

*14th and 15th Century
Hand sewing and finishing
Techniques*

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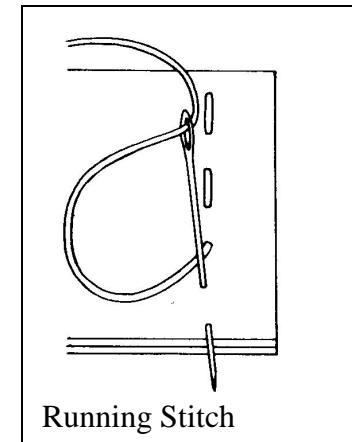
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Some things, regardless of how much time has passed still stay the same. One of these things is the basics of hand sewing techniques. Whether you are looking at archaeological finds from Birka, or in Greenland or England in the 14th~15th century, or to the basics of modern sewing techniques, they all still use the same basic stitches. In this handout we will look at what stitches were used in the 14th to 15th century, different construction methods, and finishing techniques to use on seams when you are hand sewing your garment.

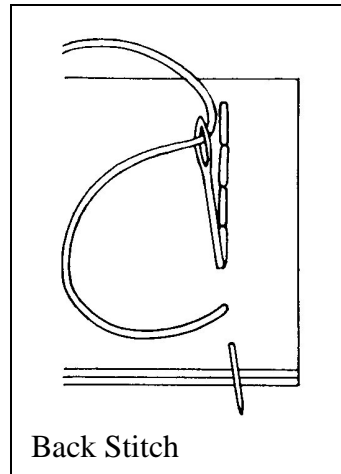
Stitches:

The most commonly used stitch is a running stitch. Traditionally a running stitch is a line of stitches where you

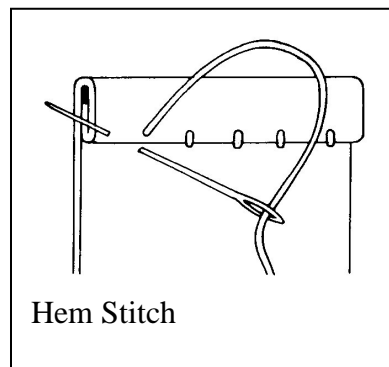
pass the needle in and out of the fabric, making the surface stitches of equal length, the size of these stitches varies somewhat, but it is usually have a stitch length of 2 to 4mm.



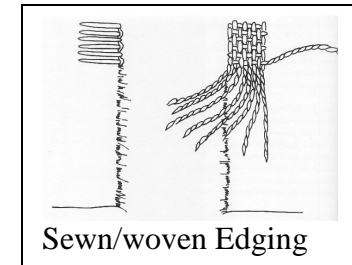
A Variant of a running stitch is a back stitch. It is believed that the back stitch might have been used on armholes, and also the seams on closely fitted hosen. They can also be seen on some of the Greenland gowns, attaching the gores to the body of the garment. With a back stitch you bring the thread through on the stitch line and then take a small backward stitch through the fabric. Bring the needle through again a little in front of the first stitch, then take another stitch, inserting the needle at the point where it first came through.



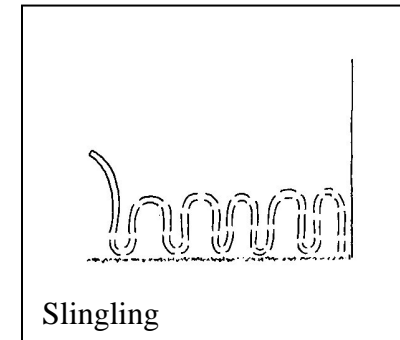
The next several stitches fall into the same basic idea, whether you call it an overcast stitch or a hem stitch or a whip stitch. They are all stitches that are formed by



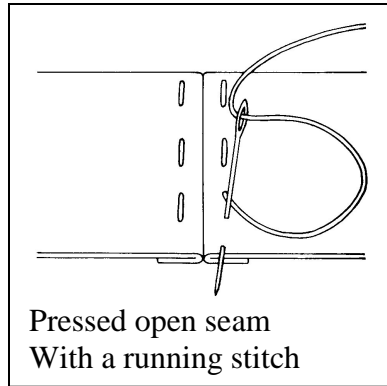
Another option that is common on the buttonhole side of a gown and also around the bottom hem, a woven edging is added to the edge of the fabric where you weave/sew the edging down.



Another stitch that can be used to reinforce the button hole side of the gown or edges that are not folded, that isn't in the stitches section, is called Singling. Singling is a seam, which is pulled 'flat; into the textile and are invisible from the right side of the fabric.

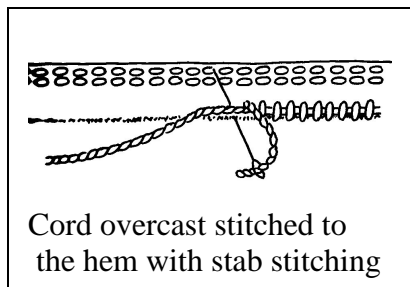


be almost hidden on the front side, or you can use a running stitch to secure the open seam.



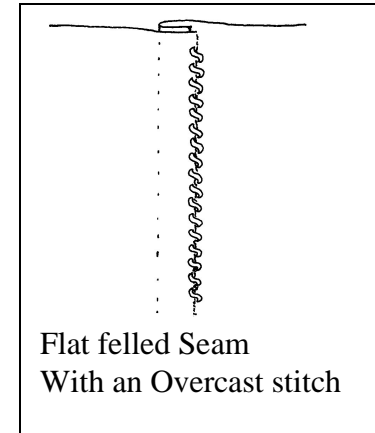
Next, to protect or finish your edges, for buttonholes and eyelets simply use the buttonhole stitch. (Do Not cut or punch your eyelets. You want to use an awl to piece the fabric and spread it for your eyelet.)

There are a couple of ways to finish your edges, you can add a facing, this is also good with linens to reinforce your button holes.



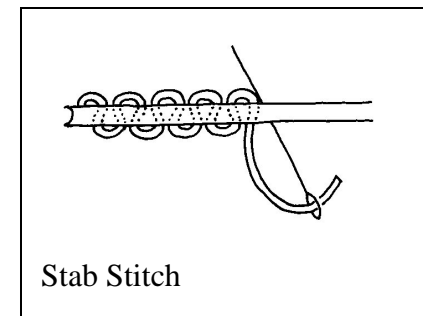
You can use a silk facing, though a linen will work too. It was also common for a single fold hem, with a cord put over the raw edge and both the edge and cord are overcast stitched down. Stab stitching is added in the folded over section of the hem.

parallel run of loops through the fabric. With the hem stitch, you sew from right to left.



The stab stitch is used to reinforce hems and shoulder seams and other embellishments. The best way to describe a stab stitch is if you look at the cross section, it looks like trapezoids. It appears to look like a running stitch close together, but both on the front and back side of the fabric.

Final stitch we will cover is the buttonhole stitch. This stitch is used after you cut your button hole and is also used



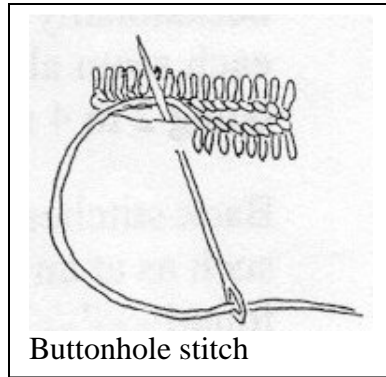
when making an eyelet. Simply Put the needle under and through the fabric edge; loop the thread around the needle point, and pull the needle through. Tighten the thread, positioning the "knot" of the stitch at the fabric edge.

These are the stitches that you will use to construct your garment.

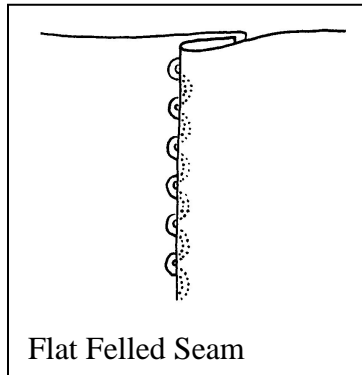
Construction methods:

The Simplest method of joining two pieces of fabric together is to place the right sides of fabric together and then run a running stitch parallel to the raw edge. If this is a high stress area like the back seam on hosen or the armhole seam, you can use a back stitch instead. Next the seam is pressed open; in the next section we will discuss finishing a pressed open seam.

The next seam method used was a flat felled seam. This is a seam created by using a running stitch to join the two pieces of fabric that are slightly off-set, then turning the longer seam allowance over the shorter piece and using an overcast stitch to secure the seam allowance down.

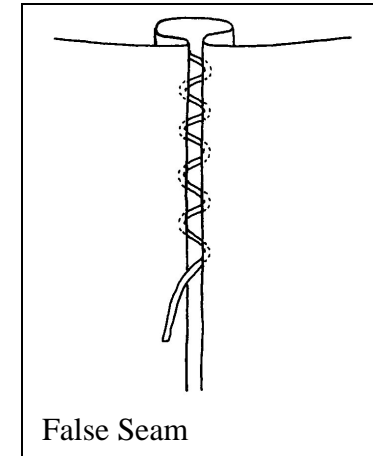


Buttonhole stitch



Flat Felled Seam

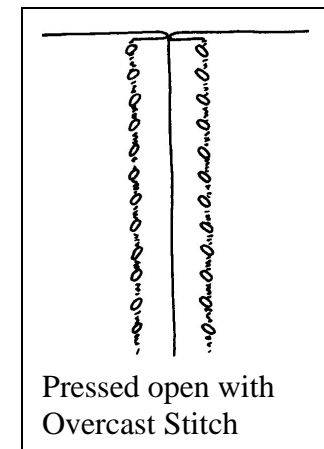
Finally we have the false seams; these were used to balance out panels in a gown, or to put a seam line where you didn't want to cut the woven garment. You would fold the piece in half and sew your seam line. You press the seam open, but you don't cut the fold in the fabric.



False Seam

Finishing work:

If you are planning on not lining your garment, you will want to do more finishing work on your seams to protect them, and make your garment last longer. Of course with flat felled seams nothing more needs to be done. But if you are simply doing a pressed open seam, you can either secure your seams with an overcast stitch that will



Pressed open with Overcast Stitch