

Why San Rocco wears an Akubra

While it is not at all clear, according to current scholarship, whether the inventor of the Akubra¹, Benjamin Dunkerley, was influenced by mediaeval traditions of fashion, there is little doubt that San Rocco wore a hat remarkably similar to that of the iconic Australian hat.

According to Robert Bartlett, in his seminal study *Why can the dead do such great things?*, points out that the wearing of a hat similar to an Akubra was standard for mediaeval pilgrims:

*A classic example of the pilgrim garb at the end of the Middle Ages is provided by a life-size painting of St. Roche (Rocco) dressed as a pilgrim, now in the local museum in Bari. He has an iron-tipped staff, a scrip with a buckle, and a voluminous cloak. He wears a large hat with a cord, and on its upturned front brim there are scallop shells and crossed keys, symbols of pilgrimage ...*²

There are other parallels to be noted as well. While iron-tipped staffs are now more likely to be briefcases, the “voluminous cloak” surely reminds us of court garb. Whether the criminal jurisdiction in the Northern Territory should abandon wigs in favour of an Akubra—especially for ceremonial sittings—is perhaps a discussion for another time.

Chips Mackinolty

¹ **Akubra** /ə'ku:brə/ is an Australian brand of bush hat, whose wide-brimmed styles are a distinctive part of Australian culture, especially in rural areas. The name is believed to be derived from an Aboriginal word for head covering.^[1] Akubra's best-known hats are made from rabbit fur felt with wide brims, and the term "Akubra" is sometimes used to refer to any hat of this kind. Many Akubras have drawstrings to help keep them on the wearer's head on windy days, as well as adding to the hat's appearance.

Akubra hats are an important part of traditional outdoor clothing in the Australian bush. They are often worn by hunters, farmers, graziers, horsemen, and stockmen on the land. As well as protecting their wearers from sun and rain, they are used in less obvious ways: holding eggs or mushrooms, covering the eye of a recalcitrant horse, fanning fires, and watering dogs.^[2] Akubras have also been worn by some Prime Ministers of Australia, notably Ben Chifley, whose Akubra is in the collection of the National Museum of Australia.--Wikipedia

² Bartlett, R, *Why can the dead do such great things? Saints and Worshipers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, P 419, Princeton University Press 2013.