



Penny Walton

When Viking raiders first arrived in England, the men wore sleeved tunics and trousers. Beneath the tunic might be a linen shirt; over the tunic a cloak of fur or heavy cloth, with a long shaggy pile, was worn in cold weather. Leather was used for shoes, pointed caps, and the belts from which their swords and knives hung.

Later, when the Vikings began to settle down in England, their women joined them. They wore long, pleated linen dresses with short sleeves, over which a length of cloth held up by shoulder straps was wrapped round the body under the arms. A shawl would help to keep them warm. They tied their hair in a knot and sometimes wore a headband, with ribbons hanging down at the back. Beads of glass and amber were worn, as well as pairs of brooches which fastened the shoulder straps and also had keys and other odd items hanging from them. Both men and women liked bright colours – red, yellow, purple, blue and green.

Clothes might be edged with coloured braids, sometimes trimmed with gold thread for the wealthy.

Anglo-Saxon men had the same style of clothes as the Vikings, but not so the women, who had stopped wearing such dresses over a hundred years before, and would see them as very old-fashioned. Instead they wore loose tunics over long-sleeved dresses with cuffs, and covered their hair with a head-dress.

After some years it seems that the Viking women learned to wear the long tunic too.

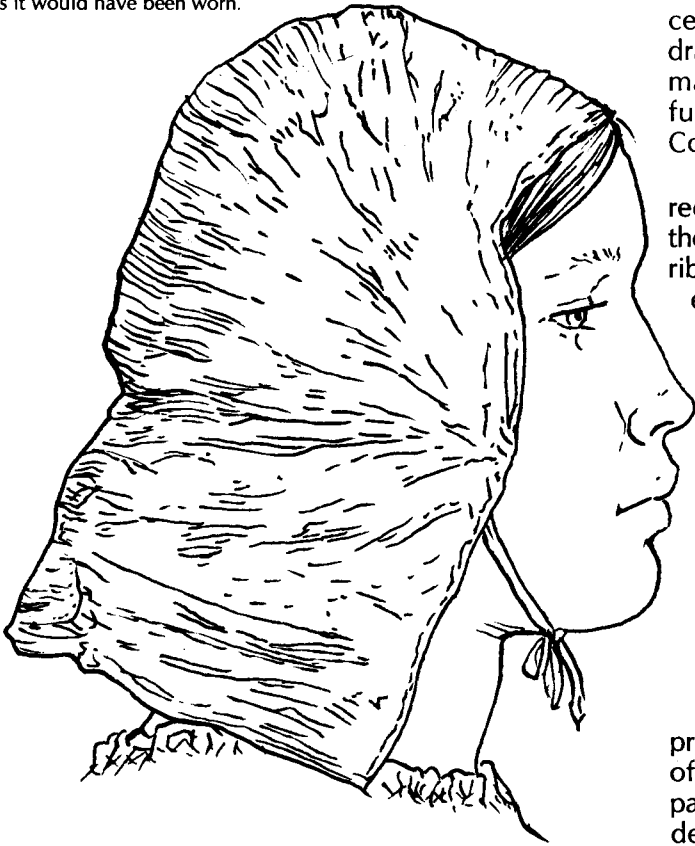
An Anglo-Saxon woman with head-dress.



A Viking man. Anglo-Saxon men wore similar clothes.

A Viking woman with paired brooches and knotted hair.

The silk cap found at Coppergate, as it would have been worn.



We know about dress in those days from cemetery excavations in Scandinavia and from drawings that decorated Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. Now our knowledge has been further increased by finds of clothing from Coppergate.

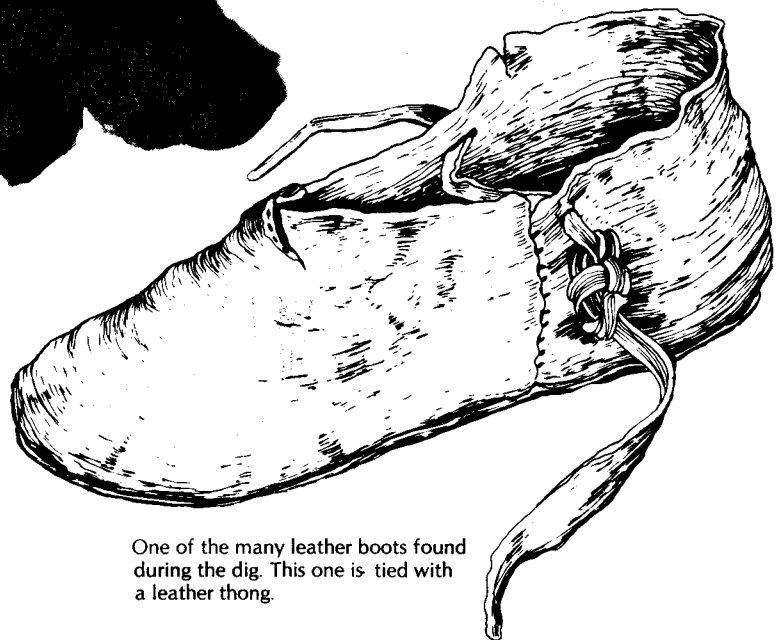
One such item was a cap made from a rectangle of silk, folded in half and stitched up the back. Other traces of stitching show that ribbons had once been attached to the front on either side. Finds of silk caps from other sites suggest that they were a popular fashion among Viking women in later times, perhaps because as Christians they were expected to cover their heads.

Another Coppergate item was a wool sock, probably white when made, with a narrow band of red above the ankle. Stitches around a repair patch show that the sock had been worn a good deal!

There were several complete boots and shoes, and fragments of many others. The boots, which reached just above the ankle, had a flap which passed over the front of the foot and fastened at the side with a toggle. Some were low-cut, like slippers.



The Viking Age woollen sock found at Coppergate.



One of the many leather boots found during the dig. This one is tied with a leather thong.



A silk pouch, decorated with a cross.

Buckles and strap-ends for belts, and brooches for fastening tunics and cloaks have also been found, as well as a small pouch of costly silk which hung from the neck and may once have held a saint's relics.