

III.

CLOTHING FOUND ON A SKELETON DISCOVERED AT QUINTFALL HILL, BARROCK ESTATE, NEAR WICK. BY STEWART ORR, F.S.A. Scot.

In June last (1920) the skeleton of a man, dressed in a complete suit of clothing, was found in a peat moss at Barrock, near Wick, lying with the arms straight along the sides, on its face, at a depth of three feet from the surface. The body was wrapped in a plaid or blanket, and as this was unfolded the cap and shoes were found above the knees. The hair was long and of reddish colour. Evidently the man had met with a violent death, as the skull showed the mark of a heavy blow.

The clothing, in a wonderful state of preservation, consisted of:—A round, flat bonnet or cap; an outer jacket or coat (fig. 1, No. 1), tight fitting to the waist and very full-skirted; an inner coat (fig. 1, No. 2) of similar shape and material; an outer pair of breeches (fig. 1, No. 3) cut very wide; an inner pair of breeches (fig. 1, No. 4), of similar cut and material; a pair of hose or stockings made of the same cloth as the clothes; a pair of light, low-heeled leather shoes, in fragments; a plaid or blanket; and a detached shaped piece of cloth.

There was no shirt or underclothing as the term is commonly understood. The garments are made throughout of a strong, brownish cloth, homespun, and obviously all had originally been outer garments.

In the only pocket of the whole suit was found a leather purse containing nineteen bawbees or sixpenny pieces Scots. Although several of the coins were indecipherable, they were evidently all of the reign of Charles II., except one of William and Mary, the date of which had been obliterated. This last coin gives a clue to the date of the man's death, as the last William and Mary bawbee was struck in 1694. The purse crumbled to pieces after being exposed to the air.

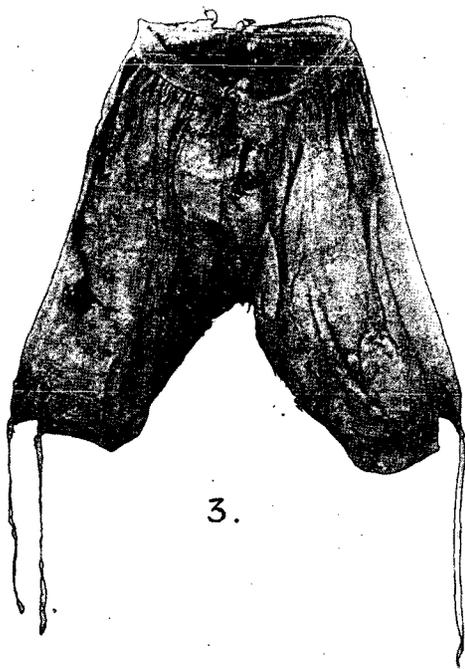
But for the coins, which date the garments as late as the reign of William and Mary, they might have been assigned from their fashion to some years earlier. It must not be forgotten, of course, that the wearer seems to have died a violent death, and had not an ordinary burial. Even in the seventeenth century, this, though more frequent than now, was not normal; consequently it is possible that he may not have been quite a typical man of the place and period. We are scarcely, for instance, justified in concluding from this clothing that shirts were not commonly worn at the time of this man's death.



1.



2.



3.



4.

Fig. 1. Clothing found on Skeleton at Barrock.

The times were disturbed in the early part of William and Mary's reign, and many people had been moving about under arms and as fugitives, and a good many seem to have lost their lives in the open.

Whether or not the costume is typical of Caithness about 1690, it is certainly not at variance with what little we know of the dress of that time further south.

It has been suggested that the dress is a uniform, and a very plausible argument for this is the skilful and practised manner in which the clothes, though of very plain material, are cut and put together, and the evident importance attached to the minor detail of the little triangular gussets in the coat skirts. Still, though this shows a definite purpose to produce a garment conforming to a pronounced fashion, it is not quite conclusive evidence that the dress is a uniform. Apart from weapons and equipment, military and civilian dress did not differ so greatly in these times. The stand-up collar, for instance, was a characteristic part of some of the civilian doublets earlier in the century.

In any case, this discovery is of unique interest in Scotland, for, while a certain number of garments of bygone times have been preserved, they are almost invariably those of persons of importance, and often intended to be worn on formal occasions. Frequently they are isolated garments and not complete costumes. Portraits, too, and pictorial records deal largely with eminent people, often dressed in what is not their everyday wear.

Here we have the clothing, from head to foot, of somebody who was certainly not sumptuously arrayed. His garments are of plain material, well worn and patched. Presumably he was a man of the peasant class.

The drawing (fig. 2, No. 1) shows how the clothes would appear in use. The costume is fairly typical of the last quarter of the seventeenth century, before the tight-fitting breeches and long-skirted,

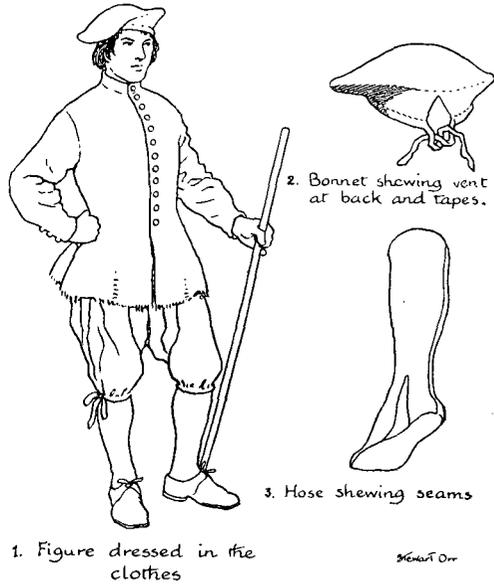


Fig. 2. Sketch showing Clothes in use, Bonnet, and Hose.

deep-pocketed, open coats of the eighteenth century came into general wear.

The garments are now all of a brown hue, but the bonnet and the outer and heavier breeches are of a distinctly darker shade, as is also the strip at each edge of the plaid and at one end of the shaped piece of cloth. Might these darker shades have originally been black, grey, or blue? While we know that brown from crotal was and still is a favourite and easily dyed colour, it might be of interest to inquire to what extent such a prolonged contact with peat might have affected the original colour of the cloth. On the tape at the knee of the breeches a red-and-green pattern is still quite clear.

The clothing seems to be that of a well-proportioned man of about 5 feet 5 inches to 5 feet 6 inches in height.

The bonnet is made of cloth (not knitted), and is of similar shape and construction to those lately worn on service by the Scottish regiments. The top is of one round piece of cloth; the lower annular part to which it is sewn round the edge is in three pieces, skilfully put together so as to save material. Round the opening for the head a half-folded hem is stitched on and turned back outside. At the back there is a vent, the two sides of which are considerably overlapped and stitched roughly in that position. So overlapped the cap could only have fitted a child, and could by no means have been worn by a normal person of the stature of the wearer of the rest of the clothing. In this stitched position the girth of head which the cap would fit is only 21 inches.

The ordinary function of the vent in the bonnet is to permit of adjustment to the exact size of the wearer's head. This was done by means of a tape attached to each corner. These tapes were drawn to the requisite tightness and tied, as shown in the drawing (fig. 2, No. 2). No vestige of tape remains on the bonnet. The ribbons hanging from the back of Glengarry and Balmoral bonnets of to-day are the decorative survival of this adjusting tie. For the most part they are sewn together at the vent and hang down without any pretence of a knot, their significance quite lost. During the war there was a revival of the knotted ribbon or tape, though it was sometimes stitched in position. The same idea may be seen (in an atrophied form) in the leather band inside a modern hat. The little cord running round the band and tied at the back was originally intended to adjust the fit of the hat to the head.

The outer coat has a close-fitting body tight to the waist, and a stand-up collar about 2 inches high. The skirt is very wide—so wide that the width of skirt in the back piece is more than the width of the cloth. To

get this width a piece has been inserted from below the waist downwards cut lengthways of the cloth at right angles to the piece above. In addition there are little triangular gussets let in at the foot of the side seams. The circumference round the skirt approaches 2 yards, while the waist measures about 32 inches. In both coats the edge of the skirt is very much frayed and tattered, no trace of any hem or finish remaining. The side seams in both coats finish under the centre of the armpit as in a modern waistcoat. The sleeves in the outer coat are fairly wide, tapering in tight to the wrist, where there is a $5\frac{1}{2}$ -inch vent with three buttons and buttonholes.

The inner coat is not in such good condition as the other, but is similar in cut and material. Saving that in this coat the back and skirt are cut in one piece and the skirt though longer is perhaps not quite so full, they are of identical shape. In the first coat there are twelve buttons in a space of 16 inches, the top buttonhole being in the middle of the collar. In the second or inner coat all the buttons are wanting but twelve buttonholes remain, three or four at the top being torn away. The space which had been occupied by these fifteen or sixteen buttons is 20 inches. The sleeves in the second coat have 6-inch vents at the wrists and four buttons and buttonholes each.

The buttons are spherical in shape, being formed of a few rags or clippings tied up like a dumpling in a small piece of the cloth. This was a very simple and usual way of making buttons before the days of their wholesale manufacture. The web of cloth yielded the whole material. Indeed, these garments are "all wool" in a sense rarely realised to-day with sewn clothing, for they are stitched throughout with woollen thread similar to the yarn of which the cloth is woven. A small clue of this yarn is in the pocket of the breeches.

The two pairs of breeches are also similar. The outer pair and the bonnet seem to be of a slightly different material from the cloth of which the other clothes are made. It is of a darker hue, and appears to be more loosely woven of a heavier yarn. This may account in some measure for the extreme shrinking of the bonnet. The breeches do not appear to have shrunk to anything like the same extent.

Like the coats, the breeches show a very great contrast in girths at the waist and round the seat. As will be seen from the pattern, they are of striking size in the seat and of very moderate waist measurement. In the outer pair the back parts are cut the full width of the cloth, and come round to the centre of the front of the leg, so that there is no side seam at all. Consequently the front pieces of the breeches only extend in width from the middle of the thigh in front to the inside leg seam. This is an economical use of cloth; and as the garments

are loose and very much folded and pleated, the seam would not show as in tightly fitting breeches. The material is gathered into a waistband 32 inches in girth, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep, with a vent at front and back, the front vent being 8 inches deep and the back 9 inches. The waistband fastens at each vent with a large cloth button and a buttonhole. At the knee there is a vent and a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch hem similar to that surrounding the bonnet. To each corner of the vent a tape is attached to fasten the breeches at the knee. This tape, now brownish in colour, still has traces of a red-and-green pattern in its weaving.

Immediately to the right of the front vent, opening inside below the waistband, is the only remaining pocket of the garments. It is $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, and contained a clue of woollen yarn and the wearer's money. This pocket has the appearance of having been added by a less skilled hand than the maker of the clothes. There is some trace of there having been a similar pocket in the same place in the other (inner) breeches, but only its outline in stitches remains.

The outer pair of breeches is extensively patched internally, and in some parts almost lined with the same cloth. So much so, that it was at first thought to be an elaborate system of pockets.

The inner pair of breeches differs but slightly from the outer pair. The breeches differ in having but one vent in the waistband, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep, which is placed in front and fastened with one button; and there are no vents at the knees, round which the breeches would fit fairly closely. They also measure rather less round the seat, and are cut (unlike the first or outer pair), as shown in the pattern (fig. 3), with a side seam like those of to-day. Except that they have no fastening, they would lie at the knee very much as riding breeches do. This pair of breeches seems to be made of the same cloth as the two coats and the hose.

The hose would probably be pulled over the knee outside the breeches, as was a frequent fashion.

There is no underclothing as we understand the term. The man was wearing two suits of ordinary outer clothing, one over the other. The inner suit is somewhat more worn and tattered than the outer; otherwise, save for the position in which they were found, and the absence of buttons from the inner coat, there is no indication which is which. The wearer must have been warmly dressed. In the absence of further information, it seems probable that the man was so clad owing to special circumstances. Either it was winter, and he was much exposed to cold, or he may have been a fugitive and sleeping out at night.

The clothes are well tailored and sewn, and skilfully put together.

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They are entirely unlined—bonnet, coats, and breeches—and the inside seams are carefully stitched down.

The stockings or hose (fig. 2, No. 3) are of special interest. They

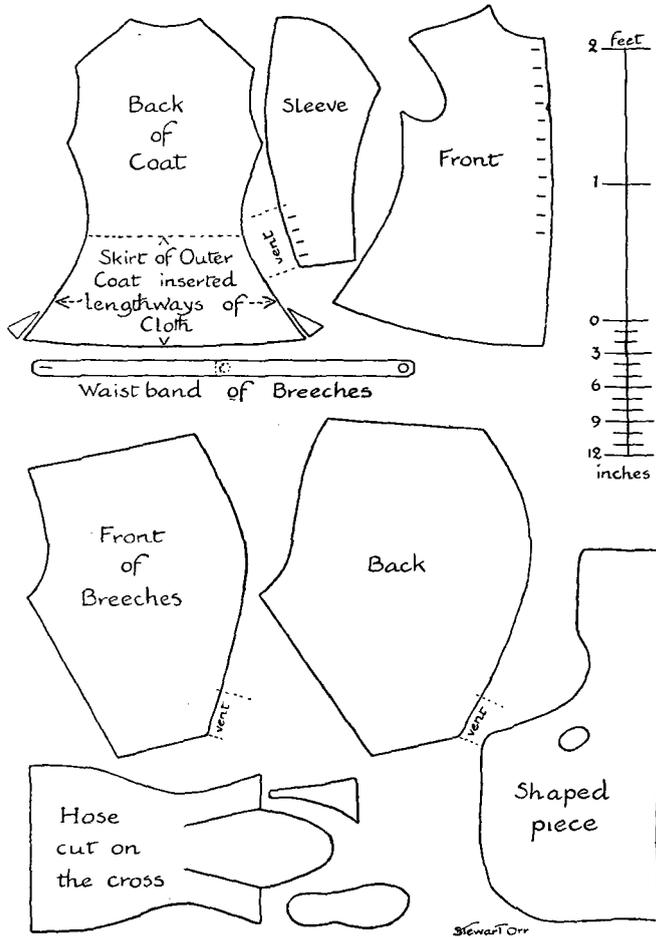


Fig. 3. Patterns of Clothing found with Skeleton.

are not knitted, but are cut out of cloth (fig. 3) and sewn together. They are in good preservation except for the soles, which are gone, though parts of the hem at the foot where they were sewn on remain. Before the invention of knitting, and long afterwards, all hose were so made. In order that the stocking may lie neatly and with elasticity over the calf and at the ankle, the cloth is cut on the cross with the

warp and weft lying diagonally. This is why the checks of tartan hose are diagonal. They were formerly cut out of a web of cloth, and to serve their purpose at all they had to be cut on the cross, though this used up more cloth. The hose of Highland regiments continued to be so cut from cloth well into the nineteenth century. Though tartan hose are now knitted, the checks continue to be diagonal because of the original necessity.

The blanket or plaid calls for no special notice. It is about 8 feet 6 inches by 5 feet and is formed of two narrow widths sewn together. Each width has a darker-hued border about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch from its outer edge, very similar to the dark stripe near the edge of a modern blanket. The plaid is excessively tattered at one end, and a considerable piece of its surface at that part is missing.

Of the same cloth as the plaid, and showing at its narrow end a little of the darker border just mentioned, is a piece of shaped cloth (fig. 3) the position on the wearer and the function of which we have not been able to determine. From its shape it seems possible that the narrow end lay over the shoulder from behind, the broad lower part lying under the arm close to the side, with the round hole slightly in front of the armpit. This piece of cloth has a peculiar dark, greasy-looking mark like an old blood-stain, which is repeated on the left or buttonhole side of the inner coat. When the piece is placed on the coat in the position just described, these dark stains coincide. The side upon which it is hemmed and the stain upon the coat give some ground for associating it with the wearer's left side. With the hemmed side inwards the piece would lie on the wearer's right side in a reversed position—that is, with its narrow end lying over the shoulder from the front. On either side it suggests the possibility of a commodious bag or pocket. Here too, however it might be attached, the round hole, which is also hemmed round, would lie very conveniently as a pocket or frog for the reception of a weapon.

The region of the armpit was in Scotland, as elsewhere, a favourite and very handy place in which to carry a knife or pistol ready for immediate use. The terms "oxter knife" and in Gaelic "sgian achlaise" bear testimony to the practice.

It is also possible that this piece of cloth, being cut from the same web, may have been directly associated in some way with the plaid. The vanished piece of the plaid might have shown some evidence of this. I incline to the belief that the round hole was intended for the reception of a knife.

The patterns are to scale, and give the size and measurements of the clothes.

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Neither of the coats nor of the breeches is distinctively different from its fellow, hence the patterns represent both or either of the coats and both or either of the breeches.

My thanks are due to my friend Mr James Gilchrist for his assistance in examining the clothing, and for cutting the patterns of the coat and breeches.