

# ye 18<sup>th</sup> Century Tailor

\* Practical tips for recreating 18<sup>th</sup> cent<sup>y</sup> clothes \*

## "Fitting the Waistcoat"

Does your waistcoat fit like the one shown in FIG. 1? Does it suffer from a gap between the waistcoat and the breeches? This seems to be a commonly observed problem, but perhaps the following tailoring tips will help you toward a better fit.

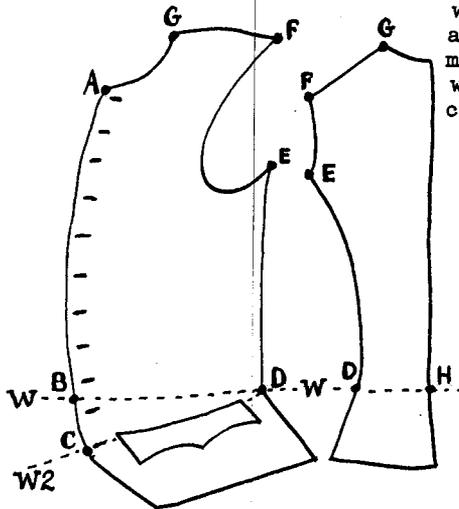
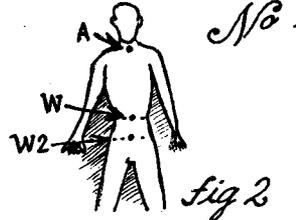
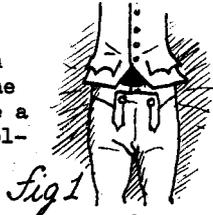


Fig. 3

The waistline for the 18th. cent. man was 2 to 3 inches below what is considered as the waistline of today. Today the waistline is considered to be a line drawn around the waist at the navel and the top of the hip bones. FIG.2 shows the modern waistline which we will label W and the 18th. cent. waistline labelled W2. However, one of the critical 18th. cent. waistcoat measurements is W, the hip line.

FIG. 3 shows the basic pattern of the 18th. cent. man's waistcoat taken from existing garments of the 1770 - 85 period. On the left is the front panel and on the right is the back panel. Note that the front panel is larger thereby placing the side seam on the back of the torso. A is the top center front placed at the top of the sternum. B is the point where waistline W intersects the center front (cf). The measurement BC is the extra material needed to lower the front panel to W2, the 18th. cent. waistline. D is at the point where the top of the hip bone intersects line W. By placing D here and opening the side and rear vents this allows the waistcoat to fit and prevent "riding up". The slight curve to the cf on the front panel allows the garment to fit in at A and fit in at C. NOTE: This arc cutting is for 18th. cent. bodies. Modern bodies tend to need more in the chest. Thinner people will, of course, need less arc. The line ED is cut straight on the front panel while the same line on the rear panel is cut with a negative arc. This allows the garment to "pull in" to conform with the body from the shoulder blades down to the waist. The lines GF are cut to allow the shoulder seam to fall back of the top of the shoulder. In this manner the pattern followed the slope of the 18th. cent. shoulder. NOTE: Modern bodies tend to have less sloping shoulders than 18th. cent. ones so the pattern may have to be slightly altered.

The point in adding length to the cf at BC is to bring the waistcoat to the 18th. cent. waistline to cover the top of the breeches and to present a better, tailored effect. The addition of two to three (or more) inches to the cf measurement is not destructive of the line that 18th. cent. tailors drew from the last button across the top of the pocket flap and the top of the hip vent to the top of the rear vent.

Good tailoring of a waistcoat begins with the measurements and applying these to the pattern. Be patient! Test fit the garment before finishing. Put it on inside out and adjust the seams to fit. 18th. cent. waistcoats were snug fitting garments. Any looseness was taken out by the tailor or, in the case of many military issued waistcoats, by adding tie strings in the back.

With patience, skill and a bit of good fortune your 18th. cent. waistcoat will look and fit like the one shown in FIG. 4. If you have any questions or need a tailoring problem solved contact ye 18TH. CENTURY TAILOR at Guilford Courthouse NMP or through the editors of this NEWSLETTER.

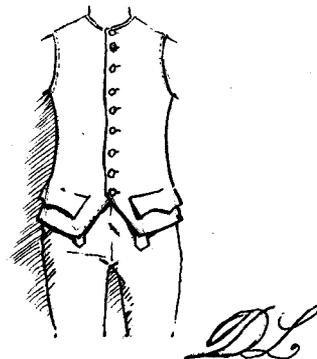


Fig. 4

NEXT TIME: "How to Measure"

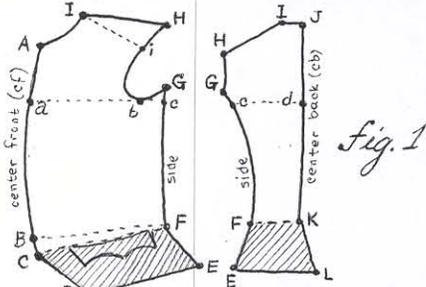
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❖ Practical tips for recreating 18<sup>th</sup> cent<sup>y</sup> clothes ❖

"How to Measure"

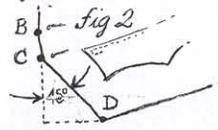
No. 2

In our last article we discussed the fitting of a waistcoat. In this article we will approach the method of measuring to get a good fit. In Fig. 1 is the outline pattern marked with the points that we will be using as reference points.



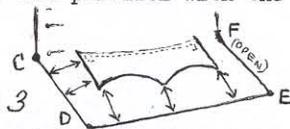
Measurements: (1). To measure the center front, ABC, measure from A at the top of the sternum down to the navel at B, then add the extra length BC to lower the waistline to the 18<sup>th</sup> cent. level as discussed in the last article (No.1). On the pattern make this length along the arc that forms the center front. (Note: the amount of arc depends on the build of the intended wearer. A slim person has an almost straight cf than a heavier person.) Add the length CD for the waistcoat skirt. The amount of length added here will depend on the era

the waistcoat reflects. Early 18<sup>th</sup> cent. ones were quite long with very little cut away on the skirt's cf, but later (ca. 1780's) were shorter being about 5 to 6 inches. (Note: some later waistcoats had no skirts, merely a band of cloth around the bottom.) For a Rev. War period waistcoat, the cutaway should not exceed 45 degrees (Fig. 2). (2). Next measure the waist at BF-FK. Example: If your waist measurement at this line is 36", then the measurement from BF-FK would be 18 inches, plus 1/2 inch for cf overlap and 4 X 5/8 inch for seam allowance, all totaling 21 inches. Note that most of the pattern measurement is given to the front panel since it is large than the rear panel because of the rearward placement of the side seam. (3). Now add how much skirt desired to both panels at CD, FE, and KL as shown in the shaded areas. (4). Take the center back measurement from J at the top of the spine and base of the neck down to K where it intersects with line BFFK. This will be a straight line on the pattern. Add the skirt measurement KL equal to that of the front panel. (5). Now take the chest measurement abcd. Note that point b is just under the arm and is directly at the side (not side seam). Add the extra to this measurement as you did to the waist, ie. overlap and seam allowances. (6) Take the shoulder measurement from I, at the top of the shoulder at the neck to i, top of shoulder at the arm joint. (7) Take a measurement of the neck, AI-IJ, and adding this to the pattern as a half-circle. This measurement should be taken around the neck where it joins the torso.

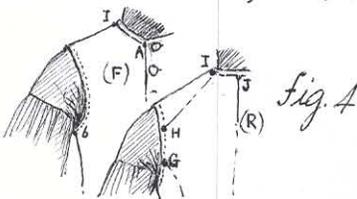


Add all of these measurements to your pattern, remembering to add seam allowance (usually 5/8 inch.) Also remember that the side seam GF on the front panel is a straight line and GF on the rear panel is cut on a shallow arc. You may want to take an extra measurement between the chest and waist to establish a median point on the rear panel's arc.

In cutting the pocket flap make sure that the front edge is parallel with the center front of the skirt as in Fig. 3 and that the lower edge with the "points" are parallel with the lower edge. The top edge of the flap is usually convex, curving from the front at C or the bottom button to the rear, opposite F, at the top of the side vents. The vents are left open from FE and KL downward.



Around the armholes, 18<sup>th</sup> century waistcoats should fit snug, but not binding. As shown in Figure 4, the hole should allow for freedom of movement, lying close to the fit of the body in order to fit under the tight fitting coat. The top of the armhole should come to the edge of the shoulder, not cut in as much as modern vests. The hole cuts in slightly at the chest and continues under the arm and continues with a shallow arc to the top of the shoulder.



These tips in measuring a waistcoat are offered as a helpful guide. If you are starting from scratch, try a pattern made up according to your measurements and based on the outline pattern in Fig. 1. Try this pattern using inexpensive cloth, cutting or adding until the right fit is obtained. Transfer this to a paper pattern and then cut your intended cloth. If a pattern is already available to you then using this measurement guide will help toward a better fit for you. If linen is used as your selected cloth, pre-shrink it before you cut.

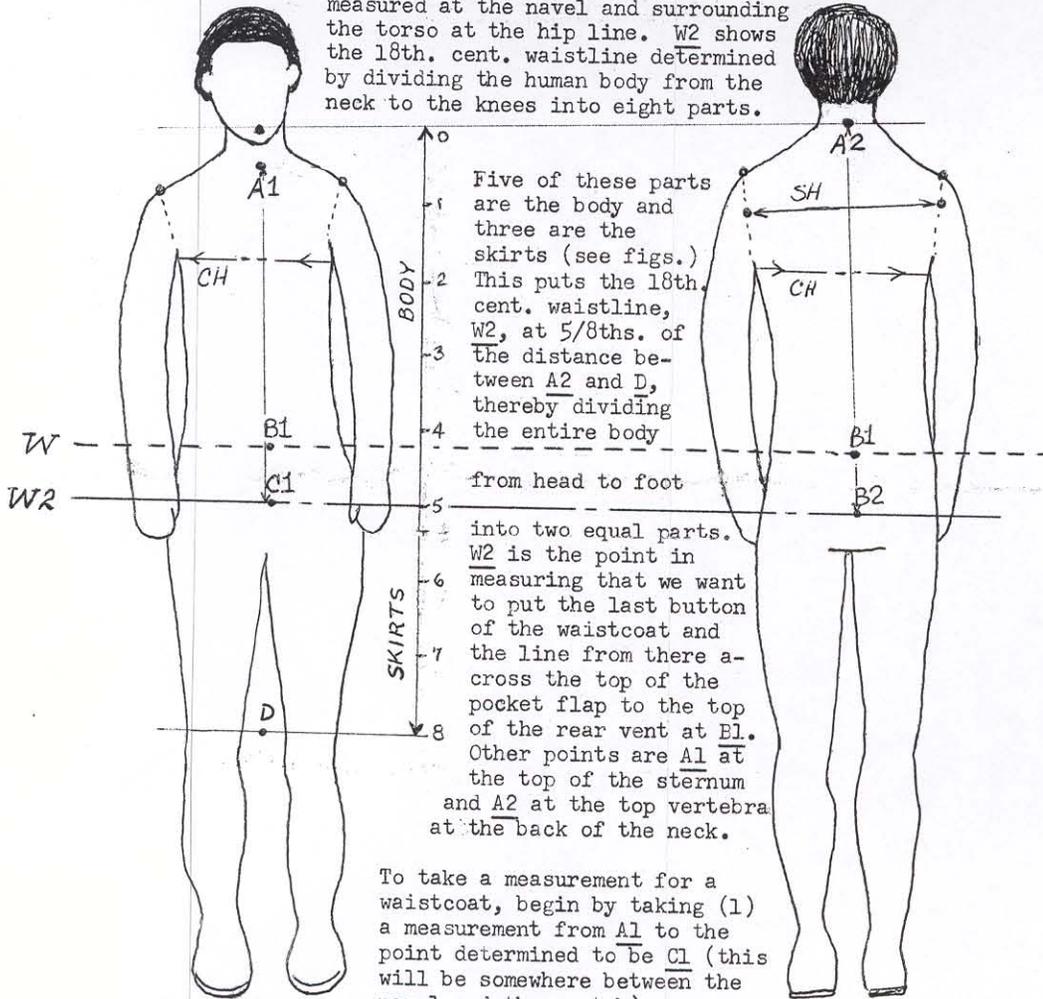
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"How to Measure"

No 2

In article No. 1 we discussed the two waistlines concerned with 18th. cent. tailoring of a waistcoat. Shown in figures 1 and 2 are these lines. W represents the modern waistline measured at the navel and surrounding the torso at the hip line. W2 shows the 18th. cent. waistline determined by dividing the human body from the neck to the knees into eight parts.



Five of these parts are the body and three are the skirts (see figs.) This puts the 18th. cent. waistline, W2, at 5/8ths. of the distance between A2 and D, thereby dividing the entire body

from head to foot into two equal parts. W2 is the point in measuring that we want to put the last button of the waistcoat and the line from there across the top of the pocket flap to the top of the rear vent at B1. Other points are A1 at the top of the sternum and A2 at the top vertebra at the back of the neck.

To take a measurement for a waistcoat, begin by taking (1) a measurement from A1 to the point determined to be C1 (this will be somewhere between the navel and the crotch)

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

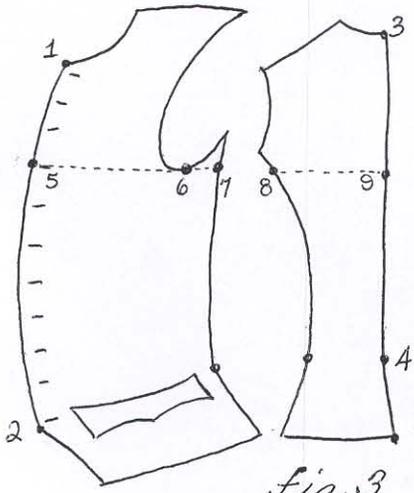
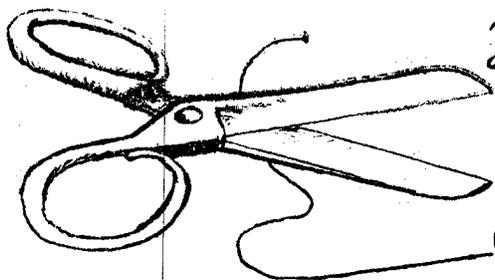


Fig. 3



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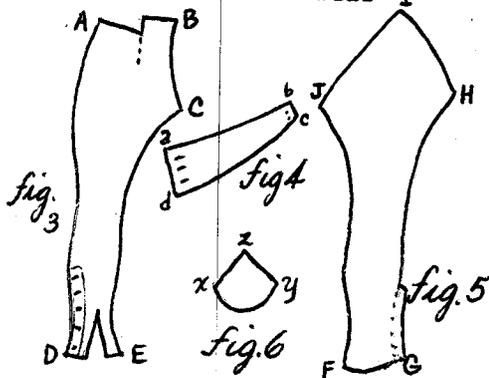
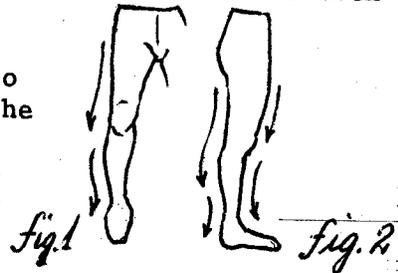
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## "Fitting Overalls"

No 3

Many have found that overalls are the hardest to fit items in an 18th. century soldier's wardrobe. Eyewitness reports among living history folks indicate that ill-fitting overalls are almost universal. Poor fitting overalls, though common, are really not that difficult to correct. Following are some tips that will help you construct or even correct yours to better fitting overalls.

Overalls, because they fit the entire leg, must be cut to respond to the double curve that the leg makes between the thigh and the foot. (fig.1&2). They must also fit so that they follow the outline of the leg and the lower leg especially the calf. They must also be cut so that they are comfortable to wear.



In making a pattern, cut it as you would the shape of the leg, bearing in mind the curves and the outline already discussed. This can, sometimes, only be accomplished by trial and error using inexpensive cloth. If linen is used as the selected cloth for the garment pre-shrink it before you cut it out. Figures 3 through 6 show the basic panels and pieces comprising the garment. Study how each piece is cut.

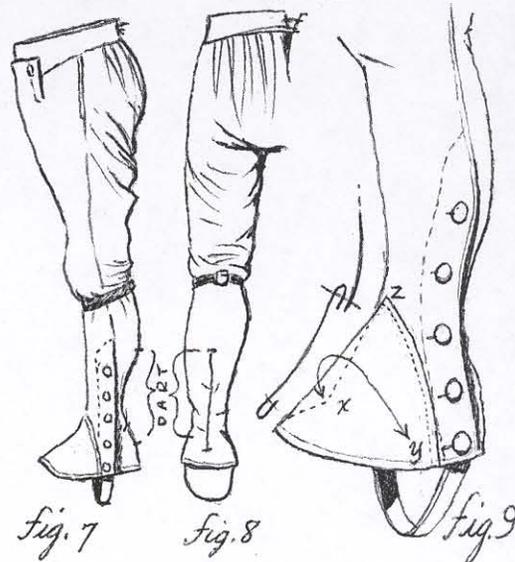
In taking a length measurement measure from your hip bone down to the lower edge of the foot along the side of the leg. Transfer this measure to the pattern. The length of the measure should include ab on fig. 4 (waistband), AD on fig. 4 (front panel) plus seam allowance of 5/8 in. on top and bottom of the waistband, the top of the front panel and the bottom of the front panel. Always allow extra length for overalls. When worn they should be a little longer than needed. This is done for comfort to the wearer. Garters worn around the leg below the knee draws up the extra and relieves the folds of material around the ankles. Actual practice accounts for this point. Tight overalls, as seen in artist's drawings, cannot be very comfortable nor correct. In service the linen must have stretched anyway producing a very baggy garment.

Overalls should also fit snug in the crotch. Cut BC (fig. 3) as short as the actual measurement for the wearer. (Remember to include the waistband measurement). Note that the pattern has a deep arc from C to a midpoint between CE. This allows extra room without binding. Bear in mind that CE must equal FJ and that AD must equal HG in length.

Overalls, as in breeches, must be gathered to fit in the rear (HI) to allow the wearer to bend over or sit without pulling up at the knees. This may be alright in breeches if they do not have enough in the rear since they are not strapped to the foot as in overalls. Note, too, that the pattern (fig.3 & 5) allows ample cloth for the hips

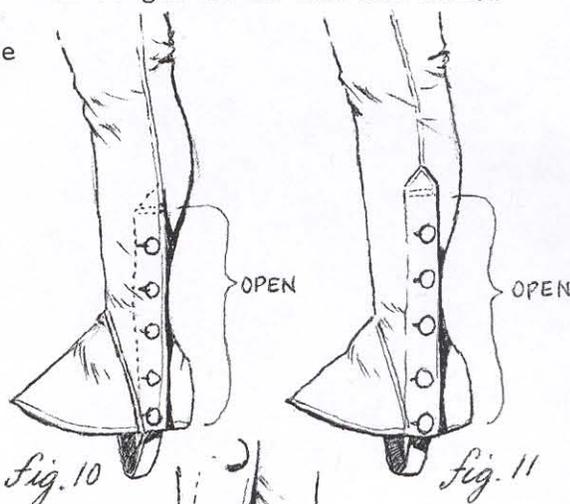
and thighs, ie. the side seam is cut in front with an outward arc, but because of the gathering in the rear it is cut inward on the rear panel.

Overalls are only fitted below the knee. Above the knee they should be slightly loose for comfort. To make a loose below the knee pair fit better, put them on inside-out and on the rear panels pin a vertical dart of material from the calf downward fitting it close to the leg. Generally you need not continue the dart to the bottom of the panel, but to an inch or two above (fig. 7&8). Sew along this pinned line. This trick will make them appear tailored even if the pattern has not been cut properly (NB: this was probably the way the originals were fitted. 18th. C. Tailor).

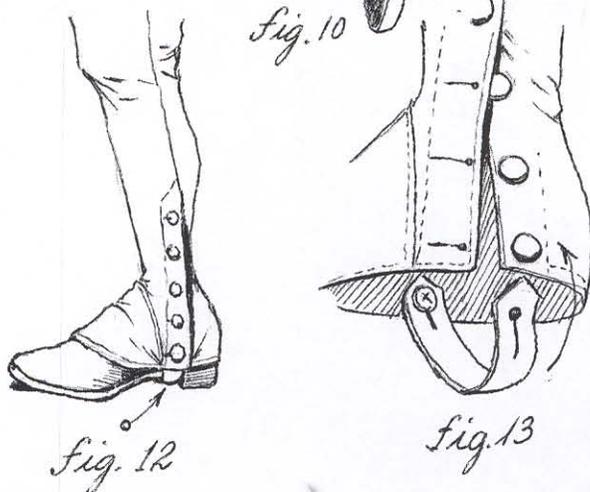


The tongue (fig. 6) should be lined to reinforce it against tearing by the shoe buckle. It should also be sewn to the front panel as shown in fig. 9, ie. not seamed. It should also be wide enough to cover the width of the shoe. To obtain this put the unfinished overalls on, fit them to the bottom of the leg. Then measure across the instep. This should be the measurement for xy. (fig. 9)

The side slit on overalls should be as high up as the bottom edge of the swell of the calf muscle (fig. 10). This allows the wearer to get them off when they have been fitted tightly. A shorter slit will not allow the foot room to get in or out nor allow the overall to fit snugly. Five buttons are usually the number used on the overall opening. An alternate opening (see Sketch Book '76) is to use a separate placket set over the **side seam**. This, too, must be open as the other (fig. 11).



In fitting the strap that goes under the shoe, it must line up with the sole and heel (fig. 12). Attach to the inside of the overall using a flat button so that a worn strap may be easily replaced. Button the other side of the strap to the lowest button on the side opening. Button it here first and then button the opening closed for a neater appearance. (fig. 13).



(Next time: "Making a Broadfall")

# ye 18<sup>th</sup> Century Tailor

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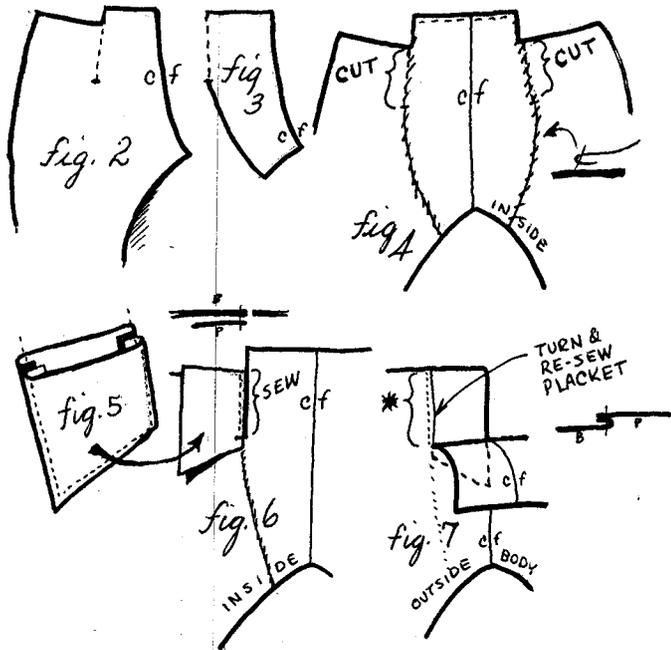
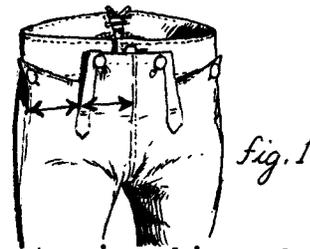
## "Making a Broadfall"

No 4

In this article, I will suggest an effective means of constructing a broadfall opening in men's breeches or overalls.

The Broadfall was in use in men's clothes during the era of the American Revolution having replaced the vertical, placket front opening sometime in the 1760's. Broadfalls during the time that we are interested in were relatively narrower than those of the next decade and following. As a rule, the broadfall of ca. 1781 should not exceed one-half of the pattern between the side seam and center front (Fig. 1).

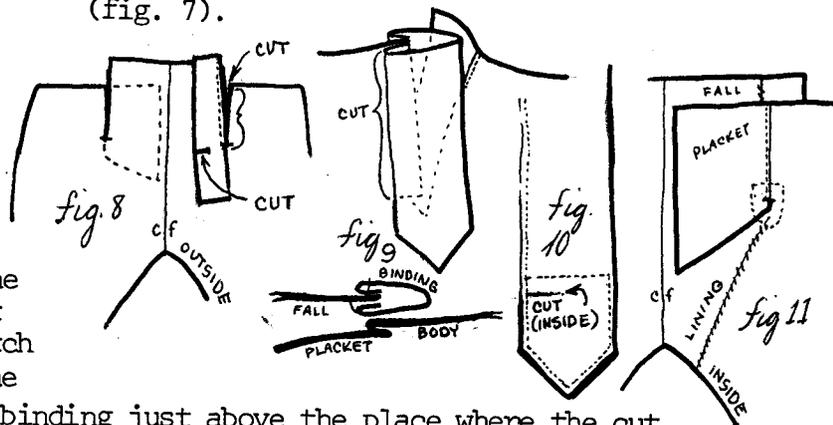
I feel, in no case, because of the size of modern bodies, should the broadfall be over eight inches across the entire front. In the case of originals, they seem to be rather narrow, some being about 5 to 6-inches wide.



The first step in making a broadfall, is to determine where it will be on the pattern. After that, mark (fig. 2) it on the pattern and its depth. Cut your fall lining as shown in fig. 3. Sew the front two, body front and lining pieces, together to form the center front (cf). Carefully whip stitch the lining to the body as in fig. 4. Make your first cut on the body panel to the depth marked. You will need to make two plackets as shown in fig. 5. These will be inserted next.

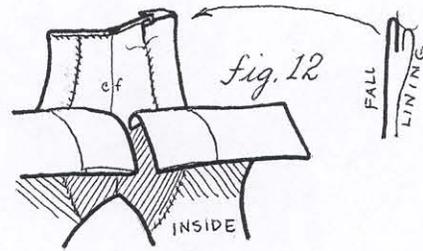
With the outside of the body panel toward you sew the plackets along the cut line (you may also cut the line after you sew the plackets in place). See fig. 6. Sew very close to the edge. Turn the placket inside and re sew (fig. 7).

Make sure in re sewing the placket, not to sew any further down than the mark that begins the opening (\*). Allow some of the placket to remain below the mark. Now we are ready to apply the binding. Lay the binding strip (fig. 8) along the edge of the cut and sew. Make a cut into the strip at the mark. Fold as in fig. 9 and whip stitch behind. Make a point at the bottom of the binding and sew (fig. 10). Sew across the binding just above the place where the cut

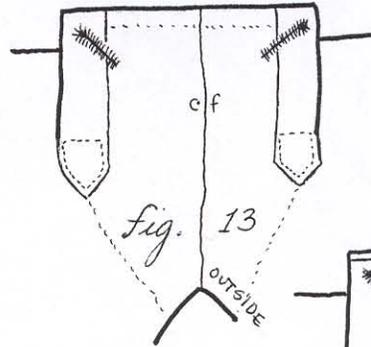


was made in the binding. Be sure to catch the placket in the stitching (fig. 11). This method will make a strong joint at this point and will prevent tearing from stress. Complete by repeating the same on the other side of the broadfall.

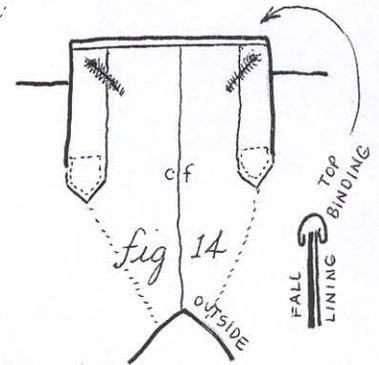
To finish the broadfall, undo a bit of the top binding stitching. Fold in the top and secure under the lining. Whip stitch the lining across the top (fig. 12).



Work two buttonholes (fig. 13) into each corner of the broadfall. Normally, no buttonhole is needed worked at the center front. Later, buttonholes were placed here, but only when the broadfall was much wider (ca. 1790-1830). No ca. 1781 broadfalls have this feature, but it is not impossible that they did.



An alternate way of completing the top of the broadfall was to bind it (fig. 14). Instead of folding in the top a binding strip, just as has been applied to the edges is placed along the top. Either way is your choice, but the first method seems to be the easiest, less bulky and more to the period than the second.



Once the broadfall has been completed the two front panels may then be attached to the two rear panels and then the waistband attached.

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CORRECTION: In article No. 3 of the 18TH. CENTURY TAILOR concerning the "Fitting of Overalls" please correct (par. 4) the side seam measurement error. It should not include ab on the waistband, but rather the width of the band at its midpoint, minus seam allowances.

Thank you,  
18th. c. Tailor

If you have any questions or comments concerning THE 18TH. CENTURY TAILOR please direct them to Don Long c/o Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, Greensboro, NC 27429 (919) 288-1776. Individuals are urged to make comments or corrections at will. This information is supplied to Volunteers in Parks courtesy of Guilford Courthouse NMP.

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## "Making Buttonholes"

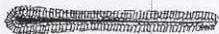
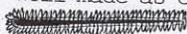
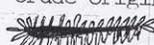
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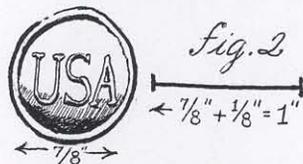
In this article we will focus on the making of buttonholes, a necessary, fashionable and functional addition or decoration to any 18th. Century garment. Considering that an ordinary regimental coat of ca.1781 had over 40 buttonholes they would have added a considerable amount of time to the construction of the garment. Making a functional, durable buttonhole that is also attractive does take both time and skill, but the result is worth all the effort. If your garment is well made, sloppy buttonholes ruin it.

Many of the reproduction clothes seen today are made with machine made buttonholes. If this is acceptable to your standards than it is permissible, but if you want the garment to look authentic, it must have hand worked buttonholes! This article will help you in making these correctly and have them look attractive.

The 18th. Century Tailor has examined many original garments to study construction and quality of buttonholes. Even on period everyday-type garments the holes are well-worked. Some are "crude", but these are an exception as, generally they are made well. Even "crude" ones are better than usually seen on reproductions. Remember, the better the quality of the garment, the better the buttonhole should be. In short, an officer's coat should have better buttonholes than those on a private's coat. (Fig.1)

Before actually working a buttonhole on a garment it is well advised for a beginner to practice on a scrap of cloth made to duplicate the parts and thickness of the garment. If working a buttonhole on a garment, especially woelens, it is advised to interline between the body and facing so that the buttonhole is worked on a firm foundation.

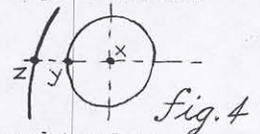
- a.  Well-made as original
- b.  Crude original
- c.  Crude modern reproduction



The first step is to determine where the buttonhole will go and how long it should be. Measure the diameter of the button you plan to use and add 1/8 to 3/8 inch depending on its thickness (Fig.2). For a 7/8 inch button the buttonhole should then be no less than 1 inch.

Some buttonholes were made longer, but most of the extra length was false (not opened). Also measure carefully to determine the distance between the buttonholes. On a coat with a 10-button front, the space between would be the distance from the top button the the bottom one divided by nine. Sometimes spacing can be done by eyesight, but it is not as precise. (Fig 3)

The distance from the edge of the garment or material to the front edge of the buttonhole is determined by the diameter of the button. If the button is 7/8 inch, its radius is 7/16 inch or xy on Fig. 4. Therefore the distance from x to z is 7/16 inch plus yz which is usually 1/8 or 1/4 inch.



Once the location of the buttonholes are made prepare a thin cardboard template as shown in Fig. 5. This reflects all your previously computed measurements. Side A

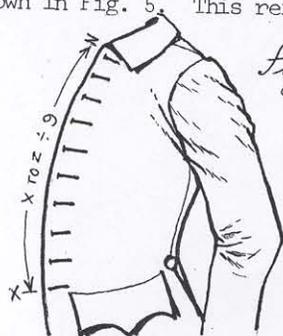


Fig. 3

represents the edge of the garment or material. B is the distance between the edge and the forward end of the buttonhole. C is the length of the buttonhole (if the buttonhole is to be partly false, place a mark on both sides of the slit to mark the length of the hole that will be functional (a)). D is the distance between buttonholes. Use the template to measure distance between buttonhole positions by marking the first two, #1 and #2, and marking third by placing #1 over the second; continue until all have been marked in like fashion. Use tailor's chalk for woelens or linens; or a pencil for light colors.

After marking the positions for the buttonholes, baste diagonally around your marks

(Fig. 6) to hold all the material to prevent pulling and shifting. Stitches are no more than 1/4 inch.

Next, stitch the outline of the buttonhole (Fig. 7). This could be done on the sewing machine if you wish. This action holds the edges of the buttonhole secure when the slit is made through the material. (Note: Many of the buttonholes observed on 18th.c. garments lacked the round eye as seen on modern garments). Remove basting.

Cut the hole with care (cut one hole at a time as you work to prevent raveling), using a sharp blade or scissors. Begin cut at *a* and cut to *b* (Fig. 8). On loosely woven material, such as linen, you can use clear tape to hold the cut ends. Cover the marked area with the tape; cut the buttonhole slit through the tape and then work the hole. If tape is not used you can overcast the cut edges with thread (Fig. 9) or you can wax the edges by passing a warm knife blade rubbed with a wax through the slit.

Buttonholes may be worked with or without gimp or stranding thread. Buttonholes worked with these have a neater, continuous look (Fig. 1a). If gimp is used, first thread a needle with the gimp. Knot the end and then at a point 1/4 inch beyond the back of the buttonhole pass the needle and gimp all the way through the material from the top of the garment material and back up and through at *a*. Continue by laying it parallel to the cut slit. Secure it for now by wrapping around the needle after the same is placed through the material as in Fig. 10. (When the upper half of the buttonhole has been worked, bring it along the other side and again secure as previously done. After the hole has been completed, pass it through at *b* and cut it and the remaining knot away).

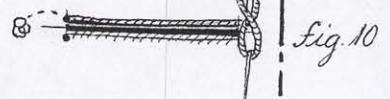
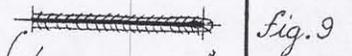
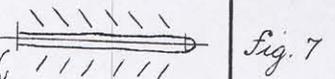
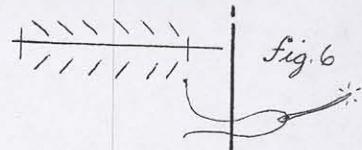
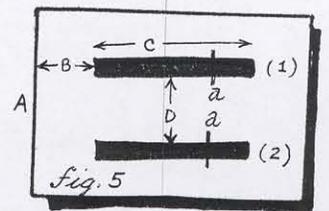
Gimp or stranding thread are used to make the buttonhole look neater and more durable by giving it a firm finished edge. "Gimp" is a firm cotton or linen cord about 1/16 inch in diameter. "Stranding" is a softer twisted thread and can be made from short lengths of cotton or linensewing thread or cord (1 1/2 to 1 3/4 yards length) threaded into a needle. Bring the ends together just as if making ready to sew with a double thread. Then wax the thread with beeswax, being careful not to have too much wax at any one place. The wax holds the threads together and makes the slit edge firmer so that it will not press down when the buttonhole thread is applied over it. After waxing, twist the strands together using the fingers smoothing the two strands along the length of the entire section until evenly twisted without any kinks. An average buttonhole requires about 1/8 yard of gimp or stranding. Make sure that what you use is close to the color of the buttonhole twist that you use so that the two are compatible.

Buttonhole twist is best obtained in silk although synthetics are offered on the market. It usually comes in black and white and colors to match materials. Period twist would probably only be in a few colors, so black and white would be used on garments. Red twist has been seen on uniforms. On blue the twist is almost always black. An old tailor's rule is to select a color twist two times darker than the material. Always use a length of twist that is sufficient to work the entire buttonhole. A small buttonhole may be worked with 3/4 yard of twist, but a large one (without any false part) requires no less than a yard. Remember, it is better to have too much twist than not enough since it is difficult to restart a stitch in making a buttonhole and make it look neat. A continuous length of twist creates a better appearance, but if the thread does break fasten off the first thread well and secure the new one, beginning a stitch back of the first thread and bringing the stitch of the second thread up through the last purl of the first thread, so as to make the joining as nearly invisible as possible.

Select a needle of medium-heavy size about 1 1/2 inches long with an eye just large enough to carry the twist. Too large a needle makes close placing of the stitches difficult and also weakens the edges. A "No. 6, short" was an old tailor's recommended size.

(IN OUR NEXT ARTICLE OF THE 18TH. CENTURY TAILOR WE WILL COVER THE ACTUAL MAKING OF THE BUTTONHOLE AND FINISHING TIPS)

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# ye 18<sup>th</sup> Century Tailor

\* Practical tips for recreating 18<sup>th</sup> cent<sup>y</sup> clothes \*

## "Making Buttonholes (Continued)"

No 6

In the last article we covered the preparation of the buttonhole prior to actual working them. In this article we will complete and finish them.

After the stranding of the buttonhole, it is ready to be worked. Thread a needle with a strand of buttonhole twist of the proper length and color. Wax the thread lightly and evenly with some beeswax. Then, holding the garment so that the outer edge is to the left, fasten the thread at the end, on the right-handed side and up close to the end of the buttonhole slit, with a tiny back stitch (fig. 1a). Hold the buttonhole in this position over the forefinger of the left hand, and bring the fastened end of the thread toward the inside of the buttonhole (fig. 1b). Insert the needle through the slit and bring it up just outside of the stitched line around the buttonhole slit (see fig. 7 in Article No. 5); then bring the two threads as they come from the needle around the point under the needle (note this in fig. 2), and draw up the thread firm

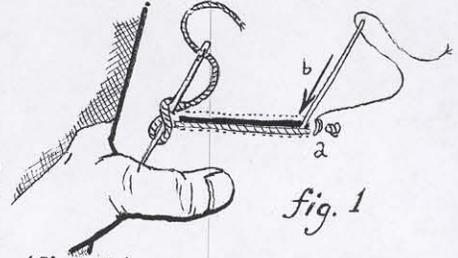


fig. 1

and close to form the stitch. Note that a "purl" or knot will be formed on the edge of the slit that is both pleasing to the looks of the buttonhole and strengthening too. Then insert the needle again and continue working to the opposite end of the buttonhole, keeping the nail of the thumb just back of the stitching as a guide in taking the stitches, so as not to make any too deep in any place.

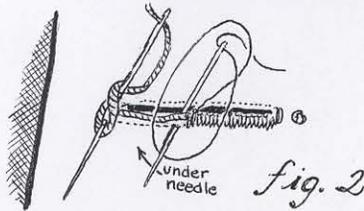


fig. 2

When the eyelet is reached in working the buttonhole, release the strand of gimp or stranding thread at the front end and hold it in position around the front while the buttonhole-stitches are worked over it. Arrange the stitches at the beginning and ending of the eyelet so as to form corners; i.e. so that the turn of the eyelet will be as nearly perfect as possible (fig. 3). Turn the work gradually and change the direction of each stitch slightly while working so that the stitches will radiate from the center. To do this the purl must be crowded and the other end of the stitches placed a bit farther apart and more slanting than they are at the sides of the buttonhole. After the eyelet is completed, pull the stranding thread up and under the working thread, so as to take out any slack that may be in it and secure a true, uniform eyelet edge, securing the stranding thread at the back of the buttonhole (fig. 4).

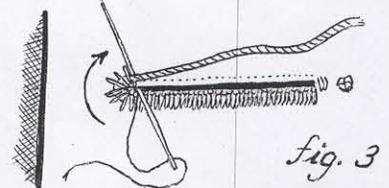


fig. 3

Next turn the work so that the other side of the buttonhole will be toward you and proceed to work this half of the buttonhole. Just before the end is reached, remove the stranding thread down through the cloth, precisely at the end of the buttonhole, to the wrong side; then twist it around the end of the finger and hold it tight until the last buttonhole-stitch is finished (fig. 5).

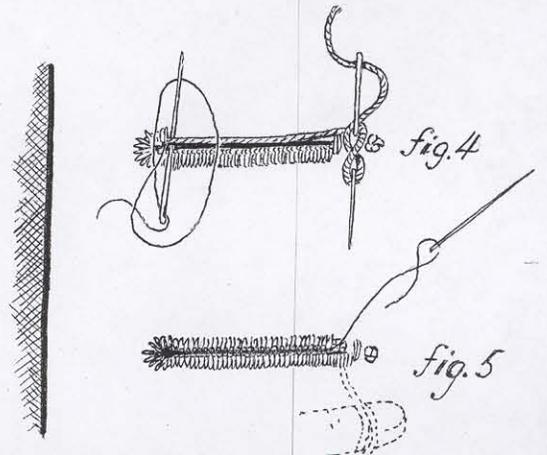


fig. 4

fig. 5

When the buttonhole-stitches are completed, a bar tack may be worked at the end, if desired. To make such a bar tack, turn the work so that the back of the buttonhole will be next to you. Then take two or three bar-stitches across the end of the working thread, keeping them very close to this end of the buttonhole, and cover these stitches with tiny over-and-over stitches. Make the little over-and-over stitches directly alongside of each other, so that a neat, narrow bar will be the result. By putting the eye of the needle instead of the point under the bar threads, the work may be done more quickly, as the eye of the needle will not catch the thread. When the over-and-over stitches are completed, fasten the

working thread securely on the inside of the material and cut off the stranding thread. With this the actual working of the buttonhole is complete. If part of the buttonhole is to be false, as many 18th century types were, extra stranding and twist thread are required. Instead of working the edge of the buttonhole slit, as I have just shown in this article, pierce the cloth and work on top of the cloth (fig. 6). Finish as you would a regularly worked buttonhole.

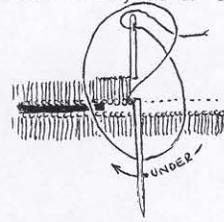


fig. 6

To finish the buttonhole after it has been worked, overcast it with with basting thread, and press it well on the wrong side, using a press cloth, so that the edge will be smooth and the ends of the buttonhole properly shaped. The overcasting-stitches should be left in until the garment is entirely finished. The eyelet of the buttonhole should be rounded out by means of a stiletto or a rounded awl-like tool.

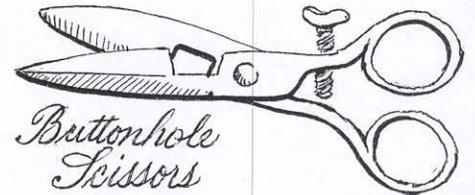
In the 18th century tailor's shop there would some division of labor, ie. breaking up the tasks according to skill. Among the workers there were always those whose primary job was the working of buttonholes. Buttonholes were always worked by hand as machines to do this were not invented until the nineteenth century. Therefore, to make your reproduction garments authentic they should be made with hand-wrought buttonholes.

As we have seen to make a handmade buttonhole takes a certain amount of work and developed skill, but the finished product is worth it. I suggest that you practice on scraps of cloth to develop your skill and improve the quality of your buttonholes. You will note that each one will improve over the prior one. Practice is worth your effort.

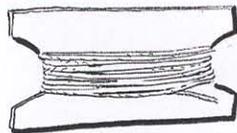
Below are some of the tools used by the tailor to make buttonholes as shown in period plates.



Buttonhole Block



Buttonhole Scissors



A Skein of Twist



A "No. 6, Short" Needle



A Stiletto

The 18TH CENTURY TAILOR wishes to acknowledge the following sources for information in writing this article.

Principles of Tailoring, Woman's Institute of Domestic Arts and Sciences; Scranton PA; 1916.

Essentials of Sewing, Cook; Publisher and date unknown.

The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600-1900, Norah Waugh; Theatre Arts Books, NY; 1964.

A Diderot Pictorial Encyclopedia of Trades and Industry, Vol. 2, Denis Diderot; Reprint of plates in original 18th. c. edition with new text; Dover Press; 1959.

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Next time: "Lacing a Buttonhole"

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❖ Practical tips for recreating 18<sup>th</sup> Cent<sup>y</sup> clothes ❖

"LACING BUTTONHOLES"

No 7

In this article I will discuss the applying of lace (18th. century term for braid) to a buttonhole. Lace can be either of woven wool, linen or of metallic thread. Lace was applied to both civilian and military clothing, around buttonholes, along edges and seams, and for pure decoration. The applying of lace to uniforms during the period of the American Revolution period was a standard practice, although more so in the European armies than the American army. Officers, who represented the wealthier classes of 18th. c. society, were better able to afford the luxury of gold or silver lace (and embroidery, too) upon their uniforms. However, woolen lace was applied to private's uniforms. In some cases, metallic braid was allowed for non-commissioned officers and musicians.

Applying lace was just as time consuming for metallic as it was for woolen lace, but maybe a little more difficult. It takes effort for both. Applying lace to a uniform could account for as much labor as its basic construction. Perhaps this accounts for its lack on American uniforms. For instance, a private of British Foot Guards' coat took about 9 to 10 yards of white woolen lace. Cutting and folding and then stitching all this lace took hours. But, alas! This was the 18th. century and work was cheap and lace was the deemed fashion.

Lace for a private's coat was usually 1/2" wide. In British service, lace was a regimental distinction. It was usually white with woven-in colored stripes or "worms" for the foot regiments and yellow for artillery. Further, the lace could be sewn in pairs or triples, box looped, bastioned looped or scalloped looped. (fig. 1). Metallic lace was supposed to agree with the color of the regiment's buttons, ie. silver lace=silver buttons, etc.

The easiest to make was the boxed looped buttonhole. (fig. 1a). After all the buttonholes have been located and worked (see "18th C. Tailor", No. 5 & 6), you are ready to sew on the lace (NB: I believe that the cut buttonholes were worked before the lace was applied, however some people believe that the lace itself was the hole's binding and did not need to be worked).

First, begin by cutting a 7" length of lace (you may want to practice using a 7"x1/2" strip of paper). Fold the two ends together and carefully whip stitch them together to prevent fraying (fig.2). Make a 45° fold to the left (fig.3) and tack this fold down. The whip stitched edge should be covered by the edge of the just folded lace. Next, fold the lace at another 45° angle, making a point (fig. 4) at x. Fold the lace under and down so that the lace is now parallel. Stitch across the diagonal line to finish this end of the loop. At this point your half finished loop should look like this (fig. 5). To make the folds on the other end, flatten the lace and fold to a point (fig. 6). Take a couple of small stitches near point x. Then fold the point over the top of the loop and stitch it flat with the point facing back toward the other, completed end (fig. 7). Stitch along each diagonal seam. Finish by pressing with an iron. These loops can thus be made up all at once and then added to the coat or uniform. In the uniform-making industry of the period, these were probably made by one person and then applied by another. Lace may be folded and applied directly on the uniform if you wish, folding and stitching as you go.

After making the loops, they are ready to be applied. Using a 7" length of 1/2" lace will produce a loop about 1" wide by 2 5/8" long. Place the loop over the buttonhole (fig. 8) and allow 1/4" from the edge of the facing, collar, pocket or seam, depending

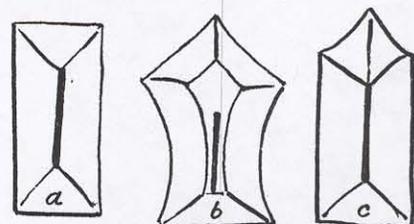


fig. 1



fig. 2

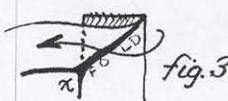


fig. 3

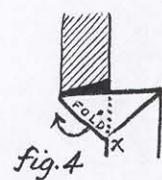


fig. 4

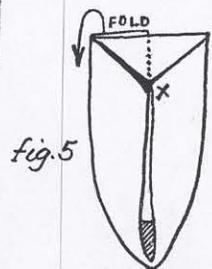


fig. 5

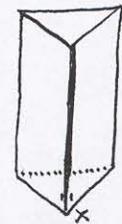


fig. 6

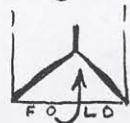


fig. 7

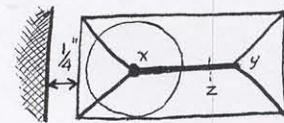
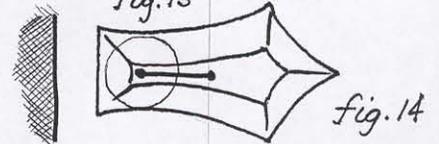
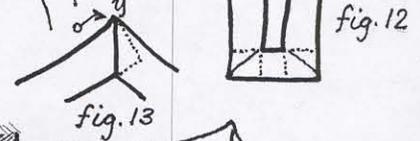
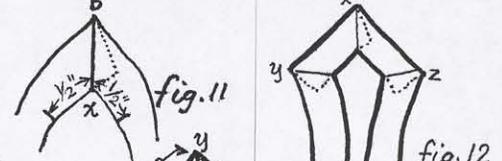
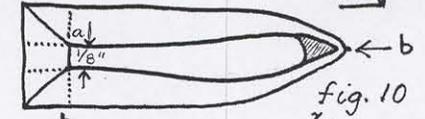
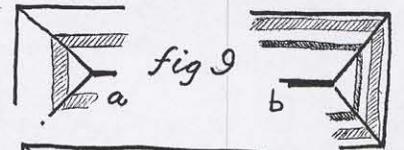


fig. 8

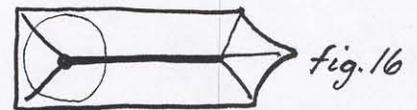
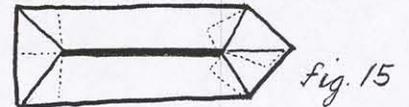
on where it is to be used. The button should be thus located at x. If the button is 7/8" in diameter the buttonhole should not be open all the way to y, but should be somewhere near z. However, not all loops were for cut buttonholes as some were false and for decoration only!

In most British infantry regiments, the lace had a regimental "worm" pattern which had to be matched in the folding (fig. 9a). If you are making loops of such lace, be sure that these worms join at the corners and that the correct edge is out or in (fig. 9b), since some pattern worms were not in the center of the lace or were woven in a particular pattern.

Making a bastion loop (fig. 1b) takes longer and is more difficult. Cut a 7 1/2" piece of 1/2" lace and begin as you would on a boxed loop. Instead of forming a point (fig. 4 at x), make a 1/8" flat point (fig. 10). Next, stitch down the diagonal seams and then determine the mid point for the opposite loop end at b. Make a small pencil mark here. Form a loop by folding under. this angle should be less than 45°. Stitch this fold in place. Place a mark 1/2" on both sides of point x (fig. 11). Fold the lace so that the folded points are on these marks (NB: Both openings should face the mid point fold) and forming a 3-point loop (fig. 12). The points x, y, & z should be sharp and not overlap (fig. 13). When the bastion loop is finally applied to the coat the long sides of the loop and the two forward short edges are curved in producing the the bastion shape. The buttonhole itself is arranged so that the button rests on the narrower end (fig. 14).



A scalloped loop is not quite as difficult as a bastion loop to make, but still requires the same number of folds. Only two British regiments wore this type- the 2nd or Coldstream Guards and the Third Guards. The First Guards, the other Foot Guards regiment wore the bastion loops. Start with a 7 1/8" length of lace and proceed as with the boxed loop. Make the point as in fig. 4 & 5. Then mark the midpoint as in fig. 10. Then make 3 folds. one in the center and one on each side so that all three points meet at x (fig. 15). Stitch these three diagonal seams down and make a small holding stitch at x. Make sure your folds will permit the loop sides to be parallel. When applying this loop to the coat the pointed end is scalloped (fig. 16). The loop is placed so that the button is on the boxed end.

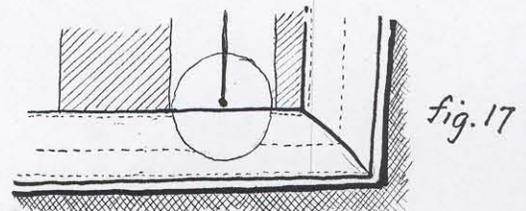


All lace was sewn on using an open, back stitch or a fine running stitch. It was never applied with an overcast stitch. This can be seen in Hew Strachan's British Military Uniforms, 1768-96, Arms and Armour Press, London, 1975, in plates 36-39. Here, too, are all the loops for the foot regiments actually sewn to a bit of facing cloth. Only the boxed and the bastion looped buttonholes are shown. Interesting are the slight variations in the bastion loops.

Metallic lace, usually in gold or silver, was folded in these same pattern loops. Folding and sewing metallic lace is a bit more difficult because of its stiffness and the desire to have it lay flat on the garment. It was usually applied by sewing with a fine back stitch. Sewing it on was slow since the needle had to pass up from the bottom on each stitch and down from the top, much as you have to do in embroidery.

Lace was also applied to seams and edges. On some uniforms these were covered by a wider lace. In this case a fine running stitch was applied, in addition to the edge stitching, down the middle (fig. 17).

Lace definitely makes a plain uniform much more showy, but at great expense of time and labor. For an authentic garment, all your lace must be sewn on by hand. It takes a lot of time, but the results are worth it.



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