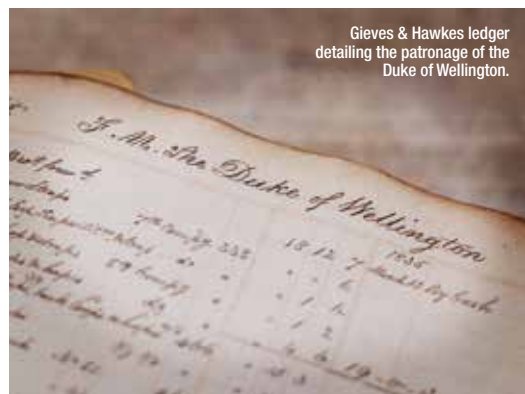


FEELING THE NEED FOR TWEED

In pursuit of the kind of rustic three-piece once worn solely for gamey pursuits in bucolic environs, the *Rake's* Editor-in-Chief — a terminal urbanite — enjoys a didactic fitting experience at Savile Row's Gieves & Hawkes.

by Nick Scott

I like to think that James Watson Gieve invented the first-ever sartorial app. His father, James Gieve — the first tailor in the family whose name would eventually join that of Thomas Hawkes above the door at No. 1 Savile Row — was a man of entrepreneurial derring-do who once converted a small vessel into an atelier, then voyaged from Portsmouth to the Black Sea during the Crimean War to ensure that British naval officers laying siege to the Russian fleet at Sevastopol were impeccably clad for the task (the family's link with the British navy had been firmly established, with both Admiral Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington being former customers).



Gieves & Hawkes ledger detailing the patronage of the Duke of Wellington.

James Jr., though, was a less swashbuckling, more studious soul, who made his name in the '30s with innovative homespun endeavours such as his 'Dress Indicator', a handy pocket reference dial that informed naval officers which formal attire to wear on which occasions, and which uniform elements — cap, tunic or sword, for example — were required with, say, a frock coat dress with epaulettes, in order to comply with dress regulations.

Were the younger James alive today, I'm confident he would create a modern iteration of this handy guide — one that would enable a man to prod and poke his way to sartorial correctness via his tablet or phone. And, beyond enlightening him as to which accessories to pick out for any given outfit, it would probably advise him on all aspects of any new tailoring venture. Factors such as existing wardrobe, forthcoming social engagements, emotional versus physical comfort, and the degree of flamboyance that the user is feeling at the time of the first fitting would barely scratch the surface.

One factor he might choose to omit from his application's algorithm altogether, though, would be practicality. Modern men will think nothing of buying a four-by-four vehicle capable of shunting a giant cheese grater across the surface of Mars, then

subjecting it to nothing more unforgiving than the gravel carpark outside little Jemima's pony club — and this quixotic lunacy tends to continue when he's at his favourite tailor. James Watson Gieve would have understood this. He would have grasped the contemporary male's fondness for whimsy over common sense; for making expensive purchasing decisions that have little to do with when and how he might use the commodity he is acquiring, and everything to do with the cultural, social, historical or literal power it packs.

I mention all this because, today, I — a perennial urbanite whose idea of shooting grouse is downing double measures of the Glenturret distillery's finest in some cosy metropolitan retreat — am on the hunt for the kind of tweed three-piece that was once the preserve of ruddy-jowled, rifle-toting members of the pastoral elite. It's something that I require to fill a lacuna in my wardrobe — the Editor of *The Rake* not owning a tweed suit is like the Editor of *Rolling Stone* not possessing a copy of *Sgt. Pepper* — so I'm glad to be in the very capable hands of one Lee Webb, a Senior Bespoke Cutter at Gieves & Hawkes and a man with a well-earned reputation for his keen eye and technical excellence.

On the day of the first fitting, Webb takes me through the tweed pattern books, offering extensive insights into their origin and texture. He's encouraging about my general material intentions — "The 13oz coarser cloths," he says, "are the most conducive to tailoring. You put an iron on them and you can stretch and mould them" — and my specific choice comes with a flash of what amateur psychologists call 'thin-slicing decision-making' and real ones call 'rapid cognition'.

It's a green fabric with powder-blue checks, reminiscent of a bottle-green tweed jacket worn by Anthony Eden in a shot recently reproduced in this magazine, that leaps out and begs to be chosen. Wonderfully coarse yet undeniably elegant, it's the material antithesis to shiny broadcloth woven in sweatshops (or, these days, enslaved orphan marmosets in the darkest depths of the Amazon — who knows?). It's the type of fabric that is happiest when pressed flush against the deep-red leather seats of a vintage Bentley; a cloth that would be a veritable second skin (or, come to think of it, nude suit) for that most rakish of anthropomorphic bounders, Mr. Toad.

The textile in question is a twist cloth named Hartwist, created by Porter & Harding. Weighted at 18oz (Webb describes it as 'bulletproof') in order to withstand the climatic rigours of the grouse moors, it's long been a popular choice for farmers, gamekeepers, country sportsmen, and now, metropolitan jessies from the media who are more at home debating the categorical imperative over deseeded olives than cleaning the barrel locknut on a bolt-action deer-hunting rifle. There's a moment's hesitation —

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