

## The Socio-Economic Impact of the English Leather Glove Industry from the 17th Century to Its Recent Decline

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**Abstract :** Gloves are significant physical objects, being one of the oldest forms of dress. Glove culture is part of every facet of life; its extraordinary history encompasses practicality, and symbolism reflecting a wide range of social practices. The survival of not only the gloves but associated articles enables the possibility to analyse real lives, however so far this area has been largely neglected. Limited information is available to students, researchers, or those involved with the design and making of gloves. There are several museums and independent collectors in England that hold collections of gloves (some from as early as 16th century), machinery, tools, designs and patterns, marketing materials and significant archives which demonstrate the rich heritage of English glove design and manufacturing, being of national significance and worthy of international interest. Through a research glove network which now exists thanks to research grant funding, there is potential for the holders of glove collections to make connections and explore links between these resources to promote a stronger understanding of the significance, breadth and heritage of the English glove industry. The network takes an interdisciplinary approach to bring together interested parties from academia, museums and manufacturing, with expert knowledge of the production, collections, conservation and display of English leather gloves. Academics from diverse arts and humanities disciplines benefit from the opportunities to share research and discuss ideas with network members from non-academic contexts including museums and heritage organisations, industry, and contemporary designers. The fragmented collections when considered in entirety provide an overview of English glove making since earliest times and those who wore them. This paper makes connections and explores links between these resources to promote a stronger understanding of the significance, breadth and heritage of the English Glove industry. The following areas are explored: current content and status of the individual museum collections, potential links, sharing of information histories, social and cultural and relationship to history of fashion design, manufacturing and materials, approaches to maintenance and conservation, access to the collections and strategies for future understanding of their national significance. The facilitation of knowledge exchange and exploration of the collections through the network informs organisations' future strategies for the maintenance, access and conservation of their collections. By involving industry in the network, it is possible to ensure a contemporary perspective on glove-making in addition to the input from heritage partners. The slow fashion movement and awareness of artisan craft and how these can be preserved and adopted for glove and accessory design is addressed. Artisan leather glove making was a skilled and significant industry in England that has now declined to the point where there is little production remaining utilising the specialist skills that have hardly changed since earliest times. This heritage will be identified and preserved for future generations of the rich cultural history of gloves may be lost.

**Keywords :** artisan glove-making skills, English leather gloves, glove culture, the glove network

**Conference Title :** ICTFI 2021 : International Conference on Textile and Fashion Industry

**Conference Location :** Zurich, Switzerland

**Conference Dates :** January 14-15, 2021