



The Ladies Ulster in the 1870s and 1880s: From “Eccentric-Looking” to “Beau Ideal”

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The Ladies Ulster in the 1870s and 1880s: From “Eccentric-Looking” to “Beau Ideal”

Abstract

 OPEN ACCESS

The nineteenth century tailored overcoat, The Ladies' Ulster, is an important garment for dress and textile historians because it reframes our understanding of period women's attire through its untrimmed, waterproof and functional design. Despite this only a little research has been conducted on the garment. This article focuses on the evolution of the overcoat in the first two

decades of its adoption. It examines the critical reception of the Ladies Ulster in the 1870s when it was described initially as "eccentric-looking" (The Sportsman, November 15, 1873), and considers its design evolution to become considered by the end of the 1880s a "a beau ideal lady's coat" (The Queen, June 18, 1887).

Keywords: tailors; active-wear; nineteenth century; active women; waterproofing; the Ulster

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The Ladies Ulster in the 1870s and 1880s: From “Eccentric-Looking” to “Beau Ideal”

Introduction

The Ladies Ulster is a tailored overcoat that was first available to upper-class women in at least 1871, having originally been a waterproof men’s overcoat dating from 1866. By the end of the 1880s, after a period of controversy, the Ulster had become a fashionable item in a woman’s active-wear wardrobe and beyond. Almost nothing is written on the Ladies Ulster, thus this article serves three important functions: firstly, to carve a place specifically for the Ladies Ulster in the academic dress history narrative of nineteenth century womenswear; secondly, to promote the place of tailoring in womenswear during this period; thirdly, to challenge contemporary preconceptions about what women wore in the late nineteenth century.

This article will explore the Ladies Ulster’s journey from unconventional to highly fashionable. Compared with fashionable women’s attire from the 1870s, embodied by the saccharine frilliness of the gauzed and embellished gowns, the earliest Ladies Ulsters were considered “eccentric looking” by some for their utilitarian, starkly untrimmed, waterproof, and tailored appearance (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873). It was a long overcoat with a waistbelt either “complete as a strap or as a strap across the back,” regularly featured a detachable hood, or a cape covering the shoulders and yoke, and was

designed for “ease and utility” when hunting, riding, or traveling by railway or steamboat (Cunnington and Willett 1960, 223, *The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873). The Ladies Ulster was made of water-resistant, other times fully waterproofed, and most often woolen, materials. Waterproofing had become increasingly commonplace in womenswear since the 1850s—for example, advertisements appear in regional newspapers for waterproof cloaks for traveling, waterproof riding jackets for hunting, and even waterproof “bonnet covers” (*Hereford Times*, April 3, 1858 and *The Manchester Examiner*, February 2, 1850). These features of the Ladies Ulster are crucial to understanding the manner in which functionality lay at the heart of its design and popularity. While theorists such as Diana Crane have framed nineteenth century garments with a masculine flavor as a form of an “alternative style,” this article illustrates how functionality rather than symbolic communication made the Ladies Ulster so popular (Crane 1999, 242). By the end of the 1880s, the Ladies Ulster had reached an apogee of popularity for women for two further reasons. Firstly, the prevailing style was then for fashionable urban daywear that was tight-fitting (but nonetheless bustled) and closely-tailored in heavy wools and tweeds (Buck 1984, 60). Secondly, producers increasingly designed the garment

with a focus on ornamentation and fashionable shaping.

Upper-class women had long frequented their tailor during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for the production of close-fitting riding habits, as has been extensively discussed in articles such as Cally Blackman's "Walking Amazons: The Development of the Riding Habit in England during the Eighteenth Century" (Blackman 2001, 47–58). The range of tailored women's garments for hunting, traveling and outdoor pursuits expanded as the nineteenth century progressed—and from the 1870s, the Ladies Ulster became a key garment in this repertoire. As this article will articulate, the design of the Ladies Ulster, originating in menswear, illustrates the manner in which upper- and middle-class women, and tailors with female clients, were appropriating men's tailored dress for these practical uses.

Little is written on the invention of the men's Ulster in 1866, nor on its popularity and dissemination during the nineteenth century. Almost nothing is published on the Ulster's adoption by aristocratic and upper-class women at the beginning of the 1870s. Jack McCoy's "The Ulster Coat" in *Irish Arts Review* in 1985 (The Ulster Coat 2020), remains the most comprehensive published investigation into the Ulster coat, even 37 years after its writing. Of note more recently, is Samantha Asam's Steinhardt School at New York University Master's thesis, "The Globe-Girdler's Ulster Coat," relating its use by the journalist Nellie Bly (Asam 2020). The information presented here is the result of my own ongoing research into Ladies Ulsters for a Research Interest Group (RIG) on Fashionable Tailoring for Women 1750–1930,

which forms one small part of the far larger EU Research body *Groupement D'intérêt Scientifique Apparences, Corps & Sociétés* (ACORSO). The RIG's function is to make the first trans-European and transatlantic comparative study of the development of tailored feminine garments in the 1750–1930 period.

The Ladies Ulster's frequent appearance in advertisements and tailors' manuals makes its omission from dress history literature surprising. Its oversight is less remarkable however, when one considers that garments with an emphasis on functionality, especially all-weather wear, which the Ulster typified, seldom make their way into the rarefied stores of costume collections. Garments made of heavy wool and tweed are prone to destruction by moths and have not survived. Diana Crane has also described how "histories of fashionable clothing give the impression of consensus concerning appropriate female apparel" as restrictive and ornamental, and that these histories have "virtually ignored" clothing which subverted this sense of consensus (Crane 1999, 242). Thus, the lack of representation of the Ladies Ulster in histories of fashionable clothing is also indicative of the patriarchal attitudes which have not historically favored depictions of women looking strong and practical (Tuchman 1979).

During the pandemic, accessing the few surviving examples of the Ulster in collections has been near-impossible. Therefore, essential for the primary research of this article have been tailors' and cutters' manuals, with their patterns and detailed commentaries on the garment's construction, which have enabled me to identify the original design

characteristics of the men's and women's Ulsters and their construction. These printed materials are an unparalleled source in charting its adaptation and modification to changing fashionable preferences and silhouettes. Period newspaper advertisements often featured detailed illustrations of the Ulster and their prices, and these have enabled me to assess the appearance, spread and accessibility of the garment to female consumers across the United Kingdom during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Meanwhile, women's fashion journals from the period, rich in etiquette commentary and fashion plates, have enabled me to plot the Ladies Ulsters fashionable adaptation by women from utilitarian country-wear overcoat to fashionable walking coat.

A "New Overcoat Made of Irish Frieze Perfectly Waterproof": 1860s

According to Jack McCoy, John Getty McGee laid claim to launching this style of "new overcoat made of Irish frieze perfectly waterproof" for men, from his clothiers, merchant tailors, and general outfitters in Belfast in 1866 (McCoy 1985, 18–23). It, "fitted close at the chest, buttoned down the front and fell to either three-quarters length, or fully to the ankles" (McCoy 1985, 19) (Figure 1). The popularity of the men's Ulster overcoat spread both exceptionally quickly and over a wide breadth of the United Kingdom. By 1870, a mere four years after its invention and release, the men's Ulster coat, especially that produced by McGee & Co., was widely advertised in newspapers across the British Isles.

The original men's Ulster, by appearance alone, is often difficult to

THE "ULSTER,"
A NEW OVERCOAT
MADE OF IRISH FRIEZE, PERFECTLY WATERPROOF,
INVALUABLE TO GENTLEMEN FOR TRAVELLING OR DRIVING TO THE COVERT SIDE.

PRICE: THREE GUINEAS AND A HALF; WITH WINDERMERE LINING, FIVE GUINEAS.

Only Measure required is the Width round the Breast, and Height.

JOHN G. M'GEE AND CO., BELFAST, IRELAND,
WHO WILL FORWARD PATTERNS AND ORDERS TO ANY PART OF THE KINGDOM.



Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Watling-street, London, E.C., November 4th, 1868.
Sirs,—I never gave a testimonial about anything in my life before, but I cannot refuse your request. The "Ulster" Coat is, without any exception, the best driving Coat I ever possessed. It is quite impervious to wind and rain; and even in the present weather I come home warm and comfortable every day, although I drive some four or five hours at least almost every time I go out. Congratulating you on your success, I am, Sirs, yours truly,
Messrs J. G. M'GEE AND CO. (Signed) W. EYRE M. SHAW.

WIFE HOOD, 10s. EXTRA.

Figure 1

John G. McGee and Co. Belfast, Ireland. "The 'Ulster' A New Overcoat" advertisement, *The Field, The Country Gentleman's Newspaper*, November 20, 1869. Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

discern from numerous men's overcoat styles during the mid-to-late nineteenth century period, for multiple reasons. Firstly, there was a plethora of overcoat styles available to men in the nineteenth century, each with their own stylistic names, but which in reality were differentiated only by a range of subtle design distinctions. Secondly, most overcoats of the period sought to comply with the general conventions of appearance of men's overcoats, so style and design characteristics were often subtle rather than overt and flamboyant,

making differences in style more difficult to discern to the untrained eye. Finally, overcoats made bespoke or even made-to-measure by tailors, could accommodate the whims and fancies of the client or individual tailors preferred adaptations, thus resulting in discrepancies from the "original" design (Couts, n.d.). Given the origins of the Ladies Ulster in men's overcoat design, and this haziness of visual discernment, it is worth identifying and defining the individual design characteristics of the men's Ulster overcoat, to aid identification

and consider its individual merits. To contemporary eyes it can be tricky to discern the difference between these enveloping, utilitarian, yet carefully tailored, outwear garments for men, and later for women. However, tailors' and cutters' manuals from the period, alongside close analysis of fashion plates, help illustrate the subtle differences between these styles.

Some of the most fashionable and costly tailored men's overcoat styles of this period included the Ulster already mentioned, as well as the Chesterfield, Inverness and the

Raglan. Each of these were enveloping overcoat styles, intended to be worn as the outermost garment, especially during the winter when warmth is paramount. McCoy in “The Ulster Coat” asserts that the Ulster’s predecessor was the early nineteenth century men’s Greatcoat or Surtout, also called the Carrick Coat (Carrick Coat 2020), a coat which was “long, full, swinging loosely from the shoulders and often with several overlapping collars or capes,” (McCoy 1985, 18). However, by the 1860s “greatcoat” tended to often be used as a generic term for a variety of outdoor garments, while other overcoat styles had superseded the true Greatcoat which had been so popular during the 1830s. One of these more popular styles was the Inverness, a style of outdoor coat, voluminous and loose; it reached to the knees and featured a deep cape, the full length of the arm, falling from a fitted collar. It was considered suitable for traveling, evening soirees and journeys to the theater (Cunnington and Willett 1960, 244). Women too later adopted this style, as a beautiful full-length British gray wool example from 1885 held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York illustrates (Figure 2) (1885.2009.300.333a, b.). For the Raglan, which was popular through the 1850s and 1860s in a knee length style, then again in an adapted form in the 1890s, the deciding feature was the distinctive sleeve and collar cut. This was achieved, as described by *The Ladies Tailor: Jacket, Mantle & Costume Cutter*, by “the arrangement of shoulder and sleeve, the latter being carried right into the neck” (*The Ladies Tailor*; Thomson 1899, 117). Thus, the sleeve was cut up to the neck on the shoulder, a style known as a “pointed sleeve” (Cunnington

and Willett 1960, 217). Such a cut creates greater depth of the underarm, useful for accommodating bulky sweaters and jackets underneath. The back of the coat meanwhile was cut as one piece and worn loose with “a degree of “sackness”” (*The Ladies Tailor*, 117). It was not a casual design, however, being described by an advert of 1855 as, “Soft, warm, durable and tastefully made-up” (*The Scotsman*, December 5, 1855). Finally, the Chesterfield was a highly popular overcoat from the 1840s, acceptable for wear in town and country. Many advertisements boasted that it could be made up in “a great variety of material” (*Gravesend Reporter, North Kent and South Essex Advertiser*, November 14, 1863). Double or single-breasted and knee length, it featured a short back vent, and its smarter iterations had vent pockets and a fly front.

By contrast, the Ulster was advertised from the outset as an active-wear garment, claiming it was “invaluable to men for travelling or driving to the covert side [...] impervious to wind and rain [...] though I drive for some four or five hours at least” (*The Belfast News-Letter*, December 1, 1869). In the 1860s and early 1870s, it was offered in water resistant materials, including Irish Friezes, tweed or wools such as Cheviot, and often with a hood. Such features place the garment firmly in the realm of weatherproof utility wear. Despite this, stylistically, the Ulster was far closer to the Chesterfield than any other men’s overcoat. Indeed, both the Chesterfield and Ulster were overcoat designs which could be double or single breasted, were worn “over the undercoat,” and fell to knee length or full length (*The Tailors Classical and Infallible Text Book of*

Cutting 1900, 113–115). Both the Chesterfield and Ulster were more closely tailored than the Inverness or Raglan, yet neither featured a waist seam. In the cutting of these two overcoats, the c.1900 publication suggests that the main difference between them was that Ulsters were wider at the waist with “the sideseam being a straight line or hollowed a trifle” and sat further away from the figure at the rear than the Chesterfield. Another clear distinction from the patterns featured in the same publication is that the Ulster was fitted close to the chest while the Chesterfield “is sprung forward a little.” Yet, in cutting the Ulster, “all other details and points are found and adjusted as for chesterfields” (*The Tailors Classical and Infallible Text Book of Cutting* 1900, 115).

The men’s Ulster coat, from its invention and release in 1866 by the Belfast merchant tailors John G. McGee & Co., was initially discreetly advertised in newspapers across Great Britain. In 1868, a small advertisement for “The Ulster, a New Overcoat made of Irish Frieze, of a very superior quality, perfectly Waterproof” appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on December 12, 1868. In less than a decade, flashy illustrated advertisements were appearing on the front page of regional, rural British newspapers. In the *Canterbury Journal, Kentish Times and Farmer’s Gazette* of January 1877, “The Ulster a New Overcoat made of Irish Frieze, Perfectly Waterproof, [...] with Windemere Lining FIVE GUINEAS” was advertised by John G. McGee & Co. Lighter in weight than previous men’s traveling coats, and weatherproof, by that year the coat had proved to be so popular that McGee had bought, according to *The Belfast*



Figure 2

Coat. 1885. Wool. Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Frederick Loeser Fund, 1964. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art Open Access.

and *Province of Ulster Directory* (PRONI 1877), a second premises further down the high street in Belfast, exclusively to accommodate its manufacture and sale.

The popularity of McGee's Ulster coat proved so total that by at least 1872 McGee & Co. had extended their Ulster Coat designs to include a version for women. An advertisement for a Ladies Ulster manufactured by McGee in the Irish newspaper the *Downpatrick Recorder* in 1872 (Figure 3) stated:

The Ladies Ulster Coat, for wearing over the riding habit in driving to covert. For wearing when driving in the country. For wearing when travelling by railway or steamboat. Perfectly proof against wind and rain. Prices—four guineas and five guineas each. Patterns and Orders sent to all parts of the globe. John G. M'Gee [sic] & Co. Inventors and Sole Makers. Belfast, Ireland (Downpatrick Recorder February 10, 1872).¹

The Ulster's features of close tailoring across the chest, with a wide waist and rear are perhaps key in identifying its adaptation for womenswear in the opening years of the 1870s. During this time, the bulk of fashionable women's skirts was thrown behind, over a crinolette or bustle, while the bodice was closely fitted. The Ulster, with its wideness at the waist and rear and closely tailored chest, would have accommodated this fashionable women's silhouette, while providing a practical covering. While the wearing of fashionable silhouettes by women engaging in active pursuits may seem incompatible, fashion historians have previously explained how nineteenth century women did so "in order to

retain respectability at the same time as getting exactly what they wanted" (Strasdin 2018, 74).

"Now Ladies are Taking to and Adopting Them": 1870s

The development of the Ladies Ulster in the early 1870s was hardly surprising, given that women had frequented tailors for the production and procurement of riding habits and Pelisse style overcoats since at least the eighteenth century (Lambert 2010, 60). In further evidence of women's use of tailors for the production of overcoats, an 1833 tailor's manual entitled *Hearn's Art of Cutting Ladies' Riding Habits, Pelisses, Gowns, Frocks &c.*, whose author purported to address "the chief cares of the Master Tailor," outlined detailed directives for the production of a woman's overcoat named a "Ladies Great Coat" (Hearn 1833, 40). The inclusion of a women's overcoat in a publication from this date suggests that their production by tailors was the norm. Even as early as 1833, Hearn notes that the most desired style of these overcoats was close fitting, stating that, "Ladies Great Coats are frequently required to be what may be termed a close fit i.e., made to the form the same as the Pelisse, and are generally used for walking." He goes on to note that, "[...] it may be necessary to allow them something larger, in consequence of their being to be worn over other garments" (Hearn 1833, 40). Clearly, despite acknowledgement that a little extra room was required in the overcoat to allow it to fit over a woman's ensemble, the tailor's ability to produce garments using the complex skill-set of stab stitching and steam-heat molding to obtain a close, sculpted fit was highly prized for even the most utilitarian of women's

outerwear garments as early as the 1830s (Taylor 2007, 107). The rapid dissemination of the Ladies Ulster style of overcoat should come as little surprise therefore, as by the mid-nineteenth century tailors had been producing garments for women clients for decades, and thus were well-versed in the production of women's outerwear coats in a variety of fashionable styles. Those who were not had ample literature with which to educate themselves.

Even cursory primary research in period newspapers and fashionable magazines illustrates that many tailors, clothiers and manufacturers other than John G. McGee were selling Ladies Ulsters from at least 1871—a matter of which McGee & Co. were well aware. In light of the prevalence with which tailors and outfitters were producing their own versions of the Ulster, John G. McGee made sure to retain credit for his invention. Even twelve years after its release, in the London paper *The Field The Country Gentleman's Newspaper* in 1878, McGee & Co proudly advertised themselves, as "The Ulster Coat Inventors & Sole Makers" and went on to note that, "All others are imitations; [...] for the genuine "Ulster" will please write direct" (*The Field The Country Gentleman's Newspaper*, January 19, 1878).

One of the tailors who most quickly produced and sold a Ladies Ulster was the rival English firm, Mr. Benjamin of Ulster House (an aptly named shop, indeed), on Conduit Street in London's smart Mayfair district. The firm clearly flourished, as a decade later in the *Post Office London Commercial Directory* of 1882, the firm was listed as B. Benjamin & Sons, merchant tailor, and was still in residence in Ulster House, and by

THE LADIES' "ULSTER" COAT,
 FOR WEARING OVER THE RIDING HABIT IN DRIVING TO COVERT.
 FOR WEARING WHEN DRIVING IN THE COUNTRY.
 FOR WEARING WHEN TRAVELLING BY RAILWAY OR STEAMBOAT.
Perfectly proof against both wind and rain.
PRICES—FOUR GUINEAS AND FIVE GUINEAS EACH.
Patterns and Orders sent to all Parts of the Globe.

JOHN G. M'GEE & CO.,
 INVENTORS AND SOLE MAKERS,
 BELFAST, IRELAND.

THE "ULSTER."
 A NEW OVERCOAT MADE ONLY FROM GENUINE IRISH PRIZEE,
 PERFECTLY WATERPROOF.
Invaluable to Gentlemen for Travelling or Driving to the Covert side.

NEW SHADES AND IMPROVED MARK, SPECIALLY FOR THE "ULSTER," FOR THIS SEASON, 1871—2.

JOHN G. M'GEE & CO.,
 BELFAST, IRELAND,
 INVENTORS AND SOLE MAKERS OF THE "ULSTER" COAT.

PATTERNS AND ORDERS FORWARDED TO ANY PART OF THE GLOBE.

PRICES—SAXONY LINING, 3 GUINEAS AND A-HALF.
 HUNTING ANGOLO OR WINDERMERE LINING, FIVE GUINEAS.

M E A S U R E .

Only Measure required is the width round the breast taken under the arms and over ordinary Coat, also height of Wearer.

VOLUNTARY TESTIMONIALS
 IN FAVOUR OF
THE "ULSTER" OVERCOAT.

METROPOLITAN FIRE BRIGADE,
 WATLING-STREET, LONDON, E.C.,
 November 4th, 1871.

Sirs,—I never gave a testimonial about anything in my life before, but I cannot refuse this request. The "Ulster" Coat is, without any exception, the best driving coat I ever possessed. It is quite impervious to wind and rain; and even in the present weather I come home warm and comfortable every day, although I drive some four or five hours at least almost every time I am out. Congratulating you on your success,
 I am, Sirs, yours truly,
 (Signed) W. EYRE M. SHAW.

Messrs. J. G. M'Gee & Co.

Figure 3

John G. McGee and Co. Belfast, Ireland. "The Ladies' 'Ulster' Coat" advertisement, *The Downpatrick Recorder*, February 10, 1872. Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

1888 they were making tailored garments for the Belgium Princess, H.R.H the Comtesse de Flandres (*The*

Queen, April 14, 1888). In December 1871 Benjamin took out a large, illustrated advertisement in *The*

Sportsman dedicated to Ulster coats. His own versions of men's Ulster coats dominated the advert, yet one

THE SPORTSMAN, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1871.



WINTER FASHIONS, 1871-72. ULSTER HOUSE, 72, PICCADILLY.

<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">No. 1 & 2</td> <td style="width: 70%;">Ulster Travelling Coats</td> <td style="width: 20%;">30s. to 35s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" "</td> <td>" Ditto, lined with Alpaca or Italian Cloth</td> <td>40s. to 45s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" "</td> <td>" Ditto, lined with Waterproof Tweed or Cheviot</td> <td>45s. to 50s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>" "</td> <td>" Ditto, lined with Saxony or Angola</td> <td>55s. to 60s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No. 1</td> <td>Ulster Travelling Cap</td> <td>8s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No. 2</td> <td>" Ditto " Hood</td> <td>10s.</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">READY FOR IMMEDIATE USE, OR MADE TO ORDER IN A FEW HOURS.</p>	No. 1 & 2	Ulster Travelling Coats	30s. to 35s.	" "	" Ditto, lined with Alpaca or Italian Cloth	40s. to 45s.	" "	" Ditto, lined with Waterproof Tweed or Cheviot	45s. to 50s.	" "	" Ditto, lined with Saxony or Angola	55s. to 60s.	No. 1	Ulster Travelling Cap	8s.	No. 2	" Ditto " Hood	10s.	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">No. 3, 4, 7</td> <td style="width: 70%;">Winter Overcoats, made to order, in Frieze, Witney, Flots, Beavers, Melton, and Cheviots</td> <td style="width: 20%;">30s. to 60s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No. 5</td> <td>Winter Fur Jackets, in Frieze and Witney</td> <td>35s. to 55s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No. 10, 11, 8</td> <td>Winter Morning Suits</td> <td>50s. to 70s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No. 8, 9</td> <td>Winter Frook Suits</td> <td>60s. to 100s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No. 12</td> <td>Dress Suits</td> <td>70s. to 100s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Winter Trousers</td> <td>15s. to 21s.</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Black Dress Trousers</td> <td>18s. to 30s.</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">The Best Guinea Trousers in the Kingdom.</p>	No. 3, 4, 7	Winter Overcoats, made to order, in Frieze, Witney, Flots, Beavers, Melton, and Cheviots	30s. to 60s.	No. 5	Winter Fur Jackets, in Frieze and Witney	35s. to 55s.	No. 10, 11, 8	Winter Morning Suits	50s. to 70s.	No. 8, 9	Winter Frook Suits	60s. to 100s.	No. 12	Dress Suits	70s. to 100s.		Winter Trousers	15s. to 21s.		Black Dress Trousers	18s. to 30s.
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THE ULSTER COVERT COAT,
3 Guineas.

Made to Order from the BEST WATERPROOF IRISH FRIZES, BANNOCKBURN, MOSS TROOPER TWELDS, AND CHEVIOTS.

Adapted for Riding, Driving, or Walking.

Mr. BENJAMIN having been honored with the Patronage of Ladies of Distinction for his



ULSTER TRAVELLING COATS, has had soft pliable materials SPECIALLY WATERPROOFED for their USE AND COMFORT.

"ULSTER SHOOTING SUITS,"

With Brecks, Knicks, or Pants, from Bannockburn, Moss Trooper, Tweeds, and Cheviots, and specially Waterproofed.

50s. to 70s.

THE ULSTER TRAVELLING OVER BOOTS,



21s.

ULSTER TRAVELLING COATS,
READY FOR IMMEDIATE USE.

With all the latest improvements, 30s. to 35s.

Ditto lined Alpaca or Italian Cloth, 40s. to 45s.

Ditto lined Waterproof Tweed or Cheviot, 45s. to 50s.

Ditto lined Saxony or Angola, 55s. to 60s.

Ulster Travelling Cap, 8s. Do. Hood, 10s.

Ready for Immediate Use, or Made to Order at a Few Hours' Notice.

MEASUREMENT REQUIRED, SIZE OF BUST AND WAIST, AND THE HEIGHT.

N.B. For Patterns, &c., address B. BENJAMIN, Ulster House, 72, Piccadilly.

Figure 4

B. Benjamin, Ulster House, Piccadilly, London advertisement. *The Sportsman*, December 2, 1871. Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

small section claimed he was “honoured with the patronage of Ladies of Distinction for his Ulster Travelling Coat” (Figure 4). Like McGee & Co., Benjamin clearly produced the Ulster for male and female clients alike, suggesting it was entirely commonplace that a tailor would produce the garment for both genders. A significant illustration of his 1871 Ladies Ulster exemplifies its features as full-length and double breasted, with a belt and a flap pocket at each hip. The sketch accessorizes the look with a riding whip, and Tyrolese style

hat with trimmings at its rear—a scant nod to embellishment in an otherwise plain ensemble. In later years, Mr Benjamin claimed credit for the invention of the Ladies Ulster. In 1875 he stated that, “[he] little thought when he introduced Ulster coats into England a couple of years ago, that they would become supreme elegance in Paris. They are considered extremely *comme il faut* and that is an essential point with Parisian ladies in dress” (*The Sportsman*, May 22, 1875). While in a later column in *The Queen*, Benjamin claimed that:

Many years ago being asked by a well-known lady in the hunting world to make her an Ulster (then a strictly manly garment) and seeing the success which attended it, their spirit of enterprise suggested to Messrs Benjamin the question whether Ladies should not have the benefit of tailoring as enjoyed by a gentleman [...] This success is proved by the host of imitators (March 6, 1886).

By 1873, Benjamin’s Ladies Ulster advertisements had expanded to feature a range of Ladies Ulster overcoat

CONDUIT-STREET, W.

ULSTER

TRAVELLING COATS

FOR LADIES,

From 42s. to 100s.

MR BENJAMIN, daily receiving increased patronage and recommendations from ladies of distinction for his **ULSTER COATS**, which he is now making with expanding skirts (if required), to fit equally well over habit or dress, has had manufactured and waterproofed, specially for the above, materials of the softest texture in substances suitable for every climate.

THE LADIES' ULSTER COAT.—Ladies apparently have a decided objection to the opposite sex monopolising a successful novelty. When anything new is introduced to the buying public, and is taken up and patronised largely by gentlemen, a strong desire becomes apparent among the fair sex to appropriate the novelty likewise. This was the case with Hansom cabs in days gone by, and recently the same tendency is evident with Ulster Coats. For some months after their introduction Ulsters were decidedly regarded as essentially masculine attire, but now ladies are taking to and adopting them, more especially for country wear. By this time the Ulster is familiar to every one. It is an eccentric-looking garment, and often provokes a smile, simply because

LADIES' UNIVERSAL CLOAKS

WITH MOVEABLE CAPS AND HOOD,

50s. to 80s.



ULSTER Riding and Hunting Habits 70s. to 100s.
 ULSTER Walking and Travelling Dresses 70s. to 100s.
 ULSTER Riding and Walking Jackets 30s. to 50s.
 ULSTER Riding Trousers 25s. to 30s.

ANSWER.—Fashion, that capricious goddess at whose sway we all grumble, and to which most of us all eventually submit, has promulgated a new ukase for the approaching autumnal season. Among some leaders of ton it is now considered desirable that husband and wife should be dressed as much as possible alike in colour and material as can be attained when riding, hunting, or travelling. Mr Benjamin, of 33, Conduit-street, Bond-street, has, in order to give ladies an opportunity of following this latest fashion, designed a jacket for riding, hunting, or travelling, closely resembling the shooting jackets introduced by him for gentlemen. These jackets are made without padding, fitting easily and gracefully to the figure, and can be worn either with or without a band round the waist. Ease and utility are the distinguishing qualities claimed by

Figure 5

B. Benjamin, Ulster House, Piccadilly, London advertisement. *The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873. Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

styles (Figure 5), including one titled “Ladies Universal Cloaks with Movable Cape and Hood, 50 s. to 80 s.,” and were available in gray tweeds, Cheviots, and soft woolen fabrics, describing the overcoat as, “fasten[ing] the entire length of the front with buttons that match the cloth charmingly” (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873). The advertisement went on to describe how “Mr Benjamin, [...] has manufactured and waterproofed, specifically for the above, materials of the softest texture in substances suitable for every

climate” (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873). Such language clearly attempts to feminize the offering, by centering the description of the garment on the soft texture of the textile, in contrast to the emphasis on its use and hardness in the original men’s advertisements. Interestingly, however, the garment’s origins as a man’s coat are admitted to and emphasized by Benjamin himself who, in a mocking tone, notes that:

Ladies apparently have a decided objection to the opposite sex

monopolising a successful novelty [...] For some months after their introduction Ulsters were decidedly regarded as essentially masculine attire, but now ladies are taking to and adopting them [...] (The Sportsman, November 15, 1873).

An extract from *The Queen* which Benjamin also chose to include in his advertisement, emphasizes, and probably exaggerates, the similarities between Benjamin’s Ladies Ulsters and those produced by the firm for men, stating that, “ladies who are

determined to agree at least in exterior with the opposite sex, have but to choose the same material, and the result is affected" (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873). However, their modeling on masculine attire is not denounced as a fault. Instead, they are praised as "useful and comfortable garments," in which "ease and utility are the distinguishing qualities claimed by Mr Benjamin as appertaining to his latest introduction, and the specimens submitted to our notice were certainly quite satisfactory on these points" (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873).

The introduction of the Ulster to upper-class women's wardrobes was not without controversy. Even Benjamin himself admitted that "it is an eccentric-looking garment," but this was not due to its associations with "masculine attire." It was considered problematic for its untrimmed and practical esthetic to be in contravention to the profusion of trimmings and lace, as well as the double skirts or polonaise, which were the height of women's fashion in the early 1870s. As Benjamin himself explained, "we regard all flat, untrimmed backs as out of fashion. Hence, and for no other reason, does the Ulster look singular" (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873).

Indeed, the singular simplicity of the Ladies Ulster at this time is nowhere more apparent than George Frederick Watts' (Watts 2021) painting entitled, *The Ulster Coat*, of 1874 (Figure 6). The portrait depicts Mrs. May Hitchens (née May Prinsep) wearing a full-length, buttoned, hooded Ulster coat—collar turned up against the wind, her hands stuffed deep into the pockets. Enveloping Hitchens, the coat hugs her body, emphasizing its warming qualities. Drab-gray and

starkly unembellished, the garment suits the rugged wilds of the heathland in which she is standing. It looks bulky, perhaps even a little encumbering. Only a top-hat in the Tyrolese style with an upturned brim and red feather, an established style for country pursuits, gives a nod to elegance. The result is a highly intimate picture, reflecting the close personal relationship between herself and Watts, whom was a resident in the Prinsep's household. Hilary Underwood (Underwood 2020), writing for Watts Gallery, has described Watts as "part tenant, part cherished friend and guest" to the Prinsep family, and how Hitchens and Watts enjoyed a lifelong friendship, with the painter settling in Compton in part because Hitchens and her husband resided there. This special relationship may explain the unconventional, informal choice of attire for the full-length portrait. Hitchens does indeed look singular. Especially so when consideration is given that the prevailing style of fashionable daywear during this period, as described by Harper Franklin (Franklin 2020) for *Fashion History Timeline*, demanded light effervescent layered confections of ensembles with bodices frequently as extravagantly decorated as skirts. Social expectations delineating the use of appropriate clothing, however, dictated specific styles depending on the location, activity and gender. Activities such as hunting and riding had long permitted women the wearing of woolen, tailored, sober and practical garments, which would have been considered totally inappropriate for womenswear in other settings. Thus, the Ladies Ulster's appropriate adoption during this period of the early 1870s remained firmly, for "ordinary occasions" such as for

"driving to covert, and in the country generally" (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873). McGee similarly, and explicitly, advertised his 1872 Ladies Ulster for hunting wear and "wearing when driving in the country. For wearing when travelling by railway or steamboat" (*The Downpatrick Recorder*, February 10, 1872). It was decidedly not for promenading, nor for fashionable urban sites. As Benjamin himself noted in 1873, "if a lady walked down Regent Street wearing an Ulster, she would attract much more attention than she cared for [...] we do not counsel it for walking, simply because it would be conspicuous" (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873).

The Ulster's early adaptation and production to womenswear by Benjamin may, in part, be due to his firm's privileged location on Conduit Street in London, a site long associated with tailors to the great-and-good who had spilled over from the adjoining Saville Row. In the early decades of the century, Beau Brummell had frequented Weston & Meyer (later John Meyer & Sons) on Conduit Street, while in the late 1850s Henry Creed, of Creed & Cumberland, tailor to Queen Victoria, had a shop on Conduit Street (Evans 2004, 42). It is a fact long acknowledged that wealth and high class permitted a certain level of sartorial unconventionality not afforded to the respectable lower, middle or aspiring classes, meaning upper-class women who could afford an expensive beautifully tailored, practical, "masculine" Ulster overcoat, could acceptably adopt the garment despite its singularity of appearance. Furthermore, wealthy women had far greater access to leisure time, travel and countryside activities than those in the working and lower-middle classes, placing this



Figure 6

G.F. Watts, *Portrait of May Prinsep, (The Ulster Coat)*. 1874. Manchester Art Gallery. © Image courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery.

style of garment, during the opening years of the 1870s, firmly within the interests of women in the upper and upper-middle class with a mind to practical outdoor leisured pursuits, travel, and a taste for co-opting menswear.

Indeed, the adaptation of the men's Ulster to womenswear and the controversy it courted, already had a precedent. Diana Crane, in "Clothing Behaviour as Non-Verbal Resistance: Marginal Women and Alternative Dress in the Nineteenth Century," identifies a practise by women during the nineteenth century which selectively appropriated individual items from men's clothing within ensembles of fashionable womenswear. This practise she terms an "alternative style" that co-opted "potent symbols of masculine identity" (Crane 1999, 244–245). Explained by Crane as "non-verbal symbols as a means of self-expression" these items, such as neckties, the hard straw hat or boater, felt fedoras, and waistcoats, according to Crane usefully acted as "symbolic communication" devices (Crane 1999, 242). During the nineteenth century many women increasingly came to understand clothing as a site of political and ideological, as well as fashionable, expression. Womenswear during the century was incredibly important for communicating information about the wearers class, role, wealth, desires and social standing. The most fashionable clothing designed in Paris emphasized restrictiveness and decoration as a communication of the social expectation of middle and upper-class women's docility, domesticity, and idleness, as inert homemakers and child bearers and not active homeworkers or the employed. Deviations from these expected fashionable

norms in women's dress were collectively detected and read as defiance (Crane 1999, 241–242). Thus, for women seeking to challenge established societal expectations or simply to undertake activities beyond the expected feminine inertia, the appropriation of menswear items could be seen by some to be co-opting, not just the design, but also the social freedoms, and the practical physical dynamism afford to men.

Indeed, in many ways the Ladies Ulster was embraced exactly for these reasons; its practical shape, water-proof textile and design features such as copious pockets, did facilitate women's physical involvement in hunting and traveling to covert. However, Crane's reading of the co-opting of masculine garments by fashionable women as automatically a "symbol statement" of "subversion" can be challenged for tailored womenswear such as the Ladies Ulster (Crane 1999, 260).

Tailored women's outer and active wear was both already established and fashionably accepted by the 1870s. Cally Blackman has described how the women's tailored riding habit, an originally distinctly utilitarian garment, became by the middle of the eighteenth century "an essential part of the wardrobe of fashionable middle and upper class women" (Blackman 2001, 47). It reached sartorial acceptability 100 years prior to the Ulster, even despite its development running "in tandem with that of the male suit" (Blackman 2001, 47). While its initial adoption in the seventeenth century, via the masculine influence on women's riding garb, did cause "consternation and critical comment," by the middle of the eighteenth century it had long surpassed any association with dissent to be

entirely fashionable and wholly respectable (Blackman 2001, 48). Furthermore, we know from the 1833 tailor's manual *Hearn's Art of Cutting Ladies' Riding Habits, Pelisses, Gowns, Frocks &c.*, that the production of women's overcoats, such as the "Ladies Great Coat" was the norm by tailors, and thus that well-off women who could afford tailormade overcoats had been wearing them since at least the early nineteenth century. No mention is made in *Hearn's Art of Cutting* of the garment being radical, dissenting, or mocked (Hearn 1833, 40). Even the fashionable women's magazine, *The Queen*, noted by 1873 that, "it is now considered *de rigueur* that husband and wife should be dressed as much as possible alike in colour and material as can be attained when riding, hunting or travelling" (as quoted in *The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873). Such evidence suggests that aristocratic and upper-class women who in 1871 were buying tailored-made Ulsters from Belfast and Conduit Street at expensive prices were not adopting the Ladies Ulster for ideological reasons rooted in gender role subversion or as an "alternative style" of dress (Crane 1999, 242). Instead, they were taking up a new style of tailored overcoat for genuinely practical reasons. As Benjamin himself admitted, the first Ladies Ulster he produced was at the behest of a "a well-known lady in the hunting world"—a woman engaged in the exact activity for which the garment was originally designed (*The Queen*, March 6, 1886). In 1873 it was noted how "ease and utility are the distinguishing qualities" of the Ladies Ulster rather than denouncing them as marginal or dissenting (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873).

Early upper-class establishment women adopters were setting the fashions for Ladies Ulsters, as fashion leaders, in line with a historic precedent of these types of women adopting tailor-made utilitarian garments to accommodate the leisured, seasonally rural, and increasingly sporting lives that they led.

Any associations with menswear, and its plain and simple appearance, did little to dampen the broader popularity of the Ladies Ulster, and by 1875 a plethora of producers, both on and outside of Conduit Street, were advertising ready-made Ladies Ulsters which could be produced and sold at far lower prices than the 84 s being asked for McGee's offerings. The December 1875 edition of *The Globe* newspaper featured a lengthy advert for Ladies Ulsters produced by Doré's "First-class cash tailor" whose premises were also on Conduit Street in London. "Cash" tailors had, by this time, been around for decades—they expected cash payment from customers, did not sell on credit, and their business methods were considered a safe way to do business, ameliorating the risk of losing money through debtors or defaulters. This ready money meant such establishments were often in better financial positions than those businesses that sold on credit, and in economic downturns were often in good positions to buy up surplus stock at low prices from other establishments experiencing hardships, and pass on the savings to customers (Zakim 1998, 45). Doré's advertisement was for men's and women's garments, with the first half dedicated to "Ladies Ulsters," which were described as, "in all colours, [...] in every material, [...] with Cape, [...] with Hood, [...] a luxury in travelling, [...] thoroughly comfortable, [...]

thoroughly durable, from 63 s" (*The Globe*, December 2, 1875). Clearly, while still costly, the 63 s price is far more affordable than the starting price of 84 s asked by McGee. These garments, despite the name of the establishment, were not bespoke or even made-to-measure tailored items. Made-to-measure meant only a few basic measurements needed to be taken, for a form of "customized mass-production" to take place to create an approximate fit for the client (Aldrich 2003, 143). Instead, these Ladies Ulsters were ready-made, as the advertisement acknowledges they have been "selected with great ease from all the best manufacturers" (*The Globe*, December 2, 1875). Similarly, in October 1875, S. Neale & Sons, Hertford, also advertised "a well selected stock" including Ladies Ulsters (*Hertford Mercury & Reformer*, October 9, 1875). Winifred Aldrich classifies ready-made production during this period as, "anonymous wholesale production" (Aldrich 2003, 143). According to Michael Zakim, some ready-made garments during this period were "recognizable by clumsy buttonholes or a general "misfit" justifiably blamed on the cost-cutting measures of proprietors." As Zakim has discussed, ready-made coats or suits were generally "organized by merchants [...] many of whom had themselves never made a suit and whose artistry was manifest, instead, in the profitable coordination of a transatlantic cloth market, an urban labor market, and a Continental credit market" (Zakim 1998, 42). Thus, within four years this "eccentric-looking garment," with its origins in menswear, had already crossed the threshold of acceptability and reached a stream of demand

which could only be quenched by ready-made supply.

Clearly, several shifts had already occurred in the consumption of the Ladies Ulster. Within four years of its adaptation to womenswear, they were easily available from tailors and suppliers across the United Kingdom, in a variety of materials, style variations and prices below the four to five guineas being charged by tailors such as John G. McGee & Co. Their availability in the ready-made market suggests that some versions of the garment had begun to become detached from the "artisanal fastidious" of the tailor, with an availability centered on accessibility to a wider, middle-class customer base but with the potential detriment of a far poorer fit for the client. It also suggests the garment was beginning to be accepted and mimicked by the aspiring upper-middle and middle classes, who while unable to afford a bespoke version of a Ladies Ulster, sought out the practical garment being sported by fashionable "ladies of distinction" while undertaking their country pursuits of hunting, riding and driving in the country (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873).

The popularity of the Ladies Ulster spread far and wide, reaching across the Atlantic to the shores of the United States. In 1876, the fashionable American lady's magazine *Harper's Bazar* featured a large illustration and description of a "Lady's Ulster with Russian Hood" (*Harpers Bazar*, December 9, 1876) (Figure 7). Here, a cape "is dispensed with," as *Harper's* explains, "in order to contribute to its lightness" (*Harpers Bazar*, December 9, 1876). Despite the Ulster's fashionable silhouette, the garment does appear distinctly practical, with a large button-down pocket at the left hip, and another small



Figure 7

"Lady's Ulster with Russian Hood" *Harpers Bazar*, December 9, 1876. © Cornell University Library Open Access (<https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/hearth4732809>).

button-down pocket on the sleeve. While often obscured in newspaper illustrations, or omitted from supporting textual detail, multiple pockets were a distinctive feature of the Ulster coat for men and women. In their early incarnation in the 1870s, in their most utilitarian manifestation, pockets on Ladies Ulsters were at a multiple. In a somewhat disingenuous

description of the types of items stored in Ladies Ulsters, given their use for outdoor countryside pursuits and distance traveling, Benjamin's advertisement of 1873 describes how pockets were placed:

on the left side of the front, a pocket at each side below the waist, and a tiny pocket under the cuff of the left

sleeve. These several receptacles are handy, and we all know what a comfort a multiplicity of pockets prove for purse, tickets, handkerchief and scent bottles (The Sportsman, November 15, 1873).

Yet, despite practical pockets being characteristic, this example illustrates how the careful cut and fit

of the garment, achieved through tailoring's cutting, basting and steam molding, could ensure its fashionability. Emphasis in the *Harper's Bazar* example is placed on the description of the "gracefully shaped" back, and the "close" sleeves. Thanks to the meticulous and large illustration, it is clear how seams, strapping, and buttons placed vertically up from the hem, were creatively used by the Ulster's producer, the fashionable New York department store, Arnold, Constable & Co. to ensure a fashionable silhouette for a garment which only two years before had been described in London as "singular" (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873). Such design features ensured the Ladies Ulster's acceptability to women who wished to adopt the freedom of the style, without courting the controversy of a garment that was singularly plain. Clearly, the Ladies Ulster had not only crossed the Atlantic, but also the threshold of wider commercial acceptance and thus retailers. The tailored features enabled Arnold, Constable & Co. to achieve a fitted silhouette which mirrored precisely the newly fashionable Princess-line; slim and columnar over the bodice, sleeves and hips, widening toward the hem with the bulk of fabric thrust behind the lower legs. The clever dropping of the back strap to hip height, which was traditionally fitted at the waist as a shaping device, is a particularly novel and dexterous technique for slimming the garment over the rear.

The Textile

Harper's Bazar recommended the Ladies Ulster to be made up using "English water-proof cloth in blue or gray" (*Harpers Bazar*, December 9, 1876). Indeed, the American

publication was not alone in these suggestions for Ulsters during the 1870s. Mr Benjamin of Ulster House in his advertisement for "manufactured and waterproofed" Ulsters in 1873, suggested "grey tweed, of a soft pliable quality [...] cheviots and Angolas, and other soft woollen fabrics well suited to the purpose" as well as "waterproofed [...] materials of the softest texture" (*The Sportsman*, November 15, 1873). In an 1875 advert, he also boasted of his "unusually extensive and varied stock of woollen goods, specially manufactured and waterproofed" (*The Sportsman*, May 22, 1875). Waterproof fabrics were crucial in the garment's production because they realized the Ulster's full potential as a practical winter overcoat for the wet weather of the British elite's sporting playground; transforming the garment from an item consumed for warmth and wind protection, to one which could boast of its ability to keep the wearer dry. Several developments went hand in hand to ensure the popularity of these waterproofed garments in womenswear—the increasing popularity of outdoor pursuits such as hunting and traveling, for both genders, the development of transportation systems increasing the ease and speed of travel, alongside a desire by many women to become more physically active (Shephard 2012, 184). Furthermore, since the middle of the nineteenth century, garments such as "The Ladies True Protector," a waterproof cloak made by Shellard & Hodgson in Birmingham, reassured women that these garments which were "impervious to rain" were also "graceful in form" and "flattering" (*Scarborough Gazette*, July 13, 1854).

There is a notable paucity of detail however, on how the Ulster was waterproofed. It seems eminently feasible that multiple methods were utilized and that these varied according to the date, style and textile used. From the plethora of techniques for waterproofing textiles which had been in use for decades by this point including the applications of oils, waxes, and tars, it is rubber and chemical alum-based soaks which appear to have been the leading approaches. According to *The Belfast and Province of Ulster Directory of 1877*, McGee bought a second premises further down the High Street in Belfast at number 26 1/2, which was used as an "Ulster coat and India-rubber warehouse" (1877, 432). This acquisition of further floor space illustrates that for John G. McGee & Co. by 1877 the Ulster overcoat business was booming. By that year, the establishment covered 30, 32, 34, and 26 1/2, High Street, Belfast. Furthermore, the new site's designation as a simultaneous "India-rubber warehouse" illustrates that rubber very likely played a role in the waterproofing of McGee's Ulster overcoats. Further evidence might be added to this supposition by an earlier advertisement from McGee. In November 1866, the year of his reputed invention of the Ulster coat, McGee's advertisement in *The Banner of Ulster*, read:

John G. McGee & Co.

Waterproof clothiers

Belfast

Have made extensive preparations for the present season in waterproof garments for Gentlemen's wear, and

respectfully solicit inspection of their New Stock [...] The Waterproof Drab Double Texture Coat, so generally worn, and so indispensable for coachmen

The New Waterproof Cloak for Ladies (The Banner of Ulster, November 27, 1866)

The use of the term “double texture” here is crucial, as it refers to a method of waterproofing by spreading rubber between two layers of fabric. By the 1860s it was a common technique used in the application of rubber to garments for the purpose of waterproofing (Shephard 2012, 184). Charles Macintosh’s patented formula for producing waterproof materials using rubber had been around since 1823 by this point (Slack 2002, 63). As Hikmet Ziya Ozek outlines in “History of Waterproof and Breathable Fabrics” in *Waterproof and Water Repellent Textiles and Clothing*, the early rubber waterproofing process involved, “sandwiching a layer of moulded rubber between two layers of fabric treated with rubber naphtha liquid” (Ziya Ozek 2018, 28). These garments enjoyed a period of fashionability in the 1830s after military officers adopted them, however it was problematic. The rubber made the material sticky in Summer and brittle in Winter (Shephard 2012, 184). So, in 1843, Macintosh’s technique was further developed by Thomas Hancock who applied the newly discovered practise of vulcanizing rubber, improving its elasticity and melting properties, as well as its stability when dried, by adding sulfur and heating to high temperatures. According to Arlesa J. Shephard in “Waterproof Dress: Patents as Evidence of Design and Function From 1880 through

1895,” as waterproofing methods improved and the technique became ever cheaper, increasingly fashionable styles were made until demand for them reached a peak in the 1880s and 1890s (Shephard 2012, 184). Rubber, according to Manuel Charpy in “Craze and Shame: Rubber Clothing during the Nineteenth Century in Paris, London and New York City,” appeared to be “miraculous,” and remained the most common textile waterproofing technique until the 1890s (Charpy 2012, 438–439). To early manufacturers the substance was especially useful for outdoor clothing, and was eminently suitable for rural, leisure activities which demanded new fabrics capable of keeping up with the demands of outdoor pursuits. Fabrics paired with vulcanized rubber promised increased elasticity, hygiene, and waterproof qualities (Charpy 2012, 438–439). One of the few fashion articles which engaged with this technique of waterproofing cloth for womenswear of the period, was “Dress for Travelling” in *The Queen* in July 1887. In a paragraph on “waterproofs of various kinds,” it noted how:

Cheviot tweeds, with India rubber between two cloths, are far more than showerproof, and yet look like the ordinary material. It is well for travellers to remember that no India rubber article should ever be cleaned or dressed with oil, grease, soap, or varnish, and must never be put near the fire, as it spoils the material (The Queen, July 30, 1887, 153).

While this textile suggestion is not explicitly recommended for any specific style or cut, its appearance in a paragraph which already mentions “for driving, there is the ventilated

waterproof ulster with a cape,” aligns it for use in the repertoire of tailored overcoat styles including the Ladies Ulster (*The Queen*, July 30, 1887, 153). Furthermore, the engagement by one of the most fashionable women’s magazines of the period with the specifics of such a textile application suggests it was widely practised. Thus, given the earlier advertising of this method by McGee in 1866, the visual representation of the bulky and encumbering Ulster in Watts’ painting of Hichens of 1874, and the explicit recommendation of the cloth treatment for women’s waterproof overcoats in *The Queen*, it seems entirely feasible that double-texture was a preferred method for waterproofing Ladies Ulster’s in their early incarnations.

However, rubber may not have been the sole technique used to achieve a waterproof finish to the Ladies Ulster. Chemical treating to achieve a waterproof finish to garments was mentioned in textile literature and social commentary from throughout the nineteenth century. Column inches were frequently expended in newspapers explaining the perfect recipes for “How to Make Cloth Waterproof,” with one recipe in 1852 recommending soaking the cloth in “three lbs. of alum in water, and two lbs. of sugar of lead” to which was then added “1lb of glue in water” (*Montrose Standard and Angus and Mearns Register*, July 23, 1852). While a column in the *Irish Farmers Gazette* in 1854, again recommended alum, but this time mixed with “isinglass” and “soap” (*The Irish Farmers Gazette*, June 1854). Similar recipes appear throughout the century. One in 1889, is particularly revealing, suggesting how “a solution of alum itself will render cloth, prepared as

described, partially waterproof, but it is not so good as the sulfate of lead. Such cloth—cotton or woollen—sheds rain like the feathers on the back of a duck” (*The Field, The Country Gentleman’s Newspaper*, October 12, 1889). These chemical recipes claimed to make the textile “unaffected by rain or moisture” but to “not render the cloth airtight” (*The Field, The Country Gentleman’s Newspaper*, October 12, 1889). Thus, leaving woolen garments warm and waterproof, yet breathable—a happy combination for attire designed for active, and therefore sweaty, pursuits. Indeed, Shephard has noted how between 1880 and 1895, “the multiple of patents focused on providing ventilation speaks to the inability of the [rubber] waterproof garments to breathe” (Shephard 2012, 196). Clearly, textile treatments which could achieve a reputedly waterproof finish alongside breathability were highly sought after. One Benjamin & Sons advertisement for “Ulster, Stalking or Universal coats, with Moveable Cape, Hood and Gun Flaps” in 1884, featured a quote from sporting newspaper *Bell’s Life*, which applauded the garments, saying “It is warm, but not heavy, and perfectly waterproofed by a new process, which permits the free escape of perspiration” (as quoted in *The Sportsman*, 22 November 1884). While specific details concerning the “new process” are absent, it is entirely feasible that a chemical treatment was being utilized to provide a lighter coat with improved breathability. However, Shephard’s research suggests that these chemically treated garments were in fact, shower-proof rather than fully waterproof, explaining how, “when a breathable compound was used, the product was not fully

waterproofed. Many recipes for chemically treated fabric boasted that the fabric was a breathable form of waterproof garment [...] the garments were only water-resistant and in a heavy rainstorm, the garment would eventually become saturated” (Shephard 2009, 51).

Images of surviving Ulsters from the 1880s attest to the likelihood of chemical waterproofing treatments. A photograph of an “c.1888 Plaid Wool Coat with Detachable Postillion Cape” (Figure 8), revealing displays the interior of the garment. Closely tailored, this Ulster with removable cape, is made of a checked wool tweed in shades of brown. The interior is lined with a mustard silk at the bodice and sides while the skirt rear is unlined. Light and draping, a double-texture method is therefore unlikely to be in application to the fabric here. Indeed, it is feasible that as a close-fitting Ulster became increasingly *de rigueur* during the 1880s, chemically treated woolen fabrics were more suitable to achieving a closely tailored cut due to the absence of the rubber layer.

“Which Yet Preserves a Certain Unmistakable Air of Good Style”: 1880’s

Detailed fashion illustrations and cutters’ manuals of the 1880s attest to the close shape and fit having become a central design feature of the Ladies Ulster by this decade. These reveal a changing construction of the Ladies Ulster and an increasing feminization of the style. “The Fabiola Ulster” of 1880 is an example of the rapid stylistic progression that the Ladies Ulster had undertaken in less than a decade (Figure 9). Designed by Mesdames Adolphe and Marie Goubard of Covent Garden, London, (dressmakers, pattern makers, as well

as publishers) it was carefully illustrated in a full-page spread (*Myra’s Journal of Dress and Fashion*, October 1, 1880). In the hands of these dressmakers (The Post Office Directory of 1880 lists Madame Marie Goubard as a Dressmakers’ pattern maker, while Adolphe Goubard is listed as a paper pattern modeller), the illustrated style of this overcoat confidently casts off the utilitarian connotations of the earlier, tailor-made Ulster designs. It is evident here how the stylistic progression of the Ulster shape evolved to keep perfectly in tandem with the broader evolution in fashionable women’s silhouettes, increasingly integrating what was once a singular, entirely practical, garment with the established clothing tropes of restrictive and decorated fashionable womenswear. Such a feminization would have made the garment more palatable to a broader range of women, especially those attracted to its connotations of physical freedom and travel, but not its “eccentric” utilitarian plainness. Ironically, however, it simultaneously moved the design further away from its intended exertive sporting purpose.

In the opening years of the 1880s, the princess-line silhouette continued to dominate fashionable women’s garments; slim and columnar over the bodice, sleeves and hips, widening toward the hem, with any trace of a bustle having diminished. The construction produced a restrictive columnar silhouette—a silhouette which the Fabiola mimics. Wendy Gamber has described the production hierarchy in dressmaking establishments, and how the expert cutting required to generate such a precise shape illustrates the skill which distinguished dressmakers at this time from seamstresses and needlewomen.



Figure 8

"#3809 – c. 1888 Plaid Wool Coat with Detachable Postillion Cape." n.d. *Antique Dress*. Accessed 26 August 2021. <http://www.antiquedress.com/item3809.htm>. © Antiquedress.com. All rights reserved. (www.antiquedress.com).

The dressmakers' traditional "pin-to-form" technique of draping, pinning, and then cutting, radically differed from the cutting, basting and steam-molding process employed by tailors. The requirement of expert cutting by skilled dressmakers who made fashionable woolen garments, however, placed their practice when making such items closer to the work being undertaken by tailors, making such dressmakers ideally situated to interpret the Ladies Ulster for themselves (Gamber 1995, 458). Full-length, the

Fabiola Ulster is closely shaped to the figure using vertical seams, and vertical pleats at the sides of the skirt to give the requisite fullness behind the knee, dispensing entirely with a waist seam. Single breasted, with a tasseled Russian hood, and tightly fitted in the bodice and sleeves, it features matching buttons the length of the bodice, and the flapped pockets at the hips so typical of the Ulster. Once again, the back strap, which was traditionally fitted at the waist as a shaping device, has been dropped and

duplicated. Here it is fitted both at hip and knee height and is particularly unusual, efficient, and visually striking in slimming the garment over the rear and legs. Despite being produced by a dressmaker rather than a tailor, the structure of the garment owes much to the original tailor-made Ulster designs, with the added novelty of a "finishers" eye for the decorative (Gamber 1995, 462). The illustration depicts the wearer traveling, rather than in a wooded rural scene as was so common, clutching a small bag,



NO. 233.—THE FABIOLA ULSTER. (Back and Front View.)

Made-up Model, trimmed, 4s. 6d.; untrimmed, 2s. 3d.; Flat Pattern only, 1s.; of Mesdames ADOLPHE and MARIE GOUBAUD, 39 & 40, Bedford Street, Covent Garden.

Figure 9

"No. 233 – The Fabiola Ulster" Mesdames Adolphe and Marie Goubard, Covent Garden. *Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion*, October 1, 1880. Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

sheltering under an umbrella, with a larger holdall placed on a bench beside her. Clearly, this is not the singular utilitarian Ulster of nine years

ago. "For daily country walks the Fabiola Ulster is very useful," further suggested *Myra's Journal*, while the illustrations by-line described how

Mesdames Adolphe and Marie Goubard could provide the garment at a twentieth of the price being asked by McGee or Benjamin, stating,

“Made-up Model trimmed 4s 6d; untrimmed 2s 3d; flat pattern only 1s” (*Myra’s Journal of Dress and Fashion*, October 1, 1880). In contrast to the strikingly plain Arnold Constable & Co. design, the Goubard design is decoratively styled; the tassel on the hood and wide turned back cuffs, are accompanied by a narrow show of flouncing at the hem and frilled cuffs, a large silk bow is tied under the chin securing the feather trimmed chapeau, and generously sized earrings. While such a restrictive and frilly interpretation was by no means the norm for Ladies Ulsters by this time, especially not those produced by tailors, it is usefully illustrative of the increasing move away from its functional and plain origins toward a burgeoning feminization of the Ladies Ulster for popular, cheaper dissemination. Embellishments and a restrictive fitting here erode the garments association with practical country pursuit attire, and instead place this interpretation of the Ladies Ulster firmly within the realm of fashionable women’s traveling and walking coat.

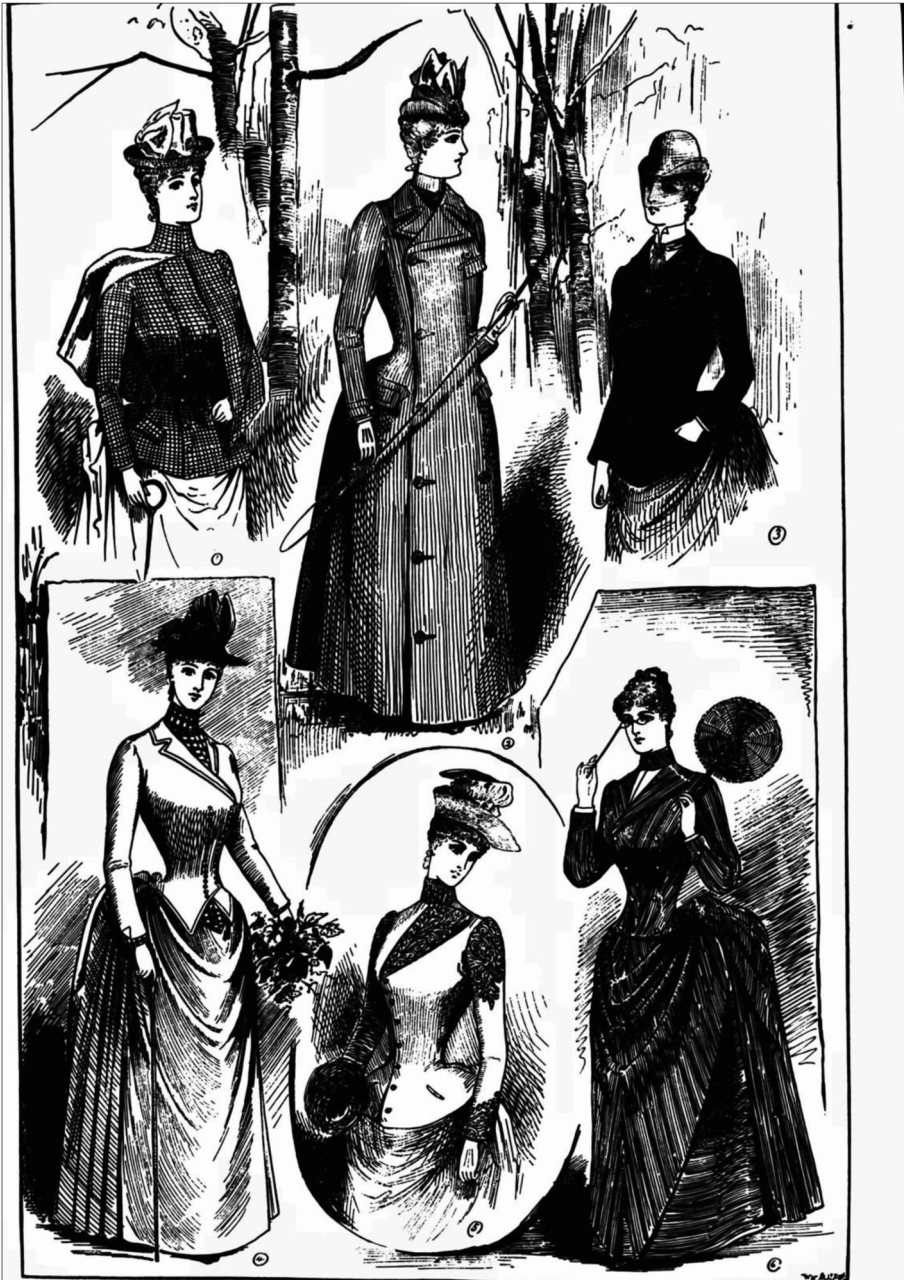
Tailors and cutters modified their Ladies Ulster designs in tandem with changes in the fashionable silhouette. James Thomson’s *The Ladies Jacket, Ulster and Costume Cutter*, published at the end of the 1880s, emphasized a bespoke and exacting cut, and much time is spent by Thomson demonstrating how a tailor might achieve the closest of fits while accommodating the fashionable bustle. Thomson suggests placing two darts for a close shaping of the Ladies Ulster bodice, at a length of 4½ inches, saying, “when the waist measure is small in proportion to chest measure, it is better to take two darts out. I know that some ladies prefer two, and it is for the cutter to decide which looks best”

(Thomson 1889, 8). Both Ladies Ulster patterns featured in Thomson’s cutting manuals of 1889 are single breasted, and as was traditional since the Ulster’s inception, closely fitted down the front of the garment. In the system describing the cut only ½ inch is suggested to be added to clients “center of breast and front of waist” measurement, meaning the garment would have clung tightly to the body at the front. The Ulster’s front length is cut “4 inches shorter than the back length,” and the back-of-the-skirt pattern of the Ulster is notably shaped to accede to the fashionable bustled silhouette. After 1884, women’s dress featured a severely protruding bustle which hung from the center-back waistline. In accommodation to this, the writer even suggests, “cut[ing] the bottom part of the back separately” (Thomson 1889, 8). Evidently, tailors and cutters continually adapted their Ladies Ulster patterns to accomplish a close fit through accommodating and embracing broader modifications in fashionable women’s silhouettes and exactly shaping the pattern to flatter these styles.

Indeed, such stylistic evolutions were not exclusively the work of tailors or dressmakers seeking acclaim via novelty designs but were also undertaken by the original Ulster producers. A full-page illustration in *The Queen* of October 1888 depicts a selection of women’s “New Jackets, Coats and Ulsters” supplied by Messrs Benjamin of Ulster House (Figure 10). Illustrations of bare-branched trees and foliage frame the ensembles suggesting their use as decidedly rural. Among these the “Driving Ulster in fawn scotch cheviot, with broad lappels [sic], double breasted, and loose fronts,” takes

prime position (*The Queen*, October 27, 1888). It features flapped pockets at the hips and on the left breast, while its wearer brandishes a driving whip. It is appropriately made up in a luxurious but plain and hard-wearing wool flannel, known as Cheviot, and as Benjamin had been assuring female clients for more than a decade that their “cloths possess the advantage of being [...] thoroughly waterproof,” it was designed to keep the wearer dry (*Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, December 10, 1881). The double breasted front is sprung forward in the style of the Chesterfield overcoat in an amalgamation of overcoat design features, while the rear of the garment is closely shaped over the exaggerated proportions of the fashionable bustle and the sleeves appear tightly fitted. While the accompanying text neglects to divulge the tailored fit of the garment, leaving the detailed illustration to suggest tightness, other Ulster manufacturers flaunted the close fit of their offerings. For instance, the fashionable London department store Peter Robinson on Oxford Street advertised “New Tight Fitting Ulsters from 42s” in *The Illustrated London News* in 1888 (*The Illustrated London News*, November 10, 1888). Clearly, by this decade, the close-fitting and bustled shaping of the fashionable ladies Ulster had become the stylistic convention.

Evidence illustrating how cutter’s recommendations of the tight fit of the Ladies Ulster translated into the tangible garment is apparent in a cabinet photograph taken in 1882 at Davis & Sons in Lancaster, now in the collections of Manchester Art Gallery (Figure 11). It depicts an unknown woman wearing a fashionably cut tight-fitting Ladies Ulster and



New Jackets, Coats, and Ulsters, designed by Messrs Benjamin, Ulster House, Conduit-street, Bond-street, W.

No. 1. THE SHORNCLIFFE JACKET, made in drab checked Scotch tweed, double-breasted, with cape. It is also made white to match a costume.

No. 2. DRAVING ULSTER in fawn Scotch cheviot, with broad collar, double-breasted, and loose fronts. Seams stitched outside.

No. 3. THE COWRIE COAT.—Loose-fronted and short, in dark blue cheviot, double-breasted, with large buttons, and pockets.

No. 4. THE SARNOUSVILLER.—A leather mixed Scotch cheviot costume. It has a double-breasted bodice and checked vest and cuffs, also a neatly draped skirt.

No. 5. A dove-gray habit-cloth closely-fitting JACKET, having one revers, Robespierre fashion; it is braided in silver and grey on the cuffs, collar, and epaulettes.

No. 6. THE DORVA.—A striped Scotch cheviot costume, with small leather waistcoat and cuffs.

Figure 10

"New Jackets, Coats, and Ulsters" Messrs Benjamin, Ulster House, Conduit Street. *The Queen*, October 27, 1888.

Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).



Figure 11

Cabinet photograph of woman in an Ulster. 1882. 2008.40.6.770. Manchester Art Gallery, United Kingdom. © Image courtesy of Manchester Art Gallery.

matching “Louvre” cape (Thomson 1889, Plate 22). The caped Ladies Ulster is fashioned in a checked tweed, buttoned the full length of the

front, and is cut to reveal and accentuate the fashionable silhouette of the date, which was tightly corseted, slim-sleeved, and noticeably but

lightly bustled having not yet achieved the exaggerated protrusion which would become the fashion by the mid-decade. While the portrait is

taken inside a studio, exhibited by the painted landscape backdrop, the Ladies Ulster is accessorized with a Henley rowing cap and clutched leather gloves, granting the ensemble an air of the sporting and recreational despite the tight, thus seemingly restrictive, fit of the overcoat. In its tight-fitting close-cut tweed fabric and adjoining cape, this example is quintessential of the style of Ladies Ulster which became ubiquitous.

While these stylistic evolutions were also carried out by traditional tailors such as Benjamin, presumably to keep their Ladies Ulster designs relevant, he was vocally uneasy about what he perceived to be a vulgarization of the style and the increasingly expansive usage of the Ulster name to a range of overcoats by other firms. In an 1881 advertisement column, designed to emphasize the firms “distinct, perhaps an unique, position amongst tailoring firms,” Benjamin rather stropily stated that:

The Ulster overcoat is a garment with which we are now as familiar as with any other article of clothing [...] The manufacture of the garment has, however, undergone considerable change, and there are few houses in the trade where a genuine Ulster—an overcoat in the first and last sense of the word—can be obtained [...] for the name is now given to anything [...] But the Ulster proper is not a walking coat, but a travelling coat, pure and simple. Its place is not the pavement nor the promenade, but the outside of a coach or the inside of a railway carriage, when the air is nipping and the thermometer low (Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle, December 10, 1881).

While the column’s purpose is primarily the advertisement of their range of tweeds and “very beautiful woolen stuffs,” Benjamin’s comments, especially his reprimand, are notable. The admittance of the garment’s ubiquity is undoubtedly a self-congratulatory measure, but it is an acknowledgement also borne out by other sources. While the Ladies Ulster jostled for column inches alongside the plethora of women’s overcoat styles available by this date, it appeared in fashionable magazines, especially in the cooler months, on a near-weekly basis in advertisements, illustrations, and commentaries on fashion. Benjamin makes clear however, that in his view, many of the garments termed Ulsters were no such thing, instead merely trading on the cache of a stylistic name which had become synonymous with a hard-working full-length overcoat used by a range of classes for a range of outdoor activities. Indeed, comparison of Ladies Ulster designs from these two decades illustrates the spectrum of styles with which the Ulster name became associated. Whether born of resentment or a fair and astute dismay, as far as Benjamin was concerned few of these overcoats were “genuine” Ulsters. Furthermore, Benjamin’s criticism suggests that he had observed, and disapproved of, the Ulster’s use beyond its originally designed function. This suggests that the Ladies Ulster which a decade previously had been considered “an eccentric-looking garment,” for its utilitarian plainness and derivation in menswear, and thus only suitable for exertive countryside pursuits, was being employed for a broader range of polite, sedate, and public, outdoor activities. Indeed, a year earlier, Myra’s *Journal of Dress and Fashion*

suggested that Ladies Ulsters “are very useful for traveling and at the seaside”; its coastal suitability having never been mentioned by Benjamin, though McGee did support its use “when traveling ... by steamboat” (*Myra’s Journal of Dress and Fashion*, August 2, 1880; *The Graphic*, January 1873). Benjamin’s comments, and his continued use of illustrations placing depictions of the Ladies Ulster in a countryside setting, suggests his views remained firmly fixed regarding the correct occasion for its use. However, clearly his business acumen accommodated the demands of his clientele and thus the expansion of his styles of Ladies Ulster to include, by 1883, “Walking Ulsters” and “Yachting Ulsters” as a part of their repertoire (though the particulars of the design of these Ulsters are frustratingly absent) (*The County Gentleman*, December 1, 1883).

Further evidence of the increasingly commonplace presence of the Ladies Ulster at occasions beyond riding, shooting, and traveling by this decade, appears via the unlikely source of an 1888 newspaper article entitled, “High Court of Judiciary: Sitting in Dundee.” Recounting the trial of Henry John Dixon for the murder of Margaret Downs, the columnist notes how in the hordes clambering for admission to the public galleries, “a considerable proportion of the crowd were ladies, young and old, neatly dressed in sealskin jackets, fur lined cloaks, ulsters and bonnets” (*The Dundee Courier and Argus*, March 8, 1888). Lou Taylor has described how from the 1870s there was an “obligatory autumnal move of [London elite] Society to Scotland” for sporting pursuits on great estates (Taylor 2007, 110). Perhaps a contingent of this clientele who originally



Figure 12

"The Stornoway" The Royal Scotch Warehouse Regent Street, London. *The Queen*, June 18, 1887. Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

popularized the Ladies Ulster lingered into spring and attended the public spectacle. The eastern Scottish city's seaside location, and its links at this time to jute manufacture and whaling, however, may also partly explain these women spectators' adoption of

the functional waterproof Ladies Ulster. These women's wearing of the garment in an urban center, to a highly public, highly official, indoor event, nevertheless belies the notion that these garments were only being worn for countryside pursuits and

convincingly illustrates the extent and range of their use by the close of 1880s.

Such public use is of little surprise however, when we consider the stylish considerations with which many even practical tailormade and

waterproofed Ulsters were being produced during this decade. A full-page advertisement for The Royal Scotch Warehouse, Regent Street advertised a “comfortable and wonderfully useful rough weather ulster, which yet preserves a certain unmistakable air of good style” named “The Stomoway” (Figure 12) (*The Queen*, June 18, 1887). The advert featured a lengthy description of the overcoat alongside a small sketch of the female wearer in profile, demonstrating the Ulster’s fashionable bustled silhouette, pointed draping hood and the nearly imperceptible accoutrement of the formerly functional waist strap lowered here as a gamish to the bustled skirt. It is described as being made up in:

soft checked homespun, in which only the natural colours of the sheep’s wool are used. At the same time the variety of colouring is quite wonderful, for the check has lines of grey and purple, upon a foundation of pale tan, although no dye of any kind is used (*The Queen*, June 18, 1887).

It was further described as fastening with “large horn buttons,” while it is lined with “one of the shot silks, now so fashionable” (*The Queen*, June 18, 1887). Clearly, the highest quality of materials were being employed in this garment, and thoughtful features such as the horn buttons point to a consideration of style far above and beyond the utilitarian practicality of early Ladies Ulsters, even despite this design’s directed use as being a rural rough-weather overcoat. Such intense description of the fine quality and coloring of the homespun cloth and its shot silk lining focuses the garment’s appeal on its sartorial merit, over and above its functionality and

practicality, being ultimately described as, “a beau ideal lady’s coat” (*The Queen*, June 18, 1887). Highly stylish examples such as this illustrate how the garment itself had by the 1880s become fashionable, thus part of the dominant style, rather than one which was simply essential in protecting clothes from inclement weather and the exertions of countryside pursuits.

Conclusion

While the Ladies Ulster continued to feature in women’s wardrobes well into the twentieth century, the 1870s and 1880s are especially rich in their illustration of the origins of the once “eccentric looking” Ladies Ulster, its rapid dissemination and ultimately its fashionable acceptability. It was born as a practical, waterproof “strictly manly garment.” However, assertive hunting women driving to covert, and tailors with female clients, appropriated the style for women’s practical sporting use (*The Queen*, March 6, 1886). Newspaper advertisements by tailors illustrate, even celebrate, its origins in assertive upper-class women customers appropriating the distinctive and practical men’s tailored garment, and demanding it be made for them. These earliest designs in the opening years of the 1870s unambiguously reframe popular notions of the types of garments worn by upper-class women in the nineteenth century, illustrating how women—such as the society muse May Hitchens—were embracing this “untrimmed,” utilitarian garment for country pursuits of hunting, shooting and walking, absent of the established feminine signifiers of restrictiveness and embellishment during the period. Its functionality lay at the heart of its original design; and its functionality is what its earliest

women adopters sought. As such, the Ladies Ulster epitomizes the practical garments some nineteenth-century women were embracing which enabled them to engage more fully in active outdoor pursuits, and who were co-opting, not just a design, but also the physical dynamism afforded to its male wearers. Only four years after its integration into womenswear, this once “eccentric-looking garment” had already crossed the threshold of acceptability and reached a stream of demand only quenched by more cheaply available ready-made supplies from cash tailors and dressmakers, not merely the bespoke offerings of tailors such as McGee and Benjamin.

By the close of the 1880s the Ladies Ulster was a perfectly fashionable item in a woman’s countryside activewear wardrobe, and beyond. This expansion of use may in part be thanks to the application of the Ulster name to a plethora of designs which adulterated the original. The term was even applied to overcoats which were dressmaker, and not tailor, made. While tailored Ladies Ulster designs developed to be increasingly tightened and caped, the broadening of its production outside of tailoring lent itself to a sartorial shift which emphasized a traditionally feminine frilliness by featuring the trappings associated with the “finishers” eye normally used on women’s fashionable day wear. These hosts of “imitators,” as Benjamin and McGee referred to them, likely expedited the use of the Ladies Ulster for a far wider range of functions than its original, utilitarian manifestation was intended.

Note

1. A covert (pronounced cover(t)) is the term used in hunting for

an area of scrub, brush or woods where wild animals find protection. The dogs of the hunt will drive the animal from the covert for the riders to take pursuit.

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