

A 1745 Era Highland Suit

INTRODUCTION

Surviving specimens of mid-18th tartan are rare, examples of Highland clothing more so. The reason is principally due to the 1746 Act of Proscription¹ which banned the use of male Highland clothing² from 01 August the following year. The ban lasted for thirty-five years and although less stringently enforced from around 1770, many of the Jacobite era clothes would have been discarded, or the material reused and subsequently, worn out clothing was replaced by Lowland/southern style garments. There are only six known surviving tartan coats said to be from the time of the last Jacobite Rising: *The '45*. Two are almost certainly early 19th century. Of the six, two are part of complete outfits that include trews; one was made for an English Jacobite³, the other is said to have been worn by Prince Charles Edward Stuart. That outfit was displayed in the United Services Museum (USM)⁴ during the 1960-70s (Plate 1) and subsequently returned to the family who is said have owned it since the mid-18th century.



Plate 1. The Prince's Costume. Photo: Dunbar, History of Highland Dress

¹ Abolition and Proscription of the Highland Dress 19 George II, Chap. 39, Sec. 17, 1746

² Other than such as should be employed as Officers and Soldiers in his Majesty's Forces.

³ Sir John Hynde-Cotton Tartan Suit. <https://www.nms.ac.uk/tartansuit>

⁴ Now the National War Museum, Edinburgh Castle.

Dunbarⁱ cites the family tradition that the suit is said to have been worn by Prince Charles Edward (PCE) at the Battle of Culloden ‘and acquired by Colonel Augustine Earle⁵, Judge Advocate in Scotland in 1745, from a lady in whose house she affirmed they had been left by the Prince.’ Prestonⁱⁱ gives more detail, stating that ‘Augustine Earle was a member of the Society of Antiquaries and a Commissioner for Excise and by 1730 had been appointed Judge Advocate for the north of England, which encompassed Scotland, a post he held for many years. One of his duties included passing judgement on Jacobite rebels who had supported the failed claim of Prince Charles Edward Stuart to the throne in 1745. To show her gratitude for shielding her from prosecution, the story is told of how one elderly lady presented her with her greatest treasure, the tartan trews, plaid and bonnet which Bonnie Prince Charlie is said to have left in her cottage near Inverness after his defeat at Culloden, when he disguised himself as a serving-maid before sailing over the sea to Skye.’ If the story is true, then there are a handful of places where the Prince could have changed his clothes following the Defeat at Culloden. Potential sites are discussed later.

Suit Overview

During his time as Honorary Curator of the USM Dunbar, examined the clothes and formed the opinion that they could not have belonged to the Prince because of their size and the quality of the material which he said ‘is of the thin hard variety in use up to the 1830s’. He measured the coat as having a 30-inch chest, the trews a 30-inch waist and measuring 39 inches waist to heel with an inside leg length of 31 inches. He concluded that the ‘suit is a close fit on a thin youth of under five feet tall.’ⁱⁱⁱ Whilst Dunbar’s measurements are broadly correct his assessment of the build and height of the owner are less convincing, especially the height. In 2016 the author had an opportunity to examine the suit and formed the opinion that it would have fitted someone of 5’ 9” - 5’ 11”;^{iv} more keeping with the Prince’s height and certainly not a youth under five feet tall.

The suit comprises a short coat of a complex tartan and trews of a simple two-coloured check (Plate 2). There are of elements of the suit’s design that support the alleged mid-18th age and potentially to it having belonged to the Prince or someone close to him. The cut of the coat and inclusion of trews rather than a plaid or kilt is typical of a gentleman’s mid-18th century Highland Clothes intended for riding.



Plate 2. Suit overview showing the different tartans. © The Author

⁵ Dunbar appears to have conflated different Augustine Earles. The Earle family tree is complex and the name was subsequently double-barrelled. Augustine Earle, the Judge Advocate, was not a military man, nor were his grandson or great grandson, both named Augustine Earle Bulwer, but a later descendent, Col Edward Augustine Earle Bulwer (1865-1934).

The Coat

The coat is made from hard tartan, cut straight and beautifully matched at the back seam with a plain black velvet collar and turn-back cuff facings, and is lined with a red twill-weave wool cloth. It is a single-breasted, closed front coat that buttons from the neck to the natural waist from where it is slightly flared with three rear vents, one each side and one in the centre (Plate 3). There are two pockets, lined with the red material, each with two functioning and one faux button (Plate 4). The epaulettes run rearwards from the back of the neck covering the shoulder seam and button at the bottom, a style seen on the Culloden Coat.⁶



Plate 3. Front and rear view of the coat. © The Author



Plate 4. Waist pocket with two functioning and one faux button.. Photo: EF Williams.

⁶ https://www.scottishtartans.co.uk/Culloden_Tartan.pdf

There are 33 buttons on the coat; they are made from bone with a silver covering stamped with the Jacobite Rose⁷ (Plate 5). Several of the buttons are hidden (Plate 6).



Plate 5. Front and rear view of the buttons showing the construction. Photo: EF Williams.



Plate 6. A button hidden in the tail-vent, and yarn to prevent the two sides flapping. Photo: EF Williams.

⁷ The white **rose** became a symbol of the Jacobite cause whose aim was to restore the exiled Catholic King James VII/II and his descendants to the throne of Scotland, England and Ireland. It is essentially the White Rose of the House of York in reference to James VII having been Duke of York prior to ascending to the throne.

The complex tartan of the coat is finely woven at 76 epi⁸, much finer than typical early 19th century tartan, and has a slight difference in the warp and weft pattern; the former having fine blue guards to the light blue pivot – marked X (Plate 7).



X

Plate 7. Full sett of the coat tartan with blue guards to the light blue pivot in the warp. © The Author.

The omission of the blue guards in the weft was obviously deliberate as it occurs through what is otherwise a balanced warp and weft pattern. Whether this was a design choice or the result of running out of yarn to match is unknown but as the blue from the broader band could have been substituted with little obvious difference, it seems likely that it was a conscious decision. In all, there are nine colours: three shades of blue; two reds; green; yellow; black and white in the warp pattern. Such complex patterns are a feature of a number of mid-18th century patterns; a similar pattern was used in a plaid said to have been used by the Prince at the siege of Carlisle a few months before Culloden (Fig 1).



Coat said to have been worn by Prince Charles Edward at Culloden, 1746



Plaid said to have been used by Prince Charles Edward during the siege of Carlisle, 1745

Fig 1. Comparison of the coat tartan with that of a plaid used by Prince Charles at Carlisle © The Author.

⁸ Ends (threads) Per Inch which equates to approximately 28 ends per centimetre.

The Trews

Due to the cutting and shaping needed to fit them, trews would have been a more expensive garment than a kilt and were generally the preserve of Highland gentry. They were also the preferred choice for equestrian use. Surviving examples of 18th century trews are even rarer than surviving coats; this pair therefore offer a unique opportunity to examine one style of construction.

The material is a worsted wool 2/2 twill, finely woven at 80 epi with a half-inch red and green dice/check pattern. It is unusually narrow, around 13 inches wide, meaning that several sections needed to be joined in order to construct the pattern on the bias for the legs which are attached to the straight cut trunk section. The trews are made from several unmatched pieces and included a separate waistband. These pieces are more easily seen if viewed in black and white (Plate 8).



Plate 8. Trews with the seams highlighted to show the irregular construction. © The Author

There are four domed death's head buttons⁹ on the single fly closure (Plate 9) and a further two on the waistband which is lined with a white woollen twill-weave cloth to add stability. There are latter has two rows of eye-holes at the rear of the waistband for a tightening cord but this is missing (Plate 10).

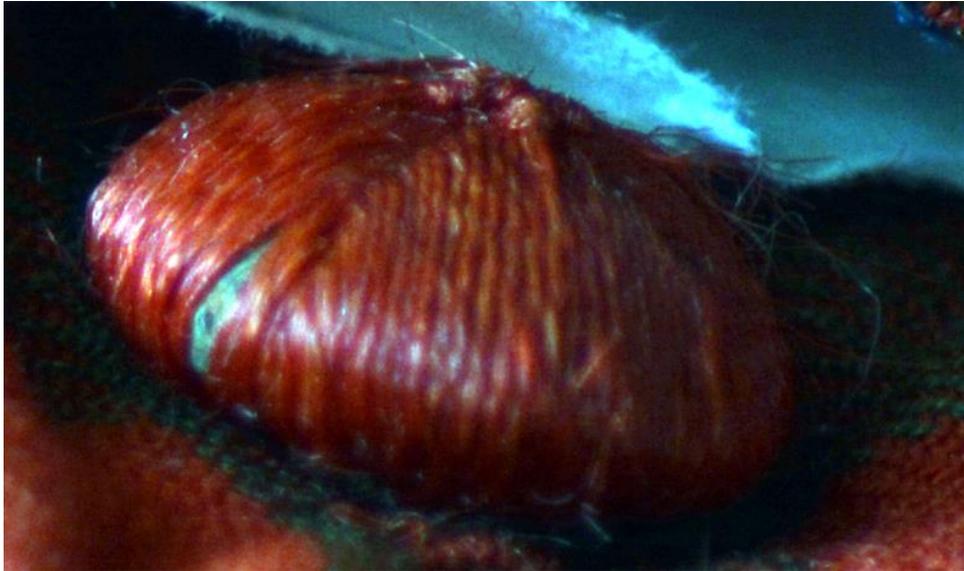


Plate 9. Domed death head button on the trews. Photo: EF Williams.



Plate 10. Waist lining and rear eyelets for a tightening cord. Photo: EF Williams.

⁹ The term "death head" comes from the German word 'Totenkopf', literally, a 'dead man's head'; so-called because the crisscross design used to weave the button looks like the crossed bones under the skull. This type of button is found on numerous garments dating from the early 1700's to the late 19th century. It was made when a bone, horn, or, wooden button form was wrapped with thread. The domed style was earlier and it became less so over time until a flat form was the norm.

Damage to the soles of both feet through apparent wear is evidence of considerable use (Plate 11). There is also staining to the inner thighs that may reflect contamination from saddle dressing (Plate 12).



Plate 10. Damage to the foot section of both legs. Photo: EF Williams.



Plate 12. Discolouration of thigh areas. Photo: EF Williams

Although no dye analysis has been conducted, the quality of the red is indicative of the use of cochineal; whilst the green would have been a combination of indigo (blue) and an unknown yellow source. The green shows evidence of uneven dyeing with some of the yarn

being much yellower. The regular spacing of the different shades confirms that the yarn was hank-dyed rather than dyed in the fleece, Whether the difference is due to the green having been produced in two different dye-lots, or that the dyeing was inconsistent in a single vat is not clear.

The red and green check is a variation of the more frequently seen red and black pattern found in a number of mid-18th century portraits. The latter pattern was called *Rob Roy* in early 19th century pattern books; at the same time, the red and green version was sold under the name *No.66 or Small MacLachlan*. Today it is more commonly known as Moncrieffe.

The Prince's Clothes?

In a letter written in Inverness on April 22nd, 1746 by Donald Campbell of Airds to Archibald Campbell of Stonefield he describes the Prince at Culloden, when the army was drawn up in battle array the day before at Newlands, as wearing '*a tartan jacket and a buff vest*'. Whether the coat discussed here could have been worn in such a manner has not been determined. On the day of the battle, eye witness accounts report the Prince was covered in spattered mud and blood, as his horse was hit by artillery fire and fell under him.

Regretfully, the identity of the lady from whom Augustine Earle is said to have acquired the suit is not known. If these were the Prince's clothes that he wore at Culloden then there are three places where he might have exchanged them for something less obvious in the hours and days following the battle (Plate 13). His movements have been well documented.^{iv} After leaving the field on the 16th April his route took him down the east side of Loch Ness; passing Fort Augustus, his party stopped for the night at Droynachan just north of Invergarry. Early the following morning they made their way along Loch Arkaig to Donald Cameron's house (a bothy) in Glen Pean where they spent two days and then on to Arisaig to stay with MacDonald of Borrodale. It is perhaps nothing more than a coincidence that the story surrounding the MacDonald of Borrodale tartan is that it is taken from clothes given to the Prince by Lady Borrodale '*the better to disguise him and make him pass for one of the country*'.¹⁰

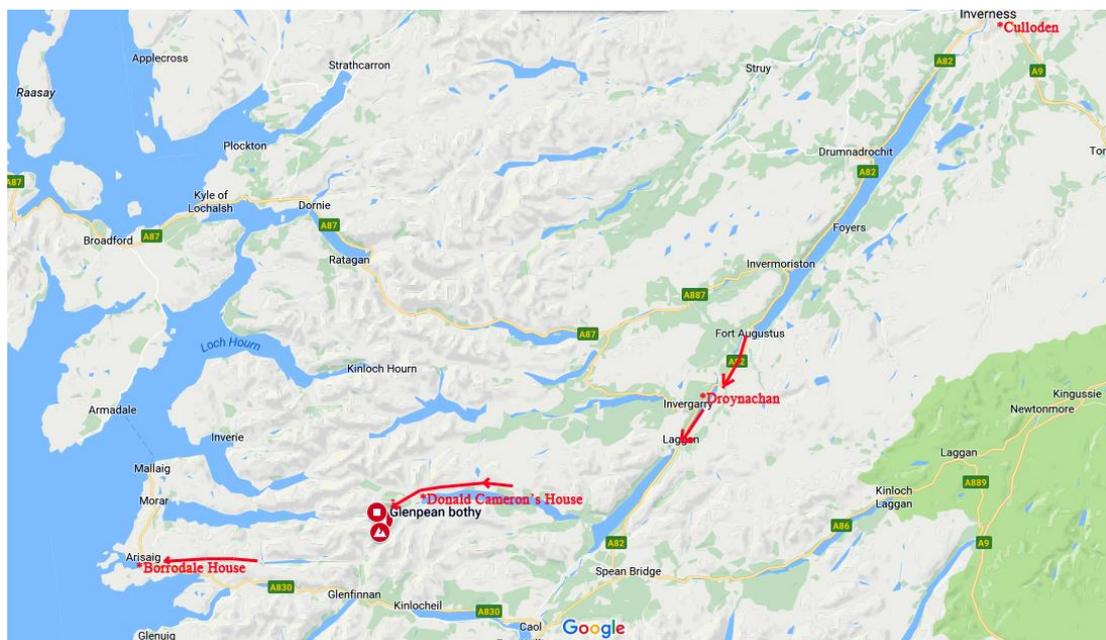


Plate 13. The Prince's route following Culloden and possible places that he might have changed clothes for something less obvious.

¹⁰ The implication being that his clothes were too obviously those belonging to someone of rank. The story is discussed in detail here - https://www.scottishtartans.co.uk/MacDonald_of_Borrodale.pdf

Conclusion

It is unlikely that it will ever be possible to confirm with certainty whether this suit was worn by Prince Charles Edward at Culloden, or indeed elsewhere. Dunbar's assertion^v that this could not have belonged to the Prince because it was too small and the tartan consistent with early 19th century cloth is questionable. Not only would the suit have fitted someone taller than his estimate of under five feet, the quality of the cloth and dye shades are consistent with extant mid-18th century examples. The employment of the Jacobite (Tudor) rose on the coat buttons certainly supports it having been the property of the Prince or someone in his close circle.

Dunbar's assessment of the suit being from the first quarter of the 19th century is also at odds with the cut and construction of the coat and trews which are entirely consistent with the purported mid-18th century date. There are no known examples of Highland Revival clothing being retrospective, they are stylistically all contemporary with the fashion of the time c.1780-1840. Features such as the rearward facing and bottom fastening epaulettes, domed death head buttons, construction of the jacket buttons, plus the biased and straight cut construction of the trews all support this outfit being earlier.

This is the first detailed assessment of the suit. The construction and stylistic features support a mid-18th century date, so too the tartan and assumed dyes. Further research and dye analysis would help to establish whether the initial observations by the author hold true. It would be ideal if it could be made available on long term loan to a museum in Scotland where it could be viewed and studied further.



Plate 14. Reconstruction of the unnamed tartan of the coat. © The Author

ⁱ **DUNBAR J. T.** 1962 *The History of Highland Dress*. Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh

ⁱⁱ **PRESTON J.** 2003 *The Squires of Heydon Hall* Quiller Press, Shrewsbury

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid.*

^{iv} **BLAIKIE W. B.** 1897 *Itinerary of Prince Charles Edward Stuart from his landing in Scotland, July 1745 to his departure in September 1745. Compiled from The Lyon in Mourning supplemented and corrected from other contemporary sources*. The Scottish History Society, Vol XXIII

^v *Ibid.*