

## How to Cheat at Being Medieval

Windrush Bowmen run their archery have-a-go's in both civilian and medieval mode. Some event organisers require medieval dress as part of the agreement for groups to attend.

You may have seen some club members wearing complicated and historically accurate clothing, accompanied by a clutch of weaponry appropriate to the period. This is not just for our medieval have-a-go's, but because they also take part in medieval battle re-enactment and living history displays and so have kit that meets those requirements.

For our medieval have-a-go's the requirements are not nearly so strict. This document suggests ways you can cheat at looking medieval. If you come along to one of our medieval events and like it, then there are plenty of people who can point you in the right direction of acquiring your own kit without breaking the bank, or with no expense at all.

In addition, there is a certain amount of spare kit in the club that can be lent to participants.

### General

There is no need to worry about dressing up in the finery of a king or queen. We are supposed to be a camp of archers so ordinary is good.

Medieval clothing is only required by event organisers while the event is open to the public. What you wear after the public go home is your business.

Neon-bright colours and cotton prints should be avoided as these look really out of place. Plain, dull colours are best.

Wet weather – if the weather turns bad a pair of black wellies are indispensable. Leather walking boots are ok at a pinch. Go with plain laces. Unfortunately modern waterproofs look completely incongruous.

Cold – surprisingly the sun doesn't always shine. Having a warm layer that doesn't look out of place can be tricky. If you can get hold of a “Scottish Widows” cloak, that's fine. You can also wear a thermal layer underneath your “medieval” kit. A plain knitted woollen beanie hat in a muted colour also helps.

Heat – surprisingly the sun does shine occasionally, so a hat is advisable. A plain, woman's straw hat without a ribbon is suitable for everyone. Linen coifs can be got for a fiver or so. Soaked in water they can keep your head really cool.

Accessories – not essential to begin with but some kind of pouch or purse to keep the essentials like money and car keys in can be useful. Purses can be made from scraps of leather or picked up for a couple of quid.

If you are handy with a needle and thread, Sarah Thursfield's “The Medieval Tailor's Assistant” is the definitive work. A PDF version is available free. For the beginner it is especially useful for running up shirts and shifts/chemises.

If you are interested in going further and taking part in medieval combat and living history, a more comprehensive kit guide and other information is available.

The golden rule – if it looks Game of Thrones, then it's good to start with.

### Men

Plain white or cream slip-over shirt with no buttons (women's blouses may do the job).

Plain jog bottoms (no branding), close fitting if possible, again, muted colours.

Women's thick woolly tights or leggings (if you're brave enough)

Leather belt to go over the shirt

Plain leather waistcoat (dark buttons) - optional

Plain flat-soled boots of any length (black, brown, tan, red, blue, green), leather walking boots (plain laces).

If you are dressing as a monk, plain leather buckled sandals (no socks) are ok.

Plain slip-on leather shoes.

Some members have made their own medieval shoes.

If you are portraying a very poor soldier, you can even wrap linen rags around modern shoes to conceal them.

### Women

Medieval women's attire is the hardest to cheat at. "Bobbing" may be a better bet (see below).

Ankle length linen chemise/smock

Some kind of long, straight dress, plain cotton or linen if possible, shiny nylon at a pinch (soft colours). If long sleeved, a chemise isn't vital (you know what "medieval" looks like).

Tavern wench corsets over a linen chemise and long skirt are not strictly medieval, but will do.

Leather Alice-in-Wonderland shoes.

Plain flat-soled boots of any length (black, brown, tan, red, blue, green). No Ugg boots.

Some members have made their own medieval shoes.

If it's cold, cream or grey woolly tights can be worn under a dress (not black or flesh coloured)

### Women dressed as men

Officially known as "Bobbing" after Blackadder, this is possibly the easier option for women.

Plain white or cream slip-over blouse with no buttons

Leather belt to go over the shirt

Thick woolly tights or leggings (muted colours)

Plain leather waistcoat (dark buttons) - optional

Plain flat-soled boots of any length (black, brown, tan, red, blue, green), leather walking boots (plain laces). No Ugg boots.

Some members have made their own medieval shoes.

If you are portraying a very poor soldier, you can even wrap linen strips around modern shoes to conceal them.

### Children

In the medieval period, children wore miniature versions of adult garments.

### Moving on

If you want to acquire kit of your own or get into historical re-enactment proper, there are traders markets in spring and autumn as well as lots of online suppliers. Talk to a club member who does re-enactment for more advice.

Mike Pritchard  
mritchard625@brookes.ac.uk