

## Basic Documentation and Research

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Documentation is the orderly research and presentation on a topic. This documentation could be on an arts project, a name or other piece of heraldry or any other item, that you want to keep a record of your research and work both for yourself and others. There are many reasons to document your work. It may be as simple as being able to refer back to the information to as formal as competition or publication. Whatever your reasons are, documentation should be a major part of your project.

But what is research and how do I get started? Well let us talk first about sources. Within the region of costuming, almost any project starts off with a search for an idea. Let's us costuming as an example: When we want to make something but we are not quite sure what we want to make, then it is a good idea to start your search with some general books of costuming which would give you a general idea of time periods, fashions and generic information. Such a book as John Peacock's "Costume 1066-1966" published by Thames and Hudson or Braun and Schneider's "Historic Costume in Pictures" published by Dover Books. These two books are often used as a first look type of resource. Unfortunately these are not very good books for authenticity. One of the reasons is that they are not based on actual garments in the majority of the examples and they do not cite the original sources for each garment in such a way that you can find the original work. These books are excellent examples of Tertiary Works. Tertiary means that the authors have not seen the original garment and they have not documented where they have gotten their pictures. These types of books are great for getting ideas and general information but alone cannot be a sole source for an entry. One of the things that characterize the type of source is the sources that the authors used in the book. All of the John Peacock's sources are other generic, survey type books like his own, although each is somewhat more specific in time period.

The second class of sources is referred to as Secondary Sources. These can range from the better types of survey books which include pictures of the original articles such as Francois Boucher's "2000 Years of Fashion" which is an excellent generic, survey book of fashion to the Museum of London Books on different artifacts found in London. This type of source can also be magazine articles from scholarly journals and internet articles from reputable sources. The authors have usually been in contact with original article or very close to the source, have done extensive research into the area and have developed theories or patterns of their own concerning the artifacts. The sources in their bibliography are usually other scholarly works from reputable places and show a variety of works consulted. This class of source should be making up the majority of your sources for any research and documentation project.

The last type of source is a Primary Source. This is the actual garment, piece of jewelry or shoe. Since we cannot all have access to these sorts of artifacts, most SCA competitions also include pictures of the artifacts within this category as long as it is

documented as to the particulars of the piece. Portraits, tombs, manuscripts are all Primary Sources for costumers, although it is always best to find several examples of the item in several different sources. Photographs are great resources as long as you include the documentation that the museum has with the picture.

Let me address one particular myth within the SCA. That is that all paintings of biblical subjects painted out of timeframe are allegorical and therefore cannot be used as documentation. This is false. In Stella Mary Newton's book "Dress of the Venetians", she very skillfully shows what portions of dress are allegorical and which are period to the time of the painter. She uses her knowledge of the period and the social history to pick out those elements of the paintings that are correct. This is a great work to show this type of research. Thus while you are looking through great, big coffee table books of renaissance art, do not discount a dress just because it is an allegorical painting. Go a little further in your research to find those elements that are correct and then let yourself create an original piece of art.

So, you have gone out and found the exact dress that you want to make. You have found several portraits that use dress style that you have chosen and now you are going to make the dress for the next competition. What do you do now? Notice that I have not said that you have made your dress before you get to this step. Many a costumer has gotten in trouble because they have tried to make their outfit first and then find documentation to fit the dress. Bad news! You start with your research, making careful note of sources, ideas and information and then you are ready to begin your work.

One of the best ways of documenting your work is to keep a project journal. In the journal you can jot down your references, quotes, paste pictures etc., of the work so that when it comes time to write your documentation, the information is all there. Then as you go along, you can jot down such things as fabric choice, content, amount of yardage used, steps in the pattern development, lessons learned and other pieces of unique information about your project.

Once your project is complete it is time to write up the documentation for the competition or display. Documentation is one of the most crucial pieces of the overall project. This tells the judges what you did, how you did it, the choices you made when you created your piece of art. Documentation also tells the judges about your knowledge level when you made your project. This is important and it is usually the sole way that you communicate with the judges. But the judges want to enjoy the day as much as anyone so they do not have time to read your doctoral dissertation and thus the one page wonder is born. On one or two pages put the answers to these essential questions.

What is it? Where does it come from? What processes did you use to make it? What did you learn in making it? What sources did you use? These five questions are the major areas of interest to the judges. Even if I do not know anything about the piece of art in front of me, with good documentation I will be able to judge the piece. Without that documentation, I would be lost.

This first part is on one to two pages. At the end of your information should be your sources. I cannot emphasize enough that you must quote and properly identify your sources. DO NOT TAKE CREDIT FOR OTHERS WORK. When I have entered a piece that other people have worked on, I will give them credit for that work. I will never quote without citing that source in the documentation. There are way too many knowledgeable folks out there for you to forget this honor. I have included examples of two types of bibliographies—a regular one and an annotated one. Each has a different purpose. You must use the one that is right for the project.

If you want to, also make available additional comments, pictures, supporting items behind the single page. In that way, a judge can look at the additional documentation is time is permitting and you have the rest of the information on your project for later. Depending on the level of competition or if it is a display, I will change the amount of information I put down. Some competitions focus on a particular style of art or a time period. We all may know that wool was used extensively in period, but sometimes it is good to make some short comments on the influences of the guilds in medieval England and their effect on the wool trade. Or if you are entering something unusual, it is helpful to explain your thought processes. Cotton was used in the middle ages. It was not used much for dresses in England, (reference comment on the guilds...) but it was available in Moorish Spain, Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries. You may mention trade routes, shipping routes and the importance of trade. All of these things you may want to convey to your audience but it would take up too much room in the primary documentation. A suggestion is to add tabs behind the documentation and reference those tabs in the documentation. If the person wants to read more, they can flip back to the tab, read about the trade routes and go on.

Another thing that I will do in competition and displays is to provide copies of the documentation for people to take with them or at least your reference sheet. In that way if your display catches the interest of someone, they can take your references as a start for their own project. Sharing the knowledge that we have learned is one of the mandates of our Society and this is one way to do that.

In the end remember to start your documentation before you finish your project. Keep good notes as you go along so that you can adequately describe your processes. Understand the differences between sources and use a variety of sources for the project. Read about the time period so that you have an understanding of the context that the project would be used in. Write up your documentation so that others can understand your work and adequately judge it for competition or take away knowledge from a display. Display and compete with your work and provide a notebook for comments from the populace. Write comments for others and seek out fellow artists – it is fun!

## Basic One page Documentation for SCA Competition and Display

Item: Sideless Surcoat

Time & Place: 1350-1375 England

Materials: Linen/Cotton blends in skirt, linen for top and dolphin. Cotehardie made of silk

History of Style: During the 1300's, there was an evolution of fashion from a style of loose fitting under and over gown to a more fitted styled under gown and open overdress. Some sources have assigned different names to these styles but the generally accepted names are sideless surcoats and Cotehardie. Stella Mary Newton refers to the cotes-hardies as a masculine garment (1) and instead refers to the woman's garment as an "open super-tunic". But whatever your final decision on what to call these garments they were a significant development in fashion. Monks preached against women with tight garments showing their bodies in public, city statutes dictated how much of what types of material could be used by various stations of people and poets spoke of the new styles. The "sideless surcoats" can be seen in numerous manuscripts, in particular several pages of the Luttrell Psalter c. 1320-1345. In just a few pages, several variations in the style are evident (2) and the style continued to be worn until the late 1400's for formal court wear as shown by such illustrations as the marriage Banquet of Clarisse, an illustration in a French manuscript dating c. 1468-1470.

I have based my surcoat on Jean Hunnisett's pattern in "Period Costume in Stage and Screen." The particular dress is based on the tomb brass of Lady Margaret of Cobham. I used this pattern because I liked the way that the skirt draped away from the top. When the Barony started the project of Baronial heraldic surcoats, I experimented with several different patterns. From a single straight piece, to a more elaborate pieced pattern, I felt that this pattern mirrored the image best.

It is made of Linen/Cotton blend, since I was trying to match colors for baronial colors and linen for the top. In period these dresses were made from homespun and wool for lower classes to velvets, linens, fine wools and silk and could be lined in fur for the upper nobility.

The dolphin is appliquéd on as was appropriate for the time, and the heraldic nature of the dress is in true keeping with the styles of the period.

The Cotehardie is a pattern that was developed by Mistress Gyth of the Danelaw for me. It is taken from many different effigies and painting of the period. Mistress Gyth has the documentation for the dress. Many different theories have been given for the way in which this gown is constructed and I do not wish to address those points. I have included several excellent sources in my bibliography for further reading.

Conclusion: I really enjoy the way this pattern drapes. I believe that it compliments the wearer and is true to the silhouette of the period.

Standard Bibliography: Mixture of magazine articles, books and internet connections.

SOURCES:

Blackhouse, Janet, "Medieval Rural Life in Luttrell Psalter", University of Toronto Press, London 2000

Boucher, Francois, "2000 Years of Fashion", Henry Abrams Co., London 1987.

Hunnisett, Jean, "Period Costume for The Stage and Screen, Patterns for Women's Dress– Medieval to 1500, Players Press, California 1996

Nevinson, J. L. *Buttons and Buttonholes in The Fourteenth Century*, Costume, The Journal of the Costume Society, Number 11, London 1977

Newton, Stella Mary, "Fashion in the Age of The Black Prince", Boydell Press, 1980

Richard the III Society, Online Library, Feb. 01 Internet Site  
[Http://www.r3.org/bookcase/wardrobe/ward14/html](http://www.r3.org/bookcase/wardrobe/ward14/html).

Schilder, Helen, *Fourteenth Century Sewing and Textile Information*, Handout for class taught at Pennsic 31 by Dame Helen of Greyfalls

Schilder, Helen, *Creating a Fourteenth Century Medieval Gown From Primary Sources*, handout for classes taught at Pennsic 31 by Dame Helen of Greyfalls

Staniland, Kay, *Medieval Courtly Splendour*, Costume, The journal of the Costume Society, Number 14, London 1980

Woolgar, C. M., "The Great Household in Late Medieval England", Yale University Press, London, 1988.

Examples of Annotated Bibliography –A Short Synopsis of Each Item. Not used as much in formal papers or scholarly work but excellent for SCA use and classes.

Blackhouse, Janet, “Medieval Rural Life in the Luttrell Psalter”, University of Toronto Press, London 2000 –Excellent work which shows through illustrations some of the common dress found in England in the 14th century. No information about costuming but good examples of dress of the period

Boucher, Francois, ““2000 Years of Fashion”, Henry Abrams Co., London 1987. An absolute necessity for anyone doing costuming. This survey of costume throughout the years is an excellent starting point for research and documentation.

Hunnisett, Jean, “Period Costume for The Stage and Screen, Patterns for Women’s Dress– Medieval to 1500, Players Press, California, 1996. Excellent book on construction techniques. Gives some good information about the history of each piece. Be mindful that the construction techniques are hers and not necessarily strictly period.

Nevinson, J. L. *Buttons and Buttonholes in The Fourteenth Century*, Costume, The Journal of the Costume Society, Number 11, London 1977. This article is a great piece of special costuming work. Buttons make or break an outfit and this article has some great points.

Newton, Stella Mary, “Fashion in the Age of The Black Prince”, Boydell Press, 1980 This book is considered one of the premier books on the time period. Be prepared, there are not a lot of pictures but just bunches of great text and scholarly discussion of the period. Another must have someone who wishes to study this time period.

Schilder, Helen. *Fourteenth Century Sewing and Textile Information*, Handout for class taught at Pennsic 31 by Dame Helen of Greyfalls. Dame Helen is a wonderful teacher and her handouts from her classes are particular good for SCA costuming. She quotes her sources and explains her techniques within the historic costuming. I highly recommend taking her classes if the opportunity presents itself.

Staniland, Kay, *Medieval Courtly Splendour*, Costume, The journal of the Costume Society, Number 14, London 1980. An excellent article on the scrumptious fabrics, extreme uses of furs and other extravagant behavior in the field. Ms. Staniland is an incredible scholar and her work is truly excellent.

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