

# The Medieval Dress and Textile Society

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Issue 99



Image: Herod's Banquet, by Pedro García de Benabarre fl.1445-1485.

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya

## Dates for Your Diary

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2023 at 4pm BST Online Chat by Jennifer Scott, "We carried war raiment and arms: the clothing and weapons of the Scots at war." from her new book covering the period 1460-1600

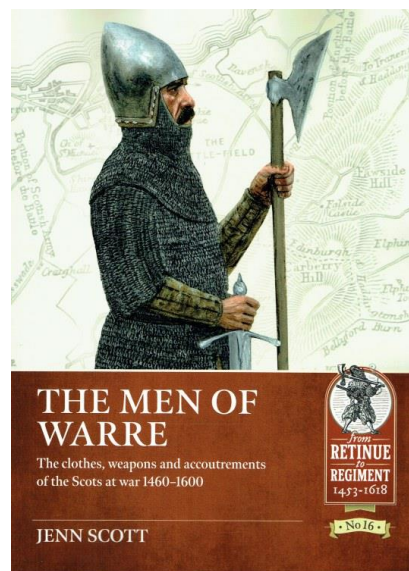
19<sup>th</sup> August 2023 at 4pm BST Online Chat by Fiammetta Falchi on the Tristan quilts which date to c.1360-1400

4<sup>th</sup> November 2023 – Learning Through Reconstruction – in person study day

21<sup>st</sup> April 2024 – Annual Conference – online

28<sup>th</sup> April 2024 – AGM – online

Further details to be finalised, please check the website for further information.



## AGM 2023 Report

The complete minutes and officers' reports from the AGM, have been provided to all members separately, you should have received them with this newsletter. One of the main decisions taken at the meeting, was that the following proposal was agreed:

"The committee are proposing that, with effect from 1 January 2024, the Society's newsletters will ONLY be published ELECTRONICALLY, via members' email addresses. It is considered uneconomical now to produce paper copies, with ever increasing postal charges and continued warnings from the printer about potential increases in his costs."

Just to confirm, print copies will be sent to those who have paid for print copies for this year.

## 'What lies beneath' Reports from the MEDATS Spring Conference

### A Tudor Bonnet Takes Shape

#### Challe Hudson

Portraits of early sixteenth-century queens show gable-shaped bonnets of very different silhouettes. The jewels and soft materials of these bonnets may be effectively the same, so the speaker suggested that the key to their different shapes lay in the paste, the unadorned white understructure visible against the cheek. From her investigation of hundreds of effigies on tombs and brasses in parish churches of England and Wales, she invited us to join her in taking the measure of, and peering under the edges of, the uniquely English gabled bonnet.

Challe Hudson is an independent scholar interested in late medieval and early modern English fashion. She is currently studying the depiction of Tudor women's fashion preserved on church monuments, effigies and monumental brasses, and is an active member of the Monumental Brass Society and the Church Monuments Society.



Right: This is the effigy of Alice Walleys, wife of Simon Digby who died in 1519, located in the Parish Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Coleshill, Warwickshire. Underneath her bonnet the paste frames her face, from the gabled peak above her forehead to the curved ends that terminate near her shoulders.

### **The mystery of the Norwich child jersey stocking knitters. Lesley O'Connell Edwards.**

This paper set out to explore what lies beneath an early modern documentary statement. Thomas Wilson comments in *The State of England 1600* that children in Norwich aged between six and ten years earned £12,000 towards their keep mostly by knitting jersey stockings, which were sold in London, France and elsewhere; and that children aged seven and over could make four s[hillings] a week at the trade.

At first glance, this is a very rare thing: information on textile workers in a specific place. But the children's earnings are far too high for the period, so how reliable is Wilson? There is evidence which suggests there is some truth in Wilson's comments, and this paper set his writing in the context of this, and considered other aspects which cannot be directly confirmed.

Jersey stockings were very fine stockings, hand-knitted from fine wool yarn. They were made across England, not just in the Channel Islands. Jersey stockings occur in a wide range of contemporary documents from household accounts to government and civic records. Queen Elizabeth paid 26s 8d for two pairs in 1588. Norwich was the second city in England in 1600, noted for its textile industries including fine knitted stockings.

Wilson's comment that the stockings were traded abroad is the easiest to substantiate. Overseas port books list the items being exported, their destination and the exporter. Those for Yarmouth, the nearest port to Norwich, survive for Michaelmas 1600 to Michaelmas 1601 and for Easter to Michaelmas 1602. All the stockings listed are described as jersey: 2,940 pairs in 1600-1601 and 1,523 pairs in the six months of 1602. Although Wilson only mentions France as a specific destination, nearly 70% of the Yarmouth exports went to the Low Countries, and only 7% to France. Some of the traders exporting stockings have ties to Norwich, which means they would have been well placed to acquire jersey stockings knitted there.

No direct evidence for any trade in jersey stockings between Norwich and London has been traced – although there is a little evidence of Norwich stockings being traded in London. Evidence in early 17th century aulnage disputes shows stockings being transported to London by road.

A number of sources show that children were knitting stockings in this period. The Tudors considered that five years was not too young to start work. Three contemporary sources provide age data on groups of child knitters: taken together these show 55 children aged between 6 and 10 years, out of a total of 124 knitters aged under 21.

Wilson's numerical data seem to be the greatest weakness. The 4s a week he claims that child knitters aged seven and over could earn is far too high for an individual wage for the period: women and children might make 3d[pence] a day at casual work (12d = 1s[hilling]). A married woman spinner could earn 1s 4d per week in 1620. Weekly wages for some knitters are given in the 1597 Ipswich census of the poor: 12 of the 15 child knitters earned between 4d and 8d a week; only one adult earned more than 1s.

However, there is an alternative explanation for the term 'earn': did Wilson use it to mean what the child earned for the city, not for themselves as individuals? In 1586, Robert Payne states that 8s could be 'earned' from one pound of raw wool by turning it into yarn and knitting two pairs of jersey stockings from the yarn.

Wilson provides both a weekly earning and an annual total, which enables us to work out what a child might earn annually, and how many child knitters there might be. Assuming a child worked for 50 weeks a year, allowing for Christmas, then s/he would earn 200s i.e. £10. Wilson tells us that most of the £12,000 the children earned came from jersey stocking knitting, so assuming the 7 - 10 year olds earned £10,000 of that then one thousand child knitters would be needed. Norwich's total population was around 15,000 in 1600, so this is 7% of the population just knitting jersey stockings. No other contemporary evidence mentions this sizable number, but before Wilson is dismissed out of hand, another possibility needs to be considered: were all the knitters living in the city? Evidence suggests that there were

knitters in the countryside around: for example, a 1596 inventory shows yarn being put out to knitters there. Did Wilson presume that since the stockings came from Norwich, all the knitters lived there, too?

This paper revealed sufficient evidence to corroborate some of Wilson's claims which means that the others need to be seriously considered. The State of England 1600 is in Camden Miscellany, 16 (1936), (3rd series, 52). Lesley O'Connell Edwards is an independent scholar who researches the history of hand knitting, using both archives and artefacts. Her main interests include all aspects of hand knitting in Tudor England, and hand-knitters as an occupational group, and she is currently researching the structure of the trade in knitted stockings, using a variety of archival sources. She was part of the Holy Hands research project in 2020-2021 examining knitted liturgical gloves led by Angharad Thomas.

Hastings Sanderson is an independent researcher specializing in 16th century pattern books. She owns the reference site Modelbuch.com and the blog Modelbuch Muse where she does frequent posts matching the patterns with extant textiles and paintings as well as actively working to make more of the books available to the public in free digital formats.

## **A late sixteenth-century farthingale sleeve**

### **Ninya Mikhaila**

An extant farthingale sleeve and the silk satin sleeve it supports form part of a collection of garments still owned by the Willoughby family to which it originally belonged in the 1590s or early 1600s. Relatively few garments survive from the sixteenth century, and evidence for what would later be termed 'underpinnings' is even harder to come by. Such items of dress are usually hidden from view in paintings and portraits, and the materials, cut and construction are rarely described in detail in the documentary sources. The Willoughby sleeve support is a valuable source of this information. Made from fustian with fourteen hoops of whalebone, or baleen, encased in linen strips, its construction matches contemporary documentary evidence for farthingale sleeves which were assumed to form part of elite dress. For example, the wardrobe accounts of Queen Elizabeth I include references to dozens of pairs made for the queen and her royal servants between 1585 and the late 1590s. The fustian is of a cheap type known as Holmes or Jean, typically used as lining material for garments of the elite. This inexpensive fabric was also used for the clothing of ordinary people, particularly doublets for men and women's waistcoats. The whalebone was probably imported through merchants from the Basque region of Spain and France as it was not widely available until the early seventeenth century. Evidence suggests that the fashion for farthingale sleeves moved rapidly through society. Only four years after the first mention of the garment in the royal wardrobe, farthingale sleeves start to make an appearance in the household accounts and personal correspondence of gentlewomen and they are depicted on several effigies on monuments sculpted in the 1590s and early 1600s. They had become a feature of ordinary women's dress by the early seventeenth century when in 1611 an edict ordained that 'maid-servants and women-servants' should not wear any sleeves of wire, whalebone or with any other stiffening'.

It has been assumed that the original owner of the sleeve was Elizabeth Willoughby, wife of Francis Willoughby of Wollaton Hall in Nottinghamshire. However, there are numerous

candidates, as Elizabeth and Francis had six surviving daughters and a tempestuous marriage during which they spent many years apart. Following Elizabeth's death Sir Francis swiftly



A reconstruction of the farthingale sleeve made by Ninya Mikahila using brushed cotton fabric and modern plastic boning proved lightweight, flexible and comfortable. Photo by Adam Shaw, © The Tudor Tailor

remarried and his new wife, Dorothy, moved in for two years between 1595 and 1597. During those two years the ownership of clothing and jewellery appears to have been the cause of many disagreements between Francis and his daughters. Aside from the wives and daughters of Sir Francis it is possible that the farthingale sleeve may have been his, or his son-in-law Percival's. Men's clothing featured stuffing, bombast, boning and stiffening at various times in the sixteenth century, and it is clear from portraiture that certain styles of men's gown sleeves were supported by a structure underneath, possibly hoops.

The evidence for farthingale sleeves makes it clear that they were highly fashionable items of dress and were widely adopted in the last decade of the sixteenth century. Reconstructions made of both the sleeve support and the satin oversleeve proved to be lightweight, flexible and comfortable to wear in contrast to previously held assumptions that such large sleeves would impede movement. Even with so many pairs having been made and worn, it is not surprising that, until now, there have been no known examples. As was usual with garments in the past, most of them were likely taken apart and the useful materials reused once the taste for large sleeves had passed. Sixteen yards of whalebone would be suitable for boning a pair of bodies or stays and is unlikely to have been left lying around unused. The survival of the Willoughby sleeve may be due to the circumstances of Sir Percival's last twenty years, when he lived alone at Wollaton Hall. During his final year he kept to one end of the building following a fire in 1642, which caused significant damage. That only one farthingale sleeve remains, suggests that the recycling process may have been interrupted and the garment forgotten. Such survivals often owe their existence to poor housekeeping or 'benign neglect'.

By the time Elizabeth Willoughby's great, great grand-daughter Cassandra came across the sleeve in the 1680s, enough time had passed for it to have become a fascinating curiosity which she considered worth keeping. Thanks to her preservation of the farthingale sleeve, and its continued care by her descendants, it is now a unique complementary artefact which adds immeasurably to the evidence for an iconic Elizabethan fashion which, in Cassandra's words "old pictures shew was the dress of that time". The sleeve remains in the Willoughby family's private collection and is currently undergoing assessment prior to conservation. Research on it continues and will be published in due course.

Ninya Mikhaila, who is the current Chair of MEDATS, is a costume historian and re-creator who is well known for her work on television and for films. In collaboration with Jane Malcolm-Davies she heads The Tudor Tailor, which organizes exhibitions and other events and publishes books.

## **Bents as a Material of Early Modern Fashion: their origins, uses and demise in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England**

**Sarah A. Bendall**

Bents were reeds and grasses used to structure the hoops of foundation garments such as farthingales and bodices (stays), the undersleeves and shoulders of garments, and the bodices of gowns. A surviving example of a farthingale in the Museo Etnografico de Castilla y Leon, Zamora may have used esparto grass. [The cover image is of a painting, Herod's Banquet, by Pedro García de Benabarre (fl.1445-1485), in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya showing this style of farthingale.] There has been little attempt to identify bents as plants and there are few material remains. The speaker used wardrobe accounts and naturalist books, as well as experimental history using millet grass, marram grass, reeds and common rush (*Juncus acutus*), to identify what bents were in sixteenth and seventeenth-century English context, their materiality, usage and why they came to be replaced by later materials such as whalebone.

Sarah A. Bendall is a Research Fellow at the Gender and Women's History Research Centre, Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, Australia Catholic University.

## **Conjecturing the Clothes: sixteenth-century drawers fit for an Italian noblewoman**

**Chiaretta di Fiore (nom d plume)**

The wearing of drawers in sixteenth-century Italy is a debatable topic. It is unclear who wore them, when, and why, though there is a commonly-held association with prostitutes. Some textual evidence exists that noblewomen also wore them. However the only visual evidence shows Venetian courtesans wearing ornate breeches, significantly different from three surviving pairs of embroidered linen drawers. The speaker described research into materials, decorations, colours, stitches, and other design elements common to mid-reconstructing a pair of drawers fit for an Italian noblewoman based on research into sixteenth-century Florence.

Chiaretta di Fiore (nom d plume) is an independent researcher who has been researching and reconstructing Italian calzoni (drawers) as worn by noblewomen of 16th century Florence.

Image right and below: Italian 16<sup>th</sup> century drawers. Linen embroidered with silk and metal threads and metal lace. Acc. No. 10.124.4. Metropolitan Museum New York.



## The Benefits of Wear: Examining the Support Structures of Embroidery

**Erin Harvey Moody and Christy Gordon Baty**

The opulence of Elizabethan and Jacobean embroidery is partly due to its unique dimensionality. Supporting structures were never meant to be seen, but the speakers exploiting breakdown of silk and other materials, and natural (or unnatural) wear and degradation over time, together with modern techniques like x-ray, examined typical underlying materials like twine and wool, as well as wood forms, nutmegs, shell hulls, and even the more exotic and unique birds' beaks. They examined two- and three-dimensional

embroideries in several collections, including pictures, caskets, bags, frames and book bindings.

Presenting together: Erin Harvey Moody is the Costume and Textile Technician for the Richmond Museum of History and Culture. Erin Harvey Moody completed Post graduate certificates in Museum Education, University of Glasgow, and Collections Management for Costume and Textiles, CSU Long Beach. Christy Gordon Baty is a graduate student of History at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. They co-authored "A Book by its Cover" for Harvard Magazine and they have presented "Women's Work Seen and Unseen: the Economic Influence of Needlework" at the Centuries of Cloth Conference at the University of Cambridge. And most recently, Erin and Christy won the Agnes Strickland prize for best paper presented at the South Central Renaissance Conference for "Gloriana's Gifts."

## **Call for Papers: Learning through Reconstruction**

Saturday 4 November 2023.

In person event at Lancaster Hall Hotel, 35 Craven Terrace, London W2 3EL

The Medieval Dress and Textile Society invites proposals for 20-30 minute papers on the theme of 'Learning Through Reconstruction', relating to research and study performed through, or supported by, the reconstruction of dress and textiles of the period c.400 – c.1625.

Presentations may include works in progress, finished reconstruction projects or planned projects, on any type of clothing or textiles including armour and furnishings. In addition to the presentation, we encourage presenters to share hands-on objects. In particular, this conference will aim to promote papers which demonstrate one or more of the following:

- Rigorous and detailed use of remaking practices as a component of scholarly study.
- Close study of surviving dress and textile artefacts.

- Theoretical examination of the value and use of reconstruction, remaking, experimental archaeology or re-enactment study in the field of dress and textile history.

- 'Embodied' research practices.

- Interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary research.

- Innovative collaboration between researchers from different approaches and backgrounds (e.g. 'hands-on' makers and 'hands-off' academics working together in new ways).

To Apply

Please submit an approximately 200-word abstract explaining the subject matter of your paper to the MEDATS Secretary Heather Mbaye at [secretary@medats.org.uk](mailto:secretary@medats.org.uk) by 31 July 2023.

## Two Early Pattern Books for Weaving Brocaded Tablet-woven Bands Nancy Spies

Following Hastings Sanderson's interesting introduction to 16th-century pattern books which were used to make lace and embroideries to decorate collars and cuffs, I thought members might be interested in learning about two pattern books specifically for weaving brocaded tablet-woven bands. By the time of their appearance, these brocaded bands, popular for a thousand years in Europe as trim on a wide variety of textiles, were gradually being replaced by lace and embroidery as ornamental trim. The designs themselves are fairly simple, but the books, both products of the St. Clare Convent in Nürnberg, are important as they are two of the earliest known textile pattern books.

The oldest book of the two is dated between sometime after 1424 and before 1452 by the authors; the Heidelberg University Library where it is held (Cod. Pal. Germ. 551) gives it a date of 1471-1475. It is part of a larger, composite manuscript, the first pages of which consists of 342 patterns for these brocaded bands followed by sections on medicines for humans, falcons, and horses and finally some recipes. The brocading patterns, done by different hands, include many that include pearls, a not-so-surprising fact when you learn that St. Clare Convent was responsible for repairs to the regalia of the Holy Roman Empire which included the pearl-and gold encrusted mantle of Roger II, the Norman king of Sicily. All the patterns have been transcribed into a modern version for ease of weaving by Ute Bargmann who has also woven examples of them. Ute and Claudia Wollny have produced a truly beautiful book in full colour with many photographs of the bands themselves. There is an excellent introduction which for the most part applies to both this book and the second one. They have titled their book "Roslein und Wecklein: Brocading Patterns for Tablet Weaving from the Late Medieval, Cod. Pal. Germ. 551" The second book, "Anna Neuper's Modelbuch" dated 1517, was the work of a 70-year-old nun, Anna Neuper, who was at the same St. Clare Convent mentioned above. It is held in the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 57 Aug. 8<sup>o</sup> and contains patterns ranging in width from 73 to 11 tablets, all variations on overall geometric designs. Her method of writing the patterns is so simple that it is possible to actually weave from her originals. I transcribed them into a more modern version, however, for greater ease of use by modern weavers. Anna Neuper included an introduction to her little book (7 inches x 5.5 inches). You can hear her own voice in your ear as you weave her patterns.

*This book is to be kept in the sacristy of St. Clare's. It was written when one counted fifteen hundred and seventeen years. It was written by a poor little sister of the order of St. Clare in praise of the Lord and in honour of the blessed Virgin Mary at St. Clare, my dear mother. And whoever will use this should think of me with an Ave Maria or with a requiem for Sister Anna Neuper. The patterns written down here are all for gold bands which are worked by means of tablets, and for the long marks you always lift at the back of the shed one thread and for the short marks you press the threads down until you get to another long one.*

*I beg all the dear sisters who use a pattern to copy it to a piece of paper so that this little book will receive less damage and will hold up longer. It was hard work for me to*

*produce this book. My sleep was disrupted when I thought about how I could work one of the patterns.*

*I am also asking all the sisters that, whenever they find an error, to correct it; I have not woven them all, sometimes I lost my senses, so that I thought I had written down a line or a number of marks, and sometimes I realized that I hadn't done it; also my age has befallen me and I now regret that I haven't done this in my youth when I was smarter than after seventy years, but my dear sisters would not give me any peace.*

It is interesting to note that the younger Anna Neuper must have been weaving these bands when the older patterns in the first book were in use at St. Clare's.

Both books are somewhat difficult to find if you want to purchase them, so I am providing the information you need if you want to obtain copies.

"Roslein Und Wecklein" is available at <http://www.brettchenweben.de> for €29.90 plus shipping.

"Anna Neuper's Modelbuch" is available as a PDF for \$5 at <http://www.redstoneglen.com>. Click on "Shop", then "Digital Download"



A queen doing tablet weaving. Psalter, ca. 1300 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce MS 131, fol. 18v)

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## Exhibitions

Staging the Table in Europe 1500–1800 will be on view at Bard Graduate Center Gallery from February 17 to July 9, 2023.

The website <https://exhibitions.bgc.bard.edu/stagingthetable/> has links to sections on linens, on tablescapes, and on the art of folding napkins.

The Viking World, Historiska Museet,  
Stockholm, 28 May — 31 Dec 2023

All the 2,500 items in this exhibition  
are available online via their website.  
<https://vikingar.historiska.se/>

Right: from the exhibition website, a  
fragment of a patterned cushion or  
pillow with partially preserved  
stuffing. Found at head height in a  
grave. The cushion is woven with  
weft rip weave (tapestry technique)  
so that the weft covers the warp. The  
fabric has clear traces of dye,  
including red and dark blue/black and  
picked patterns in red and blue. The  
weave is very fragile and the stuffing  
has not been investigated further.  
Grave find, Birka, Bj 739, Adelsö  
Parish, Uppland. Photo: Ola Myrin,  
Statens historiska museum. CC4.



≈10cm

## MEDATS COMMITTEE CONTACT DETAILS

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## 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.