

1930s Mens Suit Condition Report & Treatment Proposal

Accession #: F.2016.182a,b,c

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Object: Men's evening suit, 1932-1937

Culture: American or European.

Designer/Maker: unknown, possibly French.

Description: Black wool mens evening suit from 1932-1937. Peaked satin lapels and 3 decorative buttons on either side of the jacket. Jacket is cut away sharply at the front and has long coattails, ending below the knee. Fully lined in black satin (body) and cream and blue striped silk (sleeves).

White pique cotton vest with deep curved shawl collar and asymmetrical pointed front closure. One functional and one decorative button for the cross front close, with an interior button. Two functional pockets. Back of the vest has a waist belt with a metal buckle, marked "PARIS FRANCE." Both the back of the vest and the belt are constructed in plain-weave white cotton.

Black wool trousers with a front button fly and ½" black silk satin ribbon down the side seams. Two pleats on either side of the front. In-seam side pockets and two jetted back pockets with button closures. Unlined with the waistband faced in black and cream silk and cream and blue bias cut silk strip.

Historical Context:

Despite a general loosening in the fit and requirements of the typical men's suit by the 1930s, the evening suit and its constituent parts still remained tightly regulated.¹ Full evening dress for men was considered akin to military wear in its uniformity despite a slight broadening of suit styles to choose from starting in the earlier part of the century.² The men's evening suit consisted of a black tailcoat, always worn open, and trousers offset by a white waistcoat, shirt, and bow tie; a formula that had been solidified the decade prior.³ What distinguishes this suit from other periods is the length of the coat tails which extend past the knee and the nearly 5" lapel, both of which were characteristic of the early to middle part of the 30s.⁴ Overall, the silhouette of the period

¹ Diana de Marly, *Fashion for Men: An Illustrated History* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 125.

² Sharon Sadako Takeda et al., *Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear, 1715-2015* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2016), 161.

³ Ibid.; "Evening Suit," V&A, accessed September 17, 2024, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O34494/evening-suit-charles-wallis-ltd/>.

⁴ Lydia Edwards, *How to Read a Suit: A Guide to Changing Men's Fashion from the 17th to the 20th Century* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 145; Sue Nightingale, *A Dandy Guide to Dating Vintage Menswear: WWI Through the 1960s* (Atglen, Pa: Schiffer Pub. Ltd, 2011), 180.

emphasized a large chest and shoulders by way of increasingly wide lapels, layers of shoulder pads, and raised arm holes.⁵

Photos:



Fig. 1-2 Front and back of jacket.



Fig. 3-4 Front and back of vest.

⁵ Nightingale, 175.



Fig. 5-6 Front and back of trousers.

Labels:



Fig. 7 The metal buckle on the back of the vest reads "PARIS MADE IN FRANCE."

Construction:

Jacket: It is predominantly machine stitched with some areas finished by hand.

The sleeves have three decorative buttons on each cuff.

The jacket is fully lined, mostly in black silk satin and the sleeves in cream and blue striped silk twill (matching the facing of the trousers).

The CB seam of the lining has a ½" pleat down its length, only on the PR side.

On both sides, the facing of the lapels has an open seam over the interior chest pockets. The lining of the body of the jacket continues underneath it, and the pockets continue 2" further beneath it (*fig. 8*). The open edge is finished with hand stitches.

The lining of each coattail has a ½" pleat on the outer seams.

The coattail linings also have a split in the seam on both sides, 6 ½” long, starting 2” down from the waist seam and 2” from the CB (*fig. 8*). These splits open into linen plain weave and cotton twill pockets. They are finished by hand.



Fig. 8 Slit in lining seam of coattails opens into lined pocket (left) and its location on the garment (right).



Fig. 9 The facing of the lapels is not secured over the interior lining.

Vest: It is predominantly machine stitched. Topstitching along the collar and hem. The front of the vest is lined but the back is not. The back arm holes are finished with hand stitching. The back outer yoke is stitched over the back of the shawl collar, and the shawl collar is hand tacked down at the front, to hold it in place.

Trousers: They are predominantly machine stitched with some hand finishing, especially on seams. They do not have a separate waistband, and are faced with a 1 ½” black and cream silk band and then with a 3 ½” bias cut cream and blue striped silk facing. This second

band is joined at the CB and has a $\frac{1}{2}$ " pleat at the sides of the trousers. The CB seam has a $1\frac{1}{2}$ " split at the top.

They have a $2\frac{1}{8}$ " deep hem, hand stitched down. A $\frac{1}{2}$ " cotton twill selvedge edge is on the back of the trouser leg hem (side seam to side seam) to reinforce it.

The inner leg seam allowances are uneven, with the back of the leg having a $1\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowance and the front having $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance. The back side seam shows remnant threads, possibly from being taken in.

The pants have 2 pleats on either side of the front, folded towards the CF.

There is a small gusset at the center of the crotch seam.

There are 2 buttons on either side of the front and 1 button on either side of the CB seam, to attach suspenders to.

The sides of the trousers have metal buckles and fabric tabs to adjust the waist.



Fig. 10 Detail of front fly button closure on trousers.



Fig. 11 Stitch holes showing alterations, such as CB seam being taken in (lower edge of image).



Fig. 12 Inner seam of PR pant leg, showing the uneven seam allowances and remaining threads. Seams are finished with hand whipped stitches.

Condition: Excellent.

Suit Jacket: Excellent condition.

- PR exterior waist seam, 1 ¼" in from front edge of coattail, has a pinprick hole.
- PR armhole lining by interior pocket has 1" split in seam.



Fig. 13 Split in seam of PR armhole lining.

Vest: Good condition.

- Brown discoloration throughout.
- Interior collar area has more significant brown discoloration.



Fig. 14 The interior of the vest collar, showing dark brown discoloration.

Trousers: Excellent/good condition.

- PR front, 2" down from waist and ½" in from front fly - two small pinprick holes.
- PR and PL side seams along pocket opening, black silk ribbon detail is detaching.



Fig. 15 Silk satin ribbon detaching on PR side seam over pocket opening.

Previous Treatment/Repairs:

Jacket: None visible.

Vest: None visible.

Trousers: Evidence of waistband having been altered. Stitch lines show the CB seam was taken in. Remaining threads show previous stitching at inner seams of trouser legs.

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