

Mandy Barrington, *Below the Waist: Pads, Hoops, Crinolines and Bustles* (Routledge, 2025) 386pp., 393 col. illus. Pbk £35.00. ISBN 9780367438098.

This book will appeal to anyone interested in the construction and reproduction of historical underpinnings—not only to understand how pads, hoops, crinolines, and bustles were made, but also to explore how these shaped women’s silhouettes from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth century. Mandy Barrington, Senior Lecturer in Costume at the Arts University Bournemouth, brings a clear passion for the art of costume making and a genuine curiosity about the histories and techniques that inform it. The book guides readers and makers through the process of construction, offering detailed instructions and historical context for each garment, making it a useful resource for students, practitioners, and costume enthusiasts.

The book is handsomely produced, with colour photographs and a clear format, including sections on pattern drafting and construction tools, sewing equipment and techniques, a list of materials used in the construction of underpinnings, and a guide to taking female measurements for pattern making. It also provides a list of British museums that house significant costume collections, including those consulted for the research, as well as suppliers of materials in the UK and US. Throughout, the author’s enthusiasm for costume is evident, guiding anyone working with the patterns and the construction of the garments with confidence. The writing and composition of this book could not have been easy, simply because there is so much information to consider. Communicating the craft of costume making through words alone is never simple, so the book includes step-by-step diagrams and photographs to assist the reader, and the author has clearly aimed to present the information as clearly and accessibly as possible. Inevitably, the best way to learn or develop the skill of costume making is simply to make them.

Although attempts to develop the sewing machine began in the late eighteenth century, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that its use became widespread. Historically, many underpinnings—especially those made before the advent of the sewing machine—were entirely hand-sewn. Those produced after its invention may be hand- or partially machine-sewn, but few are completely machine-made. In this book, the author uses hand- and machine-sewing techniques, even when recreating garments that date from before the invention of the sewing machine. This provides a useful method for guiding readers through the construction of historical undergarments, making the techniques accessible while still conveying the principles of their original construction. The hand-sewing involved in making them is minimal, and the stitches are very simple, so readers should be comfortable following them even if they are not experienced hand-sewers. It is worth noting that there are no diagrams demonstrating how to make the stitches, so if this is needed, readers may wish to consult a tailoring reference such as *Classic Tailoring Techniques for Menswear* by Robert Cabrera and Denis Antoine.

This beautiful, illustrated book is certainly a welcome addition to the field of historical dress. Barrington is an author with over twenty-two years of experience teaching costume making and a series of period garment-making books, giving her a confident command of her subject. The information in this book is more than just a selection of patterns; it transports the reader to the past and encourages consideration of the significance of studying and creating historical garments.

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