

Jayne Shrimpton, [Fashion in the 1940s](#), Shire Publications Ltd, Oxford, UK, 2014, 72pp, available in paper or ebook, available for purchase online or through [Woodslane](#), Australia.

[Jayne Shrimpton](#) is probably best known in the genealogy research world for her book [Tracing Your Ancestors Through Photographs](#), so I was interested to see what her other books on women's fashion were like. [Fashion in the 1940s](#) published by [Shire Books](#) is set against a war time background and the austerity that went with it. While there is a British focus, I think there are some lessons for us here in Australia too.

It is often hard to find information on our female ancestors and sometimes photographs are our only clues. But in all probability women wore their very best clothes if they knew they were going to be photographed. The photos used in this publication are what I really like as there is a mix of formal and more casual photos showing women in a range of activities including work.

The list of contents provides an outline of the publication starting with the Introduction and then Dressed for War where we learn about Land Army girls and factory workers. Restricted Fashion talks about rationing and fashion items simply not available while Keeping up Appearances is all about how they kept their clothes mended and respectable despite the restrictions. Children's shoes and clothing exchanges were something I was not previously aware of but how sensible. Did we have them here too?

I guess no fashion book would be complete without a chapter on Bridal Wear and we must remember that this was war time and many people married their loved ones just before, during or when they returned home. This leads naturally into Post War Style and the last chapters Further Reading and Places to Visit suggest where to go for more information. The book is also indexed.

Men's and children's fashions are mentioned more in passing with women's fashions the main focus as you might expect from this time period. There were also references to shoes, hats, hairstyles and makeup with appropriate illustrations from women's magazines of the time. Who knew that the secret of Elizabeth Taylor's beauty was Max Factor lipstick?

As I said earlier this is written from a UK perspective and Jayne was fortunate enough to be able to use some of her own family photographs to illustrate her chapters along with UK women's magazines and newspapers. Whenever I read non Australian reference works, I try to imagine my own families in that context and how could I find out that kind of information on them. In Australia we have digitised newspapers in [Trove](#) and New Zealand has [Papers Past](#). We are also fortunate to have the [Australian Women's Weekly](#) digitised from 1933 to 1982 and freely available online via Trove.

The 1940s were my grandmother's era and my mother just a teenager. I don't have many family photos due to floods but what few I have I am now going to look at differently thanks to Jayne's book. I now want to know what life was like for my female relatives during that era.

The cover is almost haunting with a woman holding her bag and looking off into the distance. What was she thinking about? What did my grandmother's think about?

Leaving someone with the desire to know more is what makes a good reference publication. If you are interested in the war time years, women, fashion or just what life was like in the 1940s then Jayne's *Fashion in the 1940s* is a book that you should definitely read.

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