9.1 Fastenings

Hook and eye
A hook and eye fastener consists of a blunt hook that passes through either a small handworked eyelet hole or loop, or a metal eyelet or bar, which are sewn to opposite parts of a garment. Hooks and eyes are used to close garments and provide strength. They range in size and are often used in groups.

Hook and eyes.

This form of fastening was in use in England from the 14th century, known as ‘crochets and loops’. Early hooks and eyes were made of hammered flat iron. Throughout the 18th century hooks and eyes were made of copper. Around 1830, they began to be made of brass. In the 1840s wire drawn hooks were in vogue and were made from brass or iron wire. Handworked eyelet holes or loops preceded metal eyelets and bars. Straight metal eyes were common in the 19th century, particularly when placed adjacent to the boning on bodices. Hooks and eyes mainly featured on outerclothes, since underclothes were fastened by more comfortable tapes, ties and buttons that would withstand laundering.

In the 1890s the size and style of hooks and eyes diversified. Strong hooks were essential for weighty closures on capes, skirts and trouser waistbands, while lighter hooks were needed at necklines or on underclothing.

Triple wire strand hooks appeared in the early 1900s. From 1900–10 hooks and eyes were used to attach the skirt to the bodice at the waistband. Curved metal eyes became more popular in the 20th century. In the 1920s the fashion for straight shapeless dresses reduced the amount of fastenings needed.

Lacing
Lacing is a method of closing or fastening a garment by pulling a lace through eyelets or around hooks to draw the edges of a garment together. A lace could be a ribbon or cord. Lacing is commonly found on corsets to draw the two sides together. Until the 1840s, the eyelets were worked by hand. From the 1840s stronger metal eyelets were in use.

Drawstring
A drawstring is a cord, ribbon or thread which can be drawn through a channel on a garment. It is pulled and tied to form a closing. It is used to secure loose fabric and hold a garment in place. Drawstrings can be found on the bound edges of necklines, wrists or waists. From the 1790s to 1820 very small drawstrings were used around the neckline of fine muslin gowns. Prior to the 1860s small drawstrings were sometimes used to draw in the waist.

Poppers/press studs
Press studs, also known as snap fasteners or ‘poppers’, are a pair of interlocking discs. They are attached to separate parts of a garment and snapped together to fasten. Press studs can be sewn onto or punched into fabric.

The two components of a press stud.

They were first patented in 1885 by German inventor Heribert Bauer as a fastener for men’s trousers. The early versions of the press stud had an S-shaped spring in the top disc instead of an indentation.

Press studs were sometimes covered in silk to make them invisible. In the early 20th century ‘poppers’ were mounted, evenly spaced on thick satin ribbon which could be bought by the yard and sewn onto the closing edges of garments.
**Buttons**

Buttons are discs, knobs or balls used as fastenings or for ornamentation. Buttons draw parts of a garment together by being slipped through a buttonhole or a loop. Buttons can be manufactured from many different materials, both natural and synthetic, such as ivory, shell, bone, horn, wood, glass, metal and plastic.

From the 1860s, the black glass or jet button was made fashionable by Queen Victoria who wore them in mourning for Prince Albert.

In the 1860s, the first buttons were made from celluloid, an early plastic. Dresses dating from 1865–75 often have beaded buttons. From this time linen covered buttons were popular for underwear.

Though buttons and toggles were used for many hundreds of years, the buttonhole appeared in Europe around 1200, copied from the Turks and Mongols by returning crusaders. By 1250 a Button Makers Guild was established in France.

By the mid 14th century, buttons had become very popular. Tailors produced garments with many buttons and buttonholes. The button’s popularity spread across Europe, with monarchs adorning themselves with literally thousands of buttons. In the 16th century, Puritans condemned buttons as sinful and the number of buttons used diminished a little. In response, button-makers made increasingly detailed and elaborate buttons.

During the 1870s, there was a ‘buttoning-up’ fashion and men’s coats were made to button up high on the chest. This fashion encouraged the production of fancy buttons of mohair, silk, ivory, horn or black vulcanite.

As ivory became increasingly expensive in the 19th century, button manufacturers started to make buttons from the nut of a South American palm tree that resembled genuine ivory. This is known as vegetable ivory or corozo.

In Europe buttons were mass produced from the 19th century. The United States became the leading manufacturer after the first world war.

At the turn of the 20th century picture and novelty buttons were in vogue. Mechanisation meant they no longer had to be handpainted, but could be printed en masse. New moulding processes enabled buttons to be made in all shapes and sizes.

**Main types of buttons**

- **Flat or sew-through buttons** have two or four holes in their centre through which thread is sewn to attach the button.
- **Covered buttons** consist of a circular shape, covered in fabric, crimped to a back with a shank attached.
- **Worked or cloth buttons** can be made from embroidered or crocheted stitches over a dome or ring known as a form.

**Shells (left) and plastic buttons.**

**Filigree metal button.**

**Cloth covered flat buttons.**

Button fashions varied over time. For example, before 1825 men’s trousers had one button of bone or metal on each side of the fall front. From 1825, two buttons began to appear on each side.

**Dresses dating from 1865–75 often have beaded buttons. From this time linen covered buttons were popular for underwear.**
• Shank buttons have a solid visible surface with a pierced shank at the back through which the thread is sewn. In garments to be laundered, a shank button was attached through an embroidered eyelet hole with a metal clip on the inside of the garment.

• Shank button top and bottom.

Specific types of 18th and 19th century buttons

• Basket button — buttons covered in an interlacing pattern. Sometimes made of metal, they were used in the 18th and 19th centuries and were especially fashionable on men’s coats.

• Dorset thread button — a button made from a wire ring covered with white cotton threads which radiated from the centre and were kept flat. They were used from 1700 to about 1830 and are usually found on underclothes.

• Horn or bone button — buttons moulded from horn and bone were easily carved and used from the 18th century.

• Shell button — polished pearl shell buttons can be distinguished from plastic by the colours and roughness of the back.

• Snail button — 18th century button trimmed with French knots and used on men’s coats and waistcoats.

Zipper

In 1851 Elias Howe patented the ‘Automatic, Continuous Clothing Closure’ a forerunner to the zipper, but it was never marketed. In 1913 Gideon Sundback, head designer at the Universal Fastener Company, developed the modern zipper. He improved on Whitcom Judson’s ‘Clasp Locker’, invented in 1893, by increasing the number of fastening elements per inch. After further improvements it was patented as the ‘Separable Fastener’ in 1917.

Shell button, top and underside.

At first zippers were made of brass and predominantly used as a closure on boots for the US army. The name ‘zipper’ appeared after the Goodrich Company added the fastener to a pair of rubber boots and called it the ‘Zipper Boot’ after the buzzing noise and speed of the closure.

In the 1920s and 1930s, some clergy were opposed to zippers as they allowed one to take one’s clothes off too quickly! Thus clothing with zippers was seen as inappropriate for women and was not fully accepted until the 1940s.

A campaign in the 1930s promoted zippers for children’s wear, highlighting their ease of use. Zippers slowly increased in popularity for children’s clothes in the 1920s and 30s.

During the 1930s, zippers began to appear on skirts and dresses and on trouser flies from 1935, though men were reticent in accepting them. Tailors disliked zipper flies and created the fly front, a fold of cloth to hide the zipper. Designer Elsa Schiaparelli championed the use of the zipper in couture, adding bold zippers as features of her designs from 1935.

In the mid 1930s colourful plastic zippers became available. In 1934 Yoshida Kogyo Kabushikkaisha (YKK) was created. YKK became the world’s largest manufacturer of zippers.

By World War II, zippers were widely used in Europe and North America. Following the war they spread to the rest of the world and ceased to be a novelty.