

***Thomas Michelson's Coatee, 1815-1820***

## *The Person*

Captain Thomas Michelson belonged to the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the North Yorkshire Militia as signified by the black velvet facings of his coat. The militia was a domestic force raised in the event of an invasion or domestic unrest. Militia groups were organised by the Lord Lieutenants, with members recruited from the local population. As they acted as a police force, a militia force could not serve in the county they were recruited from. In this period, regular soldiers were recruited by ballot, meaning that if you were chosen you had to either serve or pay someone to take your place. Officers were not balloted as their membership was seen to be part of their civic duty. The 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment was based at Malton, North Yorkshire and formed initially in 1809. Although the regiment was raised in North Yorkshire this does not mean that the regiment was confined to the county. They could be sent anywhere in the entire country. During times of war the militia was posted for many months away from home. Many men also transferred from the militia to the regular army during war. When the country was not at war, Michelson would have been required to attend training for a few weeks each year. When Michelson was commissioned on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1815 England was still engaged in the Napoleonic War.

Uniform was provided by the government, with financial provision provided to the commander of the regiment. Colonel Dundas, North York Regiment, issued a statement on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1803 concerning the soldier's appearance. He ordered that the men should not deviate from the prescribed regimental uniform. The men were to wear a coat, with white waistcoats and breeches which include the regimental buttons. Black topped boots were to be worn at all times, unless on parade in the afternoon or evening. At these occasions officers were permitted to wear shoes and buckles if they wished. The following other items were also required: black regimental cloth gaiters, black silk or leather stocks, cocked hats, swords and knots, crossbelt, sash and gorget. Each officer was also to be provided with a regimental greatcoat of blue cloth with a scarlet trim.

## The Design

Michelson's coatee combines military and civilian male fashions of the Regency period. Civilian fashion calls for coats cut away squarely at the waist, little decoration and tall collars. Focus was placed on well cut and well tailored garments as a sign of quality. This particular coatee is not as tailored as other items in the museum's collection. It is cut without a waist seam causing it to hang more loosely on the body. Tailoring at the back of the garment creates an exceptionally narrow back and therefore the appearance of a waistline. Faux pockets decorate the skirts of the coatee. The pocket flap displays a scalloped edge with white superfine broadcloth trim. Each is decorated with four regimental buttons with buttonholes of red thread.

Facings are the way in which a regiment is identified by its uniform. In this case, black cuffs, lapels and collar denote the North York Militia. An order dated 1796 requires the lapels to extend to the waist and fasten shut with hooks and eyes. This coatee fastens shut only at the top of the jacket with three pairs of hooks and eyes. The lapels are then cut to sit slightly open without being fastened. They are tapered towards the bottom and then curve outwards where the final button sits to highlight the shape of the waist. The coatee is cut away squarely at the front corresponding to Regency fashions.

The collar is particularly tall, faced with black velvet with a single regimental button placed above the epaulette. North York Militia buttons consist of a crown atop a Yorkshire Rose surrounded by a garter which reads "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*". This translates as "*Shame on Him Who Thinks This Evil*". The motto is that of the British monarch, specifically the Order of the Garter. Many military regiments include it in their badges. Underneath the garter are the words North York.

The back of the coatee is well cut with the orientation of the shoulder, back and sleeve seams creating a distinctive kite-like shape. The seam which fits around the arm extends almost half way up the natural shoulder. The shoulder seam extends from the back of the neck to the back of the shoulder, instead of across the top of the wearers shoulder. The placement of these seams causes the back of the garment to be particularly narrow; narrower than the natural body shape. Epaulettes can be attached through specially made holes in the coatee. In this case the epaulettes are thickly padded underneath to ensure they hang squarely on the shoulders of the wearer. Wound metal strips decorate the epaulette along with tiny sequins and beads.

Sleeve shape is correspondingly well shaped with a slight curve to the elbow section to reduce excess fabric. However, excess fabric underneath the arm and at the back of the shoulder is caused by the orientation of the shoulder, back and sleeve seams. This excess of fabric allows the wearer some degree of movement which would be restricted by the narrow back.



Top: Black velvet facings with hooks eyes. Only one pair remains.  
Bottom: Fashionably tall collar.





Top left: Faux pockets attached to skirts.  
Top right: Positioning of shoulder, back and sleeve seam.  
Bottom: Epaulette.







Top left: Sleeve shape.

Top right: Quilted lining.

Bottom: Sword belt clasp.



## ***Item Measurements and Fabric.***

Michelson's coatee has been made by hand. The fabrics used are of such high quality that they do not require hemming, such as the bottom of the tails. In some cases the fabric has been turned back upon itself to create a thicker, softer edge.



Buttons: ½ inch or 1.2 cm



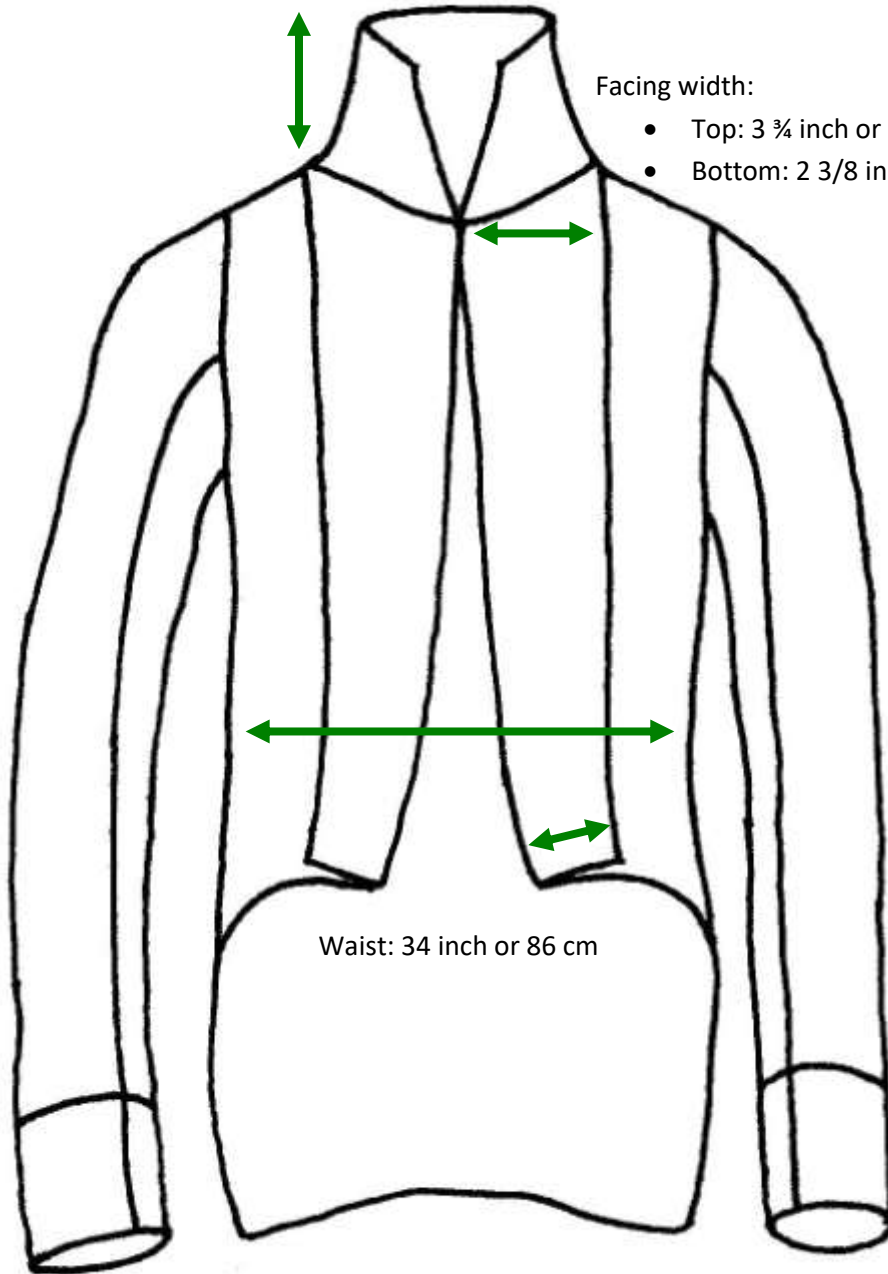
6 ¼ inch or 16 cm wide

2 inch or 5 cm deep

Collar height: 3 3/8 inch or 8.5 cm

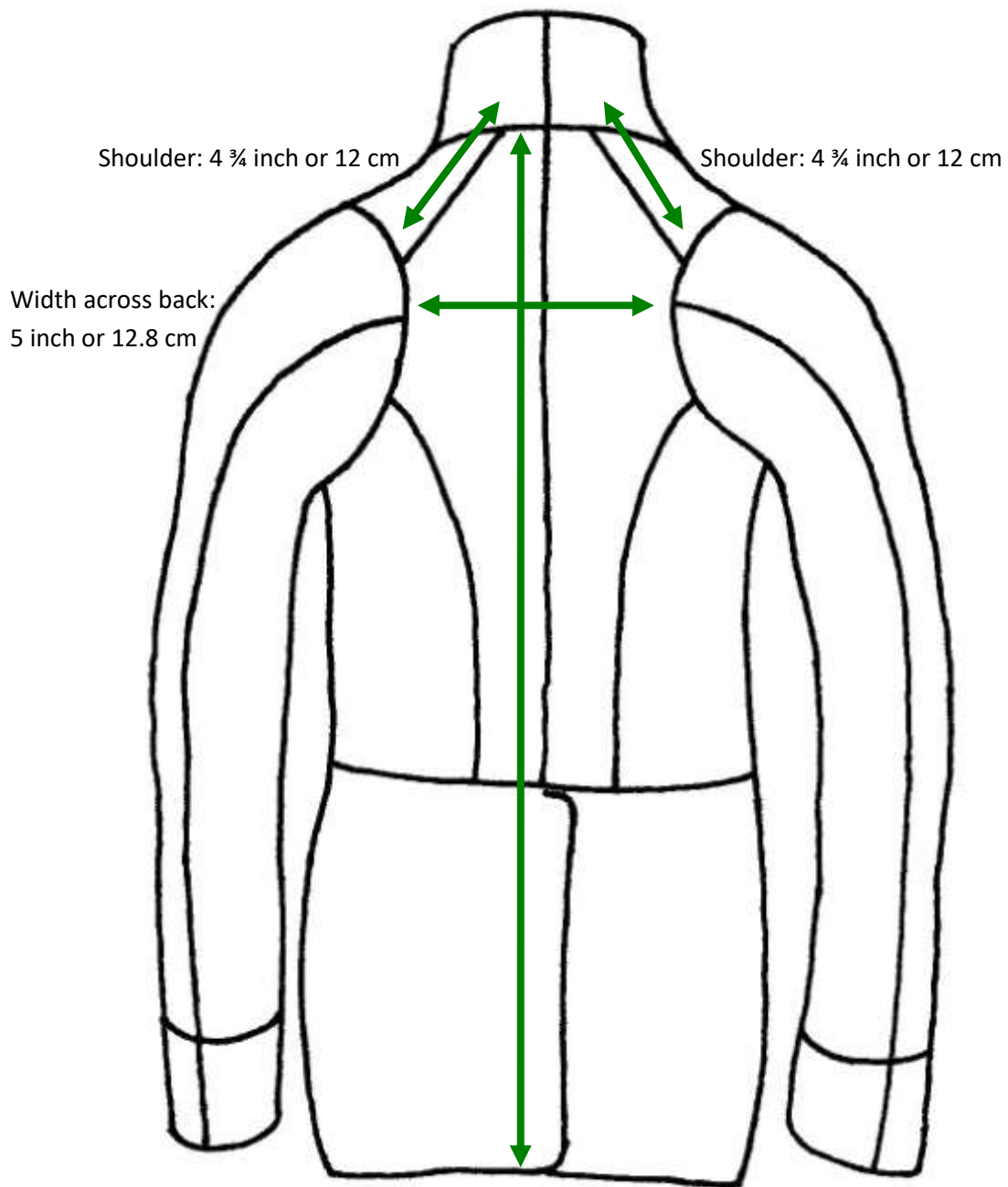
Facing width:

- Top: 3 3/4 inch or 9.5 cm
- Bottom: 2 3/8 inch or 6 cm



Waist: 34 inch or 86 cm



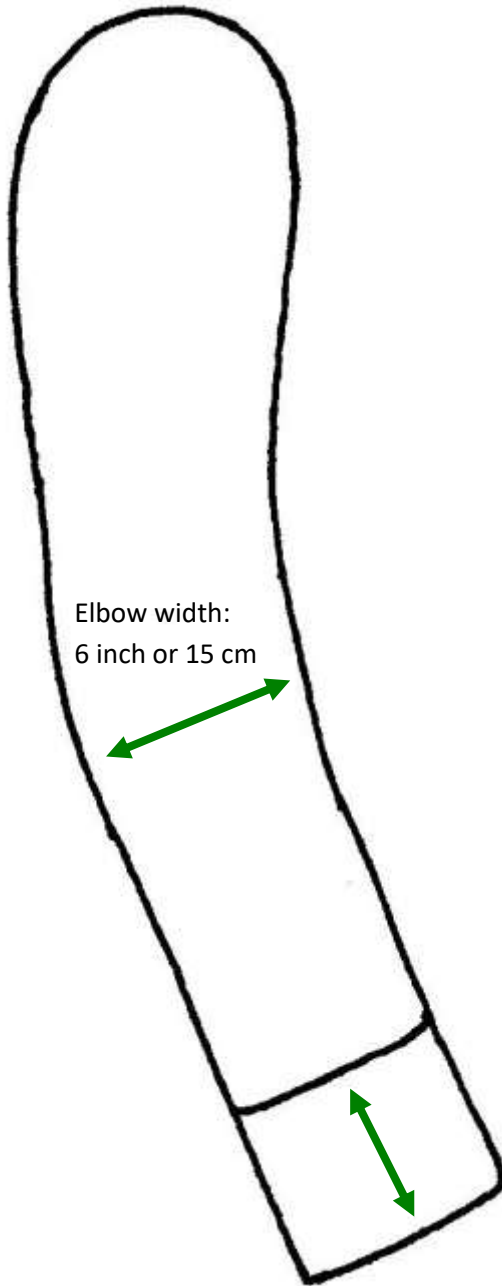


Shoulder: 4 ¾ inch or 12 cm

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Width across back:  
5 inch or 12.8 cm

Nape to hem: 25 inch or 63.5 cm



Elbow width:  
6 inch or 15 cm

Sleeve length:  
28 ¾ inch or 73 cm

Cuff height: 3 3/8 inch or 8.5 cm



Red superfine broadcloth



White superfine broadcloth



Black velvet



White linen lining