

Feature



Wearing a Man's Regency Era Neck Cloth Christopher Bertani*

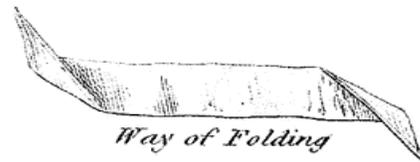
A long-time Regency-era costumer shows how easy it is to create a fashionable look that would gain even Beau Brummel's approval.

The cravat, or neckcloth, is the ancestor of the tie. For a much of history, a man would never be seen without at least a scrap of something around his neck. When assembling an outfit for a Regency period impression, few articles make a greater impact than a well tied cravat.

We have probably all seen "Neckclothitania or Tietania, being an essay on Starchers, by One of the Cloth" (engraved by George Cruikshank). While this is a spoof of neckcloths, a neckcloth frames the face, and is one of the things people will notice when looking at you. While you might be able to get away with less than ideal shoes, a missing or poorly tied neckcloth is instantly noticed.

A neckcloth can simply be a square of fine muslin, about one yard square. I have found [Dharma Trading](#) to be an excellent source of neckcloths. Look for their pre-hemmed cotton gauze scarves, 36" square.

NECKCLOTHITANIA



Pub^d by I. J. Stockdale. 42, Pall Mall, 1st Sept^r 1818.

Neckclothitania image from [Wikimedia](#)

Trone d'Amour Tie.*

The *trone d'Amour* is the most austere after the Oriental Tie — It must be extremely well stiffened with starch.† It is formed by one single horizontal dent in the middle. Color, *Yeux de fille en extase*.

Irish Tie.

This one resembles in some degree the Mathematical, with, however, this difference, that the horizontal indenture is placed *below* the point of junction formed by the collateral creases, instead of being above. The color, *Cerulean Blue*.

* So called from its resemblance to the Seat of Love.

† Starch is derived from the Teutonick word, "Stare" which means "stiff."

Ball Room Tie.

The Ball Room Tie when well put on, is quite delicious — It unites the qualities of the Mathematical and Irish, having two collateral dents and two horizontal ones, the one above as in the former, the other below as in the latter — It has no knot, but is fastened as the Napoleon. This should never of course be made with colors, but with the purest and most brilliant *blanc d'innocence virginale*.

Horse Collar Tie.

The Horse Collar has become, from some unaccountable reason, very universal. I can only attribute it to the inability of its wearers to make any other. It is certainly the worst and most vulgar, and I

In the photos for this article, however, I am using a red spotted neck handkerchief from [Burnley & Trowbridge](#). It is not as exquisitely fashionable as a plain white square, but it shows the folds more clearly.



Fold square fabric on the diagonal.

If you choose to starch your cravat, it will stand up throughout the night in a warm ballroom. I have found that spray-on starch requires a lot of spraying to get the desired effect. An application of a solution of rice starch works much better, but requires more work beforehand. Look for rice starch used in bookbinding applications. (I obtained mine from [Talas](#) bookbinding.)

To use rice starch for stiffening your cravat, it needs to be mixed with water and boiled on the stove, using a double boiler. The instructions on the packet I have are intended for glue, so once I had it boiled up, I diluted it by half with more water.

Soak the cravat in the starch solution, spread it out, and let it dry until damp, then iron it. Use a press cloth, or you will get burnt rice on your iron. The cravat will end up as stiff as paper, but still able to be steam ironed.

To turn a yard square piece of fabric into a cravat, you need to fold it on the bias. First fold it on the diagonal (left), and iron it flat. You get much less distortion if you iron in a zig-zag pattern, following the grain of the fabric, not the diagonal.

Next decide how tall you want the finished cravat. In my first attempts I folded it twice, making the final height 1/4 the height of the starting triangle. This turns out to be not tall enough on my neck. Folding it into thirds gives a better height (right top).

Do not worry if it seems much too tall; your chin will crease it down to a more reasonable height, and give it a proper silhouette in the bargain.

Iron down the crease after each fold (right center). The final cravat needs to be very flat before you put it on (right bottom), otherwise it may end up looking like a doughnut around your neck!





To wear the neckcloth, find the center. It isn't a rectangle; the short ends are sloped, and the points should be on the bottom when worn.

Put the center of the neckcloth against the front of your neck (left top), pass the ends behind, and bring them around to the front again. You can cross the ends in back or loop them around each other and keep each end on the same side; I find that crossing the ends in back gives a smoother look (left center).

You can tie the ends in a bow, just like you tie a bow-tie, or just in a square knot (left bottom), and tuck the ends inside your waistcoat (right top).

The photo at right shows the results: a well-dressed Regency gentleman with an impeccably tied neck cloth.

Don't be discouraged if you can't tie your cravat perfectly at first. There is the famous story of a visitor to Beau Brummel's meeting his valet coming down the stairs with a tray full of cravats. "These, Sir, are our failures!" said the valet.

Christofer Bertani is interested in historical costume re-creation centered around the English Regency/Napoleonic era, particularly uniforms, with a sideline in SciFi costuming from written sources.

