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# The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

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November 2019

[www.medats.org.uk](http://www.medats.org.uk)

Issue 90



A reconstruction of the Arnolfini gown by Ninya Mikhaila for the BBC television series

*A Stitch in Time*

## Editorial

Welcome to the autumn edition of the newsletter, and my first attempt at a newsletter for MEDATS, please bear with me. If you have any suggestions, comments, brickbats, please contact me. My thanks to Ninya for her considerable advice on taking over from her.

This newsletter contains reports on or abstracts from the papers presented at the MEDATS study day 'Learning through Reconstruction' held on the 21st September this year. The day was well attended and well received, and I think that many people liked our new venue.



Our new venue at Lancaster Hall Hotel

The call for papers for the 2020 conference *Textiles at Home: Cloth making and usage in the domestic sphere*. has been extended to the end of December. The conference itself will be on Saturday 30 May 2020.

There will be another visit to Norwich in February, further details are in this issue.

This issue also contains some information on the Llangorse textile in the National Museum of Welsh Life, the exhibition of the Bacton Altar Cloth, and a forthcoming conference from the Tudor Tailor, as well as a book review and an obituary.

I would be very grateful for any contributions for the next newsletter: information on research projects, exhibitions, book reviews, photographs or reports on museum visits will be much appreciated.

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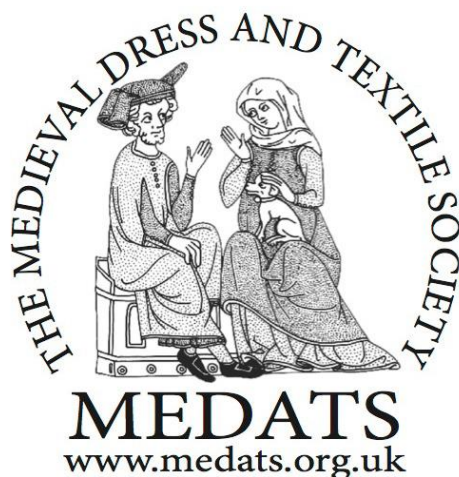
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# Learning Through Reconstruction

Abstracts from the study day on Saturday 21 September 2019  
Lancaster Hall Hotel, London

**Geeske Kruseman**, Independent Scholar

*Comparing hose: Thorsberg c.250 and Stockholm 1567*

The abstract of the talk is below, but Geeske has put the entire talk on Academia and it can be found at:

[https://www.academia.edu/40577603/Kruseman\\_Geeske\\_Comparing\\_HOSE\\_c.250\\_1567\\_MEDATS\\_talk\\_21.9.2019](https://www.academia.edu/40577603/Kruseman_Geeske_Comparing_HOSE_c.250_1567_MEDATS_talk_21.9.2019)

This talk for the Medieval Dress and Textiles society stems from a startling resemblance between two seemingly unrelated garments: the Thorsberg hose (archaeological find, DK, c.250) and the leather foundation of the 'pluderhosen' of Nils Sture, who was murdered wearing them, SE, 1567. Across the 1300 years, their cutting patterns turn out to be essentially the same.

Its main point is that both are constructed like medieval hose and unlike modern breeches or trousers, A hose leg has one centre-back seam only, and two hose legs are joined by an inset piece and two crotch seams; a trouser leg has two side seams, or one side-seam and one side-fold, and two trouser legs are joined directly by a single crotch seam. (as seen below in the photograph of the reconstruction)

Anatomically, the back-seam pattern exploits the stronger left-right symmetry of the human body, while the side-seams pattern uses the weaker back-front symmetry. Classifying legs-and-hips garments in terms of their essential symmetry in relation to the symmetry of the human body, regardless of when the garment was made, who wore it, or what it was made of, yielded some unexpected results.

The Thorsberg garment, for one, must be re-classified from 'trousers' (male) to 'hose' (not gendered). And in fact, it fits a woman at least as well as a man.

In medieval legwear, I was startled to find traces of the side-seams construction only in underwear, while the outerwear seems to be exclusively cut on the back-seam pattern – all the way from the earliest evidence to the trunk-hose and pluderhosen of the 1560's, when



breeches cut with side-seams appear. These take over men's legwear, in the Netherlands at least, by 1590, and all 17th C. fashions appear side-seam based, even the c.1600 trunk-hose revival. If true, this would mean that Nils Sture's 'pluderhosen' were the last descendants of the Iron Age hose and its medieval descendants (across 1300 years), and that the breeches which displaced them were a novelty of the 1560s.

That big if is offered not as a fact but as a suspicion in need of more evidence.



Above: Welsh wig cap reconstruction

**Kirstie Buckland**, Independent scholar  
*Fifteen steps to the 'Craft, trade or science' of capping*

As explained in April, we can never know the genuine working practices and conditions of medieval craftsmen (or women?) but can speculate through research and experience.

It was claimed that fifteen callings or occupations contributed to the acknowledged "craft, trade or science" of capping. I would try to explain these fifteen stages in modern terms and how my personal methods have developed in the past forty years. I have been studying surviving excavated 16 c. examples and the tools in use while making my versions for films, theatres,

museums and re-enactors. Inevitably these wearers have different requirements from the everyday working citizens or posing courtiers of the 16th century who would probably think our efforts laughable.

**Alison Beadnell**, MA student at UCL  
*Being present in the past*

Several years ago a chance conversation with a history re-enactor surprised Alison with the depth of knowledge and care expressed about their 'Kit' (costume). As a fashion industry professional she was intrigued and wanted to discover if this was typical. For her MA in Materials, Anthropology, and Design she joined an early Anglo-Saxon re-enactment group to research the making of their Kit, to understand how utilising historic craft methods affects their experience, and how getting inside these hand-made artefacts and interacting with the world through them felt. Her presentation reviewed the



Above: Alison's reconstructed outfit



items of 6th century (style 1) Kit made during her research, consisting of peplos, tunic and turn-shoes. It required hand-sewing, dying, tablet-weaving, wood-whittling, embroidery, and leather-working; alongside archaeological and historical understanding. She explained the new skills learnt, such as drop-spindle spinning, which not only created period-appropriate yarn, but through its embodiment facilitated authenticity in the physical portrayal of an Anglo-Saxon person. Learning from the group went beyond the academic, incorporating copying evidence from objects, copying people's gestures and skills as they made objects, learning by watching, learning by listening, and most of all learning by doing. She has continued re-enacting, but has also embraced hand-making for her modern-day clothes.

**Katrin Kania**, Freelance textile archaeologist

*The Devil is in the details: Practical reconstruction as a way to better understand craft procedures and their products*

When setting out to do reconstructions of textiles, it often seems at first glance like a simple task. After all, how can it be difficult to make a common, coarse, plain-woven fabric from wool? However, in many cases, things turn out not to be so simple, as the devil is in the details. Often, attempts at reconstruction will uncover blind spots in research or documentation and lead to more questions about how something was done in historical craft processes. The more accurate the reproduction is intended to be, the higher the probability for issues to turn up in connection with materials and techniques used now and then. Using documentation of artefacts as a main source for reproduction and comparing the results of the reproduction attempts to the originals can also shed some light on the suitability (or unsuitability) of our common methods to analyse and document textiles, and show what additional information would be needed for a more thorough description of the object.

**Alexandra Lester-Makin**, Independent scholar

*A partial reconstruction of the 10<sup>th</sup> century Cuthbert maniple: what did we learn*

St Cuthbert's maniple is one of the most important early medieval embroideries surviving today. The only embroidered maniple to survive from Anglo-Saxon England, it represents tangible archaeological evidence of highly skilled medieval craftsmanship and artistry. The



original focus of the Cuthbert Maniple Recreation Project was to address our lack of understanding regarding the maniple's technical characteristics, such as stitch formation, and to explore larger questions about workforce, organisation, and timescales. However, it became obvious that the recreation can also tell us about the creating process and the embroiderer, for example her thought processes regarding the creation of the maniple, in a way

that visual examination alone cannot. Sourcing the correct materials became one of the most challenging issues as mass produced equivalents were inappropriate for many reasons. In the end I found three experts who were able to weave the silk ground fabric, and source suitable silk threads and dye them; two further projects in themselves.

Thus, the whole project became a collaborative experience of shared knowledge. I am now embroidering one section of the maniple. A section being a figure, the hillocks it stands upon, the foliage above it and stitch-work surrounding it. This is slow progress because I am following the original embroiderer's work; direction of stitches, colour choices etc. However, this mental process is also helping me learn about the embroiderer; her working pattern, thought process and understanding of the materials and design. There is still a long way to go but the amount of new knowledge and data I am gathering bodes well for the rest of the project.

### **Ninya Mikhaila**

#### *A Stitch in time: Reconstructing the Arnolfini gown*

This presentation offered insights into the process of researching and reconstructing the gown worn by the wife of Giovanni Arnolfini, as depicted in the painting of 1434 by Jan Van Eyck, now in The National Gallery. The gown was made in 2017 for a BBC television series entitled A Stitch in Time and the aim was to create as faithful a reconstruction as possible, using hand sewing methods and period appropriate tools and materials. Clues as to how the original gown might have been made were drawn from documentary, visual and archaeological sources including fifteenth century royal wardrobe accounts which suggested that the fur that could be seen on the outside of the gown was supplemented by a lighter weight fur in parts of the lining which would not be seen. Sculpture and paintings showed other views of similar gowns making it clear that the distinctive pleats across the chest and back were secured in place in some way other than the belt, and fragments of original garments found at Lengberg Castle in Austria demonstrated how woolen broadcloth could be basted to linen canvas to allow the natural drape to be controlled and sculpted into formal pleats which could be stitched into place. The reconstruction was made from broadcloth, sourced from a Yorkshire Mill, and partially lined with faux fur to represent arctic fox, the hidden areas of lining were made from another, lighter weight faux fur to represent squirrel. A girdle was made from silk satin embroidered with gold thread and finished with a brass large buckle and strap end.



Above: A way of re-creating the pleats on the gown

# MEDATS STUDY DAY

## 16th century knitted and other textiles at Norwich

**Museums, Friday 28th February 2020, 10am – 4pm**



After the success of the Study Day last February we are returning to Norwich. The day will include viewing a selection of sixteenth century knitted and other textiles from the collection, a tour of Stranger's Hall and an optional hands-on workshop.

Norwich Castle Museum, Shirehall Study Centre and Strangers Hall

EARLY BIRD BOOKING UNTIL 31 December 2019

£30 for members, £35 for non-members. After 31

December 2019: £40. Prices include a buffet lunch

For tickets send payment and stamped addressed envelope to:- Ticketing Secretary, Carole Thompson, 9 Fairthorn Road, Charlton, London, SE7 7RL

or book through the MEDATS website <http://medats.org.uk/>

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### **Ann Saunders (1930-2019) a personal appreciation**

I first met Ann Saunders at a Costume Society Conference in the early 1970s, and as many others will attest, she was very good at getting people to agree to do things, in my case to create an index to Costume, act as membership secretary and later produce the annual list of periodical articles for Costume. She was also very supportive of all those who sent her papers for publication, and many in the field of clothing history will be grateful for the way in which she navigated them through the field of peer reviewed journals. She was indefatigable, with really high standards as far as scholarship was concerned, but she could also be very tactful, always getting the best out of people. As Valerie Cumming has pointed out she assisted and encouraged over 350 different writers in her tenure as editor of Costume.

Clothing was not her first interest, her PhD was on the history of Regent's Park, and her book on The Art and Architecture of London went into three editions. As well as editing the journal Costume for forty-one years she also edited many publications for the London Topographical Society. She will also be remembered for her History of the Merchant Taylors' Company with Matthew Davies and the History of the Mercers' Company.

I will miss her enthusiastic telephone calls, which could end up in all sorts of academic byways.

Pat Poppy

## BOOK REVIEW

**John S. Lee, *The Medieval Clothier***, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2018. pp. 365. 41 illustrations of which 10 in colour. ISBN 978-1-78327-317-1

A clothier was a middle-man, supplying raw materials to textile workers who operated in their own homes, collecting the products and selling them on. Clothiers were, essentially, dealing with woollens, the heavy fabrics which required complex processes such as fulling and shearing, not with the lighter worsteds which were more easily produced.

This book focuses on the textile industry 1350-1550, a period in which England was transformed in many respects. Reduction in population caused by the Black Death meant a shortage of labour. Accordingly wages increased, there was more social mobility and people could afford better clothing. Climate change brought a need for warmer, thicker garments. The English cloth industry expanded dramatically, both for home use and for export. In this climate of change, clothiers co-ordinated the smooth flow of goods from one production stage to another, financing materials and labour, often relying on credit to do so. Some clothiers became outstandingly successful businessmen and merchants, making fortunes in the process.

The author uses evidence from wills, taxation records, trade records, literary works and material remains of houses, workplaces and churches to examine the contribution of clothiers in six chapters. 'Making Cloth' explains all the processes involved in clothmaking from sourcing wool to dyeing, discussing the decisions and actions of the clothiers at each stage with examples of individual persons and places. 'Marketing Cloth' examines trading links. Much cloth was sent to London, whence it was shipped overseas by merchants who might be dealing in other goods as well. Some was bought direct, some traded through cloth fairs. 'Identifying Clothiers' shows that clothiers were largely established in rural areas, where most of the textile industry's workers were based. 'Clothiers and Government' highlights the quantity of legislation controlling textiles and the vulnerability of the industry to outside factors such as bad harvests and war, which several times threatened unrest among low-paid workers. 'Clothiers in Society' considers how clothiers lived, their dwellings necessarily including room for producing, finishing or storing cloth, some clothiers purchasing redundant religious building for the purpose. Wealthy clothiers were remembered with elaborate funerals and monuments in churches. 'Famous clothiers' focuses on four great dynasties: the Paycockes of Coggeshall, the Springs of Lavenham, the Winchcombes of Newbury and the Stumpes of Malmesbury.

Additional material comprises details of cloths taxed by county and by locality; cloth types as defined by statute; the wills of four prominent clothiers featured in Chapter 6; a fascinating gazetteer of surviving buildings associated with clothiers, which includes the houses they built as residences, cottages they built for their workers, a guildhall and churches containing brasses and carvings associated with clothiers; a glossary and a bibliography.

Review by Gale R. Owen-Crocker



**2020 conference - call for papers**  
**Textiles at Home:**  
**Cloth making and usage in the domestic sphere**

Saturday 30 May 2020 11am-5.30pm, preceded by the AGM of the Society at 10am  
Lancaster Hall Hotel, 35 Craven Terrace, London W2 3EL



Proposals are invited for 20-minute papers on relevant topics dated between c.500 and c.1600  
We are particularly looking for new research. Topics may include but are not limited to:

**The textile objects of daily life:**

What was used in the home and how?

**Domestic textile production:**

What textile objects were made at home? What methods were employed in their production?

**Furnishings:**

How did textiles decorate the medieval living space, and make it comfortable and useable?

How did textiles affect the experience of domestic life?

**Garment making and mending:**

Who made domestic textiles, and how? What techniques and skills were devoted to their repair and maintenance?

**Ownership:**

What value did domestic textile objects have to those who owned them?

Please submit your title and a 200-word synopsis to the Events Secretary,  
Natalie Rachel Walker, [natalierachelwalker@gmail.com](mailto:natalierachelwalker@gmail.com)

**EXTENDED DEADLINE**

We will now be accepting submissions until the end of  
December 2019.

Please share this call with anyone who may be interested in sharing their  
work on medieval textiles in the home.

Thank you.

## The Llangorse Textile

On display in the Gweithdy gallery at the National Museum of Welsh Life at St. Fagans is the Llangorse textile. The textile dates to the 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century, and was discovered in 1990 during the excavation of a crannog. The crannog was built in the 890s at Llan-gors lake, near Brecon, in what was then the independent kingdom of Brycheiniog. Tree ring analysis of the oaks used to build it show they were cut down between 889 and 893 AD. The site was destroyed by fire in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century. This possibly relates to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle record that the forces of Queen Aethelflaed of Mercia destroyed Breccanmere, the English version of the lake's name, in 916 AD.



The textile discovered at the dig was a charred lump in waterlogged silt. Extensive conservation has revealed fragments of what may have been a tunic, there is an inserted gore and a hem. The fabric is a 23 thread to the centimetre plain weave linen, decorated with linen and silk threads. The pattern, which can just be seen in the photograph, is of birds framed by vines.

Further information may be obtained from

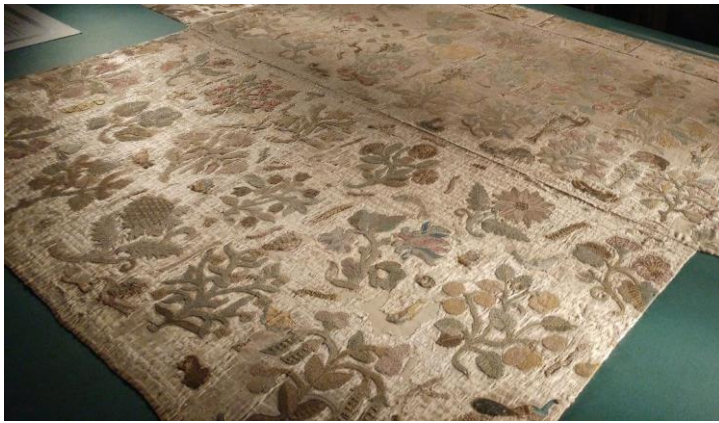
H. Granger-Taylor and F. Pritchard, (2001), 'A fine quality insular embroidery from Llangors Crannog, near Brecon'. In: *Pattern and Purpose in Insular Art* edited by M. Redknap, S. Youngs, A. Lane and J. Knight, p.91-99. Oxbow Books.

L. Mumford and M. Redknap, (1999), 'Worn by a Welsh Queen?' In: *Amgueddfa*, vol. 2, p.52-4.

L. Mumford, H. Prosser and J. Taylor, (2007), 'The Llangorse textile; approaches to understanding an early medieval masterpiece' In: C. Gillis and M.-L. B. Nosch (eds), *Ancient Textiles: Production, Craft and Society*, p.158-62. Oxbow Books.

Article and photograph by Pat Poppy

## The Bacton Altar Cloth now on display at Hampton Court Palace



In a special exhibition at Hampton Court Palace, titled 'The Lost Dress of Elizabeth I', the Bacton Altar Cloth is now on display to the public for the first time following its three-year-long programme of conservation. The cloth, thought to have once formed part of a garment owned and worn by Elizabeth I, was brought to the conservation studios at Hampton

Court on loan from its home in St Faith's Church in Bacton, Herefordshire, in 2016. To accompany it the 'Rainbow' Portrait of Elizabeth I, also on loan from its home at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, forms part of this exciting exhibition. In the iconic portrait the queen is shown wearing a bodice embroidered with a floral design very much resembling that on the cloth. Included in the rest of the exhibition are some beautiful modern tributes to the embroidery, made for the display by members of the Royal School of Needlework. Examples of flower and animal patterns from Tudor herbal books and bestiary prints have also been displayed, alongside some smaller examples of similar embroideries of plants and flowers, on loan from the V&A. The exhibition is included in the price of entry to the Palace, and will run from 12 October 2019 until 23 February 2020.

Article and Photograph by Natalie Rachel Walker

### Missing Persons: Who Were the Typical Tudors?

A two day conference and programme of events to launch *The Typical Tudor*, a new book which focuses on the dress of ordinary men and women in the sixteenth century. Confirmed speakers include Susan North, curator of fashion at the V&A Museum; Dr Kathy Davies, author of *Artisan Art: Vernacular Wall Paintings in the Welsh Marches 1550-1650*; Hilary Davidson, formerly curator of Fashion & Decorative Arts at Museum of London, Alexandra Hildred, Head of Research at The Mary Rose and Tarnya Cooper, Curatorial and Collections Director, National Trust. Further information from - [www.tudortailor.com](http://www.tudortailor.com)



**Missing Persons:**  
Who were the typical Tudors?  
Book launch and conference

Nottingham, Friday 3 - Sunday 5 April 2020

For tickets and more details please visit  
[www.tudortailor.com](http://www.tudortailor.com)



## MEDATS COMMITTEE CONTACT DETAILS

**President** - John Cherry, [president@medats.org.uk](mailto:president@medats.org.uk)

**Chairman** – Dr. Elizabeth Coatsworth. (to be succeeded by Ninya Mikhaila at the 2020 AGM)

**Honorary Secretary** - Christine Carnie,

**Treasurer** – Mary Frost, [treasurer@medats.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@medats.org.uk) (to be succeeded by Challe Hudson at the 2020 AGM)

**Membership Secretary** – Linde Merrick

**Ticketing Secretary** – Carole Thompson

**Programme Secretary** – Natalie Rachel

**Newsletter Editor** – Ninya Mikhaila, [newsletter@medats.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@medats.org.uk) (to be succeeded by Pat Poppy at the 2020 AGM)

**Publicity Secretary** - Heather Mbaye, [publicity@medats.org.uk](mailto:publicity@medats.org.uk)

**Web master** - Saragrace Knauf

## MEDATS SUBSCRIPTIONS

Information about MEDATS and application forms may be had from the Membership Secretary, Linde Merrick, or from the society website: [www.medats.org.uk](http://www.medats.org.uk).

Annual subscriptions (payable in pounds sterling only) run from 1st Jan – 31st Dec.

### Rates:

**£15** Individual members worldwide;1 (£6 paper newsletter surcharge for Europe, £9 paper newsletter surcharge for worldwide outside Europe).

**£20** Households worldwide (2 members); (paper newsletter surcharges as above)

**£10** Student members worldwide (with proof of status); (paper newsletter surcharges as above).

**£30** Institutions irrespective of location.

**£5** Electronic newsletter subscription, non UK.

1: Members may stand for office within the society, vote in meetings and elections, and gain a discount on attendance at meetings. Within the UK the newsletter is available electronically as a PDF file, or on paper. Please specify which method of delivery is preferred. If no preference is recorded, electronic delivery will be assumed as a default whenever an e-mail address is supplied.

2: One copy of the newsletter will be sent whichever mode is employed, but both named members enjoy the full range of rights and privileges.

3: This gains none of the privileges of membership and is not available to residents of Great Britain.

## CANCELLATION POLICY FOR EVENTS

A full refund will be given if a cancellation is made 30 days or more before the event.

Refunds for cancellations made at shorter notice will be given on a discretionary basis dependant on whether the ticket can be resold or not. The final decision will be made by the treasurer.