
The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

February 2015 www.medats.org.uk Issue 76



Two of twelve watercolours illustrating whaling activities
from the journal of Robert Fotherby, 1613.
Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society
(See future meetings on page 8)

Editorial

In this edition of the newsletter we had hoped to be able to confirm the date and venue of the next conference. Unfortunately due to a number of unavoidable events (see Jane Bridgeman's letter to members overleaf) we are still not in a position to do so. Apart from the difficulties of organising the event with an under wo/manned committee we are now in need of a new venue. For the past three years we have been very lucky to have the use of the Stephenson Theatre at The British Museum, graciously hosted by Naomi Speakman. This is no longer the case as, unsurprisingly, the BM must now prioritise it's own events.

This means that we are looking for an alternative, affordable option. This is something of a challenge, especially in London. We are currently making enquiries into other possibilities but would welcome any suggestions from the membership.

The theme of the next conference is occupational dress and we have a number of potential speakers lined up, though their availability is not guaranteed since we do not have a confirmed date. The subject matter is fascinating and should make for a very interesting day. If any members have suggestions for speakers, or indeed wish to submit a paper please do get in touch. The somewhat overdue AGM will also be held at the next conference and it is more important than ever that members attend and make their views known. We intend to send out a letter or email to all members as soon as the venue and date have been confirmed.

On a positive note Timothy Dawson has updated the website which is much improved, please do take a look and give us your feedback www.medats.org.uk In addition we can announce that the society has taken a step into the 21st century and can now take membership payments via Paypal, an easy way for those of you who have not yet paid this year's subscription - please be aware that this will be the last newsletter you will receive unless payment is made!

Ninya Mikhaila

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Christine Carnie and Mervi Pasanen with some of the clothes they made for the television series *Secrets of the Castle*. See page 3.

To receive the newsletter as a colour PDF file electronically, please e-mail medatseditor@hotmail.co.uk

A letter from Jane Bridgeman

Dear Members,

Your Committee for some time now has been in something of a crisis, and I have been asked to bring this to the attention of everyone through the Newsletter. For the past four or five years the Committee of this Society has suffered from a chronic lack of personnel, although managing collectively. The Committee has had no Chairman after our newly elected Chairman Dr Geoff Egan died very suddenly in December 2010. Having myself been Programme Secretary from 1996-2010, my successor in 2011 Dan Towse resigned in 2013, through ill health. Since then there has been no replacement. More recently, this last year, Jenny Tiramani and Mark Meltonville had to resign through pressure of work and now, as result of an unexpected illness, Bushy Westfallen, our hard-working and versatile Acting Hon. Secretary and Ticketing Secretary has also had to resign.

MEDATS has gained two new Committee members from the British Museum, Naomi Speakman and Lloyd de Beer, young curators from the Museum both researching for their Ph.Ds. Professor Gale Owen Crocker has also volunteered her services. She has just retired, although she still has considerable academic and family responsibilities. Despite these welcome additions the Committee still remains short-handed.

What MEDATS achieves on behalf of its members has been managed always in a voluntary

capacity because we are all, in one way or another, passionately concerned with the history of dress and textiles before 1600. Any society is only as strong and as active as its members. Please do not take the generosity of your Committee members for granted, because now we are now in a situation where the Committee struggles to maintain the activities for which MEDATS was created.

The next Annual General Meeting will be held at our forthcoming conference (the venue & date yet to be confirmed). This will be an opportunity for any member willing to join the committee to stand for election. (seconded by two members of the committee). It will also be the right time for everyone to discuss the future of MEDATS.

Life may seem to be becoming more and more busy, and the general everyday bureaucracy of living more annoying, complicated and expensive. But I am sure there are members with academic or curatorial experience who have ideas, and contacts, that would enable them to help arrange conferences and study days, or others who could easily organise the Committee's Agenda and take minutes, and take care of ticketing arrangements. Without these basic activities the Medieval Dress and Textile Society cannot survive.

This Society was founded in 1991, over twenty-four years ago. It would be a great pity if, in its twenty-fifth year, it closes down.

Jane Bridgeman, 6th February 2015

Secrets of the Castle

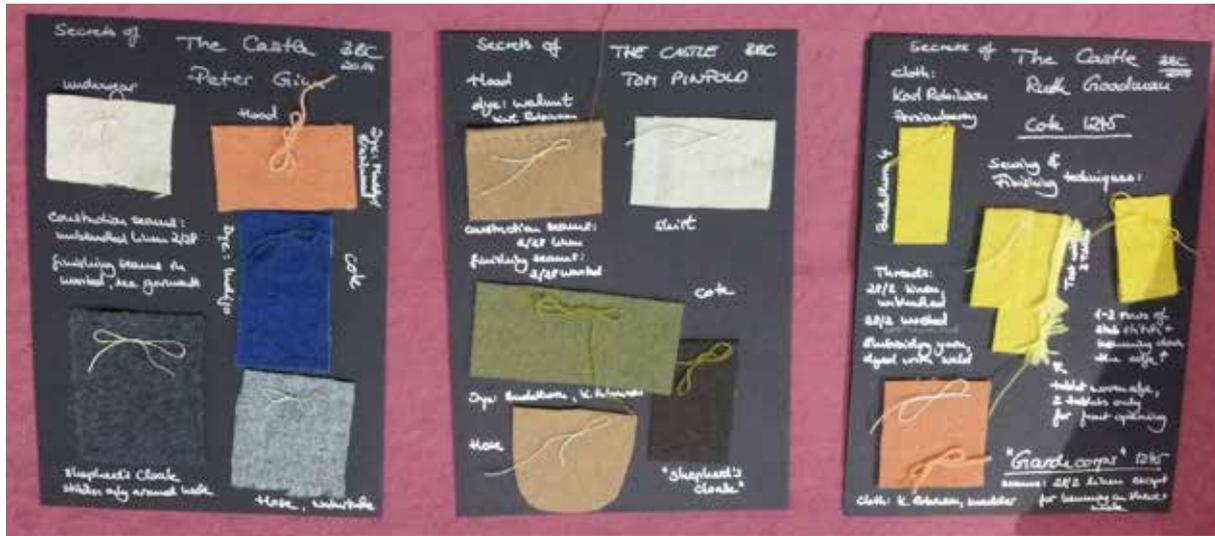
Christine Carnie gives an insight into the challenges of making 13th century clothing for television

A year ago I was delighted to be asked to make garments for the presenters and some of the extras in the television (Lion TV/BBC2) series *Secrets of the Castle*. The brief was to make garments dating from around 1240-1250, for a series similar to the "farm series" that the team had done before, but this time based in and around a castle.

From initial designs to the start of filming I had less than 6 weeks. Whilst researching the styles of the period, I learned that the filming would take place in France, so I was able to extend my research to include French resources. I therefore used English and French illustrated manuscripts from around 1240 to 1260 as a basis for the designs, with the main input coming from the Maciejowski Bible (MS M.638), 1250, and the Life of St. Edward the Confessor (MS Ee.3.59), 1250-1260.

Since TV is such a visual medium, I chose to go with bright colours for the garments, evoking the feel of the images in the illustrated manuscripts. The cut and sewing techniques for Ruth Goodman's cote and smock are taken from extant garments of the period. Other garment details, like the slit at the hem of the sleeves so they can be turned back, and the neck openings, are taken from the images in the manuscripts.

The production team wanted to use naturally dyed cloth, and due to the short lead time, the choice of cloth type was limited. However, there was a beautiful range of colours to choose from. The dyed garments were made from a light-weight tabby woven wool. All the colours were chosen by the people who the garments were made for. Ruth Goodman's yellow cote is dyed with buckthorn and the orange surcote with madder. Tom Pinfold chose walnut and buckthorn green, and Peter Ginn, woad/indigo blue and natural grey.



The pallet of naturally dyed materials for the team

Peter's hood was made from the same material as Ruth's surcote. The hood shows how working for a TV production influences the choices you make; the original hood was a pale green, but it did not work on camera, so I had to design a new one with a more vibrant colour.

because it creates a strong but flexible seam, which we needed for the proper drape. Most construction seams (holding the garment together) were sewn using unbleached fine linen thread, whereas finishing seams were sewn in either naturally dyed worsted wool thread or linen.



Peter's hood and Ruth's linen cap, barbette and fillet

Ruth's headgear was made from bleached linen, and all the underwear from a medium weight unbleached linen. The smock and shirts were made from a finer material than I used for Tudor Monastery Farm so they would not be too bulky under the softer outer material.

Working for filming has its own unique challenges and these influenced some of the design choices from the beginning. Neither Tom nor Peter had surcotes, except for the cloaks, whereas Ruth had a cote and surcote. The men were going to do a lot of hard physical labour, and though filming started early in the year most of it would be done in the warmer months, when there would be little chance for them to wear a second layer of clothing, so we did not make any. Peter and Tom wear completely different outfits for working in the castle itself, this had to do with safety measures and other filming related decisions. Another drawback of the very short production time was that neither Tom nor Peter were available for any fittings before filming.

All the garments are hand sewn. In this I had help from my friend and colleague Mervi Pasanen from Swan River Crafts in Finland, we teamed up for a long weekend of cutting and sewing. I had prepared all the designs and we then finalized cutting plans and sewing techniques. We made seam samples for all garments before committing to cutting and sewing, to test the drape and bulkiness of the seams. We copied the seam technique of the extant St. Clara's dress for Ruth's yellow dress,

Whilst challenging, the experience was enjoyable and I was pleased with how the garments looked on screen. The construction held up well, as far as I could tell from watching the series, especially given some of the punishment that Tom and Peter gave them. I am hoping to have a chance to examine the garments now that they have been worn and used. I'm looking forward to using what I learnt in the future, though hopefully with a slightly more relaxed timescale.

Images from the Maciejowski Bible can be viewed at the Morgan Library & Museum website <http://www.themorgan.org/collection/crusader-bible/1>

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Medieval Clothing and Textiles 10

Robin Netherton & Gale Owen-Crocker (eds.)

Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge 2012

£35.00 Hardback ISBN 978-1-84383-907-1

The latest volume of *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* casts its net somewhat wider than previous editions, venturing into rather more theoretical realms and reflecting upon modern scholarship in the field.

The first article, 'Behind the Curtains, Under the Covers, Inside the Tents: Textile Items and Narrative Strategies in Anglo-Saxon Old Testament Art' (Christopher Monk) is the substantial theoretical excursion. As the title suggests it is an exercise in Art History rather than the sort of fare usually found in this series and other publications like it. Clothing and textiles are, of course, inextricably culturally embedded and carry a wide range of messages. Dress historians especially (at least those worth their salt!) constantly deal with this awareness, and as a great deal of the source material a dress historian uses for cultural insight is, perforce, pictorial, they must develop an acute appreciation of the nuances of art. The very nature of the subject forces them to be inter-disciplinary and open-minded. In contrast, I venture to suggest that Art History tends to be very different. I would even say that it could well be the ultimate Ivory Tower discipline. It is admirable in a sense. With no potential to do Oral History surveys to determine the actual views of artists and audiences, they have an untrammelled freedom to conjure theories out of the air, usually with no fear of contradiction. (Literary sources sometimes offer contemporary commentaries on works of art, although how often Art Historians are aware of such is debatable.) Such speculations are not without value. They must, however, always be approached with considerable skepticism, and this piece is very much a case in point.

Lisa Monnas' article 'Some Colour Terms for Textiles' puts us on much more familiar ground, and, indeed, illustrates the multi-disciplinary effort that is so often entailed in historical dress and textile studies. The debates one can often hear today about what colour or shade is denoted by a given word shows that there will always be significant uncertainty in interpretation, yet the collection and interpretation (however provisional) of terminology is essential work. 'Weft and Worms: The Spread of Sericulture and Silk Weaving in the West before 1300' (Rebecca Wendelken) presents the reader with nothing new, but is a very useful summary of the present state on knowledge on this subject.

'Liturgical Vestments of Castel Sant'Elia' (Maureen Miller) is a fascinating exposition on a large, but little-known collection of (mostly) thirteenth-century ecclesiastical dress in Italy, which could clearly reward more intensive and analytical study. Legal records are often a source of remarkable details for an insight into everyday life. The documents discussed in 'Clothing Distraigned for Debt in the Court of Merchants of Lucca' (Christine Meek) only cover a few decades in the fourteenth century, but are very detailed. Once more they offer, amongst other things, a caution against modern paradigms on the value of items of clothing. Even garments which are described as "very worn" could still be deemed to have value enough to be taken in lieu of debt.

'Sacred or Profane: The Horned Headdresses of St Frideswide's Priory' (Valida Evalds) is another article which seeks to delve into attitudes and perceptions of dress as reflected in art. It is a rather more interesting and persuasive effort than the first above. The reason it is so must be acknowledged to be in part that it discusses an area and period in which the evidence and scholarship is much more extensive. The tone is also quite different from the earlier article though, as the author covers the diverse interpretations that can be applied to the subject matter.

"Translating" a Queen: Material Culture and the Creation of Margaret Tudor as Queen of Scots' (Michelle Beer) traces the evolution of the wardrobe and accoutrements as Margaret made her journeys – both physical and metaphorical – from her betrothal in London, through her Progress through England and Scotland to her marriage and installation as Queen of Scots. Each phase of this process was accompanied by a new suite of textiles, sometimes newly made, and sometimes remade. 'A Formidable Undertaking: Mrs. A. G. I. Christie and English Medieval Embroidery' (Elizabeth Coatsworth) is a fitting acknowledgement of the activities of an important and pioneering scholar and practitioner.

Timothy Dawson

Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain: A Multilingual Sourcebook
Louise M. Sylvester, Mark C. Chambers and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (eds.)
Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge 2014
£60 Hardback, 412pp black and white with 8 colour plates
ISBN: 978-1-84383-932-3

This is an impressive volume containing a wide range of transcribed documents referring to dress and/or textiles between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. These include wills, accounts, inventories, moral and satirical works, sumptuary legislation and extracts from epics and romances. Each section begins with an introductory discussion of the material, which provides an overview and demonstrates where the documents came from, and in what form they were read. Throughout the book the transcriptions are laid out with their original spellings on the left hand page and modern English versions on the right. This is a particularly useful feature as it gives the reader the choice to read either form, or to read one and check it against the other. The selection of material is rich and enlightening. Having such different forms of documentation gathered in one place offers valuable insights into both the perceptions and the realities of dress in the medieval period. There is an extensive glossary of terminology at the back of the book. The illustrations are restricted to the cover and plates, and all eight plates are examples of the original documents rather than depictions of dress. A frustrating element of this book is that the date range for the documents is not made clear in any index or contents list, so this must be discovered by reading each section. The sourcebook is an enjoyable and informative read. A definite must have for anyone studying the history of dress in England and Europe the medieval period.

Ninya Mikhaila

Special offer

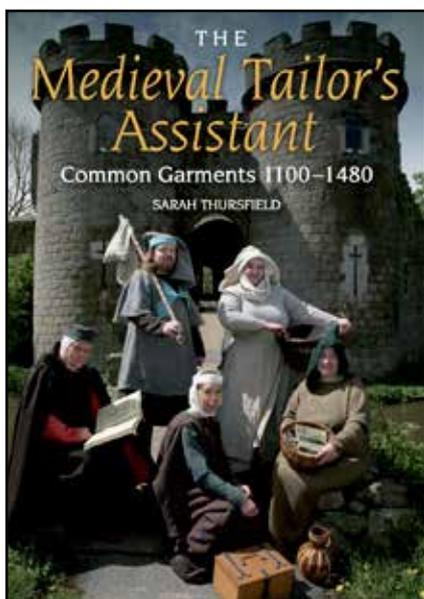
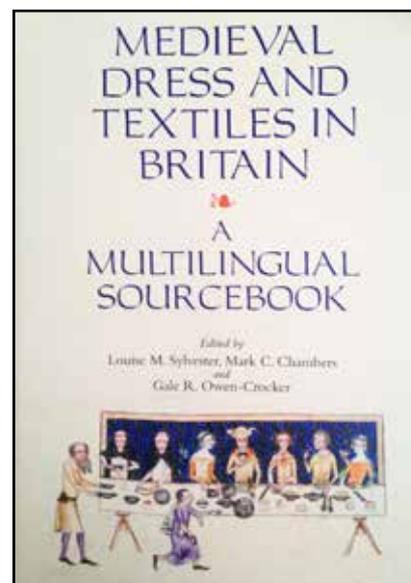
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FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

The Medieval Tailor's Assistant: Common Garments 1100-1480

Sarah Thursfield

Crowood, 2015

£25 ISBN: 978-1-84797-834-9

The Medieval Tailor's Assistant is the standard work for both amateurs and professionals wishing to re-create the clothing of Medieval England for historical interpretation or drama. This new edition extends its range with details of fitting different figures and many more patterns for main garments and accessories from 1100 to 1480. It includes simple instructions for plain garments, as well as more complex patterns and adaptations for experienced sewers.

EXHIBITIONS FORTHCOMING



Floorspread, painted and dyed cotton, Coromandel Coast, about 1630. © Victoria and Albert Museum

Victoria & Albert Museum,
Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL

The Fabric of India

3 October 2015 - 10 January 2016

Showcasing the best of the V&A's world-renowned collection together with masterpieces from international partners, the exhibition will feature over 200 objects ranging from the 3rd to the 21st century.

Shoes: Pleasure and Pain

13 June 2015 - 31 January 2016

This exhibition will look at the extremes of footwear from around the globe, presenting around 200 pairs of shoes ranging from a sandal decorated in pure gold leaf originating from ancient Egypt to the most elaborate designs by contemporary makers.

<http://www.vam.ac.uk>

EVENTS FORTHCOMING

The School of Historical Dress

47 Charles Square, London

15th Century Men's Doublets

20 April - 24 April 2015

A practical course exploring the shape of the farsetto (doublet) in Italy in the 1400s. Students will learn about the shape, materials, the layers of construction and how these garments were worn. Each student will draft a pattern and make a toile of a full size doublet from c.1450 based on surviving garments, image research and written documents.

info@theschoolofhistoricaldress.org.uk

www.theschoolofhistoricaldress.org.uk

Lutterworth Embroiderer's Guild

Leicestershire

Dressing Queen Elizabeth I

Saturday 6 June 2015

A presentation using reconstructed garments showing how the Queen dressed from her underwear to her jewel encrusted exterior.

Non-members welcome.

Contact normatkay@hotmail.com for ticketing information.

<http://www.emreg.org.uk/branches/lutterworth/programme-events-for-2015>



FUTURE MEETINGS

MEDATS Spring/summer meeting and AGM 2015

Occupational Dress



One of twelve watercolours illustrating whaling activities from the journal of Robert Fotherby, 1613.
Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society

Jane Malcolm-Davies and Ninya Mikhaila of The Tudor Tailor will share some of their latest findings following a recent research trip to Red Bay in Labrador to study the clothing of sixteenth century Basque whalers and mariners.

Members are invited to submit papers and/or suggest suitable speakers on the topic of occupational dress.