

14th Century Cloth Hosen

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First published June 15, 2010 at Foundations Revealed



Bias cut hosen were worn by both men and women of the 14th Century. Although a utilitarian garment, hosen were made of a variety of fabrics, and in a selection of weaves and colors. While plainer than their counterparts of later centuries, they were still a major element of the contemporary wardrobe, making their history and construction an important point of study for any Medieval enthusiast.

Materials used

Most extant hosen from this time period are in very poor repair, but remnants do exist and a great deal of information can be gleaned from them. Many of the extant examples appear to have been made from tabby woven cloth or a 2/2 twill. Remnants from a 14th Century London find discussed in *Textiles and Clothing* were made from a medium weight tabby weave¹, as were three examples of hosen from the Greenland finds, which also appear to have been made from a tabby woven fabric². Meanwhile, five examples from the Norse Greenland finds were made of a 2/2 twill³. The right side appears to have had a Z-twill grain while the wrong side shows an S-twill grain⁴.

These extant hosen were made from both silk and wool; most of the textiles from the Norse Greenland finds seem to have been made from sheep's wool⁵. Interestingly, one pair of long hosen found among these textiles appears to have been an imitation of pontifical stockings. While the Greenland stockings seem to be made of wool, Ostergard indicates that the pontifical stockings on which they are based appear to have been most often made of ornamental silk weaves⁶.

While linen was certainly in use in Greenland⁷ and Europe⁸, I have unfortunately not found any listings of hosen being made of linen. This may be due to poor preservation. Most linen remnants from this time period found in Greenland are little more than black carbon flakes and are very delicate⁹. Linen during this time is certainly used in the creation of clothing¹⁰ and used in the creation of hosen during later centuries, but at this time it is hard to know for sure if it was used in the creation of hosen during the 14th Century.



A servant. Image from the Luttrell Psalter. Circa 1325-1335.



Detail from The Marriage. Nicolo da Bologna. 1350's



Detail of a father and two young men. Image from the Tacuino Sanitatis. 14th Century.

Thread

There is evidence that several different kinds of threads were used in the construction of hosen from this time period. Surviving remnants of Norse textiles from the Greenland finds, among which are several examples of hosen and stockings, show that the thread used to sew these garments together was specially made for its intended purpose. The threads used for these garments were spun from sheep or goat hairs¹¹. These threads were “then two-plied [in]to a sewing thread with a diameter of less than a millimeter-always Z-spun and S-twisted”¹². This thread was then treated with beeswax, helping to strengthen it¹³. In addition to these specially made threads, linen and silk thread are also often mentioned as having been used in the creation of garments listed in English Great Wardrobe accounts of the period¹⁴.

Construction and Decoration

Medieval hosen were cut on the bias, and hosen made during the 14th Century were no exception¹⁵. While cutting garments on the bias causes significantly more fabric waste than cutting them on the grain, it does give the garments considerably more stretch and elasticity and allows a much closer fit. The added give and elasticity is also particularly useful for hosen because the legs need to have their full mobility; this would not be possible if they were cut on the grain.

Like hosen and stockings of later centuries, cloth hosen in the 14th century seamed up the back in order to provide a tight fit to the leg. Unlike in later centuries, however, their construction methods were not particularly standardized. Fragments of 14th Century hosen found in London

indicate that some hosen had wedge shaped gores covering the ankle and heel areas, while others show that the instep and front of the foot may have been covered by broad, rectangular pieces.¹⁶ During this time period men's hosen extended from the foot to the top of the thigh, while women's hosen only came up to just below or just above their knees.



Image from the Taccuino Sanitatis. 14th Century



Detail of a huntsman. Image from the Taccuino Sanitatis. 14th Century



Image from the Taccuino Sanitatis. 14th Century

Remnants of a pair of short, sock style hosen believed to have belonged to a young girl give us insight into typical sewing methods for these garments. The remains of the hem show that it was single fold and top-stitched using a back-stitch. Similarly the back seam was sewn with either a back-stitch or running stitch. The seam appears to have then been pressed open and the seam allowances were then sewn down using small running stitches approximately 2-3 mm from the main seam¹⁷. Remnants for hosen found among the Norse Greenland textiles show the use of stab stitching on the hem at the top of the stocking¹⁸. It is also interesting to note that a pair of extant men's hosen found among the Norse Greenland Textiles uses the selvedge edge of the fabric to form one of the sides of the top of the hosen. The other side meets it at a right angle and is hemmed with a narrow seam allowance¹⁹.

While hosen of later time periods were sometimes lined, I have been unable to find any examples of lined hosen during the 14th Century. This may be due to the fact that most of the extant hosen that remain are in very poor repair owing to the practical, utilitarian nature of the garment. Also, many of the pieces that we do have are little more than remnants and we are left to piece our knowledge of these garments together from them. However, most of the extant examples we have appear to have been unlined.

Hosen of this time period were not richly decorated as those of later centuries were, but that does not mean that they were plain. Many different colors were used and artwork illustrates both diagonally striped²⁰ and parti-colored hosen. A few remnants of 14th Century hosen found in

London appear to have been died with madder²¹ and extant examples from Norse Greenland show hosen made from black, grey, and white cloth. In fact, three of the examples listed in *Woven into the Earth* appear to have originally been white²². In addition, tan and russet appear to have been very popular in the English court of the 1360s²³.

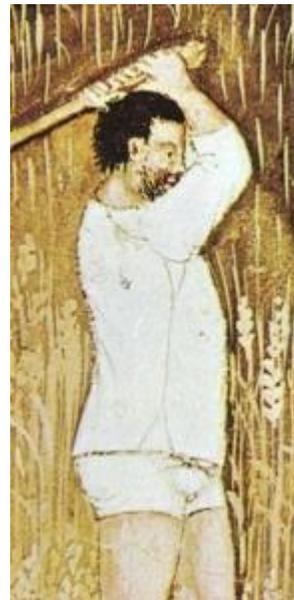
How they were worn

As discussed above, men's hosen during this time period were longer than those of women, extending from the foot to the top of the thigh. The tops of men's hosen then laced onto their linen underbreeches, or braies. The legs of their braies tucked into the tops of their hosen, and garters held the hosen just under the knee and above the top of the calf²⁴.

Women's hose were constructed similarly to the men's but were not as long, coming to just above or below the knee. Like men's hosen, they were gartered at the point just under the knee and above the top of the calf²⁵, although for different reasons: whilst men's gartering held the hosen closer to the leg, for women, gartering at this point simply served to hold their hosen up.



A man in 14th Century braies. Detail from the Catalonia "Love Breviary". 14th Century.



A man in shirt and braies. Detail from the Taccuino Sanitatis. 14th Century.



Detail of two men fighting. Note that they have rolled their hosen down around their knees. Image from the Tacuino Sanitatis. 14th Century.



Two men chopping wood. Note the patches on the knees of the hosen worn by the man in the center. Image from the Tacuino Sanitatis. 14th Century.

Patterning, Fitting, and Assembling a pair of 14th Century Hosen

We have discussed their history, how they were worn, and typical construction methods. Now let's discuss creating a pair of hosen of our own. In this tutorial we will be creating a pattern based on examples discussed in Crowfoot's *Textiles and Clothing* and *Woven into the Earth*. While hosen from this period would have been sewn by hand using the methods we discussed earlier in this article, in this tutorial we will machine our inner seams and sew all visible seams by hand. To begin, we will pattern our hosen by draping them directly onto our subject's leg. In this tutorial we will be draping a pair of men's hosen, but if you would like to drape a pair of women's hosen, follow the directions from the knee down.

Materials Needed:

- 1 pair scissors
- Straight pins
- Thread
- 4 yards of 45" wide (3.6m of 112cm wide) muslin, for draping and mock up
- 3 yards of 60" wide (2.7m of 150cm wide) linen, wool, or silk, for the hosen

Draping the Pattern

Step One: Cut a 45"x45" (112x112cm) square of muslin for draping your pattern. Your subject should be wearing bike shorts or gym shorts.

As the hosen will be cut on the bias, pin one corner of the square at the top of the thigh on your subject's leg at the same height where they will lace onto your subject's braies. This will help hold the hosen up while you drape the pattern.

When you pin the fabric, ensure that the selvedge is on the outside section of the thigh. We will use the selvedge to form one half of the top of the hosen, similarly to the way it was used on the pair of Greenland hosen discussed earlier.



Step Two: Beginning at the top of the thigh, wrap the fabric around the leg, pinning it together so that the seam runs down the center of the back of the leg. While doing this, strive to keep the fabric on the bias and the seam centered.



The back seam as it is pinned down the back of the leg.



Step Three: Continue down the back of the leg all the way to the base of the heel. Strive to keep the seam straight and centered and the fabric as smooth as possible, although there will be some wrinkling around the joints.



Step Four: Make sure that you have pinned all the way down to the base of the heel. Once you have finished, double check your back seam and that your fabric remains on the bias. When everything is correct, trim away the excess material leaving at least 2" (5cm) of fabric on the leg and more around the foot.



Step Five: Trim away the excess material over the top of the foot leaving enough seam allowance to drape the top foot piece. Adjust your seam over the heel if you need to make sure it stays straight.



Step Six: Continue to play with the fabric until your sides are relatively smooth. Once you are happy with your drape trace your seams around the base of the foot.



Step Seven: Now that we have finished the lower leg we need to go back and check the crotch of the hosen. Check for any wrinkling that might suggest where you will want to place the hemline for the crotch. Mark your hemline.



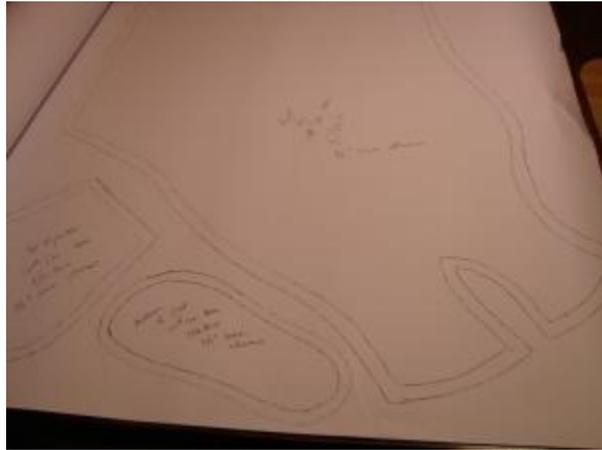
Step Eight: Drape the pattern for the top of the foot piece. Use a square scrap of fabric left over from when you trimmed the excess fabric away. Place is over the foot so that it is oriented on the bias. Using the seam lines you drew in Step Six carefully pin the fabric to the leg piece, smoothing and fitting it as you go.



Step Ten: Now that you are finished with the leg and foot pieces, mark both sides of the back seam.

Step Nine: Once you are happy with the fit, trace around the base of the foot to mark the pattern.

Step Eleven: Ask your subject to stand on a second scrap of fabric and trace the outline of their foot. This will serve as the pattern for the bottom foot piece. Note: While the other pieces of the pattern were cut on the bias, the piece for the bottom of the foot is cut on the grain.



Step Twelve: Cut out your pattern on the seam lines you have marked and trace your new pattern out onto paper. Add a $\frac{3}{4}$ " (2cm) seam allowance for fitting and mark all your pieces with grain/bias direction, seam allowance, and any other information you wish to add. Note: don't forget to double check the information you have marked. In this photograph I had forgotten to add the grain/bias directions to my pieces and had to go back and add them later!

Fitting Your Pattern

Step One: Using your new pattern, cut the pieces of a new stocking out of muslin to make a mock up for fitting. Don't forget to double check the direction of the grain when you are cutting them out.

Step Two: Baste the pieces of your stocking together. You have probably noted already that the top of the foot section forms a gore that fits into the leg piece at the ankle. For the purposes of the fitting, simply sew in the sides of this gore but leave the tip of the gore open.



Step Three: Ask your subject to try on the mock up.



Step Four: Note any areas that need to be altered.

Step Five: Make your alterations by pinning away the excess or letting out any seams that are too tight. Mark your changes on your mock up.

Step Six: Take your mock up apart and note the alterations you have made to your pattern. Adjust your mock up pieces, remembering to leave seam allowance. Transfer these changes to your paper pattern.



Assembling Your Hosen

Step One: Using your newly altered pattern, cut out your hosen pieces from your fashion fabric. Don't forget to make sure the grain and bias are correct for your pieces.



Step Two: Sew your hosen together. I prefer to sew the back seam first and then insert the top foot piece. For information on how to set in the gore, see Step Three of ["Assembling Your Stockings" in my tutorial on 16th-17th Century stockings.](#)

Once those two steps are done, attach the bottom foot piece.



Step Three: Hem your hosen by hand. I like to use a slipstitch for my hems, but you can also use a back stitch or stab stitch.

Step Four: Once you have hemmed your hosen you will need to add an eyelet in the point at the top so that they can be pointed onto the braies. Marion McNealy has an [excellent eyelet tutorial on her website, The Curious Frau.](#)



Step Five: Enjoy your new hosen!



References

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Footnotes

[1] Crowfoot, Elisabeth et al. *Medieval Finds in Excavations in London: 4 Textiles and Clothing c.1150-c.1450*. (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 1992.) p. 186-187

[2] Ostergard, Elise. *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland*. (Oakville, Connecticut: Aarhus University Press, 2004.) p. 223-228

[3] Ostergard, p. 223-228

[4] Ostergard, p. 68

[5] Ostergard, p. 82

[6] Ostergard, p. 135

[7] Ostergard, p. 78

[8] Newton, Stella Mary. *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: A Study of the Years 1340-1365*. (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2002.) p. 19, 136-139

[9] Ostergard, Elise. *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland*. (Oakville, Connecticut: Aarhus University Press, 2004.) p. 78

[10] Newton, Stella Mary. *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: A Study of the Years 1340-1365*. (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2002.) p. 136-139

[11] Ostergard, Elise. *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland*. (Oakville, Connecticut: Aarhus University Press, 2004.) p. 98

[12] Ostergard, p. 98

[13] Ostergard, p. 98

[14] Newton, Stella Mary. *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: A Study of the Years 1340-1365*. (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2002.) p. 136

[15] Crowfoot, Elisabeth et al. *Medieval Finds in Excavations in London: 4 Textiles and Clothing c.1150-c.1450*. (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 1992.) p. 185

[16] Crowfoot, p. 188-189

[17] Crowfoot, p. 187

[18] Ostergard, Elise. *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland*. (Oakville, Connecticut: Aarhus University Press, 2004.) p. 224

[19] Ostergard, p. 223

[20] Crowfoot, Elisabeth et al. *Medieval Finds in Excavations in London: 4 Textiles and Clothing c.1150-c.1450*. (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 1992.) p. 186

[21] Crowfoot, p. 186-187

[22] Ostergard, Elise. *Woven into the Earth: Textiles from Norse Greenland*. (Oakville, Connecticut: Aarhus University Press, 2004.) p. 223-228

[23] Newton, Stella Mary. *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: A Study of the Years 1340-1365*. (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2002.) p. 58

[24] Crowfoot, Elisabeth et al. *Medieval Finds in Excavations in London: 4 Textiles and Clothing c.1150-c.1450*. (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 1992.) p. 186

[25] Crowfoot, p. 186