
Girl's Red Flannel Hooded Cloak

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A recent acquisition throws new light on one of Pryce Jones's most popular products and Wales's most iconic garments: the red flannel cloak.

A ROYAL ORDER AT NEWTOWN.—The town on Monday afternoon was thrown into a state of the most pleasurable excitement on finding that Mr. Pryce Jones, the extensive wholesale Welsh flannel and general drapery merchant, had received an extensive order direct from her Majesty the Queen, at Windsor Castle, for a number of Welsh red flannel cloaks and Welsh flannel of ordinary staple manufacture, for charitable and other purposes. The order was indited by Lady Mary Wood, with a request that the goods should be sent immediately to Windsor Castle, for her Majesty. In addition to these valued orders, Mr. Pryce Jones received, by the same post, orders from half-a-dozen of the noblest ladies in the land for Welsh goods. It is apparent, from these Royal orders, that her gracious Majesty, with the kind consideration that she has ever manifested for the welfare of her subjects, has determined to encourage the staple trade of Newtown, owing to the severe shocks that it has recently received from disastrous failures. Her Majesty has, in similar charitable feeling, forwarded orders to other large manufacturing towns where they have been suffering under disasters.

Brecon Reporter, 17th November 1866

In 1866, the people of Newtown were celebrating news of a 'first' for not only their town, but the whole of Wales. Budding young entrepreneur, Pryce Jones had just landed an order from HRH Queen Victoria. This was very welcome news to the townspeople, many of whom were employed in manufacturing the woollen flannel for which Newtown was renowned. But in 1866 the industry was facing competition from both Yorkshire worsteds as well as American cotton. The order was for a quantity of woollen goods including red flannel cloaks. These were not for the Queen's own use, but for 'charitable and other purposes'. In other words, these were for distribution to the poor and needy, probably on her Windsor estate.

The practice of distributing such items, along with food and coal, to the 'deserving poor' was seen as a 'Christian virtue' by wealthy Victorians. The fact that the Queen was showing a lead could only help Newtown's ailing industry. It wasn't long



1878 advert for the cloak

before Pryce Jones was describing himself as 'especial flannel manufacturer to her Majesty the Queen' and using Victoria's endorsement in his advertising for his cloaks. Soon, the orders came pouring in from members of the aristocracy wishing to emulate their Sovereign's example. One particular example of this is to be found in the village of Stannington, just north of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Here, in 1885, the Viscountess Ridley, purchased a quantity of Pryce Jones cloaks for distribution amongst the girls of the village school, beginning a tradition that would last for forty years. The cloaks became a distinctive feature of the girls' uniform, being worn on special occasions such as Harvest Festival and Christmas services in the church (you can read more about this at <https://northumberlandarchives.com/2018/03/09/the-history-of-the-stannington-red-cloaks-and-scarves/>).



The Pryce Jones label

We are fortunate to have a Pryce Jones cloak in our collection. Such surviving examples are extremely rare. Our example appears similar to the one featured in his price list of 1878. It is a size 3 girls cloak, measuring 32 inches in length with a hood decorated with a black ribbon. According to the advert, this would have cost 6 shillings and 9 pence, which translates to about 33p in our money. However, in 1878, that sum had the modern purchasing power of around £30. Unlike the advertised examples, ours is finished in what appears to be a bouclé yarn with the inside napped to provide a soft, fuzzy texture. It is fastened at the neck by a simple metal catch and on the inside it has strip flannel on each side so that the wearer could slip their arms through, presumably to prevent the cloak flying about in the wind. So perhaps, this example may have been designed for a more sophisticated market.



A black ribbon provides decoration and a means to fasten the hood securely



Arm loops retain the cloak close to the body for warmth