

Regency Headdress

Hats, Caps, Bonnets, Bandeaux!

In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (the 1995 BBC production) we often find Lydia or one of her sisters endeavoring to alter a bonnet. This was no doubt a nacky way to imitate the latest modes, or to get a different look without actually having to purchase a new hat. Whatever the desired result, it was a handy talent to be able to transform one's headwear, especially in nineteenth century London, when for a lady to leave the house bareheaded was a sign of ill-breeding.



It was no small thing, this wearing of hats. Understandable then, that the Bennet girls, like all gently bred women, were appropriately concerned with the state of their headwear. As the illustration to the left shows, a bonnet was vastly changeable, and could range from being demure to sweet, spunky to showy. Further, there were a great many styles of bonnet—from the austere poke bonnet, (which was high but narrow, casting the face into shadow) to those resembling a cap.

A great deal of the effect depended upon the ornamentation or beribboning of the hat in question; and nearly anything that was considered attractive was used for this purpose:

- Jewels, beads or buttons
- Feathers, fur
- Faux flowers, real flowers
- Brooches, pins
- Veils (not dark, unless in mourning, usually)
- Lace, ruched fabric, ribbons, edging
- Silk scarves, other scarves
- Cording, rosettes
- Netting, epaulettes, etc.
- Swaths of fabric

However, despite all of the customization available, bonnets were only the beginning of what a Regencian woman might sport upon her head.

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Below: A Millinery Shop

Left:

A Regency Poke Bonnet

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In addition to the BONNET, women of fashion wore:

- ❖ **Bandeaux** --stretchy fabric bands worn around the head, sometimes close to the forehead, which could be thin or wide, depending upon one's taste or inclination, and could be ornamented heavily or not, according to taste and expenditure. [right: **Princess Charlotte wears a bandeau of flowers**]
- ❖ **Veils**-- Freestanding and not necessarily covering the face, but simply draped over the head. There were also veiled bonnets, particularly for mourning. In the illustrations below, the veils are not for mourning.
- ❖ **Tiaras** – A favorite for the heroine in, *Before the Season Ends*, tiaras are slim, elegant, and crown-like. Worn mostly for full-dress affairs, and ideally constructed with expensive silver or gold and precious gems, making them exclusive to the wealthy. No doubt they had less expensive counterparts, however, and cheap imitations.
- ❖ **Caps** —A genuine cap for a lady was soft, lined for warmth, and probably made from only the finest muslin. Lace could be sparse or abundant. During the night, they were essential for warmth. (For an era that lacked central heating, a cap, of any style, was eminently practical.) The “mob-cap” was popular in the 18th century and many women continued to wear it into the 19th. Like many other articles of clothing, the mob-cap (the “Parisian mob”) started in France, crossed the channel and became wildly popular in England. Caps were worn indoors, but sometimes a lady might choose to wear one beneath her bonnet—which was an absolute necessity for venturing forth from one's abode in daylight.



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Above: A very fancy cap

Turbans (Sometimes called, toques.) Popular in the later Regency. This style did not, like the Empire dress, have its roots in classicism, but in the ever-widening expanse of the British Empire. As men returned to England with more and more trinkets and delicacies from the Far East and India, certain accessories (not to mention furniture and decoration) became the fashion. Turbans were draped around the head, often with ample fabric left to hang down gracefully in back, or to the side. This headpiece, too, could be, and often was, ornamented. Large fringed, tassels were often sported. And the color, print, and quality of the fabric, as well as the choice of ornament or tassels went far in completing a modish outfit.

Tocques—These were stiffer than a turban, but unlike a bonnet were brimless, and always close-fitting to the head.



Above: Early century mob caps

“There were not any marked changes in the shape and cut of gowns or wraps during the first decade of the nineteenth century, but on the other hand an endless variety of head-dresses, trimmings and accessories followed with bewildering rapidity, and the names it was the fashion to give each innovation would fill a dictionary.”

Elisabeth McClellan

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Quotes:

“And, as a last dignifying element, a **tiara**: a delicate, lightly embellished headpiece, which was placed gingerly over Ariana's head and fastened into place with pins.” *From, Before the Season Ends*

Left: **A tiara**

“Mrs. Merry, wife of the British Minister wore, in 1804 to an Assembly, “a breadth of blue crape about four yards long and in other words, a long shawl, put over her head instead of over her shoulders and hanging down to the floor, her hair bound tight to her head with a diamond crescent before [a tiara?] and a diamond comb behind...” *



“WIENER ZEITSCHRIFT.” July 1820

It is easy to see that the variety of style, color and decoration in women's hats could be as individual as the women who wore them or the milliners who made them.

On evening occasions women did not wear bonnets, but used embellishments on the hair, if not a wig, to adorn their heads. Having the right style of hair was so important, in fact, that some women did resort to wigs:

“The hair, descended from the high estate given it by the last and fairest of French queens, hung in loose waves upon the neck until the awful fashion of wigs came in. When that strange mania prevailed, it was hardly thought decent to wear one’s own hair. No matter how long, how thick, how beautiful, the ruthless scissors must clip it close and a horrible construction by a hair-dresser take its place. The wig fashion did not last long, only a year or two, then came the Grecian bands and plaits with short curls on the forehead, and next turbans....Turbans, capotes and head-dresses of every possible material were in the height of fashion in the early years of the century.” *

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Here is a snippet I found from a book published in 1875, which indicates that it was still the custom for women to wear bonnets out of doors, and caps indoors. The fact that this little portion also mentions visiting churches (English churches being this month's newsletter feature) made it irresistible. This is from the opening chapter, where a British mother and her daughters are just coming in from a busy day of sight-seeing in Rome.

[From the book, *Wyncote*, by Mrs. Thomas Erskine]

“Well, I am thankful to think that we have nearly done with Rome!” exclaimed Mrs. Cooper, as she sank into an easy chair in her drawing-room in the Via Condotti. “Joanna, ring for Maple and put my bonnet on the table; how dreadfully tired I am!”

“Please, mamma, don't take off your bonnet till Maple brings your cap,” answered a tall schoolroom girl, with strongly-marked features and a decided manner; “and, Rose, will you ring the bell while I dot off the churches we have seen to-day? Dear me! There is so much left to do, and so very little time left to do it in. Here is Saint Agostino—some one said we ought to go there; and San Lorenzo, where the Guido is, we have not seen that; and what with the packing, and the tiresome picnic at the Pamphili Doria to-morrow, we shall get through very little more.”

“The only think I care to see is home, Joanna,” said Mrs. Cooper, putting on the cap which the maid had brought. ...



Left: Little girls wore the same style hat or cap as their mothers, only smaller. If you notice, even the clothing is like that of a miniature adult. It wasn't until later in the century that “children's clothing” really became differentiated from adults.

Right: A Very Frilly Cap



Resources:

**Historic Dress in America 1800-1870*, Elisabeth McClellan
Wyncote, Mrs. T. Erskine

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A Turban



A Toque



A Tiara



Turban and Toque



Linore Rose Burkard is a serious watcher of period films, a Janeite, and hopeless romantic. An award winning author best known for Inspirational Regency Romance, her first book opened the genre for the CBA. Besides historical romance, Linore writes contemporary suspense (*The Pulse Effex Series*, as L.R. Burkard), contemporary romance (*Falling In*), and romantic short stories. Linore has a *magna cum laude* English Lit. degree from CUNY which she earned while taking herself far too seriously. She now resides in Ohio with her husband and family, where she turns her youthful angst into character or humor-driven plots.

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