

10.1 Stiffening/lining/padding

Whalebone

Whalebone was strong, light and resilient and suited the need for a supple stiffening that would retain its shape and not crack or break.

The hard material is not bone but 'baleen' from the upper jaws of certain whales which filters food entering the whale's stomach.

It was used in underclothing from the late 1670s until about 1800 and then again from 1820.

Whalebone predominated over other materials used for corsets such as cane, steel, bone and wood.

The international whale fishing industry profited greatly when corsets were popular from the 1820s–1920s.



An example of whalebone protruding from a silk bodice.

Buckram

Buckram is a coarsely woven stiffened cloth made of cotton or linen. It is used to stiffen clothing and millinery or in bookbinding. Buckram is impregnated or coated in a substance, such as glue or starch, which fills the gaps between the fibres. This process stiffens the fabric and increases its durability.

Buckram helps garments hold their form and stabilises fabric for stitching. It could be used for stiffening collars, gowns, tops of sleeves etc. Buckram coated in starch is also often used in millinery. It is softened in water, pulled over a hat block and left to dry hard in shape.

During the Middle Ages the term 'bokeram' was used to describe a type of fine cotton cloth, but it was not stiff. It is thought 'buckram' is derived from Bokhara in Uzbekistan, a source of fine linen.

Canvas

Canvas is a thick plain-woven fabric usually made from cotton, hemp or linen. It is a strong cloth with a firm even weave. Canvas can be used in garments to give shape and body, for example, in the shoulders and chest of a suit. There are two types of canvas: plain and duck. The threads of duck canvas are more tightly woven.

Padding

Padding has often been used in garments to enhance the body shape. Wool, cotton, kapok or straw may be found inside garments between two layers of fabric. From the 19th century wool padding was sometimes used in the upper torso of men's jackets and on the shoulders to enhance their shape and form. Tubular padding was sometimes attached to skirt waists and hems in the early to mid 19th century. Soft bustles of cotton lint, kapok or wool were often separate accessories tied around the waist. Women's shoulder pads were particularly fashionable during the 1940s and 1980s.

Petersham

Petersham is a stiff ribbed ribbon used for reinforcing garments and millinery. It can be used as stiffening on waistbands, corset edges or along hat brims. Petersham has a flexible picot edge which allows it to curve easily and fit the line of a garment, for example, the curve of a waistline.

It was named after Lord Petersham (1780–1851), Charles Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Harrington. A Colonel and Lord of the Bedchamber, he was a popular man in society, known for his eccentric tastes. He designed the petersham overcoat.



An example of petersham.