



A Colonial Gentlemen's Clothing: A Glossary of Terms

Banyan

A gentleman's banyan was a loose, informal robe to be worn instead of a coat. Influenced by Oriental fashion, these popular robes were also called Indian gowns, nightgowns, or wrappers. Cut either in a loose T-shape or as a long simplified coat, they were acceptable wear for home or informal business. Made most often of patterned materials, these useful garments could vary from light and cool to quilted and warm. (See also NegligeŽ Cap)

Breeches

From the late 16th century until the early 19th century, most men wore breeches as their lower body garment. Through the centuries breeches were seen in many forms and lengths. In the early 18th century breeches were barely seen beneath long waistcoats and coats. By the mid-18th century they were more noticeable beneath shorter waistcoats and open coats, and so the cut of breeches became tighter and revealed the shape of the leg. Worn by all levels of society, breeches were made in a great variety of silks, cottons, linens, wools, knits, and leathers. (See also Trousers)

Coat

A coat was the uppermost layer of the 18th century man's suit, worn over waistcoat and breeches. Both the cut and the title of the fashionable coat saw several evolutions through the course of the century. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries a coat was a relatively straight loose garment, with the slight fullness in the knee-length skirts falling into folds over the backside of the hips. In the 1720s and 1730s the skirts of the fashionable coat grew in volume and were set into regular pleats. In the 1730s an alternative to the weighty full skirted coat was developed. This new fashioned coat, with narrow skirts set in pleats and other defining features, including a collar, was termed a Frock. Through the middle decades of the century both the coat and the frock were worn, coats being for fashionable full dress, frocks for fashionable undress. By the 1770s the distinctions in purpose and terminology were becoming blurred. None but the most conservative older man would be seen in a full-skirted coat. The frock had entered into fashionable full dress, and was by many simply referred to as a coat. In the closing decade of the 18th century and into the next, the frock dominated fashionable dress and language. (See also Suit)

Cloak

The cloak has been the most enduring of outer garments throughout the history of fashion. In the 18th century a man's cloak was made with a collar at the neck, a cape over the shoulders, and hung to the knee or below. The most usual form was circular. Cloaks were made of dense well-fulled wools, often dyed scarlet. Other choices in fabric included worsteds, camlets, and occasionally plaids. Cloaks were also known a "roquelaires" or "rockets." It was in the 18th century that a rival to the dominance of the cloak appeared in the form of the great coat. (See also Great Coat)

Cravat

The 18th-century man almost always wore some sort of neck cloth, whether fashionably dressed or at labor. The cravat was one of many forms of neckwear. It was a narrow length of white linen that could be adorned on its ends with lace,



fringe, or knots. It was worn wrapped about the throat and loosely tied in front. The cravat was first seen in fashionable dress in the mid-17th century. It was derived from the "crabate" worn by Croatian soldiers serving with the French Army (ca. 1645-1650). By the mid 18th century it was worn in informal attire. (See also Neck Handkerchief and Stock)

Great Coat

Many men of the 18th century chose great coats as their protective outer garment in foul weather. Most often made of heavy fulled woolens, it served well to keep one warm and dry. Some men are known to have had accompanying waistcoats and leggings made in the same heavy wools. The great coat generally had a collar, a cape over the shoulders, deep cuffs, and was worn to knee length or longer. Occasionally, great coats were made in alternative fabrics of lighter weights, particularly oiled silk and linen. (See also Cloak)

Hat

Towards the end of the 17th century the vast wigs then worn by some men made it impractical for them to wear the fashionable broad-brimmed hat unless necessary. Custom dictated, however, that hats should then be carried beneath the arm. Rapidly, the hat began to be folded to make it easier to carry. In the 18th century this habit and changing fashions led to many sorts of folded or cocked hats - cocked on one, two, or three sides. It was the hat with three sides cocked that dominated fashion and was seen in innumerable variations of adornment and proportion. While beaver felt was the preferred material others, including wool and camel's down, were available.

Hunting Shirt

During the second half of the 18th century a garment referred to as "a hunting shirt" began to appear in North America. The earliest and simplest form seems akin to the coarse shirts that European wagoners and farmers wore as a protective coverall. In the years prior to the American Revolution this garment came to have a distinct American character. Several of the Independent Companies wore hunting shirts emblazoned on the breast with the motto, Liberty or Death, and several of the early colonial armies chose hunting shirts as their new uniforms. It is, however, with the frontier that this garment is most associated. Unfortunately, few examples of 18th or early 19th century hunting shirts survive and the contemporary written descriptions do not complete the picture. Reconstructions of this garment are largely conjectural.

Leggings or Spatterdashes

Since a man's breeches of the 18th century came to just beneath the knee, a covering for the lower leg was useful for warmth and protection. Leggings fully covered the lower leg from a few inches above the knee extending to cover the top of the foot. Spatterdashes covered the leg from the mid-shin to the top of the foot. Made of stout woolen or linen cloth or of leather, leggings and spatterdashes were worn by the sporting gentleman, laboring man, and the military.

Monmoth or MonmouthCap

In the 17th and 18th centuries small knitted woolen caps worn by the laboring sort, sailors, and slaves were often referred to as "Monmouth Caps." The name is derived from one of England's great port cities and its particular associations with seafaring. Knitting of caps and stockings was a common pastime for sailors, they sold their wares in the dock streets for additional income.



Neck Handkerchief

The most informal sort of neckwear generally worn by sporting gentlemen, working tradesmen, and laboring slaves. It

commonly was a square folded and tied around the neck. They were usually made of linen, cotton, or silk, and could be in white, plain colors, woven checks and stripes, or printed patterns. (See also Cravat and Stock)

Negligé Cap

The negligé cap was a small informal cap often, though not always, worn to accompany a banyan. For some men it served to cover a shaved head when the wig was removed, others wore them over their own hair. Made in a variety of materials, these caps were often embroidered. It could be constructed in different ways, the most usual of which was to be cut in wedge-shaped quarters with a turned-up band. (See also Banyan)

Shirt

The shirt was worn as a man's undergarment, covering the body from neck to knee. Most were made of white linen which could be very fine or very coarse. A gentleman's best shirt may have ruffles (ruffs) at the wrist and/or breast. A laborer's shirt was sometimes made of unbleached linen or small patterned checks and stripes. A plain shirt might serve as a nightshirt.

Shoes

Men's shoes were made in a great variety of styles and qualities. Fashionable low-heeled shoes or pumps were of softer leather, coarse common shoes of sturdier leathers. 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 worn for utilitarian purposes. Boots of many sorts were worn for sporting, riding and working.

Stockings or Hose

Stockings of the 18th century were worn by men and women, and were most often knit. The knitting frame (machine) was developed in the late 16th century and many improvements during the 18th century increasingly forced hand knitters from their business. Fashionable stockings of silk or cotton were generally white, and at times were decorated with knit or embroidered patterns at the ankle, referred to as "clocks" or "clocking." More utilitarian stockings of linen, and particularly worsted wool, were seen in colors, with blue and gray predominating. Occasionally, coarse stockings for the low laboring sort and slaves were cut of woolen or linen cloth and sewn to fit the shape of the leg.

Stocks

A stock was a gentlemen's most formal neckwear. In fashionable dress it was universally of fine white linen pleated to fit beneath the chin. For martial purposes it was often constructed of black leather or woven horsehair. For the clergy the white linen stock had falling bands added. All of these forms were buckled behind the wearer's neck. (See also Cravat and Neck Handkerchief)

Suit

What is today recognized as a man's three-piece suit began to develop in the late 17th century and was well established by the 18th century. In the early 17th century most men wore as the outer layer of garments a tailored doublet and full breeches.



In the middle of that century the vest was introduced to European fashion from Asia Minor. Looser forms of doublets left unbuttoned allowed the long vest to be seen beneath. As the 18th century began, the doublet gave way to the new coat and the vest began to evolve into the shorter waistcoat. Breeches, formerly covered by long vests, were then visible and were increasingly cut closer and tighter. Within the first decades of the 18th century a man's suit was recognized as coat, waistcoat, and breeches. At times it was thought fashionable, especially for formal dress, to wear all matching pieces referred to as a "suit in ditto." But often a man would choose a different waistcoat, or waistcoats, to accompany matching coat and breeches. It was most sporting to have none of the three garments alike, but well chosen. (See also Coat, Waistcoat, Breeches)

Trousers

During the 18th century breeches were worn by all levels of society; however, trousers were also worn by middling tradesmen, laborers, sailors, and slaves. Trousers were generally cut with a straight leg and were worn to the ankle or slightly shorter. As trousers were utilitarian garments, they were made mostly of durable linens. (See also Breeches)

Underdrawers

The primary male undergarment of the 18th century was a knee-length shirt, yet some men also chose to wear underdrawers. Made of linen or of woolen flannel, and always white, knee-length underdrawers served as separate linings to breeches. They aided in preserving the breeches and added an additional layer of warmth. The extent to which underdrawers were worn is not well documented. (See also Shirt)

Waistcoat

The 18th century man was almost never seen without his waistcoat. Not to have it on was considered "undressed." The waistcoat, or vest, of the 1770s was fashionably worn to the upper part of the thigh, opening in a "V" beneath the stomach. Waistcoats were made in all qualities of silk, cotton, wool, and linens. If adorned, it could be embroidered, printed, brocaded, quilted, tasselled, silver or gold laced, and was generally the most elaborate article of men's dress. When worn for utilitarian purposes it could have sleeves, be called a jacket, and worn outermost instead of a longer skirted fashionable coat.

Wigs

Throughout western history wigs have come and gone from fashion, but it is undeniably the 18th century that was the golden age of male wig wearing. In the second half of the prior century wigs had entered into court fashion in both England and France. In the early years of the 18th century the Full Bottomed Periwig reigned with its cascade of curls. As the century progressed, the proportion of the wig generally decreased and the variety of fashionable forms expanded greatly. By mid century wig wearing was available to most levels of society for the individuals who chose to do so. While certain styles of wigs became associated with particular professionals; the vast majority of wigs had no particular connotations. Made of human, horse, goat, or yak hair, the choice of material and styles changed constantly with fashion and personal preferences. In the closing decade of the century the wearing of wigs was less common amongst the young and fashionable sort, although some conservatives continued to wear wigs into the 19th century.



A Colonial Lady's Clothing: A Glossary of Terms

Brunswick

A three-quarter length jacket worn with a petticoat, the Brunswick was an informal gown or a traveling gown. It had a high neck, unstiffened bodice that buttoned, long sleeves, and frequently had a sack back (loose pleats) and a hood. (See also Jesuit)

Cap

The cap was worn by women and girls to dress their heads. It was a practical piece that allowed the head to be dressed without styling the hair. At the same time it protected the hair from everyday dust and dirt so that the hair need not be washed as frequently. A hat was tied on top of the cap when going out. The cap could be made of linen, cotton, or even all lace. Lace and ruffles could be added to the cap. The style of fashionable cap changed frequently.

Cape

A protective outer garment that was shaped to the neck, covered the shoulders, fastened at the center front and was usually shorter than a cloak. Made of either heavy or light fabrics of wool, cotton, or silk.

Caraco

A jacket of many different styles worn in the second half of the 18th century. It was worn with a petticoat and was considered day wear at home or for informal activities. It was always considered "undress."

Cloak

A long, loose, unfitted, protective outer garment that fell from the neck and the shoulders and was usually secured at the center front neck. Sometimes hooded, and usually made of a heavy woolen fabric.

Dress

Dress in the 18th century referred to the overall fashion for everyone and not a single garment. It was the total look from head to toe. Full dress would refer to the most formal, fashionable look. Today the military's most formal uniform is referred to as the full-dress uniform. (See also Fashionable Undress and Undress)

Fashionable Undress

In the 18th century this referred to the less formal clothing for everyone, but still in the best of fashion. Usually worn during the day. (See also Dress and Undress)

Gown

Throughout the 18th century a woman's dress usually consisted of a gown and petticoat. The gown consisted of the bodice and skirt joined together, with the skirt open in the front to reveal the separate petticoat, which was an essential part of the dress and not an undergarment. (See also Petticoat and Stomacher)



Hat

Worn for fashion and for protection against the sun, a lady out of doors almost always wore a hat. A fashionable hat usually had a very shallow, flat crown and a wide brim. Hats of chips or straw were the most popular from the 1730s to the 1770s. There were many ways for them to be trimmed and trims would change with the fashions. A straw hat might even be entirely covered with fabric. Ladies' riding hats were often of felt and might be cocked like a gentleman's.

Jesuit

Similar to the Brunswick, but the skirt of the gown was full length. (See also Brunswick)

Mitts or Mittens

In the 18th century mitts were elbow-length, fingerless gloves. Although there was a thumb, it was open and the fingers were left free. They were usually cut with peaked flaps over the knuckles. Embroidered floral motifs and fancy arm openings were popular adornments. Heavy mitts gave warmth in winter and light weight ones protected the arms from the sun in summer. In the winter the hands could be kept warm with a muff.

Mob Cap

A mob was undress headwear; becoming popular in the 1730s and worn in some form into the next century. It had a puffed crown placed high on the back of the head, a deep flat border surrounding the face, and side pieces carried down like short lappets, which could be left loose, pinned, or tied under the chin. The flat border usually was frilled or had lace.

Muffs

Tube-like accessories used for keeping the hands warm, muffs were of various sizes as dictated by fashion. They could be covered with fur, cloth, or feathers, and were usually padded.

Pattens

Pattens were overshoes consisting of a raised sole standing on an iron ring, with an adjustable strap used to secure them. Designed to lift the wearer's shoes off the ground so as to protect them from soiling or damage when there was wetness, mud, or muck. Pattens were worn by both men and women into the early 20th century.

Petticoat

A woman's skirt-like garment worn with a gown or jacket. Most gowns were open-fronted robes needing the addition of the petticoat to fill the gap. Quilted ones could be worn for both warmth and fashion. Underpetticoats of linen, wool, or cotton were added for warmth.

Riding Habit

A riding habit consisted of a petticoat, jacket, and waistcoat, or waistcoat fronts attached to the jacket. The jacket followed the lines of men's coats until the 1780s, except that it had a waist seam and bust darts. Habits were suitable for traveling and fashionable undress.



Shift

The shift was the undermost garment worn by children and women. It served the same purpose as the man's shirt. Made from various qualities of white linen, it had either a drawstring or plain neck, as well as drawstrings or cuffs at the elbows. It could be plain or lace trimmed.



Shoes

Shoes were made of silk fabrics, worsteds, or leathers. Depending on current fashions, they may or may not have had elevated heels. They would fasten by buckles, clasps or, if very utilitarian they might have ties.

Short Gown

Loose T-shaped garments cut to the length of the hip or thigh. Made to wrap or Bed Gown over in front and held together by pinning or held closed with the apron. Made of utilitarian fabrics to be worn by the laboring sort and made of better fabric for the middling sort and worn as undress.

Sleeve Ruffles

Ruffles were attached to the edge of the gown sleeves to cover the elbows. Either plain or lace trimmed ruffles, the degree of decoration and the number of ruffles varied with fashion.

Stays

Stays were the essential foundation garment of the 18th century. They developed from the "boned bodies" of the 17th century, and in the 19th century were to become corsets. But just as the names of these garments changed, so did the shape and effect upon the body. The fashionable 17th century torso was an elongated tubular trunk, with little taper and encased the bosom.