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**Front cover image:** James Gillray (1757–1815),  
'Sophia, Honour, & the Chambermaid',  
*Tom Jones*, Book X, ch. V, 1780, stipple engraving  
(28.8 × 21.4 cm, plate mark). Yale Center for British Art,  
Yale University Art Gallery Collection, B1994.4.96.

**Back cover image:** Pair of quilted silk pockets (L 38.9 cm and  
39.8 cm). Victoria & Albert Museum, T.87.A-1978, T.87.B-1978.

**Frontispiece:** Pair of embroidered pockets marked with the  
initials 'G O', 1774 (L 41 cm and 42 cm). Manchester Art Gallery,  
MCAG.1951.107/2.

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## ‘small things forgotten’

It is terribly important that the ‘small things forgotten’ be remembered. For in the seemingly little and insignificant things that accumulate to create a lifetime, the essence of our existence is captured. We must remember these bits and pieces, and we must use them in new and imaginative ways so that a different appreciation for what life is today, and was in the past, can be achieved.

James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, 1977, 161

The nineteenth-century nursery rhyme in which Lucy Locket lost her pocket is perhaps the only shared memory of the object at the heart of this book.<sup>1</sup> Yet every day between the late seventeenth and the late nineteenth centuries, British women and girls of all social classes wore detachable pockets like Lucy Locket’s (fig. 2). They tied them round their waists independently of their clothing, reached them through openings in their petticoats and dresses, and put them on and off at will (fig. 3). Pockets may seem obscure now, but when restored to our attention they open up a nexus of historical questions, ranging from women’s domesticity and work to agency, from possession to financial independence and from consumer practices to privacy. Far from being insignificant, they offer a disconcertingly fruitful insight into women’s lives in the past.

In the early summer of 1725, an advertisement for a lost pair of pockets appeared in a London newspaper:

Tie-on pockets may have been less specialised than men's integrated pockets, but they nevertheless offered women an effective opportunity to carry their things, sometimes in great quantity. They could be made as roomy as required without causing unwelcome pull or strain on the dress. This adaptability accounts in part for why they outlived or coexisted with some of the other containers traditionally thought to have replaced them, such as the reticule bag of the Regency period or later sewn-in pockets. The premature obituaries of the tie-on pocket written by fashion journalists who waxed lyrical over the appearance of the reticule c.1800 have been taken at face value, a mistake compounded by the tendency of fashion and dress history to consider garments and accessories in isolation from one another. In fact, tie-on pockets continued to be worn over time with dramatically different fashionable styles of dress and despite the competition of alternative carriers, such as reticules or male-style integrated pockets. Their resilience reveals a more intricate chronology, in which an essentially unfashionable accessory outlives supposedly more desirable novelties.

A garment and a container, visible and invisible, dress and undress, public and private, the clearly gendered but still puzzling pocket existed not only in the material world but also in the mind. Loaded with meanings as much as with portable possessions, pockets have had a powerful presence in discourses and representations of gender throughout the period. In her short story of 1914, 'If I Were a Man', Charlotte Perkins Gilman alerts us to the gendered politics of pockets. Written at a time when feminists were demanding both dress and political equality, the short story portrays its heroine, a 'true woman' who nevertheless wished 'heart and soul she was a man', suddenly turning into her own husband and spending the day as him. Pockets are among the numerous revelations and 'new views, strange feelings' she encounters on that day. On the way to (his) work in an office, she explores the many pockets of his outfit:

Of course she had known they were there, had counted them, made fun of them, mended them, even envied them; but she never had dreamed of how it felt to have pockets.

Behind her newspaper she let [. . .] that odd mingled consciousness rove from pocket to pocket, realizing the armored assurance of having all those things at hand, instantly get-at-able, ready to meet emergencies. The cigar case [. . .] the firmly held fountain pen, [. . .] the keys, pencils, letters, documents, notebook, checkbook, bill folder – all at once, with a deep rushing sense of power and pride, she felt what she had never felt before in all her life – the possession of money, of her own earned money – hers to give or to withhold; not to beg for, tease for, wheedle for – hers.<sup>4</sup>

The chapter bridges the material and the immaterial, the descriptive and the interpretative, and explores how readily, and often dramatically, the pocket accommodated gendered ideology. Its material, formal and practical characteristics gave rise to metaphorical and polemical interpretations that made it alternately domestic and erotic – a reminder that pockets have always been political.

### Sartorial practices

The male cloak, doublet and hose of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries became reorganised as the coat, waistcoat and breeches of the mid-seventeenth century onwards, and continued the benefits of plural pockets, as the garb of the raggle-taggle band in Paul Sandby's *Asylum for the Deaf* clearly shows (fig. 8). All through the period from the late seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, the staple items of the suit remained in place, though constantly subject to fashionable changes in cut, materials and decoration, most notably in the early nineteenth century, when close-fitting trousers, sleeker jackets and coats came to dominate. Yet for the whole of that period, whatever the style or social class, men's fashions were united by a fraternity of pockets.<sup>5</sup> For men of all ranks, their pockets were finely attuned to their possessions, their work, pastimes and interests, and provided





ABOVE, TOP  
**23** Name, number and year inked on the back of a pocket, 1877. Norfolk Museums Service, Norwich Costume and Textile Collections, NWHCM:1970.171.59.

ABOVE, BOTTOM  
**24** Press stud for the closure of an evolved pocket, late 19th century (detail). Abbey House Museum, Leeds, LEEDM.E.X.0174.

difference between a fashion-led history of dress and one that focuses instead on sartorial practices.

### Revealing pockets

Tie-on pockets eluded strict definition. Physically detached from the dress, they were also unfixed in terms of categorisation. Sometimes aligned with undergarments, at other times they were worn outside the clothing. In one of the earliest technical compendia describing the trade, Frenchman François-Alexandre de Garsault puts pockets within the remit of the *lingère*, who specialised in the making of body linen, listing them as part of the necessary pieces of a woman's trousseau, alongside her caps, smocks, petticoats and handkerchiefs.<sup>60</sup> In the bills that record the purchase of Georgiana Spencer's trousseau in 1774, 'six pairs Pockets' appear together with quilted petticoats, caps and 'Irish cloth drawers' on a merchant's bill (fig. 67).<sup>61</sup> When pockets are mentioned in women's inventories, they often feature together with undergarments. In the 1747 inventory of the Duchess of Montagu's apparel, her pockets are thus to be found among her stockings, hoods and caps.<sup>62</sup> The same classification prevailed in the nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> Yet, at other times, pockets seem to have belonged to a set of matching clothes or accessories that situated them within a regime of visibility and display.

A letter to Glasgow tradesman Robert Burn ordering the wedding ensemble of a bride and her groom in 1775 specifically cites the matching of the tie-on pockets to the fabric of a light-blue poplin wedding dress, specifying 'strings for a woman's pockets and waltening [*sic*] for same all according to the colour before mentioned'.<sup>64</sup> The same matching of outer dress and the tie-on pocket characterises an eighteenth-century doll wearing a pocket made in the same printed cotton fabric as her gown, establishing a visual link between different layers of garments that is not normally made (see fig. 40).<sup>65</sup> A pair of yellow silk quilted pockets that match a lightly boned waistcoat further complicates our understanding of the status of pockets (fig. 25). As part of a matching set, and made in a highly fashionable, vibrant colour, the pockets seem to belong to an aesthetic of visibility, on a par with the practice of matching the various parts of fashionable dress at the time.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, the quilting, together with the light boning of the waistcoat, show similarities with maternity clothing, which would not be worn in public but might be worn as undress in the privacy of the home.<sup>67</sup>

These connections between clothing that otherwise belongs to different sartorial regimes illustrate the inherently unstable status of tie-on pockets. Having a fixed identity neither as a garment nor as an accessory, sometimes underwear, sometimes outerwear, neither dress nor quite undress, the pocket was in between. The ambiguous pockets do not settle easily into the categories

RIGHT AND BELOW  
**25** Woman's matching waistcoat and pockets, mid-18th century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

**25a** Quilted silk waistcoat (L 56 cm). V&A, T.87-1978.  
**25b** Pair of quilted silk pockets (L 38.9 cm and 39.8 cm). V&A, T.87.A-1978, T.87.B-1978.





SUFFRAGETTES AT HOME.

He. "I SAY, THAT LADY OVER THERE LOOKS RATHER OUT OF IT."  
 She. "YEP, YOU SEE, MOST OF US HERE HAVE BEEN IN PRISON TWO OR THREE TIMES, AND SHE, POOR DEAR, HAS ONLY BEEN BOUND OVER!"

suppose that women would use them more wisely.<sup>91</sup> While it underscores the empowering potential of pockets in terms of individual liberty, Duer Miller's piece firmly situates pockets within a gender opposition that is inherently political. Initially published in the USA, it was reprinted and circulated in Britain, showing how similar pocket rhetoric could link women's political activism across the Atlantic.

These articles were appearing at a time when British suffragists sometimes used their pockets as part of their campaign. Emily Wilding Davison tells of her militant acts of arson involving her pocket:

I took out of my pocket a packet of the same size as an ordinary letter. It was of grease proof paper tied with cotton. Inside was coarse linen well soaked in kerosene [. . .] I calmly applied a match [. . .] held it for a second [. . .] I let the packet, now well alight go down the receptacle, & threw the matches in afterwards.<sup>92</sup>

Conversely, it is the contents of Davison's pockets on 4 June 1913, the day she ran onto the Epsom racecourse, that have fuelled historians' debates about whether or not she intended to die a martyr for the suffrage cause. The police report on her death established that she had on her a small purse with a return railway ticket to Victoria station, as well as money, a notebook and stamps. As no handbag is listed in the police report or visible on the footage of the event, these items must have been carried in pockets, whether tie-on or sewn-in. The intense debate among historians about the list of her possessions and the quasi-relic status of the small leather purse show the continued polemical charge of the pocket as a locus of women's power and autonomy (fig. 34).<sup>93</sup> By

the time the suffrage campaigning yielded its first results for British women in 1918, tie-on pockets had been mostly abandoned. Yet the loss of their unparalleled capacity was sometimes regretted. Remembering the dress of her childhood in late nineteenth-century Cambridge, artist Gwen Raverat (1885–1957) exclaims: 'We had *Pockets*' – the emphasis is hers.

What lovely hoards I kept in them: always pencils and India-rubbers and a small sketch-book and a very large pocket-knife; beside string, nails, horse-chestnuts, lumps of sugar, bits of bread-and-butter, a pair of scissors, and many other useful objects. Sometimes even a handkerchief. For a year or two I also carried about a small book of Rembrandt's etchings, for purposes of worship. Why mayn't we have Pockets? Who forbids it? We have got Woman's Suffrage, but why must we still always be inferior to Men?<sup>94</sup>

\* \* \*

The place of tie-on pockets within sartorial practices from the second half of the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries and within the discourses that appropriated them in text and visual form shows this apparently mundane thing to be far more complex and rich than its humble appearance and status in the dress hierarchy would suggest. Its chronology is not only longer than commonly assumed but also more complex, because other forms, such as the integral pocket and the small bag, both pre-existed and coexisted with them. Functional and capacious, the tie-on pocket trumped both so-called competitors by its independence of clothing. Because of its discrete nature, its form and appearance were not determined or compromised by the construction or fabric of the dress it was worn with, allowing it to continue in use through many a revolution in the structure and shape of dress. Its propensity all through the period to be charged with lively meaning and metaphor, appearing as alternately erotic and virtuous, reveals links to gender constructions as well as to sexual

politics more generally. Its relationship to women's political power – or lack of it – appears ambiguous and contradictory, illustrating the continuing power of the pocket to trigger polemics.





## ‘work’d pocketts to my intire satisfaction’

### Making and Getting Pockets

In 1832 an elderly street seller, Caroline Walsh, went missing in east London in mysterious circumstances. At the ensuing court case, her two granddaughters identified some of her clothing. Both recognised her pocket, made by one of them, Ann Buton, a pedlar’s wife, for her grandmother some time before. Ann’s sister, Lydia Basey, the wife of a ‘boot-closer’, testified: ‘This was my grandmother’s pocket – it is the one I saw on her, and had seen my sister make’. Ann further testified to caring for her grandmother, and attending to her washing and lodgings. She made her a cap, knitted her stockings, ‘quite different from what are sold in the shops’, and made her the pocket, ‘entirely my own work’. Ann also had detailed recall of all her grandmother’s clothes: ‘the flowers on the petticoat went of a turn; it was a kind of flower pattern, which went down not exactly in stripes, but it was a much lighter colour than the ground’. Accustomed to touching apparel to value it, a second-hand clothes dealer involved in the case was hampered in her identification of a bonnet: ‘I cannot tell what it was made of, for I did not take it in my hand’.<sup>1</sup>

These testimonies of Ann, Lydia and the dealer reveal how experienced hands and eyes could form a tacit understanding of materiality in an age of handmade clothes, which persisted despite the industrialising of textile manufacture and global trade.<sup>2</sup> When Ann made her grandmother’s pocket, she also demonstrated how making, central to household economy, could constitute a form of caring within social and familial relations, binding

BELOW, CLOCKWISE  
FROM TOP LEFT

**60a** Embroidered vase on a pocket, early to mid-18th century. Nottingham City Museums and Galleries, NCM.1964.35.

**60b** Embroidered vase on a pocket, early 18th century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, CIRC.86-1938.

**60c** Embroidered vase on a pocket, mid-18th century. Charles Paget Wade Collection, Berrington Hall, SNO.1452.

**60d** Embroidered vase on a pocket, early to mid-18th century. Worthing Museum and Art Gallery, WMAG.1966.389.

In practice, women often exchanged patterns, reinforcing their familial and neighbourly networks. In 1792 Nancy Woodforde records how, on a morning visit, 'Lady Bacon brought me a Pattern to worke my Muslin Petticoat by it from Lady Ca Hobart who has worked one like it. I drew of the Pattern and return'd it to Lady B this Evening.'<sup>90</sup> In colonial America, c.1760, Hannah C. Sansom noted in her journal that her cousin Sarah Smith Pemberton had drawn embroidery patterns for her, including two patterns for silk-embroidered pockets.<sup>91</sup> The frequent circulation of commercial patterns added to the possibilities. Subscribers to *Wheble's Lady's Magazine* in 1772 opened their July issue to find free inside an 'exceeding pretty Pattern of a Lady's Pocket'. In October 1786 the *New Lady's Magazine* included a pattern depicting the astounding ascent of the Italian aeronaut Vincenzo Lunardi in a hot air balloon, complete with cat and dog, made in London in 1784. In September 1786 Lunardi had again been in the English news when one of his assistants died during a flight. The following year, Mary Hibberd (or Hebbert) used the pattern in her own way on her named pocket (figs 62-3).<sup>92</sup> An amateur domestic embroiderer could get her pocket pattern drawn by a professional pattern drawer, a service often offered by haberdashers (fig. 64). Motifs could also circulate through peripatetic teachers of embroidery.<sup>93</sup> So there was no shortage



**61** Embroidered pocket, early to mid-18th century (L 36.2 cm). Fashion Museum Bath, BATMC.VI.14.1.

of help for the domestic embroiderer wanting to adorn the front of her pocket. Some surviving pockets suggest that women thought of their pocket front as a place to improvise from memory or from amateur drawing. More generally, the motifs used by women on their pockets show an active engagement with nature, exotica, technology, current events and the wider world (see figs 59, 62, 119, 120).

In *Grandmamma's Pockets*, little Annie regrets that her grandmother's wonderfully embroidered 'state pockets' could not be seen. It is still commonly



136 William Hogarth (1697–1764), *A Harlot's Progress*, 1732, plate 1, etching with engraving (31.6 × 38.6 cm, plate mark), showing the arrival in London of a rural servant with her box. Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, Folio 75 H67 800 v.1 (Oversize).



modern moral satire in *A Harlot's Progress* (1732; fig. 136). Caroline Parker in 1837 told the court that her box was stolen after she left her employment with Mrs Wise. She explains: 'I was only a month with her – I only went a month on a trial – I have been to several situations'.<sup>52</sup> Moving from house to house was often the plight of women employed in domestic service. In 1736 Mary Hanson, a woman accused of theft by her master in Bedale, Yorkshire, had come from Ripon to look for a place, and though she was twice hired into families, she never stayed more than three weeks.<sup>53</sup>

Being able to pack and move their possessions around was crucial to these women. While the bulkier items of clothing were kept in the servant's box, the pocket served to carry small possessions or whatever money a woman had. Freshly arrived in London 'in the wagon' from Bedfordshire in June 1838, Lucy Jackson was looking for a place with a laundress when she was lured into lodgings with the promise of help. She was talked into taking off her pocket, which contained her money, and putting it into her box before going out, on pretence that it would be safer. She was then waylaid, her belongings were stolen from the lodgings and she was forced to return to her uncle in the country.<sup>54</sup>

For servants, pockets also played a special role in their career prospects, since it was in their pockets that they would keep 'the character' to recommend them to potential employers. This crucially important personal archive carried the symbolic authority and reach of the written word. Prized and preserved in their pockets by even the illiterate, the 'character' was kept so close to the

137 William Shayer Sr (1787–1879), *Outside the Royal Oak*, c.1840, oil on canvas (63.5 × 76.2 cm). Richard Green Gallery, London.



body itself that this fragile archive could be said to transfer some authority and reassurance to the woman who carried it.<sup>55</sup> In 1799 Elizabeth Macdonald, a servant of all work who had her pocket cut, was asked: 'You are an Irish woman, and travel about with your character in your pocket?' Although not listed in the indictment because of no monetary value, 'the written characters' which she kept in her pocketbook were of far greater value to her than the £1 note she had lost.<sup>56</sup> They represented the promise of future employment and stability. When in employment, the portable pocket was also necessary for servants working around the house or sent on errands: carrying messages, settling bills or fetching goods. A servant's pocket was central to performing her duties. In it she carried the keys with which her mistress might have entrusted her, or the simple needlework tools needed to mend and darn the household linen.

Pockets were so closely connected to the role of the female servant that in visual and literary representations, they could even be used as an insignia