

Department Of Waist Management

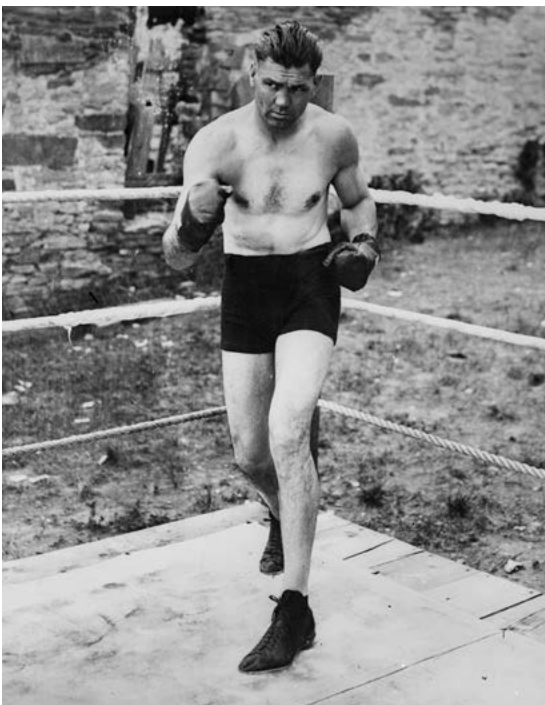
Some form of underwear is tucked into the top drawer of every man's tallboy – but how exactly did it arrive there? **Matthew Myers** offers a brief history.

IN THE BIBLICAL BEGINNING, Adam's modesty brought about the fig leaf. Primitive tribes wore a protective gourd around their goods, but it was prehistoric man who first covered up with animal skins and fabrics woven from plants. The lap-lap (yes, like the thing Tarzan wears) hung around, literally, to become a staple of the ancient Egyptians, Romans and Greeks. They were considered so essential that King Tutankhamun had 145 of them, known as shendoh, stacked in his tomb in preparation for the afterlife.

By the Medieval period, men's underwear, known as *braies* were made of linen. They were loose-fitting drawers that stopped mid-calf. A prototype to knickerbockers, the lace-up breeches were a firm favourite for knights, who wore them under their armour. But by the time of the Renaissance, our forefathers decided that having to lace and un-lace each time they took a pee was too darn annoying and, *voilà!* The codpiece was born.

The codpiece's main purpose was to provide a simple and quick opening men could use for relieving themselves, and, in many ways, was a precursor to the taken-for-granted modern fly (known in tailoring terms as a split fall). King Henry VIII was the best publicist for the codpiece. His was exceptionally large – he was, after all, the king. In fact, during the Middle Ages the word *cod* didn't just apply

The codpiece protrudes proudly from beneath the folds in this portrait of England's King Henry VIII by Hans Holbein. The codpiece was convenient and practical but also a statement of virility and power.



Before Beckham: American boxer Jack Dempsey (above) had, perhaps, the greatest influence of any sportsman on men's underwear trends in the 20th Century. The boxer short (left) is named after the style of shorts he wore to fight in. Note also, the singlet-style top (right), sometimes called a tank top.

to something served with chips, it actually meant scrotum. And while many copied the king's style for the remainder of the 16th Century, historians have debated if old Henry's huge codpiece actually contained medicated bandages to combat venereal disease. Having said that, the codpiece was also often used as a handy pocket. Obviously not for condoms.

In the Victorian era, a tighter, longer-legged garment that connected with a shirt became popular. It later evolved into the "union suit", worn by soldiers in the American civil war. Known for their warmth and a convenient "drop seat" or "fireman's flap" at the back, this head-to-toe garment would, in turn, become the tighter long johns, named after the champion

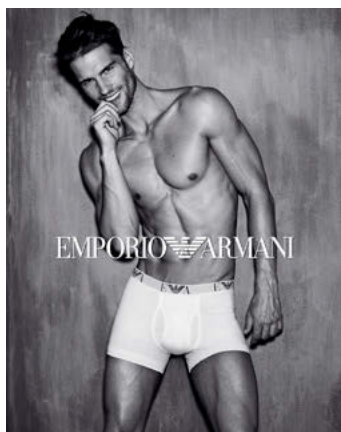
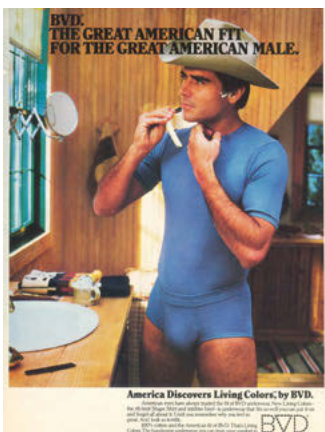
boxer who made them famous, John L Sullivan.

Curiously, the boxing ring brought about another advent in men's undies: the boxer short. Jacob Golomb, who developed the Everlast sports brand, decided to create a featherweight style of boxing shorts and replaced the trunk's leather belt with an elastic waistband. By the 1930s, what had been seen as prizefighters' sportswear became the in-vogue underwear of the Jazz Age. During this time period, the word "underpants" entered the dictionary, and boxers were all of a sudden challenged with a rival – briefs!

In 1935, Arthur Kneibler, an apparel engineer at Coopers hosiery company received a postcard from a friend visiting the French



The traditional loincloth involves roles of fabric carefully twisted between the legs and around the waist rather than the leather lap-lap that Tarzan is often depicted wearing.



Fabrics have evolved but the cut of men's underwear has changed very little between the 1970s and today.

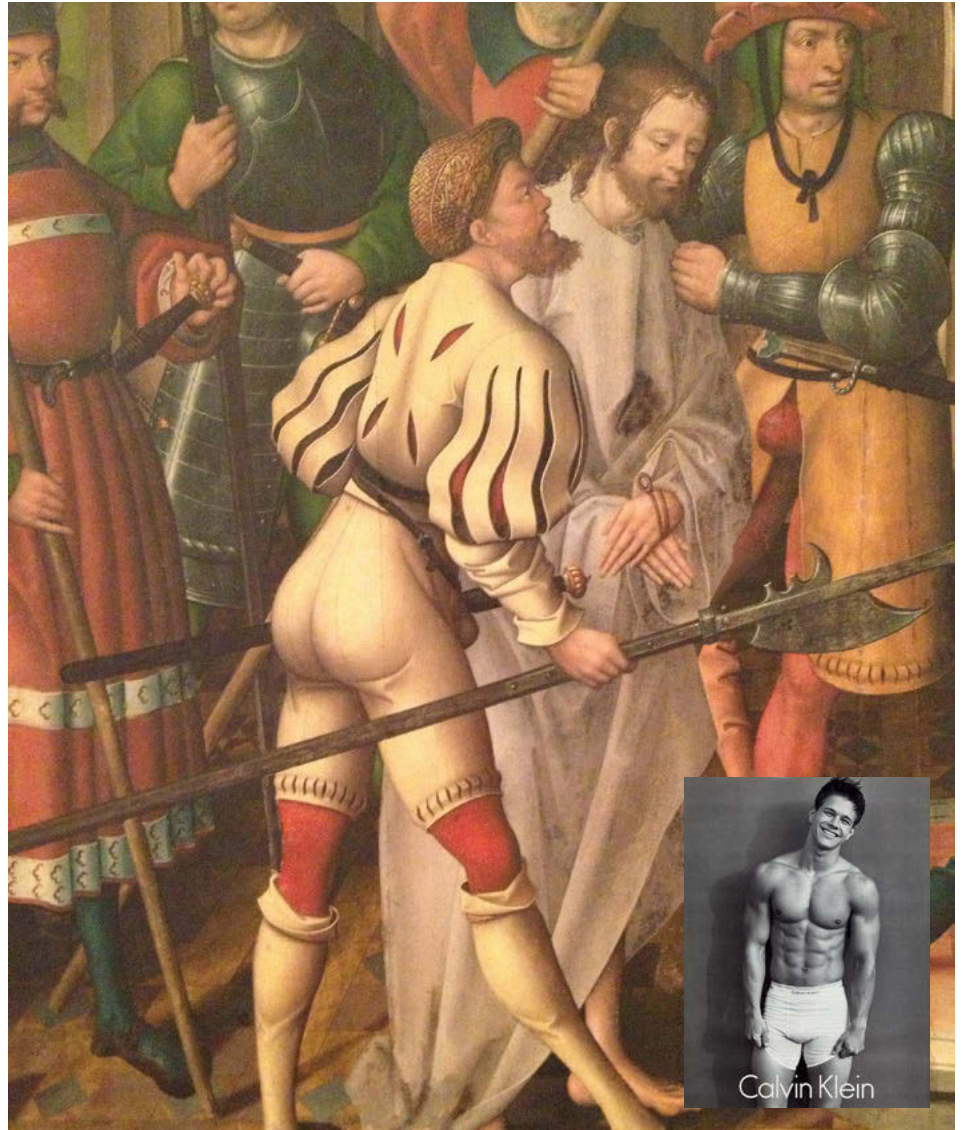


This advertisement from 1934 shows how fussy mens underwear was pre-World War II. Post-war, the brief, the “gob shirt” (which became better known as the T-shirt) and singlet or tank-top became popular. Military simplicity and practicality had a lasting influence.

Riviera. Europe was already familiar with a bikini style bathing suit worn by men, but what Kneibler saw was a future in global underwear. He developed a new style that was snug fitting, without legs and featured his answer to the codpiece, a daring Y-shaped opening. In just three months of its release, 30,000 pairs were sold. It goes without saying that Coopers continued its winning streak and, in 1971, changed its name to Jockey.

In some ways the overall concept of the jockey short wasn't new. The invention of the bicycle in the previous century had brought about a development in 1874 – the jockstrap. Bicyclists, known as jockeys, were finding cobblestone streets a little too challenging for their private parts, so a Chicago sporting goods company, Sharp & Smith, created what was to become a modern day locker room staple, not to mention a favorite of gay men.

Jump ahead to WWII and the boxer short was still being used as basic underwear for military men, and, in the postwar '50s, boxers soared in popularity with civilians. Also making up part of a new trend was a tight,



short-sleeved military shirt worn by soldiers and sailors. What was known as a “gob shirt” became fashionable with a rebellious new generation: it was named the T-shirt.

At this point, the boxers versus briefs debate began to unfold. Fans of the brief liked the snug support, while those favouring the boxer liked the hang loose comfort. However, as pants got tighter through the hippy '60s and disco '70s, briefs became almost essential.

In Australia, Jockey released the Jockette range – super-brief, high-cut underpants that

Marky Mark's Calvin Klein ads made it obvious, but the fetishisation of the male body in underwear is not new. In this painting, the lead figure's backside is accentuated by the tight fitting garment and his drooping stockings expose his legs. Look closer and see how his pouch and the hilt of his sword resemble a scrotum and erect penis.

reflected the hyper-sexual fashions of the '70s Down Under. The sporty cut referenced the popularity of the Speedo swimsuit. Jockey became synonymous with men's underwear and the word “jocks” entered the Aussie vernacular as a generic term for all underpants.

But the winds of change were blowing yet again. The 1980s brought about a boxer revolution, thanks to innovative designers and a generation of cashed-up yuppies. The boxer short took on bright colourful patterns, particularly with cartoon characters, and continued to be fashionable into the '90s. And then the most recent development came by

What Became Of The Codpiece?

Originally a metal case for protecting a man's member during war, the codpiece evolved into a leather protrusion that was sometimes stuffed with padding and decorated with ribbons or flashy stones. Men also found the codpiece a handy spot

to keep not just the family jewels, but also their coins and valuables. When the codpiece went out of fashion in the late 16th Century, some suggest that the phallic emphasis simply moved northward to the neck. The colourful cravat, worn around the neck, resembled

the shape and evolved into the modern tie, a phallic shape with a neat arrow pointing right down to the goods. However, considering a man can't store his coins in a necktie, it is widely believed that the modern day pants pocket is, in fact, the vestigial codpiece.

“ By the 1930s, what had been seen as prizefighters’ sportswear had become the in-vogue underwear of the Jazz Age. ”

way of a hybrid. Enter, Calvin Klein.

Along with leading designers such as Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein began a revolution in underwear that used sex as the selling point. In the early 1990s, Klein’s head of design, John Varvatos, raised the bar by combining the butt-hugging firmness of a brief with the cut of a boxer to create the boxer-brief, also known as the fitted boxer or hipster trunk. To top it off, Klein got a muscled Mark Wahlberg to display them in advertisements and before you could say Y-front, every man and his “boys” wanted a pair. In one of history’s greatest marketing moves, Klein cleverly branded his name across the elastic waistband. Who needed a billboard in Times Square when hip-hop singers and gay men could be walking advertisements? Calvin Klein underwear became so popular they became simply known as “Calvins”.

Today, Calvins are as popular as ever, and the boxer brief flourishes. Underwear has become so innovative and sexualised that even the skimpy G-string and thong have given way to a new half-side thong pouch. Officially termed a *String Latéral Flash Bleu Alter*, recent internet images of gays wearing them on a beach went viral with the question, “Are they serious?”

Perhaps there was a similar reaction to the first codpiece back in Tudor England?

Underwear design is advancing continuously. While Canterbury sells a style called “ball control”, some designers believe the next move should be crotch sizes, akin to the sizing of bras. Considering the ratio of waistband measurements to, ahem, one’s manhood, may not be as strange as it sounds. Andrew Christian, Cocksox, Aussiebum and others are targeting the gay market with enhanced butts and built-in front pouches that do for a man what the wonderbra does for a woman’s breasts. In the era of social media, it’s now common for brands like Andrew Christian to have Tumblr pages where fans post their underwear selfies.

The future of underwear will no doubt continue to follow the many directions and dimensions of its forerunners, but don’t rule out the long reign of the original jockey brief. Reports from around the world, including our own DNA poll, show that a classic tighty-whitey is still the most popular among men. Perhaps it can be developed into a loincloth?

More: For further information visit undressedbendigo.com



Anyone for shuttlecock? Women are still the main buyers of men’s underwear. Wives want their partners to look like David Beckham. Mums want their sons to play manly sports like, er, badminton!

A Public Airing Of Underwear

Undressed: 350 Years Of Underwear In Fashion is an exhibition currently running at the Bendigo Art Gallery in Victoria. Organised by the world’s leading museum of art and design, London’s Victoria And Albert, the exhibition details a history of the undergarment from 1750 to present day. Apart from many rare, delicate historical items, pieces from iconic designers including Calvin Klein, Christian Dior, Gianni Versace and Jean Paul Gaultier are on display.



Underwear companies that market to gay men understand the importance of a generously filled pouch to create the right impression – not unlike Henry’s codpiece back in Tudor England.



Underwear revolution: the “string latéral flash bleu alter” (above) is the 21st Century’s first true underwear innovation. But is it really underwear considering it’s designed to not be worn under anything at all.

UNDIES: HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR BRIEFS?
A DNA online readers’ poll reveals...

