

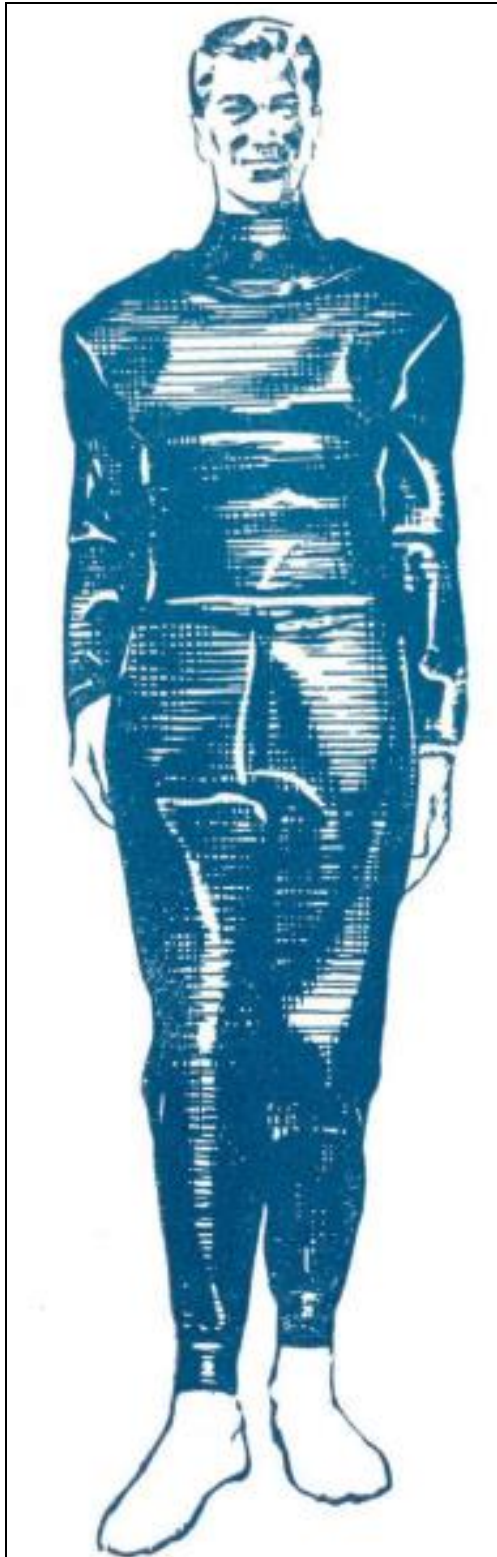
Lillywhites Skin Suit

Lillywhites of Piccadilly Circus is London's largest sporting goods store. For many years, its underwater sports department published an annual mail-order catalogue, leading the way in the supply of equipment to British divers. Individual items of underwater gear, e.g. fins and suits, were occasionally commissioned for sale under the Lillywhites brand name.

The two-piece Lillywhites Dry Diving Suit first appeared on page 7 of Lillywhites' 1955 Underwater Sports Equipment List, where the garment was illustrated by the image below left. The suit reappeared on page 3 of Lillywhites' 1956 underwater equipment catalogue, illustrated as in the image below right.

**Historical
Diving
Suits**

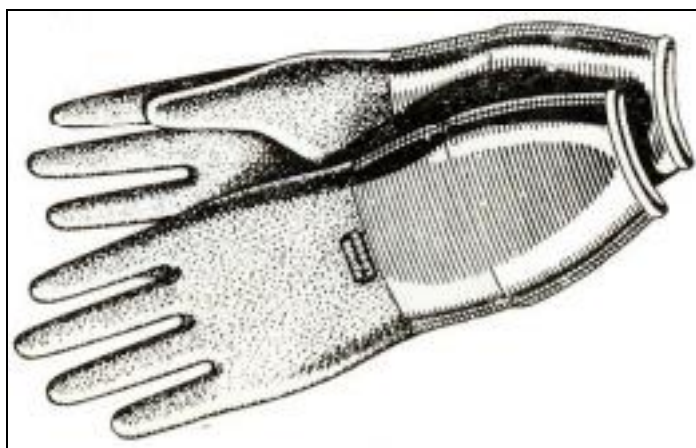
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References

1. Lillywhites Ltd (1955-1956) *Underwater Catalogue 1955, & Underwater Catalogue 1956*, London: Lillywhites.
2. Peter Small (1957) *Your Guide to Underwater Adventure*, London: Lutterworth Press.

- Two Lillywhites Skin Suit accessories are illustrated below. The bootees and gloves are described in Lillywhites' 1956 catalogue thus: "Bootees for use with the Lillywhites skin suit consisting of rubber sole and upper with watertight ankle seal for joining over seal on the trousers. £2 5s 0d. No Purchase Tax. Rubber gloves, completely covering the hands and wrists, for added protection in cold and dirty waters. £1 10s 0d including 1/1 Purchase Tax."
- A third Lillywhites Skin Suit accessory, though not illustrated in the catalogue, was a black rubber Diving Hood with Neck Seal priced at 16/9 including 2/6 Purchase Tax.



Lillywhites Skin Suit Facts

- Two sources of information about Lillywhites Suits have been identified: Lillywhites' underwater equipment catalogues for the years 1955 and 1956 (Lillywhites, 1955-1956) and the 1957 edition of Peter Small's book *Your guide to underwater adventure* (Small, 1957).
- Two versions of the suit were available, one with neck and ankle seals, the other with hood and bootees.
- Small described the suit as "slightly lighter and 'tighter'" than its competitors, "being designed to take light woollens under it" (Small, 1957).
- The suit was made of rubber on stockinette, a combination of materials used in other dry suits of the period, e.g. Heinke's Delta Underwater Swim Suit.
- Lillywhites' 1955 catalogue describes the suit thus: "This skin-tight suit has been designed to give maximum freedom of movement whilst at the same time offering protection against the cold. It can be worn next to the skin or where the water is cold and prolonged diving is expected the swimmer can wear light woollens under suit. The suit itself is made from high grade natural rubber, proofed on to a stockinette cloth giving suppleness and strength. Sealed completely at the neck, wrist and ankles, this suit enables the swimmer to practise his sport throughout the year, even around the British coasts. £15 12s 6d. Two-piece skin suit, as above, fitted with Frogman type hood. Medium or Large sizes £18 4s 6d inc. £2 4s 6d Purchase Tax. Bootees for the above suits consisting of rubber sole and upper with watertight ankle seal for joining over seal on the trousers. £2 3s 4d. No Purchase Tax" (Lillywhites 1955).
- The suit's description in Lillywhites' 1956 catalogue is shorter: "The two-piece suit has been designed to give maximum freedom of movement whilst at the same time offering protection against the cold. It can be worn next to the skin or where the water is cold and prolonged diving is expected the swimmer can wear light woollens under the suit. Made from high grade natural black rubber, proofed on to a stockinette cloth giving suppleness and resistance to wear. Complete with Bootees and Hood, in small, medium and large sizes. £16 0s 0d including 11/7 Purchase Tax. As above but fitted with Neck and Ankle seals £14 6s 0d including 10/4 Purchase Tax" (Lillywhites 1956).