

The Medieval Tailor's Assistant



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making common garments 1200 -1500

Shirts and smocks

The male shirt and female smock were essentially the same. They varied only in length and in details of the neck finish. Both were simple garments normally hidden from view: they didn't change significantly during the three hundred years covered here (Fig 1).

Because it was longer, the smock was usually widened with gores to allow free movement. The longer the smock, the wider it should be at the hem. The smock shown (Fig 3) is flared from the shoulder, but the flaring or gores could start from the underarm or waist. Men's shirts could also be made with gores, especially to fit larger figures. A few styles of shirts and smocks had collars, to protect the collar of the garment worn over them.

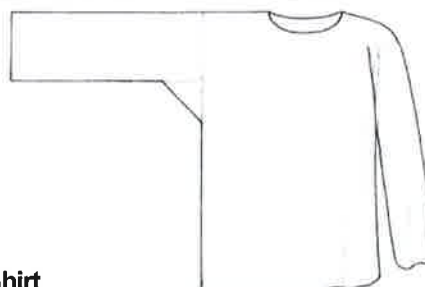
There is no evidence that medieval shirts had yokes, nor that either garment was fastened by drawstrings at the neck or wrists.

Planning and cutting a shirt or smock

The pieces are simple in shape, so the following instructions don't provide pattern layouts. You may prefer to start with a paper pattern before marking the fabric, or plan a scaled layout on paper before marking and cutting the fabric. If you cut from fabric folded along the shoulder line, note that the Front neck is deeper than the Back. First take the wearer's measurements and work out the dimensions for each pattern part. These dimensions include seam allowances, but be generous - the garments are better loose than tight. Some dimensions make use of other personal measurements (*Blocks*, Figs 1, 2).

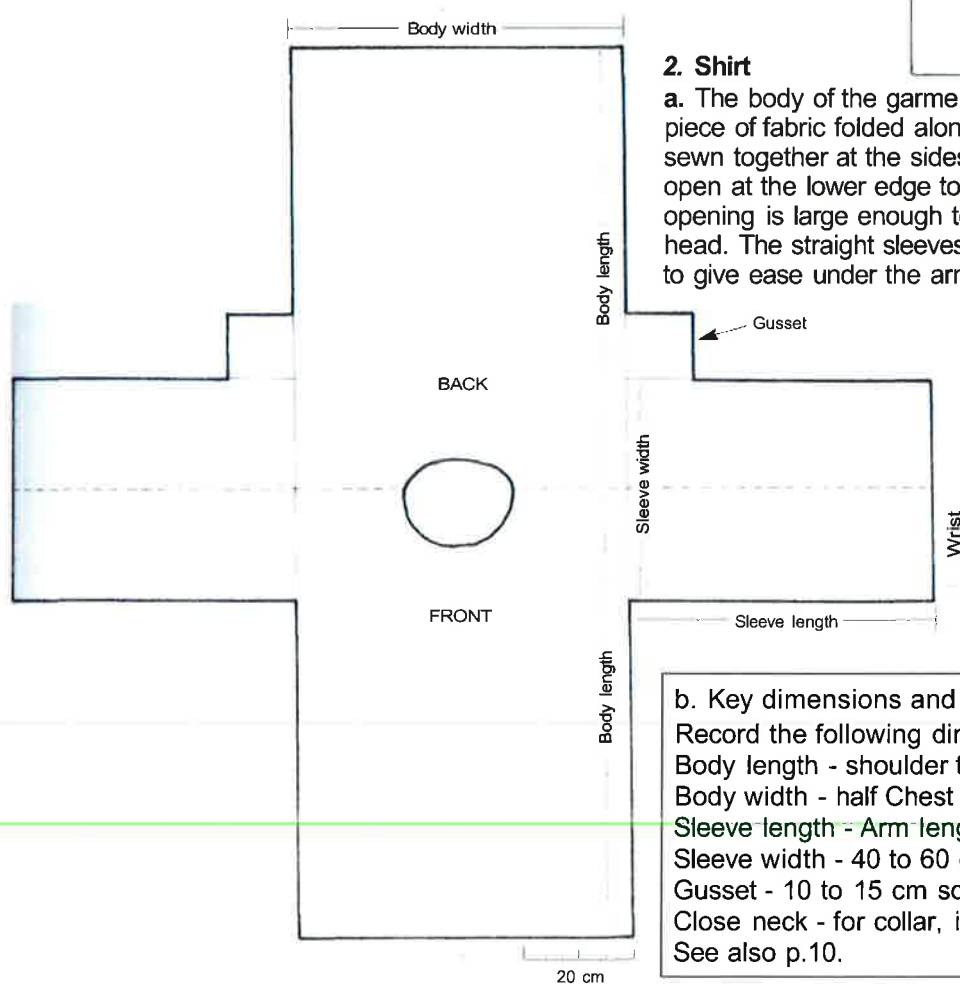
continued on p. 72

2a



2. Shirt

a. The body of the garment is made from a single piece of fabric folded along the shoulder line, and sewn together at the sides. The sides could be left open at the lower edge to form vents. The neck opening is large enough to slip on easily over the head. The straight sleeves are set on with gussets to give ease under the arms.



b. Key dimensions and assembled parts

Record the following dimensions

Body length - shoulder to mid-thigh, or longer

Body width - half Chest + 15 cm, or more

Sleeve length - Arm length, from tip of shoulder

Sleeve width - 40 to 60 cm, according to size

Gusset - 10 to 15 cm square

Close neck - for collar, if required

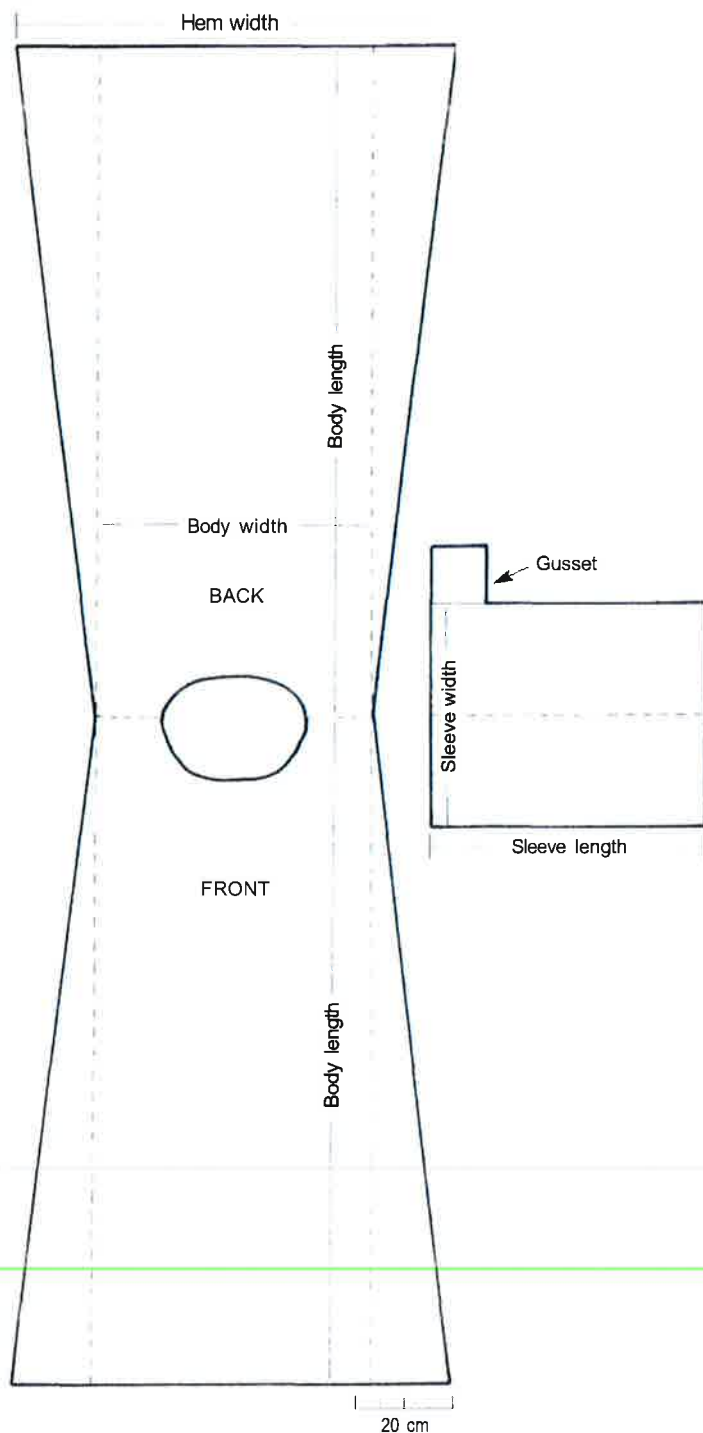
See also p.10.

Smocks

3a



b



3. Smock

a. The smock is cut like a longer shirt, with a wider hem produced by flaring or by adding gores. Here the flaring starts from the shoulders, setting the sleeves slightly upwards. This conveniently increases the underarm length.

b. Key dimensions and parts

Record the following dimensions

Body length - shoulder to calf level, or longer

Body width - half Bust + 10 cm or more

Hem width - Body width + twice Gore width

Gore width - half hem increase required over body width, 15 cm or more

Gore length - from waist, underarm or shoulder, to hem

Sleeve length - Arm length, from tip of shoulder

Sleeve width - 35 to 50 cm, according to size

Gusset - 8 to 12 cm square

Close neck - for collar, if required

See also p. 10.

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Start with the body and fit the other parts to make the best use of the linen. Dimensions can be adjusted slightly to make the pieces fit on the material. The above dimensions *include seam allowances*.

The bodies for shirts and smocks are best cut along the length of the material; gores can be cut as part of the body or separately in pairs (Cotes, Fig 4). The body is normally folded along the shoulders and cut in one piece, but shoulder seams are fine if your material isn't long enough to cut the body in one.

The sleeves may be cut along or across, provided both are cut the same way; the gussets (and collars) can be fitted in around the main pieces. Fig 4 shows an alternative sleeve made without a gusset and fitting closer than the plain one.

Making up

Body - If you have cut separate gores, sew them to the body as the first step, then sew the shoulder seams, if required. Make the neck opening; see below for neck finishes.

Sleeves - The two ways of making up are:

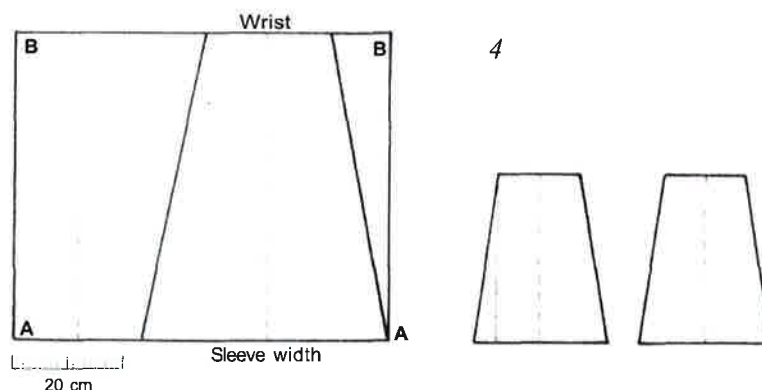
1. Sew the side seams, then make up the sleeves and gussets and set them into the armhole (Methods, Fig 7).

2. Join the sleeves and gussets to the body, then sew side and underarm seams in one (Methods, Fig 8).

4. Tapered sleeve

This sleeve is tapered to the wrist and made without gussets. Add 5-10 cm to the straight Sleeve width. Use the Hand measurement for the wrist width.

One sleeve is shown cut whole, and the other with a gore for economy.



The diagrams show the sleeves going onto a straight-edged body, but the process is exactly the same with the slanted edges (Fig 3a), when the sleeves will slant upwards, improving the underarm ease.

Hem the lower edge and sleeve ends.

Neck finishes and collars

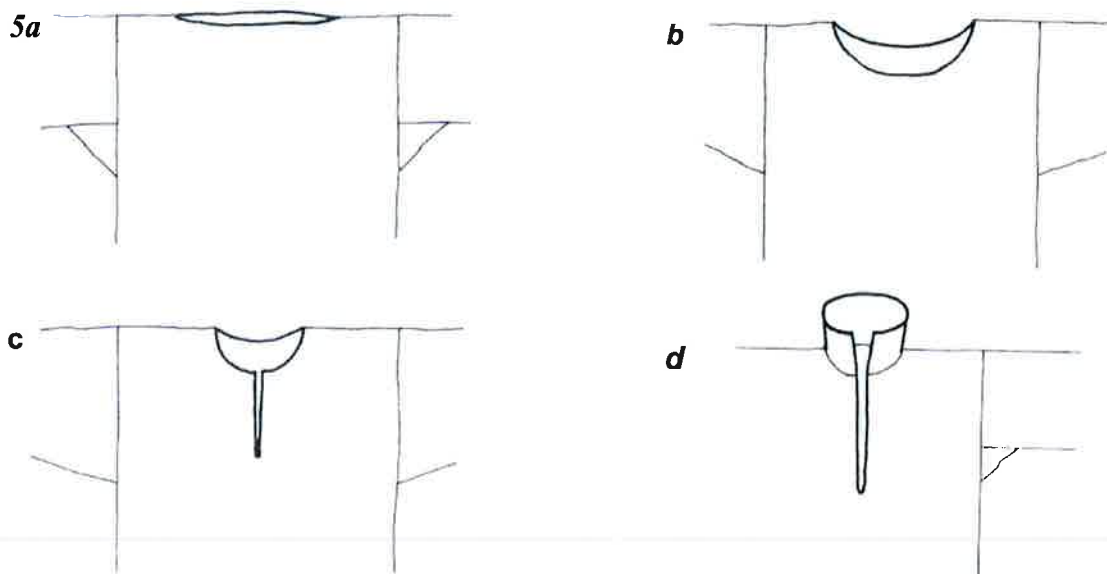
A straight slit (Fig 5a) is the simplest neck opening, but the commonest neck style is a slightly oval opening, deeper at the front than the back and big enough to slip easily over the head (Fig 5b). This is hemmed, or faced with a narrow straight band on the inside. The neck

edge of the smock doesn't normally show much above the cote or kirtle.

Men's shirts may also have a close-fitting round neck, with a front slit (Fig 5c). Cut the slit deep enough to pull on easily, and reinforce the base of the slit (*Methods*, Fig 10). This style may be made with a narrow binding extended to form ties (*Methods*, Fig 9c).

Around 1400, when very high gown collars were popular, both the shirt and the smock acquired collars too (Fig 5d), probably to provide a barrier between the gown collar and the wearer's neck. This collar persisted on men's shirts well into the 15th century to protect the high collar of the doublet.

Neck styles



5. Neck styles

- Straight slash along the shoulder line.
- Wide oval neck - by far the commonest style.
- Small neck with front slit, sometimes banded.
- Straight collar, for wear under a high-necked doublet.

Cut a straight band, 15-30 cm wide, equal to the length of the neck edge + seam allowances for front edges. Hem the front slit, fold the band double, and hem it on to enclose the neck edge. See *Methods*, Figs 9 & 10 for neck binding and finishing slit openings.