

**The Conservation of the Clothing and Equipment
Belonging to Surgeon-Major T.H. PARKE (1857 – 1893)
From the Collections in the National Museum of Ireland**

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Thomas Heazle Parke was born at Kilmore, Co. Roscommon on 27 November 1857. He is said to have attended local schools and it is known that he was educated in Dublin where he also achieved his medical training and qualifications. He registered as a medical practitioner on 1 February 1879. He joined the army and was gazetted as surgeon-captain on 5 February 1881. He served in Egypt in 1882 and 1883, returning to Ireland for a brief spell in 1883, before joining the Nile Expedition for the relief of General Gordon at Khartoum in 1884. In 1887 he volunteered his services as medical officer on the Emin Relief Expedition, led by Henry Morton Stanley (1841 – 1904). Parke obtained leave without pay from the army in order to accompany Stanley on what turned out to be an ill-fated expedition (Lyons 1994).¹

The medical skills and courage displayed by Parke in Africa earned him the respect and admiration of many. In April 1888, he along with A.J. Jephson, another member of the expedition, became the first Europeans to see the snow-capped Ruwenzori Range of mountains (the legendary Mountains of the Moon, the *montes lune* of Ptolemy) and he was the first Irishman to travel across the African continent.

In recognition of his achievements in his short life, he died at the age of 36, a Memorial Fund was established which resulted in the erection of a bronze statue on Leinster Lawn in Dublin². The statue was unveiled on 19 December 1896; some years later it was moved to its present site outside the Natural History Museum (*below*).

In 1920 the National Museum of Ireland received a donation from Miss Florence Parke, sister of T.H. Parke, of some of the clothing and equipment worn and used by her brother on the Emin Relief Expedition. These objects and their treatment are the subject of this short paper.

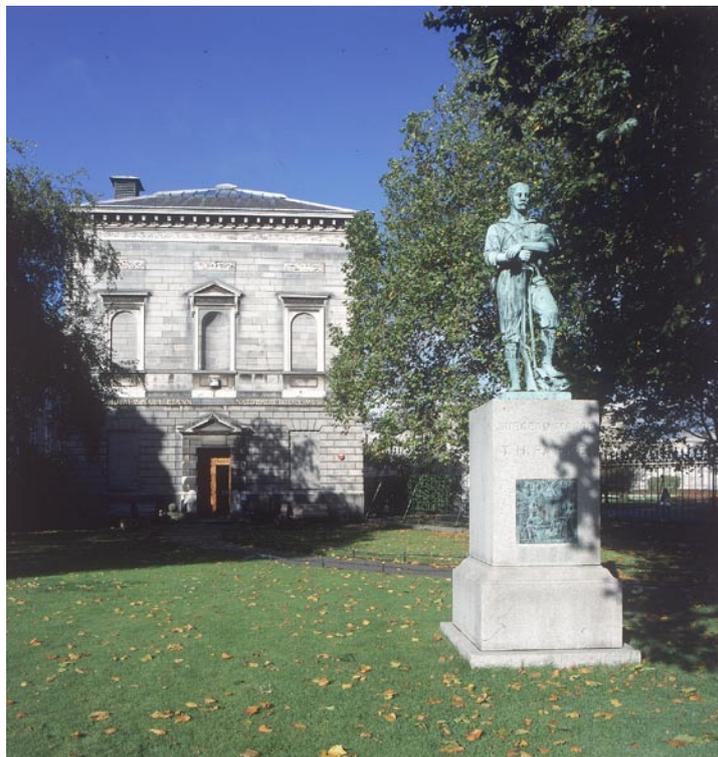


Photo © National Museum of Ireland

The Collection of Parke Material in the National Museum of Ireland

The collection consists of the following garments and accessories, which are registered in the collections of the Art & Industrial Division of the National Museum of Ireland³:

- Long sleeved shirt
- Pair of breeches
- Sam Browne belt with attached leather pouch and shoulder strap
- Canvas and leather satchel
- Water bottle



Photo © National Museum of Ireland

For many years these objects were displayed in the Natural History Division of the National Museum of Ireland. The position and location of the display case meant that the objects were subject to unacceptably high light levels. The mounting method used was also inconsistent with ethically sound standards of conservation treatment (*left*).

In 2002 the Parke material was short-listed for inclusion in the forthcoming exhibition on the military history of Ireland (Soldiers & Chiefs, The Irish at War at Home & Abroad from 1550) and in April of that year they were removed for treatment to the Conservation Department of the National Museum of Ireland.

Note on the production of the fabric

The entry in the National Museum register for the year 1920 states that the garments “are made of cotton cloth woven by the natives of Central Africa from their raw cotton.”⁴ In T.H. Parkes’s manuscript diary, which is held in The Mercer Library, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, the entry for 8 May 1888 states “*Emin Pasha has given me some cotton cloth which was woven by his people in The Province I have had 2 pairs of knickerbockers one pair of trousers and one shirt made out of it.*”⁵ It is difficult to tell if the garments in the National Museum’s collections are the items referred to in this diary entry. The fabric certainly appears to be hand woven from hand spun yarns.

The history of the production of this fabric is a subject that would repay further investigation and Parke’s four manuscript diaries held in The Mercer Library could provide valuable information.

THE GARMENTS: MAN'S SHIRT

Description

A man's collarless shirt with long sleeves and an opening at the neck at the centre front. The main body of the shirt is made from three pieces of tabby woven, cotton fabric. The sleeve is constructed from a single piece of fabric. There is a single patch pocket at the proper left front⁶. There are underarm gussets and a number of narrow fabric inserts at the junction of the sleeve and the front and back panels at the shoulders. There is a slit at the lower edge at each side of the shirt; the slit at the proper left is formed at the junction of the front and back panels, while the slit at proper right is a cut in the fabric, which has been hemmed. The neck opening is faced with a dark green fabric in contrast to the beige colour of the shirt. There are three pearl buttons at the neck opening. The shirt is hand stitched throughout. There are two types of seam construction: the main seams at the front of the shirt are secured with a whipped running stitch with the bulk of the seam on the outside of the garment. All of the remaining seams are raised seams (Morrell 1991). Technical details of the fibres and fabric of the shirt are to be found in **Table 1**.

Condition

The overall condition is fair. There is ingrained soiling evident which gives the fabric a stiff feel. The main seams are in a sound condition with a few areas of loose stitching in the seam lines. There is some evidence of wear at the neck edge and a small area at the right side slit is damaged. There is a marked difference in the shade of the inner surface of the fabric when compared with the outer surface. That on the inside is considerably darker. The exposure of the shirt to the elements during its functional life may account for this difference in shade. There is a dark pattern evident at the waist and at the shoulders, which is consistent with the position of the Sam Browne belt and the shoulder straps of the water bottle and satchel. These areas were protected from light during the years of display but there may also have been some transfer of colour from the leather to the cotton fabric. There are a number of small rust coloured stains throughout the shirt, these are found at the left side neck and shoulder; at the patch pocket; at the right waist; at the left side slit and at the centre back. These stains were tested for the presence of blood, the results were negative.⁷

Treatment: Documentation and cleaning

The shirt was photographed and measured. It was then surface cleaned using low powered vacuum suction to remove loose particulate soiling. Following testing it was wet cleaned in a 1% aqueous solution of non-ionic surfactant Synperonic N⁸ with a 0.05% solution of SCMC⁹. This treatment resulted in a reduction in soiling and a softer feel to the fabric thereby reducing the possibility of future damage due to abrasive dirt particles.

Treatment: Support stitching

Damaged areas at the neck edge were supported onto patches of dyed nylon net. The small area of damage at the right side slit was also given a stitched support using dyed nylon net. This treatment should ensure that the condition of the shirt is stabilised.

BREECHES

Description

Tabby woven cotton breeches gathered at the knee and fastened with a metal buckle. There is a fly front opening with the lower three of the five buttonholes concealed. The top two buttonholes are visible. The waistband is constructed from four separate pieces of fabric. A patch of the same fabric has been stitched to an area of loss on the lower right leg directly above the fastening. A belt loop is attached at centre back. The breeches are hand stitched throughout. Technical details of the fibres and fabric of the breeches are listed in **Table 1**.

There is no selvedge evident in this garment. Therefore to distinguish warp from weft the following criteria were applied:

- there is a higher thread count for threads running the length of the garment
- there is a higher twist for threads running the length of the garment
- the threads running across the garment are generally bulkier with a lower twist

For these reasons it was deemed that the warp runs the length of the garment and the weft runs across the garment (Leader 2004).

Condition

In general the breeches are in a fair condition. They are heavily soiled with ingrained and surface dirt. There are a few orange/brown stains that are thought to be rust and two wax deposits at the centre back of the right leg. There are several holes at the front of the trouser legs. The tongue of fabric at the left buckle fastening is distorted and is quite stiff to the touch, a number of threads have broken here. The stitching of the inside waistband at the right side seam has gathered the fabric and is causing distortion. Two of the buttons are missing at the fly front opening. As with the shirt, there is a difference in colour between the inner and outer surfaces of the fabric. The inner surface is darker than the outer but the difference is not as marked as with the shirt.

Treatment: Documentation and cleaning

The breeches were photographed and measured and then surface cleaned using low powered vacuum suction to remove loose particulate soiling. Following testing they were wet cleaned in a 1% aqueous solution of non-ionic surfactant Synperonic N with a 0.05% solution of SCMC. This treatment resulted in a reduction in soiling and a marked decrease in the stiffness of the fabric.

Treatment: Support stitching

A stitch support treatment using patches of dyed cotton lawn secured with laid and couched stitch worked in polyester threads¹⁰ was used in the following areas of loss: the left knee and lower left leg and small areas at each knee fastening.

Object	Warp	Weft
Shirt Principal textile of tabby weave	28.3 ¹¹ per 25mm S spun, single ply Raw cotton ¹²	25.6 per 25mm S spun, single ply Raw cotton
Facing fabric of 4/1 satin weave at neck opening	46 ¹³ per 10mm Z spun, single ply Wool	46 per 10mm Z spun, single ply Raw cotton
Breeches Principal textile of tabby weave	27.33 per 25mm S spun, single ply Raw cotton	21.67 per 25mm S spun, single ply Raw cotton

Table 1: Technical details of fibres and fabrics

SAM BROWNE BELT

Description

This consists of a tanned leather pistol belt that is 58mm wide and 1045mm long with a metal buckle. A single leather shoulder strap is attached to the belt at the left, it crosses the chest and goes over the right shoulder and is attached again to the belt at centre back. A leather pouch is attached to the belt at the left side. There are two metal rings attached to the lower edge of the belt, these are for the attachment of other accessories. A hooked spring clip is attached to a leather loop.

Condition

Overall the belt is in a fair condition. The leather is dirty and worn in places. The metal elements are lightly corroded. The attached pouch is split in places and is distorted in shape.

Treatment: Documentation and cleaning

The belt was photographed and measured. The leather was surface cleaned with low powered vacuum suction and further cleaned with Groomstick¹⁴. This removed much of the soiling. Further treatment is necessary to the attached pouch; at time of writing this had not been completed.

SATCHEL

Description

A cotton canvas and leather satchel with a long shoulder strap and a front flap secured with a single leather strap and metal buckle fastening. At the back there are two leather loops for alternative attachment to a belt. The shoulder strap is secured to the satchel with two metal buckles and is removable. The satchel is lined with cotton fabric.

Condition

The overall condition is poor. The object is dirty with loose and ingrained soiling and the surface of the canvas is abraded. The object is misshapen, giving the bag a flattened appearance. There are three holed areas in the front flap and one hole at the front left. The leather straps and the long shoulder strap are dirty. The shoulder strap has been crudely repaired with twine. The three metal buckles are tarnished.

Treatment: Documentation and cleaning

The satchel was photographed and measured and then surface cleaned using low powered vacuum suction to remove loose particulate soiling. Following testing, the canvas, particularly the front flap, was swabbed with a 50:50 mixture of IMS¹⁵ and a 1% aqueous solution of Synperonic N. Considerable soiling was removed by this treatment.

The leather shoulder strap and the attached leather elements were surface cleaned with low powered vacuum suction; further cleaning was carried out with Groomstick. This treatment removed some of the soiling.

Treatment: Humidification and support stitching

The shoulder strap was removed to allow greater manipulation of the satchel. Using an ultrasonic humidifier the distortion to the shape was reduced.

A stitch support treatment using patches of dyed cotton lawn secured with laid and couched stitch was used in areas of loss.

Treatment: Internal support

Pieces of Ethafoam¹⁶ were carved to match the internal dimensions of the satchel. Three separate pieces were made to allow for safe insertion. Each piece of Ethafoam was covered with silk fabric to reduce the possibility of damage to the cotton lining. When in position inside the satchel, the foam inserts ensure that the shape of the object is maintained.

WATER BOTTLE

Description

This object consists of a bottle, curved on one side and flat on the other. The bottle is covered with wool felt and has an outer covering of cotton canvas. The canvas is seamed around the outer edge of the bottle and secured at the neck opening with cotton twine. The leather shoulder strap is also secured to the bottle by this twine; this latter construction appears to be an old repair. At the bottle opening there is the name *S.W. Silver & Co. Cornhill, London* stamped into the stopper on one side and the words *Col. Cochrane's Patent*¹⁷ on the other side. The leather strap is in two pieces joined together with a metal buckle. A small piece of metal wire of unknown function is looped around the bottle's neck. The material of which the inner bottle is made is unknown. The bottle was examined under magnification and was X-rayed¹⁸. As no metal was evident in the construction, it is most likely to be made of wood.

Condition

In general the object is in a poor condition. The cotton canvas is heavily soiled with both surface and ingrained soiling. The canvas is patched at the bottle's shoulders on the front side with a piece of the same fabric. This patched repair is frayed at the edges. There are areas of loss in the canvas and wool felt thereby exposing a small area of the inner body of the bottle. Where exposed, the wool felt displays some old insect damage with some frass in evidence. A small square hole is cut in the canvas and felt at the centre of the flat surface of the bottle, this appears to be a deliberate cut. There are two holes at the front neck opening. The leather shoulder strap is soiled and cracked.

Treatment

The bottle was photographed and measured and then it was frozen for six days at minus thirty degrees Celsius (-30°C) to ensure that there was no active insect pest infestation. It was then surface cleaned using low powered vacuum suction to remove loose particulate soiling. The damage to the patched repair was given a nylon net overlay to ensure that any damage to the frayed edge of the patch was minimised.

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- ¹ The Natural History Division of the National Museum of Ireland issues a complimentary information sheet on the life of T.H.Parke.
- ² The artist Percy Wood received the commission for the statue.
- ³ Art & Industry collections NMIHA: 1920.203 - 207
- ⁴ NMI Art and Industrial Division accession register for year 1920.
- ⁵ Quotation from diary by permission of Librarian, RCSI
- ⁶ Proper left means on the left side as worn.
- ⁷ The Kastle-Meyer presumptive test for the presence of blood is non-destructive.
- ⁸ Synperonic N is a nonyl phenol ethoxylate manufactured by ICI; its former name was Lissapol N.
- ⁹ Sodium carboxymethyl cellulose is a soil anti-redeposition agent.
- ¹⁰ *Skala*, manufactured by Gütermann is a fine polyester yarn available in a wide range of shades.
- ¹¹ Three figures were taken from different parts of the shirt and the breeches. An average count was calculated from these figures.
- ¹² For all fibre identification, a sample of yarn was mounted on a glass slide and examined under magnification using a 50:50 mixture of glycerine and distilled water as a mounting agent.
- ¹³ In the absence of a selvedge it is assumed that this is a warp-faced fabric.
- ¹⁴ A natural rubber molecular trap
- ¹⁵ Industrial Methylated Spirit.
- ¹⁶ Ethafoam is polyethylene foam.
- ¹⁷ The assistance of Erica Arnold, National Army Museum, London is acknowledged in deciphering this lettering.
- ¹⁸ Parameters: 50kV/5mA/40 seconds and 50kV/5mA/20 seconds