

# LOW STATUS

slaves and indebted bondsmen with no real property of their own would probably make up a sizeable percentage of the population.

*Every re-enactment group will claim to take pride in their "authenticity", but although nobody ever sets out to deliberately get things wrong very few rigorously study all the available research. Sadly most seem driven by personal vanity and a desire to "dress up" to impress their mates, rather than accurately recreate what the evidence suggest was typical of the period. I like to think I try much harder than most to get things right, but interpretation of the evidence can be subjective and some may disagree with the advice offered here. As such these notes are offered only for guidance in the hope that people will do their best to set their own group's dress code and standards in line with their understanding of the available evidence.*

**Kit list men- simple tunic, leather or cloth cord to use as a waist tie (not necessarily a proper belt)**

**Kit list women- simple tunic, some manner of plain head covering, leather or cloth cord to use as a waist tie**

*I'd not ask anybody to suffer for the goal of ultimate authenticity so if the weather, ground conditions or other circumstances are not suitable for such limited kit, then much of the average status clothing can probably be worn provided it is kept to the pale, un-dyed fabrics suitable for low status individuals. If anyone challenges you simply claim to have a generous master who would not see a hard working slave suffer.*

Sleeves should be slightly loose on the upper arm and tight at the forearm, yet long and pushed back at the cuff. There is some evidence to support the notion that the poorest slaves/workers wore short sleeved or even sleeveless garments.

Most men's tunics are cut to hang to about knee length when tied or rucked up at the waist. Slaves tunics may have been a little shorter to reduce the amount of cloth used.

All clothes across every status of society would be very time consuming to make. Therefore all clothes would be well cared for, well maintained and would be endlessly patched, darned and repaired if damaged. It is unlikely that many slaves would ever get completely new clothes, they would have to make do with old "hand-me-downs" and so your costume should reflect this.

Male slave's legs should probably be bare but hose or trousers can be worn for warmth or modesty.

Slaves should probably go bare-foot or wear raw hide rivelins, however, leather turn shoes are advisable on the grounds of comfort and safety.

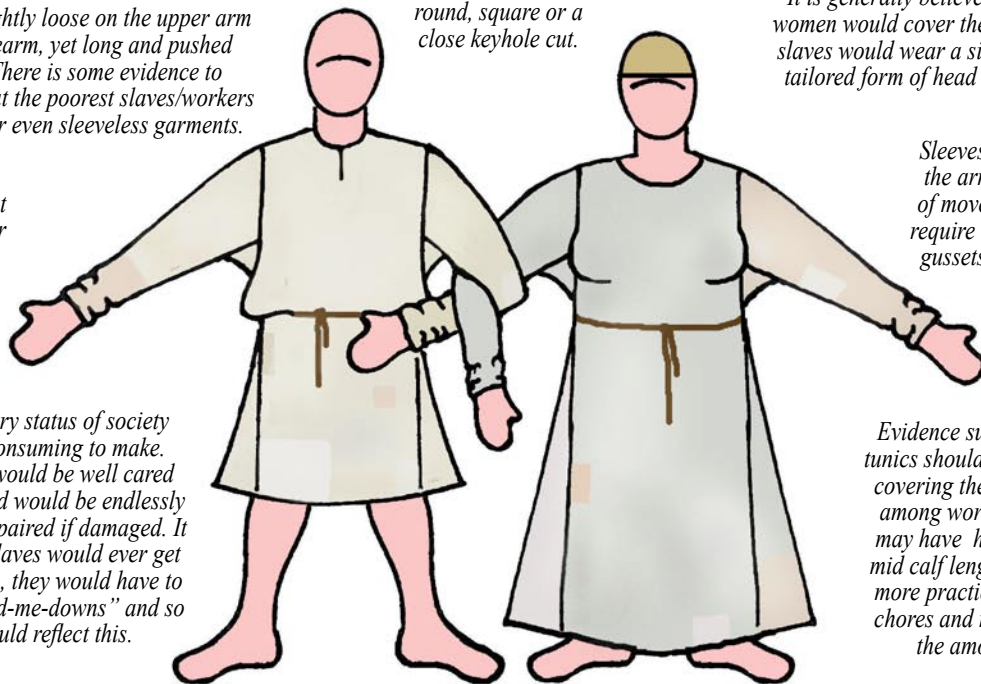
All visible hems and seams should be hand stitched and I'd encourage people to try to match the fineness of period needle work. Even cheap clothing would be very well made to last. Period woollen garments were sewn with woollen thread averaging about 2-3 stitches/cm, whilst linen clothes would be sewn with linen thread averaging about 3-5 stitches/cm.

Necklines can be round, square or a close keyhole cut.

It is generally believed that all working women would cover their hair but whether slaves would wear a simple scarf or more tailored form of head wear is not known

Sleeves are commonly widened at the armpit with a gusset for ease of movement. Women's tunics may require larger, or differently shaped gussets to accommodate the bust.

Evidence suggest that most women's tunics should hang to ankle length, just covering the top of the feet. However among working women, some skirts may have hung to between knee and mid calf length. This would have been more practical for carrying out daily chores and much cheaper in terms of the amount of cloth needed.



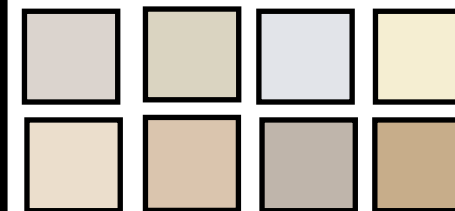
## Fabric Types and Colours.

\*Use only pale un-dyed wool or linen cloth but avoid true white.

\*The colours below are loosely representative of the natural sorts of off-white, cream, grey and beige colours you should aim for, but bear in mind un-dyed cloth may not be totally uniform in colour, fabrics may be subtly mottled or have a slightly mixed "tweedy finish".

\*Use mainly tabby weaves with a low sett (warp/weft count). ideally around 7 threads/cm for wool and roughly 8 threads/cm for linen if at all possible.

\*Costume should look plain, faded, careworn, and probably patched, repaired or second hand.



## Dress Accessories/Jewellery.

\*Strictly speaking you wouldn't own anything, everything you wore would be provided by your master. Your costume would be simple and unadorned

\* Within the realms of re-enactment it's quite acceptable on the grounds of comfort and/or safety to wear more than the minimum kit shown here, speak to your group leader about what they will and won't permit. As such it may be necessary to use a plain wooden or bone pin to fasten or secure any additional items of clothing.

## AVERAGE STATUS

self sufficient rural folk working hard to provide the basics for themselves would probably make up significantly more than half the population.

*Most groups authenticity rules can be somewhat liberal regarding the use of coloured cloth and decorative braid among the majority of their members and I do not feel they are wholly backed up by study of period textiles, dye analysis or other archaeological evidence. Whilst most re-enactors like to dress up, few willingly dress down. The guidelines here are a cautious interpretation of the evidence liable to satisfy the most stringent of any re-enactment groups dress codes.*

**This is the way in which the majority of the population would most probably have dressed most of the time, and as such, this is the way I would encourage the majority of re-enactors to dress.**

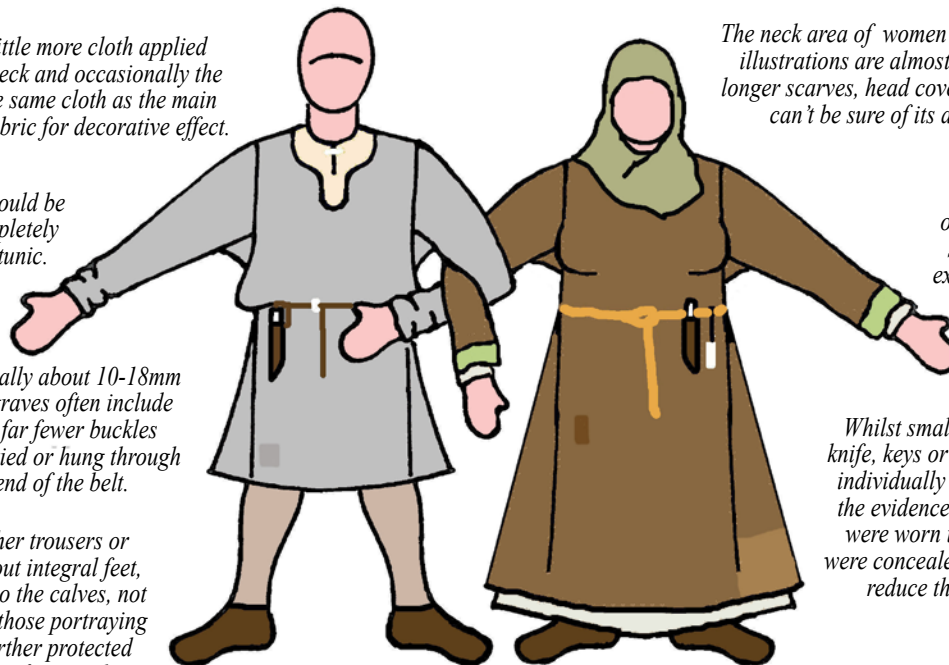
*Those with access to a little more cloth applied protective facings to the neck and occasionally the cuffs. These may be of the same cloth as the main tunic or of a contrasting fabric for decorative effect.*

*Men's over tunics should be long enough to completely conceal the under tunic.*

*Belts should be narrow ideally about 10-18mm wide. Although women's graves often include strap ends, they contain far fewer buckles suggesting they may have tied or hung through loops formed at the end of the belt.*

*Leg coverings can be either trousers or hose, with or without integral feet, but should be close fitting to the calves, not loose or baggy (except for those portraying the Rus). These can be further protected with leg bindings/puttees if you wish.*

*Leather turn shoes can be worn in variety of styles but these should be shoes rather than boots that project way above the ankle. Period leather shoes would not normally be as smooth as mechanically dressed modern leather, but should show grain pattern, creases and natural growth marks across their surface.*



**Kit list men- under-tunic, over tunic, hose or trousers, turn shoes, belt and a knife in a simple sheath, dress accessories of wood or bone. (hood, socks, cloak and leg bindings are optional)**

**Kit list women- under tunic, overdress some manner of plain head covering, turn shoes, belt and a knife in a simple sheath, dress accessories of wood or bone. (socks, and a mantle or cloak are optional)**

*The neck area of women's tunics shown in period illustrations are almost invariably covered by longer scarves, head coverings or wimples, so we can't be sure of its actual construction.*

*It seem likely that women's over tunics should have looser sleeves and a shorter skirt to expose a little of the under tunic at the wrist and the ankle.*

*Whilst small day to day items like a knife, keys or needle case may be worn individually suspended from the belt, the evidence suggests that if pouches were worn to carry such items they were concealed under the outer tunic to reduce the risk of loss or theft.*

*The hangeroc is a classic viking women's outfit. (see High Status) Although generally associated with wealthy high status individuals and potentially more common in Scandinavia than Britain it is often important that Vikings distinguish themselves from the Saxons within the same re-enactment society. Consequently many groups encourage women of this rank to wear a hangeroc made of cloth more appropriate to average status individuals.*

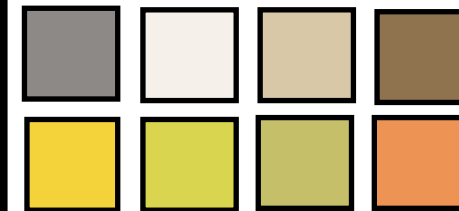
## Fabric Types and Colours.

\*Use pale un-dyed wool or linen for the main costume construction, some darker naturally grey/brown wools are acceptable as are bleached (not modern bright white) linens.

\*Coloured facings at the neck or cuffs may occasionally be permitted. Weak yellow/greens are the most appropriate but drab brick red/orange may also be accepted.

\*Similar colours may be used for a little simple decorative stitching.

\*Tabby or twill weaves can be used, wool twills of contrasting warp and weft offer some degree of decoration. Try to stick to a low(ish) sett of roughly 7-12 threads/cm for wool and 8-16 threads/cm for linen.



## Dress Accessories/Jewellery.

\*Belt buckles, pins and other dress accessories should be mainly bone or wood.

\*Minimal use of cheaper metal dress accessories like pewter, iron or bronze may be tolerated.

\*Think functional rather than decorative, your dress accessories are there to hold your clothes in place.

\*Carrying a knife was sign of freedom so a small knife (typically 3 to 4 inch blade) is encouraged.

\*Combatants of this rank should only have minimal war gear perhaps a spear and plain shield

## HIGH STATUS

individuals of some wealth would probably only be commonplace in wealthy towns/trading ports or may be the leaders of smaller rural communities.

*Consider the sorts of activity you wish to portray within your group and those you may have to help out with, - are they all appropriate for a high status individual? Many tasks on a Living History camp would only be undertaken by lower status individuals, whilst only a few specialist crafts would be limited to the wealthy. Wearing high status kit may exclude you from much of what goes on. I'd encourage every person to bring lower status kit with them to every show in case they are either required to, or wish to help out with more common place duties. Your group may also require you to dress down to balance numbers among the different social classes.*

*We have no strong archaeological evidence to support the widespread use of dyed linen cloth in our period, and as such it is best avoided. However, many re-enactors do use it on account of earlier examples, occasional literary references and the fact we can reproduce it using period dyes.*

*Note that most period examples of tablet braid are much finer, narrower and plainer than most used by modern re-enactors, try to stick to those less than 1cm in width.*

*High status tunics, over dresses or hangerocs would probably have fuller skirts with wider gores in the seams to show the wearer could afford to use more cloth. Even so, most still seem to have been worn to similar lengths as cheaper clothing.*

*Trousers or hose may have been less frequently dyed, so unless the rest of your kit is very high status stick to un-dyed cloth. However, puttees/leg bindings seem to have been regularly dyed so these can be coloured.*

*Construction of higher status costume rarely differs much from low status: it's the quality, and quantity of cloth used that matters most. Many people fixate only on the colours of cloth and decorative braid available to higher status individuals, Colourful dyes and braids are not appropriate if applied to the same types of cloth as used for low status clothing, you must look out for more complex patterns of weaving and cloth with a higher sett or thread count.*

**Kit list men- under-tunic, over tunic with coloured or decorated facings, hose or trousers, turn shoes, belt and a knife in a decorated sheath, cloak, decorative metal dress accessories (hood and leg bindings are optional)**

**Kit list women- under tunic, hangeroc with appropriate domed brooches and beads, coppergate or some other head covering, turn shoes, a mantle or cloak, belt and a knife in a decorated sheath. (other decorative metal dress accessories, are optional)**

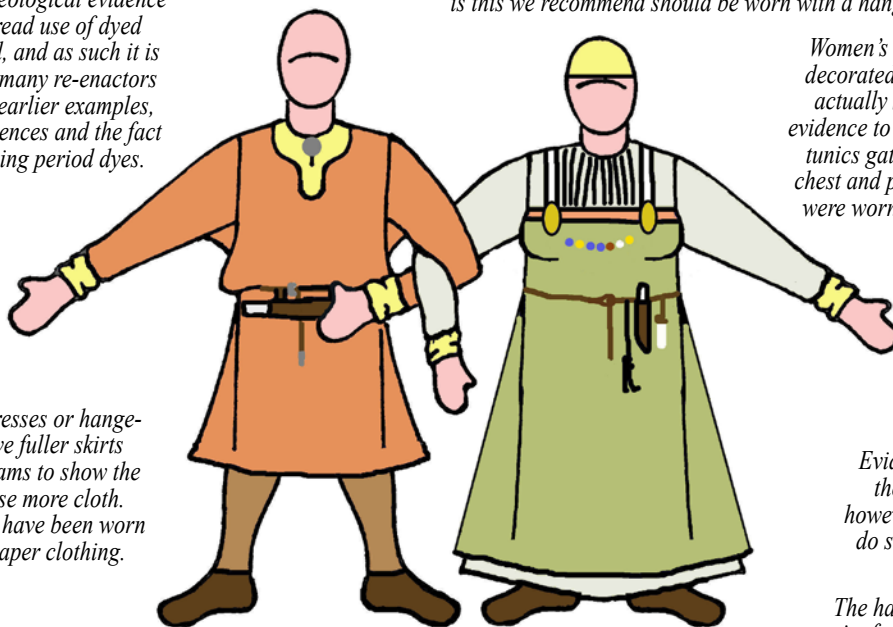
*A small linen or silk cap known as a coppergate may have been preferred by wealthier viking women, and it is this we recommend should be worn with a hangeroc*

*Women's under tunics are more likely to be decorated than men's as the decoration will actually show. There is a growing body of evidence to support the notion that linen under tunics gathered or pleated around the neck/chest and potentially down their entire length, were worn in association with the hangeroc.*

*Wearing long strings, or multiple strings of beads was rare. Although some finds do include hundreds of beads, just a dozen or so beads would be a more representative number.*

*Evidence for wearing belts with the hangeroc is very limited, however most re-enactors prefer to do so for reasons of practicality.*

*The hangeroc (a type of suspended pinafore dress) is characteristically high status Viking. Evidence for it's exact form is very inconclusive and it seems probable that different forms may have existed. All we can be sure of is that current evidence suggests it was always made of good quality cloth, and was worn with the domed oval brooches which hold it up via varying complexities of linen straps.*

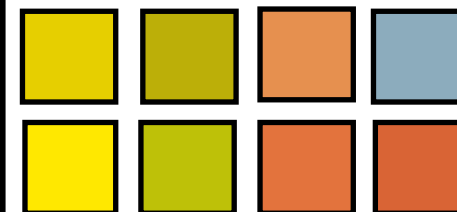


### Fabric Types and Colours.

\*Use of yellow/green wool for the main construction of prominent over-garments is encouraged. Some weak washed out brick reds or faded slate blues may be tolerated for those of greater wealth.

\*Brighter colours may be used for facings at the neck, cuffs and hems, for embroidered decoration or for the production of tablet woven braid.

\*Twill weaves are recommended for both wool and linen cloth. Most dyed textiles should be of a finer quality than average and should have a higher sett. Ideally more than 12 threads/cm for wool (thick cloaks are often less) and more than 16 threads/cm for linen.



### Dress Accessories/Jewellery.

\*Belt buckles, clothes pins and other dress accessories can all be decorative metal with minimal use of precious metals like silver

\*Wearing items of non-functional jewellery is permitted but again restrict the amount of silver.

\*Warriors of this rank may need more than basic war-gear and may possess a plain helmet, simple sword or perhaps an old suit of mail though keep in mind people of this rank may not necessarily be able to afford the latest designs or most decorative examples.

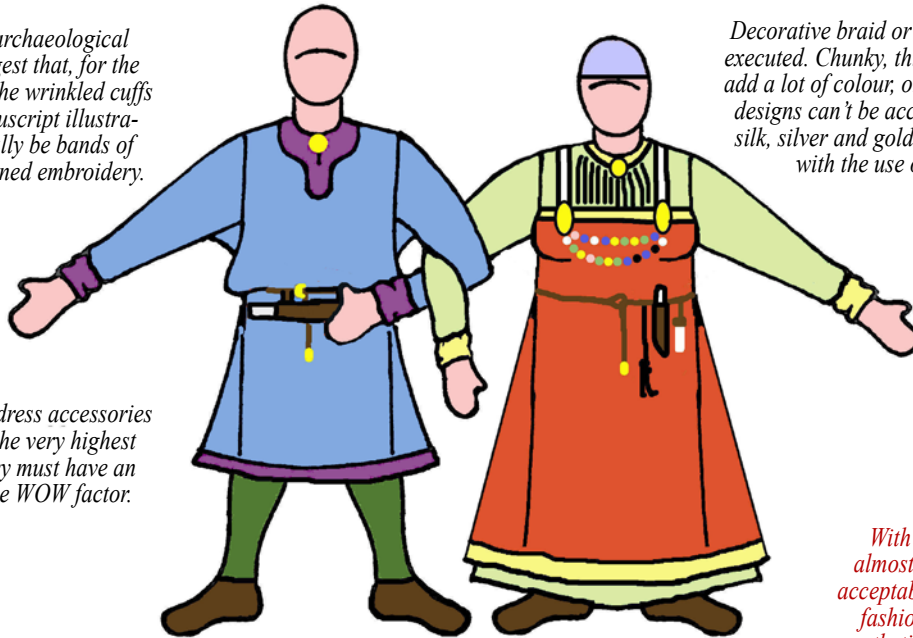
# ELITE NOBILITY

the nobility with easy access to expensive foreign goods and command of armies would probably be so rare as to be never be seen by most ordinary rural folk.

*Perhaps the biggest problem with attempting to portray the highest ranks of society is not in attempting to reproduce inappropriate costume, braid, embroidery or jewellery, but in failing to produce these replicas to a high enough quality to communicate the skill of the period crafts worker. All re-enactment societies are full of cheap, quickly executed, half-hearted and un-convincing portrayals of those claiming to be the ruling elite. Quite simply don't attempt this unless you are willing to dedicate a lot of your time and effort towards getting it right.*

*There is some archaeological evidence to suggest that, for the wealthy at least, the wrinkled cuffs depicted in manuscript illustrations may actually be bands of quilted or cushioned embroidery.*

*Jewellery or dress accessories must be of the very highest quality. They must have an indisputable WOW factor.*



**Kit list men- under-tunic, coloured over tunic with elaborately decorated facings, hose or trousers, turn shoes, cloak, belt and a knife in decorative sheath, decorative silver or gold dress accessories (hood, and leg bindings are optional)**

**Kit list women- under tunic, coloured hangeroc with appropriate domed brooches, beads and other jewellery, coppergate or some other head covering, turn shoes, cloak or mantle, belt and a knife in a decorative sheath.**

*Decorative braid or embroidery must be very finely executed. Chunky, thick needle work used to quickly add a lot of colour, or excessively simplified minimal designs can't be accepted. At this level a lot of fine silk, silver and gold thread is to be expected along with the use of pearls and gemstones*

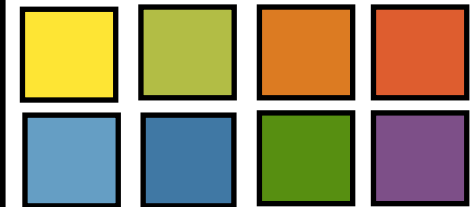
*We have occasional references or finds supporting the use of a wider range of garment types or styles. If you want to research and recreate a rare or more unusual item of clothing that is perfectly acceptable for individuals of such high rank.*

## Fabric Types and Colours.

\*These ranks of individual can use any colour/dye we've evidence for, which could include foreign imported dyes. Complicated double dyed colours such as purple and rich greens are also permissible, however it would be rare for all but the wealthiest to use the most expensive colours for the main construction of their clothes, such colours would be used largely for decorative trims.

\*Cloth must be of a luxurious nature which means a high sett, complex weave and may include some silk.

\*Costume must include a lot of fine decoration in the form of braids or embroidery, which should include precious metal threads and silk.



## Dress Accessories/Jewellery.

\*Lots of silver and some gold should be in evidence, replica jewellery should be of the highest quality.

\*Decoration should be on more than just the outer garments, under-tunics should also be moderately decorated as should knife sheaths and warriors war gear.

\*People of these high ranks almost certainly had more than just the occasional slave, they had a retinue of staff. Your most prominent dress accessory would be the size and opulence of the entourage that travelled with you.

## Is it Authentic?

The simple but blunt answer to this most commonly asked question is almost always no! The somewhat fuller answer is very dependant upon how we choose to define authenticity.

Historical re-enactment can only ever be a compromise, no portrayal of the past can ever be totally authentic. We have to contend with two problems: The first is that we do not have enough reliable evidence to define with absolute certainty what constitutes an authentic portrayal of the past. The second is that the practicalities of living in a busy modern world means few of us have the time, the money, or the skills needed to fully research or accurately recreate every item of costume or artefact we need. Consequently we cannot define authenticity as an absolute quantity, instead we must judge a level or degree of authenticity in everything we do. The two questions we really need to address are; "Is it authentic enough for our particular needs?" and "How can I make it more authentic?"

We must also distinguish between accuracy and authenticity. An item may be an incredibly accurate replica of a period find, but may still not be "authentic" to the character you portray. We must check each item presents a consistent picture when used with all our other kit, both as an individual and as part of a larger society. Collectively we should aim to portray the representative, not the unusual. So, if shopping for kit, or if making your own, always start by asking would this item or material have been readily available to the character I am portraying. Only if the answer is yes should we contemplate making or acquiring any piece of kit, doing our best to keep our reproductions as accurate as we can.

**THE BIGGEST MISTAKE ANY RE-ENACTOR CAN MAKE IS TO PRODUCE OR BUY SOMETHING BELIEVING IT TO BE TOTALLY AUTHENTIC. PERFECTION DOES NOT EXIST. EVERY REPRODUCTION GARMENT, ARTEFACT OR RAW MATERIAL INVOLVES COMPROMISE. IF YOU CAN'T IDENTIFY THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF THESE DIFFERENCES FROM A TRUE PERIOD EXAMPLE ASK SOMEBODY MORE KNOWLEDGABLE THAN YOURSELF WHAT THEY ARE. YOU CAN THEN DECIDE IF THE COMPROMISES WHICH SAVE US TIME AND MONEY ARE INSIGNIFICANT ENOUGH TO BE JUDGED TOLERABLE!**

On the whole the best re-enactors to turn to for advice are the ones that will tell you all the reasons why their own kit or costume isn't actually quite as authentic as you might first have thought. Those people who will acknowledge the faults with their own kit are the ones who will constantly strive to improve it. Those who believe their kit is perfect are mis-guided and are unlikely to see any reason to improve. In many cases the reasons a particular artefact or piece of costume may be in-authentic can be minor, and many so called "problems" may fall well within the realms of tolerable compromise. Having in-authentic kit is no reason to be embarrassed as all kit is in-authentic to some degree, Not knowing why your own kit is in-authentic is a serious problem. If you don't know why an item is in-authentic, how can you improve it, and how can you be sure it is authentic enough to meet your group's standards? Surely it's better to keep asking questions to improve your knowledge and understanding, than to rush out and waste your own time and/or money on something your group may have to prevent you from using.

## Common Problems.

**\*NOT ASKING FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT, - DON'T START ANYTHING UNTIL YOU ARE SURE IT WILL MEET YOUR GROUP'S MINIMUM STANDARDS.**

\*Blindly copying somebody else's kit just because you liked it. Their kit may not be accurate or may not be relevant to your social status. Always start with research, even if that's just asking others about their research.

\*Forgetting about obvious signs of modern life when on display to the public. Watches, nail varnish, lip stick, tattoos, piercings, radical hair dyes/styles and other modern jewellery or cosmetics should all be removed or concealed. Items like cigarettes, drinks cans, plastic bottles, car keys, mobile phones, cameras etc. should also be avoided when in costume.

\*Deliberately mixing modern and period items is not good practice. Don't assume nobody will notice if you pop out in your trainers, that people will ignore the carrier bag your lunch is in, or that nobody will see the T-shirt you are wearing under your tunic.

\*Mixing kit (even historically accurate kit) of high and low status within one outfit is not acceptable, you should present a coherent look relevant to one particular social rank.

\*Ideally we would want the lower ranks dressed in pale greys and browns to be the most commonly seen on site. However, re-enactment events are always a riot of colour as everyone tries to play the very rich. People should consider taking it in turns to play the rich, this way the rare and elaborate stands out rather than looking ordinary and common.

\*Disposing of low status kit as you advance in social rank. (Everybody should have available some low/middle status kit if needed)

\*Using too much colour or decoration on your kit. Most peoples clothes would be undyed and un-decorated, with functional rather than decorative dress accessories. (See earlier about representing those of lower status)

\*Concentrating only on the colour of your clothes rather than the fineness of the cloth. Get into the habit of judging cloth by the sett and pattern of it's weave. The richer the character you portray the finer the cloth.

\*Visible machine stitching. Some groups allow the use of sewing machines for inner seams, but visible necklines, cuffs and hems should ideally be hand stitched.

\*Rushing the hand finishing of garments. Period hand sewing was often finer than modern machine stitching. Chunky, irregular hand stitching looks wrong on period clothes.

\*Leaving inside seams un-finished, holes un-patched and hems to fray. All period clothing was too valuable to leave to fall apart. Your costume may, and probably should look care-worn, but never un-cared for.

\*Attempting too much in too short a time; aim to do a little to a high standard rather than a lot to indifferent standards.

**\*TAKING IT ALL TOO SERIOUSLY AND FORGETTING WE SHOULD BE HAVING FUN. NOBODY IS PERFECT SO DON'T MAKE YOURSELF MISERABLE TRYING TO RIGOROUSLY FOLLOW EVERY LAST RECOMMENDATION TO THE LETTER.**