

Finishing Touches: Making Cloth Buttons

A & S XL

with Sabrina de la Bere

Chronology:

- early 13th C. - buttons introduced to Europe. 13th & 14th C finds of pewter, bronze and brass buttons.
- 14th C. - tiny cloth buttons along sleeve London finds of 12 - 46 buttons in a space of 315 mm. Attached to fold of fabric - 3 mm fold with silk facing. Sewn with silk thread. See Figure 141.
- 14th C. - London - 14, 17, 18 & 20 mm diameter - flat cloth buttons. See Figure 148.
- other 14th C. finds similar to sleeve 64 at Herjolfnæs and Nieuwendijk

Features of Buttons from the London Finds:

- circles of a fulled cloth - no stuffing - dome shaped - see Figure 147 (right) - 9 mm diameter with 2-3 mm shaft - shaft formed by attaching threads and then wrapping.
- circles of fabric in flat form, no stiffening. Evidence of stab stitching through with gathered cloth consolidated on backside.
- circles of fabric in flat form with internal disc of horn or wood - speculation of authors as there are no stab stitching and the back is not as consolidated.
- generally 5-6 mm in diameter (smaller on some)
- spaced 5-8 mm apart with 6 mm being frequently the pattern

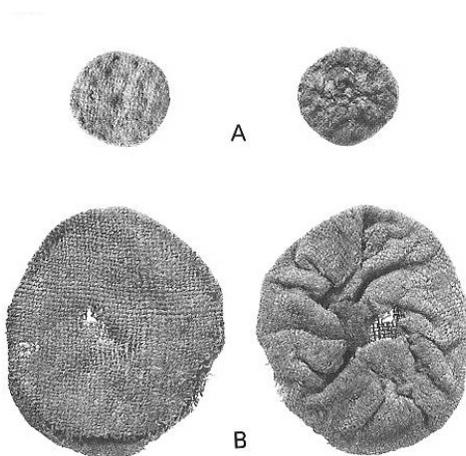


Fig 148 Buttons from a deposit dating to the late 14th century: (A) No 225, (B) No 228 (each button shown both sides). Scale 1:1

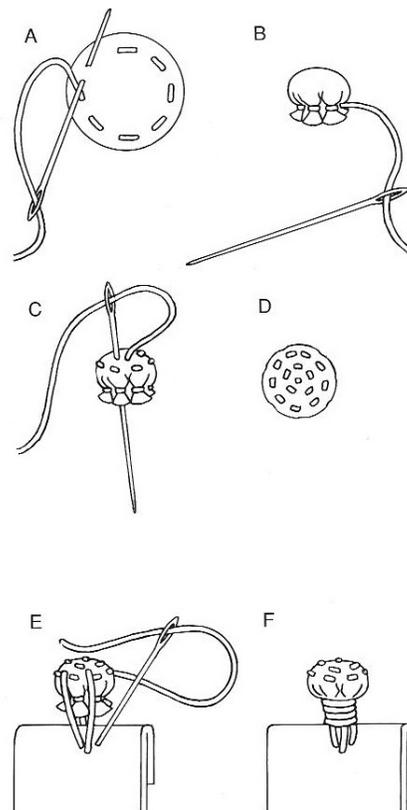
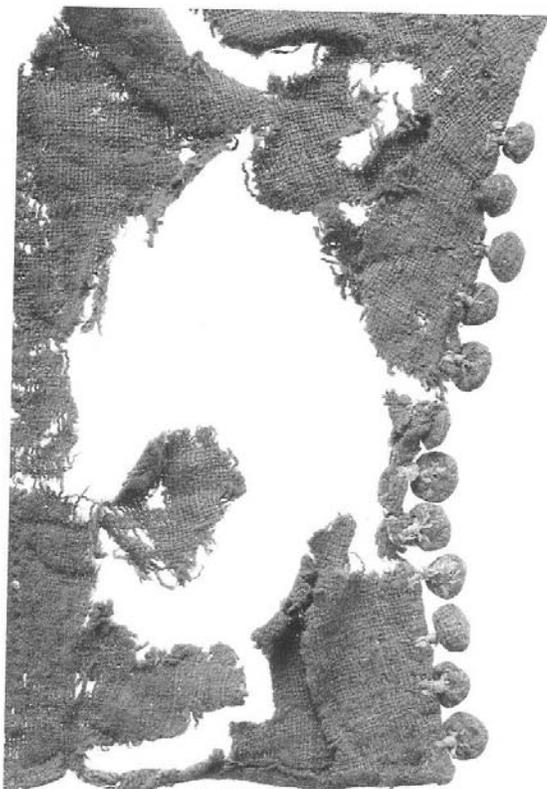


Fig 147 Method by which some of the buttons were made and attached

Below “Fig 141 Details of sleeve, No. 64 showing buttons and silk stitching at wrist edge.”



Dress weight wool felt -
 Button 1 - 3/4” diameter circle, no stuffing - final size 1/3” (approx. 8 mm)
 Button 2 - 1” diameter circle, cotton batting - final size 1/2” (approx. 10.5 mm)
 Button 3 - 1 1/2” diameter circle, 1/2 diameter wooden disk - final size little over 1/2” (approx 12 mm)

Thoughts and conclusions:
 The attachment of the buttons in a line creates the fold in the “clothing”.
 Lighter weight fabric, like linen or wool twill, would make smaller buttons possible.

Photos and information from Museum of London: Textiles and Clothing c. 1150 - c. 1450 : Medieval Finds From Excavations in London 4, by Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard and Kay Staniland. Published by HMSO 1992 ISBN 0 11 290445 9. Pages 166 - 172.