



## What's Beneath Your Feet?

### Georgian Costume



#### Rich Girl

#### Dress

Cotton or muslin

This dress is *Empire* line – the most popular style of dress in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. An Empire line dress was slim and high waisted with a low square neckline. It was named after Napoleon's First Empire in France; his wife Josephine wore the style.

Those in avant-garde circles and with a daring fashion sense would wear this type of dress without a slip or stays (corset). A few of the young and daring ladies even wore their light muslin dresses damp, as this made the fabric cling to their figures. However the majority continued to wear petticoats and stays. Sometimes a coloured silk slip was worn under a thin muslin or silk gown so that the colour showed through, creating a very pretty effect. Pantaloons or pantalettes were also worn underneath.

Pale colours and white were worn for afternoon or eveningwear. Prints and colour were generally worn in the morning or at home. A pristine well-laundered dress emphasised social standing.



**Rich Girl**

**Pantaloons or Pantalettes**

Cotton

Pantaloons, or pantalettes were worn underneath an Empire line gown. They usually reached to the ankle or just below the knee. When pantaloons were first introduced they were thought to be quite scandalous and it was said no lady would ever be seen in a pair! Interestingly they were sometimes single legs held up by tapes, or if a complete garment, were always made with an open crotch for all ages. Very practical!



**Rich Girl**

**Tippet**

Wool

The jacket worn over the top of the rich girl's dress is called a tippet. A tippet was a cropped coat. It was typically worn over a high waisted Empire line dress for warmth. The tippet usually had a large collar and long sleeves, and was fastened at the back.

The tippet was an alternative to the *spencer*, a short topcoat with long sleeves, fastened at the front. The spencer had evolved from a man's coat worn by the Earl of Spencer. Spencers were worn by females outdoors and indoors, for day and evening wear, and made from a variety of fabrics, such as cotton and silk. A spencer can be compared to today's cardigan.



**Poor Girl**

**Dress**

Cotton

This dress is typical of the style worn by a lower class young girl. It has the same shape as the rich girl's dress: simply tailored with a high waist. It is unlikely that a lower class girl would have worn a dress of white muslin; harder wearing material such as light wool or brushed cotton would be used instead.

This dress is fastened by tapes – ribbons would be used by the middle and upper classes. Ribbon was still an expensive luxury item made of silk and used for decoration. Buttons were sometimes used.



### **Poor Girl**

#### **Apron/Smock**

An apron or smock would usually be worn over the dress. This would protect the dress from wear and tear and prevent it from getting too dirty. It was typically made from unbleached linen.

#### **Shawl**

A simple woollen shawl would have been worn with the dress and smock to provide additional warmth. This was a cheaper alternative to a tailored tippet or spencer. Cloaks were also worn by the lower (and middle/upper classes).



### Rich Boy

#### Shirt

Cotton or linen

This loose shirt with its wide sleeves and open-necked frilled collar is typical of the type worn in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Trousers

Cotton

Before the late 18<sup>th</sup> century countrymen, labourers and sailors had solely worn trousers. However they began to be worn by boys by the end of the century. Trousers tended to be ankle-length or just above the ankle and were tight fitting to begin with, and then a slightly looser fit. Men would not begin to wear trousers until at least the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; when the Duke of Wellington wore a pair to a function in 1814 he was refused admission.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries young boys wore a garment known as the *skeleton suit*. This was a departure from the 18<sup>th</sup> century style of fitted knee breeches, skirted coats, long waistcoats and tricorne hats. Instead the skeleton suit was a soft, comfortable and practical outfit, consisting of a jacket and high waisted trousers that buttoned together. An open-neck shirt with a frill collar was worn and also usually buttoned onto the waist. Skeleton suits tended to be in medium blue colour or buff.



### Rich Boy

#### Coat

Wool

Short jackets or cut-away tailcoats for boys replaced the skeleton suit in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were usually double-breasted and made from wool.



## Rich Boy

### Waistcoat

Cotton

Single or double-breasted waistcoats were adopted by young boys, made from a variety of materials such as wool, cotton and silk.



### Poor Boy

### Smock

Linen

The smock – a garment like a shirt – was worn by working countrymen and boys in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The word smock comes from the name for the embroidery used on the garment. *Smocking* is a technique used to gather fabric to make an item both fitted and flexible. It was used on working smocks around the neckline and at the cuffs. Smocks were made from heavy, hardwearing material such as linen. The length tended to vary from thigh-length to mid-calf.

In country districts very elaborate smocks were made to wear on special occasions such as weddings and celebrations. The style of embroidery and smocking was individual to each county, and can be accurately placed by the designs.



### **Poor Boy**

### **Trousers**

Working-class men had worn trousers before their general acceptance into mainstream fashion in the 1820s. Sailors and countrymen appreciated the practical qualities of trousers, as opposed to the tight-fitting, fussy combination of breeches and stockings. Trousers worn by working men tended to be of a more practical fabric than those worn by the upper classes, for example corduroy.

### **Neckerchief**

A neckerchief was a useful item of clothing for the workingman or boy, for example it protected the neck from the hot sun when working outside. Neckerchiefs could also be used to mop up sweat while working and as an emergency First-Aid bandage.

Gloucestershire Archives





## Lower Class

The children of the lower classes, for example factory workers and agricultural labourers wore variations of the same items as the upper and middle classes. To a certain extent upper and middle class fashions had been influenced by the simpler, freer modes of dress of the lower class through the new fashion for all things rural. However there were key differences: lower class children needed practical, hardwearing clothes in dark fabrics that would not show the dirt.