

Research Guide

Fashion Archives

Why Use This Guide?

Fashion archives offer a unique lens into the history and evolution of clothing, design, textiles, and culture. These collections are invaluable for researchers, designers, and historians alike. Whether you are tracing the history of a particular designer, studying textile techniques, exploring fashion's cultural impact or the social changes it reflects, this guide will help you navigate these rich and diverse resources.

The Archives: What Kind of Things You May Be Able to Find

Fashion archives often house materials related to the history and practice of fashion, including:

Garments and Textiles: Historical and contemporary clothing, fabrics, and accessories examples. These may range from haute couture pieces to everyday garments, providing insight into trends, craftsmanship, and materials.

Design Records: Sketchbooks, patterns, technical drawings, and design prototypes, often offering a behind the scenes look at the creative process.

Fashion Publications: Magazines, catalogues, and promotional materials showcasing trends and marketing strategies. These provide a comprehensive overview of the fashion industry's evolution and may reflect social, economic and political changes.

Photographs and Media: Runway photos, editorial shoots, advertising campaigns, and fashion show recordings, which document not only the clothes but also the presentation styles and cultural contexts.

Personal Papers: Documents, letters, and diaries of related individuals shedding light on their careers, influences, and personal lives.

Company Archives: Records of fashion houses or textile manufacturers, including correspondence, product catalogues, and financial documents. These are particularly useful for studying the business side of fashion.

Cultural Materials: Ephemera such as tickets to fashion shows, exhibition programmes, press clippings, and promotional materials.

Special Collections: Some archives may hold rare or unique collections, such as early textiles, traditional dress, collections relating to a certain individual, or avant garde designs.



1976 Kenzo Takada/Jap: Printed cotton ensembles; man's ensemble by Fiorucci.
Selector: Helena Matheopoulos, The Daily Express, Fashion Museum Bath,
<https://www.fashionmuseum.co.uk/galleries/dress-year-gallery>

Examples

London College of Fashion Archives: Contains materials related to the teaching and history of fashion design, including the Cordwainers Collection of footwear and leatherwork.

Examples of LCF archives include Burberry Catalogues Collection: A collection of catalogues of Burberry Ltd. clothing and footwear for men, women and children, c.1910-1950. Cuttings in folders of Burberry catalogues, advertisements, and newspaper articles.

Footwear Collections: This collection contains over 650 shoes from 1780 to the present day. Collections include the Cordwainers College Archive (developed to support the teaching of footwear design and construction), Charles Moykopf Ltd., and shoes of individual Londoners.

Menswear Collections: Menswear collections, dating largely from the 20th century, including Savile Row tailors such as Tommy Nutter, Huntsman and Henry Poole. Other garments include individual wardrobes such as Francis Golding, Percy Savage and uniforms from the London 2012 Olympics.

Fashion Museum Bath: Renowned for its collection of historic and contemporary dress, including garments from the Georgian, Victorian, and modern periods. From haute couture to home dressmaking, spanning from the time of Shakespeare to the catwalk, the collection unveils five centuries of fashion and illustrates how clothes make and shape us.

Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester: Their costume, textiles and fashion collections are extensive, covering all aspects of the history of dress, dress care and dress making, as well as aids to the appearance, and ranging in date from around 1600 to the present day.

Northampton Museum and Art Gallery: Home to one of the largest collections of shoes and shoe heritage in the world. Arts Council England designates the collection as being of local, national and international importance. The collection's strength lies in its very broad range, from ancient Egypt to the latest fashions and from Northamptonshire made shoes to footwear from around the world.

The Harris, Preston: Houses a collection of women's clothing and accessories from the 1800s to 1950s and men's clothing and accessories from the 1790s to the 1880s, including rare examples of gentlemen's clothing and servants' livery. Local firms are represented, but much of the collection reflects textile's status as a popular personal and creative activity, as well as developments in recent textile art.

The Ulster Museum, National Museum of Northern Ireland: This collection consists of 2,000 items, comprising mainly Irish and English costumes (mostly female) from the 18th Century to the present. Irish designers of the 20th Century are also represented. There are also examples of religious vestments, court dress, legal and academic robes, and ephemera relevant to the design, production, marketing and consumption of Irish designed/manufactured clothing.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London: Features one of the largest and most diverse collections of fashion and textiles in the world, including designer archives, historical garments, and accessories dating back centuries.

Design Museum, London: Focuses on contemporary design, including fashion, with archives that explore the intersection of fashion and technology.

Where to start:

Locate Relevant Archives: Identify fashion archives, libraries, museums, and special collections that hold materials relevant to your research topic. Textile companies, fashions houses, university libraries, may house relevant collections.

Contact Archivists and Staff: Reach out to archivists or staff at the identified archives. Discuss your research interests, inquire about access procedures, and confirm opening hours and any access restrictions. Fashion brands will also often have archives, while these are private, it's worth contacting them directly if you have a specific line of research.

Understand Access Policies: Familiarise yourself with the archive's access policies, registration requirements, and any copyright restrictions that may apply to certain materials. Be prepared to provide identification and adhere to any preservation guidelines.

Searching the Archive and Using the Collections



Clog, 53, UAL London College of Fashion,
Cordwainers Shoe Collection,
https://www.vads.ac.uk/digital/collection/LCF_SHOE/id/1784/rec/111

Define Your Research Focus: Be clear about your topic or period of interest to narrow your search.

Utilise Finding Aids: Online catalogues and archive staff can help you locate the most relevant materials.

Take Notes: Maintain detailed records of your findings, including collection names, call numbers, and dates.

Be Mindful of Preservation: Follow archive guidelines to ensure the materials are protected for future researchers.

Explore Complementary Resources: Consider visiting textile museums, libraries, or other cultural institutions to supplement your research.

A Note: Something to be considered when using archives is what information isn't there. And what might the reasons behind that be? There is noise within the gaps in collections.