

From function to fashion; the **elastic sided** boot



1. Men's black leather gusset shoe which may have been a sample (1832)



2. Women's blue silk boot with a flat heel for indoor wear (1840)



3. Men's black leather boots based on the traditional galosh cut upper (1860)

4. Men's black leather shoes with imitation laced-front; a good combination of function and fashion (1865)





5.



6.



7.

5. Women's black leather boots with imitation button-close front which follow the same approach in design (1875)
6. Typical men's black leather 'Beatle' boot with Cuban heel (1965)
7. Men's brown leather jodhpur boot (1990) by Loake Brothers to a traditional pattern that has not changed in 80 years
8. R.M. Williams Leather Craftsman's boot with one-piece upper (2007)



8.

Although rubber has been used in footwear for hundreds of years, the concept of incorporating rubber in an 'elastic' web did not arrive until the early 1820s. The idea quickly caught on as it was supremely functional and shoemakers soon adopted it. Initially it was used over the instep as this was easiest, used less material and also assisted fit.

The patent for elastic-sided boots was issued to Joseph Sparkes Hall in England in 1837. He had been making galoshes since 1830 and saw the potential of the new material. He presented a pair of his boots to Queen Victoria who liked them. Where the Queen led, everyone else naturally wanted to follow and in 1840 he registered a design for an elastic-sided boot with a flat sole and tapered-gussets with a square base.

Elastic gussets become accepted

C&J Clark was using elastic by the early 1850s when its advertisements included a shoe with an elastic front. In 1856 it registered the design for the Osborne Boot (named after the Queen's favourite residence) which again had a single front gusset rather than two side ones. The one drawback of a front gusset, however, was its appearance as side gussets looked much smarter.

For the first half of the 20th century, the elastic-sided boot reverted to a purely functional role where it found favour as a smooth-fronted boot that could be worn for riding without catching on the stirrup irons. It came to the forefront of fashion once again with the 'Beatle' boot, named after the iconic British pop group, and has remained part of the fashion scene in various forms ever since.

Function becomes fashion

The ultimate transfer from function to fashion came about with the famous Australian 'stockman's boot' first created by R.M. Williams in the early 1930s. Designed as a comfortable and hard-wearing boot for drovers on cattle ranches, it has since diversified into a range of footwear sought after worldwide. This ability to combine function with contemporary footwear has stood the elastic-sided boot in good stead for nearly 200 years and will doubtless do so for many more to come. 