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Ad Montem

Eton's Lost Procession

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Curated by Rebecca Tessier



Verrey Gallery, Eton College
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Charles Turner (1774-1857), *Lord Ingestre and Mr Mitford in Montem Costume*, drawing, c.1820 (FDA-D.580-2010)

Front cover: Montem Salt Bearer's outfit, 17th-century style, early 19th-century (MEL.441:1-5-2010)

Ad Montem

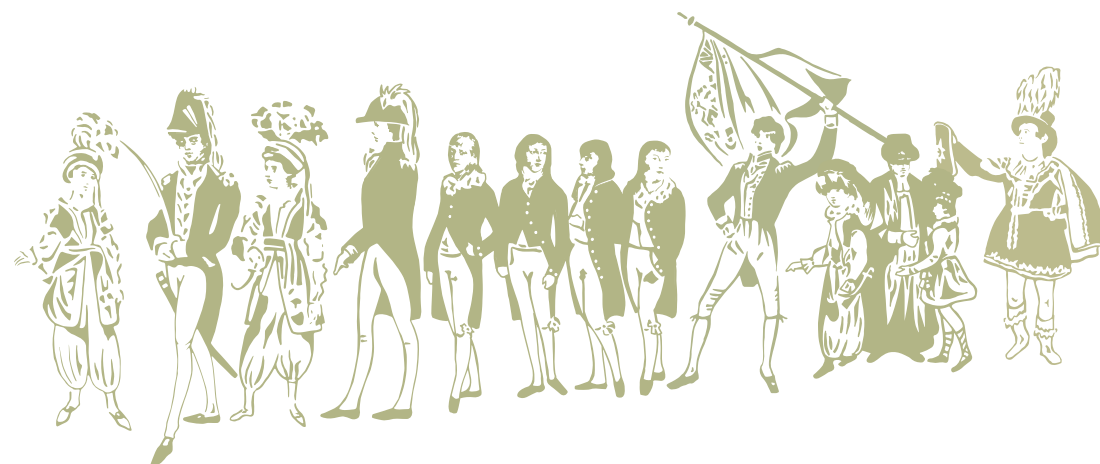
Eton's Lost Procession

Montem, a peculiar and spectacular Eton ceremony where boys would process *ad montem* ('to the hill'), was celebrated for centuries. First recorded in 1561, it is believed that Montem began as an initiation ceremony for boys. By the 19th century it had become a grand pageant, in which Etonians processed in elaborate ceremonial and military dress from the college to Salt Hill in Slough. Huge crowds flocked to see the procession, glimpse attending royalty, and participate by giving money in exchange for a pinch of salt or, later, a paper ticket.

Although some felt that the excesses of the occasion were merely the performance of an ancient ritual, by its final decades many felt that Montem had become an excuse for frivolity and immorality. It became a victim of its own success. School leaders ultimately decided that the boys' behaviour was unacceptable, as were national attention thanks to royal patronage, and the increasing crowds, aided by developments in coach and train transport. The ceremony was abolished, with the final Montem taking place in 1844. Less controversial traditional ceremony and school events continue to be important to Eton, however, through celebrations such as the Fourth of June, a summer event featuring the Procession of Boats.

Clothing, ephemera and written accounts provide glimpses into Montem, a unique example of intangible heritage. Its customs incorporated school hierarchy, student organisation and teamwork, comedic oratory and identity as Etonians, both while pupils at the school and later, as adults. Alumni were a core part of the Montem audience, which for many was a day of reminiscence and reinforcement of their lifelong connection to Eton.

There are few, if any, records of the earliest Montem ceremonies, which relied on handed down experience and etiquette. We can, however, recover much more about the final century of increasingly immoderate Montem festivities. This exhibition traces the traditional event, from its ambiguous origins to its abolition through historic artwork, archival records and rare surviving examples of ornate costume. It also examines reminiscence, reuse and restoration at play in the scarce representatives of historic children's clothing that remain.



Montem: Origins and Locality

The earliest known description of Montem is an account of Eton in 1560-61, the *Consuetudinarium*, written by William Malim (Head Master, c.1560-63). Malim outlines Montem as an annual ritual taking place in late January at Montem Mound, a sacred place set in a lush landscape. The boys 'give glory there to Apollo and the Muses, they praise it in song...Here the novices or newcomers...are at first seasoned with salt, and then shrewdly hit off in rhyme'. Verse recital and application of salt were key features of the rite of passage which continued throughout the following centuries, although the form, purpose and even date went through several changes. Numerous theories evolved regarding the meaning behind Montem, from links with religious practices such as the election of a Boy Bishop¹ to the use of salt in feudal payments². Perhaps it was simply a destination for exercise in the absence of playing fields³. Certainly, there were notable echoes of religious ceremonies, with two boys impersonating a parson and clerk. The parson would deliver a mock sermon atop the mound before kicking the clerk down the hill, an element of the ritual that was omitted after receiving the disapproval of Queen Charlotte in 1778.

Over time Montem became a more regular and organised production. After 1759 it was celebrated biennially on Whit-Tuesday, and from 1775 it was held every three years until its abolition. It was during this period that it took on the more military characteristics that became central to the event. Although elements of hierarchy remained, it no longer included quasi-religious rites of passage, but fundraising and festivity instead. Rather than seasoning new boys with salt, Etonians would exchange pinches of salt for money from passers-by; these funds went towards the university expenses of the Captain of the School. Towards the end of the 18th-century the salt itself was removed from the ceremony; thereafter money was still exchanged but the 'salt' took the form of a paper ticket.

Location was a crucial part of Montem, rooted in activities connecting Eton to Slough. Montem day started at Eton; Runners (or 'Servitors') woke at dawn to travel to outlying districts (Windsor Bridge, Colnbrook, Maidenhead Bridge, Salt Hill, Slough, Datchet Bridge, Iver and Gerrards Cross) to collect money. They would return to Eton to deliver their takings to the Salt-Bearers, who carried them in the procession. The parade would then start with a march around School Yard before heading out of Eton, past the playing fields and via Slough to Salt Hill. There the boys would march again in front of the King or Queen, before ascending Montem Mound to deliver orations. The Standard Bearer would complete the ceremony by waving the flag. Slough's inns became integrated into the festivities, hosting the boys not only for dining but for exuberant 'ritual destruction' of their gardens before the procession returned to Eton. Finally, boys would gather on the playing fields to end the day's festivities.

The site of Montem Mound gained local significance through its involvement in this ancient rite, however its historic importance goes back farther. Throughout the centuries of Montem it was accepted as an important archaeological feature. It was thought to be a barrow (ancient burial mound). When it was first listed as a Scheduled Monument in 1976, it was described as a small motte (medieval castle). Further studies have since identified it as an early Anglo-Saxon burial mound. Although slightly depleted, and bordered by buildings and roads rather than the verdant fields of Malim's sacred landscape, the mound remains a focal point and Montem has left its mark in the names of many surrounding roads and buildings.



1. William Evans (1798-1877), *The School Yard: Fourth June*, print, 1852 (FDA-E.343-2010)
2. Charles Turner (1774-1857), *Montem in Weston's Yard with King George IV*, pencil and watercolour, 1820 (FDA-D.509-2010)
3. William Evans (1798-1877), *Playing Fields: The Eton Montem*, print, 1852 (FDA-E.264-2010)
4. Bill for schooling for Con O'Neill, 1617 (ED 26 01)
5. Charles Turner (1774-1857), *Salthill, Montem*, pencil and watercolour, c.1820 (FDA-D.510-2010)
6. George Bryant Campion (1796-1870), *Montem*, pencil and watercolour, 1838 (FDA-D.129-2010)
7. Briefing note on Montem Mound prepared for Sir Geoffrey Agnew, Fellow of Eton College, 1986 (COLL BB 01 58)
8. Newspaper article, [1877] (SCH P 08 04 07)



William Evans (1798-1877), *The School Yard: Fourth June*, print, 1852 (FDA-E.343-2010)



Charles Turner (1774-1857), *Salthill, Montem*, pencil and watercolour, c.1820 (FDA-D.510-2010)

The Montem Procession



The main focus of Montem was the vibrant procession of Etonians that travelled from Eton to the mound on the Great Bath Road. Organised by the students, this hierarchical procession included boys of different ages and positions in the school, and in later years followed a military structure. Each boy had roles to play, with varying actions to carry out and costumes to wear. Whilst the 12 elaborately dressed Runners were at their collecting posts the rest of the boys would also rise early, prepare themselves (much effort was placed in setting hair and donning their uniforms and costumes), and breakfast together with gathering visitors before greeting attending royalty around 11 am and then starting the procession.

The procession had a set order that changed slightly over the years but generally followed a regimental pattern. The older boys led the procession in military dress. Among them the senior Colleger (also known as King's Scholar, with lodging in College) was Captain of Montem; the second most senior Colleger was a Salt Bearer and placed at the end of the procession. Collegers in subsequent seniority were Ensign, Lieutenant, Sergeant-Major and Steward. Any remaining Collegers were Generals. The seniors wore 'distinctive details of uniform denoting rank, which could be at once distinguished from the various forms of epaulet and the great of little prevalence of giltth, except for the steward who wore ordinary formal dress of the period. The senior Oppidan (student with lodging in the town) was the second Salt Bearer; the second most senior Oppidan ranked as Colonel and the remaining as Sergeants. Accompanying the seniors were younger boys who acted as Servants (or Pages), costumed in fancy dress that was chosen by the older boys. This costume was usually very splendid and colourful, inspired by historic court dress, and foreign garb.

The younger boys followed next in the procession, wearing red military or blue Navy-style jackets, with cocked hats, and carrying swords. They were accompanied by the youngest boys who wore the old Eton costume of blue

jackets, white waistcoats and white trousers. Boys of this rank were 'Pole Bearers', carrying wooden wands.

The two Salt Bearers tended to be at the rear of the procession; exquisitely dressed in vibrant silks, velvets and gilt metal, with plumed hats and carrying the 'salt' in matching velvet bags.

9. Montem Salt Bearer outfit, 17th-century style, early 19th-century (MEL.453:1-4-2010)
- Plumed Montem hat, 17th-century style, early 19th-century (MEL.449-2010)
10. Montem Salt Bearer's bag, red velvet, early 19th-century (MEL.455-2010)
11. Montem Salt Bearer's outfit, 17th-century style, early 19th-century (MEL.441:1-5-2010)
12. Montem Salt Bearer's bag, purple velvet, early 19th-century (MEL.459-2010)
13. Montem jackets, red military-style, 1840-44 (MEL.428-2010, MEL.430-2010, MEL. 436-2010, MEL.509-2010)
14. Richard Livesay (1750-1826), *The Montem Procession*, oil on canvas, c. 1793 (FDA-P.52-2010)



George Bryant Campion (1796-1870), *Montem*, pencil and watercolour, 1838 (FDA-D.129-2010)

Richard Livesay (1750-1826), *The Montem Procession*, oil on canvas, c. 1793 (FDA-P.52-2010)

People of Montem

For many boys, their role in Montem was a momentous part of their school career.

A number had their school portraits painted in Montem dress by prominent artists of the day. Others wrote detailed accounts of the day to their families. Descriptions of the lavish costumes worn and reports on what the royals did and how much ‘salt’ they gave featured prominently in their letters.

Although Montem started as an initiation ceremony, it evolved into a grand fête for the whole school, drawing royal patronage and public attention. After King George III first attended in 1778 it became an even grander affair, reported in national media.

The attendance of royalty had an impact on the structure of the day and attracted increasing numbers of visitors to the event. The King or Queen were met by boys, masters, musicians and visitors at 11 am. Part of the colonnade, furnished with carpet and seating, was reserved for the royal spectators. The royal and noble attendees would then see off the procession from the Foundation area and playing fields and follow on in a suite of carriages to join the boys at Montem Mound. No one, whether King or humble passer-by, escaped the call for salt; the King or Queen gave £50, and other royal figures gave sums up to £50. Prince Albert, the final

royal to attend Montem, gave £100 in 1844⁵ (the relative value today would be over £10,000).

15. William Beechey, R.A. (1753-1839), *Charles William Henry Scott, Earl of Dalkeith*, oil on canvas, 1789 (FDA-P.35-2010)
16. Richard Livesay (1750-1826), *Wyrley Birch in Montem costume*, oil on canvas, c. 1790-1793 (FDA-P.420-2010)
17. Thomas Webster, R.A. (1800-86), *George Goldney in Montem costume*, oil painting, c.1834 (FDA-P.539-2015)
18. Charles Turner (1774-1857), *Battiscombe and the Duke of Buccleuch waving the Montem flag*, drawing, 1820 (FDA-D.582-2010)
19. Charles Turner (1774-1857), *Lord Ingestre and Mr Mitford in Montem Costume*, drawing, c.1820 (FDA-D.580-2010)
20. Charles Turner (1774-1857), *Montem study*, pencil and watercolour, c.1820 (FDA-D.1513-2016)
21. Charles Turner (1774-1857), *Mr White*, drawing, c. 1820 (FDA-D.507-2010)
22. Joshua Edward Adolphus Dolby (1811-1881), *Montem in School Yard*, print, 1838 (FDA-E.2417-2015)
23. Envelope for donation to the Captain of College from King George IV, 1820 (ED 533)



Unknown artist, after Samuel Hieronymus Grimm (c.1733-94), *Eton Montem 1778*, drawing, after 1778 (FDA-D.1365-2015)



Objects of Montem

There was more to Montem than dressing up. A suite of objects were central to the day's events. From the paper tickets given out in place of salt, or sold to grant access to various locations throughout the day, such as entry to breakfast at the College or dinner in the gardens of the Windmill Inn, to the velvet, silk and gilt metal bags that were carried by the Salt Bearers in which to collect the day's raised funds, only a few of these objects from centuries of Montem survive.

Paper ephemerals such as tickets or the printed Montem Ode distributed in the later years were not intended to last, although happily some attendees retained theirs as souvenirs.

Hardier items such as the wooden Montem wands (or poles) carried by junior boys are also rare survivals. Part of their purpose was to be chopped in half by the corporals wielding

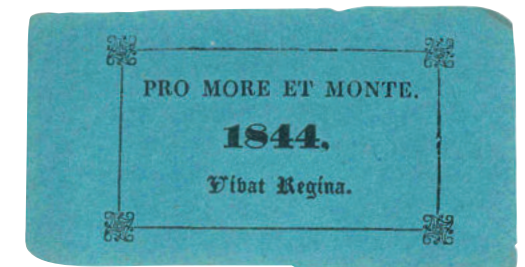
swords as part of the festivities, so few remain. It was considered a ‘great achievement for a pole-man to carry his wand through the day uninjured’⁶.

The Montem flag was a key feature of the ceremony; the Ensign commenced the parade by waving the flag at the start of the event in School Yard and heralded the end when he flourished it atop Montem Mound.

24. Montem Salt Bearer's bags, used in Montem processions from 1829 to 1844 (MEL.432-2010, MEL.444-2010, MEL.454-2010, MEL.461-2010)
25. Montem tickets, 1829-44 (SCH P 08 02 01)
26. Montem wand, painted with Eton Arms, 1778 (MEL.367-2010)
27. Montem pole, late 18th-early 19th-century (MEL.398:02-2010)



Montem Salt Bearer's bag, used in the 1838 Montem (MEL.432-2010)



Montem ticket 1844 (SCH PO8 02/3)



Reception and Controversy

In its final decades Montem was a spectacular, highly attended and widely publicised event. Although many elements of the festival had been altered due to various interventions by head masters and school leaders as Eton adapted to the changing times, much of the traditional Montem remained.

By the 1830s and '40s there were increasing arguments both for and against the ceremony from prominent voices. Old Etonians met to put forward their case for its continuation; supporters raised it in the House of Commons, and both the Prime Minister and the Queen were consulted.

For some, it was reason enough to continue Montem that it was an ancient custom, entered into with the appropriate spirit. Montem festivities were defined and structured; although allowing for high spirits which at times descended into disorder, it was within bounds of reason accepted by the venues and visitors. Local innkeepers, tradesmen and cab drivers benefitted from the extra business and were later greatly impacted by the loss of Montem.

Many placed the blame on the influx of visitors, which had been rising since the 17th century as the number of stagecoaches on the route increased and Salt Hill became the second stop from London to the West. The number of spectators grew exponentially after the opening of the Great Western Railway in 1838.

For those who opposed Montem it was an excuse for misbehaviour, with enough examples of rowdiness to require cessation. The Montem motto *'Mos Pro Lege'* (Custom for Law) was considered a euphemism for 'highway robbery'⁷ by some. This objection to the fundraising method, plus the buffoonery of mocking orations and riotous conduct, formed the main arguments against Montem. The excesses of dining and drinking, followed by destruction of the inn's gardens were often so severe that, after making compensation to the innkeepers, the Captain of the School had greatly diminished funds to take on to university – thereby negating the ostensible reason behind the event. Some of the boys were also becoming wearied by the

event; one boy declared in his letter home that 'between the heat, the crowd and the dust I was almost suffocated...I was never more fatigued in my life'⁸. Provost Francis Hodgson (1840-53) criticised the 'meanness' of Montem which caused injury to the Captain of the School and instilled bad habits into boys long after the day itself:

*'to say that this occurs only once in three years, is to make good morals occasional...'*⁹

This echoes the contemporary worry that in the early 19th century public schools were 'functioning largely as undisciplined arenas of experience rather than institutions for education'¹⁰. Traditional practices were not the only thing to evolve; later in the century the curriculum at Eton was dramatically changed following the Public schools act of 1868.

28. P.H.D., *Figures in a carriage met by Montem Salt-Bearers*, preparatory drawing (FDA-D.1366-2015), and print (FDA-E.2353-2015)
29. Printed notices of meeting of Old Etonians, 1847 (SCH P 08 04 06)
30. Petition to Queen Victoria from the boys of Eton College, [1847] (ED 531 05)
31. Copy letter from Lord John Russell, Prime Minister, to Edward Hawtrey, Head Master, 7 January 1847 (COLL P 09 134 110)
32. Copy letter from Provost Hodgson to Edward Hawtrey, Head Master, [1844] (COLL P 02 06)



Disgraceful reality! Join to this the undoubted evils inflicted on the characters of the Upper Collegers by the habits then formed, according to inveterate usage – habits of unblushing because established indulgence at the expense of a schoolfellow, whose money so loosely gained seems naturally spent with equal looseness – habits tending to harden & deface the moral sense in the most serious manner. The HeadMaster has been chiefly influenced by these last

Excerpt from copy letter from Provost Hodgson to George Howard, Lord Morpeth (later 7th Earl of Carlisle), 19 November 1846 (ED 531 04)

...Join to this the undoubted evils inflicted on the characters of the Upper Collegers by the habits then formed, according to inveterate usage – habits of unblushing because established indulgences at the expense of a schoolfellow, whose money so loosely gained seems naturally spent with equal looseness – habits tending to harden & deface the moral sense in the most serious manner....



Farewell to Montem

Abolition was in the air during the 1844 Montem. Censure of the traditional high jinks resulted in dining taking place back at the College rather than the Slough inns, which brought a notable reduction in the rowdiness and noise-making.¹¹ Most surviving costumes are from the 1841 and 1844 events; it was clear Montem was a dying custom and people began to hold onto the clothing as well as the ephemera surrounding the day's organisation as keepsakes and records. We can piece together a clear picture of the day from the Montem Ode, tickets, dinner plans and lists of attendees and from numerous written accounts and the widespread printed and illustrated reports of the day from national media.

In 1846 the school announced that there would be no Montem in 1847; May 28 1844 became the final Montem, ending centuries of this historic and unique Eton ceremony. There were fears of rebellion against the decision from Etonians, however despite a few riotous acts from some of the younger boys, what would have been the Montem day in 1847 passed relatively peacefully. Intentions to divert the boys into other opportunities for jollity and school spirit centred on sporting events and amplifying other school customs such as the Fourth of June. This

Eton holiday centres on another ceremony, the Procession of Boats, that involves boys dressing in historic costume and boater hats lavishly adorned with flowers, skilfully handling oars, instead of flags or swords. What remains markedly different to Montem is that this day, as with the Eton celebration for St Andrew's Day, remains a school affair within Eton only.

*Farewell to thee, Montem! The daylight is gone,
And all, save the joys of remembrance, are flown;
On Fifteen-Arch Bridge the last carriage I hear,
And the shout from the Christopher dies on my ear.*

*Farewell to thee, Montem! They say 'tis the last;
But I will not believe it till three years are past;
And then if I find that dear Montem is gone,
I'll go to Salt Hill and keep Montem alone!*¹²

33. Montem Ode, 1844 (SCH P 08 03 01 14)
34. Order of the day, 1844 (SCH P 08 06 04)
35. Dinner arrangements, 1844 (SCH P 08 07 02)
36. Report from the Morning Post, 29 May 1844 (SCH P 08 04)
37. Montem buttons, 1844 (MEL.450-2010)
38. Tickets for Montem, 1844 (SCH P 08 02 03)
39. Verses entitled 'Farewell to Montem', 1832 (ED 454 07)



From the *Illustrated London News*, 1 June 1844 (Private Collection)

MONTM ODE, For 1844.

WHANG, bang, ting, tang,
With a whiz, and a buz, and a hum, and a clang,
Which is heard by Chalvey, and Datchet, and Upton,
'Tis striking Four, by the clock of Lorton;—
And those who went full early to bed,
Thinking of feathers and coats of red,
And had slept with their boots and cocked hat on a chair,
And fancied, in dreams, that "the Duke" stood there—
Peep out, and wonder, (and well they may,)—
That they're still abed upon Montem day.

Woe to the villages round about,
To each one is speeding a trusty scout,
Whose instructions have been to take silver and copper,
(Should a lady give gold, he is not to stop her);
And we're only to hope, that he who has had
The "Long run" fixed for him, whether or no,
Will find things in the long run not so bad,
But go it like bricks, as he ought to go.
Well! all the white poles, and the mob, and the "gen's,"
Who have come down from town, disregarding expense,
Are getting entangled, and rowing and swearing,
And bonnets are crushing, and gowns are tearing,
And people with corns upon every toe,
Are voting "that gentlemen should not push so."
I'm sure that a man with a ready-made pair
Of boots, which were ticketed "Thirteen-and-Six",
Who bought them on purpose at Montem to wear,
Must find himself in a terrible fix.

I want describe how the breakfast's got through,
But come at once to
THE RENDEZVOUS:
Where the boldest of warriors, full of their tricks,
Are preparing—as soon as allowed to dish on—
Like an awkward squad, in unsoldierly fashion,
To cut their own and the lower boys' sticks.
I hope, by the way, that whatever they slay,
Be it caldage, or poles, or pales on the way,
That WOLLEY'S legs—which are rather odd,
And shaped like the joints of a fishing rod—
Will meet no mishap; and that no one's fist
Will assault with a sword our Medalist;
And unless they wish to be knocked on the head all,
They'll meddle not with the man of the medal,
But that's by the way—for here comes one
Who's sure to suffer no harm to be done:
Ifooty of head and clumsy of limb,
The Graces had nothing to do with him!
With feathers waving, and fierce cocked hat on,
See HELM advance with the Mareda's baton;
Which Fame reports, though of course she lies,
Phrenological bumps this day supplies.
To what my dame's cook calls "Lower Byes,"
Who comes here!
I shall fail, I fear!
Oh Muses, I pray, put together your noodles
To describe for your poet the pair of Waddles,
Of whom shall I speak? the man of drums,
Or gallant Captain DLAKE,
Whom the said fat cook that I've quoted above
Has declared, on something she's ready to take,
The nearest by much of any one comes
(Though a drake, J to a duck, and a deer, and a love!
He really should have on his lowered collar,
Something to shew he's the Newcastle Scholar,
Look at his eyes! the blackest of jet,
A nose that would make a Phidias fret
To produce such another; and then such a bean,
He has thought it right that each page should be seen
With a little sham bow,
And an arrow or so
To stick at the back of his Lincoln green;
And no doubt from Bishop, and peasant, and peer,
He'll draw a sum as heavy and good
As formerly was in merry Sherwood,
By Friar Tuck and bold Robin Hood;
Good luck!
What's become of Tuck?
Of jaunty men, and with fairer locks,
Than adorn e'en the college barber's blocks.
GONATZ stalks
On the story walks,
And looks as if 'twould give him more pleasure,
To be smoking the shortest of pipes at his leisure;
For none better than he delighteth to be
Scolded by tobacco's mild fragrancy.
Who's this that comes smiling,
Ladies beguiling?
Beware of your hearts!
Or before to-night,
Through CAMPER WRIGHT,
There'll be something wrong in those sensitive parts.
Oh! where could one see such a dingy red
As his whiskers and head?
Or rather his face,
Which Miss — informs me "is modelled with grace."
It would hardly be fair to speak more fully
Than has already been done of WOLLEY;
So Paul farewell, adventurous KNIGHT,
Nor thou, dark DAY, my muse inspire,
Not yours "of love the purple light,
Or the soft bloom of young desire,"—
(I quote from the most original flowers,
Just out, by the author of "Lighter Hours.")
Away, away!
Drybobs, Wetbobs, or what you will,
Here is a youth who can match your skill
In wiping the ball,
Or a game at the wall;
All health to JAMES, whom the White they call!
He looks as if 'twould to him be easy
To dance as the goat of Carlotta Gris.
In the ballet performed at th' Italian Opera,
Named Esmeralda.—(I wish it was proper.)
I'm cock-sure I see—
By his blinking 'ee,

Which declares him very short-sighted to be—
The elder MAXEVES,
To whom has been given
A skin not as white as the snow they call "driven,"
(An artist would hint,
'Twas the neutral tint.)
How comes this mishap?—
He's a desperate sap,
And here's Mr. HORNBURY, whose skin is so white,
That the ladies pronounce him a terrible fright;
Oh ladies! oh fie! his chief beauty's his skin,
Though his body may prove to be bloodless within;
For remember that none of us scrubbly Snobocracy,
Though we scraab ourselves raw,
Are allowed by law
To have skins as white as the Aristocracy,
And next in order MAXEVES the less,
Who would all but a cockney much distress,
And a good grammarian solely exasperate,
By playing old Harry with every aspirate,
E his curly head, at which every one stares,
Seems to say, "just look, 'ow I give myself hairs,"
Oh LAVIMBER NEVILLE! oh fie, oh fie!
You are smoking dear Punch, but why, pray why?
Is it because of your fat round face,
And the absence of Herbert's white skin and grace?
I'm sadly afraid he will cut your connection,
Which perhaps will account for your present dejection.
Go ask of "liddy" PARRAZZ,
What he will advise as best to be done;
Or ask of him, whom none can call
I'm sure, a stunted Corporal;
For Nature never agreed to stunt
That pride of our army, mother HEVY.
Ladies, don't blush, there's nought to alarm ye,
'Tis not a Moll Flaggon who follows the army;
But one who is really most highly respectable,
And in any mispractices hardly detectable,
Oh CRUISBANK, oh CRUISBANK! you're rather too late, man,
To etch a fresh ballad of "Noble Lord Bateman";
But here is a subject that you would admire,
With a heart as capacious as one could desire;
Who'd eclipse in affection Lord Bateman's Sophia,
And what more can the tenderest female require?
As soft as a Puff, and as sweet as a Banbury,
Who would not delight in the elegant HAWBURY?
Go Hornby, pass on, for my Pegasus slackens
His pace, and on seeing your eyes are such black-uns,
Begins to go
Terribly slow;
Or is that seeing the face of VASSETTARY,
He prepares his off leg for a terrible hit hard?
And—no! I'll pass on, for the Colonel may be
Tempted to take a sly hit at me,
And I know if he opens his mouth in choler,
'Tis ten to one that a stang will follow.
Come, come, there must be no flaggin' now,
Except for the Ensign, who's making a bow
As stiff as a poker; I'm told, by the bye,
That all Ensigns have been most outrageously sly,
And that this one took lessons in winking his eye,
To give pleasure when certain "young ladies" came by,
But from such immodes my song let me purge,
For fear the vexed HEVROX should sing a dirge,
But who comes here, to close the procession?
He has clearly made an immense impression!
Secreted and smirking,
Eyes wickedly working,
Oh ha!
'Dear ma!
'Do look at lieutenant what's-his-name!
"Smith, is it not?"
'Oh no, I forgot."
'Tis that dear little STEPHENS, the ladies man!"
'With the newest of fashions turned out by Davies,
From Hanover street, for his Barn Aric,
But where is burly Brocklebank?
Him that the Captain ought to thank,
For getting the Queen
(God bless her) to give a pretty round sum
To make up what euds call the teo-tootum,
And the Prince with a smile
Sits by her while,
With a good-natured mien,
And he has not shirked giving, I ween!
But GRANNY, where's she?
Who represents—
As fess may do the elephants—
Old England's Aristocracy!
Gathering salt for the captain's pocket,
While her head quakes, I wot,
(Though a quaker she's not,
And sharp she looks out that the folk don't dock it,
'Tis said that soldiers who have past
Their weary pilgrimages at last,
Love to sit down beneath some tree
To tell their tale of victory;
While some fair stream winds rippling slowly,
Tangled with a light as soft as wooly,
As Heav'n's own blue can fling upon it,—
Or—Madame Voullon's brightest bonnet,—
(This simile I was forced to invent,
Because I was dabbling in sentiment.)
So here let it be—
Here's three times three
To the very good health of Her Majesty,
And the whole of the Royal Family;
Long be it Eton's pride to see
Gentle and simple of every degree,
Walking beneath each old elm tree!
And many long years may all of us know it,
So pray, most humbly, the

MONTM POET.

Montem Ode, 1844
(SCH P 08 03)

13

Childhood Costume



Montem Salt-Bearer's outfit, 17th-century style (MEL.451:1-4-2010)

Photograph of Cecil Millett in Montem costume, 1912 (SCH LIB 06 01)



Montem costume offers a unique insight into historical children's clothing. It weaves together early English court dress, exotic fashions, and military uniform. It was worn for 'fancy dress' and for 'dressing up': for play and for prestige. The extant examples of costume we have, artistic depictions, and minutely written descriptions of clothing from earlier years all convey how important this fancy dress was to the boys and their families, and even to wider society, through influence on fashions of the day¹³.

The costumes were replicas of adult clothing. Until the end of the 19th century children dressed in smaller versions of what their elders wore. Much of the clothing used for dress-up was the formal wear of earlier eras. The outfits were also notably prestigious, worn to signify elite status both within the school hierarchy and externally. For centuries ordinary clothing was made of wool and linen, and later cotton. Vibrantly coloured silks, richly adorned with gilt metal covered-thread, ribbons and slashes adding further layers and colours, topped with extravagantly plumed hats were luxurious and mimicked the highest of court dresses, whether from the court of King Charles II, a Grand Vizier of the Turkish Empire or a Highland Chieftan. In earlier years costumes were loaned from theatres¹⁴; later boys and their families spent considerable sums on buying their pieces or hiring from London.

Children's clothing is temporary: it is soon outgrown. Boys would send costume home and families would keep them for future use or as a souvenir. It is typical for garments, particularly significant items, to be handed down through generations of a family, or passed on to others. All this increases wear and tear, making it difficult to preserve historic examples. The Montem procession and associated rowdiness offered additional challenges for delicate textiles. In 1781 Lord Clifton John wrote to his parents:

*'my coat did not suffer at all, the only things that did were my hat & Stockings...I believe the Stockings are quite spoilt. The sash & Gorget have not received the least injury, & I will send them to you as desired. I have put them up very carefully.'*¹⁵

Montem clothing was repurposed for other fancy dress events and for entertaining. Many of the costumes show signs of alterations and repairs, indicating they were reused at least once. In recent years conservation has revealed a number of the adjustments made to the outfits; inserting panels to accommodate a child's growth or to fit a boy with a different physique; or reinforcing seams and areas of wear. It was not only the elaborate dress worn by Pages and Servitors that were treasured; the red military jackets were immediately reused by the boys, who were allowed to continue wearing them for school in the months following Montem. Some stretched this; accounts indicate some boys were still wearing their red coats in 1847, three years after the final procession.¹⁶

40. Montem Salt-Bearer's outfit, 17th-century style (MEL.451:1-4-2010)
41. Blue velvet Montem coat, worn by John Phillips Judd in the 1826 Montem (MEL.431-2010)
42. Montem Salt-Bearer's or Page's outfit, c.1830s-40s (MEL.446:1-2-2010), with cotton sateen breeches, c.1830s-40s (MEL.452-2010)
43. Unknown engraver, The Illustrated London News, Eton Montem illustrations, 1844 (private collection)
44. Cushion refashioned from a Montem Salt Bearer's bag, bag would have been used pre-1844 (MEL.548:01-2010)
45. Photograph of Cecil Millett in Montem costume, 1912 (SCH LIB 06 01)
46. Red Montem jacket, 1840 (MEL.440-2010)

Citations

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- ² R. Neville, *Floreat Etona: Anecdotes and Memories of Eton College*, Macmillan & Co., Ltd, London, 1911, p.131
- ³ M Fraser, *The History of Slough*, 2nd edn, Slough Corporation, 1980, p.74
- ⁴ Neville, p.149
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ J Long, *Eton Memories by An Old Etonian*, London, 1909
- ⁷ Commons Hansard for 15 March 1847, Commons Chamber, Eton Montem vol. 90, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1847-03-15>
- ⁸ Letter from Alexander Read to his mother describing Montem, 1820, Eton College Archives (ED 390)
- ⁹ Copy letter from Provost Hodgson to George Howard, Lord Morpeth (later 7th Earl of Carlisle), 19 November 1846, Eton College Archives (ED 531 04)
- ¹⁰ J Reed, 'The Public Schools in Victorian Literature' in *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, University of California Press, June 1974, Vol.29, p.59
- ¹¹ Neville, p.148
- ¹² William Selwyn, Farewell to Montem, 1832, Eton College Archives (ED 454 07)
- ¹³ C Dille, 'The Eton Montem custom c.1750-1844: privilege, pageantry and sanctioned misrule' in *Cultural and Social History*, 19 July 2018, p.11
- ¹⁴ Brand, p.214
- ¹⁵ Transcript of letter from Lord Clifton John to his parents describing 1781 Montem, November 1951, Eton College Archives (COLL/PG15/157)
- ¹⁶ Neville, p.146

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