

## Journalism – Marks and Spencer (City Life Magazine)

**The ongoing decline of Marks and Spencer is seen by many as a symbol of some sea change in our national character. STEVE COCHRANE ponders the ramifications if we should ever lose this august institution.....**

It wasn't always like this. Marks and Spencer's wasn't always synonymous with five year olds getting beaten up for wearing St. Michael's trainers, while their teachers looked on and said "I hate bullying, but they've got a point." Oh no. M and S used to be the hip name to drop. "Look," the beatniks used to cry upon spotting a particularly fine polo neck, "that's a real Marksola roll neck. Solid gone baby and a lovely cotton nylon mix." To 'Spencer it up' was how the Mods described getting dressed for a really hot date, and few people realise that John Lennon originally said "The Beatles are bigger than St. Michaels Maxi-Pants in a range of pleasing pastels," but was persuaded to tone it down to 'Jesus' by a worried Paul McCartney.

The mistake the store made was not to move with the times. They continued to stock flannelette night shirts in a shade of pink so livid scientists warned it could rot teeth at thirty paces. They still tried to tempt the ladies with dresses made out of the wallpaper from a Prestatyn Bed and Breakfast lounge-cum-dining room, specially cut so as to make the most curvaceous of women look like an over-stuffed Chesterfield that's borrowed some of Anne Widdecombe's pulling gear for a night on the town. And what else but blind faith could have led them to believe that there was yet a market for the Maxi-Crotch Sober Pant, available in twenty eight shades of grey and advertised with the slogan 'The only contraceptive you can boil wash.' Every now and then they try to jazz things up a little, yes, but it's like watching your great Auntie pretending to dig Public Enemy; "Well, dear, it's like Chuck D always says, it's an ill wind that blows no mother any good."

But I, for one, fear the consequences if we should ever lose this Great British Institution. Take the true story of Jack. Jack was a middle aged bank clerk, content with his life of dull conformity, happy with his tedious lot, until the day the local branch of Marks and Spencer's closed down. "Marks has gone," said his wife, June, casually, "so I bought your pants from somewhere else." He took the carrier bag upstairs, and went to put his pants into the pant draw (left hand side, third draw down) and that was when his life turned upside down. For inside the bag lurked black pants, red pants, skimpy, silky things that didn't have a 'Y' on the front or an extra wide waistband for Total Security. He locked the bedroom door and tried a pair of the pants on. Jack felt dizzy.

In his St. Michael pants his crotch had always seemed so.....well....British. It was a John Mills of a crotch, clearing its throat and enquiring politely if anybody minded awfully the fact that it was bulging ever so slightly. Now, in these New Pants, these Modern Briefs, it was a snarling Marlon

Brando of a groin; "Yeah," it seemed to sneer, "I'm quite a package. Wanna make something of it?" And yet Jane had always told him the Cumfi-Lux Snug Brief YFronts were the only pants available, denying him access to the vivid world of boxers and tangos and (he blushed hotly) pouches.

So what else was she lying about? What about sex? Did everybody else do it in separate rooms? And the jeans, the Ken Barlow jeans made out of blue cardboard. Not to mention all those Christmas presents from the 'Men's Gifts' department. He stared at his whiskey decanter in the shape of Nick Faldo through eyes wet with tears of rage and frustration. The six inch tall silver coated pewter figure in characteristic pose seemed to be mocking him with its wryly triumphant grin. "Look,"

it seemed to say, "I don't wear sensible trousers, I wear three quarter length plus fours in a vibrant tri-colour check. But then, I'm a golfer. And my wife doesn't shop at Marks. " And then Nick Faldo laughed. Laughed and laughed and laughed.....

As I said, that's a true story, and if we don't stop now it's going to be repeated up and down the country, causing the onset of anarchy and a descent into blind violence and random cruelty. So just go out and buy some sensible underwear. That's what I did, and this body length, firm support hip hugger girdle fits like an absolute dream.