

'Over what crinoline should these charming jupons be worn?': Thomson's Survival Strategy During the Decline of Crinoline

By LUCY-CLARE WINDLE

Crinolines were arguably the first industrial fashion, mass-produced in factories and using the latest steel-making techniques. This article hypothesises on the strategies of leading manufacturer W. S. Thomson, particularly as the crinoline subsided out of fashion during 1866–74. Thomson attracted women with new products such as the batwing skirt, and sold them a narrowed crinoline as an integral part of the look. Thomson advertised regularly in The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine during this time, and was frequently recommended in the editorial columns. This article constructs a narrative of events based on a single primary source, and poses the questions raised by that source.

The dearth of information about W. S. Thomson is remarkable. His company was one of the most prolific crinoline manufacturers of the nineteenth century. This article attempts to piece together Thomson's strategy during the decline of crinoline, between about 1867 and 1874. It describes in particular how Thomson introduced a woollen skirt, the batwing, which required a small crinoline to be worn underneath. It draws on a primary source that regularly mentioned Thomson: the magazine, specifically *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (hereafter the *EDM*) from 1862 to 1874. Although the scope of the project was limited to one magazine, a complete set was available to provide an unbroken narrative.¹

This article is rooted in my previous research into a surviving Thomson crinoline that is largely constructed with vertical textile tapes and horizontal metal wires.² Printed inside the waistband is the inscription 'THOMSON'S "PRINCESS." NO. 371', and a crown labelled 'TRADE MARK'. The Princess offers some intrinsic evidence of mass production. For example, the wire is passed through channels that have been woven in across the tape by halving the warp and inserting double weft. Only one in every three channels is used, the others appearing flat and undisturbed, which suggests that the tape was produced in large quantities for use on various models of crinoline. I also examined other surviving examples, or photographs or drawings, of wire and tape and fabric crinolines. Wherever possible I compared measurements. I read of those made of cheap cane, or netted thread, or fabric stiffened with horsehair (the original *crin au lin*). I saw advertisements for rubber hoops (recommended for the seaside as they did not rust).³ These crinolines in different materials came from a wide range of manufacturers. The fluctuation of the fashionable shape can be summarised as follows: the crinolines of the 1850s

added fullness evenly around the skirt; around 1860 the front flattened but the back continued to expand. In the late 1860s the crinoline subsided, and volume became concentrated at the top back of the skirt in the form of the bustle. A crinoline was sometimes worn under the bustle in the early 1870s, but it was of a much narrower shape than previously. With this comparative work, I tentatively dated the Princess at around 1870–72, when the crinoline was passing out of fashion. The Princess's dimensions are closest to later examples, with a hem circumference of around 78 in. This contrasts with a Prize Medal of 1864–67 at 116 in., or a paper pattern of 1862 at 126 in.⁴ I did not see the Princess in any advertisements, but Thomson's Bijou Princess crinolette is illustrated in the *EDM* of October 1873.⁵

The necessity for this object-based approach was compounded by the fact that I could find no biographical details at all about W. S. Thomson the man, beyond the facts that he was American, and that he filed several patents for cage crinolines during the second half of the 1850s, in Great Britain, France and the USA. Hundreds of such patents were being filed around that time, but Thomson actually put his ideas into mass production. The *EDM* places him at Cheapside in 1874, but provides few other clues about the company (apart from what the products suggest).⁶ From other sources, I traced the following well-known account back to 1943, within an article that, maddeningly, has no references:

The largest firm of crinoline-manufacturers was that of Thomsons' [*sic*] in London, which had branches in New York, Paris, and Brussels, as well as others in Saxony and Bohemia. The London factory alone employed over a thousand women, and turned out between three and four thousand crinolines daily. The number of hooks and eyes required amounted to a quarter of a million a day. In twelve years the branch in Saxony alone manufactured 9,597,600 crinolines. The quantities of material required for such an enormous output may be gathered from the fact that the steel wire for the frames of all these skirts amounted to many times the circumference of the earth.⁷

How might such momentum be redirected when demand for its end-product ceases? That was the question facing Thomson and his competitors. The scale of the industry is suggested by the fact that amid the welter of dressmaking patterns in the *EDM*, I saw only one for a crinoline.⁸ Factory-made crinolines appear to have been the norm. The cage crinoline has been interpreted by historians as the first industrial, affordable fashion, thanks to advances in making suitable steels.⁹ In 1857, *The Times* reported that 'a firm in Sheffield has taken an order for 40 tons of rolled steel for Crinoline, and a foreign order has been given for one ton a-week for several weeks'.¹⁰ By 1862, 130–150 tons of steel were being consumed weekly by the crinoline trade, or roughly one-seventh of the weekly output of steel in Sheffield.¹¹ In 1865, Henry Mayhew noted that:

It may be safely calculated that every female in the kingdom possesses two sets of hoops. [...] Crinoline has become a vast commercial interest. [...] It extends itself to the forge, the factory and the mine. At this moment and at any moment throughout the year, men and boys are toiling in the bowels of the earth to obtain the ore of iron which fire and furnace and steam will in due time, by many elaborate processes, convert into steel for petticoats.¹²

What is odd about this massive consumption of steel is how little it is documented in general histories. Two histories of the British steel industry, published in the 1960s, do not mention crinolines once.¹³ More recent work from another angle also

indicates this gap. Andrew Godley has demonstrated that the sewing machine is not the complete explanation for the high annual growth rate of labour productivity in the UK clothing industry during 1855–71. Sewing machine sales were still quite low in the 1850s and 1860s. He does not offer another explanation for this high growth in productivity, and again, crinolines are not mentioned.¹⁴ Yet those seventeen years precisely coincide with crinoline's boom.

Advertisers of the 1860s readily acknowledged the co-operation between the steel and clothing industries. Even as the fashion for crinoline waned at the end of the decade, developments to the steel wires continued.¹⁵ Twin steels were available for machine-stitching onto skirts to customise their shape.¹⁶ Steel was still being used in corsets, bustles and crinolettes. Thomson regularly advertised the 'unbreakable' corset busk, that 'greatly reduces the risk of fracture, while permitting the use of most highly-tempered Steel'.¹⁷ By 1873, the steel industry appears to have been successfully selling to other areas of the clothing industry. In the October issue of the *EDM*, the regular columns — 'Spinnings in Town' by 'Silkworm' and 'The October Fashions' — agree that steel ornaments and trimmings, in a range of finishes, are 'quite the rage'.¹⁸

At the height of their popularity, crinolines were widely worn and widely ridiculed. *Punch* suggested that fashion and satire had attained a symbiotic relationship, become a reciprocal creative force.¹⁹ Men may scoff at crinoline, claimed the article, but were not persuading their female relatives to abandon it. Some human instinct for display was being fulfilled. This article refers to 'integuments' — a striking term for crinolines, as it usually applies to natural coverings such as skin, husk or rind. The implication is that crinolines are an integral part of a woman, a protective and showy covering.²⁰ The *Punch* article was quoted in the *EDM*, so was clearly expected to appeal to women as well as men. Such cheerfulness offers an interesting contrast with modern references to the crinoline as a 'cage'.²¹

Because the crinoline supported skirts so much more effectively than petticoats, the fashion for fullness could be pushed out to a new extreme. Breward suggests that this artificiality reached its apex with the gored skirt, where all of the fullness was created by a metal support and none at all by fabric.²² Protecting those enormous skirts from the dirt was attempted by leather petticoats and hem guards. Hoisting the skirt up was another option, using either an integral arrangement of tape or a *porte-jupe*.²³ Underskirts were on show. Worn on top of the crinoline, their primary function was to disguise the shape of the hoops, but by 1863 it was 'absolutely necessary that they should be tastily got up'. The *EDM* started to describe these underskirts in some detail. 'The inevitable flutings', achieved by gauffering (crimping) after each wash, were reportedly a very popular trim that February, and linsey is considered a particularly practical fabric because it can be brushed clean.²⁴ Looping up the skirt, a practice born of necessity, became an established fashion, the new method of creating shape and fullness as the crinoline subsided in the late 1860s. The narrowing underskirts were a foil for the increasingly ornate folds of the 'Pompadour' overskirt.

Although the *EDM* carried advertisements and articles relating to the crinoline from 1856 onwards, I could find no mention of Thomson until the issue of August 1862.²⁵ Thomson's advertisements consistently urge consumers to check crinolines for its trademark: a crown, with its associations of pride, loyalty, opulence, quintessence, supremacy. There is no mention of any actual royal endorsement. More quantifiable status came with an award of 'the only Prize Medal for Crinolines' at the International Exhibition of 1862 in London. Thomson named one of its crinolines the 'Prize Medal', and advertisements of around 1862–64 often include a sketch of a medal.

Thomson's competitors included Carter's Crinoline Warehouse, Hubbell, E. Philpott and Addley Bourne. In 1864 Hubbell and Philpott were both advertising the Ondina (waved hoops) and the Sansflectum (rubber hoops). By April 1865, Philpott had been taken over by Addley Bourne, which was retailing Thomson's crinolines as part of its range. All their advertisements carried drawings of different crinolines, and some had sketches of fully clad ladies to show the effects created, but at no time did I see a picture of a lady wearing an uncovered crinoline (unlike cartoons). Badges of public approval such as crowns and medals — power rather than sex — were used to attract customers.

In March 1865, Thomson extended its exposure in the *EDM*, to be featured in the two hand-painted colour plates supplied with each issue (see Col. Pl. III). Even if the ladies in the plates were sketched from life, there is no way of knowing whether or not they were wearing Thomson's crinolines under their skirts. Yet Thomson continued to be mentioned on the colour plates until May 1866 inclusive. It is a clever tactic. While using its own advertisements to emphasise integrity and quality, Thomson was here getting its name associated with Parisian style. Mass production and haute couture were appearing together, much as the *EDM* itself trod a fine line between social aspiration and social exclusivity. Thomson was able to exploit this advantageous position when the fashionable crinoline began to subside.

Some modern accounts suggest that the crinoline abruptly vanished in the winter of 1867–68, and certainly *Punch* was carrying cartoons of their use as gardening frames in early 1868.²⁶ However, I would argue that the subsidence began earlier than that and happened more gradually. The plate for March 1866 suggests an emerging Parisian interest in the sculptural possibilities of fabric (Col. Pl. IV). The grey skirt is looking less solid, its folds deeper, than those of the previous year, and the purple overskirt is puffed.

Crinoline manufacturers were swift to make alterations in response to this new trend. Many existing models were adapted, to produce the Demi-Sansflectum, the Prize Medal Plastique, the Demi-Ondina Jupon. As early as April 1866, Addley Bourne advertised 'The Pompadour Crinoline' without steel.

When on the figure, [it] falls into such a variety of graceful forms that the dress is compelled to take an elegant negligence, and to assume those deep and rich folds in which artists so much delight.²⁷

Addley Bourne also offered the Gemma, or Jewelled Jupon 'in choices of circumferences and of number of hoops', along with a full description of its

eight varieties of crinoline 'with Remarks on the Changes of Taste' and advice on choosing a crinoline to suit particular figures. To enable a consumer to personalise her choice as much as possible would seem to be a wise strategy, at a time of uncertainty over what would replace the almighty crinoline. But then, perhaps, Addley Bourne decided that it could no longer compete with Thomson. In July 1867 it placed a full-page advertisement for a £20 trousseau, and continued thereafter to focus on underwear and baby goods, only offering crinolines in small print and at low prices.²⁸

Thomson ceased to be credited on the coloured plates in June 1866. It published two small advertisements that contributed to the debate (see Fig. 1), and then, in March 1867, posted a larger advertisement for a Prize Medal, 'adapted to present fashions'. That was Thomson's last direct advertisement in the *EDM* for over a year. I speculate that having provided its customers with a suitable stopgap, Thomson retreated, in order to regroup and redesign.

The November and March issues of the *EDM* support the assertion that crinolines were redesigned rather than rejected during the winter of 1867-68:

Of crinolines there is a complete assortment, for crinolines, though now reduced to small proportions, do not appear likely to be discarded this winter.²⁹
Crinolines, far from being left off, have merely changed their shape; they are plain in front, but puffed out on either side so as to remind one strongly of the hoops or *panniers* of the last century.³⁰

On an individual level, of course, women would have been discarding and leaving off their crinolines, in order to replace them with the smaller ones that manufacturers were offering. I saw no mention of altering readymade crinolines.

JUST PUBLISHED
(Gratis).

**THE GREAT CRINOLINE
QUESTION**

Solved by Her Majesty
THE EMPRESS OF THE FRENCH.

Ladies should at once obtain Gratis of their Draper
or Corset Maker THOMSON'S new Illustration,
showing the veritable "MODE DE
L'IMPERATRICE."

FIG. 1. Thomson discreetly keeps its name in the public eye, advertising in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, vol. 11, no. 76 (August 1866) and 3, no. 81 (January 1867)

LATEST PARIS FASHIONS.—"Is the reign of Crinoline over? No—decidedly no; it has only changed its form. More elegant and moderate in its proportions, it is now more than ever indispensable to an elegant toilette."—*La Revue des Modes*, Sept., 1866.

"Crinoline is not dead; it is modified."—*Figaro*, Oct., 1866.

"Crinoline retains its proportions, having, in an improved form, obtained a new lease from Fashion."—*La Revue des Salons de Paris*, Oct., 1866.

"No modest woman should venture into the streets of Paris, on foot, without Crinoline."—*Revue Illustrée*, Oct. 8, 1866.

"Even Muslin Skirts must be upheld by Crinoline; the new shape, though hardly noticeable, must form the basis of all tasteful toilettes. If some of the old forms of Crinoline were absurd, how much more absurd to rush into the opposite extreme of Himp, inelegant, discomfort?"—*Musée des Familles*, Oct., 1866.

"To-morrow, we are always told, 'Crinoline goes out of fashion; that to-morrow will be long coming.'"—*Petit Courrier Des Dames*, Oct. 6, 1866.

"La Jupe-Cage Thomson' resists all attacks levelled against Crinoline."—*Le Petit Courrier Des Dames*, Sept., 1866.

**THOMSON'S
PRIZE MEDAL, EMPRESS, AND DOUBLE EYELET
SKIRTS**

Can now be had in small sizes—viz., 2, 2½, and 2¾ yards round, made as above, without Steels at top, and called "Plastique;" thus—"Prize Medal Plastique," "Empress Plastique," and "Double-Eyelet Plastique;" 2 and 2½ yards round will be made in Plastique only. Sold by best Drapers everywhere.

The remainder of this article draws heavily on the fashion reportage in the *EDM*, a methodology complicated by the fact that I do not know the terms of the relationship between Thomson and the *EDM* editorial team. For example, is Silkworm reporting a trend or is she seeking to create one — or to maintain one, in the case of crinoline? How much obligation is she under to produce ‘advertorial’? She tends to enthuse about the products of selected companies, rather than assessing the similar products of diverse companies. Whatever the truth, it is fair to say that repeatedly, the columnists raised the question of whether crinoline was over, and concluded that it was not. In September 1870, for example, the *EDM* wrote off steel in jupons, but in October recommended the panier crinoline which did have steels, as well as Thomson crinolines in general, ‘new in shape if not in material’.³¹ How much influence Thomson had on such inconsistencies is a matter for further research.

In 1868, ‘The October Fashions’ reported that, ‘Even those persons who avoid all exaggeration in fashion, and resist its innovations as long as possible, wear two skirts to their dress’ with the upper skirt shortened to reveal the underskirt.³² At this point Thomson introduced the batwing underskirt. It was made of light, thick, Australian wool, without seams or hoops, and was designed to fit and mould over a crinoline and prevent its outlines from being seen. It was initially available in grey, scarlet, violet or blue, and other colours were soon added to the range. Most excitingly, it could be customised. ‘The plain ones can be braided by ladies who possess sewing machines, the material being so soft as to offer no resistance to the needle.’ A reversible version was available, whereby ‘two distinct petticoats are obtained for little more than the price of one’.³³ They were also available with embroidered, appliquéd, embossed or printed decoration. Designs of flowers, foliage, stars, scrolls, diamonds, ovals, tartan, lines and bands all featured. Trimming was an easy way for Thomson to respond promptly to the latest trend.

The batwing was prominently advertised in the *EDM* over the next four years, and Silkworm gave it plenty of enthusiastic copy about twice a year. In October 1869 she reports that the batwing cloth has been made finer and still lighter, and that ‘the qualities of the batwing petticoats are their extreme lightness, their warmth, their great durability, and last, but not least, their elegance and beauty’.³⁴ The artistic effects that could be created by colour and trimming are a particular focus. Scarlet batwings are recommended for cold days, rich royal blue for the prettiest contrast with the snow. In December 1871 Silkworm reports that the trimmings have been designed in Paris. Her description of the ‘Oriental’ trimming in October 1872 is characteristic hyperbole:

Artistic outlines of black velvet frame *pinces*, ovals, triangles, and other forms in brocaded silk, in rich gold, scarlet, and black. It is not possible to describe in words the effect of this rich trimming, but if one recalls the glories of Indian shawls, taken reverently out from sandal-smelling cases, a slight idea of the effect of the Oriental jupon will be obtained. Imagine the skirt daintily raised over such a petticoat!³⁵

‘What a treat it was to one who considers DRESS ONE OF THE FINE ARTS’, comments Silkworm of this visit to see the full range. Thomson’s launch of the batwing in 1868 can be interpreted as part of the nascent Arts and Crafts movement. At this

date, Arthur Lasenby Liberty was running his Oriental Bazaar at Farmer and Rogers' Great Shawl and Cloak Emporium on Regent Street, prior to opening his own shop in 1875. Shawls were popular throughout the crinoline years, and the opening up of Japanese society after two centuries encouraged a taste for exotic designs and fabrics from various cultures.³⁶ Liberty and Thomson both appear to have sought out innovative materials that would balance the aesthetic and the functional — Thomson claims this for the batwing in his advertisement of late 1869 (Fig. 2).

I speculate that Thomson used materials for his batwing that had been originally procured to make cage crinolines — with mixed results. For example, Silksworm effuses about the batwing trimmings in March 1869:

The effect of the new trimming is capital; it has the exact appearance of a plain or shaded satin ribbon *laid on* the skirts, neither sewn nor stitched nor run on; it is not woven in, but appears to keep its place by 'uncanny' help. It is so firm that it cannot be removed by fair means.³⁷

She reports a modification, however, in December 1870:

These new skirts are a great improvement upon those of last year, the new trimming being applied and embroidered on, so that there is not the slightest chance of the trimming coming off, even if the wearer sits, feet on fender-stool, 'hugging' the fire, as many ladies do, to the detriment of their health and dresses.³⁸

December 1, 1869.] THE ENGLISHWOMAN'S DOMESTIC MAGAZINE ADVERTISER.

THOMSON'S "ROYAL BATSWING" SEAMLESS OVERSKIRT.

One of the most perfect novelties ever produced. The result of a combination of inventive art with the highest skill in manufacture, it is the perfection of an article of ladies' attire.

The "Batwing" possesses all the desirable qualities hitherto sought in vain in a woollen garment—it is **Durable, Light, Warm,** and at the same time most **Elegant,** a sure protection against cold and the sudden changes of this variable climate, a health-preserver as well as a perfect luxury.

Being "**Seamless**" and



moulded to the human form, an **exquisite fit is insured to any figure,** which cannot be attained in an article made with seams.

Taking advantage of the latest improvements introduced in steam machinery, these goods are now produced, not only with increased rapidity, but at a considerable reduction in price, retaining in every particular, however, their high qualities and excellence; wearing longer, washing or cleaning easier, and with less shrinking or spoiling than any other woollen fabric.

FIG. 2. Advertisement for the batwing in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, vol. 7, no. 116 (December 1869)

Perhaps Thomson had been using the same adhesive that had held its crinolines together so firmly (coating the steels with fabric, for example). If so, this adhesive, intended for wear under layers of fabric, evidently could not survive exposure to a fire. It is striking that Silkworm blames the wearer rather than Thomson — another example of questionable independence of the magazine from the manufacturer.

The name batswing had a contemporary significance, as it was given to a gas-burner with a flame shaped like a bat's wing. It also relates to a crinoline launched earlier in 1868, the Zephyrina, or Winged Jupon, presented as a 'new safety crinoline', with a gap at the front hem, and the ends of the lower hoops connected in two curves rather like wings.³⁹ Zephyr means west wind, but it also means 'a thin light worsted or woollen yarn; a shawl, jersey or other garment made of such'.⁴⁰ Perhaps the name was chosen to prepare the minds of customers for the batswing. A lighter 'Spring Batswing' or 'Zephyr' appeared the following year (see Fig. 3).⁴¹ Complete costumes of batswing fabric were introduced, consisting of petticoat, short skirt with looped sash, and mantle. Thomson also diversified into readymade costumes of fine opaque silk or of chambray, mostly in neutral shades.⁴² The 'Satinpiper' mentioned in Figure 3 might be the chambray petticoat, trimmed with narrow satin bands, recommended by Silkworm in March 1869.

The bustle (more frequently called the tournure in the *EDM* around this date) makes an appearance. First used to complement the narrowing crinoline in elaborate outfits, by 1870 it was widely used for both walking dresses and trained ones.⁴³ Crinolines were presented as an integral, indispensable part of a complete range. The clever thing about the batswing was that it was a new product but kept the concealed crinoline in use. The editorial copy in the *EDM* tended to help this along, mentioning the crinoline almost as a casual afterthought. In November 1868 Silkworm recommends a 'new resilient crinoline' for wear under the batswing: 'It is small at the edge, while hanging well off the hips, where increased size is required by the prevailing mode.'⁴⁴ Thomson's Empress New Resilient matches this description and featured in the range for some years.⁴⁵ In March 1869, Silkworm describes some of Thomson's readymade range, and

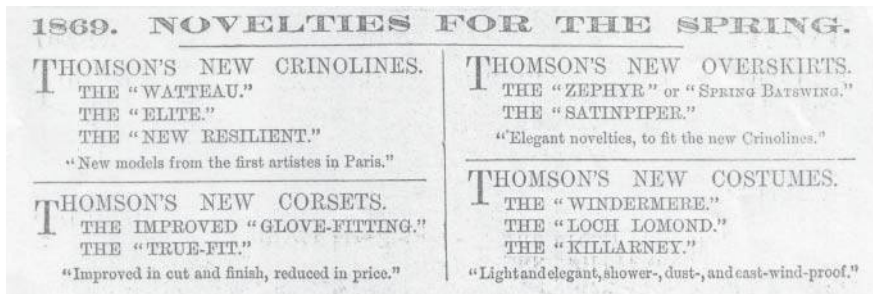


FIG. 3. Advertisement in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, vol. 6, no. 108 (April 1869)

continues: ‘After looking at these pretty skirts and dresses I enquired for the new crinoline — the “*Elite Skirt.*” This skirt is entirely original.’⁴⁶ Her description of the batwing the following October ends with, ‘The question occurs over what crinoline should these charming jupons be worn?’. An elliptical skirt is recommended, and a Patent Elliptic was being advertised around this time.⁴⁷ Silkworm uses the term that Thomson was applying to its latest style, even when the product was not named directly. Two Patent Elliptic crinolines were shown just below the batwing of Figure 2 in the same advertisement, literally and visually in a supporting role. These simple drawings with text constitute the most typical style of Thomson advertisement. In addition, a riddle format appeared several times in the *EDM* during 1869–70, where printed on the green magazine cover was the silhouette of a bat (see Fig. 4). It stimulates the imagination around a mere woollen skirt, helping create associations of softness, lightness and originality.

A suggestion of the interdependence of the batwing and the crinoline is maintained by the pattern of Thomson’s advertising in 1870 and 1871: a picture of a single crinoline in the spring, and of a single batwing in the autumn. (Corsets are mentioned in each advertisement but not illustrated.) An impression of confidence and leadership is created with the uncluttered drawing of the panier crinoline in the spring of 1870 (Fig. 5). The autumn 1870 batwing (Fig. 6) is shown with greater fullness gathered into the waist, compared to Figure 2, possibly to assure the reader that it would accommodate a variety of tournures.⁴⁸ It retains this shape in subsequent illustrations.

The spring 1871 crinoline is the ‘new duplex’ which combined tournure and jupon.⁴⁹ The duplex is described as light and practical: ‘the lower skirt prevents that close clinging of the skirt which is so ugly and uncomfortable.’⁵⁰ Some models had detachable tournures. The batwing advertised in autumn 1871 is unchanged except for the trimming.⁵¹

In spring 1872 the pattern is broken, with six different crinolines or crinolettes illustrated, and also a corset and a busk (Fig. 7).⁵² Faltering fashion leadership can be read into this visual proliferation, even though (with the *Globe* reference to crinolines) Thomson claims to be making deliberate progress away from the garment that it had itself produced in thousands, if not millions. The

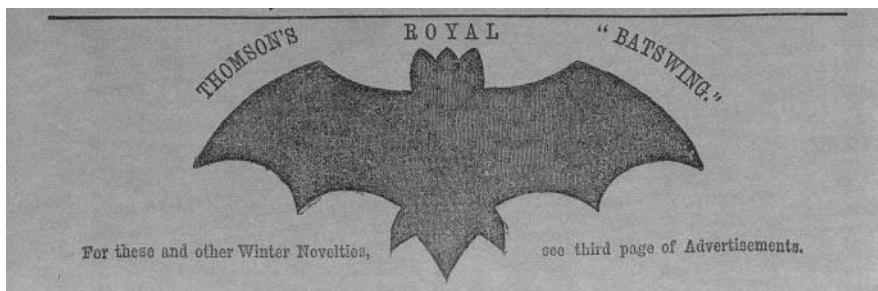


FIG. 4. An attractive and striking advertisement in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, vol. 7, no. 116 (December 1869)

THE ENGLISHWOMAN'S DOMESTIC MAGAZINE ADVERTISER.

[March 1, 1870.]

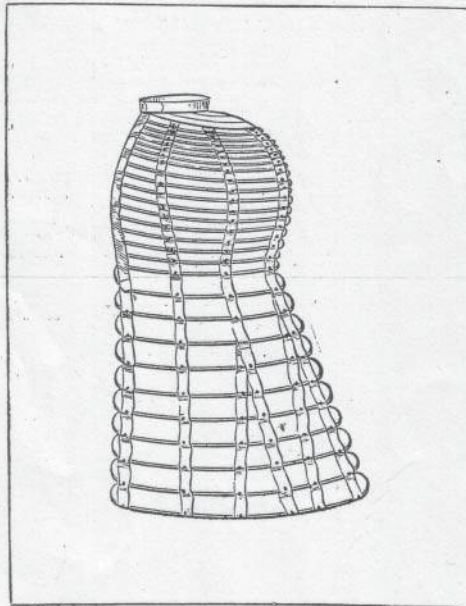
**THOMSON'S
NEW AND IMPROVED STYLES IN CRINOLINES
FOR THE SPRING OF 1870 NOW READY.**

Particular attention is invited to the NEW JUPON, as Illustrated, and which will be found unique in construction, very comfortable in wear, and perfectly adapted to the requirements of the latest Spring Fashions.

THE "PRIZE MEDAL PANIER,"
With Eyleted Tapes, 2 yards 6 inches round.

THE "EMPRESS PANIER,"
With Broad Woven Tapes, 2 yards 6 inches round.

SPRING, 1870.



THOMSON'S NEW MODEL,
THE "PRIZE MEDAL PANIER."

THOMSON'S CELEBRATED GLOVE-FITTING CORSETS.

The only Perfect Corset.
The Perfection of Design and Manufacture.
Cut on a new and most correct principle.

Will not stretch in wear.
Gives the greatest Elegance of Shape.
Made in Five Qualities.

The Name, THOMSON, and Trade Mark, a CROWN, stamped upon all Genuine Goods.

FIG. 5. A narrow crinoline in an unusually uncluttered advertisement, in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, vol. 8, no. 119 (March 1870)

THOMSON'S NOVELTIES

FOR THE AUTUMN OF 1870.

THE ROYAL "BATSWING" OVERSKIRT.

A wonderful invention in Ladies' Attire, made of pure Australian Wool, light and warm beyond belief. SEAMLESS and MOULDED TO THE SHAPE; ornamented by a new process, called "Buhlesque," a combination of Satin, Velvet, and Silk Repts, in new and tasteful designs. RENDERED INDESTRUCTIBLE by being EMBROIDERED on. Can be had plain, in Scarlet, Violet, and three shades of Grey, and in all these colours ornamented in various patterns.

The GENUINE GOODS are ALWAYS SEAMLESS, and stamped with the name, "THOMSON," and with the Trade Mark, a Crown.

CORSETS.

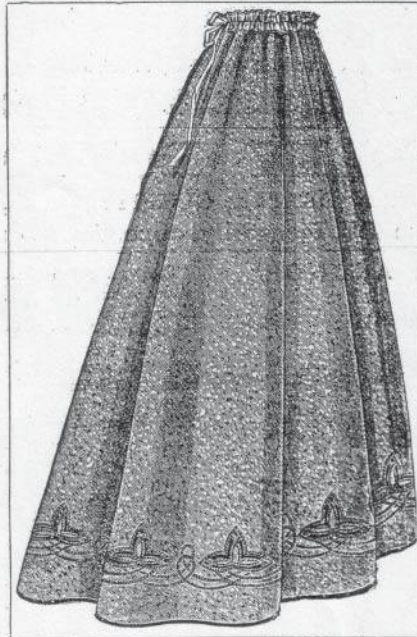
THE "GLOVE-FITTING"

The perfection of design and superior manufacture. Cut on a most correct principle, accurate fit is obtained. Will not stretch in wear.

The "Glove-fitting" is now made in five qualities.

Reduced in price this season.

Always stamped with the name and Trade Mark, a Crown.



ROYAL BATSWING.

CORSETS.

THE "CURVILINEAR."

An entirely new model, fitting close to the waist, yet affording much freer scope for the play and movements of the chest, lungs, and hips than any Corset ever before invented. Made in two styles, with or without front fastening.

Always stamped with the name and Trade Mark, a Crown.

CRINOLINES. The "Panier."

Combining Bustle and Crinoline in one. Lighter and more comfortable than those who have not worn it can easily believe.

Always stamped with name and Trade Mark

CRINOLINES. The "Adaptable."

Ladies who prefer covered Crinolines cannot fail to like this novelty, which adapts itself to every fold of the dress or movement of the wearer.

CRINOLINES. The "Resilient."

Made of the lightest Watch-Spring Steel. Owing to its great popularity last season, it remains unaltered.



and to be had of all First-class Retailers.

CRINOLINES. The "Plastique."

An old favourite, remodelled this season. Combines, at a low price, moderate bustle with great lightness and durability.

Fig. 6. Advertisement for the batwing in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, vol. 9, no. 126 (October 1870)

advertisement of September 1872 has the usual single illustration of a batwing, but also mentions a cheaper version, with seams, which indicates some anxiety about being undercut by competitors.⁵³ Readers are warned to avoid imitations of these pure wool products, of which Thomson is the sole manufacturer: 'The admixture of cotton in the *imitation* articles can easily be detected.'⁵⁴

Figure 8 shows an unusual advertisement, a full-page spread which appeared in the *EDM* in October 1872. It helps the reader to identify with the shoppers by giving us the same view into a shop window. The dominant image is the three ladies, not the products, which await selection by the consumer. This sets a much less didactic tone than usual. Here, the batwing is being examined by a woman out alone, whose hair is dressed high in the new style of that autumn.⁵⁵ The batwing becomes a modern, independent and thoughtful choice by association. The pair of ladies appear to be discussing the crinolines and the corsets, front feet visible in purposeful step. The leader's hands are gesturing, guiding, selecting. The ease with which these women exert their spending power is neatly symbolised in the jaunty dog carrying the handbag. The male shopkeeper/manufacturer/inventor offering the unbreakable busk is arguably reduced to subservience by the fact that only his hands are shown.⁵⁶ I speculate that with this advertisement Thomson is seeking to flatter the female consumer, to make her feel confident about wielding her own taste in the face of fragmenting fashions.


In December 1872, Silkworm reiterates Thomson's warning against the imitation batwings produced by English as well as German and American manufacturers:

The endeavour to deceive is carried to a great length, as will be seen by the placards BESTWING PETTICOATS, in similar letters as shown on Messrs. Thomson's BATSWING PETTICOAT show-cards.⁵⁷

Following this striking advertisement, and these ominous words, the batwing vanishes. I could find no further trace of it in the *EDM*, up to and including the December 1874 issue, by which time the display of underskirts had been deemed out of fashion.⁵⁸ Of course Thomson may have simply decided to advertise the batwing elsewhere, but dropping it even from the small print of *EDM* advertisements would not seem to be its usual style. The most obvious explanation for the batwing's abrupt disappearance is that Thomson decided to stop producing it. As for keeping warm, batwings are no longer mentioned; instead, 'We have got through the winter [1873-74] by the aid of quilted petticoats and a tournure of eider-down or of steel'⁵⁹.


Thomson did not repeat the shop window advertisement in the *EDM*, even though the window could have been 'restocked' each season. During 1873 and 1874, Thomson changed its logo at least three times, veering from sans serif to highly ornamented lettering (Fig. 9), which suggests a certain anxiety about its identity.⁶⁰ Its advertisements were rather conventional ones, with seven or eight drawings of different products, and a claim that the glove-fitting corsets were 'now in world-wide demand'.⁶¹

Although crinolines lingered on in Thomson's advertisements, in November 1872 the *EDM* announced that 'the actual crinoline is now given up or nearly



W. S. THOMSON & CO.

SPRING, 1872.





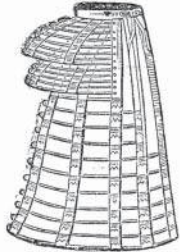
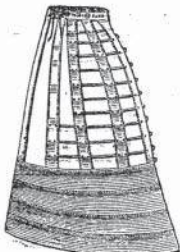

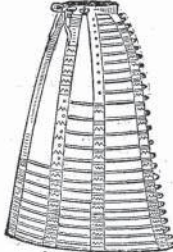
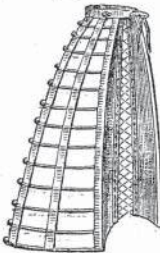

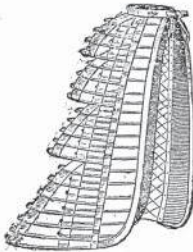
 <p>THE "PAGODA."</p> <p>A great novelty, producing exactly the perfect "tournure à la mode," so difficult to obtain without a multiplicity of skirts and bustles.</p>	 <p>PATENT CORSET BUSKS.</p> <p>"THE UNBREAKABLE," <i>Covered in Satteen.</i></p> <p>The Patented principle, "without perforation," has now been thoroughly tested; it allows the use of Steel of the very highest temper, without the dangerous risk of breaking.</p>	 <p>"DU PLEX." <i>With Single or Double Bustle.</i></p> <p>Supplies, with the least possible weight, Tournure and Jupou in one.</p>
 <p>"PARIS PRIZE."</p> <p>Half covered in Grey, Steel, Stripe, White, Scarlet, or Violet. A great improvement in several respects on the "Paris Prize" of last year.</p>	<p>"THOMSON has completely emancipated ladies from the heavy penalties of wearing ill-constructed Corsets and heavy, shapeless 'all-round' Crinolines."—<i>GLOBE.</i></p> <p>"THOMSON, to whom so many manufacturers pay the unconscious homage of imitation."—<i>MORNING POST.</i></p> <p>"THOMSON's Corsets and Crinolines are the two indispensable items of a lady's wardrobe."—<i>COURT JOURNAL.</i></p> <p>The Genuine Goods always stamped with the Name "THOMSON," and with the Trade Mark, thus—</p> 	 <p>"EMPRESS RESILIENT."</p> <p>This elegant Crinoline cannot swing or oscillate. It adapts its size on the hips to all figures.</p>
 <p>"CRINOLETTE."</p> <p>This form of Crinoline, which lays against, instead of encircling, the figure, will be found to answer its purpose admirably.</p>	 <p>"GLOVE-FITTING."</p> <p>Like the French Corset, the Glove-fitting principle adapts itself to all figures; but, unlike the Woven article, the Glove-fitting cannot stretch in wear.</p>	 <p>"CRINOLETTE."</p> <p>This "Pagoda" form of Crinulette will be found perfection for evening wear.</p>

FIG. 7. Advertisement in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, vol. 12, no. 144 (April 1872)

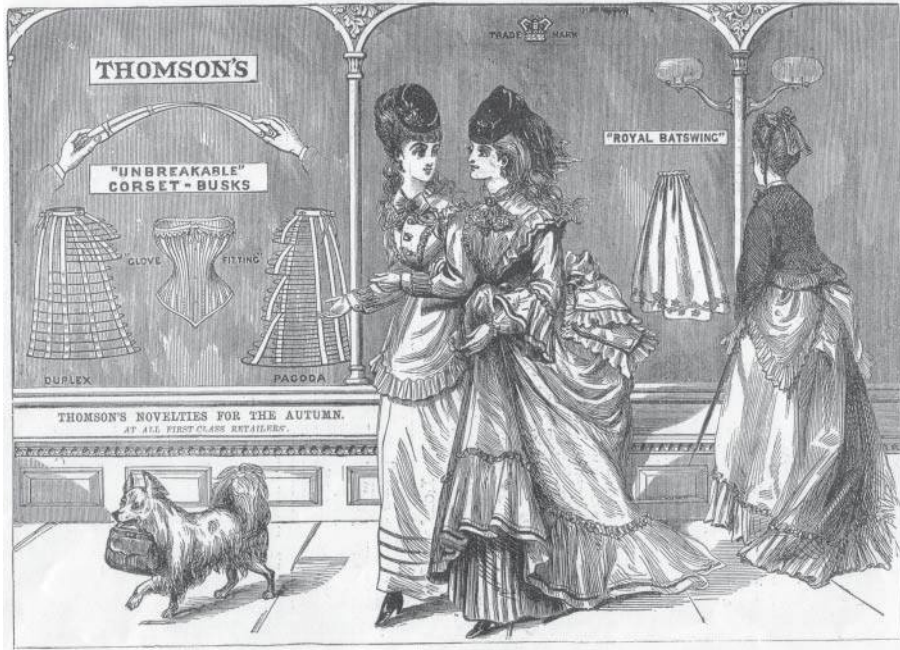


FIG. 8. The last advertisement for the batwing to appear in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, vol. 12, no. 150 (October 1872)

so', sometimes replaced with long horsehair bustles with several flutings worn to support the complex arrangements at the back of the skirt.⁶² Crinoline is again dismissed the following February — along with the panier 'full round skirts, looped up on either side a la Louis Quinze', which had previously heralded the production of the batwing underskirt.⁶³ Yet *Silkworm* was still promoting Thomson's products. In October 1873, she urges readers — even 'those who utterly reject all semblance of crinoline' — to wear the Bijou Princess crinolette.⁶⁴ She provides a rare illustration within the article, and also recommends Thomson's corsets. Six months later, she illustrates three of Thomson's bustles.⁶⁵ Bustles were shrinking during 1874, and *Silkworm* makes a very early mention of the S bend 'line of beauty'.⁶⁶ Over the next ten years, the narrow silhouette was to reappear for the first time in sixty years, before the bustle returned in the mid-1880s. The cage crinoline has never returned to everyday mainstream use.

My gleanings of the product and marketing strategy of W. S. Thomson's company between 1867 and 1874 may be read as a response to the decline of crinoline, as follows. The batwing underskirt was expressly designed to require a crinoline beneath it, and a newly narrowed one at that, in order to protect the existing revenue stream of crinoline sales. The practical benefits of crinolines were emphasised in the advertising, while the fashion focus was shifted elsewhere. Thomson diversified into other readymade clothing, and exploited customer uncertainty about fashion by offering customisable products (tournures, batswings,



FIG. 9. Two of several typefaces used by Thomson in quick succession in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, vol. 15, no. 161 (September 1873) and vol. 16, no. 169 (May 1874)

crinolines). The ever-popular corset remained in the range. Thomson continued to emphasise innovation in the material and construction of all its garments. The company appears to have been keen to avoid an outdated image, regularly refreshing advertisements with new logos and layouts. It ensured that its products were frequently mentioned in magazine articles, and it discontinued products when appropriate.

W. S. Thomson's company survived the decline of crinoline, and indeed the decline of the *EDM*. It was still advertising its corsets in the 1890s.⁶⁷ How far the company survived into the twentieth century is just one of many questions to be addressed by further research.

Photographic Acknowledgements

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In the *EDM* at this time, advertisements usually appeared on unnumbered pages, in the end papers or separate supplements. *EDM* references without page numbers therefore usually denote an advertisement. Note that the twelfth volume extends over an entire year (1872) instead of the usual six months, presumably to avoid an unlucky thirteenth.

¹ The set is complete from August 1862, the first issue I saw that contained a reference to Thomson, to December 1874. However, not every issue before that was available. I started searching from 1856.

² I am indebted to Daniel Milford-Cottam, collector and fellow MA graduate, whose crinoline this is. The Princess was examined using the methodology of Elliot *et al.* (see Bibliography).

³ I have never yet seen a surviving example of, or a contemporary advertisement for, nineteenth-century whalebone crinolines. I have seen one passing reference, in a *Punch* article quoted in *EDM*, vol. 5, no. 31 (November 1862), p. 39.

⁴ Extant Prize Medal drawn and dated in Bradfield, p. 225. Paper pattern for a skirt crinoline published in *EDM*, vol. 5, no. 30 (October 1862), insert.

⁵ *EDM*, vol. 15, no. 162 (October 1873), p. 203.

⁶ *EDM*, vol. 16, no. 168 (April 1874), p. 203.

⁷ W. Born, 'Crinoline and Bustle', *CIBA Review*, vol. 4, no. 46 (1943), p. 1690; quoted in N. Waugh, *Corsets and Crinolines* (London: Batsford, 1954), p. 166.

⁸ *EDM*, vol. 5, no. 30 (October 1862), insert.

⁹ Breward, p. 157; Levitt, p. 39; de Marly, p. 76. These writers differ on certain points, such as the degree of importance of the Bessemer process. Levitt regards it as the trigger for the industrialisation of crinoline from 1856; but Breward argues that Bessemer struggled with problems between 1856 and 1858, and that more general improvements such as new wire drawing techniques were the true catalyst.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 18 July 1857; cited in Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping*, p. 93.

¹¹ Reported by jurors of the 1862 International Exhibition, cited in Breward, p. 158. The geography of this consumption is not entirely clear.

¹² *The Shops and Companies of London and the Trades and Manufactories of Great Britain* (London, 1865), cited in Breward, p. 160.

¹³ Birch; Carr and Taplin.

¹⁴ Andrew Godley, 'The Development of the UK Clothing Industry, 1850–1950: Output and Productivity Growth', *Business History*, vol. 37, no. 4 (1995), pp. 46–63.

¹⁵ 'A word about the material of which the [Thomson's Elite crinoline] skirt is composed. A newly-invented spring called the "Siamese spring", from its being double and united as are those most unhappy beings, is employed instead of the steel bands to which we are accustomed. This spring is at once yielding, elastic, and very light.' *EDM*, vol. 6, no. 107 (March 1869), p. 142.

¹⁶ Recommended by Silkworm in *EDM*, vol. 7, no. 114 (October 1869), p. 215.

¹⁷ Tarrant, p. 78.

¹⁸ *EDM*, vol. 15, no. 162 (October 1873), pp. 203 and 194. The steel could be 'cut à facettes like diamonds', bluish, burnished (brown) or engraved.'

¹⁹ Anon, 'Fashion versus Satire', *EDM*, vol. 5, no. 31 (November 1862), p. 39.

²⁰ When I tried on a crinoline in the V&A, an observer from Chicago said that it swayed like a peacock. I found that an upright posture and smooth carriage were needed to keep the swaying under control.

²¹ For example, see Levitt, p. 36.

²² Breward, p. 151.

²³ See *EDM*, vol. 4, no. 98 (June 1868), p. 312, for an illustration of a porte-jupe, a short metal rod that clipped to the waistband at one end and at the other had a ring through which the lower skirt was pulled.

²⁴ *EDM*, vol. 6, no. 34 (February 1863), p. 190. By that April, readers were being encouraged to start thinking of their white trimmed summer underskirts as items for display, having 'become articles of as much importance as the dress in a lady's toilet'; *EDM*, vol. 6, no. 36 (April 1863), p. 285.

²⁵ *EDM*, vol. 5, no. 28 (August 1862), although not every issue before that date was available.

²⁶ Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping*, p. 134.

²⁷ *EDM*, vol. 11, no. 72 (April 1866).

²⁸ *EDM*, vol. 3, no. 87 (July 1867).

²⁹ *EDM*, vol. 3, no. 91 (November 1867), p. 595.

³⁰ *EDM*, vol. 4, no. 95 (March 1868), p. 146.

³¹ *EDM*, vol. 9, no. 125 (September 1870), p. 162; *EDM*, vol. 9, no. 126 (October 1870), p. 235.

³² *EDM*, vol. 5, no. 102 (October 1868), p. 201.

³³ *EDM*, vol. 5, no. 103 (November 1868), p. 254. This was the first issue that mentioned the batwing.

³⁴ *EDM*, vol. 7, no. 114 (October 1869), p. 214. Tartan was a fashionable trimming that month.

³⁵ *EDM*, vol. 12, no. 150 (October 1872), p. 223.

³⁶ Recognising this demand, Liberty persuaded British weavers and manufacturers to copy fabrics, and thereby produced, for example, 'Umritza Cashmere' in 1879, reputedly as soft as the native hand-woven cashmeres, but more durable. Adburgham, *Liberty's*, p. 31.

³⁷ *EDM*, vol. 6, no. 107 (March 1869), p. 142.

³⁸ *EDM*, vol. 9, no. 128 (December 1870), p. 366.

³⁹ *EDM*, vol. 4, no. 96 (April 1868). It was possibly not a great success as it never reappeared in an *EDM* advertisement.

⁴⁰ *Chambers Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1972). From Zephyros, Greek god of the west wind.

⁴¹ They 'weigh a few ounces only' according to Silkworm in *EDM*, vol. 6, no. 107 (March 1869), p. 142; they are directly advertised in *EDM*, vol. 6, no. 108 (April 1869).

⁴² Silkworm recommends them in 1869 and 1871. *EDM*, vol. 6, no. 107 (March 1869), p. 142; *EDM*, vol. 10, no. 132 (April 1871), p. 235.

⁴³ *EDM*, vol. 8, no. 119 (March 1870), p. 163.

⁴⁴ The Resilient was available either in walking length or trained for evening wear. *EDM*, vol. 5, no. 103 (November 1868), p. 254.

⁴⁵ Nancy Bradfield sketched a Resilient that she dated at 1870. See Bradfield, p. 225.

⁴⁶ It had an optional adjustable bustle and the new 'Siamese' double springs. *EDM*, vol. 6, no. 107 (March 1869), p. 142.

⁴⁷ *EDM*, vol. 7, no. 114 (October 1869), p. 215; *EDM*, vol. 7, no. 116 (December 1869).

⁴⁸ It is not quite clear whether tournures were worn over or under the batwing.

⁴⁹ *EDM*, vol. 10, no. 131 (March 1871). Repeated in April and May.

⁵⁰ *EDM*, vol. 10, no. 132 (April 1871), p. 235.

⁵¹ *EDM*, vol. 11, no. 137 (September 1871). Repeated in October.

⁵² A crinolette is a frontless crinoline.

⁵³ The seamed version is also mentioned in editorial copy that month. *EDM*, vol. 12, no. 149 (September 1872), p. 167.

⁵⁴ *EDM*, vol. 12, no. 149 (September 1872).

⁵⁵ *EDM*, vol. 12, no. 151 (November 1872), p. 267: 'Ladies have actually given up their heavy drooping chignons. Many a fair neck and delicate turn of the neck now appears, the beauties of which were long hidden by massive coils and plaits.'

⁵⁶ The use of male hands in this advertisement forms an interesting counterpoint to Leigh Summers' discussion of the fragmentation of the female body in corsetry advertising. See Summers, pp. 203–07.

⁵⁷ *EDM*, vol. 12, no. 152 (December 1872), p. 330.

⁵⁸ 'The single-skirted dress is triumphantly sailing back into the height of fashion, with its majestic ample folds and flowing train'; *EDM*, vol. 17, no. 173 (September 1874), p. 138.

- ⁵⁹ *EDM*, vol. 16, no. 168 (April 1874), p. 203. Booth and Fox advertised its down skirts in the *EDM*, vol. 17, no. 176 (December 1874).
- ⁶⁰ *EDM*, vol. 14, no. 156 (April 1873), repeated in May; *EDM*, vol. 15, no. 161 (September 1873); *EDM*, vol. 16, no. 168 (April 1874), repeated in May.
- ⁶¹ *EDM*, vol. 15, no. 161 (September 1873).
- ⁶² *EDM*, vol. 12, no. 151 (November 1872), p. 267.
- ⁶³ *EDM*, vol. 14, no. 154 (February 1873), p. 80.
- ⁶⁴ A crinolette with fabric across the front, possibly an adaptation of the Princess No. 371 crinoline. *EDM*, vol. 15, no. 162 (October 1873), p. 203.
- ⁶⁵ *EDM*, vol. 16, no. 168 (April 1874), p. 203.
- ⁶⁶ *EDM*, vol. 16, no. 167 (March 1874), p. 141; *EDM*, vol. 16, no. 168 (April 1874), p. 203.
- ⁶⁷ *The Queen*, vol. 96, no. 2501 (1 December 1894).

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