

LONG CUTS



William Smith, newly installed as Head Cutter at Douglas Hayward, incredibly finds the time to pen an instructive tract on overcoats

As the nights draw in and the weather turns, the annual ritual of retrieving heavy, woollen overcoats from their summer hideaways begins. The heady scent of mothballs brings a feeling of impending frosty days, wrapped up against the elements; trusty tweed upon back and briar in hand. As well as protecting a finely pressed suit from the elements, the overcoat provides further warmth and is another weapon in the sartorial armoury, affording the wearer another opportunity to cut a dash. If this garment is missing from your wardrobe the question is not should you buy one, but which one should you buy?

There are a number of styles to choose from. Whether single or double-breasted, tweed or cashmere, the clothes beneath are usually the governing force in the choice of over-garment. If one is dressing for work, a formal variety such as the Chester-

field could be worn, whereas if one is on the field, a fuller cut such as the Raglan may be more the thing.

The Chesterfield, which takes its name from the Earl, was the start of the modern overcoat. It replaced in popularity the body-fitting coats such as the frock coat or paletot, both of which had lots of panels and a waist seam for extra suppression. This coat was cut along the same lines as the lounge suit and thus provided a more comfortable garment.

It is long, usually being worn midway between the knee and floor and has a deep centre vent. It can be single or double-breasted and is most commonly made in navy and charcoal coloured cloth, with a velvet top collar, although this is not compulsory. The cross-pockets are usually straight with flaps. A ticket pocket is often found on the right hand side at waist height and a breast pocket invites the flourish of a silk pocket square. The cut is close but com-

THE BEST LINING FOR WINTER IS HEAVY COTTON-BACKED SATIN, WHICH PROVIDES ADDED INSULATION; THIS OF COURSE ONLY IF THE BUDGET CANNOT STRETCH TO FUR



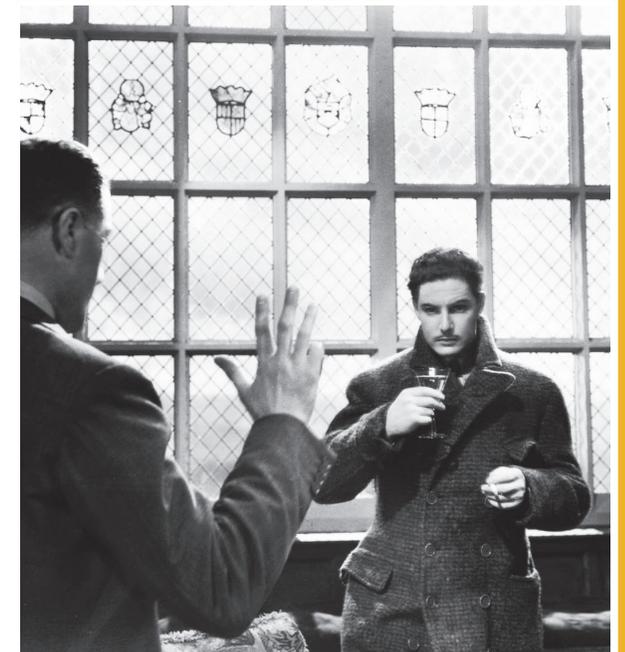
fortable, with enough swing over the hips to allow for greater movement. When inspecting a single-breasted variety, you will most likely observe that the buttons are concealed by a fly front. They can, however, be visible. A versatile style of coat, indubitably.

If the Chesterfield seems a tad stuffy, then you could opt for a Crombie, whose cut is more boxy and shorter in length. The style has been in production for at least a hundred years and its name is derived from the firm that first made them. A Crombie classically has three exposed buttons, is made from navy coloured, heavy 20oz cloth and has a velvet collar. It is usually worn mid thigh and was popularised by the Skinheads and Mods of the 1980s. A true Crombie is made in the Crombie factory and from Crombie Cloth. I hasten to add that other styles of overcoat are available from said firm.

A similar coat in both shape and length, although admittedly slightly more waisted, is the covert coat. This is another garment that is crafted from a cloth that bears its name, which was derived from the particular use that it was most suitable for, namely riding and stalking through the coverts of the English countryside. This is due to its tight weave and therefore its hardiness

against bramble. It too is worn mid-thigh and often with a velvet collar. It has no cuff buttons but instead has three rows of stitching that run parallel with the cuff and the hem of the coat. Some firms vary the number of lines but three is enough, as they are there to stop the edges from lifting when wet.

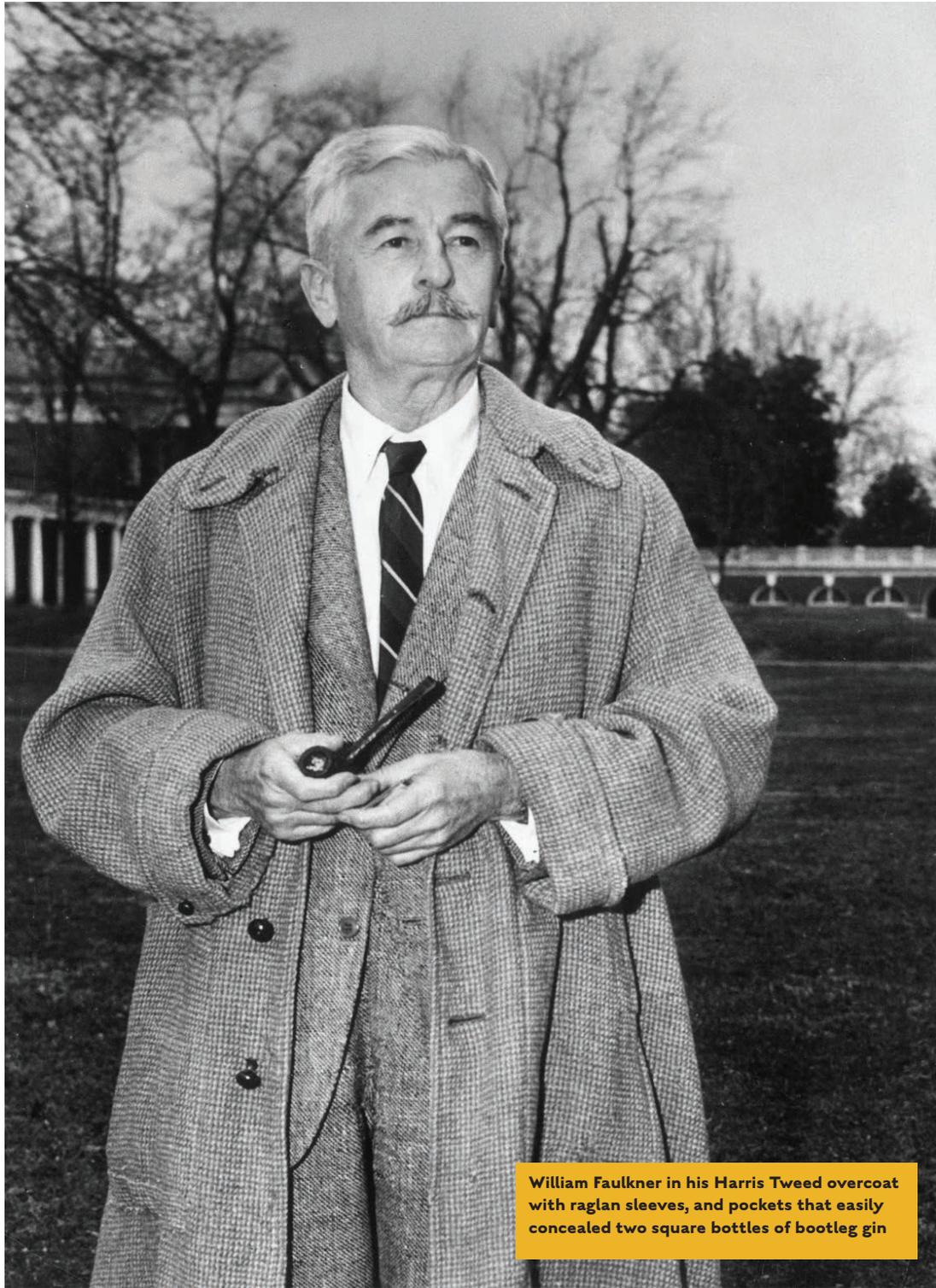
The Raglan, which is a cutter's nightmare due to the fussy alignment of sleeve seams that start at the back neck and culminate at the bottom of the armhole, is ideal for walking in the country. It can be made in any overcoating, but is most commonly seen in tweed. It is cut very full at the chest, waist and over the hips, allowing for the maximum of movement and the wearing of multiple layers of Harris underneath.



The feature that gives the coat its name is favoured for the ease in movement it gives the arms, while retaining an elegant line. A style as suited to commuting as it is to tramping. It is usually fly fronted, with a high neckline and crowned by a Peter Pan collar. As with most overcoats it is made with a centre vent. The cross-pockets most suited are Welt, set at an angle to allow easier access for the hands. It is a comfortable garment, providing both protection and a refuge from the harshest of weather. It too is named after the nobleman for which it was first created, Lord Raglan, a prominent figure at the Battle of Balaclava.

The Guards Coat is based on the garb worn by the officers of the Guard. It is double-breasted with a very generous lapel and collar, has swelled edges and is characterised by the long, deep inverted pleat in the back that is controlled by a loose half belt, which gives the suppression needed. This is a supremely elegant sartorial offering, often made from cashmere or camelhair. An excellent example can be seen worn by Robert Donat (pictured above) in his portrayal of Richard Hannay in the 1935 version of *The 39 Steps*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

If one is having an overcoat made, all manner of embellishments are possible for the discerning chap: from turn-back cuffs (both grown-on, which allow the wearer to turn down the sleeves, gaining precious warmth, and laid-on, which are just for show) to poacher's pockets that no longer hold a rabbit but rather the morning paper. Then there are belts, as on the Polo Coat, a luxurious,



William Faulkner in his Harris Tweed overcoat with raglan sleeves, and pockets that easily concealed two square bottles of bootleg gin

illegitimate child of the Guards Coat and the double-breasted Chesterfield, which should be crafted from the sumptuous pile of Vicuna, or its poorer cousin cashmere. You can even request set-in sleeves, as featured on the Loden, a coat favoured by our Tyrolean friends and again named for the cloth that it is hewn from, a coarse fabric of deep forest green.

The best lining for winter is heavy cotton-backed satin, which provides added insulation; this of course only if the budget cannot stretch to fur. Double-faced fabrics allow for an unlined coat, plain on the outside with a dandy tartan as its interior; a feature often seen on duffel coats.

As you can see, whether you are a budding Sherlock or even an imitation Arthur Daly, you will find a plethora of overcoat styles to choose from. So why stop at one? Have two. Or maybe three. 🐈



THE CASE OF THE MISSING OVERCOAT

Despite being set in the modern age, the BBC's most recent production of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, *Sherlock*, has been just as fastidious in the wardrobe department as period pieces that smothered the sleuth in tweed capes and deerstalkers.

Benedict Cumberbatch's coat, the Belstaff Milford, is the sole piece of costume retained for the character from the original 2009 pilot episode, as chosen by original costume designer Ray Holman and kept on by current wardrobe incumbent Sarah Arthur.

The Belstaff Milford is made from pure Irish wool tweed, bonded with a sophisticated, ultra-light microporous film, to make it waterproof without altering the natural qualities of comfort and breathability. Detailed with distinctive red buttonholes, three Belstaff Milfords were originally purchased from the Belstaff store on Conduit Street, London: one for Benedict Cumberbatch, one for the stunt man and a spare. In addition, co-creator of the series

Mark Gatiss bought one for Cumberbatch as a gift. That was in 2009, but since then Belstaff (clearly not with its eye on the publicity ball) have ceased production of the coat. They reintroduced it briefly in 2010, to mark *Sherlock*'s television debut, but not in large enough numbers for the coat to enter circulation. Devoted fans now have to resort to inferior copies, as there are no plans to reintroduce the coat again.

