



COIFFURES DU TEMPS DE LÉONARD.

Fashionable Parisian hairstyles of the 1770s and 1780s.  
Illustration from Eugene Rimmel's *Le Livre des Parfums*, c.1870.  
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Humans have used pigments to decorate their skin for thousands of years for different purposes including spiritual reasons, hunting and as a marker of social status.

Archaeological and literary evidence from the Roman period, as well as visual representations from coins, paintings and statues, provide evidence of a wide selection of beauty products, cosmetics and related accessories. However it is difficult to know how widely they were used, and whether they were restricted to people of certain status or used in particular contexts.

From at least the 17th century, the use of cosmetics remained a focus of debate about the meanings and morality of artifice, creating social conflicts between disapproval and desire.

When John Boot opened his herbalist's shop on Nottingham's Goose Gate in 1849, Victorian society idealised women who were demure, decorous and deeply moral. Blushing cheeks were the ultimate sign of feminine virtue, an involuntary display of the modest soul within. While many women made their own preparations to secretly enhance their complexions,

## The armoury of beauty

the explicit use of colour was considered abhorrent — a form of deception more commonly practiced by actresses and prostitutes.

By the early 20th century, however, attitudes were beginning to change. Emboldened by their experiences during the First World War, assertive young women — the so-called flapper generation — increasingly turned to colour cosmetics as a form of self-expression or to protest against the social restrictions of the previous century. Encouraged by cinema's use of make-up to enhance facial expressions on screen, and the potent other-worldly glamour of Hollywood stars, cosmetics became visible — on the more daring British women at least.



Roman portrait of a young woman, Hawara Egypt, AD 110-120.  
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Boots Pelham Street Store, Nottingham, 1896. From the Boots Archive, 2729/49