

Costume Ideas for FIRE!

Please have some fun dressing up as a seventeenth century Londoner to come to the FIRE! concert. Your costume doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. If you can find a complete outfit that's fantastic, but just one or two items – a cravat, loose white shirt with jacket or waistcoat or even a wig is fine, or a long dress or a blouse and long skirt with a cap and/or apron. Here is some information about what people wore in 1666, and some costume ideas you could use:

Cravat: If you can find some material (white cotton, linen or lace) to make a cravat (a wide piece of material tied at the neck) you are already well on your way to creating your Fire! costume. Most men would wear one, either tied neatly, in a big bow, or loosely as shown here. In this famous portrait of Samuel Pepys by John Halys, he is wearing a white cravat but they could also be worn in bright colours with a white shirt.



Jacket, coat or waistcoat: In the portrait Pepys is wearing a loose silk coat. It looks a bit like a silk dressing gown. Alternatively, men wore short jackets or long waistcoats.

Shirt: Men wore loose, white shirts, with a cravat worn at the neck and a jacket or waistcoat over the top.

Wigs: Fashionable men copied the King and wore long, curly wigs (usually brown or black), called periwigs. King Charles II (pictured here) also wore a thin moustache – you could draw on a thin moustache with face-paints.





Trousers: When Charles II came to the throne fashion became more playful and extravagant. The fashion was for ‘petticoat breeches’ – puffy, knee-length trousers, often fastened underneath with ribbons at the knee, with tights known as ‘hose’ underneath. Fashionable breeches were so baggy that Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary: “...met with Mr Townsend, who told of his mistake the other day to put both his legs through one of his Knees of his breeches, and so went all day.” (Don’t worry – you don’t need to find some petticoat breeches, but we thought you might like to see what they looked like!)

Cap and apron, blouse and skirt: Maids like Jane Birch would have worn a simple dress or blouse and skirt with a white or coloured apron over the top and a cotton cap over their hair. Unlike a Victorian mob cap, 17th century maid’s caps were close fitting starched linen or cotton with no frills, and either tied at the back over the hair or hanging in points over the ears, as in these pictures (on the right)



You could make a cap like this out of a triangle of white cotton, or a white napkin folded in half to form a triangle and pinned in place with hairpins.



Dresses: Fashionable women wore long dresses with a tight bodice. Sleeves were full and finished at the elbow, often tied with ribbons. A pearl necklace was a popular accessory. In 1666 the fashion was for hair to be worn in a bun at the back of the head, with curls falling round the face.