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The Relationship Between Female Mourning Wear, Clothing and Fashion. An Analysis of Frederic Forster's Mourning Warehouse Newspaper Advertisements, 1849 – 1923

Kevin Almond and Judith Simpson

Abstract

This article examines the newspaper advertisements produced for Frederic Forster's Mourning Warehouse in Leeds, UK between 1849 and 1923, exploring how Forster positioned his products as both clothing and fashion. Within existing literature, clothing is often viewed as functional—providing protection, signalling social roles, or serving ritual purposes—whereas fashion is associated with aspiration, innovative ideas, and personal expression. Adopting Forster's store as a case study, the research argues that Mourning Warehouses emerged from the need to differentiate between the practical black garments worn to honour the dead and the increasingly stylised forms of black attire intended for fashionable display. Yet these establishments rapidly became enmeshed in promoting mourning clothing as fashion. This shift is examined in relation to industrialisation, market competition, and the evolving roles of women, highlighting how commercial strategies actively reshaped cultural attitudes to grief, consumption, and appearance. In doing so, the study offers a distinctly original contribution to global scholarship on mourning dress and its nuanced intersection with fashion culture, revealing previously overlooked dimensions of novelty, and commercial innovation within the mourning dress trade.

Key Words: Female Mourning Dress, Fashion, Clothing, Leeds, Frederic Forster's Mourning Warehouse, Newspaper Advertisements

Introduction

The research presented in this article was funded through a cross-disciplinary grant awarded by Leeds Museums and Galleries in collaboration with the University of Leeds Cultural Institute. It seeks to investigate the complex relationship between female mourning dress, clothing, and fashion during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The discussion examines the ways in which Frederic Forster's Mourning Warehouse represented women's mourning attire in its promotional materials—from garments framed as practical and socially prescribed to those positioned as increasingly aspirational and fashion-driven—and considers how these shifting descriptions reflected broader social and economic developments.

The study draws on an analysis of 354 Frederic Forster newspaper advertisements published between 1849 and 1923. A coded, thematic analysis is adopted to distinguish clothing and fashion narratives and track subthemes over time. This serves to situate the promotional claims within the tangible material context of mourning attire and the broader evolution of Forster's commercial enterprise. Bringing these strands together, the article considers how industrialisation, growing market competition, and the changing roles of women shaped the way female mourning dress was promoted, revealing how Forster's promotional messaging navigated the line between duty and style.

The article begins by outlining the methodology, which justifies the qualitative approach adopted and details the archival and object-based strategies used for data collection, alongside the thematic evaluation process. A detailed contextual review then frames the research within three key areas: first, an exploration of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century female mourning dress in the UK, supported by photographic examples; second, a historical overview of Frederic Forster's Mourning Warehouse and its role as a leading mourning dress retailer in Leeds; and third, a discussion of the conceptual distinction

between fashion and clothing in relation to the study's aim and objectives. The final section presents the thematic analysis of the advertisements, explaining how promotional descriptions were coded to reflect either a clothing or fashion context. This analysis reveals recurring themes that illuminate the interplay between female mourning dress, clothing and fashion. Finally, the conclusion revisits the research objectives, articulates the originality of the study, and considers its contribution to global scholarship on mourning dress, while suggesting potential directions for future research.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative, interpretive approach (Jackson, Drummond and Camara, 2007). The data was gathered through archival research and object-based enquiry, drawing on 'published and unpublished materials' (Schmidt, n.d., para. 2). The Frederic Forster advertisements, which form the main body of information examined were found in the online archives of The British Newspaper Archive and in Leeds Local History Library (The British Newspaper Archive, n.d.; Leeds Local History Library, n.d.). Further information related to Frederic Forster's Mourning Warehouse and mourning dress in Leeds was drawn from object-based research in the dress and textiles collections of Leeds Museums and Galleries, the Yorkshire Fashion Archive, and the investigators' personal collections (Leeds Museums and Galleries, n.d.; Yorkshire Fashion Archive, n.d.). The researchers identified that these mourning objects played an important role in knowledge creation related to clothing and fashion history throughout 1849 - 1923 (Steele, 1998; Kawamura, 2011; Kim and Mida, 2015; Taylor, 2002).

The first section of the article draws on the newspaper advertisements, objects and existing literature to explore the social expectations for UK female mourning dress in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the context of Frederic Forster's shop. The second presents a thematic analysis of the Frederic Forster newspaper advertisements for female mourning dress. Thematic analysis looks for patterns in data to uncover meaning and to answer specific research questions, and in this case, involved two rounds of coding (Lochmiller, 2021). The first categorized the text in Forster's advertisements in relation to the distinct understandings of clothing as material, functional and socially mandated and fashion as ideological and aspirational. The second identified the subthemes prominent at different periods.

UK Female Mourning Dress - 1849 – 1923

By the mid-nineteenth century UK mourning etiquette required that black clothing was donned whenever a family member died (Jalland, 1996). Complimentary mourning – where black was worn to acknowledge the losses of personally known others – was also expected, while official mourning saw entire classes of people instructed to dress in a particular way to mark the death of an important person (Buck, 1968; Cunnington & Lucas, 1972; Taylor, 1983). The type of mourning clothing worn reflected the closeness of the relationship with the deceased and the time that had elapsed since the death.

The mourning dress practices relating to women and in particular widowhood were the most demanding. Widows' mourning was divided into a series of stages, which reflected historical mourning practice in the royal court (Cunnington and Lucas, 1972). The widow was required to spend a year and a day in black woolen dresses, heavily trimmed with crape, a black silk fabric that was crimped to remove its reflective properties (Coleman, 1969; Cunnington and Lucas, 1972). During this first stage of *full* or *deep* mourning the widow was expected to cover her head with a bonnet and veil if she went out, and with a mourning cap when at home; a practice which evoked the penitence and humility associated with the nun's clothing

on which early mourning dress was modelled (Cunnington and Lucas, 1972). Photographs of women wearing first mourning are rare as widows were expected to stay at home, however, an example of first mourning can be seen in the photograph of an unidentified Leeds woman from the late 1860s (Figure 1). The dress is covered in crape with no fancy decorative work. The white cap is a widow's mourning cap for indoor wear.



Figure 1. Photograph of an unidentified woman from the late 1860s wearing full mourning and white widow's mourning cap. Photographer, R Wingfield. © Courtesy of Judith Simpson.

In the thirteenth month of her bereavement the widow entered *second mourning* in which she wore black silk, with heavy crape trim (Bedikian, 2008). Around the twenty first month, *third* or *ordinary mourning* commenced: crape was set aside and plain black clothing adopted (Taylor, 1983). The women in Figure 2 and Figure 3 are both in later stages of mourning. They wear dresses in the fashionable silhouette of the period, and crape is applied as a decorative trim. The first is a studio portrait of an unidentified woman wearing second mourning c.1859. She wears a black dress with crinoline and crape trim. Mourning beads are attached to the bodice. The second is a studio portrait of a female member of the Lightowler family from Leeds. Again, crape is applied decoratively to the front of the bodice, and the silhouette adheres to the fashionable shape prevalent at the end of the 1880s, before the arrival of the exaggerated sleeve shapes of the 1890s. In this case, the addition of a light-coloured brooch to the collar may indicate that she is nearing the end of the second year of mourning.



Figure 2. Studio portrait of an unidentified woman wearing second mourning, wearing a black dress with crinoline, trimmed with crape trim, from c.1859, Appleton & Co. LEEDM.E.1959.0151. P.098 © Courtesy of Leeds Museums and Galleries.



Figure 3. Crape decorated on a mourning dress can be seen in the studio portrait of a woman. c. 1890; photographer, Donald MacIver, 1886 – 1901. LEEDM. E.2009.0162.0019 ©

Courtesy of Leeds Museums and Galleries.

The final stage of mourning was known as half mourning and featured outfits often in fashionable shapes and fabrics, using a subdued palette of black, white, mauve, and grey (Bedikian, 2008). An example of this can be seen in the photograph in



Figure 4, of a woman called Harriet Oldfield, wearing a fashionable black satin dress with beading made by her daughter from the early 1890s. Although she wears a jet-black dress, the decorative collar and the sheen on the fabric make it clear that she is no longer in full mourning (Almond and Simpson, 2023).



Figure 4. Harriet Oldfield (no date), wearing a black satin dress with beading, made by her daughter from the early 1890s; photographer unknown. © Courtesy of Yorkshire Fashion Archive.

Although widows' mourning was often the most extreme level of mourning dress, there were also detailed specifications for how long each relation should be mourned, and which fabrics were appropriate (Buck, 1968). These rules were less well known, less consistent and often caused great anxiety. The fashion columns of newspapers frequently published updates on the rules for fashionable mourning (

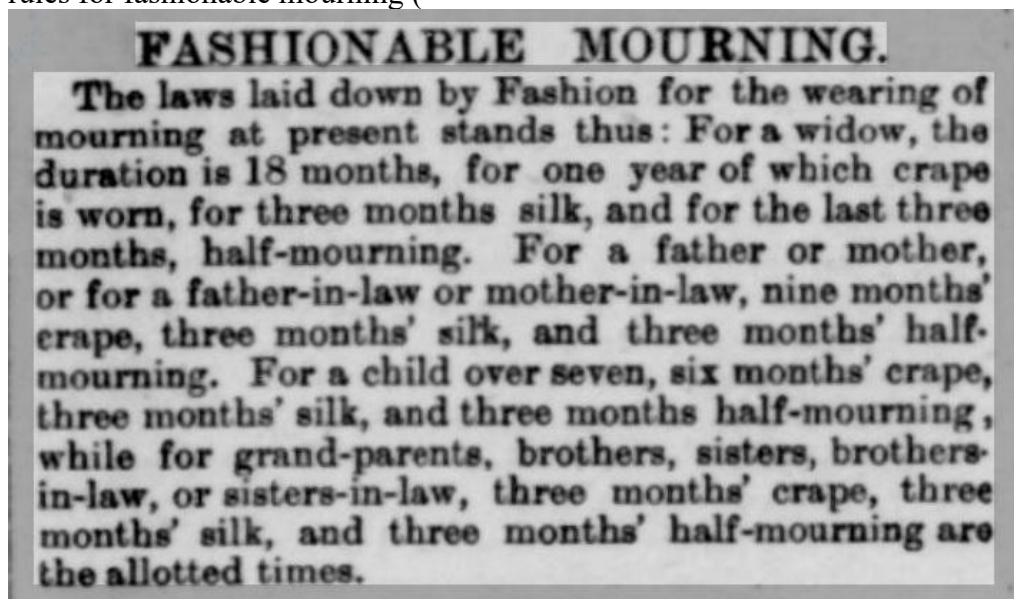


Figure 5) and magazines such as Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion responded to 'many pathetic letters asking for advice' on the matter (Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion,

1882, p.28). To make matters more complex, during the period from 1849 - 1923, UK mourning dress rules were first excessively elaborated and later contested and relaxed.

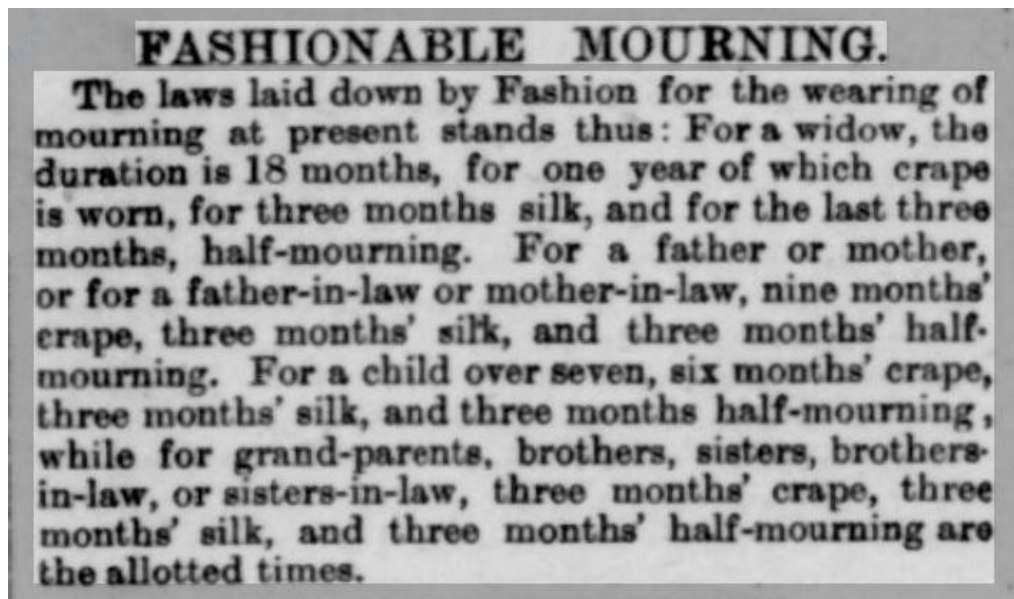


Figure 5: Rules for Fashionable Mourning. Selby Times, Friday 16 November 1894. The same text appeared in at least a dozen other regional newspapers that month.

Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

The emergence of mourning warehouses is associated with both a strong desire to honour the dead and the past they represented, and with a growing overlap between mourning wear, clothing and fashion. As black clothing became fashionable, a black dress alone was no longer sufficient to indicate mourning; there also needed to be crape trim and mourning accessories; black trimmed handkerchiefs, mourning jewelry, fans and parasols. ((Hollander, 1993; Mitchell, 2013). This imposed on women the ‘painful... labour ...of hurrying from shop to shop to procure the many different fabrics and articles needful for the occasion’, a problem which was resolved through the establishment of mourning warehouses on fashionable high streets; including W C Jay’s, on London’s Regent Street, and of course, The Leeds Mourning Warehouse opened by Frederic Forster, on Briggate in Leeds in 1849 (Pictorial Times, 1847, p.3; Carter-Lome, 2024, paras. 5–12).

By the early twentieth century the relaxation of mourning dress rules was associated with improved life expectancy, which made mourning less culturally pervasive (Kellehear, 2007). Equally, as more women started to work outside the home, they became less able – and perhaps less willing – to follow the social and sartorial rules of mourning (Buck, 1982). There was also a growing sense that mourning clothing was wasteful and pointless, and that the needs of the living should be prioritized above those of the dead (Chadwick, 1843; Buck, 1968; Taylor, 1983). Thus, by the time the First World War (1914 – 1918) made it necessary to curtail mourning dress to preserve national morale, the desire for an elaborate mourning wardrobe was already in decline (Gorer, 1965). Frederic Forster’s shop operated throughout this period of social transformation and their newspaper advertisements reflect the changes in attitudes to mourning dress in this period.

Frederic Forster's Shop in Context

In 1849, when Frederic Forster opened his shop on Briggate, Leeds was a civic centre and home to around 100,000 people (Lambert, 2025). It was also the retail centre for the entire West Riding of Yorkshire, with Briggate and Boar Lane forming the centre of the shopping area. Leeds had been prominent in the woollen textile industry since the twelfth century, and by the late 18th century the city boasted a White Cloth Hall with over 1,200 stalls, and a Coloured Cloth Hall with 1,770 stalls. From the 18th century onwards the Leeds textile manufacturing industry gained a reputation for technological innovation, with foreign dignitaries visiting the area to observe the manufacturing processes (Thornton, 2025). Then, in the mid-19th century, John Barran, who ran a men's outfitters from number 1 Briggate, revolutionised clothing manufacture by adopting, first, the Singer sewing machine and later the bandsaw to facilitate mass-production ((The Thoresby Society, n.d.). Barran's innovations were quickly adopted by other manufacturers in Leeds, and a vigorous trade in readymade clothing emerged.

Unsurprisingly, the shopping streets of nineteenth century Leeds had many drapery shops. What is astonishing is the number of these styling themselves as mourning warehouses. Briggate alone was home to seven mourning warehouses in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Borough Mourning and Funeral Warehouse could be found at number 9, and Forster operated The Leeds Mourning Warehouse from number 12 (Leeds and West Riding Express, 1863; Slater, 1892). John Dawson's business at number 15 was also listed as a mourning warehouse in some trade directories, as was Alexander Smeeton's shop at numbers 52 and 53 Briggate (Slater, 1887; Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1875, 02 November). Then there was The Yorkshire Mourning Warehouse at 58, and The Family Mourning Warehouse at 77. Chaffer & Sons at 3 New Briggate, was also listed as a mourning warehouse in some directories (Slater, 1892). This count might be artificially inflated given that not all these businesses operated at the same time or focused exclusively on mourning wear (Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1873, 31 October). There were also other businesses on Briggate which stocked mourning wear, including J & R Hardwick (tailor, draper and undertaker) at number 49, and George Pickles (undertaker and general funeral furnisher) at the top of Briggate (Leeds Intelligencer, 1850, 4 May; Leeds Times, 1851, 6 December). John Barran's shop, at number 1 Briggate also offered mourning at an hour's notice although in this case for gentlemen only (Leeds Times, 1855, 27 January). Mourning wear was also available from early department stores in Leeds such as Milling and Partners (later The Grand Pygmalion) and Marshall and Snelgrove (later acquired by Debenhams), both of which were within five minutes' walk of Briggate and sometimes promoted themselves as mourning warehouses in trade directories (Kelly's, 1888). Frederic Forster's Mourning Warehouse is the focal point for this research because the business consistently focused on mourning wear for over 70 years and operated on the same site on Lower Briggate from its establishment in 1849 until its closure in 1923 (Simpson, 2022; Leeds Mercury, 1934, 29 December, p.4).

Until around 1865, Forster styled himself as a *Mourning Draper and Undertaker* who furnished funerals, but he soon focused his attention on families requiring mourning or black dress, perhaps in response to competition from his direct neighbours (Leeds Times, 6 June 1863; Leeds and West Riding Express, 28 March 1863). In 1863 the Borough Mourning and Funeral Warehouse, at 9 Briggate, was furnishing funerals economically, even renting out scarves and hatbands, while John Barran at number 1 was dominating the menswear market (Leeds Times, 6 June 1863, p.1)

Forster sold fabrics and patterns for the home dressmaker, along with trimmings, buttons, gimps...etc., but he also employed bonnet makers, dressmakers, and experienced crape workers', in what ultimately became an on-site factory (Leeds Times, 1874, 27 June; Leeds Times, 1886, 9 October). The premises were extended in 1877, to create separate showrooms for millinery and black costumes (Leeds Mercury, 1893, 5 January). Forster's numerical claims about the size of his stock (250-300 bonnets), were supplemented by boasts of having one of the largest collections of black materials in the provinces (Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1877, 4 May and 14 December). By 1885, Forster was advertising 'a magnificent display of 300 black costumes in his spacious costume room.... [from which] 6 to 8 alike can generally be selected on an emergency' (Otley News and West Riding



Advertiser, 1885, 6 February).

Figure 6 shows an elaborate mourning bodice produced in Frederic Forster's shop c. 1900. The bodice is for second mourning. Its shape echoes the fashionable silhouette of the period and crape is applied in a decorative manner. Some of the seams have been machine stitched, but hand stitching is also evident. The inside tape belt has a label, *Frederic Forster, 12 Briggate Leeds*. This elegant and costly item would have been produced for Forster's primary market – the widow with the money and the leisure required for the conspicuous display of mourning finery.



Figure 6. Frederic Forster Mourning bodice from c.1900 © Courtesy of Leeds Museums and Galleries. Photograph courtesy of Michael Anderson.

Forster also targeted other demographics. As a city that relied on mass manufacturing, Leeds had a stratified population. In addition to the affluent industrialists, there were the middle classes who emulated them, the domestic servants who worked for them, and their factory workers – who often lived in poverty. To the middle classes Forster’s shop offered a way to demonstrate (or claim) social status, respectability, and piety through conspicuous consumption (Taylor, 1983; Simpson, 2019). The working classes may have been unable to wear elaborate mourning clothes in the workplace but were eager to put on a show at a funeral, where well-dressed mourners provided evidence that this was a decent burial and not a pauper’s funeral symbolising ‘social worthlessness, earthly failure, and... anonymity’ (Laqueur, 1983, p. 109). When Forster declared his goods to be ‘exceedingly cheap, and much under present value’, he may have had working class mourners in mind (Leeds Times, 1859, 26 February, p.1). Servants were frequently mentioned in Forster’s advertisements, sometimes in the strapline, sometimes in specific offers. Servants could not wear black following their own losses, but when the household they worked for went into mourning then servants wore it too. Nevertheless, in comparison with some of his competitors, Forster dedicated only a small portion of his advertising to servants’ mourning, his focus remaining closely on the ladies for whom choice and novelty in mourning were of paramount importance (Leeds Intelligencer, 1853, 26 March).

From the 1880s services associated with pleasure in shopping were promoted by Forster – such as ‘private and well-lit fitting rooms’ (Leeds Intelligencer, 1853, 26 March, p.1). Seasonal shows were introduced in the 1890s, followed by annual sales, which included ‘sweeping reductions and remnants’ (Leeds Mercury, 1896, 28 January, p.1). There was also

an increasing focus on *black dress*, or *black wear*, for ‘ladies wearing black from choice’ (Yorkshire Post and Intelligencer, 1906, 18 January, p.1). These innovations may have represented a response to increased competition from department stores, or to a declining demand for mourning. Certainly, the appearance of navy fabrics in the store in 1914, and coloured costumes and dresses the following year indicated that the era of the mourning warehouse was ending. Forster’s shop closed in 1923 when Forster conceded that there was no longer a demand for elaborate mourning wear because ‘after the war [World War I].... people did not feel inclined to make the show they had done before’ (Leeds Mercury, 1934, 29 December, p.4).

Throughout their period of operation, the Forster family styled their shop as ‘THE House for Black Costumes, Coats, Millinery, Black Blouses, &c’, (



Figure 7) but they shared priorities and marketing practices with other sellers of mourning goods (Leeds Mercury, 1912, 13 April, p.1). Specifically, they offered to resolve the fundamental problems faced by the female mourner. These problems were closely related to the contested nature of mourning dress as both clothing and fashion. Mourning wear was expected to combine the traditional signifiers of pain and piety with the latest styles, but this created semiotic contradictions, for ‘elegance ...would once have been considered inconsistent with the garb of grief’ (Daily News, 1894, 22 November, p.8). The example of inconvenience was also emphasized in the example of the widow’s long crape veil – ‘add[ed] physical discomfort to the inevitable burden of mental distress’ (Preston Herald, 1891, 12 September, p.9). Additionally, in an age when few women were economically independent, the need to buy mourning dress often exacerbated financial problems (Jalland, 1996). Vendors of mourning dress such as Frederic Forster, however, implied that all these problems could be resolved if the mourner simply selected the right garments from their carefully curated selection.



Figure 7. Frederic Forster advertisement. Leeds Mercury, April 13, 1912. Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

Clothing and Fashion

The analysis of the 354 Frederic Forster newspaper advertisements identified how mourning dress was promoted in both a clothing and fashion context. As numerous scholars have pointed out; clothing and fashion are not the same thing (See for example: Barnard, 2007; Bruzzi & Church-Gibson, 2013; Davis, 1992; Entwistle, 2000; Kawamura, 2005; Kawamura, 2011; Kaiser, 2011; Rouse, 1989; Wilson, 1985; Ash & Wright, 1988; Ash & Wilson, 1992; McNeil & Karaminas, 2009; Riello & McNeil, 2010; Welters & Lillethun, 2007). The term *clothing* derives from cloth and refers to the covering of the body for practical purposes; perhaps to protect the body, denote a professional or ceremonial role or convey authority. In determining the term *fashion*, Joanne Turney editor of the journal, *Clothing Cultures* wrote, 'Fashion alludes to the glamorous, the ephemeral and the avant garde. We wear clothes but imagine fashion [as] an unattainable ideal' (Turney, n.d., para.1). As Yuniya Kawamura puts it, 'Clothing is material production while fashion is symbolic production. Clothing is tangible while fashion is intangible' (2005, p.44). Clothing is about practicality and tradition; fashion is about individual expression and reacts to social change; it is a way of circulating ideas about how things *ought* to be. However, fashion is also 'institutionally constructed', rather than personally imagined (Kawamura, 2005, p.44). The individual rarely defines their own aspirational style; they choose from the ranges of garments that designers and retailers make available.

In the mid and late nineteenth century, a boom in manufacturing and retail made fashion available to a wider range of consumers. Functional garments such as uniforms, workwear and protective clothing began to adopt some of the characteristics of fashionable dress and vice versa. Kevin Almond argued in a previous article that items of clothing can be deemed fashionable at specific points in time, then once their vogueish eminence has faded, they are repatriated as clothing (Almond, 2017). Mourning dress had functional origins. It was originally a sort of uniform; mandated by society for people in a particular social or spiritual situation, but it became fashionable simply because it was 'recognized and acknowledged to be fashion' (Rouse, 1989, p.69). These definitions of the terms clothing or fashion are explored further in the coded results of the thematic analysis in the findings.

Thematic Analysis of the Advertisements

This section examines the thematic analysis of Frederic Forster's newspaper advertisements for mourning dress, exploring how these garments were understood to be practical clothing, fashionable attire, or a fusion of both. In doing so, it reveals how mourning warehouses like Forster shaped emerging ideas about womanhood in mourning, negotiating whether her appearance reflected functional necessity or the dictates of fashion.

Results of Thematic Analysis

The text from Forster's 354 advertisements was carefully scrutinised and was first coded as *clothing* or *fashion* guided by the definitions of these terms discussed in the literature review. For example, terms such as, *most serviceable wear* or *rich, pure, and durable, guaranteed wear* were coded as *clothing*, while terms such as *choicest styles* or *novelties* or *fashionable shapes* were coded as *fashion*. Where statements evoked both the materiality and traditional nature of mourning wear and its aspirational nature, they were coded as *ambiguous*. Table 1 shows a short example.

DATE	NEWSPAPER	KEY DESCRIPTIONS RELATED TO CLOTHING	KEY DESCRIPTIONS RELATED TO FASHION	AMBIGUITY IN THE DESCRIPTIONS
18/12/1868	Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer	'Every distinct article required' 'suitable for slight or deep mourning'. 'The most serviceable dress worn'.	'250 to 300 of the choicest styles' "in every variety and style". 'New black winter fabrics has just received several bales of'.	'A large variety of different black materials'.
03/02/1871	Otley News and West Riding Advertiser	'Every requisite for family or servants' mourning'. 'Most serviceable wear'.	'From 250 to 300 of the choicest styles'. 'Various novel materials with the new fringe'.	'Immense variety of every distinct article required for complimentary or deep mourning'.
22/04/1881	Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer	'Suitable for complete suits of mourning'.	'Some decided novelties'. 'The Mother Hubbard, and all the other new and most fashionable shapes'.	'Suitable for spring'. 'Fit and style guaranteed'.
15/05/2015	Leeds Mercury	'Everything requisite for mourning and black wear'.	'Latest novelties for the season'. 'In new materials'. 'In all the new designs'.	'Small and large sizes'. 'Well-cut robes'.

Table 1. Coding Sample.

These primary categories were then analysed further to identify prominent subthemes as detailed in the coding diagram in Table 2. The category of *clothing* revealed two subthemes: *mourning dress* and *practicality*. Fashion had three: *change*, *choice* and *social aspiration*,

while *ambiguity* was often associated with Forster’s marketing claims – the *range* of clothing he offered or the *expertise* he supplied – and with the emergence of *black wear* as a category distinct from mourning. The issues addressed within the theme of *clothing* were often traditional, exemplifying the Victorians’ attempts to sustain the beliefs and social structures of the pre-industrial past. Those associated with *fashion*, however, were related to the new social realities of urban life. The following sections present examples of each theme and discuss what the oscillation of these themes over time might indicate.

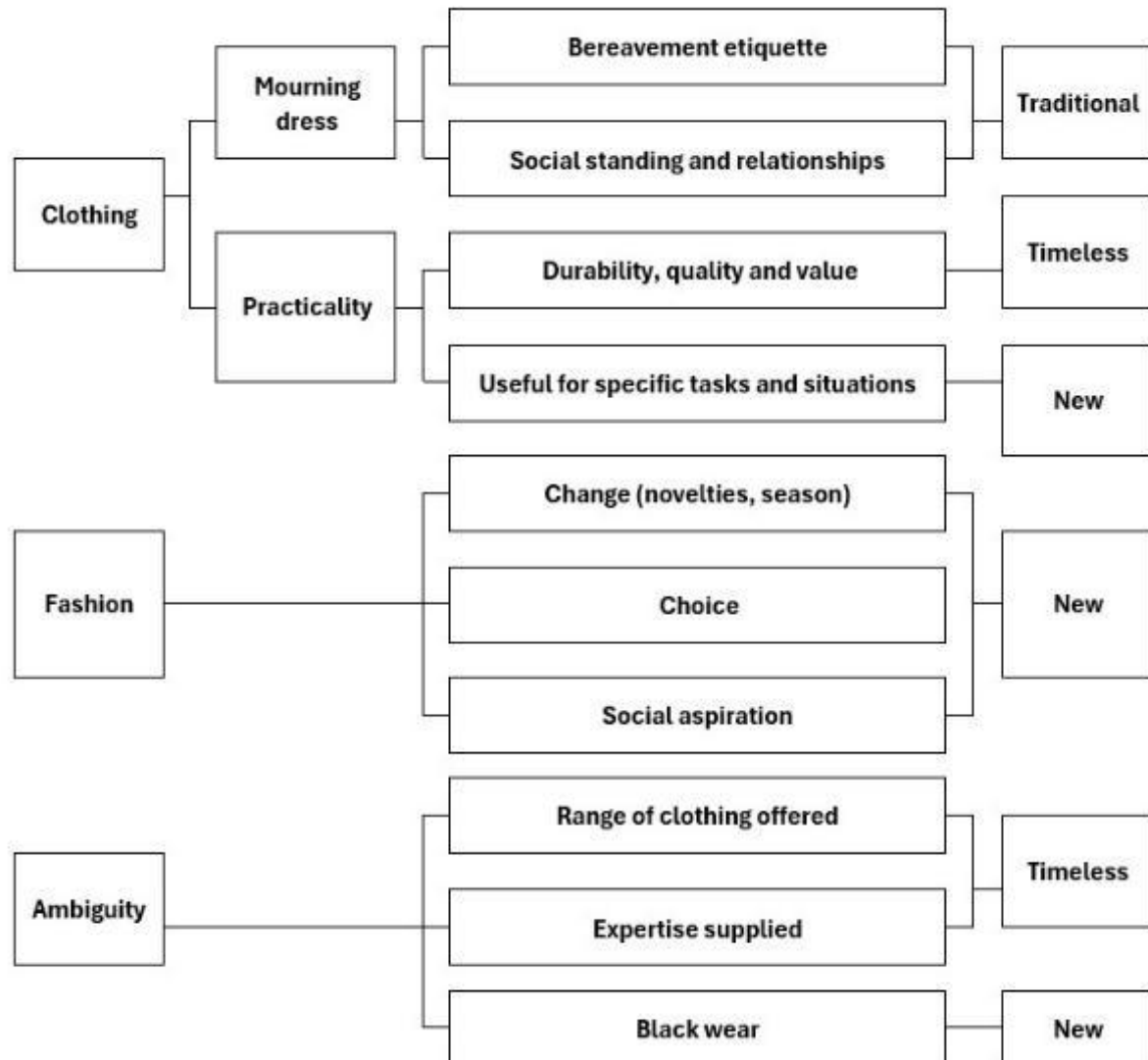


Table 2. Coding Diagram.

Clothing

Forster claimed to offer; ‘.... every distinct article required for complete mourning outfits’, ‘.... every requisite for family or servants’ mourning’ (Leeds Times, 1886, 2 October, p.1; Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1871, 17 February, p.1). Advertisements also included lists of key items such as: mourning mantles, mourning caps, mourning bonnets, mourning shawls, widows’ caps, mourning ribbons, mourning jewellery, black crape for bonnets, black crape for trimmings, black crape for dresses, black crape for falls. Both the lists, and the references to outfits being complete, present mourning wear as a civil uniform, defined by mourning etiquette and allowing little scope for personal choice. They also set up

Frederic Forster as an expert, who could ensure that mourners inscribe the most appropriate statements about social values and relationships on their body; accurately codifying the relationship with the deceased and expressing just the right degree of mourning. Mourning etiquette was intended to reproduce the social arrangements which had been threatened both by the industrial revolution and – more locally – by a particular death. When Forster supplied mourning dress, he was helping to make the social hierarchies and the kinship groups of the past tangible. The theme of clothing and its practicality has two subthemes: durability, quality and value, and usefulness for particular tasks. These are discussed below.

Clothing: Durability, Quality and Value

Forster made frequent claims about the durability of his goods. Some statements like ‘the cheapest and most durable cloth shown, wear guaranteed’, were aimed at impoverished mourners, but most were not (Leeds Mercury, 1850, 8 March, p.1). Most were simply claims of superior quality. Typical of these were Forster’s claims that his crape was ‘serviceable wear.... warranted not to spot’, or ‘warranted not to crease or to be affected by damp’ (Leeds Mercury, 1850, 4 May, p.1; Leeds Mercury, 1878, 26 October p.1). Crape was renowned for spotting when exposed to rain, but in the 1890s Courtauld’s developed a technique for dressing and waterproofing crape, and this became an area where customers could be tempted to spend more to obtain the latest textile technologies (Taylor, 1983).

Forster also boasted about the quality of workmanship in his garments, ‘every distinct article required for deep or slight mourning; lined and wadded throughout’ (Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1888, 21 November, p.1). He also emphasised the skill of his staff, who were under first class management (Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1884, 19 September). There are also formulaic claims about the features and benefits of his products: ‘rich, pure, and durable, guaranteed wear’ (Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1879, 20 June, p.1). These claims to both excellence and economy are primarily about outdoing competitors. Forster also appears to be arguing that the customer would need mourning dress at some stage and that he could provide them with the best.

Clothing: Usefulness for Particular Tasks

Forster offered mourning dress in cool fabrics (lace, silks and crepe de chine) for summer and warmer fabrics (furs, wool tweeds and velour fabrics) for winter. He also marketed some of his clothing as being ideal for very specific situations. For example, an 1862 advertisement offered ‘a great variety of second mourning dresses suitable for the country or seaside’ (Leeds Times, 1862, 23 August, p.1), (Figure 8). This is indicative of two distinct changes in etiquette. First, that a dress etiquette which required upper and middle-class women to wear different clothing for different activities and times of the day was now fully articulated. The bereaved woman may be less constrained by mourning etiquette, but remained subject to other, complex sartorial regulations. Second, that the mourner was no longer expected to remain sequestered at home but was still expected to incorporate references to bereavement and the dead into their outfits – even those designed for relaxation and enjoyment.

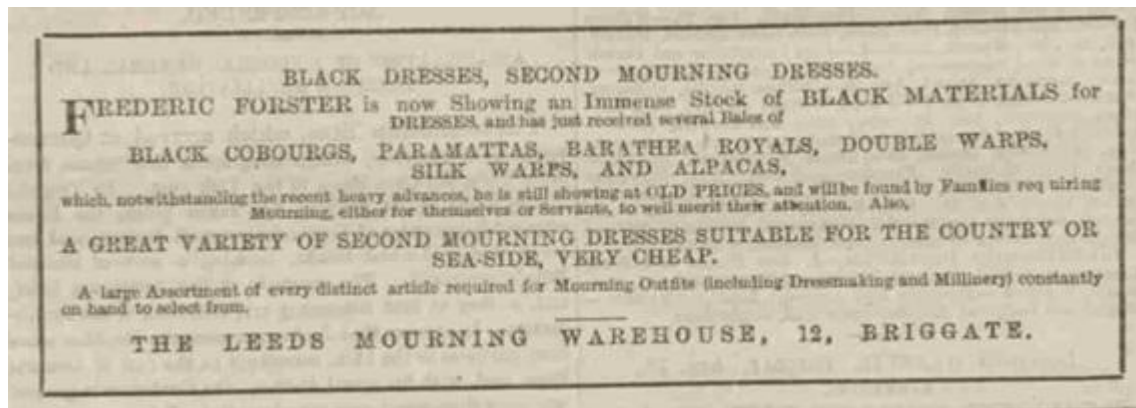


Figure 8. Frederic Forster advertisement, Leeds Times 23, August 1862, Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

Fashion

Forster's marketing material makes frequent reference to fashion such as, 'fashions for early spring...in small and large sizes' (Leeds Mercury, 2012, 13 April, p.1). The word 'style' also appears frequently. For example, in 1852, Forster announced that he would 'show a choice assortment of the newest and most fashionable styles in mourning millinery and mantles' (Leeds Intelligencer, 1852, 30 October, p.1). Beyond the obvious allusions to fashion, three themes emerge: *change*, *choice* and *social aspiration*. These themes all reflect burgeoning clothing production, and the increased importance of displaying social status through clothing. When considering Forster's garments as clothing we saw how they could impose traditional identities and behaviours on women; now, considering them as fashion, we see women starting to choose and to negotiate how they might present themselves.

Fashion: Change

Relentless change is fundamental to fashion, and change is emphasised in Forster's advertisements through frequent use of the terms *new*, *latest* and *novelties*. He made claims that the French silk used some clothes was 'direct from the looms', and that there would be 'fresh styles every morning at 9.30' (Leeds Times, 1878, 26 October, p.3; Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1876, 22 September, p.1). Forster regularly professed to have 'all the newest and most stylish shapes', and to return from his frequent trips to London with 'the latest styles of fashion in London and Paris millinery' (Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1886, 14 May, p.1; Leeds Intelligencer, 1856, 01 March, p.1). References to the newest and most fashionable styles were repeated throughout the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s, but over time the description, *Novelties* starts to replace *Styles* (Leeds Mercury, 1898, 09 June, p.1). The word, *Novelties* was a very popular term in fashion and textiles advertising at this time, originating from the French *nouveauté* – indicating a newly created seasonable style (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). Seasonal styles sometimes referred to changes made necessary by the weather conditions such as 'every class of goods suitable for the present season', but more often to the fashion seasons of London and Paris (Leeds Times, 1855, 06 January, p.1). Thus, in 1877, Forster announced his return from London with some of the choicest novelties of the season, and this emphasis was still prevalent in 1915 (Leeds Mercury, 1915 15 May).

Forster occasionally refers to specific garments or styles in his advertisements. For instance, mourning shawls and crape bonnets appeared in the 1850s when these accessories were

particularly in vogue. Novel fabrics with fashionable fringing were advertised in 1871, and in 1881, the *Mother Hubbard* was advertised (Figure 9). This was a US term for a loose, wide fitting gown with a high neck and long sleeve which was popular in artistic circles (Gray, 2014). Often however, Forster was vague about the changes in silhouette, decoration or accessories that made an item novel. He referred to ‘mourning mantles in all the most fashionable shapes’; ‘fancy bonnets and hats, in all the newest shapes’, and relied on the customer’s knowledge of fashion to contextualise these claims in their mourning dress choices (Leeds Times, 1859, 26 February, p.1; Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1887, 10 March, p.1).



Figure 9. Frederic Forster advertisement, Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 22 April 1881, ('Mother Hubbard'). Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

The preference for vague descriptors that did not refer to specific garment types was shared by other sellers of mourning wear, and, to some extent, by general drapers. Vagueness simplified the task of advertising, because the text could be recycled season after season, it also addressed the widest possible audience. However, for the mourning warehouse, vagueness was necessary. The requirements for mourning wear were complex and personal, and mourning warehouses liked to imply that only they could calculate, for an individual customer, what outfit would exactly balance the etiquette of their precise circumstances with the aspirations encoded in the latest creations from London or Paris.

Fashion: Choice

The notion of consumer choice appears most clearly when Forster lists his extensive stock, in a way that offers alternatives rather than presenting a recipe for completeness; ‘poplins,

serge's, estermes, crape cloths, cashmeres, henriettas....'; 'bonnets, picture hats, caps, costumes, coats and skirts, blouses, mantles, capes' (Wharfedale and Airedale Observer, 1898, 07 January, p.1; Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1896, 20 March, p.1). Choice is also celebrated when Forster 'respectfully informs the ladies of Leeds and its vicinity that he is now in London selecting the latest productions.... which will be ready for inspection on Tuesday next' (Leeds Mercury, 1850, 04 May, p. 1). In this account Forster presents himself as travelling to major cities to curate a varied choice of fashionable mourning items from which his Leeds clientele could choose. Forster rarely went further than London but referred to French fashion houses, and listed exotic fabric names such as: Gros de Suez; Gros de Londres; Cashmeres de France; Drap de Lyons; black silks – English, French, German, Prussian and Swiss, all of which suggested, quite literally, a world of choice (Leeds Mercury, 1850, 11 May; Leeds Mercury, 1866, 24 April; Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1868, 18 December).

Fashion: Social aspiration

Social aspiration in fashion relates to the idea that garments transform individuals, allowing them to appropriate both the status and the mode they represent. Garments do not have to be purchased or worn to exert this transformational effect; engaging with the new designs, the latest novelties, and what we would today refer to as the brand, might be sufficient. Thus, the language of luxury, exclusivity and elegance permeates Forster's advertisements. His goods are described as being of the finest quality, and from 'some of the first French and London Houses' (Leeds Intelligencer, 20 July 1850, p.1). He sells, 'the newest and most approved styles, some copied from the French, others the original French designs' (Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1877, 4 May, p. 8). He can supply 'rich mode mantles, trimmed [with] best crape'; 'black silks which for.... beauty of appearance and richness have never been surpassed' (Leeds Times, 1854, 18 March, p. 1; Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1876, 22 September, p.1). Even some of the fabrics described in the adverts sound exotic; Gros Royals, Barathea Royals, French Merinos (best makes), this includes the longer description, 'Black Serge – the Royal, a magnificent quality' (Otley News and West Riding Advertiser 29 July 1881, p. 1).

Ambiguity

Advertisements were coded as ambiguous when they could relate to either clothing or fashion, or when they compressed statements about clothing and fashion into a single sentence. Examples include 'a large variety of different black materials', and 'established 73 years ago for the supply of everything appertaining to mourning and black wear and still showing the smartest and most up-to-date novelties' (Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1868, 18 December, p.1; Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1922, 07 July, p.1). When the statements categorised as ambiguous were analysed, three subthemes emerged: range of stock, expertise and black wear.

Ambiguity: Range of stock

In an attempt to maximise the appeal of his shop, Forster frequently lists his products and claims to stock everything 'from the most inexpensive to the richest manufactured', or 'fancy black dress goods [and] plain black goods of every description' (Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1890, 16 October, p.1; Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1885, 05 June, p.1). Forster is claiming that he has everything a woman could need, and that, necessarily, embraces both clothing and fashion.

Ambiguity: Expertise

Many of Forster's statements about value and workmanship apply to both clothing and fashion. Examples include 'fit and style guaranteed', or 'length for waist, &c., which can be fitted and made up on the shortest notice', but this category is dominated by claims about speed of service (Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1886, 10 July, p.1; Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 23 November 1877, p. 1). Forster was offering to produce whatever was required extremely fast, with all urgent orders executed at once (Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 1888, 21 November). This level of speed was relevant to both clothing and fashion in rather different ways. By the mid-nineteenth century it was customary to go into mourning as soon as the death was announced (Cassells' Household Guide, 1880s). This made ordering the uniform of grief extremely urgent. However, Forster also used the idea that new goods could be quickly supplied to encourage fashionable purchases, 'fresh styles every morning at 9.30am' (Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1876, 22 September).

Ambiguity: Black Wear

Although Forster was originally insistent that he would only stock mourning items, from the mid-1880s, he acknowledged that there were 'ladies who wear black from choice' (Otley News and West Riding Advertiser, 1885, 9 October). Therefore, he began to promote black dress or black wear as distinct from mourning. Black wear represented a departure from earlier dress codes which encouraged 'middle- and upper-class women to wear clothing in rich colours, with heavy adornment, as a reflection of their husbands' status [and] unmarried young women from similar backgrounds...to wear simple dress designs, in pale colours' (Vettese Forster and Christie, 2013, p.1). Black dress enabled women to present themselves as independent and serious and included working outfits for the new generation of women who were increasingly employed outside the home. Forster advertised it in an appropriately prosaic manner: 'ladies black shirts and blouses for autumn wear.... useful black moirette underskirts'; 'smart costumes in small and large sizes' (Leeds Mercury, 1907, 11 November, p.1; Leeds Mercury, 1912, 27 July, p.1). Black wear is indicative of the extent to which women's roles, and their relationships to clothing had changed in the time that Frederic Forsters Mourning Warehouse was in operation. Not only are women emerging from the domestic sphere, but they are also starting to resist and reinterpret the clothing etiquette which previously controlled them.

Conclusion

Frederic Forster's shop operated in a period of rapid social change and technological advancement. In marketing his wares as both clothing and fashion, Forster traversed the gap between tradition and modernity. Garments marketed as clothing functioned to sustain the traditional beliefs and the social arrangements of the past, while those marketed as fashion reached forward to embrace the possibilities of the future (which included new roles and identities for women, increased social mobility and new attitudes to death). Often, Forster appeared to be offering clothing to one social class and fashion to another. Servants and the working classes were offered clothing which confirmed their social status and relationships and served either a practical or a spiritual purpose. Women with more money to spend were offered fashion; the opportunity to temper their mourning wear with statements of individuality and aspiration.

Mourning warehouses emerged because of the developing tension between clothing and fashion in mourning dress. This tension had two roots. First, was the emergence of fashionable black outfits, which created a requirement for ritual trimmings and accessories to distinguish mourning dress. Second was the changeable nature of mourning etiquette, which

was normally associated with clothing, but rapid change enabled it to be associated with fashion. As previously noted, this tension created difficulties for the female mourner, which mourning warehouses sought to resolve by providing expert advice and an extensive range of products. However, their very position on the urban high streets of the late 19th century involved mourning warehouses in a wider movement in which shopping for clothes became both a pleasurable pastime and a way of identifying oneself with new (or fashionable) ideas. Overall, the case study of Forster's store and its advertisements illustrates a shift away from the provision of clothing, towards the marketing of fashion, and there are several reasons for this. First, two of the key themes associated with clothing – bereavement etiquette and the need to articulate pre-determined social relationships – ebbed away during the period that Forster's shop was in operation. Second, the market context in which mourning warehouses emerged made it almost inevitable that fashion would ultimately prevail. Forster competed with his neighbours based on rapid production, novelty and customer choice. Speed of production was originally prioritised to meet mourning wear requirements, but the race to deliver faster inevitably took him into fashion territory. Increased customer choice and an obsession with novelties resulted from the development of mass-manufacturing, and then marketing to sell additional stock, but this was not a trend that Forster could have ignored if he wished to stay in business. Changes in society, and particularly in the status of women also encouraged a shift away from clothing towards fashion. Women were gaining social power, and they were using this to determine how they presented themselves to the world. They were able to start resisting traditional clothing etiquette and make choices that aligned with the new ideas embedded in contemporary fashion.

Ultimately this article contributes to global research on mourning dress by closely analysing the marketing language used in Frederic Forster's newspaper advertisements between 1849 and 1923. It offers a fresh perspective by revealing, for the first time, how clothing and fashion intersected in mourning attire sold by a single shop in Leeds, UK. These findings not only illuminate the cultural and commercial dynamics of the period but also open the door for further research into how sartorial choices—both historically and in contemporary contexts—serve as visual expressions of bereavement and grief.

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