

# THE RE-ENACTMENT OF THE NEWBURY COAT 25<sup>TH</sup> AND 26<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2011

The 1811 Newbury Coat



Courtesy of the National Trust

## **History of the Coat**

‘On the day above stated, (Tuesday the 25 June 1811) at five o’clock in the morn- ing Sir John Throckmorton presented two South Down sheep to Mr. Coxeter of Greenham Mills near Newbury, Berkshire. The Sheep were immediately shorn, the Wool sorted and spun, the Yarn spool’d, warp’d, loom’d & wove, The Cloth burr’d. mill’d, row’d, dy’d, dry’d, shear’d and pressed. The Cloth having been thus made in 11 hours was put into the Hands of the Tailors at 4 o’clock in the afternoon who completed the Coat at 20 minutes past 6. Mr. Coxeter then pre- sented the Coat to Sir John Throckmorton who appeared with it the same Evening at the Pelican Inn, Speenhamland. The Cloth was a hunting Kersey of the admired Dark Wellington colour: The Sheep were roasted whole & distrib- uted to the Public with 120 Gallons of Strong Beer. It was supposed that upwards of 5000 people were assembled to witness this Singular and unprecedented per- formance, which was completed in the space of 13 hours and 20 minutes. Sir John and about 40 gentlemen sat down to a Dinner provided by Mr. Coxeter and spent the Evening with the utmost satisfaction at the success of their undertaking.’

(from a History of Buckland)

### **The events of Tuesday 25th June 1811**

**The story of the Throckmorton Coat as told by those involved.**

#### **Sir John Throckmorton**

I’d had the idea for a long  
time And spoke of it once  
when we met The others

considered it folly  
And one said "Do you want to bet?"

At last we shook hands on a  
wager, I knew that the  
fellows could do it.  
John Coxeter, old White the tailor~  
and shearing the sheep ~ Francis Druett.

**Francis Druett**

A good job the master chose  
summer! T'were daylight by  
four on the clock, The missus  
'ad everything ready,  
Me 'at and me boots and me smock

I got to the farm good and early  
With lots of folk watching ~ (the  
fools!) I 'adn't to start before  
sunrise ~  
They said that were "one o'the rules."

By 'alf after five I 'ad done it  
~ they just wanted wool from  
two sheep. I keep pretty tidy  
when working  
The fleeces were both in a heap.

The crowd disappeared from the farm then  
~ it all went quiet and still.  
The runners 'ad grabbed up the  
fleeces And dashed with them  
off to the millThe The

## The Throckmorton Coat in 1991 and 2011

There were two re-enactments of the making of the coat, one in 1991 and one on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2011. As a comparison in '91 at the Newbury Show we had a large Marquee which played a big part in our success, having a large raised dais cordoned off with the layout designed to accommodate all the processes. This ensured that the public did not interrupt the proceedings.

At the Corn Exchange in 2011 space was at a premium with some operations being on a different level and some being outside the hall. In '91 we had a mechanical carder which was a big advantage making life a bit easier for the spinners and helping to speed up the process. 2011 saw a number of drum carders working flat out to keep up with the demand of carded fleece for the spinners.

The weaving at both events took a similar course, with the usual hiccups of broken threads and sticky warps. But with perseverance and sweat the cloth was finally cut from the looms. Fulling was done to musical accompaniment on both occasions.

Dyeing was done under more difficult conditions in 2011 with the public and press milling around outside the hall, as opposed to the previous effort when more space was allocated, although people were still able to see the transformation of the cloth from white to blue.

The next stage was the tailoring which again was done under pressure trying to beat the clock.

Finally it was taken to be modelled the first time by a TV celebrity and last time by the local MP. All of this was of a great learning experience, readying us to have another go in the near future.

# THE DETAIL OF 2011



## **The Opening Party.**

**L to R, The Town Crier, Brian Sylvester, Magnus Birch (of the Throckmorton family), Newbury Mayor Jeff Beck, John Clarke, Bill Skidmore, Rex Coxeter, descendant of mill owner John Coxeter**

The 2011 event was opened on the steps of the Town Hall by the Mayor, Town Crier, descendants of the Throckmorton and Coxeter families as well as Mr. Bill Skidmore, the President of the Huddersfield Textile Society. Prayers were said by the Vicar of St. Mary's Church Greenham.



David Thomas

**Linda Scurr (the Event Organiser) and the Town Crier**

The bell was rung, and then the sheep were shorn by hand in the Market Square attracting a large crowd. Their fleece was run across the Market to the Corn Exchange Theatre which had been stripped bare of its seating. Teams of pickers and carders prepared the fleece for 4 teams of spinners. The spinners started spinning at 6 twists per inch for the warp and 4 twists for the weft. Both warp and weft had a count of 12 wraps per inch.

# Dealing with the Fleece



**Tim Franks carrying the Pol-Dorsetfleece into the Corn Exchange**



**Carding the fleece**

Bobbins of wool were passed to teams winding warps and filling shuttles. Initially there was a problem with the warp threads breaking on the looms but a suggestion from Bill Skidmore of Huddersfield Textile Society that we sprayed the warp with starch saw a mad dash into town to purchase several tins. This worked.

Once the cloth was off the loom, broken warps were darned in before being rushed out into the Market Place to be fulled and dyed. The fulling process was the ideal opportunity for our VIPs to join in, marching on the cloth in a bath tub of hot soapy water in time to music provided by the Morris dancers. Out of the fulling tub, the cloth was run through an old fashioned mangle and on to the dyeing process. Indigo vats had been prepared to dye the cloth blue and amazed the large crowds waiting to see the cloth change from yellowy green into blue.

Once dyed, the cloth was returned into the Corn Exchange where it was stretched on tenter frames and ironed almost dry. The tailors did an amazing job of cutting and sewing the coat in 2 hours 1 minute. The total time taken was 14 hours 44 minutes while in 1991 it was done in 12hours 39 minutes. In 1811 it took 13hours and 20 minutes. At the end, there was a large crowd assembled to see Richard Benyon, our local MP, model the coat.



**General View of the Corn Exchange on Saturday. Carding and Cleaning at bottom right. Larger loom on the stage with some spinners. Smaller loom on floor in front of the stage. Everywhere else spinners.**





Pam Caine

**Concentrating on Cleaning the Fleece**

## **The Spinners**



Pam Caine

**Above Maggie Mockridge (l)  
and Pam Caine (r).  
Right Sue Bramwell**



Pam Caine

## Weaving the Cloth

Two looms were used. One which could produce 36 inch wide fabric was very kindly loaned to the Guild by Wiltshire Guild. This was transported to the Corn Exchange all warped up with the ghost warp and was installed on the floor of the Corn Exchange so the public could see it at close quarters. With hindsight, we should have roped off a space round the loom as the public crowded in too much. The second loom could produce 50 inch wide cloth but it was used to produce a fabric 44 inches wide. This loom had to be dismantled and brought to the Corn Exchange in pieces, then assembled on the stage and warped up with the ghost warp..

### Weaving on the 36 inch Loom

Tying on the Ghost Warp  
Jane Rowley (l) and  
Kathleen Harris (r)

Photo Pam Caine



### **The Warp being wound onto both Looms**



Pam Caine

We started the weaving on Sat. afternoon with two people throwing the shuttle and one changing sheds and beating, which worked well. We did have a big problem with the shuttle falling through and broken threads which slowed the weaving down, by the time we finished on Sat. evening we had not woven anywhere



near enough to meet the challenge time and went home quite despondent.



**Debbie Richardson weaving on the 36 inch Loom. Kathleen Harris repairing shuttles in the background**

### **Weaving on the 50 inch Loom**



**Weaving on the 50 inch loom, Left to Right Chris Fletcher, Pat Foster, Louisa Homden and Chris Wright**

## **Dyeing or Indigo under Pressure**

I knew that the dyeing process for the Newbury Coat would be make or break so the pressure was on from the moment I was volunteered for the task. I was very concerned that in 30 minutes I had the potential to completely destroy the cloth which we'd all worked so hard to create. For weeks I had been pondering the best way of having an indigo dye bath at its optimum at the precise moment that the cloth became available for dyeing.

Now the trouble with indigo is that it requires a complex combination of chemicals to enable the dye to be taken up by the cloth. Firstly, the indigo powder is only soluble in a strong alkali. Secondly, all the oxygen has to be removed from the dyebath so that the indigo molecules can get into the cloth. An additional problem is that it takes several hours for the chemicals to do their job. Finally, the bath needs to be kept at a minimum of 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

The lengths of fabric were submerged and two or three Guild members stood in the vat with bare feet and walked up and down to make sure the dye penetrated evenly and the fabric was fulfilled. The fabric was then put through an old fashioned mangle to remove water and get it as dry as possible. But the fabric was still too damp to be made up.

## **Ironing and the Tenter Frame**

Two tenter frames had been built previously. The fabric was mounted on these and a team of ironers set to work. To dry it all as fast as possible.



Albert Moss



D Walker



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D Walker

## Sewing It Together

A toile had been created in the preceding weeks and the pattern pieces were all ready to go. A team Of sewers then sewed up the pieces by hand





**The MP for Newbury, Richard Benyon, wearing the 2011 coat**



1811



1991



2011



## Snippets

I had a great time learning new skills - I'd never done any carding before, nor tried to sew the same piece of fabric at the same time as several other "expert sewers" (as the Newbury Weekly News described us.

Seeing the process flowing from one task to another put our crafts in context and I really enjoyed working closely with people I'd only seen in the distance before as well as with a close friend. Team leaders, Lesley (Dunn) (spinning / carding blue team) and Meg (Crowther) (tailoring), were both lovely and really encouraged us, though I didn't envy them their levels of stress!

Some people were disappointed that we didn't beat our previous time and I can sympathise with that but we were still well within the daylight hours of the original bet and personally I got so much out of it that I don't really care about the time. There was even an unexpected few minutes free to demonstrate my favourite braiding while waiting for the sewing to start!

Kath Clouston

One of the things that really struck me, throughout both days, was the number of people we had coming through, and coming back the next day to view completion. People came back with friends, or with children, or parents - it became quite a family event. Having done quite a lot of events over the years in Newbury, I felt the public really enjoyed it, and the fact that it had its roots in both local history and fascinating crafts. In my view it was an extraordinary community event.

I also think the staff at the cafe in the Corn Exchange need a word of thanks - as they were so very helpful - they were the folk that gave me huge jugs of ice to freshen up the weavers! And they never demurred when I came back to get more, and took it in turns to go and view what was going on!

Yvette Jones

The weavers had to work very hard because of all the broken threads. On Sunday we were at the big loom from 1100 to 1500 without even a comfort break. And it was a very hot airless day. We were saved by Yvette Jones appearing with cups of iced water every half hour. In my opinion, she saved all us weavers. Thank you, Yvette.

Pat Foster

What can I remember of the Newbury Coat weekend?

Lots of visitors. Noise. Lots of activity. Teasing the fleece. Carding. Spinning. Collecting the bobbins. Winding warps. Tying and winding on the warp. Weaving. Mending warps. Iced water. Ice creams. Fulling. Indigo dyeing. Ironing the cloth. Sewing the coat. Elated. Exhausted.

What a wonderful time. We all worked together, had a wonderful weekend and should be proud of our achievements. We have given wonderful memories to thousands of people.

Rosie Pri

