

The Rehearsal – March 18, 1782



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Garments Inspired by a Gentleman's Court Suit of the 1780's

“The Rehearsal – March 18, 1782” is based on historical fact. Frederick, Lord North, was Prime Minister of England during the Revolutionary War. He had attempted to resign several times, but King George III had consistently refused to accept his resignation. Finally in 1782, public opinion had so deserted the Tory government that the King was forced to allow him to depart.

In re-enacting this moment in history, Philip and Kathe Gust have chosen to replicate a man's ribbon embroidered three piece court costume made of corded silk from the collection of Kensington Palace. The designer is unknown, but Nigel Arch, former Director of Kensington Palace and author of *Splendour at Court: Dressing for Royal Occasions Since 1700*, has dated it to c. 1780. It is kept in a glass display case at the palace paired with a similar case showing gentleman's undergarments. It is not associated with Frederick, Lord North, but is undoubtedly similar to ones he wore when serving George III, as Prime minister of England.

All garments were hand sewn in their entirety from period correct fabrics by Kathe Gust. As we discuss each section, I will illustrate with items from the cases at Kensington wherever possible.

Since I was unable to secure a heavily corded silk fabric, the suit was constructed in 8-wale cotton corduroy in a similar color. Mathematical sampling (see below) demonstrated that the 8 wale spacing is a near match for the cording on the original silk when comparing the two based on the probable size of the embroidered motifs. Ververet, an expensive cotton velvet textile, is a period correct fabric. There is a ververet pair of breeches and a full suit (c.1780 Origin: England) in the historic collection at Colonial Williamsburg. It can be seen in their online e-museum.

Sampling demonstration panels



^ 8 wale corduroy



^ Original pocket flap and pocket tr

Inspiration and Some Comparable images

The inspiration for this entry is a man's suit circa 1780 held in the court costume collection of Kensington Palace. The suit and a companion case of undergarments are used to display the normal court dress of a gentleman of the period. A close examination of the items in both cases led to our choice of created garments and informed the selection of purchased accessories.



Suit, undergarments and accessories - Kensington Palace

**Printed cotton velvet
(velveret) suit with
cotton-linen and linen
linings**

Colonial Williamsburg
Collection





Construction

Undergarments

Shirt and under drawers are constructed of 54 inch wide 4 oz linen. The stock is made of 4 oz linen and pleated Kendall Linen Sheer. The 4oz. linen was described as "very delicate, natural white unwashed linen". It is creamy or slightly off white in color not bleached modern white fabric.

When it arrived it went into the washer. Then I put the damp mass into the freezer for a day or two to soften it up a bit more before I started working with it. It came out of the freezer and thawed overnight before I washed it again. This linen didn't feel all that stiff or rough to me, but I don't have to wear it! It does feel different after being washed and frozen.

The wonderful photos from the V&A of the fellow in dishabille show a slim silhouette for undergarments that I tried to replicate. The lace on the shirt front and cuffs is vintage hand-made bobbin lace. The lace for the cuffs and bosom of the shirt is made to be detachable for ease of laundering and re-use on other shirts. It was gathered onto bands of linen that can be tacked into place when the shirt is being worn. The shirt fastens with Dorset thread buttons, the under drawers with linen buttons over bone button forms. Stock was constructed after studying one in the Williamsburg collection.



< Replica detachable cuff ruffle

Original cuff ruffle >



Suit

The coat and waistcoat are constructed of 8 wale cotton corduroy and lined in celadon dyed linen. The waistcoat back is made of white silk duchess satin. Breeches are unlined.

Since the color of the suit fabric is unusual and difficult to match in available linen threads, I sewed it by using two different colors of thread twisted together. I had 50/3 linen thread in both ivory and light green. If I were to use either one alone, the color stands out, but by twisting the two together it turned out a close match for the fabric.

I saw this method discussed on a historic site where they discovered that a seamstress had twisted ivory and brown threads together to sew a beige suit and it works!

Replica waistcoat pocket flap >



Undyed silk ribbon was purchased in various widths and individually hand dyed to match colors. Cotton and wool floss were purchased already dyed.

Breeches

The breeches use Eagle's View Broadfall Drop Front Breeches Pattern. The buttons are formed over bone button molds for both breeches front and knees. The button and buckle holes are hand worked.



< Replica breeches leg

Original breeches leg >



Waistcoat

The back of the waistcoat was made of silk duchesse satin. It was left partially open to adjust with lacing for a better fit, after the example a French waistcoat in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum. There is no photo of the full back of the Kensington waistcoat, but careful viewing of the photos does indicate the waistcoat back is likely a white or cream fabric, not the same turquoise as the front of the garment. The waistcoat buttons were hand embroidered.

Waistcoat Back Los Angeles County Museum >

This would not be considered unusual. For example, the waistcoat in the Los Angeles Museum is red on the front. During this era waistcoats were often purchased uncut, but already embroidered. The set would consist of the waistcoat fronts, matching pockets and button covers. Lining and backs were purchased separately.

The lining of the replica waistcoat fronts is celadon linen. The waistcoat has practical flapped pockets. Buttonholes are worked with Japanese silk buttonhole twist. The laces to cinch the back are braided silk ribbon. The original pattern was by JP Ryan, but has been somewhat altered.

Frock Coat

The Frock coat is based on Mill Farm Man's Frock Coat Pattern MF-19. It is constructed of corduroy and lined with celadon linen. It has working flapped pockets. Frock coat buttons were hand embroidered and were constructed over bone button forms, like those on the waistcoat. Both coat and waistcoat feature ribbon embroidery and regular embroidery as well as couched tapestry wool trim. Buttonholes are worked with Japanese silk buttonhole twist.



of



< Original cuff

Unattached replica cuff >



Ribbon Dyework and Embroidery

The ribbons are undyed 100% China silk from Dharma Trading Co. Ribbon widths SR4 and SR7 were selected based on the original sampling for size exercise. The ribbons were individually dyed using Jacquard Traditional Textile colors. A sample set was dyed and the color blends were archived so that they could be replicated as additional ribbon pieces were needed to complete the patterns. All ribbon was heat set after dyeing and before use.

“Ribbon embroidery has been in and out of favor for centuries, depending on the fashions of the day. Its first heyday was the mid-18th century, when embroidered ribbons bedecked the fashions of the French court. From France it spread to England and then to the British colonies...” - Rankin

Wig



The wig was constructed of wefts of human hair hand sewn to a custom fitted cotton mesh cap. It was styled by the maker. The new wig style of the period is smooth around the forehead with only one or two rolls - *ails de pigeon* - above each ear. At the back, there may be a bourse as well as a pigtail. Here is a

drawing of Frederick, Lord North in his usual style of wig.



Wig powder and all cosmetics used in the demonstration were compounded by the costumers from period recipes.

Building the edges of the cap



Sewing on the wefts



Completed wig



Accessories compared with actuals

Paste shoe buckles, compared with a set in the Victoria and Albert Museum circa 1760. The ones we found are a bit different from the ones we can almost see in the display case, but very like these in the V & A.

Shoe Buckle, V&A Museum



< Shoe Buckles in the case



< Our paste buckles



Snuff Box

< Our snuffbox

Georgian Snuffbox >



Ivory Aide Memoire compared with Thomas Jefferson's pair. You write notes in pencil to help you recall meetings and other important things you need to do.



< Jefferson's

Our Aide Memoire >



This is a very delicate little pen and pencil combination. You slide the decorative collars to retract or extend the side you need to use. 3 3/4 inches long when closed. It matches very well to the snuffbox, which was found earlier. It is compared below with a pair of similar combination writing instruments made by Samuel Pemberton in 1794.



< Our combination pen and pencil



< Pemberton's 1794 pen and pencil combinations

The quizzing glass is the diciest acquisition. It is Edwardian. The quizzing glass of old is pretty rare, and even rarer on e-bay or in US antique stores. The overall appearance is good though when compared with this one from a British antique dealer.



< Our Quizzer

Georgian Quizzer >



Clocked Stockings

Colonial Williamsburg Collection



Handkerchief

Museum of Welsh Life -
Linen Handkerchief with Venetian Needlelace

Research Credits

- Recipes for hair powder and authentic makeup from "*The Toilet of Flora*", 1779 via Madam Isis' Toilette blog: <http://madameisistoilette.blogspot.com>
- Colonial Williamsburg Collection
- Monticello Collection
- Victoria and Albert Museum Collection
- Los Angeles County Museum Collection
- Porter, R., Teich, M.: *Drugs and Narcotics in History*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 39.
- Snuffbox.org.uk
- Carolyn Kayta Barrow, consultant
- Kensington suit research photos by Jeffrey Rozwadowski (Flickr) and <http://threethingsverydullindeed.blogspot.com/2009/>
- *The Lady's Guide to Plain Sewing Book I and II*, Springfield, Ohio: Kannik's Korner, 1993-97.
- *The Workman's Guide to Tailoring Stitches and Techniques*, Springfield, Ohio: Kannik's Korner, 2003.
- *The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600-1900* / Norah Waugh, London, Faber, 1964.
- *Costume Close-up: Clothing Construction and Pattern, 1750-1790* / Linda Baumgarten and John Watson with Florine Carr, Quite Specific Media Group, 2000.
- *Eighteenth-Century Clothing at Williamsburg* / Linda Baumgarten, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1986.
- *Splendour At Court: Dressing For Royal Occasions Since 1700* / Nigel Arch And Joanna Marschner, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1987.
- *The Artful Ribbon* / Candace Kling, self-published, 1996.
- *Ribbon Embroidery* / Bucilla Corp., 1994.
- *Wig Making and Styling: a complete guide for theater and film* / Martha Ruskai and Allison Lowery, Focal Press, 2010.
- *Costume Craftwork on a Budget: Clothing, 3-D Makeup, Wigs, Millinery & Accessories* / Tan Huaixiang Focal Press, 2007.
- *The Pencil* / Curt Wohlberger, American Heritage Magazine, 2004.
- *The Wish Booklet vol. 20: men's fashion 1776-1850* / Susan Bonsall Sirkis, self-published, 1977.
- *Making a Men's Shirt* (translated from Garsault's "*L'art du tailleur*", published in the 1760s) / La Couturiere Parisienne. <http://www.marquise.de/en/1700/howto/maenner/18hemd.shtml>
- *Period Sewing Techniques* / La Couturiere Parisienne. <http://www.marquise.de/en/themes/howto/technik.shtml>
- Makeup Demonstration - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMy15UMgcgA>

Suppliers

- [Fabric.com](#) - 8-wale cotton corduroy fabric, heavy weight Euro Linen fabric, Kendall Linen Sheer
- [Burnley and Trowbridge](#) - Mill Farm Man's Frock Coat Pattern MF-19, Clocked silk stockings, bone button molds
- [Wm. Booth, Draper](#) - linen threads, bone button molds, shoe and knee buckles, JP Ryan Waistcoat Pattern
- [Scarlet Scarab](#) - Stock buckle
- Ebay Store [With a Cherry on Top Please](#) - 4 oz. white linen fabric
- Ebay seller [davidcharles1946](#) - Vintage eyeglass
- Ebay seller [Westie-ladi](#) - Snuff box
- Etsy seller Alison at [Disly Vintage](#) - Vintage bobbin lace for shirt
- Ruby Lane seller Vatcharee at [AWESHOPP](#) - Georgian/Victorian paste shoe buckles
- Ruby Lane seller Deb at [Vintage Jewels / Antique Haven](#) - Ivory and silver aide memoire
- Ebay seller [theantiqueshoppe](#) - retracting pen / pencil
- [Em's Heart Antiques](#) - vintage linen and bobbin lace handkerchief
- [Dharma Trading Company](#) - silk ribbons and dyes
- [Jo-Ann Fabrics and Crafts](#) - embroidery floss and wool tapestry thread
- [Britex Fabrics](#) - silk thread, duchess satin fabric
- [Robert Land Footwear Ltd.](#) - beautiful period shoes
- [JP Ryan](#) - Waistcoat Pattern
- Kannik's Korner – books
- Smoke and Fire Company – Eagle's View Broadfall Drop Front Breeches Pattern

Appendix A. Background Historical Summary

During the 18th century men's standard garments were what we would call a three piece suit, consisting of a coat, a waistcoat and tight breeches that end at the knee. The coat and waistcoat varied considerably in appearance over the course of time, but breeches remained almost exactly the same. The suit of clothes which inspired this set of garments is a pale turquoise, corded silk suit with ribbon embroidery, c1780 in the collection of Kensington Palace. It was intended for wear at court functions.

In the 18th century, men wore elaborately embroidered coats with matching waistcoats and breeches to court. This particular suit is unusual, but not unique, in that the decoration is largely ribbon embroidery, rather than the more usually seen silk floss. The assignment of c1780 by the curators of the collection is based on the cut of the coat and waistcoat. Pastel colors and glittering gem stones were considered both manly and appropriate for dressy occasions during this time.

The originally widely skirted coats and lengthy vests found at the beginning of the 18th century became shorter, more fitted, lighter and more elegant in appearance by the 1780's. The coat skirt is significantly narrower. The coat itself can no longer button all the way down. This is a sterling example of a common fashion phenomenon - something that began as functional and becomes non-functional, but still very fashionable. Most of the many buttons and buttonholes on coats at this point are mere decoration. Some buttons do not even have corresponding button holes.

Many other aspects of the gentleman's wardrobe, similar to the breeches, remained very static during this time, but for the purposes of this documentation, I will discuss all the garments in order from the skin outward.

Undergarments and Stock

The basic man's undergarment of the 18th century is a knee length shirt. Depending on the "quality" of the gentleman in question, there may be anything from no collar, to full wrist and collar ruffles on the shirt. Ruffles may be detachable for laundering. The shirt is mainly constructed of various sized square and rectangular pieces of fabric with gussets for ease and flexibility.

The most common fabric for shirts is linen and the fineness of the weave declares the status of the wearer. The gentleman who chooses to wear only a shirt will tuck it between his legs and put on a pair of breeches over it. A man may also choose to wear drawers under his breeches – cut and shaped like the breeches, but made of linen and tying at the knee. The extent to which under drawers were worn is not well documented.

With his breeches and shirt on, the gentleman fastens a neck-cloth such as a cravat or stock around the neck. During this time the stock is usually pleated to tabs that buckle or tie at the back of the neck. Stocks can be found in several different styles. When the gentleman wears a stock, his ruffles are attached to his shirtfront.

Suit

A gentleman wearing only shirt and breeches is undressed by 18th century standards. He is considered to be in his 'small clothes' – his underwear. If he wants to remove his tight, movement-restricting coat anywhere he might be seen, including in his own house, he will replace it with some other garment such as a banyan, just as he will place a soft cap on his bald head when he is not wearing his wig.

Breeches in this era are drop fronted. The front flap of the breeches can be undone without unbuttoning the waistband. In addition to being buttoned at both the waistband and flap, they are also buttoned or buckled at the knee.

Over his shirt and breeches he wears a waistcoat and then a frock coat. The frock coat is cut in such a way as to pull the shoulders back and give an upright posture. The buttons on the coat are largely decorative. It is not intended to protect against the cold. There are additional garments for that purpose. Men's embroidered suits were the 18th century equivalent of white tie and tails today.

Shoes & Stockings

Gentleman's stockings are rolled up the leg as far as they will go and secured with a garter around the knee. Ideally the stockings extend to mid-thigh and the breeches prevent the top part of the stockings from rolling down. Stockings of this era may have woven or embroidered "clocks". These decorative patterns may be in the same or contrasting colors to the stocking.

Men's shoes were made in a variety of styles and qualities. Fashionable low-heeled shoes or pumps were of softer leather. Black was by far the most usual color, and only occasionally were other colors seen. While buckles were the primary mode of fastening, ties were also worn for utilitarian purposes. The fashion in court wear demanded highly decorative shoe buckles with jewels or paste stones. Plain silver or pewter buckles were not worn at court.

Wig and Makeup

Wig wearing was hygienic in nature. It was not common to wash hair very frequently so wearing a wig solved the lice problem, by allowing the head to be shaved. Although serving a purpose, wigs were nonetheless mainly fashion statements and a measure of wealth and status. Wigs could be colored: violet, blue, pink or yellow are known. Wig powder was made of finely ground starch and/or calcium scented with orange flower, lavender or orris root. Made of human, horse, goat, or yak hair, the choice of material and styles changed constantly with fashion, cost and personal preference.

Heavy makeup was worn by both sexes, and the look was not designed to reflect the natural world. Ceruse (white lead) or other white compounds were used as a base, and cheek and lip reddeners were applied over the top of it. Men, women, and even children wore makeup to some extent in order to achieve the fashionable white face with flaming red round cheeks and lips. Eyebrows were also accentuated.

Accessories

Aide Memoire – This small booklet of ivory leaves carried by the fashionable gentleman allowed him to take notes on the go with a traveling pencil. He could transcribe the notes to paper at a later time, wash the pencil off the ivory and be ready to take more notes the next day. These writing tablets were carried by both sexes and remained popular into the 19th century.

Handkerchief - At some point during the 18th century, the square shape was defined as the standard for handkerchiefs, which were kept in a pocket or stashed up a sleeve. People used pocket handkerchiefs of white, colored, or checked linen or cotton to wipe their faces and noses. In an era when laundry was done by hand and textiles had to be ironed without the benefit of electricity, snowy white hankies were signs of gentility and status. Expensive lace edges demonstrated the wealth of the user.

Hat – The custom of wearing wigs dictated that hats would normally be carried beneath the arm. In the 18th century this fashion led to many sorts of folded or cocked hats. The hat with three sides cocked (tricorn) dominated fashion. It was seen with many variations of adornment and proportion. Beaver felt was the preferred material, but wool and other materials were also used for hats.

Quizzing Glass - Popular with both men and women from the eighteenth century onwards, quizzing glass lenses could be round, oval or oblong with plain or decorative handles. The extreme popularity of quizzing glasses waned after 1850 but opticians continued to supply them even until the 20th century.

Snuff Box - By the 18th century, snuff had become the tobacco product of choice. The taking of snuff distinguished the elite members of society from the commons, which generally smoked tobacco. The manufacture of snuff accessories was a lucrative business. In Europe, snuff boxes ranged from those made in very basic materials, such as horn, to highly ornate designs featuring precious materials. Since prolonged exposure to air causes snuff to dry out and lose its quality, pocket snuff boxes were designed as airtight containers with strong hinges, generally holding only a day's worth of snuff.

Walking stick – These were popular accessories, even for men who did not need assistance in walking. Elaborate gold, silver, or gilt heads were held in the hand where they were readily visible for display. These sticks tended to be taller and more slender than current versions.

Appendix B. Cosmetic Recipes

Ivory Hair Powder

Corn starch (3.25 oz)
Orris root powder (0.5 oz)
Calcium powder (0.5 oz)

Grind all to fine powder and mix together. The starch is itself white and the Calcium is also very white, but the Orris root is more of golden beige. However, sifted together, the white powder stays white, albeit a cream or ivory rather than stark white. It would be easy to add more white pigment to make it whiter. Orris root naturally has a faint scent of violets. If the scent is not as strong as you would like, or if you prefer another scent, you can add a few drops of Devon Violet or another floral. The Orris root will help “fix” the scent into your powder.

Red Salve for cheeks and lips

Pulverized Myrrh (2 grams)
Honey (7.5 ml)
Bees wax (4 grams)
Olive oil (11 ml)
Iron oxide and/or carmine (2 grams or more) for color

Mix together the Myrrh and olive oil over low heat until the myrrh dissolves. Add the honey and beeswax and continue to heat and stir until beginning to thicken. Remove from heat and stir in coloring. Add three drops of essential oil to scent the salve, if desired. Iron oxide alone will make an orange brown color, adding carmine makes a redder color.

Appendix C. About the Ribbon Embroidery

Ribbon embroidery stitches are worked in much the same way as the more common floss embroidery. The main difference is the need to use short lengths of ribbon and a sufficiently large needle. Both are required due to the wear on the silk ribbons. They cannot take as much tension as floss threads and are also subject to damage and weakening simply by being drawn through the fabric to make the designs. Ribbon embroidery can also be done by couching the ribbons with matching or contrasting threads. The stitches used in this work were lazy daisy, straight stitch, and loop flower stitch. The white lattice ribbons were couching in place with embroidery floss.