

***A Private's Coatee, 1854 - 1856***

## **The Person**

This style of coatee would have been worn by the rank and file, the lowest rank of the British Army. This particular item was acquired when the Army Clothing Factory at Pimlico, London, closed in the 1930s. It is likely that it was used as a pattern as it is particularly small, has no size stamped on the lining and very little damage from wear. This coatee was, therefore, never worn by a serving soldier during the Crimean War. The campaign was marked by disease, such as cholera and dysentery. Of the Green Howards Regiment, nearly 700 men died in action or of wounds, 314 died of disease, nearly half of the total deaths.

This coatee would have been a soldier's fighting uniform as well as his dress uniform. Soldiers were ordered to burn all their clothing and equipment to try to prevent diseases being brought back to Britain. As a result of this order, only a few such coatees survive to the present day.

Roger Fenton, the first war journalist and photographer, took a number of photographs of the Green Howards serving in the Crimea. His photographs show a range of subjects from soldiers at rest to battlefield scenes. It is important to note however that many of the photographs were staged. Despite this, they show the variety of clothing and uniforms worn by the soldiers, both officers and rank and file. British army uniform was not suitable for either Crimean summers or winters. Charles William Usherwood wrote in his diary that the men were sweltering in their full dress uniforms and often discarded their stocks (leather bands worn around the neck) in the heat. Men often experienced heatstroke during summers. Conversely in the winter, having worn through their clothing, Major J Lidwell records the men as "ragged, dirty and bootless, and melting away from want of food, and the want of sufficient clothing and protection from an almost Arctic climate."



Photograph taken by Roger Fenton, June 1855 of officers of the 19th Regiment. The Green Howards Museum.

## *The Design*

The coatee is single-breasted and made of much coarser broadcloth than that of the officers' uniforms. White cotton tape attached in pairs decorates the front of the chest. Similarly to earlier uniforms, a rounded chest is created by cutting the chest panel longer along the buttons. There is therefore more fabric at the front so creating the rounded chest and narrow waist. The cotton tape is used to emphasise this shape by shortening the length of the tape towards the waist. Ten regimental buttons fasten the coatee shut. They are made of pewter. Only one button (which is on the epaulette) is original. As a pattern, the clothing factory would only require one button on the item to work from. Regimental buttons and the green facings on the cuffs, collar and epaulettes enable easy identification of soldiers.

In addition to the coatee, the soldier would have worn a shirt, trousers and boots. Two types of trousers were issued to soldiers. Grey oxford mixture to be worn 15th October to 30th April and dark blue serge trousers to be worn 1st May – 14th October. Both have a red welt down the side, like those worn by serving military personnel today. Although regulations state that these trousers were to be worn at different times of the year, Roger Fenton's photographs show that soldiers were wearing whatever they had to hand.

The tails are cut far back from the hip and lie smoothly over the lower back. White common broadcloth is used to form faux turn-backs with four regimental buttons. There are no pockets cut into the coatee tails. The tails are instead lined simply with coarse serge. A tiny pocket has been cut into the exterior of the garment just above the fourth pair of cotton tapes. Instead of pockets, the rank and file must rely on the equipment they carry.

Equipment includes water bottles, belts and haversacks. The equipment displayed with this coatee includes a waistbelt, crossbelt with percussion cap pouch, water bottle, ammunition bag, knapsack and a D type mess tin. In addition to these items, the soldier would have had his weaponry. The ammunition pouch is made of thick leather and contains tin compartments to store ammunition. The water bottle is a small barrel-like accoutrement and this style was in use throughout the period from Waterloo to after the Crimean War. Finally the knapsack is black, with a wooden frame behind it and has the regimental number 19 painted in white to make it identifiable.

The coatee sleeves are wider and straighter. A Private did not have the opportunity to acquire made to measure uniforms. Instead they had a range of sizes to choose the best fit. The sleeves could not therefore be cut too small. A slight curve is cut into the fabric to reduce excess material but it is not overly fitted. The forearm is not narrowed and the cuff does not have a plaquet with buttons cut into it. Instead the arm is cut straight. The epaulettes are made from green common broadcloth to match the facings with cotton tape and worsted wool decoration.



Top left: Sleeve shape.



Top right: Cuff.

Bottom left: Shoulder seam.

Bottom right: Coatee tails.





Top: Cotton tape facings with 19th Reg button. Note the pocket inserted above the facing.  
Bottom left: Front view of knapsack.  
Bottom right: Reverse view of knapsack.



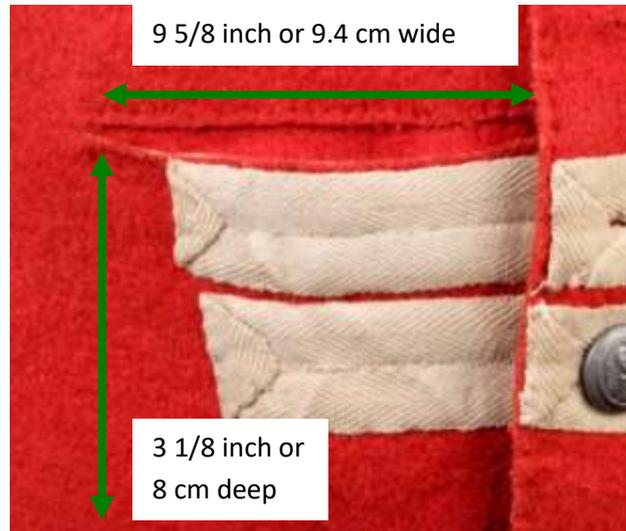


Top: View of fastenings on the ammunition pouch.  
Bottom: Top view of water bottle with stopper.



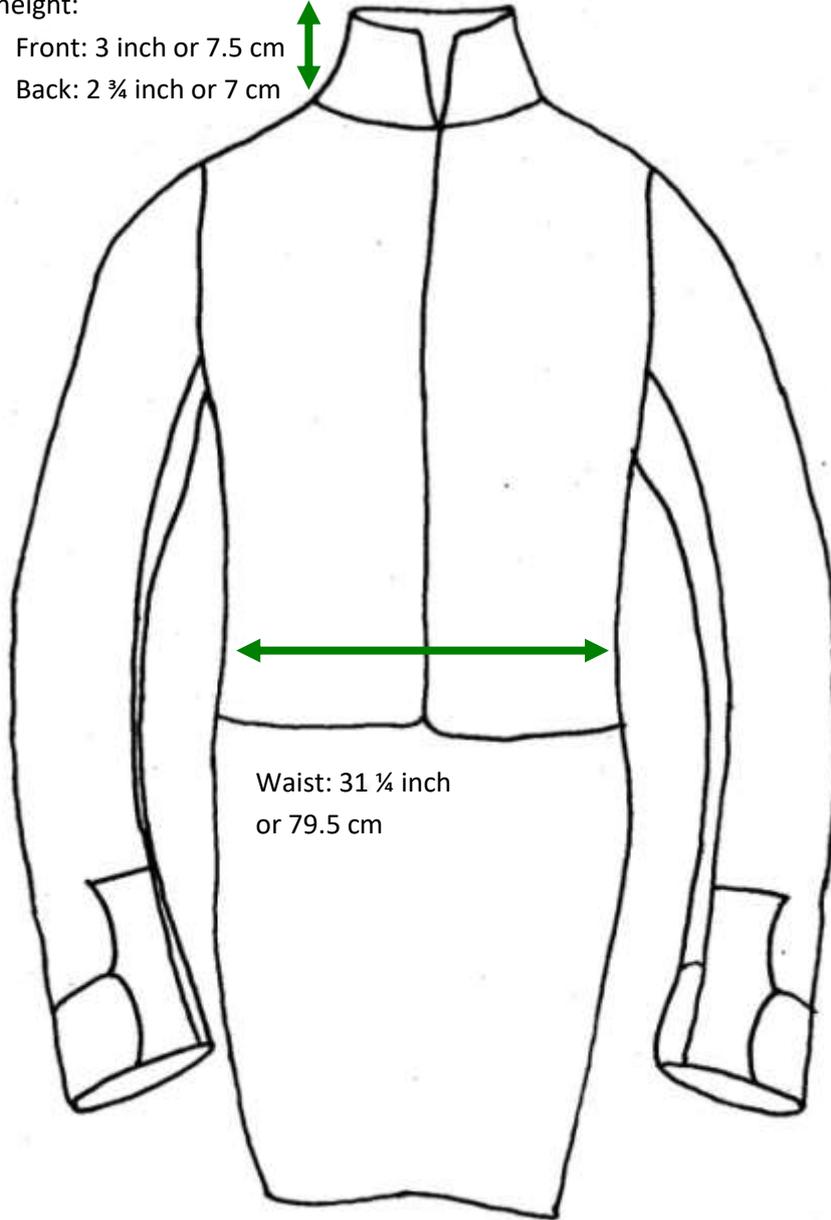
## *Item Measurements and Fabrics*

Unusually for the period, this coatee is hand-stitched. The government had awarded a contract to Peter Tait in 1854 to manufacture uniforms using a sewing machine. As this garment was likely a pattern it was not mass produced as the others would have been.

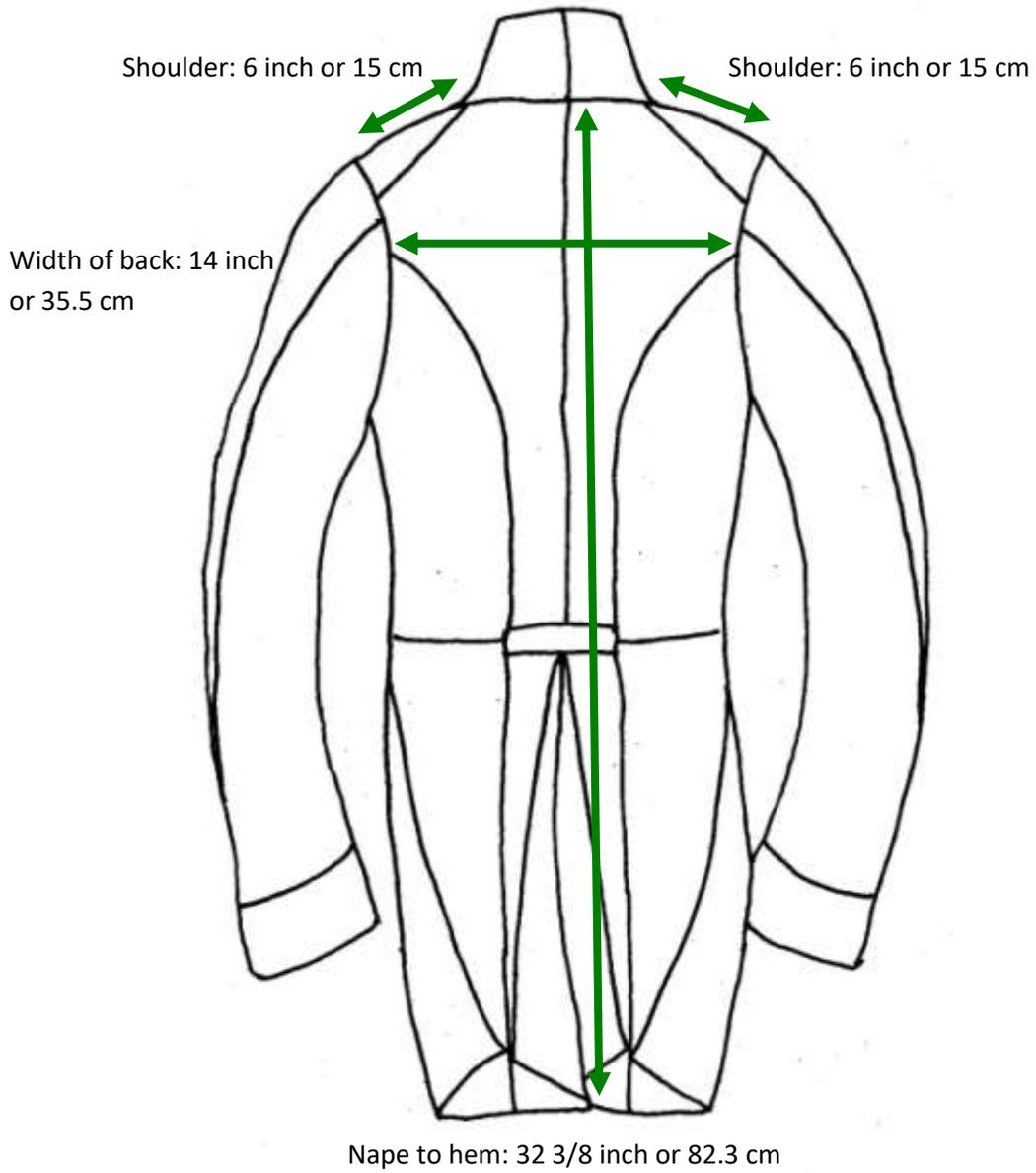


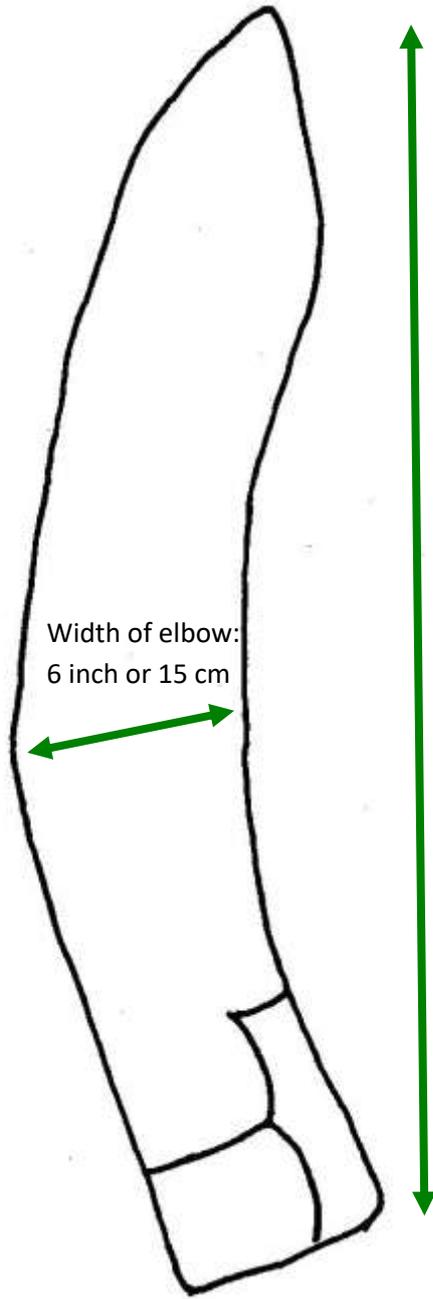
Collar height:

- Front: 3 inch or 7.5 cm
- Back: 2 ¾ inch or 7 cm



Waist: 31 ¼ inch  
or 79.5 cm





Width of elbow:  
6 inch or 15 cm

Sleeve length: 27  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch  
or 69.3 cm



Red common broadcloth.



Green common broadcloth facings.



Cream coarse linen lining.



White serge tail lining.



White cotton tape, pewter regimental buttons.