

Sommario

- 11 *Magnifica ossessione*
Natalia Aspesi
- 19 *Des souliers et des hommes*
Quirino Conti
- 29 *English footwear style*
Eric Musgrave
- 37 *Eleganza e lusso*
Fabio Farotti
- 55 *La produzione della scarpa in Italia
dal Settecento a oggi*
Giovanni Luigi Fontana, Giorgio Riello
- 141 *La scarpa su misura:
eleganza e tradizione della grande calzoleria artigianale*
Maria Canella, Elena Puccinelli
- 209 *Tradizione e tecnologia: la sintesi perfetta*
Sergio Dulio, Fabrizio Rivolta
- 263 *Bibliografia*

*The measure
of elegance*

ARTISAN SHOEMAKING FROM XIX TO XXI CENTURY



Classic English men's style is epitomised by three traditional elements – the suit, the shirt and tie, and the shoes. Savile Row has been the home of the suit for more than 150 years. Jermyn Street has been the centre for shirt makers for a similar period. Bespoke footwear workshops traditionally have been located in close proximity to these gentlemen's thoroughfares.

While mass production of footwear became the norm after the 1914-1918 war, in recent years there has been a revival in interest in bespoke shoe making, thanks to the rise in the general luxury market. Names like J. Lobb and G.J. Cleverly have an international reputation and star-studded clients' lists, while smaller London-based business such as W.S. Foster & Son and James Taylor & Son maintain the high standards that made English footwear's reputation.

Essential to spreading the English footwear gospel around the world have been the shoemakers of Northampton. Located about 100 km north of London, Northampton and the surrounding settlements such as Kettering, Earls Barton, Desborough and Rushden have been noted for the production of leather and leathersgoods for centuries.

Hides from cattle rearing, lots of water from local rivers and a plentiful supply of oak bark meant that the area had the raw materials for tanning. As early as 1200, a street of cordwainers – the ancient name for shoemakers - was recorded in Northampton. By 1452, prices and qualities of the shoemaking industry were regulated at the local court. Northamptonshire's geographical position in the centre of England meant it became recognised as the leading shoe-making area of the entire country. The 1841 census for Northampton lists 1,821 shoemakers, a figure which equates to almost a third of all the city's men aged 20 or more. In that period these normally would have been artisans working in small workshops, but the second half of the nineteenth century saw the industrialisation of the footwear business, as factories replaced single tradesmen. By 1851 there were almost 3,000 adult shoemakers, plus 1,200 under 20 years of age. In 1871 shoemakers accounted for 43% of all adult males in Northampton.

The classic English footwear firms celebrated today were founded in this period, such as Tricker's (established 1829), Church's (1873), Grenson (1874), Crockett & Jones (1879), Barker (1880), Loake (1880), Joseph Cheaney (1886), Edward

*Fabbrica di scarpe a
Manfield, Northampton,
1900 circa
Shoe factory in Manfield,
Northampton, 1900s*

Green (1890) and Alfred Sargent (1899). Treadle-driven sewing machines were introduced into Northampton in 1857. Three years later, the first machine for screwing soles and heels together was developed. An essential innovation came in 1874 when Charles Goodyear of the United States developed the machine that allowed welted soles to be produced – it was soon adopted by Northampton. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British controlled “an empire on which the sun never set”. From Canada to New Zealand, and from India to the West Indies, the manufacturers of the United Kingdom had a huge global market for their goods. As early as the late 1600s, Northampton footwear was being exported across the Atlantic Ocean to the West Indies and the boots worn by the British Army were usually manufactured in Northamptonshire. The influence of the English trade is still seen in the names of best-selling styles of men’s shoe worldwide – the Oxford and the Derby (another great British style, the Brogue, takes its name from an Irish or Scottish style that was punched with holes to allow it to dry out more quickly after a trip across a bog.)

English style was exported across the world most effectively by two Royal Princes of Wales. The man who would become Edward VII in 1901 was born in 1841, the eldest son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. He was the heir for an astonishing 59 years and with no job to do, he lived the life of an international playboy, travelling across Europe and beyond, setting the fashions of the day. Prince Edward’s love of fine tailoring made the worldwide reputation of Savile Row (and particularly of his favourite tailor, Henry Poole). It made the look of the English gentlemen the blueprint against which the respectable society of every other nation was judged.

Prince Edward travelled on his jaunts across Europe with 40 suits and an armada of boots and shoes. Just as he made the reputation of Henry Poole for tailoring, the Prince made the international reputation of his London bootmaker John Lobb, which had been established in 1849. In 1863 Lobb received a Royal Warrant from Edward, which informed the world that he was the Prince’s supplier of footwear. Like the rest of his wardrobe, Edward’s boots and shoes were a byword for the utmost elegance and quality. Lobb today has Royal Warrants from the Duke of Edinburgh and his son, the current Prince of Wales.

In the history of English footwear the First World War marks a watershed because after 1918 the shoe began irresistibly to replace the boot as the first choice of smart society and mass production replaced bespoke shoe making. Edward VII’s grandson, Prince Edward – who was briefly Edward VIII in 1936 before being created Duke of Windsor – was even more of a trend-setter for

men's fashions. As well as championing soft, comfortable tailoring in the 1920s and 1930s, the dandy Prince enjoyed breaking rules on footwear. When he first wore brown suede shoes with a grey flannel suit in the 1920s, it came as a shock – not least because up until then suede shoes had been associated almost exclusively with homosexuals.

The Prince of Wales was a regular visitor to the United States and he picked up some of the iconoclastic attitude of that relatively young nation. In the 1932s, for example, he amazed society by wearing full brogues to play golf. He enjoyed brogues so much that he liked a more elegant version for social occasions. From the mid-1920s onwards, he was regularly seen in “spectator shoes”, which mixed white and black or white and brown in one shoe, typical of his flamboyant style. He also was a great fan of the slip-on or moccasin style, which had its origins in Norway, was further developed by the Americans and refined by the English. In 1960 an inventory of the Duke of Windsor's wardrobe listed more than 100 pairs of shoes along with 55 lounge suits, 15 evening suits and three formal suits (all with two pairs of trousers for each).

Most of the styles of today's English ready-made shoes were originally designed between the world wars – essentially the 1920s and 1930s – for individuals. High-profile socialites like the Prince of Wales and immaculately turned-out British movie stars like David Niven, Noel Coward and George Sanders were the pin-up boys of the popular press, setting the fashion trends of the day.

The upper-class ancestry of English shoes made them the choice of gentlemen the world over. As England is a “green and pleasant land” that gets lots of rain and quite a few cold months, English styles were, and remain, heavier, stronger and more durable than lighter-weight footwear from southern Europe. The welted style is easier to repair than the lighter constructions also, allowing an Englishman to keep a favourite pair of shoes in his wardrobe for many, many years. Such longevity will help ensure that English footwear style will continue to shine like a highly-polished pair of Oxfords.



Classica Derby con fibbia laterale appesa tra gli strumenti di lavoro del calzolaio
Classic Monkstrap with a slightly square toe hangs amidst shoemaker's tools