

Accessories for the Regency Gentleman

BY CHRIS BERTANI

The English Regency is a long period of time. Although technically it only covers the years when the future George IV ruled as a proxy for his father (from 1811 to 1820), the Regency period is often considered to encompass the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars as well (roughly 1790 to 1815). This time period covers some very drastic changes in clothing that set the trends for men's suits for the next couple of centuries.

Beyond his clothing, a gentleman would include a number of accessories as part of his daily wardrobe. Some were special items that were only worn or carried on certain occasions; but some items were indispensable and no gentleman would leave the house without them.



Footwear

A gentleman may wear shoes, although as the Regency progressed boots became more and more popular.

Boots generally fell into two categories: riding or hessians. Riding boots, also called top boots, were black with a russet colored cuff turned down at the top. Hessians were cut lower in back, came to a point in the front, and were embellished with a tassel. Shoes would have been buckled, but were cut with a lower vamp than in the mid-18th century. Of course, for dancing, shoes would be worn in place of boots.



Headgear

During the regency era, hats for gentlemen's dress were generally what we would describe today as a top-hat, but the shape of the crown and the brim, as well as the height, varied greatly.

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The hat was originally made of beaver fur. Later silk became more common as the beaver population diminished. The brim was quite curved because hats were still made on a round block. When the resulting hat is shaped to fit an oval head, the ends of the brim curve down and the sides curved up.

Regency Hats

For evening, men could wear a chapeau-bras. This hat resembles the bicorn worn with several kinds of military uniforms, but folded flat to easily carry under the arm: hence the name, translated from the French, into "hat-arm."

In summer, a straw hat could be worn, often made in the same shape as the regular hat.

Buttons and Fasteners

Buttons that closed a gentleman's shirt at the collar were usually Dorset-style thread buttons. These were made of thread wound or knotted around a metal ring. They held up much better in the laundry and were not visible under a neckcloth. However, the cuffs were held closed by cufflinks, which could be as simple as two small metal shank buttons held together by a link, or as ornate as the wearer desired, such as fancy metalwork with inset gems. In both cases, cufflinks were symmetrically detailed on each side, unlike the decorated outer face and plain inner bar of modern cufflinks.

As trousers began to replace breeches in men's fashion, suspenders (or braces as they are still called in Britain) were used (along with straps under the instep) to keep them fashionably taut along the leg. The suspenders were 'Y' shape, with a single strap down the back, and were adjusted by buckles on the straps. The straps might be embroidered, although most of the examples I've seen are later Victorian articles.

Watches, Fobs, Rings, and other accoutrements

Any man of quality would own a watch carried inside a fob pocket, a small welted pocket in the waistband of his breeches or trousers. To easily pull the watch out of this tiny pocket, the watch was attached to a ribbon and fob. The fob, engraved with a monogram or coat of arms, often doubled as a seal form impression into soft wax. The fob was either made entirely of metal (steel, gold, silver, pinchbeck, etc.) or with a carved gemstone as the seal. In some examples, the base swiveled to lie flat against the body when worn.



Trousers with top flap open. (Image at: <http://janeaustensworld.wordpress.com/tag/regency-fashion/>)

Regency Accessories, *continued from page 2*



Watches were usually open-faced as opposed to the flip-open cover of Victorian watches. They were wound with a separate key suspended from the ribbon alongside the fob.

The very fashionable wore two fobs on matching ribbons, one from each fob pocket. Usually the very wealthy and conspicuously wealthy carried more than one watch. The second fob was usually attached to something else. I find that the remote entry widget for my

car works well, and enables me to carry that modern accessory nonobviously.

A gentleman, particularly one with a coat of arms, might wear a signet ring that, like a fob, was meant to leave an impression in sealing wax..

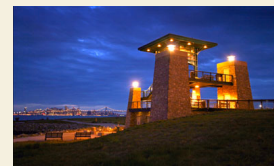
During the Regency period, swords were usually only carried by military men in uniform. Civilians carried a walking stick of cane or bamboo rather than solid wood.

In his pockets a Regency gentleman carried a wallet (for those new small-denomination banknotes), a card case, a small pocket flask, or a snuff box. Snuff boxes in particular could be of a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and materials, from papier-mache to bone to gold. Even at that time they were considered collector's items.

Finally, the quizzing glass, though usually thought of as more of an 18th century accessory, was still in use during the Regency, by Beau Brummell, among others. *F*



Upcoming Events



Starverse Picnic

Sept. 29, 2013

The dramatic view from Oakland's Middle Harbor Shoreline Park provides an inspiring backdrop for Starverse denizens from all walks of life. The massive, otherworldly cranes at the Port of Oakland (which inspired George Lucas' AT-AT walkers in *The Empire Strikes Back*) will set the mood beautifully. Costume: Star Wars, Firefly, Fantasy, SciFi or Steampunk.



Costume Salon: 18th c.

Oct. 6, 2013

Join us for potluck tea snacks, socializing, and sharing

resources. No costume required. Email costumesalons@gbacg.org,



Regency Tall Ships Adventure

Oct. 13, 2013

Two grand tall ships will take us into the San Francisco Bay for an epic,

three-hour battle featuring cannon, close-quarters maneuvers, and a taste of 18th-century maritime life. **Tickets have sold out.**

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The Aunt Inez's Dress Project

An adventure in costume restoration

BY ROSE LITVIN

I don't normally do 1920s. My body (and love of corsetry) lends itself better to Victorian or Edwardian costuming, which happily coincides with my love of corsetry. Recently, however, I received a lavish wedding invitation. I knew that I had to do something fun and different as I read:

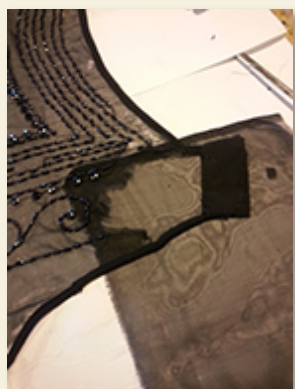
“A theme celebration in honor of the newlyweds inspired by the movie, ‘Midnight in Paris,’ that will take you back to the glorious age of Paris in the 1920’s...Please dress in French-inspired couture from your Golden Era.”

Different, yes. Fun? I daily question that initial perception and possibly, delusion.

First stop: eBay. I searched with visions of something beaded and wearable. Sadly, the sticker shock of online inventory forced me to consider other options. I purchased a beaded 1980s formal thinking I could rework it into my Twenties outfit; but upon its arrival, I decided to scrap that project. Returning to the same seller, I found two not-so-gently-used dresses. I was intrigued, primarily because I wanted to “fix” something myself after reading “Nan Sews the Dress” blog. Without another thought, I clicked “Buy” and snatched them up for bargain prices. Days later upon delivery, the phrase, “You get what you pay for,” crossed my mind. The description for the dresses didn't include, “Held together with black electrical tape.” When I fully unwrapped one of the dresses, a sheer black silk beaded on both sides with a similar pattern, there was a small sticker with flowing writing: “Aunt Inez's dress circa 1925.”



Held together with electrical tape.



Beginning the patching process.

I admit that I'm a hobbyist: I sew costumes, not historically accurate clothing. I find that “costuming” is a more forgiving hobby than faithfully recreating period dress. I also know very little about conserving clothing or restoring vintage or antique clothing. I decided to recreate rather than restore the dress. Thus, the challenge was on and the “Aunt Inez Dress Project” began.

I started by gently laying the dress in a bathtub of cool water with a tiny bit of oxygenated cleaner. I let the dress soak and repeated the process until the water was clear. I picked up any beads that had fallen off and saved them before opening the bath drain. I then carefully lifted the dress and laid it on several towels to absorb the water. To dry it, I set the dress out on the kitchen island and placed a fan (on low speed) nearby. It dried very quickly. Now came the most nerve-wracking process: dismantling the dress. Before I did this, I carefully removed the iron-on tape covering some holes, a gummy tag in the back neckline, and the heinous electrical tape. The sides were French-seamed and sewn with the smallest machine stitching I have ever seen. I tried to pick the seams apart, but quickly realized that it caused new damage to the dress. There was nothing I could do except cut the dress apart. Thank goodness for the roomy fit of Twenties fashion! There was enough leeway to

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reassemble the dress. Another plus in my favor was the bias cut “wings” that drape down from the sides, the hips, and to the hem. I was careful not to cut through or damage these when I took the dress apart. With cautious snips, I separated the dress into two panels.



Correcting beading pattern to reflect mirrored motif.

Patching the silk was another challenge. Foolishly I thought I could somehow adhere bits of silk to fill in the holes in the fabric. Several tests runs of double-sided iron-on tape and various adhesives proved to be futile and frustrating. I went to the GBACG Yahoo Group with my SOS for their collective wisdom. Following several responses I determined that an adhesive that dried with a clear matte finish did not exist. I stopped looking for the next best adhesive and went on to Plan B.

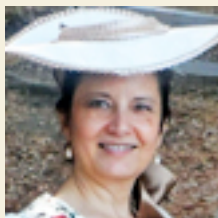
Previously, I purchased several yards of silk chiffon. (Thank you, eBay for cheap yardage!) This would underline and stabilize the dress; however, in the end I switched to a different color because the sheer materials layered together made the dress too dark. I tried stacking many different poly chiffon colors and settled on a sheer, light umber fabric that, when layered, gave the dress a whole new look that I liked very much. This left me oodles of black silk for patching. Now the challenge was making patches with the smallest of overlaps for me to run tiny stitches of silk thread around the perimeter. Using a #20 needle and a new spool of silk thread I began my restoration. Unfortunately, my ambition and good intentions vanished when I realized that I made a mess of both the dress and the patches. Recalling my experiences with fiberglass repair (another story), I decided to try Fray-Check™ to seal the edges of holes in the dress and to make my own stabilized patches. I did a test run on some spare material and found that using a fine brush and a very small amount of Fray-Check™, I had a sealed edge without a glossy or white rim. I cut a large piece of my spare silk, laid it out on a piece of tinfoil and painted a thin layer of Fray-Check™ over the whole piece. I then hung the piece up to dry and, Voila! I had my homemade, non-fraying silk patch material. I could now cut whatever size of patch I needed without it unraveling.

I still have a lot to do. Once it's fully patched, I will underline the dress and repair the beading as best I can. From other blogs I've learned that one can salvage beads from the turned under hems. (Brilliant idea!) Also, I have to figure out what to do with the shoulders that are very damaged. I may have to cover them completely with an opaque material, possibly velvet. Finally, I have to put together a simple slip. This has been the easiest step of the process. I found a great resource to easily make a DIY 1920's slip on the *American Duchess* blog site. To date, I've spent several hours attaching odd shaped patches over both the front and back of the dress. Nevertheless, I'm confident that I will be the “bee's knees” viewed from across the room. Close up? That may be a different story, but I'm hoping the flow of champagne and soft lighting will reveal this vision of Twenties chic. *F*

You can follow the Aunt Inez Dress Project at Tfirah.blogspot.com.



The dress laid on top of a lining of umber-colored fabric.



President's Column

BY DEBORAH BORLASE

Summer nears its end, and the bi-annual GBACG Costumers Bazaar has passed with all its treasures and pleasures. We are now in the midst of planning for 2014. Have you an event idea that has been at the back of your creative brain, longing to be realized? Most of our events are actually planned by our membership and we hope that YOU will host one in 2014! Think about an event that calls to your heart-of-hearts, then pop open our Event Planning form (link below) and fill 'er out!

<http://www.gbacg.org/about-gbacg/gbacg-events.html>

Or contact one of our Event Coordinators at:

<http://www.gbacg.org/events>

Events *continued from page 3*

Sister Organization Events

Discount ticket information:
<http://www.gbacg.org/about-gbacg/member-benefits.html>

BAERS: The Sanditon Ball

Sept. 21, 2013: <http://www.baers.org/index.html#baerscal>

PEERS: Steampunktoberfest Ball

Oct. 5, 2013: <http://www.peersdance.org/steampunk.html>

PEERS: Le Bal des Vampires

Nov. 2, 2013: <http://www.peersdance.org/vamp13.html>

Interested in joining the GBACG or renewing your membership? Want to purchase tickets to events or workshops? You can do all of this on the GBACG website:

- Join/renew your membership: <http://www.gbacg.org/about-gbacg/join-gbacg.html>
- Purchase event tickets: <http://www.gbacg.org/gbacg-calendar.html> - see individual event webpages to order online (via PayPal), or to print out a form that you can mail in with a check.
- Purchase workshop tickets: <http://www.gbacg.org/gbacg.org/gbacg-calendar.html> - see individual workshop webpages to order online (via PayPal), or to print out a form that you can mail in with a check.
- Post or view pictures on Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/groups/gbacg/>
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