

THE WEARING OF WATCHES

BY GENEVIEVE CUMMINS

Watches - introduced c. 1520 - have been the most common fashion accessories for men, and an essential part of a woman's jewellery display.



1. Mid 17th century lady wearing an enamel watch and crank key apparently on a chain draped at the waist. Courtesy Centraal Museum Utrecht.



In the 16th and 17th centuries both men and women wore their watches on view – men from a cord or chain around the neck (for example Henry VIII); women from a neck chain or from the girdle. The key-wound watches could be draped over a ribbon at the waist, the chain with watch at one end and a key, as part of the fashion accessory, at the other (Plate 1).



2. Gown, c. 1775, of Spitalfield silk with the addition of a gilt-metal watch chatelaine (with crank key and small box for comfits) along with a gilt metal equipage for personal items. Courtesy Cavalcade of Fashion.



Further Reading
From *'How the Watch was Worn'*. See page 155 for more on the author's leading and thorough publication on the subject.

In the 18th century men wore elaborate outfits with shorter vests (waistcoats) and cut-away coats. The watch was now hidden from view and held in a pocket in the breeches (the fob pocket) with a chain, cord or ribbon outside on view holding a key and a varied collection of trinkets (*breloques*) including seals (Plate 3). Women wore their watches on an elaborate waist-hung accessory called an equipage (now known as a chatelaine) made from base metals, steel to gold, enamels and jewels. (Plate 2). This style persisted throughout the nineteenth century – keyless examples being more slender.



3. Regency shirt, vest and trousers with watch in fob pocket, ribbon with key and seals that would be visible.

During the Regency period (1795-1830) fashions were changing to slender clinging clothes for women. They now wore their watch with the chain draped over a waist band, a style called the Macaroni chatelaine (Plate 4). This could also be draped across the body (Plate 5). At the end of the Regency period, women also wore long draped guard chains with the watch attached to the waist with a small watch hook (Plate 6).

The word Chatelaine

The word 'chatelaine' - the Mistress of a Castle - came into use in 1828-1829 for a waist-hung chain featuring a key – the ladies playing with the romantic notion of being the chatelaine of their own chateau.



4. Regency gold silk gown with gold, blue enamel, pearl and diamond watch, maker Shrapnell, with compatible Macaroni chatelaine draped over a cord at the waist.

In the 1840s men started wearing their chain, watch and trinkets on the vest. The watch was not visible and was held in the vest pocket. Prince Albert favoured this style, his name being given to the vest chain (however called a Dickens chain in the U.S.A.).



5. Three colour gold watch, maker Tobias, with Macaroni chatelaine draped across the body and held by two watch hooks, a Regency style.

The chain was usually anchored to a buttonhole by a bar or a ring. The chain could be single or double and held a watch key and other varied trinkets (Plate 7). The vest chain persisted as the dominant style for men until it was overtaken by the wristwatch at the end of the century. A later style was the broader fob chain. During the nineteenth century women wore many styles with the watch often visible. As well as the chatelaine, watches were worn on neck chains (Plate 9), guard chains, or waistcoat chains with the watch placed behind the belt or in a pocket or pinned to a brooch on the bodice (Plate 8). The brooch watch (Plate 10) was a style favoured by nurses.

7. Charles Dickens on a Carte de Visite c. 1867, wearing a double Albert or Dickens vest chain with fob, T-bar to buttonhole.



6. Late Regency gown adorned with a matching suite of long guard chain, watch hook, watch, buckle and brooch. Suite courtesy Martin & Stein Antiques.



9. Matching blue enamel watch and neck chain.

8. Detail from a cabinet card of a lady, c. 1875, wearing bustle gown, guard chain and watch held in a watch pocket.



10. Two brooch watches—one of platinum and sapphire in Art-Deco style, the other a blue enamel ball watch, both have bow-form pins..

Wristwatches, likely worn by women from early times (Queen Elizabeth I) and looking like an elaborate bracelet, were hard to prove from portraits as the dial was usually hidden. Men had not yet worn wristwatches – it was considered bad form and totally effeminate. The practicality of the wristwatch during war and aviation changed the tide and the wristwatch won the day after the late 19th century. The dial was proudly displayed, although occasionally covered for protection on some sporting watches, or when it was considered impolite for women to look at their watches.

Waltham World War I

Future

F. P. Journe



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One wonders what the future of the personal time piece will be.

Much thought and ingenuity now goes into the design of the wristwatch to tempt or satisfy the needs of the public – concentrating on status, cost and social statement. The wristwatch is now challenged by smart phones.

