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Forgotten Wardrobes: Keepers of Lost Clothes

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Abstract

Once purchased, clothing spends the majority of its life ensconced in a wardrobe until it is selected, to be worn or is finally forgotten about or discarded. The wearing of a garment also changes over time as a person's body size, taste and lifestyle develop. The research explores these changing facets through a pedagogic research project – *Keepers of Lost Clothes* - that centered on embedding sustainability within the fashion design curriculum.

Research Aims

To explore the hidden life of clothing and the changing relationships we have with our clothes.

To document the results of the pedagogic project that considered how discarded and forgotten clothing could be remade and reconsidered.

To evaluate the results of the project in relation to the sustainability of the Make Do and Mend initiative established in World War II.

To identify key factors from both initiatives to identify a future direction for remade and recycled clothes in fashion design and education.

Methodology

The research was conducted utilizing a mixed methodology that combined a qualitative and quantitative approach.

Archival Research.

Practice Based Research.

Numeric assessment of their relevance to a global direction for remade and recycled fashion.

Triangulation of results through consultation with six fashion industry experts.

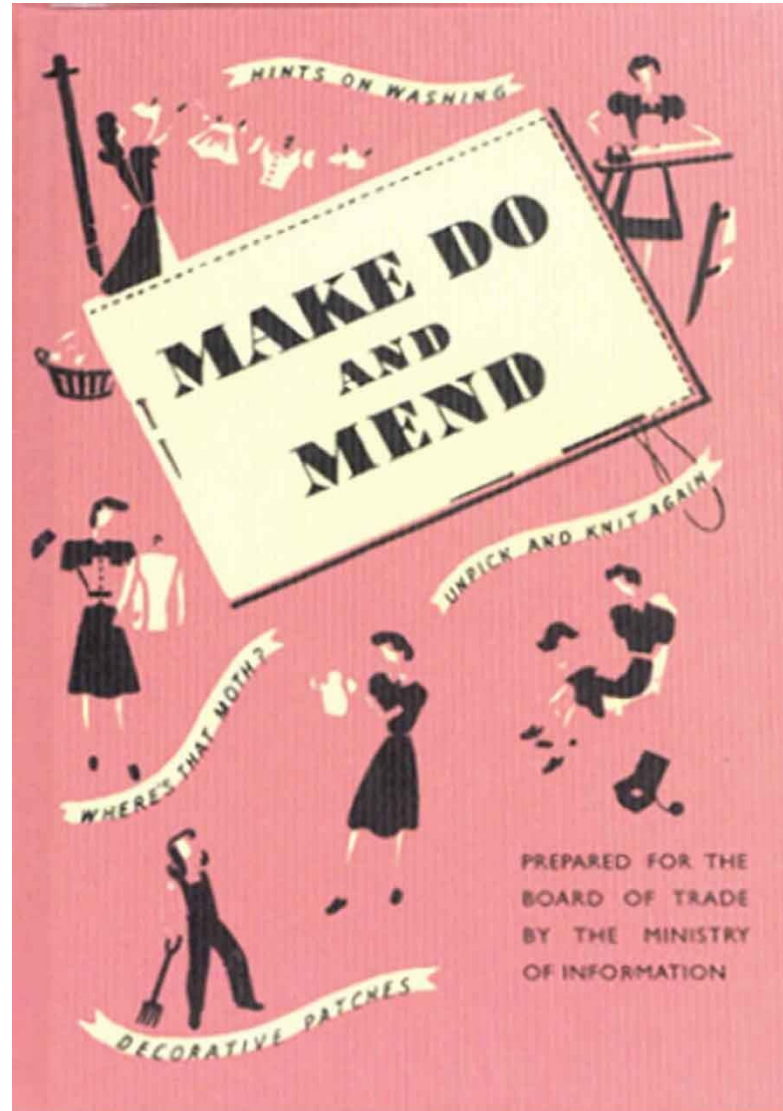
Literature Review

Historical analysis of the origins to remaking and recycling clothing framed by the Make-Do and Mend initiative established in World War II (Eben, 2005; Imperial War Museum, 2007; Lonsdale, 2009; McDowell, 1997; Norman, 2013; Summers, 2015; Tavangari, 2010; Wilson, 2009).

A selection of works that act as instruction guides for recycling clothing were also consulted (Chapple, 2016; Edwards, 2021; Fulop, 2021; Hertz, 2011; Maycroft, 2009, Press, 2018; Sullivan, 2021; Tickner and Peacock, 2012; Ward, 2021).

Make Do and Mend

www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1GCEA_enGB1003GB1004&source=univ&tbm=isch&q=make+do+and+mend+images&fir=e8WtyfDUh0GgmM%252



Make do and Mend: dressmaking class fashion show in London, 1943, catalogue number; D12897. Courtesy of The Imperial War Museum, UK.



Mrs Sew and Sew

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=sNqUBQ95&id=B4787D0EC6C673BC22C99B79D874A0D76A896517&thid=OIP.sNqUBQ95vY15gIOVosABKwHaHk&mediu...>



Recycling Clothing

<https://www.google.com/search?q=recycling+clothing+images&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwi2jI33o8H3AhUMjxoKHQlyBIMQ2-cCegQIABAA&aq=recy>



Archival Research

Three garments that epitomized the values of the make-do and mend initiative were identified in the *Yorkshire Fashion Archive* at University of Leeds, UK.

Hand knitted grey cardigan with cabling to make a honeycomb like structure from c.1943. Yorkshire Fashion Archive, University of Leeds.



Dress and Top front and back view c. 1944. Yorkshire Fashion Archive, University of Leeds.



Grey dress made from men's suiting c. 1945. Yorkshire Fashion Archive, University of Leeds.



Practice Based Research

Keepers of Lost Clothes

Lecturers, Katie Lenton and Jennie Pendergast at Leeds Beckett University, UK originally established Keepers of Lost Clothes as a pedagogic research project (The Newsroom 2019: n.pag.). The project centered around embedding sustainability within the BA (Hons) Fashion course curriculum to increase awareness of the industry's impact upon the environment and encourage students to adopt environmentally conscious approaches to fashion design and production.

Grace Wilson, Keepers of Lost Clothes shirt. Photograph courtesy of Lunar Rising.

Her keeper's shirt is therefore a homage to missing out on leaving school (figure 6). The concept came from adding value to an old shirt containing her school day memories. As she described, 'I took inspiration from my old school shirt used on the last day of school and tried to replicate this theme within the shirt designed for the Keepers of Lost Clothes project'



**Sasha Wilding,
Keepers of Lost
Clothes shirt.
Photograph courtesy
of Lunar Rising.**

Her garment is unisex, and influenced by the street style she observed around Leeds city centre (figure 7). It is made from second hand shirts sourced from Oxfam however during construction, she ran out of shirts with which to construct the sleeves. She came up with the idea of using the cloth bag Oxfam put the shirts in when purchased. The bag then influenced the shape of the sleeve pattern and she created two sleeves out of one bag.



Bethan Hood, Keepers of Lost Clothes shirt. Photograph courtesy of Lunar Rising.

Bethan Hood's focus in the project was to develop a design relationship with old and used clothes and consider how they could be transformed to reduce waste. She also wanted to incorporate her interests in cycling and non-binary clothing into the design narrative as well as developing her skills in patchwork and surface embellishment. In Hood developed the fabrication and colourway to suit a variety of customers from all genders to encapsulate her ideas about the ways in which used clothing can be transformed and worn by all



**Ellie Woodhead,
Keepers of Lost
Clothes shirt.
Photograph courtesy
of Lunar Rising.**

Ellie Woodhead's shirt is illustrated in figure 9 and was designed to raise awareness for cancer research. It is created from a combination of shirts and plastic bags bought from the Cancer Research Charity shop that had been dismantled and reassembled. On the back of the garment, the words *I'm Back* are a prominent feature to represent a celebration of cancer recovery and support.



Amalgamated Phrases and Themes

Key Phrases	Theme	Order of Importance
Waste Reduction Embedded Sustainability Environmentally Conscious	Embedded Sustainability	1 Score 768
Design Inspiration Creative Design Considered Design	Design Sensibility	2 Score 720
Develop Skills Happy Accidents Fashion Sensibility	Skills and Technology	3 Score 684
Recycle Reuse Refocus	Reprocess and Change	4 Score 660
Positive Impact Raising Awareness Public Perception	Perception and Impact	5 Score 648
Distinctive Clothes Heightened Value	Added Value	6 Score 564

CONCLUSION

The themes could be considered holistically as a significant expansion of the range and depth of existing literature and research related to remade and recycled fashion that should enrich the future of the global industry. This will bring new light and meaning to sustainable fashion design and the lasting evolution and potential that forgotten garments and textile waste can hold.

Many Thanks