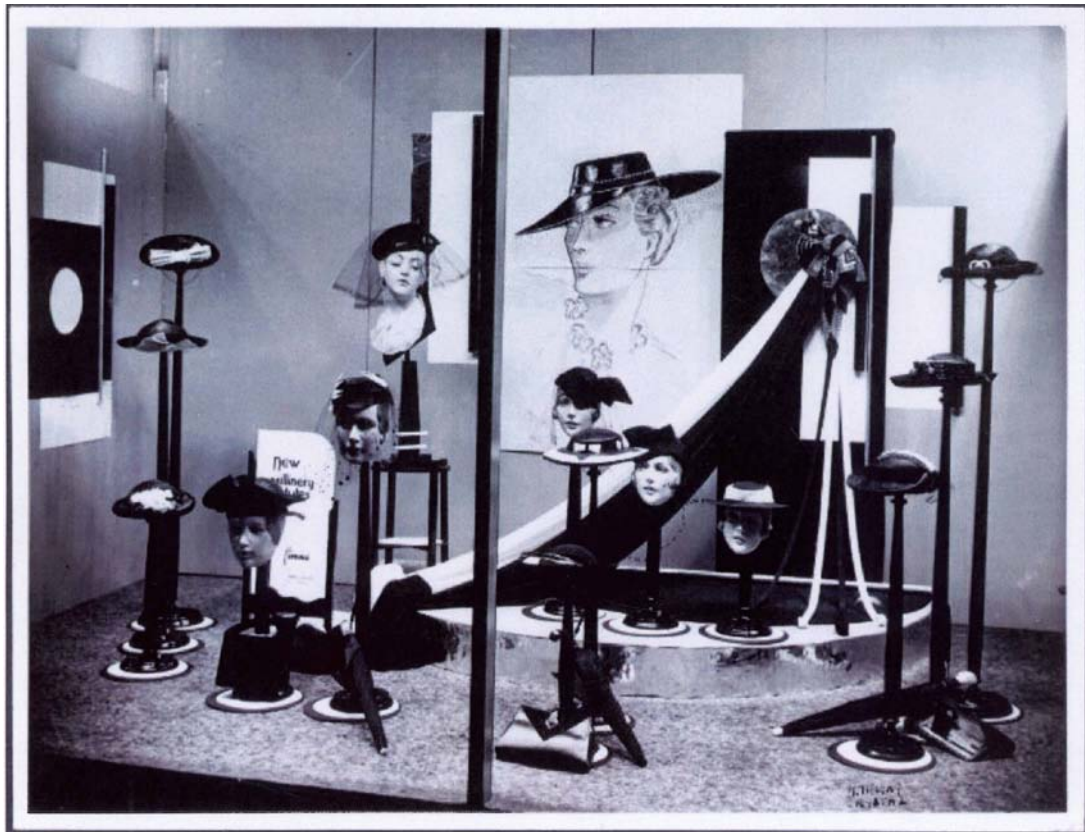


Image 8

Shop window display of spring hats at James Smith  
in Wellington c. 1930  
Alexander Turnbull Library.  
P.A Collection 3332-03 33

Department stores also utilised newspapers to promote the sale of dress weight fabrics. But they tended only to appear twice a year around the times when stores were entering into their sales periods. It was common to see large sections of a page devoted to advertising the goods that would be included in the sales. Fabrics occupied only a small portion of the advertisement. Sale advertisements were also usually situated near the daily women's column therefore directly at a female audience. This underlines the general relationship that existed between clothing and fabric. Ubiquitous headlines like "Profits Take a Holiday" and "The Spectacular Sacrifice" could be found dominating the columns that described and named the fabrics for sale with more detail.<sup>223</sup>



Image9

Illustration used in sale promotion

*The Evening Post*, January 20 1937. p 7

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<sup>223</sup> "The Spectacular Sacrifice," *Evening Post*, Wednesday, January 20 1937; "Profits Take a Holiday," *Evening Post*, Thursday, March 3 1938.

The twice yearly sales were for many women a tantalising experience where bargains were on offer and the weekly housekeeping allowance could buy a little more. Wellington's Kirkaldie and Stains department store were famous for their sales, to the point that they were regular shopping events for many Wellington women.<sup>224</sup> Advertisements were actively directed at women and the promotional pages were full of descriptions of men's, women's and children's clothing items, accessories, household linens and fabrics for clothing creation. Like many women of the time Victoria Wood was described by her granddaughter as one who loved to buy from the sales tables.

### *Fantasy around Fabrics*

Magazines provided resourceful tips on ways to reuse cloth from existing garments; they also suggested ways to use up the left over scraps in craft activities and distributed recipes and patterns for the creation of clothing which were either knitted or sewn. Women's magazines converged around the same domestic messages prevalent in contemporary ideologies.<sup>225</sup> They promoted romance and family values and they instilled in women knowledge that her role required certain attributes to make her worthy of both. Indirectly,

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<sup>224</sup> Millen, *Kirkaldie & Stains: A Wellington Story*.

<sup>225</sup> Hackney, "'Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-Do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s."; McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s."; Deborah Montgomerie, "Sweethearts, Soldiers, Happy Families: Gender and the Second World War," in *The Gendered Kiwi*, ed. Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999).

magazines also promoted the fantasies around fabrics and often framed these in such a way that united them with contemporary thoughts of thrift and the domestic family.

In a dressmaking book published by The McCall Company in 1928, the author Laura Baldt dedicates a whole chapter to the selection of dressmaking patterns and suitable fabrics. She actively encourages women to think of purchasing fabric as one of fancy, rather than one that happens at the same time as the purchase of the garment pattern. She implies that this new approach need not hold to old conventions and instead:

Should one happen to find in going about, a lovely piece of material – that seems to be the making of a garment, why not purchase it, knowing that the pattern will unfold at the right time, and fit the design as lovely as the material itself. The chief concern would be to purchase sufficient material to provide for any design with might be chosen.<sup>226</sup>

She goes further to endorse the buying and saving of fabrics regardless of current fashion trends:

Different materials pass in and out of vogue, but we do not need to be bound by fashion, except that we would hardly choose that which has

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<sup>226</sup> Laura. I Baldt, *Dressmaking Made Easy* (New York: The McCall Company, 1928), 11.

been so long out of vogue that we should thus become conspicuous. On the other hand, some rare old materials which have lain for many years, when bought out and used will become attractive lovely garments.<sup>227</sup>

Given the context of the period, Baldt's advice stands out as unusual.

Essentially, Baldt's endorsement is easily perceived as a less than practical approach and her advice appears to defy norms of sensibility. Baldt is communicating to her audience an implicit knowledge characterised by the assumed language of sewing. She and the reader both know and understand the suitability of certain fabrics (types and weights) for particular garment styles and she and the reader are skilled enough to know of the variables in fabric widths and lengths when planning to make a particular type of garment. Furthermore, I suggest that the purchasing of fabric provided a catalyst for imagined scenarios. Thus the unmade garment came to life through thinking about its creation.

Sarah Gordon touches on a similar theme. She discusses how retailers sold fabrics under ever-present indicators of "pricing, variety, style, color and quality".<sup>228</sup> She also asserts that there were assumptions by retailers that women were versed in the language of fabric so did not think it necessary to educate shoppers on the suitability of fabric types for particular garment

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>228</sup> Gordon, "'Make It Yourself': Home Sewing, Gender, and Culture, 1890-1930."Chapter 4, 5.

styles.<sup>229</sup> Gordon makes pertinent links between dressmaking and domesticity and more importantly she emphasises the way home sewing was taken for granted as a domestic skill. But she does not make sufficient connections of the role that fabrics had in this domestic scenario.

Pleasures associated with creative fantasies and fabrics were not always limited to the self. Many women also made clothing for their children, and in particular, sewing clothing for daughters featured.<sup>230</sup> The recognised sharing of textile traditions between mother and daughter is discussed in the introduction of this thesis and in an earlier section of this chapter.<sup>231</sup>

The following example taken from a 1937 *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* also underlines this point. Its suggestive association to a woman's perpetual desire for new clothing is, in this scenario aligned to the mother/female child relationship. It is also indicative of domestic ideologies where the role of mother/nurturer is perpetuated through recognised feminine narratives associated with dressmaking.

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Burman, "Introduction."

<sup>231</sup> Laura Shaw, *The Stitch in History Oral History Project* (Dunedin: Alexander Turnbull Library, 2002); Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*.

# A LITTLE LADY - - -

## Dress Her and Win a Prize

# WANTS A FROCK

**H**ERE is a competition which will appeal to every woman reader of the "N.Z. Woman's Weekly." Try your skill, and win a cash prize. Conditions are simple, and it costs nothing to enter. Much pleasure and amusement is to be derived from dressing little girls, especially this season, when there are so many new styles and dainty materials. The little lady depicted on this page has nothing to wear—how often we have heard her sex say the same thing—so we invite you to finish the picture.

She wants a frock, as you see, and, to be seasonal, a summer dress would be ideal. We want inspirations for frocks, be they fluffy, frilly, or just plain. Aristy is not wanted, but if you can make your drawing attractive so much the better. The pictures may be drawn or coloured, just as you wish.

The following prizes have been allocated:

- First Prize . . . . . £10
- Second Prize . . . . . £6
- Third Prize . . . . . £4
- Ten Consolation Prizes, 10-

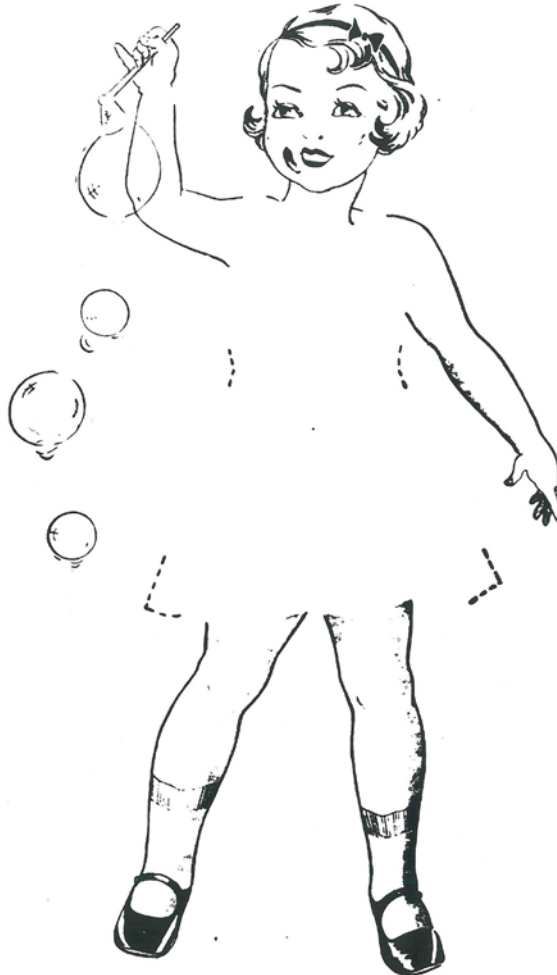
Prizes will be awarded for design only. Entries will be judged by the editress of the "N.Z. Woman's Weekly," whose decision will be final.

The illustration of the child will appear in three issues, namely November 4, 11, and 18. Christmas is approaching so you may send her back to us in as many frocks as you can think of, provided that each entry is accompanied by two forms. A form will be published in each issue in which the picture of the child appears.

The closing date for the receipt of entries is Wednesday, December 1. Entries must be posted to the "N.Z. Woman's Weekly," Box 1409, Auckland, C1, and envelopes endorsed "Child's Dress."

No inquiries as to this competition can be answered, or correspondence entered into. No responsibility can be accepted.

Employees of N.Z. Newspapers Ltd. or members of their families, cannot enter for the competition, otherwise it is open to any reader.



**"N.Z. WOMAN'S WEEKLY"**  
**CHILD'S DRESS**  
**COMPETITION**  
 (ENTRY FORM.)

Name .....

Address .....

..... 4/11/37

Image 10

"A Little Lady Wants a Frock" design competition

New Zealand Woman's Weekly, November 4 1937, p. 47



The winning entry stood to receive money and the winning design published in the following month's edition. Readers were asked to design a dress for a girl who "has nothing to wear – how often have you heard her sex say the same thing".<sup>232</sup> Interestingly the outline is presented in a 'join the dots' scenario and the image of the girl could be described as doll like, yet according to the text it is clearly a girl child. Entrants are invited to design anything of their choice, yet the outlined shape of the garment is clearly visible leaving little space to design anything but the fabric print or colour or small sewing details into the space. The gap at the shoulder of the dress outline suggests the dress is sleeveless and recognisably meant for the summer season.

Representations of fabrics in magazine and the newspapers fashion pages were often discussed in the same terms as garment designs.<sup>233</sup> I draw the discussion back to what is unsaid in this image. Firstly, the association made between the domesticated woman who is considered to be naturally maternal and in this instance, the love for her child is represented explicitly through clothing. Second, the blurred association between fabric and garments; for without one there is not the other; and third, there is also a sense in this image that suggests the understood ideology of thrift and an innate sense of how much fabric is required to make a young girl's dress. The fabric pieces

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<sup>232</sup>"A Little Lady Wants a Frock," *Women's Weekly*, November 14 1937.

<sup>233</sup> Gordon, ""Make It Yourself": Home Sewing, Gender, and Culture, 1890-1930."

required to create a child's garment were so easily segmented into a larger piece of cloth when cutting out an adult-sized garment.

The fantasy around fabric in this instance suggests that the mother could sew her daughter a dress out of the same fabric as she fashioned into a garment for herself.

Another example that demonstrates the fantasy around fabrics is the way fabrics are given personalities. The following example featured in the *Woman's Weekly* in 1943. The advertisement promotes Lux soap flakes as a sensible way to extend the life of fabrics in war time shortages. The empty garments are represented in a way that suggests the shape of a body and each garment has a speech bubble imploring the reader to consider the care given to garments.



Image 11

Rayons are more precious now, an advertisement for Lux soap flakes  
*New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, November 16, 1943, p.46

The blurred relationship between the two is evident because the advertisement links the reader to her own garments and to her own body.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has explored the tensions created through the ideologies of domesticity and the 'romantic domestic' as experienced through internal and external facets of the domestic role. It examines experiences in the first half of the twentieth century to reveal important aspects particular to experiences of domesticity in New Zealand's society and how this contributed to sewing, clothing creation and fabric collecting habits for women of that time.

New Zealand was noted as one of the most domesticated nations in the world. Because of this women were often reliant on finding a suitable husband to make their way in society. Through this I have inferred that the existence of the 'romantic domestic' amplified women's associations with textiles and clothing. Rites of passage such as weddings and motherhood united clothing with the self, the family and furnishing the home in an all-encompassing way. This was experienced through a particular language which embraced and romanticised the underlying meaning of fabric within a social context. The desire to fulfil the perceived values of marriage and family was embedded into this language in a pervasive and intrinsic way.

The tension created through the internal and external domestic 'self' are critical. Evidence such as the fantasy around fabrics reveals the double-sided nature of domestic values. The internal desire for self had a significant impact

on developing the external physical relationships with textiles. Like dreaming of the ideal husband, family and home, fabric provided a form of escapism. This adds an interesting layer to these sets of circumstances because textiles can be seen as an integral part of a woman's existence in a domestic world. They existed as clothing, they existed as furnishings in the home and they existed as craft objects, either as decorative or functional. Therefore I suggest that without garment realisation, fabric can simultaneously exist in the past, the present and the future lived entirely through the imagination.

The seductive display of fabrics in retail environments stimulated an imaginative response to fabric. This discussion has emphasised that dressmaking was actively understood as a domestic activity, therefore the relationship between clothing and fabric assumed similar realities in the shopping environment. Additionally, media publicity about fabric, clothing and fashion all assumed the same language which I suggest was received as a sensory experience. The knowledge of different types of fabrics, their fibre make up, their weave, their weight and their drape were all understood because of domestic training and their continued use in the home environment. The language of fabric was instilled through the domestic experiences and understood through an implicit set of rules. This infers that the purchased fabric quickly shifted after acquisition to one of personal autonomy.

This also demonstrates how fabrics played an enormous part in connecting the creative processes between both the internal and external positions and how they were shared between domestic ideology and the intimate self. This can be seen to suggest that fabrics purchased for the creation of clothing retained with them their visualised qualities that occurred at the time of purchase. The imagined possibilities and projected hopes all remain ever present regardless of what happens to the fabric after it has been bought. Because of this, representation of external domestic experiences are loaded with internal aspirations that permeate the fabric in a way that contributes to a more general understanding of women's domestic life experiences through objects, in this case fabrics.

## Chapter Two

### **Material Unfolding: reconstructing the life of a woman and the contents of her suitcases.**



#### *Introduction*

This chapter sets out to chronicle some of Victoria Wood's life through the narrative of unpacking the suitcases. It describes the journey of finding her granddaughter and learning more about the woman who originally owned the suitcases and their contents. This chapter uses the voice of the granddaughter Marilyn Doak to tell the story. Also included are six New Zealand women who were avid sewers and experienced domestic life in the setting of World War II and the post war period. The intention of this chapter is to give voice to the experiences of women and locate more precisely the themes about home sewing and domesticity that pervaded their lives and their generation.

Domestic stories were and are still to a larger degree obscured in historical accounts. Jock Phillips noted nearly two decades ago that:

[W]e do not know a great deal about the values and ritual of female culture, about women's experiences of rearing children, in cooking,

sewing, and we still do not have a large enough synthetic study of women or even some strong hypothesis with which to deal.<sup>234</sup>

Past considerations of domesticity were viewed as “natural and unchanging, and therefore not worth studying in their own right”.<sup>235</sup> In this sense, issues of interpretation continue to hamper the genuine comprehension of the lived experiences of women in other eras of New Zealand’s history. Accordingly certain authors suggest that there have been tendencies to layer the findings with preconceived notions of reflective interpretation which flavour the findings in a way that does not truly represent the original experiences.<sup>236</sup>

This chapter provides another building block in the overall aim of the thesis which is to understand the role that fabric played in the activity of sewing. The fabric collecting associated with this particular activity is to date undefined in other scholarly discussions on dressmaking and home sewing. As it is an important signifier to the relationship between clothing and the domestic realm, the inclusion of subjective information facilitates a nuanced perspective

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<sup>234</sup> Jock Phillips, "Of Verandahs, and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon," *New Zealand Journal of History* 24, no. 2 (1990): 131.

<sup>235</sup> Labrum, *Women's History: A Short Guide to Researching and Writing Women's History in New Zealand*, 10.

<sup>236</sup> Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home."; Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).



of the home sewing experiences of women through their everyday memories. Therefore, conversations that include fabric are highlighted in this chapter

### *Unpacking the Cases*

My search for the woman who delivered the suitcases to the department began with the unpacking of the cases. The dark brown suitcase was the first to be opened.



Image 12

Victoria Wood's suitcases

Photographed by the author

It was the oldest suitcase of the two and a typical compressed card type. It was battered and well used, with the lid raised slightly, created by a memory

of being overfull with contents and from being moved around a lot. Colour had long worn from the surface where it had rubbed against other objects to reveal the lighter brown interior colour of the case. The edges of the lid splayed slightly and at some stage, the lid corners had had a tape similar to masking tape added to reinforce the long lengths of what were now buckling with age. The two closure mechanisms made rusty from years of travel and storage were barely working with only the left hand side still functioning sufficiently to keep the lid closed. The right end of the case had the remains of two old travel stickers, one of which reads "CHECKED". This was partially obscured by another label hand written with words which appear at first glance to say "Tapestry and Crafts". But closer inspection revealed that both words were in fact misspelt.

Opening the lid of the suitcase revealed two stationery labels which had been stuck to the interior surface. Mrs Wood had written her name and address in blue ink:

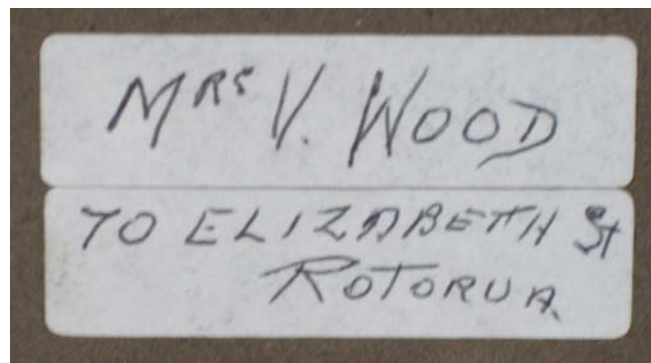


Image 13

Address from inside the lid of the brown suitcase

Photographed by the author

Once this was completely unpacked, I found written on the base another name, once again scribed in blue ink. This time it said “Mrs F Wood” and this provided me with a possible clue to the initial of her husband’s first name, and the name she had used in her married years.



Image 14

Inscription from base of the brown suitcase

Photographed by the author

Placing all of the items back, I then moved to the second suitcase. This was also a compressed card type, cream and tan in colour and more modern in its design. Its surface was textured with diagonal lines and was generally in a better condition than the first. There was one small area at the back showing signs of water damage which had caused the card to swell and bulge. The two closing mechanisms were rusted and no longer working. Riveted to the back were two vinyl straps which crossed over the top of the lid to meet

corresponding buckles that operated as an extra form of closure. The handle was formed from a hollow moulded metal but has remained in reasonable condition.

The interior of the suitcase was lined with brown checked paper and displayed an internal luggage label: “Personality Luggage, P.O.Box 340, Auckland”.

The luggage label was shaped as a pair of stylised wings, suggesting that the piece had been produced after the growing popularity of tourist air travel.<sup>237</sup>



Image 15

Interior luggage label from the cream and tan suitcase.

Photographed by the author

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<sup>237</sup> Cited: “After 1950, the increase in air travel as a trend coincided with the shift from colonial to commercial interests” Marc Dierikx, *Clipping the Clouds: How Air Travel Changed the World* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 56.

Luggage similar to this was readily available in all department stores in New Zealand as this image from a 1956 “The Farmers” catalogue shows:<sup>238</sup>



Image 16

Suitcases in Farmers Catalogue c.1956

Alexander Turnbull Library

Eph C Retail Farmers June 1956

Generally the contents in both of the suitcases were in varying stages of decay with evidence of water damage, foxing and moth holes. There was a big selection of rayon fabrics, crepes and plain weaves that were distinctly from the late 1930s and 1940s, and there were furnishing remnants and nylons which were distinctly from the 1950s and 1960s. Regardless of their condition, I felt that the fabrics resonated with an emotive quality. Other items

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<sup>238</sup> Kim Knight, "Shopping with Heart," *Sunday Star Times* 2009. "The Farmers Trading Company" is an iconic New Zealand department store which has been in existence since 1909

were from public occasions, such as two floral sprays from her daughter Ilene's wedding cake when she married in 1942. Yet, much of the contents suggested a focus on the future, and possible events, occasions and creations. There was evidence of some time spent in Hamilton and evidence of time spent in Auckland, and an essence of something that suggested her husband had died long before her.

### ***Searching for Victoria Wood***

The two first name initials in the brown suitcase were the most important indicators at the beginning of my search. The other clues were the two boxes containing memento floral sprays from a wedding cake, one in each suitcase. The box in the brown suitcase was a *Caley's Majestic* 1 lb chocolate box. At each end of the lid written annotations revealed the occasion it had come from; "off Ilene wedding cake 8/4/42". (Appendix A2 SCo11-M p179) The other box was in the cream and tan suitcase and bore the markings of a Hamilton jeweller; "Jeweller and Watchmaker – Howdens, Hamilton, NZ". (Appendix A2 SCo57-M p198) The second spray was smaller than the first and it sat on top of a hand written thankyou card to Victoria Wood which said "Dear Mum – as a token of our appreciation [...] dated 8.4.42 from Ray and Ilene Turner".

Using the Elizabeth Street address as a starting point, I set about to locate the woman who had delivered the suitcases to the department. I found Victoria

Wood at the Rotorua address in the 1981 edition of the Electoral Roll. She first appeared in the Rotorua electorate in the 1969 supplementary edition which was published in late October of that year. In total Victoria Wood had lived in Rotorua for twelve years. The gap between the 1981 edition and the 1984 Electoral Roll provided me with a window from which to take the next step.

I acquired Victoria Wood's death certificate through the Department of Internal Affairs. Its arrival in the mail was both surprising and interesting. It turned out that Victoria Wood had been born Victoria Lucy Luisa Healey in Melbourne on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1887, and had died in Rotorua at the age of 95 on March 16<sup>th</sup> 1983. The reason for my surprise was that I had assumed that the woman who had owned the suitcases would be of a younger generation, simply based on my dating of the fabric pieces and the assumption that the woman who had delivered the suitcases to the Fashion department had done so after the death of her own mother.

The death certificate revealed other pieces of information. She had lived in New Zealand for 58 years which meant that she had arrived in New Zealand around 1925. Her husband's name was Frederick Wood and the couple had married in Sandstone, Western Australia. At the time of her death, he had been deceased for 44 years. There were two surviving children: a son aged

72 and a daughter aged 69. The death notice published in Rotorua's *Daily Post* gave me the names of family members and included a Rotorua residential address for all correspondence. There was a son Vic and his wife Aylsa Wood from Ruakaka, and a daughter Ilene and her husband Ray Turner from Rotorua, as well as two granddaughters Jeanette and Marilyn, and five great grandchildren. There was also reference to her late husband Frederick.

Through the Rotorua connection, I repeated the process to locate Ilene Turner who had lived at her Rotorua address until 2000. Ilene died on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2004 at the age of 90. She was born in Sandstone, Western Australia on October 14<sup>th</sup> 1913, and much like her mother had been a widow for a very long time, but remained independent and living in her own home. With family members identified, I finally located Victoria Wood's granddaughter Marilyn Doak, the woman who had delivered the suitcases to the department in 2005. What became apparent was that Marilyn's mother Ilene had not sold Victoria's house after her death in 1983, so after Ilene's death in 2004, Marilyn was left with the task of emptying and selling two homes full of stuff.

### ***Marilyn's Memories and Stories***

I contacted Marilyn Doak in September 2008 and visited her at her home. What follows are some of the anecdotal stories and memories of her nana



that Marilyn was able to share with me. By adding these stories to information found through public records, I was able to piece together stories of Victoria Wood's life.

Marilyn had spent some time researching her family history. She had travelled to Australia to some of the desert locations where her grandparents had lived, and where her Uncle Vic and mother Ilene were born. Victoria Healey met Frederick Wood in Melbourne in the early 1900s where he worked as a chemist in the suburb of Collingwood. Victoria was born at a house in Russell Street in the suburb of Collingwood and was the oldest of thirteen children.

In recounting Ilene's memories, Marilyn described what Victoria had passed on to Ilene about being the oldest of such a large family. It had its drawbacks.

Mum [Ilene] said she was the oldest of thirteen children and her mother was – what my mother called – an invalid. Which I think meant that she was probably pregnant most of the time; therefore nana probably had to do all of the work. And she probably met this young chap here [indicating to a photograph] and decided to follow him out west.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Marilyn Doak, March 4 2009.

In 1908 Victoria Healy was registered in the Electoral Roll as a saleswoman and lived at 6 Howe Street in North Fitzroy, Melbourne. She would have been aged 20 or 21 at the time. By 1909 she was gone from that address and it seems that she left Melbourne to follow Frederick Wood to Sandstone in Western Australia where he had acquired a job as an assayer.<sup>240</sup>

Both of Victoria and Frederick's children were born in Sandstone. Vic was born on July 17<sup>th</sup> 1911 and Ilene on October 14<sup>th</sup> 1913. In recounting Ilene's childhood stories from Australia, Marilyn revealed that Victoria was a woman who was often left alone, supporting herself and her children with her husband absent in search of employment.

But then they kept splitting up, I think that he went on to where work was supposed to be and then said "ah yes, this looks alright, come here".<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> A specialised job which involves the testing of metal or ore to determine its qualities.

<sup>241</sup> Doak.



Image 17

Victoria Wood nee Healy c.1900 in Melbourne  
Marilyn Doak private collection.

They moved around Western Australia and in 1917 settled for a time in Meekatharra, a town which is about 100 miles (160.9 kms) from Mount Magnet. They also lived in Kalgoorlie in 1919 and Cue some time later.

In her times alone Victoria worked in a hotel and at some stage ran her own café in Meekatharra. Marilyn said that while living in Western Australia, Victoria had lost two homes to fire. The date they left Western Australia is vague, but when they did, they took a berth on the *Niagara* from Freemantle to Adelaide and stayed with Victoria's brother Tom. From there they caught the train to Melbourne and stayed with Rose who was the youngest of the thirteen Healey children.

When they came [to New Zealand] from Australia, they went from Meekatharra up there [and] down to Perth. Mum went to school in Perth, so nana must have been working to get the passage for the next bit. They went to Uncle Tom's in Adelaide and mum remembers that clearly so I suspect that she worked there as well. Then they went to some other – oh it was an Aunty [...] living in Melbourne, and they lived there for a while. And then on to Sydney, she seemed to live there for a while and worked in a confectionery factory.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

Their stay in Sydney was an extended one as both Vic and Ilene attended boarding school while they were there. On the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1925 they took a berth on the *Mariposa* (room 306) from Sydney to Auckland. Frederick at that stage had commenced work at the battery in the Waikino gold fields. When Victoria and the children joined him they lived in Waikino and then took up residence in Waihi in 1928. Frederick continued to travel with his work and in 1933 he spent some time in New Guinea and in 1935 was joined by their son Vic. It is uncertain whether Victoria joined her husband at this location. Ilene by this stage was living in the Devon Road home in Hamilton.

In 1939, Frederick had returned from New Guinea and with Victoria, Ilene and a guest they toured the Coromandel in a motorcar. On June 7<sup>th</sup> they were involved in a tragic accident which was reported by the *New Zealand Herald* on June 9<sup>th</sup>. The newspaper account describes how Frederick, who, supposedly on a two month leave of absence from his foreman position in the New Guinea goldfields, was tragically drowned. The car apparently stalled when crossing the swollen ford at Coroglen just south of Tairua in the Coromandel.<sup>243</sup> The car was then swept downstream and Frederick's body with it. Victoria made it to shore unaided but Ilene was unconscious and was saved by a man who arrived first at the scene.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> "Visitor Drowned," *New Zealand Herald* 1939.

<sup>244</sup> Norman West, February 13 2009. Later, Frederick Strongman was awarded a Bronze Medal from the Royal Humane Society for this act.

After Frederick's death, Victoria received the widow's benefit which meant she never needed to find employment again. One has to assume the possibility that she had additional access to assets from her late husband's estate; however Marilyn recounts that from this time Victoria was able to live her life as freely as she chose.

I think she would have thought she was made with the widows' pension.

You know she was very self-sufficient; she didn't need a lot of money.<sup>245</sup>

### *Unfolding the Stories*

Initially, after the death of Frederick she settled in Hamilton with Ilene where she was found registered in a Victoria Street house in the 1941 Electoral Rolls. Victoria Wood continued to be fairly mobile and she would, on a regular basis, either shift house or relocate from one town to another. Locating Victoria in the public records was not always consistent or successful. When I discussed this with Marilyn, she agreed that her experiences were similar in the research she undertook in Australia.<sup>246</sup>

She retained strong connections with people she had met in her travels and many of them lived in provincial towns places such as Matamata and Napier.

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<sup>245</sup> Doak.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

It was nothing for her to hop on a bus making good use of public transport to go and visit these friends. She moved to Napier in 1947 and lived there until 1950, then shifted to Auckland and into the first of her three homes she had there. Her final shift was from her house in Papatoetoe in Auckland to the Elizabeth Street address in Rotorua.

Victoria was very capable of making her own life and establishing her own empire wherever she lived. In her houses, the importance of her sewing room dominated her space and her living habits. The sewing room was generally the front room or sun room which would capture the best sun of the day.

Marilyn's childhood memory of her grandmothers sewing room in Papatoetoe was quite distinct, and she described the room to me as if she was walking into it:

It was just wide enough for a bed, which was on the left hand side of the door when she came in. On the right hand side was her treadle sewing machine; the rest of the room was filled with boxes and boxes and boxes and boxes and boxes and boxes [of fabric]. She had a wooden swivel chair, which meant that she could be sitting at her sewing machine and then swivel around so that she could get up and go out and get herself a cup of tea which she always bought back on a tray. She'd get up in the morning, have a shower, have some breakfast, go out and sew, have a cup of tea, read a *Woman's Weekly*, go back and sew, have some lunch,

have a lay down – one didn't lie down – one had a lay down, which is why she had a bed there you see; go back and sew, read a *Woman's Weekly*, have a cup of tea, make some dinner.<sup>247</sup>

The sewing room and the associated activities were clearly at the heart of how she organised her day. Victoria's sewing room resembles something that many women of the same inclination could imagine themselves in. Other women interviewed described similar spaces in their homes, but not necessarily a separate sewing room.

JN - [In] the very big kitchen, my mother had her sewing machine down one end where there was a big window - and the sewing machine was always there, never anywhere else. I suppose as a child I used to stand and watch my mother sewing and by the time I got to about, oh 14 or 15, my interest grew and I started doing some and within the first year or two; my mother always had a great amount of material which she used to buy from Evan's when it was on sale. (And you couldn't use the word pinched), but I borrowed a piece of material and made myself a dress while mum was at work. When I presented it to her she was really quite flabbergasted because like her I had had no lessons except watching her sewing.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup>JN, 25 April 2009.



Later JN described where she kept her own sewing machine in her various homes:

JN – We had three bedrooms, the girls had a room each and my sewing machine was in the youngest girl's room, and she must've watched over me like I did my mother because in her teenage years she was very keen on sewing. [...] Later my husband built a rumpus room on the back of the garage and my sewing machine moved out there. [...] But here I only have two bedrooms, the sewing machine is still here, still with me, it sits in the spare bedroom.<sup>249</sup>

In another account, a woman describes her childhood memory of watching her mother and her father work together on sewing projects.

PS – My father was a cabinet maker and always very good at doing measurements and he bought my mother a sewing machine which lived in the kitchen, and he used to help her make her dresses. He would measure up and he would help cut out the dress and mum would sew it. Dad would obviously see where things were right or wrong [in fit] and that is how my mother taught herself to sew – with the help of my father. But she always attested that he was the person behind her learning to do the

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

sewing, but she must have had natural capabilities of course and she made all the baby clothes and smocked and everything like that.<sup>250</sup>

In her later years as a married woman at home with children, PS describes taking sewing work into the home as a way of contributing to the household income and recreating the experience for her own daughter by including her in the sewing work.

PS – They would bring out the sewing to me and I worked for a man in Vivian Street. I had my own sewing machine, it wasn't the biggest one but I was fortunate that it was a semi [industrial machine] - [...] and I used to sit there with my little girl on the machine sitting beside me, up on the machine and I would sew away just to make some money. I worked hard for years at home and that's how we got along in those days.<sup>251</sup>

The other dominant theme in these two interviews was the way in which sewing was learnt and passed down from the older female family members. Much like Laura Shaw's experiences discussed in the previous chapter, learning from a mother, aunt or grandmother highlighted the regard to teach oneself the skills of dressmaking

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<sup>250</sup> PS, April 24 2009.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

The association with the sewing machine and women's work is a well told tale.<sup>252</sup> However several of the respondents did not feel that sewing for a living took away their enjoyment of creating clothes.

PS – I think it's just something you like or you don't like. I have always quite liked sewing. Even to this day I still enjoy sewing, I like getting on my sewing machine, its fun.<sup>253</sup>

GI – Learning the proper ways to sew clothes [industry methods] makes the whole experience a lot more pleasurable, as you know how to go about making it in the right order and how to quickly fix any problems.<sup>254</sup>

Clothing manufacture was a key source of employment for women throughout the interwar and post war years. Lane Walker Rudkin (LWR) was one of the country's largest apparel manufacturers. They had large spinning and knitting factories in Ashburton and Christchurch. The other side of the business was the cut, make and trim (CMT) division. Many of the smaller provincial towns in the South Island of New Zealand had small LWR factories, which at its peak was one of the country's largest clothing manufacturers employing approximately 4000 people; a workforce that was predominantly made up of

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<sup>252</sup> Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home."; Burman, "Introduction."; Tim Putnam, "The Sewing Machine Comes Home," in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

<sup>253</sup> PS.

<sup>254</sup> GI, July 4 2009.

female employees.<sup>255</sup> Regardless of the association with low paid employment and poor conditions, a job as a machinist provided an additional training ground for women to hone their skills as seamstresses.<sup>256</sup>

The amount of women involved in piece-work or out-work was significant but more difficult to account for.<sup>257</sup> Working from home allowed women to earn an income without compromising their household responsibilities.<sup>258</sup>

Ilene grew up with a mother sewing constantly around her but even though she had an appreciation of beautiful clothes, she had little interest in creating clothes for herself. She was, however, a very accomplished embroiderer.

Marilyn describes the differences between mother Victoria and daughter Ilene's aesthetics.

Nana seemed to be a very practical soul. In the houses that she lived in, everything [the furniture] was covered with white sheets that she would have made. Scraps of material were saved and used to make pinnies;

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<sup>255</sup> Price, *Lane Walker Rudkin: 100 Years in the Making*. LWR predominantly manufactured cut and sewn knitted fabrics such as undergarment and swimwear

<sup>256</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*.

<sup>257</sup> Many factories employed women to construct garments at home. The bundles of cut garment components were sent out and assembled within a specified time. Generally payment was by the unit and at a lower cost to what it would cost the factory to produce if they were to manufacture the same garment in-house. The system existed to increase low manufacturing profit margins.

<sup>258</sup> Buckley, "On the Margins: Theorizing the History and Significance of Making and Designing Clothes at Home."; Hamon, "The New Zealand Dressmaker: Experiences, Practices and Contribution to Fashionability, 1940 - 1980".

she was very much a child of the Depression in that sense. If it was on the street that she lived in and it was unattached, she would've grabbed it. Mum [Ilene] on the other hand, was very much better at embroidery and enjoyed that a lot more. She was into frills much more than nana.<sup>259</sup>

Stories of such practical use of fabric were shared by other respondents.

NS – we didn't have a lot of money but I still enjoyed making clothes for my girls. Because I had worked in a factory I had a pretty good idea of how much fabric you needed to make their clothes, I loved not wasting any fabric.<sup>260</sup>

JC – I didn't have a sewing room, but then there was only the two kids and myself, there was plenty of space, and I did an awful lot of knitting and I always made all of their clothes, I suppose nearly everybody else did the same, you wouldn't know that they [clothes] were homemade probably, pyjamas and things. [We] always cut the backs out of the men's shirts when they had finished with them to line their [the boys] trousers. I never bought underpants for them, [and] if they did [have them], they were ones I made. [But I] didn't have to do much sewing as far as boys were concerned.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Doak.

<sup>260</sup> NS, May 17 2009.

<sup>261</sup> JC, April 29 2009.

MW – I only did knitting and plain sewing for the girls. Mum, she sewed for the boys, she cut shirts, [and] she made little shirts out of old shirts and pyjamas.<sup>262</sup>

Mothers sewing clothing for their sons is a subject touched upon by Burman, who acknowledged it as rare.

As bigger boys grew towards manhood, one of many steps they have taken away from their mother's sphere of practical influence has been the consumption of ready-made and tailor-made clothing. [...] Thus a part of achieving adult masculinity has normally involved relinquishing direct contact with the female maker of clothing.<sup>263</sup>

On sewing for men, another respondent commented:

JN – I never ever sewed men's clothes, that was absolutely beyond me. I would turn collars of my husband's shirts if they needed doing, and I hated that. But apart from that, no, there was never, I mean as casual clothes or anything, no, I don't think he would have been happy wearing something I'd put together. As much as he admired what I did. He was

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<sup>262</sup> MW, May 16 2009.

<sup>263</sup> Burman, "Introduction," 13.

always very complimentary [...] that he'd say "oh don't you girls look lovely".<sup>264</sup>

### *"Stuff" Through the Decades*

The contents of her suitcases attest to the fact that Victoria Wood was an avid collector of dressmaking fabrics. Regardless of the fact that she moved frequently, she seemed to find the means to hold on to what she had, adding to it by collecting new pieces. The experience of living through the Great Depression and two homes razed to the ground by fire may have contributed to her need to hang onto "stuff". The cost of the Great Depression and the knock on effect into World War II produced similar stories and experiences of hardship for other women. One respondent spoke specifically about her childhood experiences of making do:

MW – I can remember that I never ever knitted raglan sleeves; I did the inset ones so that I could turn them to get double wear. And mum taught us how to do the sheets too, rip it down the middle [and sew the outside edges together] sides to middle. There was [sic] a lot of tips we inherited from her, I mean money was scarce, [but] you got by.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> JN.

<sup>265</sup> MW.

Many things may have influenced Victoria's collecting habits. But the collecting of textiles is a common feminine narrative, and the investigation of her belongings shows distinct patterns in the shape of her sewing habits, particularly as she aged and simplified her life, and to an extent became less reliant on the need to sew garments as a way to sustain herself. And so she turned her creative activities to the making of crafts.

I have already described her avid reading of the *Woman's Weekly* and stories from her granddaughter reveal that she was a very social person. She was very interested in other cultures and perspectives. Newspaper columns and magazines for women contained fashion news and imagery, wedding stories, tips for cleaning, child rearing, household etiquette and recipes. Together they filled the page to reflect the thinking of the time. Perhaps through this, she stayed abreast of current thinking – views expressed to female audiences, but within this she seemed to maintain her own opinions and according to Marilyn, remained an independent thinker. On collecting, Muensterberger describes how “Human life is deeply anchored in mutuality and dependence”.<sup>266</sup> There was a dual characteristic to her need to hang onto objects she had collected and her need to stay abreast of the current trends. And so as she hoarded, Marilyn recalls the shed where the extra “stuff” that could not fit into the house was put:

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<sup>266</sup> Muensterberger, "The Quest for Possessions," 68.



There was a garage out the back with miles of stuff in it. My parents got rid of most of it [after she died] because the garage leaked.<sup>267</sup>

Hearing this I commented about the contents of the suitcases and that they showed signs of water damage. Marilyn felt that:

If the fabrics had come from the 40s or 50s they would probably have been out in the garage, because by the 60s she would have been using 60s material, she wouldn't have wanted the 40s stuff probably.<sup>268</sup>

In this Victoria Wood showed that she had an awareness of current fashion trends, in particular innovation and new fabrics were important. Her awareness of the 'latest thing' in fibre and fabric development is evident through what inhabits her suitcases. The majority of the fabric pieces are woven from manmade fibres which link directly to particular shifts in fashion. Through the decades, progressions in her fabric collecting provide an account of her aesthetics. It suggests how in later years, she moved away from being fashionably aware to one who liked to make crafts and other practical things. Thus, the older the fabric pieces, the more likely they are to be a suitable length for a garment. The younger the fabrics are, the more likely it is a

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<sup>267</sup> Doak.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

shorter length and in all likelihood a remnant intended for craft. In sighting one of the few photographs Marilyn has of Victoria, the 1960s image shows her dressed in a silhouette that resembles the 1930s, thus her dress sense retained a certain aesthetic once she had reached her forties.

In a general sense, the collections of fabrics associated with the 1930s are visually pretty and feminine and all of a medium to light weight. There are a variety of crepe yarns and crepe fabrics and all are made from rayon fibres. Rayon was recognised for its drape quality making it suitable for the typical thirties aesthetic which was influenced by glamour, romanticism and Hollywood movies.<sup>269</sup>

The fabrics distinctly from the 1940s are mostly plain in colour or of poorer quality in yarn and weave structure so prone to problems such as seam slippage and shrinking. The 1940s fabrics are also all light to medium weight pieces and colourful. What appears prominent about the fabrics from the 1930s and 1940s is that they reflect a feminine quality which one would associate with the constructed notion of women from that period. This to me suggests that Victoria Wood had an optimistic personality and possibly she was a person who enjoyed that particular period of her life. Because of their weight, the fabrics also resonated with a sense that she was a woman who

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<sup>269</sup> Laver, *Costume and Fashion*; Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*.

preferred a warmer climate. Returning to Marilyn's account of her grandmother's Papatoetoe sewing room:

The sun came pelting down it must have been like Meekatharra or Western Australia – hot as hang.<sup>270</sup>

Then, to her last sewing room in Rotorua:

Well then she set up in exactly the same way in Rotorua [...] she got this room which gets absolutely all day sun – but she had the whole thing set up for sewing with the sun streaming in and just ran her life round it really.<sup>271</sup>

The latter group of fabrics either consist of sheer and flocked nylons or heavy weight cotton furnishings or curtaining fabrics. Dress lengths were less apparent in this grouping and all but two fabric pieces from this era are long enough to speak of their possible destination for clothing creation. Instead, they speak more of Victoria's shift to the creation of craft and other practical pursuits. Sewing for practical reasons were not new in her interests, but the creation of aprons (or pinnies) and dressing dolls in bridal costume were important at this time. On my first visit to Marilyn's in September 2008, she

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<sup>270</sup> Doak.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

showed me a number of home sewn pinnies and dolls dressed in bridal costume.

The fibre character obviously missing from her suitcases was collected woollen fabrics such as crepes, suiting, twill and coating fabrics. I found this curious because the woollen industries (growing, spinning, knitting and weaving), were considered an important part of the agricultural and trade sectors of New Zealand, and therefore a significant part of the country's economic links with the British Government.<sup>272</sup>

PS provided an example of these sentiments:

PS – I tended to go for good quality fabrics. [In] this day and age there are so many fabrics and I don't have the same amount of people that I was sewing for as [I did] in days gone by, but I always tended to buy what I would say was a better type of fabric for wear and tear; [generally] they would be cotton or wool, I was a great fan of woollen cloths.<sup>273</sup>

### ***Sales Dash***

Marilyn recalled that regardless of where Victoria lived she loved to “do the shops”. Marilyn described how both her mother and her grandmother,

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<sup>272</sup> Brooking, "Economic Transformation."; McLean, *Spinning Yarns: A Centennial History of Alliance Textiles and Its Predecessors*.

<sup>273</sup> PS.

through frequent visits to local shops became friends with people who ran them.

Wherever it was she was living, she'd hop on a bus and get into town. She would make good use of The Farmers' free bus and visit their store on Hobson street, and she'd do Karangahape Road visiting George Courts and Rendalls, and she'd do Queen Street visiting John Courts. She would then head over to Newmarket where there was a big fabric shop which she loved to visit.<sup>274</sup>

Victoria Wood made regular fabric purchases from all of these stores. One thing which became clear to me when documenting her fabrics was that many of the fabrics that I had originally categorised as garment lengths were indeed end of bolt purchases from the sales tables. There are numerous objects in the suitcases to support this, for example, near full cards of braiding that were marked down in price (Appendix A2 SC1 o12-N pg179) and a box containing seven tapes measures that were in inches only. (Appendix A2 SC2 o42-T pg 192)

Several of the respondents had particular stories to tell about their mothers and the fabric sales:

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<sup>274</sup> Doak.

GI – I always remember, Mum would hop on her bike and head off down to Arthur Toye’s to have a look at what had gone onto the sales tables. The next morning she would be there with all the other women when the shops opened their doors and she would be in there and around the tables with her elbows out to get at the fabrics she had spotted the day before.<sup>275</sup>

MW – Every year, Lane Walker Rudkin would have a sale of all their left over fabrics, and mum would be down there buying up bits and pieces which she usually sewed into patchwork blankets for the kids.<sup>276</sup>

JN – So of course mum would be walking down to catch the tram home, “oh look, they’ve got something at six pence a yard”, and she’d buy three to four yards. [And] I must tell you this little bit because it’s quite interesting, my mother passed away when she was 62, and being her only child, it fell on me to clean the house out and arrange for an auction and all sorts of things like that. The material that she had gathered over the years; I had it in a pile [that] measured three foot square and five foot tall – and that’s a lot of material.<sup>277</sup>

Other stories surfaced about collecting fabric.

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<sup>275</sup> GI.

<sup>276</sup> MW.

<sup>277</sup> JN.

GI – I have just made a jacket out of a piece of fabric that I have owned for forty years. Fancy that – to have a piece of fabric for so long.<sup>278</sup>

PS – I definitely find it hard to give away my fabrics; I am trying to give some away at the moment and I have given some away to a lady yesterday that I am sure she will put to good use.[...] I have purchased things for a special garment which I have never made and then I can't give those pieces of fabric to anyone, I just keep hoarding them. I do love fabrics.<sup>279</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I retell the story of finding Victoria Wood through public records to locate her family. Through these and the stories of her granddaughter, I have discussed her life and sewing habits and situated them in the context of similar themes of fabric collecting and home sewing experiences of New Zealand women from 1935 - 1955.

In comparison to other women who lived through a similar era, Victoria Wood appeared to live an independent life. Especially if considering the backdrop of New Zealand's domestic ideologies where women were portrayed as homely

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<sup>278</sup> GI.

<sup>279</sup> PS.

and dependant on a male provider – being a father or a husband. However, Victoria Wood shares many similar experiences to the other women interviewed for this study. What is known about her life portrays a nuanced one of a woman who partook in all the domestic rituals that are attached to the habits of buying fabrics and sewing. Highlighting this is what shows the absence/inadequacy of this part of domesticity in existing historical accounts.

In comparison, all but one of the oral history candidates married and settled in close proximity to their childhood homes. The connection between mother and daughter is also a common theme throughout the chapter. Generally most of the candidates share stories to reveal that some of their sewing experiences were in fact their mothers and not theirs. Many of the candidates discuss the creation of clothes and often only refer to it as something to be worn by a female. The emphasis on sewing themes to gender specific connections reiterates findings from other scholarly studies.

The suitcases and their contents also demonstrate personal habits such as labelling, cataloguing and storing. In this Victoria Wood reveals that she was affected by the social climate where thrift and economy dominated cultural values, especially in times of world events such as the Great Depression and World War II. Her appreciation and collecting of fabrics through this period demonstrates the way that she participated in conventional habits of saving

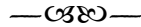


everything 'just in case'. These habits were shared by the other women interviewed. Through their stories, they were also able to recount experiences from those times. Most often they recounted these experiences through textiles and demonstrated how the fabric itself provided autonomy in a way that comfortably made the best of a domestic world. In their accounts, the fabric made it possible to symbolise time and family connections that they felt were important.

Generally I found that when I approached women to interview for the oral history part of the project, they all thought it was not important and were uncertain about how they could help. Yet when they recounted their experiences, tales were told through textiles and clothing which unlocked their memories in a way that their eyes came alive and demonstrates how fabric and clothing symbolised time and personal or emotional connections.

## Chapter Three

### Fabricating Stories



This chapter elaborates upon the untold stories in unsewn lengths of cloth. It focuses on a selection of five fabric pieces from Victoria Wood's suitcases to construct scenarios which augment the findings from the previous two chapters. Each selected piece is dated and located within the biography of Mrs Wood and takes into account the various stages of her sewing interests and the locations in which she lived. Throughout the chapter I employ a speculative approach to create stories which are intended to evoke the imaginative appeal and elusive quality that each fabric piece retains. Each piece is given a name to create an identity and express how fabric is imbued with an emotional language. The names chosen to represent each piece are either popular female names from the period or stem from historical findings, either socially or personalised to Victoria Wood's biography. I also choose dress styles or crafts outcomes that I feel represent Victoria Wood's aesthetics and spirit in the hope to manifest the key questions surrounding this thesis.

This chapter is attempting to give credence to the way in which fabrics provided women with imaginative qualities that they could layer into their lives and domestic experiences. It demonstrates how fabrics in an unsewn state always embody a potential focus of individual and personal desires to the future. In the light of this, it also suggests that fabrics symbolise the fantasy associated with it at the time of purchase and the fantasy that projects from it as long as it remains as an unsewn piece of cloth.

Close your eye and imagine:

When I say satin, what do you feel?

Can you feel the weight of it as it slides against your skin?

When I say cotton, is the sun shining?

Do you feel cool and warm at the same time?

When I say lace, do you picture yourself with a bouquet of flowers? And

are you happy? (Mutsaers 2009)

### *Everything but the Fabric*

From the outset of this project I was aware of my own intuitive impulses about the fabrics and other associated items in the suitcases. I was interested in how I could know and understand the objects and empathise with the domestic activities of sewing and clothing creation produced in an era to which I did not belong. When examining the fabrics I could visualise the fashion styles that each piece would have suited without the need to cross

reference fashion history to support my responses. I was intrigued by the effect that the fabrics had on my imagination and how I constructed stories about their purchase. Because of my training as a patternmaker, I found that I knew instinctively whether or not each piece was sufficient in length to make a garment. I was also interested in how quickly I wanted to understand how Victoria Wood had integrated herself into each particular piece when she had bought them. So I pictured the 'dress that it might have been', and attached an imaginary story to what sat before me.

In attempting to find empirical evidence to make palpable what I felt were essential and intrinsic qualities of fabric, I was thwarted by their constant similarities to fashion and clothing. I discovered that like the everyday ordinariness of domesticity, the literature surrounding fabrics, bought for the creation of clothes did not seem to exist. Information about fabrics is evident in fashion advertising and fashion columns in every magazine and newspaper I have read, yet spoken of in similar terms that describe garments. They are also evident in textile texts that discuss fibre development, history and theory. But I have found very little evidence of fabrics being discussed as a separate entity, in either popular or scholarly literature and certainly not in a way that recognises their importance in the making of narratives that operates in parallel to women's domestic lives.

On the construction of history, Henry Glassie suggests that “History is not the past. History is a story about the past, told in the present, and designed to be useful in constructing the future”.<sup>280</sup> I believe that fabric provides a realistic embodiment of this concept. This is because fabric remains alive in a way that projects, suggests and retains potential for the future. It remains alive because no matter when, it has the potential to signify something to the person who takes the time to engage with it.

This chapter operates in two parts. First it narrates a fictionalised scenario surrounding the purchase of each fabric piece. In telling the stories I have attributed a date to each piece based on my existing knowledge of vintage fabrics and dress styles. In each case the story anchors the fabric in a phase of life important for Victoria Wood and for other women like her. The next part discusses each fabric piece with attention to their relationship with their social era, particularly the fashion trends and how these were depicted in contemporary fashion columns and magazines of the time. Each section is concluded with a page designed to demonstrate the clothing or craft possibilities based on my reading of Victoria Wood’s aesthetic.

## **The Selected Fabric Stories**

### ***1937: Devon Crepe***

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<sup>280</sup> Glassie, *Material Culture*, 6.

In planning for Frederick's return to New Guinea, he and Victoria decided to buy an additional home in Hamilton. They had found a lovely home on Devon Road that had been built in 1929. It was a concrete stucco structure and it had a grand curved staircase entrance from the front garden. At this stage it was undecided how much longer he would be gone for, but they both agreed that this house would be a suitable home for Ilene who was to celebrate her 24<sup>th</sup> birthday on this day of October 14<sup>th</sup>.

Victoria was thrilled with the idea of their daughter having somewhere suitable to live and ideally somewhere that would set her up as an independent woman. The home had a room that would be more than suitable for a sewing room even though she knew that Ilene was not as enthusiastic about sewing as she. However, she decided to ignore this and buy her daughter a length of fabric to encourage her. It had been hard not to notice the popularity of florals in all the fashion columns and Ilene had commented on a picture of a floral dress in the *Waikato Times* just last week. It would be an extra birthday present for her.



Image 18

Floral frock featured in the *Woman's World* column  
*Waikato Times* Wednesday October 6 1937. p.10

This very morning she had just seen in the latest *Woman's Weekly* an advertisement for Wemco crepes which she knew were of good quality and was sure that they would be stocked at House and Daking. Victoria decided that she would go there that very afternoon to view the new lines and given that this was such a special purchase she would forgo waiting for them to go on sale.



**FRESH BEAUTY IN WEMCO FABRICS** . . . a gay loveliness in new materials which will instantly win the admiration and approval of New Zealand women.

. . . all the new season's effects in Paisleys, Persian, Floral and Monotone (in fast colours) are shown in these delightful English rayon fabrics.

Wemcolissa (the ever-popular crepe) . . . Climasol and Cilmidene (in a fascinating diversity of designs) . . . and Tuseda (a beautiful Wemco ANTICREASE fabric in plain colours) are now obtainable in New Zealand.

*Go gay this season — with Wemco.*

**Wemco** USCO  
**FABRICS**  
 PRODUCED IN ENGLAND

At All Leading Stores. Agents: R. W. UREN LTD., Nathan's Bldgs., Grey St., Wgtn.

Image 19

Wemco Fabric advertisement

*New Zealand Woman's Weekly*

October 14 1937. p 62

Making her way into town, she walked with purpose along Victoria Street toward the department store. She passed Howden's where Ilene had recently bought a mantle clock which chimed on the hour. Ilene had an elegance about her and this showed in all the things that she loved. Victoria smiled to herself picturing her daughter standing in the grand entrance of the new



house. She had a finer bone structure, more like her father and was of a quieter disposition generally. Yes, this new house would suit her very well.

House and Daking's fabric department was on the ground floor and as soon as she entered she could see the 'Wemco' sign hanging over the display of new season fabrics. Her eyes quickly darted around all the florals on offer and she was drawn to one particular piece that stood out as something that Ilene might like. It had a sky blue ground and was prettily detailed with a floral motif of cream, orange, dark blue and yellow. Victoria thought how all the colours in the print would suit Ilene's darker tones and it had a splendid drape. It was priced at 6/11 and as she carried the bolt to the counter she quickly calculated that 4 ½ yards would be more than enough to make a pretty dress.



Image 20

Detail of Devon Crepe c. 1937

Photographed by the author

The young sales assistant was new – Victoria had not seen her before. She took the time to find out her name and they chatted happily while the newly cut fabric piece was wrapped by the young woman into a brown paper parcel. Victoria was excited about her purchase and instead of her usual visit to the tearooms on the top floor she headed straight home.

As soon as she was in the door, she removed her hat and gloves and left them on the hall table. She wandered through to the kitchen to see if anyone else was home but found the place empty. She placed her basket on the table and removed the parcel. Victoria couldn't resist, she had to unwrap it and look at the fabric again. It was just as delightful as when she had seen it in the store. She thought about the latest fashion styles and how feminine they were. She had read somewhere recently that the latest looks were very similar to Edwardian styles, which were of course from the era of her youth – so pretty and feminine.<sup>281</sup>

She walked back down the hallway and into her bedroom. Holding one end of the fabric, Victoria let the rest of it drop to the floor holding it up against herself to view in the mirror. It was such a good colour. She loved the way that crepe fabrics could drape over the body without clinging in an unsympathetic

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<sup>281</sup> "Designs for 1937," *Waikato Times*, Saturday March 13 1937.

way – especially on a fuller figure like her own. Victoria was certain that it would suit her daughter, yet if she were to make this piece up for herself she would use that lovely pattern she had purchased from a January issue of the *Woman's Weekly*. It had a draped collar which sat around the neckline and covered the bust in a flattering way. There was also no waist seam, but instead inserted diagonal panels which tapered to the hip area which would lengthen the body visually and distract from her thicker waist. She particularly loved the gathered inserted panels at the elbow of the sleeves and was sure that this would make the dress very cool to wear on hotter days.

Victoria quickly reminded herself that this fabric was not for her but for Ilene. So, she refolded the piece and walked back down to the kitchen. She put it back onto its brown paper wrapping left open on the table and went to her sewing room at the front of the house to find a pretty ribbon to retie the parcel. Ilene would be home soon and she was sure that she would love it as much as Victoria did.

### ***1937 – Crepe Fabrics and Florals.***

Of all the crepe fabrics in the suitcases, the Devon Crepe stands out as unusual because of its floral print detail. All of the other crepe lengths in the collection are plain in colour and lean towards austerity and a plainer aesthetic. The naming of this piece relates to the Devon Road address in

Hamilton, which was owned by the Wood family from 1937 to 1940. It speaks of their happier times, of prosperity and of summer. The additional printed layers suggest it is possibly a more expensive piece, imbued with the romantic and optimistic outlooks often associated with the floral print.<sup>282</sup> There is something about this piece that suggests the aesthetics of the daughter Ilene because floral details are evident in other objects and needlework originally owned by Ilene. Marilyn had also recalled how much her mother loved living in the Devon Road house.<sup>283</sup>

Floral fabrics grew in popularity throughout the twentieth century moving from being hidden in the lining of garments to being worn as everyday fashion.<sup>284</sup>

Both floral prints and crepe fabrics were popular dress weight fabrics throughout the 1930s. Their rise in popularity was considerably enhanced by the development of rayon as a fibre which lessened the division between real and artificial silk and its availability as a fashionable material.<sup>285</sup> Influenced by what was happening in Paris fashions, crepes and floral prints showed their presence in the fashion pages of the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* and the fashion columns in newspapers which regularly promoted crepe florals' in

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<sup>282</sup> Jane Mulvagh, *Vogue: History of 20th Century Fashion* (London: Viking, 1988); Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*.

<sup>283</sup> Doak.

<sup>284</sup> Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*.

<sup>285</sup> Handley, *Nylon: The Manmade Fashion Revolution; a Celebration of Design from Art Silk to Nylon and Thinking Fibres*; Laver, *Taste and Fashion*.

their weekly spreads. For example, the *Woman's Weekly* advised in its 21 January 1937 issue: "For informal parties or evenings at the theatre, the most suitable garb is a frock of floral crepe".<sup>286</sup>

The Devon crepe is woven with yarns of rayon fibre. The warp is a loose continuous filament and the weft a high twist crepe yarn which has been overtwisted so that it will entwine itself. These yarns are then woven in a way which displays a random distribution of floats to produce an all over pebbled effect on the surface of the fabric, making it a good example of a true crepe. Crepe fabrics have a luxurious quality and display a distinct softness which, when worn, drapes and falls in a way that responds sympathetically to the warmth of the body, and is therefore very elegant and very comfortable to wear.

Crepe fabrics were originally made from wool and silk, then later art silk or rayon such as the fibre make-up of this piece.<sup>287</sup> Crepe fabrics were also extremely suitable for the fashion styling of the 1930s. Characteristics of the weave structure facilitate the handle and drape which is reflected in the 1930s silhouette of graceful lines, wide shoulders and narrow hips. Dress lengths tended to finish "ten inches above the ground".<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> "Field Flowers and Rose Brocade," *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, January 21 1937.

<sup>287</sup> Mary Humphries, *Fabric Glossary*, Third ed. (New Jearsey: Pearson Education Inc, 2004).

<sup>288</sup> Laver, *Costume and Fashion*, 245.

There was an increased trend towards clothing created specifically as leisurewear during the 1930s.<sup>289</sup> For New Zealand women, spring and summer were portrayed as the time to pay attention to ‘a tired wardrobe’. Depictions of florals and colour were vivid and often used in a suggestive way. They evoked warmer weather, Christmas holidays and outdoor activities. In the southern hemisphere, this meant longer days and more time for leisure. Rosemary Harden and Jo Turney draw attention to the use of floral fabrics as a metaphorical symbol of “escapism” thus epitomizing the growing interest in leisure at this time.<sup>290</sup>

The play on escapism also operated on another level. In this sense, fashion was often represented as a vehicle to look beyond past effects of the Depression and any adversities of contemporary living. This ideology is demonstrated in the advertising text published by H & J Court in Hamilton in the *Waikato Times*. In this they promote the latest fabric arrivals:

All together in the floral dance of fashion [...] in a carefree mood come  
Sun-splashed Silks, triumphant crease resisting cottons, cool new linens.  
H and J.C.’s mirrors fashion’s popular trend with a showing of new

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<sup>289</sup> Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

weaves garnered from leading designers and manufacturers. Colours, Designs and Styles all combine to make this season a gay one.<sup>291</sup>

The print on this piece has been applied using the discharge printing method. It removes colour from a fabric which has first been piece dyed to the sky blue 'ground'.<sup>292</sup> A screen or roller printing system removes the colour with a chemical paste leaving negative images of a floral cluster. These are then filled with additional printing sequences of dark blue, red and apricot colours to complete the print of the floral design.<sup>293</sup> The Devon crepe still retains its original folding from being displayed on a fabric board and therefore came from the bolt of the fabric at purchase. It is in good condition. This piece measures almost 4½ yards at 32" wide – enough for a dress length.

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<sup>291</sup> "H & J Court Advertisement," *Waikato Times*, Wednesday, October 6 1937.

<sup>292</sup> 'Ground' was a term commonly used to describe the background of a fabric if printed.

<sup>293</sup> Sara. J Kadolf, *Textiles*, Tenth ed. (New Jearsey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007).

## Devon Crepe c.1937

SC2 068-F

She walked back down the hallway and into her bedroom. Holding one end of the fabric, Victoria let the rest of it drop to the floor holding up against herself to view in the mirror. She loved the way that crepe fabrics could drape over the body without clinging in an unsympathetic way - especially on a fuller figure like her own. Victoria was certain that it would suit her daughter, yet if she were to make this piece up for herself she would use that lovely pattern she had purchased from the Woman's Weekly. It had a draped collar which sat around the neckline and covered the bust in a flattering way. There was also no waist seam, but instead inserted diagonal panels which tapered to the hip area which would lengthen the body visually and distract from her thicker waist. She particularly loved the gathered inserted panels at the elbow of the sleeves and was sure that this would make the dress very cool to wear on hotter days.

Victoria quickly reminded herself that this fabric was not for her but for Ilene. So she refolded it and walked back down to the kitchen. She put it back into its brown paper wrapping left open on the table and went to her sewing room at the front the house to find a pretty ribbon to retie the parcel. Ilene would be home soon and she was sure that she would love it as much as Victoria did.



Image 21

Design page for Devon Crepe

Created by the author



### ***1941: Rule Britannia***

New Zealand Rail had recently reduced their bus departures from Hamilton to Auckland. Once upon a time they departed every two hours between 8 am and 6 pm and now there were only three services a day to choose from.

Victoria felt that this was a great loss, especially as she fancied a trip away and this now meant that she had to plan more carefully. After the tragic death of Frederick they had had to sell the Devon Road home. But this money had given her and Ilene a nest egg each and added to her widow's pension to help her with the upkeep of her Victoria Street home – and herself of course. Ilene had moved to Auckland and had recently starting working in a legal office replacing a chap who had gone off to fight overseas. He was not quite a lawyer, but Ilene's duties covered some of his responsibilities, which Victoria thought was very prestigious indeed.

She wondered what the shops were like in Auckland now that the country was at war. The ones in Hamilton seemed to have less fabric on offer and she was sure that New Zealand would soon have to ration everything like those poor people in England. It would be hard for New Zealanders because so much of what filled the shops came from Britain and she imagined that it would be very difficult to get the goods safely shipped here. It had been some months back that she had seen an advertisement in the *New Zealand Herald*

placed by the Farmers Trading Company. The images on the page had proved that her thoughts were a reality. She supposed that this would be the way of it for some time to come. Victoria decided to that she would visit Farmers when she was in Auckland and if she could, would buy some of the fabric that had arrived in the shipment to give them her support.

Victoria hurried to catch the 11am bus. The nice young man who lived next door was kind enough to drive her to the Ward Street depot. He had recently enlisted so would be gone by the time she returned – it was sad she thought to see all these fine young people putting their lives on hold.

THE NEW ZEALAND HERALD, THURSDAY, MAY 29, 1941

# BRITAIN DELIVERS THE GOODS

*Thanks to the British Navy and the Fearless Merchant Service*

A CROSS perils seas, British ships come in—Britain delivers the goods. Sends us her unsurpassed woollens woven in Yorkshire mills, the cottons that Manchester alone knows how to spin; the fine lines of Nottingham; the excellent colvies and ticks produced by Sheffield craftsmen, and for many other fine things that have made the mark "British", the standard of quality. The Farmers received these goods with pride, and now offer them to you, knowing that you, too, will be proud to buy the products of the Motherland. . . . Do your shopping for British goods this week at The Farmers.

**They'll Walk Out!**  
**1000 SUITS of MEN'S WINTER PYJAMAS**

Don't miss this Saving . . . 16/6 Value for  
be early at THE FARMERS' **10/6**

Another English MID delivers the goods. Thousands of yards of cozy Pyjama Cloth were recently received by The Farmers. This excellent material has been made up into warm and dependable Pyjamas—the sort you need for Winter night—sold at more than 1000 yards at the retail price of 15/6 each. Men's Pyjamas have been scarce, but now a price change on the 15/6 Pyjama has had a great effect. These suits are in great demand—don't miss them. Men's and BOYS' QUANTITY RESERVED FOR COUNTRY CUSTOMERS.

As these Pyjamas will be quickly changed to suits in our Menswear Department, they should be purchased early.

**MEN! SAVE 5/- on WORK TROUSERS**

Double-crease work trousers for the delivery of British goods. English wool and French linings. Superior, tough, and durable. A perfect match for our men's 16/6. Call for yours, now. **16/10**

Quantity Reserved for Mail Orders.  
SECOND FLOOR.

The "Can Take It" TOWEL

Image 22

Farmers advertisement, "Britain Delivers the Goods"

*New Zealand Herald, 29 May 1941, p.17*

She knew that when she arrived in Auckland, Ilene would still be at work, so Victoria had to make her own way to the apartment which was simple enough. She had spent enough time in Auckland to know her way around fairly well. As she rode the bus up Queen Street then into Karanghape Road she looked eagerly out the bus window as they passed some of her favourite stores. At the corner dairy along the street from Ilene's, she bought a copy of the *New Zealand Herald*. She would read this with her cup of tea while she waited for Ilene to arrive home. Victoria noted that George Courts had some fine looking dresses that had just arrived in store and tore out a picture of the one she liked the most. Tomorrow she would go and have a good look, she was sure it would be easy enough to make something similar. It was such a good idea to come away.



Image 23

Dress from George Court advertisement  
*New Zealand Herald*, 22 November 1941, p.14

The following morning after breakfast, Victoria and Ilene caught the bus into town together. Victoria hopped off at Karangahape Road and Ilene continued on, heading towards the city station to catch another bus to Parnell where she worked. Victoria's first stop was George Courts. Entering the store she put her hand into her coat pocket to check if the picture was still there. She smiled to herself and strode up the first flight of stairs to the dress department. At the main counter she produced the newspaper clipping from her pocket and asked the assistant to point her in the right direction.

Victoria found the dress to be just as pleasing as what she had hoped. It was floral, made of 'art silk' and it was stocked in several shades. She took a navy blue and green dress into the changing room to try for its fit. The style had pleat folds that crossed over the bust line into a slightly raised and shaped centre front skirt panel – all designed to conceal the fullness of the bust and create the illusion of a waistline. The shoulders were relatively broad with a saddle shoulder detail that she recognised as the war time influence on fashion – she had read about it just recently in *The Woman's Weekly*. But the neck line and cuffs were trimmed with lace and she felt that this was enough to keep the overall look feminine and not so much like a uniform.

She returned the dress to the assistant and headed out into the street to wait for the Farmers free bus. She was so excited about the prospect of finding some fabric to recreate that lovely dress that she would do that first and then return to Karangahape Road later. Victoria was certain that Farmers would still have some British fabrics from their May shipment and they were just waiting for her to find them.

Victoria found the fabric displays to be much like she imagined. Austerity had influenced everything and the fabrics on offer seemed more sensible than what she was used to. However, there was a practicality to all of it and the fabric that seemed to stand out the most to her would certainly wash and wear for a few good seasons. In the end the piece that she chose was a soft sky blue ground with very small white dots and priced at 10 shillings a yard. For the wear she would get out of this piece she thought it was worth it. Victoria asked the assistant for 5 yards and as the young woman unrolled the bolt Victoria noticed that there was a paper sticker stuck to the cloth. It was a picture of a Union Jack that said 'All British' and Victoria felt that this was a good reward for her intentions.



Image 24

Detail of Rule Britannia print with 'All British' label

Photographed by the author.

### *1941- Utility and Austerity*

The Rule Britannia cotton print is seen as the most significant piece in Victoria Wood's fabric collection. It stands out for two reasons. First it is 100 % cotton and therefore out of the ordinary when placed into the larger context of the overall fabrics in the collection which are mostly rayon and nylon. Second, the piece had within its folds an image torn from a newspaper of a typical 1940s dress which indicates what Victoria Wood had in her mind for that particular piece. The dress style was advertised as something suitable for the older woman with a fuller figure and gave a clue to her particular dress style and aesthetics.



Image 25

Cotton print fabric and newspaper image c.1941

Photographed by the author

The image reveals an early reference to the war time uniform. The forties silhouette reflected military styling with padded square shoulders, nipped in waists and skirt lengths finishing just below the knee. Garment details regularly used epaulettes, pleated patch pockets and belts.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Ebbett, *When the Boys Were Away: New Zealand Women in World War I*; Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*, Laver, *Costume and Fashion*.

Magazine and newspaper promotions of garment styles suitable for specific age groups were not unusual at the time. Garment descriptions in fashion advertisements were often separated out and targeted to a certain age group. In particular, clothing deemed suitable for the older women was often described as 'becoming for all figures',<sup>295</sup> 'for the matron'<sup>296</sup> and 'A presentation of attractive frocks for the not so slim'.<sup>297</sup> In contrast the young unmarried woman was enticed with these words: 'fashion hits for maids'<sup>298</sup> and 'slim and subtle'.<sup>299</sup> Images clearly defined the difference with imagery of either youthful women with defined waists and 'more fashionable' styles, or women with thickened waists, as noted above.

Locating the newspaper that this image had come from, I used the information printed on the reverse which contained names and details of divorce proceedings. Two names included in that particular column helped refine the search to the latter half of 1941. There were also commendations to the New Zealand war effort initiatives: "he was very glad New Zealand had introduced conscription. It was a splendid effort on the part of the country furthest away from the heart of the conflict".<sup>300</sup> The advertisement was located in a November issue of the *New Zealand Herald* and was part of a classified

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<sup>295</sup> "Becoming for All Figures," *New Zealand Herald*, November 22 1941.

<sup>296</sup> "For the Matron," *New Zealand Herald*, Thursday October 27 1941.

<sup>297</sup> "Not So Slim," *New Zealand Herald*, Saturday May 3 1941.

<sup>298</sup> "Fashion Hits for the Maids," *New Zealand Herald*, October 12 1941.

<sup>299</sup> "Slim and Subtle," *Evening Post*, March 3 1938.

<sup>300</sup> "New Zealand Commended," *New Zealand Herald*, November 22 1941.



notice about the arrival of new dress styles to the dress department of George Courts in Karangahape Road in Auckland.<sup>301</sup>

In the search for this particular newspaper piece, I also found a full page advertisement for “The Farmers”, a well known New Zealand department store which promoted buying and supporting products from England, the mother country (see image 22 pg 136). I couldn’t help but wonder if this fabric piece had arrived in this particular shipment.

The Rule Britannia piece is labelled along the selvedge edge with alternative stamps of “guaranteed fast colours, British made” and “Summer Breeze”. It is made of an uneven plain weave in which every second warp length has two strands of yarn. The yarn structure is short staple cotton fibre. The print is applied using the discharge printing method discussed in the previous fabric selection. Newspaper and magazine advertisements for Summer Breeze were present from 1930 through to 1950. It is described in the following advertisement as a ‘Haircord’ fabric and according to the [textileglossary.com](http://www.textileglossary.com) is a “plain-woven cotton fabric which has two or more ends weaving as one [yarn] alternately with a single end”.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> "George Courts," *New Zealand Herald*, November 22 1941.

<sup>302</sup> "Textileglossary.Com," <http://www.textileglossary.com/sitemap/>.

The hard wearing nature of this piece is indicative of the austerity and utility mindset prevalent in the war years. 'Summer Breeze' and 'Trobralco' were two distinct brands of hardwearing cotton. Both were reputed to for their functional qualities and the ability to survive repeated washes. The fabric length is in good condition. The piece has a firm handle and is made for everyday sensible wearing and measures 5 yards at 36" wide – enough for a dress length.



Image 26

"Summer Breeze" advertisement

*New Zealand Herald*, November 23 1948. p.4

## Rule Britannia c. 1941

SC2 066 - F

Victoria found the dress to be just as pleasing as what she had hoped. It was floral and made of 'art silk' and it was stocked in several shades. She took the navy blue and green dress into the changing room to try for its fit. The style had pleat fold that crossed over the bust line into a slightly raised centre front skirt panel - all designed to conceal the fullness of the bust and create the illusion of a waistline. The shoulders were relatively broad with a saddle shoulder detail that she recognised as the war time influence on fashion - she had read about it recently in the *Woman's Weekly*. But the neck line and cuffs were trimmed with lace and she felt that this was enough to keep the overall look feminine and not so much like a uniform.

She returned the dress to the assistant and headed out into the street to wait for the Farmers free bus. She was so excited about the prospect of finding some fabric to recreate that lovely dress that she would do that first and return to Karangahape Road later. Victoria was certain that Farmers would still have some British fabrics from their May shipment and they were just waiting for her to find them.



Image 27

Design page for Rule Britannia fabric

Created by author

*1948: Beryl Spotted Print*

It was a quarter past four on a November afternoon that Victoria Wood opened the front door of her Napier home. She had had a very enjoyable afternoon doing the shops and visiting all of her favourite stores in town. Now she returned home to the house warm with afternoon sun and walked towards the kitchen at the back of the house which sat between the bedrooms and her sewing room, a lean-to extension to the original dwelling. She moved through to her sewing room and dropped her packages on the day bed. Looking out over the back yard she glanced at the lemon tree laden with fruit and out on to the empty section where a group of boys were kicking a ball to each other. She moved back into the kitchen where she opened the coal range to stir the embers into life, moving the kettle over the flames to get it boiling for a well earned cup of tea.

That afternoon she had visited her friend Beryl who ran the dress-goods counter at McCready's in Hasting Street. Beryl was someone she had come to know quite well in the previous year since she had moved here from Hamilton. Much like herself, Beryl was a kindred spirit in her enthusiasm for fabric and sewing and on every occasion that Victoria visited McCready's, she and Beryl would spend a fair amount of time discussing the fabrics in the shop. Mostly though, for the time being, it was reminiscing about the fabrics

that used to fill the shops before the war. Since the war had ended, they were still difficult to come by, although now that the rationing of clothing was over, maybe this would soon change. This did not stop their enthusiastic discussions about the latest fashions which they both read about in magazines and newspapers, or more importantly, it did not stop them having an opinion about them.



Attractive  
**LINENS**  
At  
ATTRACTIVE PRICES  
ABSOLUTELY CREASE-RESISTING  
Wonderful range in all the new shades.  
PLAIN LINENS  
36 inches wide 8/6 8/11 yard.  
FLORAL LINENS  
36 inches wide 5/5 8/9 9/11 11/9  
LIMITED SUPPLIES OF  
RANEE CLOTH HERE  
**J. McCREEDY LTD.**  
"THE BUSY FABRIC CORNER"  
HASTINGS ST. Phone 2309. NAPIER.

Image 28

Advertisement for J McCreedy Ltd

*The Daily Telegraph*, September 9, 1948 p. 4

Victoria was feeling particularly happy this afternoon thinking about her finds as the kettle ascended to its boiling trill. Beryl had the knack of procuring the odd bolt of fabric when it came available and today's visit had been no exception. She had been good enough to save Victoria a dress length of

spotted rayon print which was one of those crease resistant rayons made by Tootal. It seemed to her that they were now making all sorts of fabrics out of rayon to replace all the fabrics that seemed in short supply. They were calling this piece rayon linen and it was obviously not linen. Victoria shrugged. It didn't really matter to her because she had always liked rayon fabrics. This one was a bit loose in the weave but they were always so comfortable to wear.

**RAYON LINEN**  
10/6 YARD

**FOR THE WOMAN WHO SEWS HER OWN**

A super quality Rayon Linen, soft and rich in texture, completely washable and as refreshing as a breeze... the quality that's first rate... for value, comfort to wear, you'll want this lovely fabric for your Spring Suits and Frocks. Colors: Black, Slate, Brown, Light Blue, Navy, Egg Green, Almond, Royal, Gold, Taupe, Cherry, White. 36 inches wide.

**BUY YOUR FABRIC AND SELECT YOUR PATTERN ON THE FIRST FLOOR.**

**J.C. JOHN COURT LTD.**  
BOX 320 QUEEN STREET, AUCKLAND

PICTORIAL SIMPLICITY PATTERN NO. 2329

SOLE AUCKLAND AGENTS PICTORIAL SIMPLICITY PATTERNS.

Image 29

John Court advertisement for Rayon Linen  
*New Zealand Herald*. September 7 1948, p.5

Victoria thought that this piece was so vibrant in colour that it made her think optimistically about the shift away from austerity and all the drab colours that there was far too much of in the war years. This piece also made her think about the arrival of summer and she was excited about the prospects of a new summer dress for herself. The piece was a royal blue ground covered with small white and yellow spots. Even though she knew that fabric would likely only last one or two summers, the lustre and lightness of it was enough that she could ignore its poorer quality.



Image 30

Spotted rayon print fabric c.1948

Photographed by the author

Like many women, she was interested in the latest fashion coming out of Europe, however cynical she may be about wearing it herself. Just this morning she and Beryl had discussed the on-going debate about the new

“wasp waist” which was causing such a stir. But in saying this, she could understand why the younger ones would want to make the effort to dress themselves in such a way. War had been hard on them all and there was nothing like a pretty dress to take your mind off things. She had watched her own daughter Ilene live through the majority of the war with her husband Ray fighting the campaign and she felt that keeping up appearances was important for to keeping an even keel.

Victoria’s thoughts drifted back to her latest purchase. She had 8½ yards of fabric to play with and this would easily make a lovely shirt waisted dress with short sleeves and a small collar. Yes, and she would put some lovely pleats into the skirt which would be nice and cool to wear in the summer heat. The fabric would drape and soften with washes and she almost felt as if she was wearing the dress already.

### ***1948 – Recovery and Return***

Many of the fabric pieces in Victoria Wood’s collection have a spot detail which are either printed or flocked, depending on the era they come from.

The Beryl spotted rayon print stands out in the collection because it is a good example of a fabric that has been treated for crease resistance and produced to emulate another fibre. The versatility of rayon as a fibre is noted because it had a significant impact on the dissemination of fashion into the everyday



market.<sup>303</sup> It could either be woven as a filament yarn which would produce a high lustre fabric much like silk, or the yarn given a high twist to produce a textured weave such as crepe, or it could be cut into short staples lengths to produce fabric with a softer hand like cotton or linen.<sup>304</sup> In this case the Beryl spotted print is visually similar to mercerised cotton.

Susannah Handley suggests the consumer popularity of rayon was also influenced by the fact that it was the outcome of chemical creation and less influenced by commonly recognised endorsements made through high fashion circles. She believes that this was because compounds from earlier volatile versions of rayon were beneficial for the production of explosives in World War II. Therefore she claims that the popularity of rayon benefited from advertising which “was designed to propel popular opinion towards the promised chemical utopia”.<sup>305</sup>

Treatment of fabrics for crease resistance was also a growing phenomenon. Its importance grew over the post war period and is symptomatic of the growing interest in the new and the modern. There were increasing numbers of advertisements for crease resistant fabrics throughout the post war period

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<sup>303</sup> Handley, *Nylon: The Manmade Fashion Revolution; a Celebration of Design from Art Silk to Nylon and Thinking Fibres*.

<sup>304</sup> Kadolf, *Textiles*.

<sup>305</sup> Handley, *Nylon: The Manmade Fashion Revolution; a Celebration of Design from Art Silk to Nylon and Thinking Fibres*, 28.

and scientific advancements such as these meant that less time was needed for ironing and more time could be spent as a loving mother and wife.

Therefore the popularity of chemical processes also reflects women's return to the home and the shifting notions of domesticity.<sup>306</sup>

Clothing rations ceased in New Zealand in 1947, yet many things remained in short supply until 1950.<sup>307</sup> This included dressmaking fabrics which were predominantly sourced from countries that had suffered far greater wartime disruption. In this period, fashion reflected the return of feminine values and is noted for its softening silhouette which had sloping shoulders, nipped in waists, longer dress lengths and fabric fullness at the hem. The sloping shoulders were enhanced through the use of dolman sleeves, nipped in waists were created by extreme corseting, and "billowing pleated skirts now consumed indulgent amounts of fabric".<sup>308</sup> Pattern cutting of these garment details also determined that an increased amount of fabric was needed and much like the skirt, the bodice panels also utilised more fabric.

As a result of post war shortages, fashion and dressmaking featured less obviously in contemporary publications of the time. Store advertisements for fabrics were also reduced to a minimum and it is rare to see more than five

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<sup>306</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s."

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Wolfe, *The Way We Wore: The Clothes New Zealanders Have Loved*, 17.

fabric types in any fabric published advertisement at this time. The sale of fabrics was also often limited to in-store purchases with many retailers forgoing the mail order service they had previously provided.

**new season's fabrics  
shine after dark**

M & C present a wide selection of superb fabrics from the looms of France and America . . . a memorable collection that shines after dark, sweeps away the dullness of past years and brings light and colour to life.

**AMERICAN CREASE-RESISTING VELVET.** A soft, rich cloth adaptable to fashion's every mood. Parchment, moss green, American Beauty, Caribbean blue, Killarney green, fantasy blue, cyclamen, fuchsia, pride red. 40in. 26/3.

**FRENCH EMBOSSED VELVET.** Intricate patterns in a fabric of great beauty. Powder blue, wine, royal, brown, monet blue, bois de rose, burgundy, ivory, black. 36in. 39/5.

*Regret, No Mail Orders*

**TAFFETA POULTY.** Fashion fabric from America. Checks or stripes in glowing colours. 39in. 13/9.

**GEORGETTE.** From Switzerland, a superior quality sheer in shell, coral, powder blue, alicia blue, maize, cream, ivory, navy, black. 36in. 13/5.

**FRENCH LAME.** France has long been famous for such fabric. Silver, silver/black, silver/gold, plain or patterned. 36in. 26/6.

**TINSEL BROCADES.** From France, a collection of exquisite pastel brocades in many patterns. 36in. From 33/3. Second Floor.

Image 31

Milne & Choyce fabric advertisement  
*New Zealand Herald* January 31, 1948 p.4

The Beryl spotted print is a plain weave woven with filament yarns of rayon fibre. The warp yarn has a tight twist and the weft is looser with more bulk. The fabric is printed first using the same discharge printing method previously

discussed. A crease resistant process is then applied and this coats the fibres with a synthetic resin. The fabric is then dried and heat treated at a high temperature resulting in a lustrous fabric surface.<sup>309</sup> It is in good condition and still retains the original folds from purchase. The fabric has a flimsiness that is suitable for lightweight dress with full volume skirts. There is a thread tied in the selvedge edge to indicate a flaw in the fabric. The piece measures 8½ yards at 36" wide.

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<sup>309</sup> G.J Aston, *Raw Cotton to Finished Fabric* (Christchurch: J.W.Baty Limited, 1956), 66.

### Beryl Spotted Print c.1948

SC2 048 - F

Victoria thought that this piece was so vibrant in colour that it made her think optimistically about the shift away from austerity and all the drab colours that there was far too much of in the war years. This piece also made her think about the arrival of summer and she was excited about the prospects of a new summer dress from herself. The piece was a royal blue ground covered with small white and yellow spots. Even though she knew that the fabric would likely only last one or two summers, the lustre and lightness of it was enough that she could ignore its poorer quality.

Victoria's thoughts drifted back to her latest purchase. She had 8 1/2 yards of fabric to play with and this would easily make a lovely shirt waisted dress with short sleeves and a small collar. Yes, and she would put some lovely pleats into the skirt which would be nice and cool to wear in the summer heat. The fabric would drape and soften with washes and she almost felt as if she was wearing the dress already.



Image 32

Design page for Beryl Spotted Print fabric

Created by author

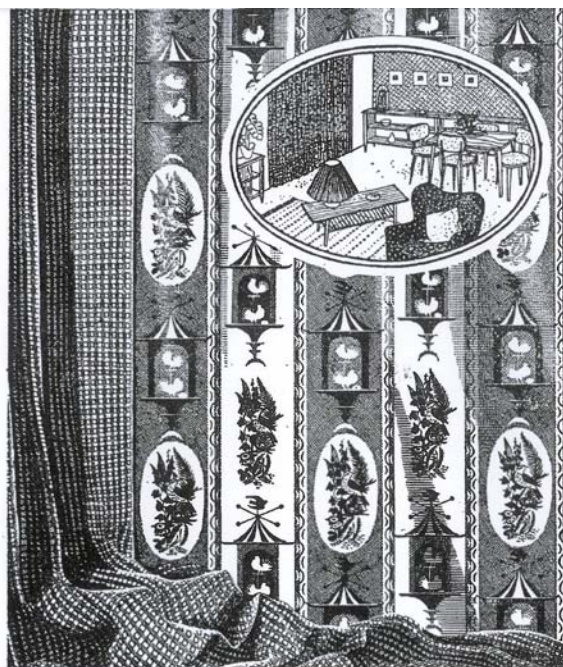
*1954: Shirley 'Barkcloth' Remnant*

Victoria had moved to her Merani Street home in 1951 to be closer to her son Vic who ran a garage north of Auckland. She absolutely loved the climate; it was warm, and warm in a different way to Napier. Best of all, her new home was set two streets back from the beach and she was able to walk there whenever she felt like it. The sea was only five minutes away and she especially loved it when the pohutukawas were flowering along the shoreline and she could wander down to the beach on a balmy summer evening after she had finished her dinner.

It was also a good spot to live in for getting to the shops. Just that morning she had been into town. She could either catch the bus or walk to Devonport, it was easy enough. But Victoria mostly liked to walk down to the ferry then ride the bus back up Lake Road on her way home when her shopping bags were full. It was always pleasant, crossing the harbour on the Calliope to downtown Auckland, then it was just a short walk to where she could get on the Farmers free bus to go around the shops.

Today she had visited Rendalls on Karangahape Road. As soon as she walked in, she headed straight to the back of the store where there was always a sales table of remnants. Straight away she found a lovely piece of

Sundour curtain fabric. It looked like a commercial selling sample and she supposed that the design was no longer available.



### 'Contemporary' or 'modern'?

There are two schools of thought. Some say 'modern': others 'contemporary'.

Well, we can leave those differences to architects, critics and the lexicographers. Our contribution to the discussion is a wide range of Sundour Fabrics—for example like the texture and the print shown here—and that seems to satisfy both schools of thought.

Whether you're thinking of curtains or covers . . . for large rooms or small . . . you can be certain of finding the fabric of your dreams. There's a whole world to choose from—bold prints or dainty chintzes, textures or damasks, velvets or chenilles, dainty marquissettes or gay

sprig muslins. And at prices to suit every purse.

They'll keep their first-day freshness, too—for they are guaranteed against fading. Every one of them. These lovely fabrics are at good stores everywhere.

## SUNDOUR

### fine furnishing fabrics

All Sundour fabrics are guaranteed against fading—most of them for the whole of their life.

MORTON SUNDOUR FABRICS LIMITED, CARLISLE, ENGLAND

Image 33

Advertisement for Sundour furnishing fabrics c. 1954

*Newsview* June 1954 Vol 10 p 92

Victoria tucked it under her arm and was about to walk towards the dress fabric department when a sample length of 'Barkcloth' caught her eye. It was buried under other bits and pieces. She quickly pulled it out and was

delighted to find that the print was of her beloved pohutukawas. The print set the branches and flowers into a soft green background. The flowers were especially lovely as there were two shades of red used to outline the shape of the flower, then small dots of black and yellow to which set it all of very nicely.



Image 34

Detail of the barkcloth and pohutukawa print.

Photographed by the author

Once home, Victoria made herself a pot of tea and carried it on a tray to her sewing room which she had set up in a built in porch at the back of the house. It was the middle of July and not her favourite time of year. But her sewing room was a good place to catch the afternoon sun which filtered in and warmed the room to a pleasant temperature. She had already unpacked her shopping and the 'Barkcloth' piece sat on the daybed waiting for further



inspection. She unfolded the length and draped it over her knee to admire the print.

Victoria's thoughts drifted between what she would make with the fabric and watching her neighbour Shirley out in her garden. Shirley had lived at number 7 for quite a few years and had been the first person in Narrowneck to welcome Victoria into the neighbourhood. Shirley was a terrific gardener and would often pass vegetable and flowers over the back fence to Victoria when they were in abundance. Everything she grew seemed to thrive. Victoria liked the idea of gardening – because she believed in good health from food. However, she had never really enjoyed it to the same degree as Shirley.

Victoria decided that she would make Shirley a pinnie as a gift. She had that Academy pattern that she had bought last year. It was a lovely wrap-around style that overlapped at the back and had good deep pockets for carrying bits and pieces. She was certain that there would be enough fabric to make the shorter one. Putting her tea cup down, Victoria stood up and found the box where she kept her sewing patterns. She also found her tape measure which she had left hanging around the door handle. The instructions on the back of the pattern said that the pinnie would take 2½ yards of 36" material. However she knew that it was possible to get the pattern out of less fabric – and besides the width of the barkcloth was 47". If push came to shove, Victoria

thought that she could always find a contrasting piece of fabric to make the pockets and ties.

### *1954 – Home and Interiors*

The 1950s are exemplified by the shift away from austerity and a general acceptance of modernism.<sup>310</sup> Women's magazines reflect this in their contents by focusing on family, home and interiors. Advertisements for textiles and products intended for dressing the home featured with greater significance while ubiquitous dressmaking fabrics and home sewing appear to take second stage. This period also represents a certain level of social conformity distinguished by a greater acceptance of ready-to-wear fashion.<sup>311</sup> This suggests that resourceful creations that were previously associated with 'making do' were no longer an important theme for magazines to endorse.

There are three pieces of barkcloth fabric in Victoria Wood's collection. All three are commercial samples which suggest that they were sold as remnants after the design was discontinued. Barkcloth was a popular furnishing fabric from the 1950s through to the 1970s and all three pieces in the collection suggest a 1950s aesthetic. The Shirley piece stands out in the collection because the print design is distinguishable as a pohutukawa which bears a

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<sup>310</sup> Lloyd Jenkins, *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design*, 123.

<sup>311</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s."

strong relationship to the Narrowneck location where Victoria Wood lived for five years.

There was a practical side to Victoria Wood's sewing habits and along with garments and mending, she loved to make pinnies. There are several patterns for aprons in the suitcases and Marilyn still owns quite a few that were made for both her and Ilene. (Appendix A2 SC1 o30-P p188)

Aprons have a strong association with female domestic habits and have persisted as a well-recognised part of women's wear for everyday household requirements.<sup>312</sup> The 'pinnie' was a necessary garment for all women because it provided practical protection for garments from household work, yet at the same time, it was also a social statement because the quality of the apron reflected the occasion.<sup>313</sup> According to Rosemary McLeod, the variety of 'pinnies' that women produced were often indicative of the task they were intended to be worn for. She describes the differences:

There were aprons for every possible nuance of formality and informality, and for every type of work; from playing at being a formal hostess to burning rubbish in the back yard. Fine embroidery skill might be lavished on them, or they might be just a crude sacking oblong bound with cloth; it

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<sup>312</sup> McLeod, *Thrift to Fantasy: Home Textile Crafts of the 1930s - 1950s*.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

could be the difference between wearing a ball gown and wearing dungarees.<sup>314</sup>

The Shirley Barkcloth is dobby or jacquard woven to create a lengthwise ripple like tree bark. The yarn is made of short cotton staples; both the warp and weft have a crepe twist.<sup>315</sup> The fabric is printed in several sequences onto a white base cloth. The print consists of a pale green splatter and pale blue/grey that suggests a shadow of the main print. The dominant print is overlaid by brown and grey pohutukawa tree branches with leaves printed using several shades of green. The flower print uses two shades of red with a yellow and black accent.

The fabric is folded from selvedge to selvedge with the wrong sides together and the cut edges are pinked to suggest that it is a commercial sample. The piece is 33" long and at 47" wide and is in excellent condition. The piece is possibly a remnant purchase and it is a heavy weight with a dense handle which suggests its durability and suitability for an apron.

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 245-46.

<sup>315</sup> Humphries, *Fabric Glossary*.

Shirley Barkcloth c. 1954  
SC2 o 54 - F

Victoria decided that she would make Shirley a pinnie as a gift. She had that Academy pattern that she had bought last year. It was a lovely wrap-around style that overlapped at the back and had good deep pockets for carrying bits and pieces. She was certain that there would be enough fabric to make the shorter one. Putting her tea cup down, Victoria stood up and found the box where she kept her sewing patterns. She also found her tape measure which she had left hanging around the door handle. The instructions on the back of the pattern said that the pinnie would take 2 1/2 yards of 36" material. However she knew that it was possible to get the pattern out of less fabric - and besides the width of the barkcloth was 47". If push came to shove, Victoria thought that she could always find a contrasting piece of fabric to make the pockets and ties.



Image 35

Design page for Shirley Barkcloth remnant

Created by author

*1955: Janey Nylon Flock*

The most exciting thing about moving to a new area was getting to know all the new shops. Papatoetoe in South Auckland was probably the most rural place that Victoria Wood had ever lived, but it was a growing community and she was intrigued by the productivity of the surrounding area which grew vast amounts of vegetables for the city folk. The town was modern and showed great promise, especially for the young families and this made Victoria very happy.

Victoria loved her new house. Out of all the houses she had lived in, this one had by far the best sewing room that she had ever had. It was a converted sun room at the front of the house and it faced out into the street. But the positioning of the building meant that sun streamed into the room for the best part of the day. Not only was it the best thing about her new home, but because she liked to spend a great deal of time in it, it meant that she was always warm and comfortable. The other thing about the room was that it was the biggest sewing room that she had ever had and she had plenty of room to store all her bits and pieces.

Victoria had made it a point to quickly get to know the local shopping centre. Papatoetoe did not have the department stores that she was used to, but

instead shops that were more specialised in what they sold. There was a local fabric shop, Rannochs, and it was the first that she had seen of its type. It did not sell clothing or household goods like the shops she was used to in her city shopping escapades. But if she felt like it, it was still easy enough to catch the bus into the city to do the usual traps.

The people who owned Rannochs were lovely. Victoria found them interesting to talk to. They had a notice board just inside the door and on the odd occasion allowed a local craft group to sell raffle tickets outside their premises. Victoria had observed on her very first visit to the store that there was a small group of hobbyists who dressed dolls for community fundraising. They had a raffle coming up and were interested to recruit new enthusiasts into their group.

Victoria made enquiries at the shop counter and they kindly gave her the name and phone number of the club president. She telephoned that afternoon to introduce herself and enquired about the group and spoke to Iris, who sounded very friendly. Iris told her that the club would meet on the following Wednesday afternoon at the Plunket rooms on Kolmar Road and Victoria was more than welcome to join them.

Wednesday came around quickly and Victoria arrived at the Plunket rooms with five minutes to spare. She enquired of one of the women there and asked her to point Iris out. Iris sat at a table with a basket of fabric and a Pedigree doll still in its box sitting on the table in front of her. On her lap sat a young girl who Victoria found out later was Iris's granddaughter, Janey, who looked a sweet little thing. Iris was busy trying to stop Janey pulling the doll out of its box.



Image 36

Pedigree Doll advertisement c 1955

*Woman's Choice* December 1955 – January 1956 p.18



After everyone had arrived, the group sat down around the table and Iris introduced Victoria to the other women. They soon got down to business and voted that the money raised from this raffle would go to Plunket. One of the women in the group produced an Enid Gilchrist book full of patterns for dolls clothes. It was passed around the table and Victoria thought that they were lovely and decided at that point that she would dress a doll in bridal costume for Marilyn. Christmas was just four weeks away and she was sure that Marilyn would love one.

On her way home, she called into Rannochs to have a look at their remnants. There were quite a few to choose from. She talked to the woman behind the counter about her idea. They chatted for a while and she suggested that Victoria might like to buy a dressmaking pattern for dolls clothes while she was there. They were very easy to adjust once you knew the height of the doll. Victoria chose a pattern and a piece of flocked nylon with flowers and dots. While she waited for her change, she commented to the sales woman that nylon was certainly very popular now.



Image 37  
Detail of Janey flocked nylon  
Photographed by the author

### ***1955 – Modernity and Marriage***

Nylon is the second most frequent fabric in Victoria Wood's suitcases and, with the exception of one dress-length piece, all of the other nylon pieces are categorised as remnants and are white, powder blue or pink. The collection of nylon fabrics illustrate the shift in Victoria Wood's sewing habits as she grew older and became more interested in craft. In her later years, she was very enthusiastic about dressing dolls and there are several bridal doll patterns in the suitcases to support this contention. (Appendix A2 SC1 o13-P p180)

Even though dressing dolls was a popular pastime for many women, there is no account of it in the scholarly literature. It is believed that dolls were used to reinforce values of motherhood and nurturing for little girls and therefore played a part in disseminating domestic ideology through education. This suggests that creating clothes for dolls came from a similar impetus.

I believe the bridal costume reflects current thinking, which was epitomised by strong family values. The focus in this instance suggests that marriage is the happy option, which, once the rite of passage was achieved, a woman could look forward to a life happily focused on her role of wife, mother and a homemaker with a loving husband to support her.

Fiona McKergow describes the 1950s as a time which focused on “the new and clean”.<sup>316</sup> Nylon played a role in shifting the domestic values into modernity. Nylon was the second synthetic fibre developed for mass-consumption and it was promoted as a fibre which would improve on the general upkeep appearance and longevity of garments. In this way, nylon was understood as a friend to every woman and its acceptance built on existing ideals of social conformity in home and family life.<sup>317</sup> Nylon also made it possible for every woman to achieve the ‘fashion look’. Its capability

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<sup>316</sup> McKergow, "Opening the Wardrobe of History: Dress, Artefacts and Material Life of the 1940s and 1950s," 82.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

to hold its shape of fussy garment details such as pleats and frills meant that the softer feminine look of fashion was easily achieved by many.<sup>318</sup> Nylon was given a personality and its virtues were highly visible in magazines and newspapers.<sup>319</sup>

In one decade, nylon has come into our lives: by itself or blended with other fibres, nylon can be the most important thing in your wardrobe. For now, whatever you wear, nylon will make it: however hard you wear it, nylon can take it. Whether its frock or foundations, blouses or jerseys that you need – anything, in fact, that must wear and wash and come up fresh and smooth as new- nylon has it all ways.<sup>320</sup>

The Janey flock nylon is a balanced plain weave. Both the warp and weft are high twist continuous filament yarns. The piece is of light weight and the weave is sheer and it has a crisp handle. The fabric is yarn dyed with a flocking applied through a printing process with a repeat of small dots and a floral rosette motif.

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<sup>318</sup> Handley, *Nylon: The Manmade Fashion Revolution; a Celebration of Design from Art Silk to Nylon and Thinking Fibres*; Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*.

<sup>319</sup> Harden and Turney, *Floral Frocks: A Celebration of the Floral Printed Dress from 1900 to the Present Day*, 72.

<sup>320</sup> "Nylon Has It All Ways," *My Home*, April 1954.

The fabric has a stamp mark at one end which suggests it was an end of roll remnant. The stamp is a red rectangle and contains the letters JSTIIF. The piece is in good condition and measures 1.8 yard long and 47" wide.

### Janey Nylon Flock c.1955

SC1 04 - F

One of the women produced an Enid Gilcrist book full of patterns for dolls clothes. It was passed around the table and Victoria thought that they were lovely and decided at that point that she would dress a doll in bridal costume for Marilyn. Christmas was just four weeks away and she was sure that Marilyn would love one.

On her way home, she called into Rannochs to have a look at their remnants. There were quite a few to choose from. She talked to the woman behind the counter about her idea. They chatted for a while and she suggested that Victoria might like to buy a dressmaking pattern for dolls clothes which she was there. They were very easy to adjust once you knew the height of the doll. Victoria chose a pattern and a piece of flocked nylon with flowers and dots. While she waited for her change, she commented to the sales woman that nylon was certainly very popular now.



Image 38

Design page for Janey flocked nylon

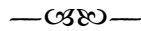
Created by the author

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have used fictional scenarios to show how fabrics bought for dressmaking can symbolise a particular time or a person. I have selected five fabric pieces from Victoria Wood's collection and included them in an account which anchors the fabrics into particular social and cultural scenarios. I have made particular reference to women, their shopping habits and the domestic practice of sewing, using the findings from chapters one and two to do this.

The fabrics in the suitcases also provide a succinct demonstration of shifting fashion and fabric trends. These are understood through fibre and weave analysis. I have also suggested possible outcomes for each fabric piece based on the fabric type, fashion styles from each period and the finished cut length of each piece which draws from my own knowledge of pattern cutting and vintage dress styles.

## Conclusion



This thesis has explored the way in which fabrics bought for the creation of clothing or craft can provide social and cultural narratives in the same way that clothing has been used to represent the past or a person. This study has identified that dressmaking fabrics have not yet been acknowledged in scholarly research as important for doing this. For this reason, I have unpacked the fabrics from Victoria Wood's suitcases and have used them with her biography to construct parallel narratives of home-sewing and domestic experiences of New Zealand women from 1935 – 1955.

I surveyed the literature and developed a framework for investigating my research question. This included research into contemporary popular literature, conducting oral histories and research-based speculation. Through these methods, I have explored how dressmaking fabric bought and saved could simultaneously embody emotional and cultural perspectives. As part of the strategy, object analysis has been utilised. This included coding and documenting each item in the suitcases with detailed descriptions and an understanding of provenance for the period each particular piece of fabric came from.

I have made use of my personal knowledge of patternmaking, garment assembly and fashion history and incorporated them into other fashion sources framed by theories from material cultural studies. I have asserted that dressmaking fabrics should be regarded as 'cultural residue', and yet, at the same time, share a similar space that would otherwise regard them as 'objects'. This approach has been influenced by the methods employed by Barbara Burman in her examination of cloth pockets held in British museum collections.<sup>321</sup> She has provided a model to analyse the fabric lengths and establish their social and cultural significance which was undertaken in conjunction with oral history sources and contemporary literature sourced primarily from newspapers and women's magazines.

I have found that dressmaking fabrics provide another narrative to existing historical accounts which focus on fashion and clothing. I have also found that fabrics tell another narrative about everyday encounters and experiences of domesticity for many women of the period. This is in contrast to the absence of mass produced fabrics from historical discussions.

I have identified that the material properties of the fabric pieces contribute to the social and cultural narrative and have used them to understand the intrinsic qualities of each piece of cloth, which, in turn, impacts on how fashion

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<sup>321</sup> Burman, "'A Linnen Pockett a Prayer Book and Five Keys': Approaches to a History of Women's Tie-on Pockets".



and clothing might be discussed and imagined. I have demonstrated that the material properties mirror the changing fashion trends and therefore the understanding of their relationship to domesticity, garment possibility and their wearability. I have identified that Victoria Wood's fabric collection reflects the shifts in fibre development throughout the period discussed.

Much like Darby Penney and Peter Stastny's book, *The Lives They Left Behind*,<sup>322</sup> I have drawn on public records and Victoria Wood's personal belongings to construct her biography. The differences between the projects are revealed through the stories of the contents. Penney and Stastny's project uncover lives suspended by circumstances and unfulfilled dreams due to institutionalisation. In contrast, the contents of Victoria Wood's suitcases simultaneously signify connections to the past and future potential. In this, her fabric collecting and sewing habits demonstrate similarities to other women who lived through the era discussed. This is exemplified through contemporary women's columns and magazines and demonstrates a general conformity to recognised sewing trends which had specific shopping traits. The fabric in this instance provides a lens through which to discuss the era, the fashion trends and the possible sewing intentions or garment suitability. I have identified how fabrics are discussed in a similar, but unexamined, way to

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<sup>322</sup> Penney and Stastny, *The Lives They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic*.

fashion and clothing which I believe accounts for their lack of presence in historical and scholarly literature.

I have suggested that the fabrics have a pervasive influence within the constructed notion of domestic values. The acquisition of textiles is therefore a significant ingredient to the allure of craft or the creation of clothing. Along with past emotional connection retained through reuse of existing garments, fabric bought for the creation of clothing can hold a similar emotional intent. Fabrics provided a form of escapism and creativity that to date is unaccounted for. It is clear that fabrics are bought and saved and then they lie as a memory projected forward – one not quite realized but nonetheless real in the minds of the woman who have engaged with them.

Victoria Wood shared some of the typical domestic habits of women from the period that I focus on. She was not always conventional in comparison to the other oral history candidates, yet much of her behaviour was typical for women from that period. The importance of textiles, their ownership, collecting and saving is therefore understood as a well recognised feminine narrative and Victoria Wood's fabric collection attests to this.

Barbara Burman makes a resonant reference to the work of Henry Glassie in the field of material culture which describes the importance of the cultural

essence held in objects, even those of everyday quality created through mass-manufacture. I believe that because these fabrics have been produced by mass-manufacture, they allow for a broader understanding of social and cultural existences and the formation of constructed ideologies such as domesticity.

This study has also identified areas that are, to date, gaps in historical research into the home-sewing practices of women. For example, one area open for further study is the craft of creating and dressing dolls. There is no scholarly literature about the habit of dressing dolls which was apparently a common practice for women from this period. While there is a strong body of information that supports the collection of dolls and toys – the only references to dressing dolls and the creation of knitted toys exists in their recipes of construction, rather than examination of the practice.

This thesis has demonstrated how speculative research can simultaneously represent personal and social narratives which reflect the domestic experiences of the period. The selections of fabrics discussed are therefore representative of Victoria Wood's sewing habits and the fabric collecting and suggest sewing habits of many women who lived in the post war period. To conclude, I have written five stories that enact the idea of escapism and creativity which I believe are unaccounted for in scholarly writing on fabric

collecting and home sewing. These stories underline the importance of a fabric collection to women who sew.

# Appendices



## Table of Appendices

<b>A1</b>	– Basic Aesthetic Terms Used with Fabrics and Fibres	<b>175</b>
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***A1: Basic Aesthetic Terms Used with Fabrics and Fibres***<sup>323</sup>

**Hand:** Feel or handle. It may be warm or fuzzy and dry or cool; smooth and slippery or fuzzy, rough, bumpy; soft or firm; “sleazy” or with good body; drapable, even limp, or crisp, stiff, wiry.

**Flexibility:** Suppleness, pliability, important to draping ability. Drapability as well as softness is related to fibre diameter (fineness); a fine staple fibre allows a fine, even, smooth, lustrous, strong yarn. Terms used for fineness are usually derived from yarn count such as denier or decitex and wool quality numbers.

**Lustre:** Subdued, pleasing shine or sheen; related to the fibre surface (smooth or rough) plus the shape of a cross section of the fibre. A round cross section would yield shine; a non-round or lobal cross section will yield lustre.

**Foxing:** Melanin pigments that have oxidised with age to a reddish-brown colour. (A term commonly used in the book trade and

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<sup>323</sup> Humphries, *Fabric Reference*, 6.

refers to spotted stains on paper that is found in antique books)



It is a borrowed term in this instance. The fabrics that display

'foxing' are all rayon fibres and therefore made from a cellulose




fibre – like paper.





**A2: Inventory of suitcases and their contents.**




1	Image		
2	SC = Suitcase one or two		
3	Sequence of unpacking (o = object)		
F	Fabric		
N	Notions i.e. buttons, braiding and lace		
P	Dressmaking patterns		
C	Containers	G	Garment Length
T	Tools of clothing production	R	Remnant
M	Memorabilia including clothing	O	Off-cut



1	2	3	F	N	P	C	T	M	Code	Description
	SC1	o1				✓			SC1 o1 -C	<u>Dark Brown Suitcase</u> : made from compressed cardboard. It measures 65 x 39 x 17 cm and is battered and well used. The handle is rusty and there are several stickers applied on the right hand end. Some are luggage labels and others are cataloguing label to suggest the contents. Possible era is 1940s
	SC1	o2						✓	SC1 o2 -M	<u>Fabric Sun Hat</u> : it has a soft crown in the centre of an 18cm wide cardboard brim that is covered in the same fabric. The brim has 5 rows of chain stitching placed at regular distances between the brim and the crown edge. The inside seams have raw edges and are also chain stitched. There is a bias strip stitched around the crown edge and two straps attached. The inside circumference is 53 cm. It is folded in half and a faded orange cotton with a stylised print of fern fronds and curls. Possible era is late 1930s







	SC1	o3		✓					SC1 o3 -N	<p><u>Braiding in a Supaloc Bag</u>: a Lynn Laces card wrapped in a 5 different colours of braiding trim. The card is folded in half to contain two addition braids. One is a white pompom braiding and a plaited red and white braiding. The original card was sold with an 8mm trim of cream and gold which has 2 silver threads running through its length. The other colours are cream and gold, white, yellow and lilac, and silver. There is a length of cut stocking tied around the bound card. The card is contained in a Supaloc bag that measures 27 x 15 cm. Possible era is late 1950s</p>
	SC1	o4	✓						SC1 04 -F R	<p><u>White Nylon Flocked Fabric</u>: the base of the fabric is sheer and made of a high spun filament yarn, woven as a plain weave and has been printed with a white flocking repeat of a floral rosette motif and dots. The piece is folded selvedge to selvedge with right sides together. There is approximately 1.9 yds (1.7m) at 45" (1.12m) wide. It has a crisp handle. The end of the piece is stamped with a production mark. It is a red rectangle with the letters JSTIIF inside. This suggests that it is a remnant purchase. Possible era is mid 1950s</p>
	SC1	o5	✓						SC1 o5 -F R	<p><u>White Leaf Flocked Nylon Fabric</u>: the base of the fabric is sheer and made of a high spun filament yarn, woven as a plain weave and printed with a white flocking repeat motif of leaves and berries. It is folded cut edge to cut edge and has a hard slippery handle. There is approximately 2.5 yds (2.2m) at 45" (1.12m) wide. The white is such that it has a purple sheen to it. Possible era late 1950s</p>



	SC1	o6						✓	SC1 o6 -M	<p><u>Unpicked Wedding Dress in Plastic Bag</u>: 5 skirt panels laid flat and folded to fit into a large plastic bag with no upper body components. The panels are A-line and the sewing edges cut with pinking shears. The panels are in varying lengths and shaped to suggest an empire line style with longer panels at the back to form a train. The two back panels are stiffer and starched to support the train style. The fabric is satin brocade woven with warp floats that cross over two weft yarns into a floral bouquet repeat. The yarn is a continuous filament yarn and polyester. Foxing is prominent on all panels. It has a firm drape. Possible era is 1960s</p>
	SC1	o7	✓						SC1 o7 -F R	<p><u>Cream Embroidered Organdie Fabric</u>: the base of the fabric is sheer and woven from a high twist staple yarn as a tight plain weave. The piece is embroidered with floral motif repeat of 3 rosettes and leaves in a triangle configuration. There is approximately 1.3 yds (1.2m) at 44" (1.10m) wide. The piece is folded cut end to cut end with right sides of the fabric together. The piece has foxing marks which in one part has turned into a hole. Possible era is 1950s</p>
	SC1	o8	✓						SC1 o8 -F O	<p><u>Nylon Pleated Strip</u>: a short length of white pleated nylon knit fabric. The piece is stained with a central fold and has been cut and pressed in half. Possible era is 1960s</p>
	SC1	o9						✓	SC1 o9 -M	<p><u>Petticoat Frill</u>: cut from the end of the garment this piece has been retained for its lace frill. The frill has two parts that make up the details. They are a woven embroidered scalloped piece which is stitched to a knitted pleated strip. The two are stitched together the attached to the petticoat hem with an overlocker. A portion of lace has been removed. Possible era is late 1950s</p>



	SC1	o10					✓	SC1 o10 -M	<p><u>Suspenders and Lace Cuffs</u>: a cellophane bag containing 4 sets of suspenders and 1 single. 2 pairs of black and 1 white still in their original packaging. The brand name is “Goral – invisible suspenders” and the card is blue and the back of the packaging provides instructions on how to use the stocking clasps. There is another white pair in a smaller plastic bag and 1 unpaired pink suspender of a different style. The bag also contains two pieces of machine made lace which are held together by maroon thread. These appear to have been unpicked from the cuffs of a garment. Possible era is 1950s</p>
	SC1	o11					✓	SC1 o11 -M	<p><u>Caley's Chocolate Box</u>: a 1 lb chocolate box containing a fabric floral spray from a wedding cake. The box has browned with age and the lid is damaged by silverfish. There are two annotations written by Mrs Wood on the box lid and along the width end. “off llene wedding cake, 8/4/42” The annotation appears to have been done on separate occasions. The floral spray is made up of blossoms and stems of lily of the valley. The leaves are made of silver foil and all is tied with a cream satin ribbon. Possible era of the box is early 1950s, the floral spray is 1942</p>
	SC1	o12		✓				SC1 o12 -N	<p><u>Silver Braid on Blue Card</u>: the blue card is from a commercial supplier of haberdashery but there are no commercial markings. Written in black crayon on one side is “8' Card” and in pencil on the opposite side positioned under the braid is “6' per yard”. This suggests that it is a sales table purchase. The braiding is ½ inch (1.2cm) wide. It is woven with a dark grey edge and a central silver herring bone pattern made up of rayon fibre floats. The braiding is lustrous and shows a similar aesthetic to uniform styling. Possible era is 1940</p>

	SC1	o13		✓					SC1 o13 -P	<p><u>Dolls Clothes, Soft Toys and Smock Patterns:</u> a group of four pattern instructions are folded around their associated patterns but are missing their envelopes. Two of the patterns are dolls clothing, one pattern is soft toy animals and the last is a 60s style work smock. There is also a hand drafted pattern piece made from brown paper written on by Mrs Wood with "Heart shape pyjama &amp; nightie bag – make 2 pink, 2 blue". The oldest dolls clothes pattern instruction sheet has a hand written annotation which reads "Heigh [sic] 18". It is a Simplicity pattern 7971. Written on the soft toy instruction sheet is "cat". It is Simplicity 7929. Both of these patterns are dated 1955. The last doll instruction sheet is Simplicity 8561 which Mrs Wood has written "Marilyn doll 16 in Hight [sic] 16"". This pattern is dated 1968. The last sheet is simplicity 7596. The instruction sheet is wrapped around another Simplicity pattern style 7903. Both patterns are 1960s styled work smocks. The pattern tissue of all patterns remains uncut.</p> <p>The patterns are contained in a plastic bag that is turned inside out.</p>
	SC1	o14		✓					SC1 o14 -N	<p><u>Card with Lace Remnants:</u> A piece of card which is cut from an Irvines frozen steak and kidney pie box is rapped with a variety of white and cream lace trim remnants. The card is folded in thirds and holds five different lace styles, which are machine made and secured into position with a beaded dress making pin. There is three other small lace remnants held inside the folded card, two are wound into smaller skeins. The plastic bag is well used and worn. It has a large hole that extends the full width of one side. Possible era is 1950s</p>

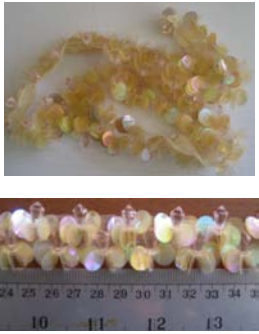

	SC1	o15	✓						SC1 o15 –F	<p><u>Apricot Cotton Organdie</u>: the base of this fabric is made from a high twist staple yarn. The fibre is cotton and the piece is translucent and a fabric that would have been used for undergarments or nightwear. It has as crisp papery handle. The piece is yarn dyed an apricot colour and printed with a small floral repeat which consists of clusters with deep and light pink flowers with an accent of green and light blue leaves. The fabric piece is 2.5 yards long and 36" wide (2.2m x 90 cm) There is slight damage and water stains at one of the cut ends. The piece is folded in from cut end to cut end and is creased to retaining the memory of the folds.</p> <p>Possible era is 1940s</p>
	SC1	o16	✓						SC1 o16 –F	<p><u>Tangerine Damask Art Silk</u>: a dark orange brocade fabric which is 10½ yards long an 26" wide (approx 9.5m x 66 cm) It is Japanese rayon and is woven with a continuous filament yarn that is yarn dyed and woven on a jacquard loom which reveals shows raised areas of yarn floats in the form of a floral spray woven with filament yarns. The yarn structure is made from rayon fibre; the warp and weft yarns are both loose and yarn dyed. The sheen of the fibre makes the pattern very shiny and light reflective. It is folded in a concertina configuration and is possibly an end of bold purchase. There are a few spots and fade marks. There are production stamps at the end of the cloth which read <i>Imperial Japanese Passed</i>. It is of medium weight with a moderate drape. The fabric is of poor quality and would not be suitable for fitted garments as the seams would be prone to seam slippage. Possible era is 1940s</p>



	SC1	o17		✓					SC1 o17 -N	<p><u>Braiding and Piping</u>: a plastic bag which contains two cards of braiding. One card has been hand cut and wound with two 'colourways' of corded piping. The colours are white with a black trim and white with a green trim and both measure approximately 6mm in width. There is a line drawing of a ballerina on one side and hand written annotation that state how much of each is wrapped on the card. 3 yards for the black and 4 yards for the green, both written in red pen.</p> <p>The second card is from Lynn Laces in Auckland and is in its original packaging. The uneven thickness of the braiding on the card suggests that it is not of its original length of 36 yards stated on the braiding cover. Portions of the braid have been removed by pulling it through and underneath the packaging. The braiding is pale grey in colour and intended for corset lacing. The plastic bag is held together with a perished rubber band – now broken. The plastic bag has a small piece of perished Sellotape at the open end. Possible era is late 1950s</p>
	SC1	o18		✓					SC1 o18 -F  R	<p><u>Powder Blue Nylon Tricot</u>: a powder blue nylon fabric which has a double knitted structure which creates a pleating detail on the right side of the fabric. It is 1.7 yards long and 47" wide (1.6m x 1.2m). There are small areas of foxing. The pleating detail runs parallel with the selvedge length.</p> <p>The fabric s folded in a selvedge to selvedge with right side together. Possible era is 1960s</p>



	SC1	o19	✓						<p>SC1 o19 -F</p> <p>G</p>	<p><u>Sky Blue Celanese</u>: a length of sky blue rayon lining fabric which is folded and rolled into a bundle which has then been tied with a length of cream braiding. It is 4.3 yards long and 30' wide. (approx 3.9 m x 75cm) It is a plain weave which has been yarn dyed. The warp yarn is a continuous filament and the weft is a high twist crepe yarn. It has a smooth surface with a papery handle and would be suitable as a petticoat or under garment. The piece is damaged with signs of fading, foxing and water marks. It is folded in a concertina configuration and at each end of the fabric there is evidence that the fabric has had pieces removed from the original length. The folded piece is rolled into a bundle and tied with a length of cream braiding. Possible era is 1940s.</p>
	SC1	o20	✓						<p>SC1 o20 -F</p> <p>R</p>	<p><u>Dirndle Border Print Remnant</u>: a cotton border print remnant which is 1.3 yards long and 36" wide. (1.2m x 90cm) The yarn is a long length staple and a plain weave then printed. The print is bold and larger at the hem edge and progresses to a smaller print at the waist edge. Colours are shared between each strip of pattern to link the two selvedge edges which both have solid black lines.</p> <p>The pattern is suggestive of fabric that would be sold as a skirt length but the length of this does not provide enough to make a skirt suggesting that is a remnant purchase. Possible era is 1940s.</p>



	SC1	o21	✓						<p>SC1 o21 -F</p> <p>G</p>	<p><u>Tussah Silk</u>: a length of cream tussah silk with a slight water stain at one end and is woven in a plain weave out of continuous filament yarn with slubbing. The fabric is 6 yards long and 29" wide. (Approx 5.4m x 73cm). The piece has a delicate papery sound and is folded in a concertina configuration suggesting that the piece remains as it would from fabric purchase. The fabric is heavily creased.</p> <p>Possible era is 1940s</p>
	SC1	o22			✓				<p>SC1 o22 -C</p>	<p><u>Queen Anne Chocolate Box</u>: a 1 lb chocolate box which contains notions such as buttons, garment rivets, a buckle and a tape measure. Hand writing is on the box in several places and there are two pieces of brown tape which is also written on. The words reference the contents of the box and some have been crossed out to suggest the box has had several storage purposes. Words are "Zips &amp; Short Straps", "Darning Silk", (written twice and crossed out both times) "Odds &amp; Ends", "Bindings", "Receipts" and "Receipts House".</p> <p>The box contains 5 odd large buttons that have been cut of coats, a few still have the original thread that sewed them in place. There are two triangle shaped button cards of purple dyed shell button (12). A large maroon casein plastic belt buckle. A card containing fabric covered buttons with metal trimmed thread holes (71). A small packet of tiny pearl buttons with shanks that feel Victorian (10). An inch rule measuring tape measure which is wound around its metal end and tied with string. A plastic bag containing four brown hair nets and three waxed paper bags labelled George Court Button Bar containing what appears to be decorative garment rivets.</p> <p>Possible eras is 1930s and 1940s</p>









	SC1	o23		✓					SC1 o23 -N	<p><u>Sequin Braid</u>: a strip of sequined braid which is 20" long and ½" wide. (50cm x 1.75mm) It is a sheer nylon ribbon which is stitched and embellished with clear apricot coloured plastic discs, under ½" in diameter (1cm) and sewn in a loop to stand proud. The discs are separated with a small apricot glass beads and small pink teardrop shaped plastic bead which hang from underneath.</p> <p>There are two layers of these and the trim. Imagine it on a crimplene dress with a sweetheart neckline. Possible era is 1960s</p>
	SC1	o24	✓						SC1 o24 -F R	<p><u>Barkcloth Curtain Remnant</u>: a discontinued selling sample which has a sale price tag attached. The fabric piece is bark cloth and it is 50s style of curtaining. The yarn is short cotton staples and both the warp and weft have a crepe twist. It is either dobby or jacquard woven to create a lengthwise texture. The piece measures 34" long and is 47" wide. (87cm x 1.18m) The cut edges are pinked to reduce fraying.</p> <p>The fabric surface is printed onto a white base cloth with a leaf pattern repeat. They are colours of red, brown and yellow with a shadow reference for each leaf in olive green. There is an additional printing layer of black lines on to the leaves to suggest veins and a textural surface. The print pattern permeates to the wrong side of the fabric. The piece is folded cut edge to and has a remnant price tag of 2 shillings. Possible era is 1950s.</p>



	SC1	o25		✓					SC1 o25 -N	<p><u>Ric Rac Remnants</u>: a plastic bag which contains six pieces of hand cut cardboard wound with a variety of white, cream ric rac lengths. There is also one silver length. The four big pieces of card are cut from a corrugated cardboard box utilising some of the internal folding structure of the original box to wrap the ric rac around. There is yellow and blue thread to secure the ric rac. The two smaller cards are hand cut from a lighter weight piece of cardboard. The card containing the silver ric rac is wound around a card that is printed with "Summit of New Zealand, shirts and pyjamas" and secured with a piece of hat elastic. The ric rac is contained in a plastic bag that is turned inside out. Possible era is late 1950s.</p>
	SC1	o26	✓					SC1 o26 -F G	<p><u>Cream Silk Lining</u>: a length of cream silk lining which has a smooth satin hand. It is a plain weave and woven with a continuous filament yarn. The fabric has a high lustre which gives the fabric a satin appearance. It has a papery sound. The length of the piece is approximately 6.5 yards long and 36" wide. (5.8m x 90cm) It is folded in a concertina configuration that suggests it is still folded the same way at time of purchase. Generally the surface is covered with small brown marks or foxing which is more obvious on the fabric surfaces closer to the outer parts of the folds. Possible era is 1950s</p>	


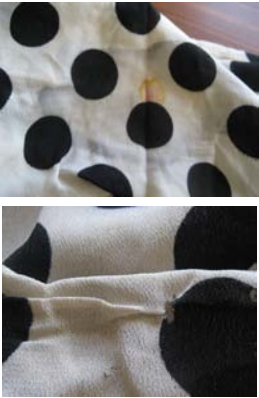

 <p>The image shows three views of a small, rectangular, rusted metal tin. The top view shows the lid with 'AIRMAN SUPERFINE VIRGINIAN CIGARETTES' and 'W. PLAYERS &amp; SONS' embossed on it. The middle view shows the inside of the lid, which is lined with paper. The bottom view shows the interior of the tin, which is filled with a variety of buttons and small objects.</p>	SC1	o27				✓			SC1 o27 -C	<p><u>Airman Cigarette Tin</u>: A small tin branded Airman Superfine Virginian Cigarettes. The tin is very rusty and base is lined with a paper</p> <p>The tin contains 5 foiled pieces of card with small shell buttons (62). This is the card from which they would have been sold from. The remainder are a variety of odd buttons, (17) plastic, (3) glass and (57) shell which have been cut from garments and still have thread attached.</p> <p>At the bottom of the tin there are two saved labels, one from a "Barker and Pollock" remnant. It has written on it 1 ¼ yards at 36" with 7/5 crossed out, the selling price being 2/11. The other from a company called C.Flocton &amp; Co Ltd. P.O.Box 1116 Wellington. Possible era is 1930s</p>
 <p>The image shows a clear glass jar with a red lid. The jar is filled with a variety of small, dark-colored buttons and other small objects.</p>	SC1	o28				✓			SC1 o28 -C	<p><u>Dista Jar with Buttons</u>: A Dista jar with a red lid. The name is embossed in the red lid which is metal and has a foil seal inside.</p> <p>The jar is filled mostly with a variety of small black glass buttons (51). There are also three metal picture frame corners, six small glass beads and a small metal rod approximately 4 cm in length and .15 cm in diameter.</p> <p>Possible era is 1930s</p>

	SC1	o29	✓						<p>SC1 o29 -F G</p>	<p><u>Pink Polyester</u>: a length of pink linen like fabric in a Catalina plastic bag. The fabric is a plain weave with irregular slubbing in a continuous filament of polyester yarn. It is 2.5 yards long and 44" wide. (2.3m x 112cm). It has a firm dense hand. The fabric is folded from cut end to cut suggesting that it is still folded as it would have been at purchase.</p> <p>The plastic bag has lettering which is printed in a royal blue and there are two pieces of perished Sellotape near the top.</p> <p>Possible era is 1970s</p>
	SC1	o30		✓					<p>SC1 o30 -P</p>	<p><u>Pinnie Patterns</u>: a plastic bag which contains three pattern envelopes with apron patterns. The oldest is an Academy Pattern, style number 4009, size 32. It shows two models displayed twice each in different lengths and fabrics. The images are black ink printed on white paper. This envelope is very full and has an additional Academy Pattern envelope inside. It is another apron style number 3218, size 38.</p> <p>The envelope also contains other objects; A NZ Post Office Telegraphs envelope which has newspaper pieces from a home made apron pattern. The last thing inside the envelope is a Butterick pattern, which belongs to an empty pattern envelope from the same plastic bag.</p> <p>The second apron pattern envelope is a Weigels pattern, style number 2341 with four models, size medium. It has no price but I would place this in the early 50s. Lastly there is an empty Butterick pattern envelope, style number 3758 and one size. It is priced at 4/6 or 45c. The flap of this envelope has writing in Mrs Wood script. "Wood 25/7/68. All patterns have been marked up in price. Possible era 1950s and 1960s</p>




	SC1	o31	✓					<p>SC1 o31 -F R</p>	<p><u>Sky Blue Check Weave</u>: a length of sky blue chequered nylon remnant. The yarn is a continuous filament yarn and woven in an elaborate basket weave. The yarn has two different gauge weights which are woven in regular intervals form the chequered pattern. A dense square surrounds a sheer centre and at the centre of the heavier yarn, a detail in the weave forms a small eyelet hole. The fabric has a crisp papery hand.</p> <p>The piece measure 1.8 yards long and is 36" wide.(1.7m x 90cm). Possible era is 1960s</p>
	SC1	o32		✓				<p>SC1 o32 -N</p>	<p><u>Green Furnishing Braid</u>: two short lengths of green furnishing braiding tied with a small length of knitted flesh tone fabric which looks like a length cut from a pair of stockings. There are two lengths held together with a pin. One is 31.5" (80cm) and the other 32" (82cm).</p>
	SC2	o33			✓			<p>SC2 o33 -C</p>	<p><u>Beige and Tan Suitcase</u>: also made from compress cardboard with corners reinforced by tan coloured card and held in place by rivets. There are two vinyl straps riveted to the back and they cross over the lid to meet two corresponding buckles. The catches are rusted and no longer work. The interior of the case is lined with brown check patterned paper with a manufacturers label "Personality Luggage, P.O.Box 340 Auckland". Possible era is lat 1950s.</p>




	SC2	o34	✓						<p>SC2 o34 -F O</p>	<p><u>Nylon Polka Dot Strip</u>: a small strip of white nylon, 11" long and 37" wide. (29cm x 95cm). The fabric is a sheer plain weave base made up from a continuous filament yarn with an applied polka dot flocking. Possible era is 1960s.</p>
	SC2	o35	✓						<p>SC2 o35 -F R</p>	<p><u>Powder Blue Sheer Nylon</u>: a remnant of powder blue sheer nylon which still has its sale price tag attached. It is a plain weave of continuous filament yarn which has a high twist. The fabric is 1.8 yard long at 44" wide. (1.7m x 112cm) The fabric is very sheer and has a crisp hand. The fabric surface is very slippery. At one end there is a sale price tag stapled to the selvedge labelling the length of 1.7/8 yds and priced at 99c which has then been reduced to 79c. The staples hold the two selvedge edges together. Because of the dual annotations of imperial and decimal. Possible era is late 1960s</p>
	SC2	o36	✓						<p>SC2 o36-F O</p>	<p><u>Sheer White Nylon</u>: a thin strip of very sheer nylon measuring 23" long and 44" wide. (58cm x 110cm). It is woven in plain weave from a very fine continuous filament yarn which has a high twist. The nylon is so white it has an almost blue sheen. The ends are frayed and a swatch section has been cut out of one end with pinking shears. Possible era is 1960s</p>

	SC2	o37	✓					<p>SC2 o37 -F G</p>	<p><u>Yellow Floral Nylon #1</u>: a length of yellow floral nylon. It is a plain weave of continuous filament yarn which has a high twist and is yarn dyed. The fabric has been printed with a darker yellow floral cluster with accents of blue and green. The background surrounding the cluster is a motif of fern leaves and curls printed in white. It is 6 yards long at 48" wide. (5.5m x 1.2m). It has a very slippery handle and would be difficult to work with. The fabric is folded cut end to cut end and is held at intervals on the selvedge edge with beaded pins. The ends of the fabric are torn. Possible era is 1967</p>
	SC2	o38	✓					<p>SC2 o38 -F G</p>	<p><u>Yellow Floral Nylon #2</u>: a second piece of the above yellow floral. This piece appears to have been removed from the first length. It has had more handling. It is approximately 2.5 yards long and 48" wide. (2.3m x 1.2). The selvages are folded together with the right sides of the fabric facing together. The selvedge edges are held together with pins at close intervals, there are also places where the thread has been used to secure the edges together. The pins positions are a combination of parallel and perpendicular to the edges. Several weft threads have been removed to find the cross grain before folding. Maroon thread had been woven through the yarns as a guide, supposedly to stop the twisting of the grain. At one end is a tag which may have come from the original purchase of all the yellow fabric (end of bolt remnant) "Rannoch Fabrics" with two price options of 29c or 2/11 dating this piece to 1967 when decimal currency changed. The fabric code written on the label is made with a fountain pen. Staples once held this label to the fabric but they have been removed and Mrs Wood has written on the label "app 2 yds 15 inches long, 48 inches wide". The card has two rusty needles pushed through it. Era is 1967</p>


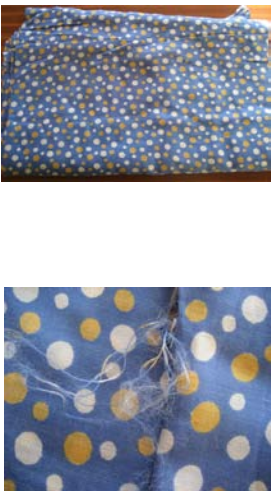
	SC2	o39	✓						SC2 o39 –F <b>R</b>	<p><u>Barkcloth Selling Samples</u>: a discontinued selling sample with four additional smaller pieces in different colour options. The yarn and weave structure is the same as SC1 o24 –F. The piece measures 34” long and is 47” wide. (87cm x 1.18m) The smaller pieces are 14½” x 11”. (31cm x 28cm) The cut edges are pinked to reduce fraying. The pattern consists of three stylised leaf designs printed onto a white base cloth with a repeat block print behind the leaf design. Possible era is late 1950s.</p>
	SC2	o40	✓						SC2 o40 –F <b>O</b>	<p><u>Black Spot Crepe</u>: a white crepe fabric off-cut with printed black spots. It is 68”long and 31” wide. (1.5m x 80cm). The fabric is rayon and made up of spun filament yarns. The warp yarn is a low twist and the weft yarn is a high twist crepe yarn. It is woven with a crepe weave which leave random floats that create a pebbly textured surface. The fabric is in poor condition and has moth holes and has been water damaged. The black dye has bled in parts of the fabric. There is also evidence that dye of a reddish colour has bled into this piece from a neighbouring piece of fabric which is not present in this suitcase. Possible era is 1930s.</p>
	SC2	o41	✓						SC2 o41 –F <b>G</b>	<p><u>Brown Crepe Fabric</u>: a garment length of brown crepe fabric. The fabric is rayon and made up of spun filament yarns. The warp yarn is a low twist and the weft yarn is a high twist crepe yarn. It is woven with a crepe weave which leave random floats that create a pebbly textured surface. The fabric is folded selvedge to selvedge with the right sides of the fabric together. It is 5 yards long and 31” wide. (4.5m x 80cm). It has good drape and good lustre. The piece is in good condition. Possible era is 1930s.</p>


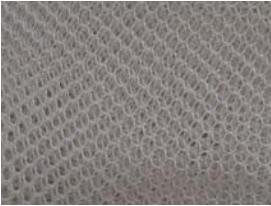







	SC2	o42				✓			SC2 o42 -C	<p><u>A Box of Measuring Tapes</u>: “Butterfly Brand Tailoring Rule”. They are made in China. The cardboard box contains seven tape measures which are wound together and have sat in this configuration since original packing. The tapes plastic material has disintegrated to the point that the tape measures are stuck to each other. The measurements on the tapes are all in inches and were possibly bought when NZ shifted to decimal currency. Possible era is 1967.</p>
	SC2	o43	✓						SC2 o43 -F G	<p><u>Floral Crepe de Chine</u>: a length of brightly coloured silk crepe de chine. The warp is a continuous filament yarn and the weft has a high twist. It is woven in a crepe weave. The print is applied to a white background and is a repeat of multiple floral designs. The flower colours are salmon pink, vermilion red, pale yellow with a black outline on each petal. It is approximately 2.7 yards long and 38” wide. (2.5m x 97cm) It is a Japanese silk and is in excellent condition and it has high lustre and a crisp handle. It is folded selvedge to selvedge with right sides together. Possible era is 1930s.</p>
	SC2	o44	✓						SC2 o44 -F G	<p><u>Yellow Cotton Lawn</u>: a garment length of pale yellow cotton lawn. It is woven in a plain weave with high twist staple yarns. It is yarn dyed and has sheen. It is 4 yards long and 36” wide. (3.7m x 90cm) It is a medium weight and has a firm handle. It is in excellent condition and is folded cut end to cut end. Possible era is late 1950s.</p>




 	SC2	o45					✓	SC2 o45 -T	<p><u>Hem Measuring Rule</u>: a wooden ruler length mounted on a block of wood which is 6.5 cm x 6cm x 14. The rule length is marked in inches and there is a metal mechanism mounted to a cross piece of wood which enables the metal guide to move up and down the length of the rule.</p> <p>It looks home made but this is an assumption. There is a screw at the front which is intended to secure the guide in position on the rule, but this is now rusted and no longer works. Possible era is early twentieth century</p>
	SC2	o46					✓	SC2 o46 -M	<p><u>Roslyn Full Bodies Longjohns</u>: A pair of full bodied fully fashioned long johns. These are in reasonable condition. There is some sign of sweat stains at the under arm with a couple of moth holes on the right side only. The fabric at the underarm has felted a little from the friction of wear. The side seam is cut and sewn as a dart and finishes at the hip area. The fully fashioned knit includes bust shaping.</p> <p>The label at the back neck is "Roslyn 'Delta' Unshrinkable No 79" and sits below a row of cover stitching that attaches a back neck band. The cover stitching runs around the total length of the neck edge. There is a small piece of tape attached at the shoulder neck area to create addition support for wearing stress.</p> <p>The front opening is constructed with strips of viyella and attached from the neck edge to the crotch area to create the opening placket. There are seven shell buttons sewn at 9cm intervals.</p> <p>The placket opening ends just above where the torso part of the garment bifurcates into the individual leg shapes. The top of the in-leg seam is reinforced with a piece of cotton tape that supports for additional wearing stress created from donning and doffing. Possible era is 1930s</p>









	SC2	o47	✓					<p>SC2 o47 –F <b>G</b></p>	<p><u>Blue Floral Crepe</u>: the fabric is rayon and made up of spun filament yarns. The warp yarn is a low twist and the weft yarn is a high twist crepe yarn. It is woven with a crepe weave which leave random floats that create a pebbly textured surface. Floral motifs are printed onto a sky blue background. The piece is folded selvedge to selvedge with the wrong sides of the fabric together.</p> <p>The floral repeat is a posy print of cream, orange and navy. The background leaves are left white as the original base cloth colour. It has been printed using the discharge printing method.</p> <p>The fabric is 4½ yards and 31” wide. (4m x 80cm) It has a soft drape. Possible era is 1930s.</p>
	SC2	o48	✓					<p>SC2 o48 –F <b>G</b></p>	<p><u>Blue Rayon with Yellow and Cream Dots</u>: a length of blue rayon which has been printed using the discharge print method. It has mustard yellow and cream dots. (The cream being the base cloth colour). The fabric is a plain weave woven with a continuous filament yarn. The warp yarn is tightly spun and the warp yarn bulkier and looser. The fabric has been treated for crease resistance which adds sheen to the surface.</p> <p>The fabric is 8½ yards and 36” wide. (8m x 90cm). It is folded selvedge to selvedge with the wrong sides together. There is a thread tied along the selvedge edge to indicate a fabric flaw. The flaw is a double bleach line that runs across the width. It is a mid weight fabric and has a moderate drape.</p> <p>Possible era is late 1940s.</p>

	SC2	o49	✓						SC2 o49 –F <b>G</b>	<u>Self Stripe Rayon</u> : a length of cream self stripe fabric that is woven with continuous filament yarns. The warp is a filament and the weft a high twist crepe yarn. The stripes follow the weft yarn. The wider stripes are constructed with a plain weave of six returns. The warp yarn then floats the weft by two or three returns to create the stripe. The fabric is 2.5 yards long and 34” wide. (2.3m x 86cm). The fabric is a yellow cream shade and there are foxing marks on the fabric. It holds the smell left from a scented liner. The creases in the fabric suggest that the piece has been folded for some time and possibly in the same configuration since purchase. Possible era is 1940s.
	SC2	o50	✓						SC2 o50 –F <b>R</b>	<u>Cream Veil Netting</u> : a length of cotton veil netting with a reasonably soft handle. The dimension of the piece is 2 yard long and 51” wide. (2.25m x 1.3m). There are no obvious indicators to tell which is length or width. There are prominent moth holes on the folded edges. It has a soft but crunchy handle, and was possible used for petticoats of bridal veils. Possible era is 1950s
	SC2	o51	✓						SC2 o51 –F <b>G</b>	<u>Mouldy Black Crepe</u> : a length of crepe backed satin which is folded with the cut end to cut end and right sides together. It is woven with continuous filament rayon yarn. The warp is a high twist crepe yarn and the weft is low twist. The piece is 5 yards long and 37” wide. (4.5m x 95cm).  The piece has a luxurious handle and drapes beautifully, it is a faux crepe de chine and also has a great deal of white mould on its surface. Possible era is 1940s.




	SC2	o52	✓						<p>SC2 o52 -F O</p>	<p><u>Powder Blue Flocked Nylon</u>: a small piece of powder blue sheer nylon fabric with applied white flocked dots. The base cloth is yarn dyed and woven with a high twist filament yarn. The main piece measures 37 x 37" (95 x 95cm) and it has a section cut out of it. This piece is possibly an off-cut as it has folded with it, small scrap pieces folded with the main piece, but the cut edges of the scrap pieces do not appear to match directly to the main piece. Possible era is 1950s</p>
	SC2	o53						✓	<p>SC2 o53 -M</p>	<p><u>Silk Headscarf</u>: a black sheer silk headscarf measuring 29 x 29" (74 x 74cm). It is silk chiffon and hemmed with a very fine machine stitched handkerchief edge. Possible era is 1950s</p>
 	SC2	o54	✓						<p>SC2 o54 -F R</p>	<p><u>Pohutukawa Barkcloth</u>: a discontinued selling sample of barkcloth with a pohutukawa print. The yarn and weave structure is the same as SC1 o24 -F. The piece measures 34" long and is 47" wide. (87cm x 1.18m) The cut edges are pinked to reduce fraying. The base cloth is white and has been printed with a pale green splatter and pale blue/grey that suggests a shadow of the main print. The dominant print is overlaid with brown and grey tree branches with leaves printed using several shades of green. The flower print uses two shades of red with a yellow and black accent. Possible era is 1950s</p>

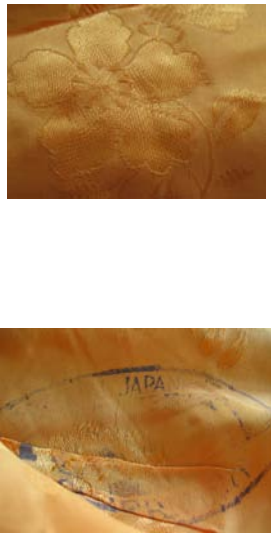
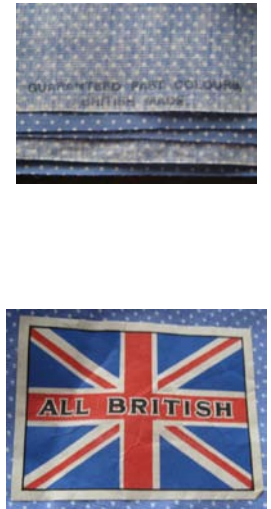
	SC2	o55	✓						SC2 o55 –F <b>O</b>	<p><u>Teal Blue Print</u>: there are two small pieces of printed fabric that is a plain weave woven in a spun yarn of rayon staples.</p> <p>The pieces are 24” and 1 yard long by 36” wide. (62cm and 1m x 90cm) Both pieces are folded selvedge to selvedge with wrong sides together. The print consists of a small spray of lily of the valley flowers tied in a bow of periwinkle blue with a gold floral print. It is a medium to light weight and the handle is soft and has a sensible feel that you would associate with regular wear and washing. Possible era is 1940s</p>
 	SC2	o56	✓						SC2 o56 –F <b>G</b>	<p><u>Cream Tussah Silk</u>: two lengths of cream raw silk which are folded and contained together. Both pieces are woven with a continuous filament silk yarn in a plain weave configuration.</p> <p>The smaller piece measures 1.8 yards long and the second 4.5 yards long. Both pieces are 33” wide. (1.5m &amp; 4.1m x 85cm). The smaller length is folded cut end to cut end and the longer piece selvedge to selvedge.</p> <p>They appear to be part of an end of roll purchase as there are three blue stripe line 4.5 cm in from the warp edge, and the warp yarns a like a fringing suggestive of how they would appear when cut from the end of the loom. The fabric is stamped at this end “Made in China”. It is a medium to heavy weight and has a dense handle. Possible era is 1930s</p>





 	SC2	o57						✓	SC2 o57 -M	<p><u>Howdens Box</u>: A small brown cardboard box that appears to have once contained a watch or some sort of jewellery. The box measures 9.5 x 9.5 x 2 cm and the top surface has a slight wood grain look. The top and lip edge of the lid has a cream border edge. The lid is embossed with “Jewellers and Watch Specialists, Howdens Hamilton NZ”. Opposing sides of the box lid has two part circles removed from the cardboard edge to make removing the lid easier. Inside the box is a small spray of flowers. The petals are made from a stiffened cotton fabric and accompanied by silver fern like leaves. There is a worn and frayed ribbon tying the little posy together. The flower spray sits on top of a hand written card, is written in blue ink. The card says;</p> <p>“To Dear Mother. As a small token of our appreciation and love on our wedding day. From Ray and Ilene 8:4:42 a souvenir from our wedding cake”.</p>
	SC2	o58	✓						SC2 o58 -F <b>G</b>	<p><u>Green Stripe Lining</u>: a length of green woven stripe lining, yarn dyed and woven in a plain weave. The yarn is a continuous filament. There are two shades of green, the darker green stripe has an edge of a softer green and then are separated by a cream stripe. It is 5½ yards long and 28” wide. (5m x 73cm). It has a crisp papery handle and is folded in a concertina configuration. Possible era is 1940s</p>

	SC2	o59	✓						SC2 o59 –F <b>O</b>	<p><u>Frolic Print Panel</u>: a small panel of fabric printed with characters in historical costume. The strip measures 15 x 33" (38 x 85cm). Three edges have been neatened with a three thread overlocker, but it has no other stitch marks to suggest that it has been unpicked. The lower edge is the selvedge suggesting that this fabric was a border print. It is woven with spun staples of rayon. It has a soft handle. Possible era is 1940s.</p>
	SC2	o60	✓						SC2 o60 –F <b>O</b>	<p><u>Pink Dotty Net</u>: an off-cut of pink dotty nylon net with applied white flock dots. The piece is yarn dyed and woven in a sheer plain weave with a very fine continuous filament. The piece has a diagonal section removed and there are two small separate pieces folded within the main piece. The original piece measured 37" long and 45" wide (95cm x 1.15m). It has a stiff abrasive handle. Possible era is 1950s</p>
	SC2	o61	✓						SC2 o61 –F <b>G</b>	<p><u>Navy Blue Silk Look</u>: this piece is a deep blue lustrous piece of fabric that has a silk look. It is yarn dyed and woven with a continuous filament rayon yarn in a crepe weave. The fabric is folded selvedge to selvedge with the right sides of the fabric together. The piece is glossy and lustrous with good drape but would be prone to seam slippage. The fabric is 3 yards long and 36" wide. (2.9m x 90cm). There are some pulled threads on the pieces suggesting that the fabric may have been flawed therefore sold at a reduced price. Possible era is 1940s.</p>

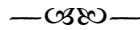


	SC2	o62	✓						<p>SC2 o62 -F O</p>	<p><u>Black and Silver Jacquard</u>: an off-cut of black and silver crepe with a small scale jacquard repeat pattern. The warp is a continuous filament rayon yarn and the weft a high twist crepe yarn. It is a woven on a doobby loom to create a small black diamond and a silver lozenge shape. The fabric is 37" long and 36" wide (93cm x 90cm). It is of medium weight and possibly Japanese. It has a crisp firm handle. Possible era is 1930s.</p>
	SC2	o63						✓	<p>SC2 o63 -M</p>	<p><u>Faux Astrakhan Strips</u>: a plastic bag containing two strips of faux astrakhan that have been removed from garments, then rolled up and sprinkled with moth ball crystals.</p> <p>The longest strip is 1.5 yards (1.4m) in length and has a curved shape with an attached lining that has been hand sewn just inside the fold edge to create a purse allowance. The shape of the strip is suggestive of the front edge of a jacket, including the collar or neck edge. Each end is finished as a coat or jacket hem would be. The second smaller piece has come from a different garment and is 29" x 3½" (55 x 9cm) and would be a suitable size for a cuff. Possible era is 1950s.</p>
	SC2	o64	✓						<p>SC2 o64 -F G</p>	<p><u>Periwinkle Blue Crepe</u>: a garment length of blue crepe fabric. The fibre is rayon and made up of spun filament yarns. The warp yarn is a low twist and the weft yarn is a high twist crepe yarn. It is woven with a crepe weave. The piece is 4 yards long and 30" wide. (3.5m x 76cm) There are moth holes in places. Possible era is 1930s.</p>

	SC2	o65	✓					SC2 o65 –F G	<p><u>Mandarin Damask Art Silk</u>: a lighter orange brocade fabric which is 4½ yards long an 26” wide (approx 4m x 66 cm) It is Japanese rayon and is woven with a continuous filament yarn that is yarn dyed and woven on a jacquard loom which reveals shows raised areas of yarn floats in the form of a floral spray woven with filament yarns. The yarn structure is made from rayon fibre; the warp and weft yarns are both loose and yarn dyed. The sheen of the fibre makes the pattern very shiny and light reflective. It is folded in a concertina configuration and is possibly an end of bold purchase. There are a few spots and fade marks. There are production stamps at the end of the cloth which read <i>Imperial Japanese Passed</i>. It is of medium weight with a moderate drape, it has a high lustre. The fabric is of poor quality and would not be suitable for fitted garments as the seams would be prone to seam slippage. Possible era is 1940s</p>
	SC2	o66	✓					SC2 o66 –F G	<p><u>Blue Spotted Cotton Print</u>: a dress length of blue printed cotton. The fabric is 5 yards long and 36” wide. (4.3m x 90cm). It is woven with a staple yarn in a haircord plain weave. The base cloth is piece dyed to a blue shade then it is printed by a discharge method which strips the colour to create the white print. The fabric is folded from selvedge to selvedge with wrong sides together, and then has been folded lengthwise (rolled). Inside the last fold is a newspaper cutting showing an image of a 1940s dress style. Running parallel with the selvedge on the wrong side of the cloth is a stamp that repeats regularly. “Guaranteed Fast Colour, British Made”. There is a sticker pasted to the fabric close to the end. It is the Union Jack with “ALL BRITISH” printed centrally in the red strip. Possible era is 1940s.</p>

	SC2	o67		✓					SC2 o67 -N	<u>Corset Elastic</u> : a small roll of corset girdle elastic. It is blush pink and is rolled up and held together with a band which has been cut from a bicycle tube. The strip measures 14" x 20.5" long. (35.5 x 52cm). The cut edge on the outer part of the roll shows evidence of unpicking. Possible era is 1940s.
	SC2	o68	✓						SC2 o68 -F G	<u>Soft Floral Print</u> : a length of folded floral fabric that is held bound with a knit type fabric, possibly cut from a stocking. The fabric is folded selvedge to selvedge with wrong sides together. It is 5 yards long and 36" wide. (4.6m x 90cm). The yarn is spun rayon staples and woven in a plain weave. It is printed with a small daisy print of royal blue, periwinkle blue and rose with some white. There is a green leaf motif throughout. It has a soft drapable handle and a soft sheen. The piece is rolled up and tied with a strip cut from a stocking. Possible era is 1940s.
	SC2	o69					✓		SC2 o69 -T	<u>Net Shuttle</u> : a wooden weaving shuttle wound with a length of string. It measures 24 cm in length and has a central prong and notched end that allows for yarn to be wound around. The shuttle is used for nets. Possible era is 1940s
	SC2	o70					✓		SC2 o70 -M	<u>Scented Draw Sachet</u> : a butter paper envelope that contains a scented draw sachet. The butter paper is yellowed and crisp. The envelope inside is a softer paper and is a salmon colour. The style of the artwork on the envelope is an art nouveau style consisting of a border scroll filled with green colour. The top portion is filled with purple colour behind white lettering, and the lower portion is filled with soft yellow behind green lettering. Possible era is 1940s.

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