

# HASTINGS 2006

## NORMAN FEMALE COSTUME GUIDE



Written by The Vikings Authenticity Team

-

### 1. General Authenticity Rules

#### **1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

- **1.1) RATIONALE.** Although 'THE VIKINGS' is a primarily a 10th Cent. Viking re-enactment society, this guide has been written to help members of the society and their guests who wish to take part in the Battle of Hastings re-fight (14-15 October 2006). This guide has been written specifically for the H2005 Hastings re-fight. Compromises have therefore been made with what is strictly authentic in order to maximise participation in this event.
- **1.2) COLOURS.** All participants must remember that the colour of the clothes worn gives a good indication of a persons rank and status. Low ranks would only have access to pale coloured or even undyed cloth, while the wealthy would be able to afford rich reds, blues and greens. Unless the portrayal is that of a member of the Clerical or Monastic Orders, clothing dyed black, white or purple should be avoided.
- **1.3) APPEARANCE.** This is the premier re-enactment event in the UK with TV and press from all over Europe in attendance, and all participants must therefore make a reasonable attempt to look the part. Specifically modern hairstyles, must be covered and all make-up, jewellery and visible piercings must be removed.
- **1.4) FEMALE COMBATANTS.** In order to comply with the English Heritage guidelines for such events, female warriors **must** dress as a warrior. Therefore the costume rules for women are exactly the same as those for men, and the appropriate costume guide must be consulted for details. If possible some attempt should also be made to hide the more obvious 'bumps'. **All** visible

piercings must be removed and participants must ensure that all tattoos are covered by their costume or masking make-up.

## **2. UNACCEPTABLE ITEMS.**

The following is an (incomplete) list of items which will NOT be allowed into the LH area at Battle Abbey.

- a) Gjermundbu or Medieval 'Great' Helms.
- b) Live-role-play type weapons or armour.
- c) Plate armour of any sort.
- d) Knitted 'String' mail.
- e) Any weapon NOT in common use in NW Europe in the Mid 11th C.
- f) Two Handed Dane-axes.
- g) Non-authentic or modern footwear.
- h) Sharp weapons of any description.
- i) Tartan or plaid of any description.
- j) Furry jackets or any form of Berserker.
- k) 'Rus' trousers
- l) Viking Hangeroks
- m) Body armour made of Horn, Bone, Wood or any form of sheet metal.
- n) Celts, Cymric, Brythons.
- o) Shields that are not round, oval or kite shaped, or any made of Hardboard or Fibreboard
- p) All body piercings must be removed and participants must ensure that all tattoos are covered by their costume or masking make-up.
- q) Items of costume or jewellery that are NOT suitable for mid-late 11<sup>th</sup> C Anglo-Saxon/Englisc re-enactment.

## **2.1 Special Items**

### **2.1a Pouches**

We would like to remind our guests that, overseas practice notwithstanding, carved leather 'box' pouches style are definitely not authentic for our period. The circular and semi-circular drawstring type, the soft leather 'kidney' pouch as well as the ever popular shoulder bags are only ones that we a certain are authentic for our period.

### **2.1b Amber**

Amber is a well-known and popular semi precious gemstone and there have been grave finds from both this country and Scandinavia. As its popularity however we are beginning to see a few pieces of unworked or 'rough' amber being worn. **This is wrong.** Without exception all of the pieces of amber from our period have been worked and polished into the form of beads or pendants. All of the unworked pieces that have been found pre-date our era by a minimum of **2000 - 3000 years**. If you are looking for alternatives, don't forget Jet (very popular in Northern England) and Carnelian (very popular everywhere). By the C10th, Amber was 'out of fashion' in Viking circles, and overwhelmingly more worked Carnelian is found than worked Amber. Amber was mainly worked into charms (such as gripping beasts, axeheads, or even birds of legs) or was worn in the shape of doughnuts or wedges. Such beads as were worn were mainly faceted, not rounded.

### **2.1c Naughty Photographs!**

Living in the real world as we do, we make certain allowances to enable our members to participate at shows with the minimum of inconvenience. In exchange we ask that all guests please be aware of members of the public carrying cameras, and do their best to avoid being photographed in costume whilst carrying, wearing or consuming blatant 21<sup>st</sup> century items. If you suspect that someone is deliberately trying to take a picture that compromises these guidelines, please inform the nearest Society Officer or Marshal who will speak to the person concerned.

## **NORMAN FEMALE COSTUME GUIDE.**

Although, strictly speaking, their presence at Hastings is wrong, this guide has been prepared to assist a number of folk who have expressed a desire to come dressed as Norman women c1066.

## **1. Rank and Options**

The women who are present at the Hastings show are most likely to represent the wives of Norman nobles, or alternatively the personal attendants of such ladies. Therefore, the only ranks of costumes permissible are specific to these roles and Norman Female costume must either be Mid-rank or High ranking Lady. The attending Norman Ladies must have a specific persona, that is a role which is fitting to their costume, and a Midranking Lady should ideally have a specific High Ranking lady as her companion.

## **2. KIT & COSTUME GUIDE**

Although the basic costume is similar for middle and upper social classes, dress must be consistent with the character being portrayed. The higher the rank, the better the quality of the garment and its decoration or ornamentation must be. Regardless of the rank being portrayed, all garments must be properly hemmed and finished. Serious inconsistencies like "flowing-silk-dress-but-no-shoes" must be avoided. Below is a checklist indicating which elements of costume are necessary for a Norman Lady.

	Mid-rank (lady's maid)	High-rank (lady)
Underdress	C	C
Overdress	C	C*
Sash or girdle	O	O
Turnshoes	C	C
Embroidery/decoration	O	C
Cloak/Mantle	O	C
Acoutrements	O	C
Bags/provisions/costrel	O	X
Jewellery	O	C
Headcovering	C	C*

KEY:

X- not an option for this character

O- Optional

C-Compulsory.

\*- Items must be finely decorated.

### **3. COSTUME DESCRIPTIONS**

There are very few manuscripts dated to the period between AD1066 and 1100, but looking at examples from both before the conquest and in the 40 or so years following 1100, what we can say for sure is that the fashion that we recognise as 11th century definitely continued into the 12<sup>th</sup>.

**3a) Underdress.** These should be made of linen (cotton is an acceptable substitute) and must be full skirted (not split) and with long sleeves. The underdress may be relatively fitted to allow it to sit under the overdress neatly, but must be without boning or other internal support.

**3b) Overdress.** This was usually of fine wool or linen, and again was long sleeved, although these were droopy (loose) and flowing especially from the elbow down. Dresses appear to have been relatively fitted at the body compared to the earlier English dresses. An example of this is seen in the Bayeux Tapestry (fig. 1 (left)). Aelfgyva is wearing a relatively close fitting dress with quite long sleeves and a wimple. Although the tapestry was commissioned by a churchman it was stitched by women so it is probably fairly accurate to say that Aelfgyva is wearing a current fashion.



From another manuscript it has been proposed that the sleeves were often lined in material of a contrasting colour and turned back to display this, although it has been debated that this merely represents artistic depiction of light and shade by using additional colour. If the overdress wearer wishes, then a high-ranking Lady may choose to line the entire sleeve in a contrasting colour. The sleeves are usually shown reaching to about the knee, though occasionally they reach virtually to the ground. This length, though, would probably have been restricted to the queen as the amount of cloth required would have made it too expensive for most women. There was, however, a wide variety in the length of sleeve and so we will allow varying lengths depending upon the lady's rank and status.

In manuscripts where the figure is not wearing a mantle we get some impression of what the neckline would have looked like. High class Norman women would have been able to employ wet nurses so there may have been less need for access for breast feeding (or if access it is not visible in the illustrations). All the visible necklines seem to show a short split, about the same length as those seen on male tunics. These can either be fastened with a brooch (or possibly an annular), as in figure 3 illustration of the future Empress Matilda's wedding to Henry V c. 1114, or left unfastened. It may be that some of these are actually a false split and is just decoration meant to imply an opening. In all cases though, where the neckline is visible it is decorated, even if it is only a different colour of fabric edging the neckline (fig. 2 (left)). For Hastings, therefore, all Norman Lady costumes should have decoration of some kind at the neck to reflect the status of the Lady.



One manuscript has survived which shows us one method of drawing in fabric to achieve a fitted look at the waist. This is the Gospel of Judith of Flanders (fig. 4 (right)) which has been dated to around the year AD1050. This very clearly shows us the long droopy sleeves, the underdress with tight sleeves, and the side fastening. Here we see what appears to be a rectangle of fabric with pleats of dress material appearing from below it. A possible way to achieve this look would be to have two rectangular (or square) pieces of fabric attached to the front and back of the dress, which could then be laced or stitched together to pull the waist of the dress in. As this is a single source it is NOT required for a Norman Lady to have a dress of this construction, however if it is wished to use a method of drawing in the waist this is permitted providing the end effect looks similar to the illustration above.



**3c) Belt (Sash or Girdle).** It is optional to have a sash or waist belt: these must be made of fabric or period braid as there are no documented finds or manuscript/literary references to support the use of leather belts by Norman ladies. In most of the illustrations there is no evidence for a belt or girdle. In some cases this is simply because the figure is wearing a mantle so any belt would be concealed underneath. Some, at first glance, appear to show something around the waist, but this may be gatherings or other fabric

manipulation. Sashes made from the same material as the overdress are fine, these may be plain or embroidered.

**3d) Turnshoes.** Shoes worn must be of turnshoe construction and must be shoes or low boots not higher than ankle height. Shoes may have solid uppers in period shape, or may be decorated with cut-out leather uppers provided that any socks that are visible are of period construction. It is acceptable to have re-enforced soles or hobnails purely for safety purposes to improve grip, but these are not authentic and if they are used the re-enactor must explain to any members of the public who ask that they are strictly a safety feature.

**3e) Cloak/Mantle.** Cloaks or mantles may be worn or carried, they should be of wool construction lined with wool or linen and may be trimmed (but not lined) with fur if the Lady is of Upper rank. Decoration of the cloak or mantle should reflect the overall status of the Lady. A matching cloak and hood may be worn if desired.

**3f) Accoutrements and Provisions.** As the Norman Lady of high class would be accompanied by a middle class entourage, it is fitting for her to be free from having to carry troublesome burdens such as heavy equipment and provisions. For this reason the Middle Class lady is recommended to be delegated the status of bag carrier! This section is purely to remind people that while it is sensible to have a period construction shoulderbag to carry modern necessities in, a High class Norman lady should be spared from carrying too many things as this would not be fitting to her status. The Middle class Norman Lady on the other hand, may be relied on to provide for her mistresses needs and is permitted to resemble a pack mule if this is what her mistress desires.

All provisions should be carried in period bags. Waist Pouches may be used – preferably of drawstring type – while strictly speaking not authentic for Norman Ladies we acknowledge that they may be necessary for practical purposes. However they should blend in with the look of the costume if used and must not have modern decoration or fastenings. Water may be carried in hidden modern containers e.g. in a shoulderbag, or in a period leather costrel. If modern containers are used efforts must be made to use them discretely and Ladies are strongly recommended to bring a period clay or wooden cup.

**3g) Jewellery.** It is optional for a Norman Lady to wear period jewellery- at the least there should be some sort of a cross worn. Crosses may be equal arm or with a longer lower arm, they must be of period design and materials. They should be pendant design rather than beaded. Gold or silver rings or bracelets must be of period design and not modern, modern wedding rings may be worn only if they cannot be taken off for physical or personal reasons. Please contact the Authenticity team prior to the show if there is any doubt as to whether proposed jewellery is period, as if asked to remove it on the day we can't take

responsibility should any items of jewellery be lost at the show. Piercings should be removed for the duration of the show as these are not authentic.

**3h) Headcovering.** Headcoverings are shown as being ubiquitous for Norman Ladies in the manuscript and in literary references, and so it is compulsory for all Norman Ladies at Hastings to wear a wimple or other headcovering. The wraparound wimple (pinned into place with period pins) is acceptable, as is a hood-style headcovering. Round wimples with a securing headband or circlet are not permitted at Hastings as they did not come into use until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Wimples may be constructed of linen or silk, and may be decorated with embroidery if desired.

#### **4). Decoration and Fabric use for the Norman Lady costume.**

Since we have no archaeological finds of dresses from this period, how they were constructed is guesswork. It is entirely feasible for the body of the dress to be made out of one panel reaching from the hem at the back to the hem at the front. However, a lot of the manuscripts show a lot of material in the skirt so you would at least need extra panels in the side of the dress and probably at the front and back as well. The Normans seemed to go in for the richness and quantity of the cloth rather than lots of decoration. Patterned linen would have been popular as would finely woven fulling woollen cloth. Silk would have still been very uncommon. In the mid 12th century Bishop Henry of Blois (Bishop of Winchester) was buried in silk robes, but he was related to the King and would have been the exception rather than the rule. For Hastings 2006 we would prefer to see the use of silk restricted to trim and head coverings.

#### **5). Further Help and Questions Answered.**

If you have any further questions on Authenticity, or need help getting your gear together please go to the Hastings 2006 List ([link here](#)) and subscribe to the Yahoo mailing list set up for discussion ahead of the event.

Since the main list may generate a lot of emails, if you wish only to be kept informed of important announcements please go to the Hastings 2006 Announcement List ([link here](#)) instead. This list will only carry postings by Event Officers.

#### **6). Example Photo of a Norman Lady Costume.**

Finally, here is a photo of a modern re-enactor dressed in a Norman style (fig 7). As it happens the lady pictured here was pregnant at the time, so the fitted waist is somewhat missing, but otherwise this presents a good idea of what those attending in October should aim for.



## References

Fig. 1 - Bayeux Tapestry c.1080

Fig. 3 - Wedding of Matilda & Henry V c.1114

Fig. 2 - Gospels, Pembroke College, Cambridge 1130-1140

Fig. 4 - Gospels of Judith of Flanders c.1050

Fig. 5 – Helena of The Vikings © P James