

A peep into the Victorian Image Collection

Part 3 – Ladies with hats

By Ron Cosens

The carte de visite (cdv) became popular in 1860 and was joined by the cabinet card (cab) from 1866. By 1905 portraits on postcard (pc) stock started to take over.

Last time we looked at some soldiers; this time we are looking at ladies with hats so it may be nice to see a portrait of a soldier with a lady with a fancy hat.

Here is an image from about 1915 and is in the form of a postcard.



Soldier & lady with pretty hat (postcard c1915 London)

Cartes de visite and cabinet cards enable us to actually see a huge variety of lady's hats from the era which started in the 1860s and ended in the early 1900s.

But before we look at the main gallery of images, there are a couple of rather different but interesting portraits that stand out from the crowd – particularly from an historical point of view.



Small black crepe mourning bonnet (cdv September 1882 London)

Firstly, here is an unusual and informative item dated September 1882; albeit not a pretty nor a happy one. Incidentally, the final print has been enhanced with pencil by the photographer, Thomas Fall of 9-10 Baker Street, Portman Square, London W.

So few family photographs indicate the date that they were taken and even fewer provide us with the name of the sitter so this one is a bit special. The fact that it also has a message on the back of the carte de visite mount makes it an important historical document.

The handwritten message reads

'Mrs. Sursfield Moore formerly Miss Julia Harding Newman wearing small crepe bonnet in mourning for her brother Jh. H. Newman of Nelmes near Romford who died May 1882 aged 71.'

Secondly, a far happier and prettier image with an unusual revelation. (this image is on the following page)

This pretty young lady had her photograph taken around the year 1900 in the (windy?) coastal town of Rhyl in North Wales and she is wearing a fashionable boater.

Look closely and you can see clearly that her hat is firmly attached to her blouse to prevent it (the hat) from being blown away and lost. An intriguing image for an indoor portrait.

Hats have had a special place in the wardrobes of ladies for many centuries and the Victorian era certainly illustrated that fact most clearly with many millions of portraits in which the sitter proudly showed off her fashionable millinery. Thank goodness for the invention of photography!

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Young lady with smart boater secured on a chain (cdv c1900 Rhyl)



Fed up lass with patterned beret (cdv c1899 St Ives, Cornwall)



High fashion hat with stuffed bird (cdv c1900 probably Bristol)

The other images show just a few of the amazing creations from the wide variety of headwear designs that were worn by ladies, from teenagers to great grannies, from 1860 to about 1905.

The hats range from the typical to the oddly weird (exotic birds beware!) and slowly evolve from the purely decorative to the more practical as the lives of the younger ladies took into account their newly found freedoms.

The world, for them, began to change dramatically towards the start of the 20th century, particularly with the popularity of the bicycle and the car.

Gallery Images

All photographs are between 160 and 110 years old and have been dated from studio details; not from a knowledge of millinery fashion.



Mary Roberts of Armagh with part of her hat on the table (cdv c1862 Dublin)



Emily Gould with the biggest hat in town (cab c1906 Wigan)