

DRESS FOR DEFERENCE AND DISSENT: HATS AND THE DECLINE OF HAT HONOUR

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Not many days ago, a certain oatmeal maker, taking upon him to be a preacher and therefore imprisoned, was called before the High Commission: where, keeping on his hat and being asked, why he did not put it off? he answered, '*He would never put off his hat to Bishops*'.

'But you will to Privy Councillors?' said one of them. *'Then as you are Privy Councillors,'* (quoth he) *'I put off my hat; but as ye are rags of the Beast, lo! - I put it on again'*.

Privy Council examination: reported, 17 April 1630, in letter from Joseph Mede to Sir Martin Stuteville

The moveable headgear of the obstinate oatmeal maker - a 'frantic foolish fellow' in the view of the slighted Bishops¹ - was no mere sartorial idiosyncrasy. His hat signalled his political stance with precision. At first, the oatmeal maker refused to bare his head to episcopal authority, believing that the Bishops of the Church of England were agents of the sinister Beast named Blasphemy, long prophesied in the Book of

Revelations. Then, on request, he doffed in submission to the secular authority of the King's Privy Council. But, as some Councillors were simultaneously Bishops, the obstinate hat was promptly replaced.

It was a defiant move, from a man of modest social status, who was after all on trial before the Court of High Commission for religious dissent. It openly challenged the convention that 'inferiors' should render 'hat honour', baring their heads to their 'superiors'. And, in this instance, it signalled that his quarrel was with the Bishops, not with the political authority of the King, although the Privy Councillors themselves showed no enthusiasm for the careful distinction.

Furthermore, the oatmeal maker was not alone in his contumacy. It was a mark of determined religious radicalism at that time, for men to refuse to doff to ecclesiastical authority and to remain covered in church.² Political egalitarians followed suit. In 1649, the Diggers kept on their hats at a meeting with their 'fellow-creator', the Lord General Fairfax. And in 1657 the Fifth Monarchist, Thomas Venner, would not uncover to the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell.³

Using an everyday and highly visible item like a hat was an effective and very personal means of communication. The development of dress and body language signalled, in immediate semaphore, an individual's social and political viewpoint. Refusing an outward show of submission before authority did not, of course, in itself topple crowns - or even episcopal mitres. Yet it gave even a powerless individual some scope for bold personal expression, while simultaneously shocking or angering the flouted 'superior'.

Challenging an accepted convention had therefore a distinct point. It depended, of course, upon the existence of the custom and also upon the visibility and prominence of the hat. Confrontation over these questions seems to have become abrasive particularly from the later sixteenth

century onwards, as the use and etiquette of headgear became increasingly formalised. Equally fascinating for modern social and sartorial history has been the subsequent waning and virtual disappearance of ‘hat honour’, while the wearing of hats has also become optional, in an interesting interplay of cause and effect. In other words, the history of headgear has signalled not only individual preferences but also wider social change. ‘The Hat, it must constantly be borne in mind, should not be lightly spoken of’, as a Victorian anecdotist of hattery announced,⁴ only half in jest.

Clothing in general, being at once ubiquitous yet personal to each wearer, affords much scope for intricate social interpretation. It does more than merely cover and protect the body, as costume historians, fashion editors, social scientists, anthropologists, and psychologists (both amateur and professional) have long indicated.⁵ The visibility of dress conveys instant and often multiple messages: social; sexual; occupational; generational; ethnic; geographical; personal. Some of those are conveyed implicitly; others explicitly and self-consciously. In particular, the selection and manipulation of external items of dress can be used to express a myriad of meanings, from display to disguise; from deference to dissent.

While dress is often imitative, therefore, its deployment is far from standardised. There is often tension between differentiation and conformity. People had - and have - relatively little choice in the general clothing styles of their era and community. Yet there is often much greater fluidity with reference to the origin and reception of shorter-term fashions, which depend upon a relatively rapid turnover as part of their appeal;⁶ and there is additional scope in acknowledging, modifying, or flouting the communal but not invariable conventions that regulate acceptability in dress and undress. Of course, sartorial freedom is never absolute.

Individuals are constrained by context, disposable income, and resource availability. Equally, however, clothing is neither the simple end-product of a given production chain, nor a static denominator of a fixed social hierarchy.

There was a long tradition of complaint in Britain - and indeed in many parts of Western Europe - that, in sartorial matters, things were not always what they seemed. Too many people were prone to dress 'above their station', it was frequently alleged. Masters were confused with their journeymen, wives with servant-maids. How far confusion spread in reality is difficult to know, but these complaints were taken seriously. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, governments had responded with strict sumptuary laws, attempting to regulate the appropriate fabrics and styles for the different social strata.⁷ But this legislation completely failed to curb competitive dressing, and anyway did not seriously intend to halt the growth of manufacturing and international trade, which brought many new wares into production and circulation.

By the eighteenth century, complaints at the deceptions perpetrated by dress were legion, almost routine. Disconsolate calls for the renewal of the sumptuary laws (which had been repealed in England in 1604) went unheeded, not least because of the manifest difficulties of enforcement in a mobile and urbanising society. Status was conferred not only by birth but by social negotiation. 'People, where they are not known, are generally honour'd according to their Cloaths ...', ran de Mandeville's celebrated dictum from *The Fable of the Bees* (1724). He added:⁸

It is this which encourages every body, who is conscious of his little Merit, if he is any ways able to wear Cloaths above his Rank, especially in large and Populous Cities, where obscure Men may hourly meet with fifty Strangers to one Acquaintance, and consequently have the Pleasure of being esteem'd by a vast Majority, not as what they are, but what they appear to be.

Concern with clothing and self-presentation was therefore by no

means confined to a small elite.⁹ On the contrary, the relative social flexibility heightened a wider interest, which fashion promoters also did their best to encourage. Women in particular at all social levels were often accused of excessive preoccupation with the externals of dress; and they constituted a significant, if far from monolithic, consumer group in the eighteenth-century market.¹⁰ But that in turn was clearly influenced by English society's acceptance; not to say outright encouragement, of female conspicuous display. 'When a poor Young Lady is taught to value her self on nothing but her Cloaths, and to think she's very fine when well accoutred ...', mused Mary Astell in 1696, 'who can blame her if she lay out her Industry and Money on such Accomplishments?'¹¹

Doubtless, many homespun citizens, like Wycherley's Plain-Dealer in 1677, denounced the "lying, masking, daubing world",¹² and deplored the growing sartorial fluidity as license. Yet there were others, who were prepared to enjoy the liberating potential of dress for concealment and disguise. For example, the eighteenth-century masquerades had an immense success by offering the opportunity for both men and women to appear anonymously - for an evening - in new social or sexual roles.¹³ Moralists were genuinely shocked, but the crowds attended happily, turning the challenge of identification into a tantalising entertainment. In daily life, too, people were able to lift constraints of formality by a change of clothes. It was reported in 1726 that some noblemen occasionally amused themselves by walking the streets attired as simple citizens, although the Duke of Bolton lacked logic when he complained at then being jostled by the Duke of Somerset's footman.¹⁴ Again, there is little evidence on the extent of this sort of reverse social adventuring, although Boswell, for example, essayed it.¹⁵ But it was certainly an option available in the relative impersonality of the great metropolis. There were also a number of recorded instances of cross-dressing, when men successfully

lived as women, and women as men.¹⁶

In a society alert to options in external display, it was not surprising therefore that careful attention was paid to hats. Headgear has always attracted attention from its visibility, and, in the European tradition, men's hats in particular have lent themselves to expression through movement - here in contrast to the greater fixity of women's bonnets and head-dresses. Aggression, defiance, salutation, respect, submission, entreaty, and emotion were readily conveyed by adroit handling. Illustrations 1-4 provide some eighteenth-century examples, as identified by artists and satirists; and these were supplemented by many more, showing men's hats variously adorned, cocked, tipped, removed, carried, raised, flourished, waved, thrown into the air, passed round, extended, cast aside or otherwise manipulated. By contrast, the lesser mobility of women's headgear gave scope for elaborate confections,¹⁷ with fashionable plumes and top-knots attracting attention and suggesting added distinction through added height.

An extensive hatting industry sustained a widespread hat-ownership, among both sexes and virtually all social groups.¹⁸ Eighteenth-century headgear was adopted not only for warmth and protection, but also for manoeuvre and display. Considerable attention was paid to hatting materials, from straw bonnets to fine beavers, as well as to style and trimmings. In public, men customarily kept their hair covered with a powdered wig or peruke.¹⁹ Their hats were then perched on top of the wig (which could reach some height) or carried under the arm. Indeed, during the eighteenth century, it became decreasingly common for men to wear their headgear - other than wigs and nightcaps - indoors, as social etiquette became increasingly formalised and as housing also became better heated. That applied both in private homes and at public assemblies²⁰ (Figs 5, 6) unless the purpose of a gathering was military or

ceremonial. For example, Members of Parliament, as political masters in their own House, were entitled to sit wearing hats, although, when speaking on the floor, they were expected to uncover.²¹ But, by the eighteenth century, many found a wig quite sufficient for their dignity.

Style instead dictated a preferred mode of carrying the ubiquitous three-cornered hat, eventually known as the tricorne,²² which was reversed and tucked beneath the arm. In the 1760S and 1770S, a special flat version was developed, which was solely to be held and not worn: the *chapeau bras*. On one occasion in 1751, a novel insult was traded by this means. At an assembly, when Lord Hervey stood holding out his upturned hat, Lord Cobham spat in it, for a guinea wager.²³ His attempt to claim it as a joke was not well received, and public opinion sided with the affronted victim. The colloquialism ‘to spit in one’s hat and wipe it’ thereupon entered the slang currency of the day, referring to the clumsiness both of the insult and the subsequent apology.

Notable men often wore notable hats. Beau Nash was famous for his white beaver, which stood out among the customary black.²⁴ Benjamin Franklin, on his embassy to Paris in 1775, had a fashionable success with his unfashionable round Quaker hat.²⁵ Charles James Fox also favoured the high-crowned style, ancestor of the later and much more elongated topper.²⁶ Radical orators meanwhile used the visibility and symbolism of white hats: as, for example, did John Thelwall in the 1790s and Henry Hunt in the 1810s.²⁷ These men were all relatively speaking social or political outsiders, using clothing to assert their presence among the crowds.

Others preferred peer group identification. It was possible ‘to know the Principles of each man by the cock of his Hat’, claimed a (fictional) man-about-town in 1702: the conceited wit tilted his hat over the left eye, the travelled wit over the right; the country squire pushed his behind his

wig, the *beau* carried his under the arm; while the man with his brim pulled down on both sides was a speculator - or a member of the Society for the Reformation of Manners.²⁸ Later, in the 1760s, the differing styles still denoted social rivalry:²⁹

There is the military cock, and the mercantile cock, and, while the beaux of St. James's wear their hats under their arms, the beaux of Moorfields Mall wear them diagonally over their left or right eye.

Henry Fielding waxed satirical on the same theme. His Jonathan Wild showed his greatness by calming disputes between his followers who wore their hats 'fiercely cocked' (known as Cavaliers and Tory rory Ranter boys) and the others, 'who preferred the nab or trencher hat, with the brim flapping over their eyes' (known as Wags, Roundheads, Shake-bags, and Old Nolls).³⁰ These echoing nicknames from the mid-seventeenth-century civil wars indicated the militant passions evoked by rival group plumage, although in this fictional case Fielding's anti-hero averted a battle. Meanwhile, many real disputes were marked by the sporting of conspicuous favours and tokens in the hat. Nor was sartorial commitment confined to Hanoverian Britain. In Sweden at the same period the two main contending political parties were formally known as the 'Hats' and the 'Caps'.³¹

Above all, as the head was symbol of authority, the covering or uncovering of the head, in Western society, was for men an important signal of relative status. Whether and how universally regarded in practice is impossible to ascertain; but the expectation was clear enough. The traditional custom was expressed in the Princeton College rules of 1756. They declared that: 'Inferiors, when they come into the company of a superior or speak to him, shall show their respect by pulling the hats'.³²

That rule was simplest for monarchs. Kings stood covered, while subjects bared their heads, although ambassadors (representing foreign kings) did not.³³ The custom was then extended down the social hierarchy.

‘Inferiors’ owed the duty of ‘hat honour’ to a ‘superior’, by removing the hat on meeting. Young men owed it to their elders; and sons to fathers, as the household was a microcosm of society. Conversely, grantees could pay pleasant compliments by waiving the custom. That was done, for example, by Charles II in 1663, when his illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, was dancing at court: ‘The king came in and kissed him and made him put on his hat, which everybody took notice of’.³⁴ On another occasion, the formidable Dr Busby, headmaster of Westminster School, claimed the same privilege, in order not to abate his authority before his pupils;³⁵ and, apparently, the flexible Charles II agreed.

Rituals of hat-doffing were studied by those aspiring to the social graces. The eighteenth-century ideal was an unflurried ease, without excessive ostentation. ‘Dress, like writing, should never appear the effect of too much study and application’, advised William Shenstone in 1764.³⁶ At the same time, the requirements of hat honour needed good style. The *Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1737) was emphatic:³⁷

The right Arm must rise to the Hat with moderate Motion sideways, the ... Hand turn'd and its Palm shown, the Fingers must be on the Brim, and the Forefinger extended on the Crown of the Hat, and the Thumb under the Brim ...; and whilst taking it off, let the Look and Action be complaisantly address'd to the Person to whom the compliment is intended; the left Arm should fall neither backward nor forward (both which wou'd look disagreeable) but gently by the Side, ... and holding the Glove in an easy, careless Manner.

By accentuating or abbreviating the action, individuals had a certain scope for self-expression. It was sometimes difficult to tell, for example when walking out of doors, within what physical range the salutation was expected, although it was accepted that it did not apply at a great distance. Some were therefore able to move away from ‘superiors’ to evade or ignore the custom.

Others, more boldly, refused to comply on principle. As already

noted, in the early seventeenth century, a refusal to bear the head to Bishops was a visible pledge of dissent among radical Puritan men, such as the contumacious oatmeal maker. Numerous others refused to take their hats off in church, particularly during the sermon, in direct contravention of the eighteenth canon of the Church of England. The same sartorial nonconformity was later retained by many of the separated Nonconformist congregations in the eighteenth century. By then, the refusal of hat honour was slightly less daring, as individuals were not alone in their obstinacy; but it made their practices distinctive, and affirmed their willingness to challenge formal convention.³⁸ In that, they were kept company by some continental and American Anabaptist and Mennonite communities, although characteristically each group had its own preferences in hat style and usage.³⁹ Meanwhile, Nonconformist women, in their plain bonnets or caps, were not in breach of traditional church etiquette derived from St Paul's instruction in I Corinthians II, which had always required female heads to be covered.

Denial of hat honour in the secular sphere developed closely with egalitarian claims in religion. Determined radicals in the civil war years of the 1640s and 1650s signalled their personal independence by that means. 'When the Lord sent me forth in the world', wrote George Fox in the 1650s, 'he forbade me to put off my hat to any, high or low ... neither might I bow or scrape with my leg to any one'.⁴⁰ Subsequently, the Quaker movement, that he founded, remained strongly committed to this rule, as a visible pledge of personal simplicity and equality. It went with use of the familiar 'thee' and 'thou' to social superiors, another challenge to the conventions of the day.⁴¹ The booming growth of Quakerism throughout the later seventeenth century suggests that this personalised expression of dissent had some attraction during the post-Restoration period of public defeat for religious radicalism, although it is impossible

to know how determinedly all individual Quakers held onto their hats.

Gradually, however, social custom began to catch up with the rebels. In the following centuries, there was a long-term decline in the rigid formality of ‘hat honour’ between men, particularly outside court and ceremonial circles. That did not happen as a result of conscious protest, although no doubt the stubborn Quakers and other nonconformist individuals had some cumulative impact (just as the long Puritan tradition also contributed to the eventual triumph of sobriety in men’s clothing styles). But changing social and cultural contexts had a yet more pervasive influence. With the growth of towns, inter-personal contacts were often brisk and fleeting, giving little opportunity for detailed mutual assessment.⁴² Indeed, in many circles, it was difficult to know who was superior to whom, apart from those at the extremities of the traditional hierarchy.

Furthermore, the prevalent constitutional (but not democratic) tradition in Hanoverian Britain encouraged a belief in the ‘freeborn Englishman’, which in turn discountenanced exaggerated expressions of personal submission. Such modes of greeting were thought of as slavish and ‘foreign’. In parallel with that, an informal and openly affectionate behaviour was increasingly cultivated within families.⁴³ Fathers no longer remained hatted before hatless sons, partly as indoor hat-wearing disappeared but also as parental authority was not presented in such magisterial style. In the later seventeenth century, for example, Lord Clarendon noted the diminishing of this signal of respect for old age as a sign of the degeneracy of the times.⁴⁴

Out of doors, doffing between men of different social class also gradually attenuated. In 1810-11, the observant American traveller, Louis Simond, noticed that in Britain, while people responded civilly to his enquiries, they did not pull off their hats, as would be necessary in Paris:

‘a slight inclination of the head, or a motion of the hand, is thought sufficient’.⁴⁵ And earlier, in 1766, a quiet Cornish rector had noted sadly the casualness of clerical salutations at Bath: ‘But poor Country Parsons pass by the side of a Bishop, without any compliment to his Episcopal Order’.⁴⁶

Of course, customs changed only gradually and in a very piecemeal fashion, so that practice was by no means uniform throughout the country. Touching the hat as a mark of respect undoubtedly continued, and it was codified for the specialist purposes of the army into the military salute, which still survives. But in civilian life the gesture became relatively brisk and perfunctory, in comparison with the traditional flourish. By the nineteenth century, there were many comments that formal hat-doffing was in marked decline. And later still, by the mid-twentieth century, even a brisk hat-touching to social superiors has become very much a minority gesture, aided and abetted by the very widespread decline in hat-wearing.⁴⁷ However, if a hat is worn, it still constitutes a mark of respect to remove it, for example at funerals.

Innovation in these matters seems to have begun in the towns, but spread rapidly enough elsewhere. In 1790, the choleric John Byng had complained that even rural England had lost its ‘honesty, cheapness, ancient customs, and civility’ - which included reverent bowing and greetings - a change that he attributed to the diffusion of knavery and abuse from London.⁴⁸ As with bowing and scraping for men, so the deep curtsy for women also began to diminish into a brisk bob, except for its continuing use on ceremonial occasions. In her autobiography, Elizabeth Ham, the daughter of a small yeoman farmer, remembered that in her Dorset childhood in the 1780s indiscriminate salutations were discouraged: ‘I used to curtsy to all the fine-dressed ladies that I met, till told not to do so by the nurse-maid, with whom I generally walked out’.⁴⁹

This form of greeting did not disappear rapidly or even totally, but in the presence of all other than royalty it became increasingly optional and decreasingly formalised. The curtsy can still be found, generally in the form of the attenuated bob, but now derives its impact from rarity. These changes had cultural as well as economic roots. They indicated a new moderation in the interpersonal expression of the inequalities of social class, a trend in public presentation that has accentuated as the British constitution has been gradually democratised, and British society urbanised.

Nonetheless, in the eighteenth century and after, the civility of ‘hat honour’ between friends and acquaintances survived more fully. That carried a related but different emphasis: it indicated deference, but not so much to strict social hierarchy, as to personal and moral worth. This usage as social courtesy was established in the informal codification of gentlemanly good manners in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵⁰ ‘Two meeting in a narrow dirty Pathway, the Party that gives way is to receive the Civility of the Hat, or a Curtsey from a Woman’, instructed *The Man of Manners* firmly in 1737.⁵¹ In Richardson’s *History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753/4), the perfections of the hero eventually wrung a reluctant tribute from an enemy: ‘I would sooner veil [doff] to such a Man as this than to a King on his Throne’.⁵²

Acknowledgements of this sort implied courtesy and a marked element of personal recognition, if not equality. As it was a custom particularly of ‘polite society’, it was particularly prized by those of uncertain status. That ambitious gentleman’s gentleman, John MacDonald, proudly recorded of one employer in 1763: ‘The Major was a polite man. If he met me in the streets ... and I lifted my hat, he returned it; but no more’.⁵³ Clearly, the greeting was less than ecstatic, but it closed the social distance between master and man. Indeed, an adventurer could turn

good manners to his own advantage. *The Frauds and Cheats of London Detected* (1802) warned against the ‘Spunger’, who raised his hat to fashionable strangers, relying upon their polite acknowledgement to give himself a bogus prestige as a man of the world, in the eyes of gullible country newcomers.⁵⁴ Similarly, *The Man of Manners* had observed wryly that noblemen were prone to receive reverences and familiar smiles from all kinds of passers-by: ‘People they have no more Personal ... Knowledge of than of Julius Caesar’.⁵⁵

Most long-lasting and ubiquitous of all forms of ‘hat honour’ was that between the sexes. Here recognition was both personal and social. Polite behaviour required men to doff their hats to women, and especially to ‘ladies’. Between friends and acquaintances, that implied civility and recognition, to which the response was a nod or smile. It meant that the traditionally more powerful man could doff to an ‘inferior’ woman but without risking social subversion, as the signal was made with the full confidence of authority. The recipient was, meanwhile, flattered by the chivalrous gesture from the ‘powerful’ male, which indicated his ‘gentlemanly’ breeding as well as her status.

There was also a class dimension, that returned to the idea of a traditional hierarchy. Hats were taken off in the presence of ‘ladies’, in deference to their social elevation. But, since these respectable personages were never clearly defined, men faced a continual challenge to their judgement. The salutation became a token of esteem that was particularly coveted by women of uncertain status, whether moral or social. In 1860, Wilkie Collins created a vivid picture of such a case. As the grim but once raffish Mrs Catherick struggled to gain respectability, the mild hero saw her manoeuvre to get the local clergyman to raise his hat to her, and reported, with a tinge of admiration for her tenacity: ‘I saw the hard ghastly face behind the window soften, and light up with gratified pride - I

saw the head with the grim black cap bend ceremoniously in return. The clergyman had bowed to her, and in my presence, twice in one day!’⁵⁶ This fictional case history suggested the importance that minor nuances of style could carry for status-conscious individuals.

It indicated furthermore that the man essentially held the power to extend or withhold the accolade of ‘hat honour’, while the putative ‘lady’ had a lesser, if not insignificant, chance to counter-attack by an appeal to conventional courtesies. Eventually, however, even this critical arena for social and sexual jousting began to lose its centrality, as inter-class hat signals began to wane, hat-wearing became less ubiquitous, and, in many cases, ‘ladies’ less instantly recognisable. In a novel of 1920, for example, the traditional ritual of uncovering and forelock-tugging was described as an ‘antique courtesy’. And on that occasion, when Dornford Yates’s indubitably ladylike but equally fictional Daphne was so saluted by an old road-mender, her brother commented with some nostalgia: ‘I’ll bet no man’s ever done that to you before’.⁵⁷ Practices of hat-doffing between acquaintances did not, on the other hand, disappear as rapidly.⁵⁸ In some circles, it still continues, albeit usually with simplicity rather than with the old-style flourish. But only a minority of the population of modern Britain now wears hats regularly, and probably only a minority of that minority continues to offer the ‘civility of the hat’.

Needless to say, by the nature of things, these highly nuanced changes occurred without a single precise historical dating. It is clear, however, that in the long term the style of ‘hat honour’ underwent a slow process of attenuation: from a flourishing removal with a bow, to an arrested half-lifting of the hat, to a brief touch of the hat or head or a vague gesture with the hand. Similarly, the occasions for such sartorial greetings have much diminished. Ceremonial ‘hat honour’ survives on special occasions and for uniformed staff, but it has normally disappeared

in casual encounters between the classes, and it has virtually, if not absolutely, abated between the sexes.

Change was considerably eased by the modern decline in hat-wearing itself. Victorian men had still sported their silk toppers, felt bowlers, and broad-brimmed 'wideawakes' in abundance. But subsequently, and notably since the Second World War, usage has become more optional and eclectic, with hatted men now in a distinct minority.⁵⁹ Certainly, that transformation has not stemmed from any failure in production or distribution, nor indeed from any lessening of the capacity of human headgear to provide warmth and decoration (although umbrellas now compete in providing protection against rain). It seems rather to record a major change in style, as much as fashion. And that, in turn, may well be inter-linked - partly as cause and partly as effect - with the diminishing custom of using hats to signal 'hat honour'.

As the old, hierarchic custom decayed, a more egalitarian form of physical greeting has quietly gained greater currency. That is the hand-shake, which is relatively more direct and intimate but still, in the English version, retains a certain distance between the participants, unlike the familiar continental embrace and exchange of kisses on the cheek. Social handshaking also began to acquire its own customs and styles. Some pumped limbs enthusiastically; others gave special signs, such as the Masonic signal; while the world-weary did no more than extend a nonchalant fore-finger. A bargain sealed with a hand-shake was personally ratified; equally, a refusal to shake hands was a direct personal snub.

As a greeting, it was known in England from at least the sixteenth century if not before,⁶⁰ when it was generally used between close friends or individuals of similar status, particularly but not exclusively on first meeting or upon remeeting after an absence. It became socially more noticeable and was probably used more widely, once hat signalling

gradually declined. Polite society in Victorian England, however, often found its body language rather too intimate, especially when confronted by strangers of lower social status. Frances Trollope in 1832, for example, found the American habit of egalitarian hand-shaking between both sexes and all social classes distinctly too forward, especially as ‘the near approach of the gentleman [ironically] was always redolent of whiskey and tobacco’.⁶¹ Elizabeth Gaskell in *North and South* (1864) also plotted the social tension between the ladylike parson’s daughter from the south, who bowed, and the cotton master from Manchester, who, in ‘the frank, familiar custom of the place’, held out his hand.⁶² Not all encounters were, however, as interesting as theirs. In modern Britain, shaking hands has become less highly charged and more casual. If there is a formal physical greeting (between other than close friends and family circles), that is probably now the form it takes, although there is still considerable social hesitation about its use, particularly with strangers of unknown provenance.

Although custom is still slowly adapting to the disappearance of ‘hat honour’, hats themselves retain their versatility. Ousted from one historic function, their sartorial and social attractions are by no means at an end. Proverbially, hats are eaten, passed round, talked through, thrown into the ring, or simply hung up. They are held in hand; secrets are kept under them; or surprises pulled out of them; and people knocked into a cocked version of them. Things are done at the drop of a hat; and sportsmen covet three for a hat-trick. Bonnets may contain bees; caps may be set at young men, and put on by dunces - or by thinkers. Hanging judges wore black; cardinals wear red. In ballads, they are draped with green willow; and music-hall ditties enquired: ‘Where did you get that hat?’ Psychologists have suggested that headgear, among numerous other items of clothing, may have phallic symbolism;⁶³ and it certainly recurs in

sexual metaphor. Moreover, opponents were ‘bad hats’ (thus, for example, the Duke of Wellington on the Reform Parliament in 1832); swells were ‘high hats’; and much, very much, is ‘old hat’. If it was enough to drive hatters mad,⁶⁴ customers have kept their sense of humour.

Consequently, the scope for intricate and evolving sartorial semaphore is never concluded. Styles, fashions, and customs in dress and its deployment are not ‘mere externals’ but are integral parts of compound historic processes. All that, from deference to dissent and more, radical oatmeal makers - and countless others - have silently signalled with their hats.

ENDNOTES

¹ BL, Harl. MSS 390, f.512v, where Mede (also Mead) announced this as a ‘merry tale’.

² Catholic tradition, which decreed that women remained covered in church, preferred that men bared their heads. Many Protestant Churches, including the Church of England, retained that canonical requirement, but radical individuals prepared to challenge ritualised conventions that to them obtruded between Man and his Maker. For example, in 1638 Stanley Gower, the Puritan rector of Brampton Bryan in Herefordshire, was accused, with his patron Sir Robert Harley, of refusing to permit parishioners to bow at the name of Jesus, or to remove their hats during the sermon and lessons, while Gower often preached without wearing a surplice: see Public Record Office State Papers 16/381/92; complaints summarised as ‘all the customary irregularities’ by the editor in *Calendar of Stare Papers Domestic: 1637-8*, p. 249. Further examples are also noted in R.C. Richardson, *Puritans in the Diocese of Chester, 1603-40* (1972), pp. 80-1, and (from Lincolnshire) in R. Cust, *The Forced Loan and English Politics, 1626-8* (Oxford, 1987), p. 298. It will be interesting eventually to learn from Church Court and allied records how numerous were such cases, but conscious radicalism has to be distinguished from casual irreverence, which was widespread: see F.G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Morals and the Church Courts* (Chelmsford, 1973), pp.117-19; and K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (1971), pp. 161-2.

³ These and other examples are cited in H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, ed. C. Hill (1961), pp. 45-6, who identifies the refusal of hat honour as Anabaptist in origin.

⁴ G. Sala, *The Hats of Humanity, Historically, Humorously, and Aesthetically Considered: A Homily* (1880?), p. 14.

⁵ A thought-provoking survey is provided in J.C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930). See also S.B. Kaiser (ed.), *The Social Psychology of Clothing* (New York, 1985).

⁶ The history of dress makes the useful distinction between longer-term styles in dress (German: *Trachten*), which are general in their application and not rapidly altered, and shorter-term fashions (Fr: *modes*), whose rigorous adoption may be confined to discrete sections of the population and which depend upon rapid turnover as part of their appeal. Changes in both are influenced not only by production and distribution, but also by consumer attitudes which may in turn change either rapidly or slowly over time. For style/fashion, see F. Redlich, ‘A Needed Distinction in Fashion Study’, *Business History Review*, 37 (1963), pp. 3-4; and for a meditative essay on these themes, see G. Simmel, ‘Fashion’ (1904), in *George Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. D.N. Levine (Chicago, 1971), pp. 294-323, first publ. in German as ‘Philosophie der Mode’ (1905).

⁷ For a key discussion and references also to longer-surviving European legislation, see N.B. Harte, ‘State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England’, in D.C. Coleman and A.H. John (eds), *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England* (1976), pp. 132-65.

⁸ B. de Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Public Benefits* (1724; 1970), p. 152.

⁹ See the substantial discussion in N. McKendrick, ‘The Commercialisation of Fashion’, in idem, J. Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The*

Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England (1982), pp. 34-99. A number of eighteenth-century commentators pointed to the importance of changes in fashion for stimulating consumer demand and thence industrial production; on that, see E.L. Jones, 'The Fashion Manipulators', in L.P. Cain and P.J. Uselding (eds), *Business Enterprise and Economic Change* (Kent, Ohio, 1973); and D.E. Robinson, 'The Importance of Fashions in Taste to Business History: An Introductory Essay', *Business History Review*, 37 (1963), pp. 5-36.

¹⁰ For women as consumers, see brief comments in L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (1987), pp. 29-30, 360-2, 375-80, 413-15. T. Veblen's classic *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1899); ed. C. Wright Mills (1970), esp. pp. 54-5, 68-9, 121-7, 242-3, attributes a key, if essentially passive, role to women in his interpretation of conspicuous consumption.

¹¹ M. Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1696), in B. Hill (ed.), *The First English Feminist: Reflections upon Marriage and Other Writings by Mary Astell* (1986), p. 148.

¹² W. Wycherley, *The Plain-Dealer: A Comedy* (1677), in A. Friedman (ed.), *The Plays of William Wycherley* (Oxford, 1979), p. 397.

¹³ The social context is surveyed in A. Ribeiro, *The Dress Worn at Masquerades in England, 1730-90, and its Relation to Fancy Dress in Portraiture* (New York, 1984), pp. 1-102; and an energetic, if hyperbolic, study of the masquerade as subversive 'misrule' is presented in T. Castle, *Masquerade and Civilisation: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (1986), esp. pp. 56-71, for subversion in dress.

¹⁴ Mme Van Muyden, *A Foreign View of England in the Reigns of George I and George II: The Letters of M. César de Saussure to his Family* (1902), pp. 113-16.

¹⁵ See Boswell's diary for 4 June 1763, when he went out looking for prostitutes in London wearing his second mourning suit with 'a round hat with tarnished silver lace' and identifying himself as a barber. He was not intent on serious concealment, however, and reported himself 'somewhat gratified tonight that, notwithstanding of my dress, I was always taken for a gentleman in disguise': see F.A. Pottle (ed.), *Boswell's London Journal, 1762-3* (1951), pp. 272-3.

¹⁶ The most famous eighteenth-century case was that of the male Chevalier d'Eon, who dressed as a woman (for whom see *ODNB sub: D'Eon de Beaumont, Charles*) but the reverse was also not unknown, either on stage or in everyday life: see P. Rogers, 'The Breeches Part', in P.-G. Boucé (ed.), *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1982), pp. 244-58; and R.M. Dekker and L.C. Van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Cross-Dressing in Early Modern Europe* (1987).

¹⁷ For head-dresses, see C.W. and P. Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century* (1957), pp. 368-88. Head-dresses and hats rose particularly in the 1760s and 1770s, while tall ostrich plumes were in fashion in the 1790s, causing *The Times* in 1795 to wax satirical about a wind-tossed 'young lady, only ten feet high': *ibid.*, p. 387.

¹⁸ See variously F.W. Fairholt, *Costume in England: A History of Dress from the Earliest Period to the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (1846), esp. pp. 523-47; Cunnington, *Handbook*, pp. 83-9, 162-4, 234-41, 343-68; A. Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England* (1979), pp. 31, 48-9, 57-8, 122-8, 147-8; and F. Clark, *Hats* (1982), pp. 12-20. Hatting was a major and labour-intensive industry, for which see J.C. Dony, *A History of the Straw Hat Industry* (Luton, 1942) and D. Corner, 'The London Hatting Trade, 1660-1800' (unpub. ppr. Pasold Conference on the Social

History of Dress, 1985); and compare also M. Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, 1987).

¹⁹ For the fashion of wig-wearing, which lasted from the mid-seventeenth to just before the end of the eighteenth century, see Buck, *Dress*, pp. 29-30, 135, 166-7; and Cunnington, *Handbook*, pp. 89, 96, 241-60.

²⁰ Eighteenth-century illustrations of balls and public assemblies, for example, show men hatless, whereas but a few decades earlier hats had customarily been worn. Contrast, for example, the frontispiece to J. Playford, *The Dancing Master* (1st pub.1651), which shows four men dancing and wearing hats; with Hogarth's satirical 'Analysis of Beauty, Plate 11' (1753) with be-wigged men dancing at a ball, their discarded hats piled on the floor: see S. Shesgreen (ed.), *Engravings by Hogarth* (New York, 1973), illus.85. Other interior scenes in eighteenth-century prints and illustrations generally, but not invariably, show men bare-headed, often with hats hung on pegs on the wall (e.g. in church, coffee-houses, clubs) but ale-house scenes show less standardised practice.

²¹ See T.E. May's codification in *A Treatise upon the Law, Privilege, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament* (1st edn, 1844), p. 191. In divisions, however, Members could speak while sitting and covered: *ibid.*, p. 152. That may be the origin of the still continuing practice (not recorded specifically in Erskine May), whereby a special hat is worn when moving a point of order during a division. A recent (post-1983) Speaker's ruling has, however, exempted lady Members from physically donning the hat.

²² Cunnington, *Handbook*, p. 85: in 1824, the three-cornered hat was given the nickname of the 'Egham, Staines, and Windsor' in reference to their triangular location.

²³ W.S. Lewis (ed.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence, Vol. X: Horace Walpole's Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann, IV* (1960), pp. 123-4. Lady Hervey, who was a witness, labelled this: 'the most ridiculous, impertinent, silly piece of boy's play that ever was committed by any gentleman past fifteen': *ibid.*, Vol. XXVI: *Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann, X* (1971), p. 30.

²⁴ For Richard 'Beau' Nash, see P. Byrde, *The Male Image: Men's Fashions in Britain, 1300-1970* (1979), p. 182; and A. Barbeau, *Life and Letters at Bath in the Eighteenth Century* (1904), p. 44, n. 2. For Hoare's well-known portrait of Nash, with ebullient hat, see also *ibid.*, facing p. 24.

²⁵ M. Von Boehn, *Modes and Manners, Vol. IV: The Eighteenth Century* (1st pub. 1909; Eng. edn, 1935), p. 247.

²⁶ A well-known portrait of the hatted Charles James Fox by C.A. Hickel is reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 221. And in a picture of a Commons' debate in 1793 by the same painter, Fox is one of only a very few MPs to be wearing a hat: see illustration in Buck, *Dress*, p. 57. In his younger days, Fox had been a dandy, reported as wearing a feathered hat in the House: see *ODNB sub: Fox, Charles James*. Sala deplors the fact that the Bloomsbury Square statue of Fox wears no hat, whereas the man himself always wore one: Sala, *Hats*, pp. 8-9.

²⁷ For Thelwall and Hunt, see note in P.J. Corfield and C. Evans, 'John Thelwall in Wales: New Documentary Evidence', *Bulletin of Institute of Historical Research*, 59, no. 140 (1986), p. 234, n. 22.

²⁸ S. Centlivre, *The Stolen Heiress: Or, the Salamanca Doctor Outplotted* (1702), pp. 17, 22-3.

²⁹ This was based on the evidence of an 'Octogenarian', as reported in J. Planché, *History of British Costume* (1834), p. 313.

³⁰ H. Fielding, *The History [sometimes Life] of Jonathan Wild the Great* (1785 edn;

1st pub. 1743), p. 95.

³¹ The 'Hats' were an aristocratic party, named after their tricorne, while their allegedly sleepy opponents were dubbed 'Nightcaps' or 'Caps'. Later the 'Younger Caps' opposed the 'Hats' from a more populist stance, before both parties were outlawed by Gustavus III: see I. Andersson, *A History of Sweden* (1956), pp. 258, 274; and S. Oakley, *The Story of Sweden* (1966), pp. 130-40, 144-5, 148.

³² The aim of the new College, first chartered in 1746 and established at Princeton a decade later, was to inculcate a 'manly, rational, and Christian Behaviour', without either enthusiasm or profaneness: see Anon., *A General Account of the Rise and State of the College, lately Established in the Province of New-Jersey in America* (1754), p. 5. See also J.H. Van Dyke, 'On the Campus'. in Anon., *The Princeton Book: A Series of Sketches ...* (Boston, 1879), pp. 377-8; and T. G. Wertenbaker, *Princeton, 1746-1896* (Princeton, N.J., 1946), pp. 28-9, 103-4.

³³ M. Von Boehn, *Modes and Manners, Vol. III: The Seventeenth Century* (1913; Eng. edn, 1935), p. 187. A portrait of King Charles I at his trial in 1649 shows his assertion of royal dignity in a large-brimmed high black hat: J.P. Kenyon, *The Stuarts: A Study in English Kingship* (1970), illus. 8.

³⁴ This event occurred on 27 April 1663, as witnessed by Samuel Pepys: see R. Latham and W. Matthews (eds), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys, Vol. IV: 1663* (1971), p. 199. Throughout, Pepys recorded a keen awareness of hatted messages. For example, in July 1663 he worried that he may have offended the Duke of York, by not uncovering when walking nearby in St. James's Park: *ibid.*, p. 252. And in October 1661 he had himself been displeased in turn at the pride of his manservant, who kept his hat on in the house: *ibid.*, Vol. II: 1661 (1970), p. 199.

³⁵ K. Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England* (Reading University Stenton Lecture, 1975), p. 8. Whatever the truth of this much-repeated anecdote, it was in character with the protagonists, the admired Dr Busby being famed as a punctilious disciplinarian: see *ODNB sub: Busby, Richard* - while there are a number of anecdotes about Charles II and hats, all showing that he was no observer of strict punctilio.

³⁶ See W. Shenstone, 'On Dress', in *The Works in Verse and Prose of William Shenstone, Esq.* (1764-9), Vol. 2, p. 164. The dictum, which was very characteristic of eighteenth-century teaching on dress, did not, of course, preclude the advent of some extremely mannered and fantastical fashions.

³⁷ F. Nivelon, *The Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1737), pp. 29-30, for advice and illustration [pagination added], also pp. 30-31, for how to bow.

³⁸ For continuing diversity of English Nonconformist customs, see brief comment in D. Coomer, *English Dissent under the Early Hanoverians* (1946), p. 36. Rowlandson's drawings include an illustration of a Quaker meeting house in the later eighteenth century; both sexes have their heads covered, the women with Quaker bonnets, the men with tall hats: see R. Southey, *Mr Rowlandson's England* (ed. J. Steel, 1985), p. 172.

³⁹ See H.S. Bender and C.H. Smith (eds), *The Mennonite Encyclopaedia: A Comprehensive Reference Work on the Anabaptist-Mennonite Movement* (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1955-9), Vol. 1, pp. 386-7 (bonnets) and Vol. 2, p. 678 (hats). It is noticeable that even within rigidly separatist communities, styles in headgear did not remain invariable over time, despite attempts at enforcing strict traditionalism.

⁴⁰ J.L. Nickalls (ed.), *The Journal of George Fox* (1975), p. 36.

⁴¹ The refusal of hat honour was not unique to Quakers, but was a part of their distinctive personal programme of 'plainness' in dress, language, and manners: see

esp. A.M. Gummere, *The Quaker: A Study in Costume* (Philadelphia, 1901), pp. 57-90, and brief comments in C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (1972), pp. 198-9; M R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (1978), p. 192; and B. Reay, 'Quakerism and Society', in J.F. McGregor and B. Reay (eds), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (1984), p. 162.

⁴² P.J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700-1800* (1982), pp. 124-7.

⁴³ See discussion in L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (1979), pp. 254-99, including p. 260: for growing informality in children's modes of addressing their parents (and a warning of the difficulties in giving precise dating to long-term changes such as these).

⁴⁴ Among Hyde's posthumously published essays was an imaginary set of exchanges between an elderly courtier, lawyer, soldier, country gentleman, and Alderman, on 'The Want of Respect due to Age': see E. Hyde, *A Collection of Several Tracts of the Rt. Hon. Edward, Earl of Clarendon* (1727), pp. 285-313.

⁴⁵ L. Simond, *An American in Regency England: The Journal of a Tour in 1810-11*, ed. C. Hibbert (1968), p. 28.

⁴⁶ Quoted in B. Mitchell and H. Penrose (eds), *Letters from Bath, 1766-7: By the Rev. John Penrose* (Gloucester, 1983), p. 87.

⁴⁷ Clark, *Hats*, pp. 85-6.

⁴⁸ C.B. Andrews (ed.), *The Torrington Diaries: Containing the Tours through England and Wales of the Hon. John Byng, later Fifth Viscount Torrington, between the years 178s and 1794* (1935), Vol. 2, p. 149.

⁴⁹ E. Gillett (ed.), *Elizabeth Ham: By Herself, 1783-1820* (1945), p. 27.

⁵⁰ See Von Boehn, *Modes and Manners*, Vol. 3, pp. 187-8; and for context, N. Elias, *The Civilising Process: The History of Manners* (1939), transl. E. Jephcott, (Oxford, 1979).

⁵¹ [E. Jones], *The Man of Manners: Or, Plebeian Polish'd ...* (1737), p. 5.

⁵² S. Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison in a Series of Letters* (1753/4; in Oxford edn, 1972), Vol. 1, p. 250. The verb 'to veil' (usually 'vail') meant 'to doff', as in the phrase 'to vail one's bonnet'.

⁵³ J. Beresford (ed.), *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman: John MacDonald's Travels, 1745-79* (1928), pp. 69-70.

⁵⁴ G. Barrington [attrib.], *The Frauds and Cheats of London Detected* (1802), pp. 54-5.

⁵⁵ [Jones], *Man of Manners*, p. 45.

⁵⁶ W. Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860; 1959), p. 444.

⁵⁷ In D. Yates's novel, *Berry and Co.* (1920; 1981), pp. 104-5, he described their encounter with an 'old, old' stone-breaker and road-mender, who initially touched his hat in greeting, but, when given money, responded 'with the antique courtesy of his class', by removing his hat entirely and tugging his white forelock.

⁵⁸ Novels produced in Britain between 1918-39 continue to refer to 'hat honour' between men and women, often with the implication that the man so doing is particularly gentlemanly in person or social status. Lord Peter Wimsey, 'the ever-polite', expands and puts on his 'gibus' specifically to take it off to a female acquaintance: see D.M. Sayers, *Murder Must Advertise* (1933; 1959), p. 79.

⁵⁹ Clark, *Hats*, pp. 60-2, 66-7: hats are still, however, regularly worn in a number of specialised occupations and for some formal occasions, such as weddings.

⁶⁰ *OED sub*: verb 'to shake' cites sixteenth-century literary references to the social hand-shake; but it certainly had a longer ancestry than that.

⁶¹ F. Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), ed. R. Mullen (Oxford,

1984), p. 83.

⁶² On departure, Mancunian John Thornton shook hands with the clergyman and his wife and then held out his hand to their daughter, swiftly withdrawing it when she snubbed him with a cool bow, she meanwhile not having been 'prepared' for his gesture: E. Gaskell, *North and South* (1854/5; 1970), p. 127.

⁶³ Flugel, *Psychology of Clothes*, p. 27, places the hat in generous company: 'We know, however, that ... the shoe, the tie, the hat, the collar, and even larger and more voluminous garments, such as the coat, the trousers, and the mantle, may be phallic symbols, while the shoe, the girdle, and the garter (as well as most jewels) may be corresponding female symbols'.

⁶⁴ The madness of hatters was proverbial, and it is often argued that they risked chronic disorientation through mercury poisoning, encountered during the production process. C. Hill has also suggested a possible derivation from the activities of Roger Crab, an ascetic seventeenth-century radical: 'The Mad Hatter', in C. Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (1958), pp. 314-22.