

The Huscarls

Dark Age Re-enactment

Support
Re-enactment



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April/May

2001

The Editor's Bit

As you may know the cost of printing and posting out the club's newsletter was just getting out of control. So we tried a new approach supplying it over the internet. Well what a great success that was, not only did we supply copies to our membership but also 160 people who are not members got a version.

As a result we have decided to continue giving it out in this way and to expand the newsletter as well. To expand the newsletter we need support from everyone and anyone, member and non-member. We would like it if you pass on this newsletter to others you think might be interested, the more readers we have the more people might contribute to our little project we have here.

Many Dark Age Societies out there are having less and less contact with each other and memberships in these clubs are getting smaller. This is The Huscarls attempt at fixing a problem that could effect us all. With better communication and support for each other could be just what we need. But it needs your help to work.

ERIC

How to make a shield

By D J Brattan II (Samildanach)

This is a guide to making a simple round shield, a shield common to a number of nations during the early middle ages but used particularly by the Vikings. Some archaeological evidence survives the early middle ages and reference is made to evidence from both Pre-Viking, Viking and Anglo-Saxon finds. The principles discussed here can also be used to make other forms of shield types.

From the finds and from contemporary iconography the shield is made of wooden planks and is flat and circular with a round metal boss in the centre of the shield face. A hole was cut behind the boss with various forms of handle across the hole for the user to hold the shield with one hand. The face of the shield could

be painted and/or covered with leather.

Shield thicknesses range from 5-8mm however for a shield that will last multiple re-enactment combats, it may need to be thicker even up to 10-12mm.

The rim of the shield can be left bare but for it to last, a rim of leather, rawhide or iron can be used.

The table below shows details of various finds. As can be seen shield sizes vary considerably from 33.5cm to 115cm and from combat re-enactment it would appear that both small and large shields have their advantages and disadvantages.

	Period	Location of find	Diameter (cm)
Anglo-Saxon	Pre-Viking	Petersfinger Gr.3	33.5 (min?)
		Glynde Gr.26	76.5
		Mucking	60-64
Scandinavian	Viking	Finglesham	61 min.
		(Sutton Hoo)	91.5
		Vendel	115
		Valsgarde	95-110
		Birka	80+
		Gokstad	94

Modified from Anglo Saxon Guide Rachel Lowerson and Dave Parker January 1992

Making the Shield

Wood Commonly, re-enactors opt for plywood rather than wooden planks and, if it can be disguised, is adequate for the job. Otherwise wooden planks that were used were of lime, ash, alder, poplar and oak with willow and lime mentioned in contemporary literature. Thickness is discussed above.

Boss Bosses vary in size and shape but for the average re-enactor without access to a forge, a roughly semi circular dish with a lip around the edge will suffice. It is attached to the front of the shield with large rivets, the Anglo-Saxons favouring five equally spaced around the lip.

Handle Again various forms are found for the handle but all fit behind the boss and normally set slightly off centre to the boss presumably to accommodate the hand. They could be either wood or iron, and could be integral with a brace that continues across the wooden planks to hold the whole shield together.

Rim If a rim is to be used it can take the form of strips of thick leather or rawhide. A cheap source of rawhide is dog chews from the local supermarket. These can be soaked in hot water and unravelled. Finds from Birka show a leather rim held on with metal clamps and another with lots of small metal plates wrapped from front to back and overlapping each other.

Strap Some shields are found to have fastenings for what was probably shoulder straps. A long strap could have been attached at both ends to the shield so that it could be slung over one shoulder while on the march.

Decoration

The front of shields were probably painted and some shields have been found to have red, black and/or yellow and red/white and cream pigments surviving. Other shields were found covered front and back with cow leather. The handle could also be ornate as can be seen by the Sutton Hoo burial.

Construction

1. Get together the wood for your shield. This could be plywood or wooden planks. Decide on the diameter of your shield anywhere between 2 and 3 ft is a decent size.

2. Lay your wood down on a table. Find the centre and tap in a nail with a hammer. Tie a piece of string cut to the length of the radius (half the diameter) of the shield to the nail. Tie a pen at the other end and, keeping the string taut, trace out a circle. Remove the nail but take note that this marks the centre of the circle for the fitting of the boss (see below).

3. Cut out the shape of the shield with a

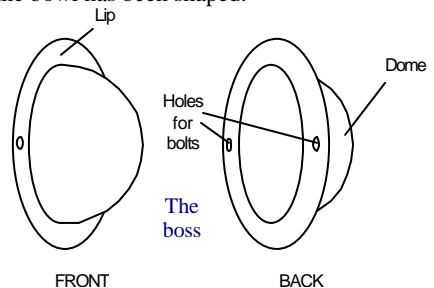
a jigsaw or similar.

4. If you want to paint the front of your shield you may wish to cover it with leather (expensive) or canvas (no evidence) first. If you do, spread glue (Wood glue or Quikgrip works) over the front of the shield. Stretch your material across the front to cover the shield and fix it to the back of the shield close to the rim with carpet tacks or short nails. Neaten it up by cutting away any excess material close to the rim. Make sure no bubbles appear in the material as this will spoil any design you paint later. The layer of material helps to keep the shield together stopping chips flying around and also makes a painted design last longer. You can put a couple of layers of canvas on but remember this will add to the overall weight and is not supported by archaeological evidence.

5. Making a boss. This a job in itself and you may prefer to buy a ready made boss from an armourer. To make the boss :

a. make a forming dish by either chiselling out a smooth bowl shape a couple of inches wider than your fist out of a tree stump or similar OR find a short length of steel pipe of the right diameter and use the hole as the dish.

b. lie a sheet of iron (preferably 2mm thick) across the dish making sure that at least 3 cm excess exists around the edge of the hole. You can start with any shape of iron as it is probably better to cut the circular shape of the lip after the bowl has been shaped.



Using a ball peen hammer, beat the metal into a dome shape using your wooden forming dish or steel pipe to keep the circular shape. repeatedly starting from just inside the rim and working around in a spiral toward the centre. Take care

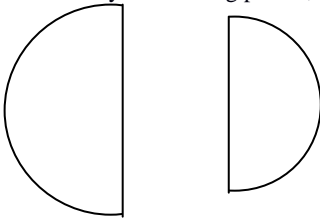
that you don't tear the metal especially when you get to a depth of 5cm or more. You are looking to make the boss at least 5cm deep and possibly more for those with large hands and/or thin shields. Make sure the lip will sit flat against the shield.

deep and possibly more for those with large hands and/or thin shields. Make sure the lip will sit flat against the shield.

c. Cut the lip of the boss at least 2.5cm wide to a circular shape with shears, hacksaw or angle grinder. Drill holes into the lip, evenly spaced, for at least two bolts or rivets to pass through.

6. Cut out a hole for your hand in the centre of the shield. It must be no larger than the inside of the dome of the boss (not the lip). Instead of one circular hole you can create a 'keyhole' handle by cutting two half circles one slightly larger than the other and spaced apart by the width of the handle. Remember that if you are using planks,

Keyhole
shape with
integral
handle →



your handle will want to run across the planks.

7. Place the boss over the hole and mark the holes for bolts. I suggest either large rivets be used for authenticity but as these are hard to come by coach bolts can do if there is effort to disguise them. The bolts will need to be long enough to pass through the wood, the boss and handle (see below). If the shield is made of planks, drill the holes in a line at 90 degrees to the direction of the planks. Drill the holes in the shield.

8. Now to fit the handle. As previously mentioned this can be a simple piece of wood or in the case of the 'keyhole' simply an integral piece of wood in the plank itself. You can reinforce this with a strip of iron 2mm or more thick and about 2.5mm wide or whatever is comfortable in your hand. The length of the strip depends on whether you are using plywood or boards. If plywood, then the handle need only be as wide as the boss itself. If you are using boards you may want to extend the length to nearly the width of the shield. You

can also use an ornately shaped piece of iron if you are looking for the Sutton Hoo effect. You can then use extra bolts to attach the boards to the strip for extra strength.

Place the boss over the centre of the strip and mark where the bolt holes will pass through the strip (see diagram below). Drill the two holes in it and assemble the boss/shield/handle (see diagram below).

With a board shield, two extra metal strips can also be put on either side and parallel to the handle (ie lying across the planks) to give added strength to the shield. Again these can be ornately shaped.

9. Paint a design on your shield (if you want). I won't discuss the various periods and styles of Anglo-Viking art here but it is suggested by a number of contemporary depictions that simple quartered designs were used sometimes varied to create a swirling pattern centred on the boss. It is not recommended but you may want to paint a couple of layers of flat (not matt, satin or gloss) varnish over your completed design. This is not authentic but it does tend to extend its life and the life of the shield generally.

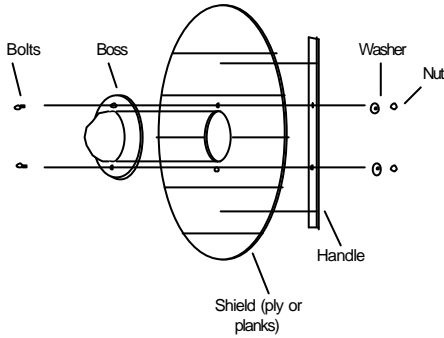
An alternative to painting is to leave the shield the basic wood colour (not suited to plywood shields) or to cover it with leather.

10. The rim. You can use leather, rawhide or iron strips. Soak the leather or rawhide in hot water and cut strips wide enough to wrap around the edge of the shield and leave at least 1cm overhang on front and back. While still wet and hot stretch it as you attach it to the rim with carpet tacks. The carpet tacks should be hammered into the front and back of the rim about 2.5cm or less apart. You might also use glue to keep it in place.

If you are not keen to use tacks you can keep the leather in place with a limited amount of iron clamps. These are simply short strips of thin iron about a 2.5cm or so wide and as long as the leather is wide. These are attached to the shield using rivets. For rivets I use clouts cut the correct length with the head on the inside and the other end peened flat with a ball peen hammer

I have seen the leather 'sewn' on with rawhide or leather cord on some re-enactors shields. I am

not aware of any evidence to suggest this was used in an Anglo-Viking context.



Construction of the shield

11. Optionally you can attach a shoulder strap to your shield. Again there is evidence to support various ways of attaching the strap but the simplest is to pass a large rivet through the shield and strap at each end. You may want to use a piece of iron as a washer on the outside of the leather to stop it from tearing.

12. Disguise your coach bolts .If you use coach bolts I suggest you use your ball peen hammer to knock the nut and head into something that looks more like a rivet head. Nut and bolt ends can ruin the look

13. The shield is now complete.

Do you have information you want to share with others!

Here is your chance, The Huscarls are looking for articles and photographs concerning Dark Age Re-enactment. So if you have an idea or information to share, maybe you want to tell us about an event you attended or something about your club or even just a letter about something you read here.

Then we want to hear from you.

Future Plans you may wish to help with:

- Combat Manual*
- Clothing Manual*
- Camping Manual*

A Viking Timeline	
Raid on Lindisfarne	793
Vikings reach Dublin	795
The Orkneys and Shetland settled	around 800
The Isle of Man and parts of Scotland settled	around 800
Swedish Vikings reach Northern Russia	800-850
Flanders Raided	820
Begin plundering Western Europe in numbers	834
Begin plundering England in numbers	835
Nantes Raided	843
Seville Raided	844
Paris & Hamburg Raided	845
Paris Raided	857
Iceland discovered by Norwegian Vikings	860
Attack on Constantinople	860
Paris Raided	861
York Taken	866
Norwegians colonize celand	874
Danelaw settlements in England	876
Swedish Vikings (Rus) assume control in Novgorod & Kiev	882
Paris Raided	886
Rollo begins the formation of Normandy in Western France	911
Re-establish Strength in Dublin	917
Creation of the Republic of Iceland	930
Eric the Red colonizes Greenland	985/986
Leif Erikson discovers American coast	around 1000
Plundering England	992-1013
King Aethelred of England commands the slaughter of every Dane in England	1002
Svein of Denmark becomes King of all England	1013
Crowns of Denmark, England, Scotland	1028
English regain Crown of England	1042
Death of Harald Hardrada and Harold Godwinson. Norman Conquest of England	1066

If The Shoe Fits

By Richard Crisp (Huscarls)

Last year I attended an event which combined several different Dark Ages re-enactment groups. I was amazed to find some individuals preferring to use GP boots, joggers or Doc Martens instead of authentic style shoes – they felt the modern shoes were more comfortable and it was apparently safer to fight wearing them. Strangely enough the original Anglo-Saxons or Vikings seemed to manage without Reeboks, and many re-enactors (including The Huscarls) consider if you're going to dress in historic clothing - do it properly!

The argument that it's somehow safer to wear modern shoes possibly stems from laziness to make the effort of constructing authentic shoes, or maybe a fear that it's too difficult. In this article I demonstrate how to make a simple Anglo-Saxon ankle boot, without using advanced techniques which you can develop later. It is a "turnshoe" – that is, the shoe is sewn inside out, then reversed.

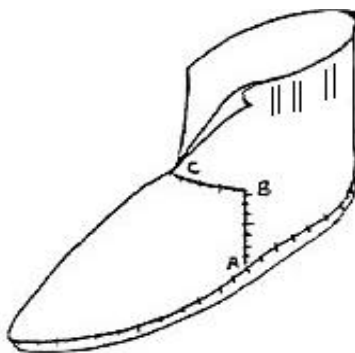
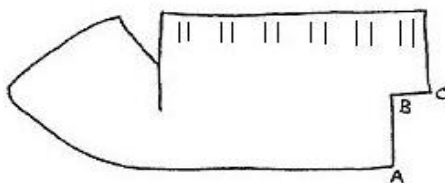
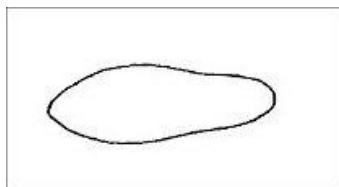
What you will need

1. Leather – two pieces will be used (one piece upper, sole). You can use the same leather for both pieces or a slightly thicker leather for the sole. A typical thickness is 2-3 mm, but I have also used thinner calf leather.
2. Wax-coated linen thread.
3. Leather thonging
4. Tools – sharp blade for cutting leather to shape; needles; awl (which may not be needed if the leather is thin enough); stitch marker

Making the pattern

Before you go anywhere near the leather you will need to design a pattern for the sole and upper – use newspaper or any other expendable material for marking out your pattern. The diagram below gives you an idea of the pattern (and how the finished shoe should eventually look) - but you

will probably need to make several versions of the pattern and try it on your feet before it's "just right" – however, it should be loose as some of the size will be lost after sewing. Also, the thicker the leather the more tolerance should be added.



The toe is slightly pointy, but don't make it too pointy or it will be very difficult when it comes time to turn the shoe inside out. A flat toe end approximately 2 cm wide will still yield a pointy effect when the shoe is reversed.

The next step...

Once you're happy with the pattern it's time to take the plunge and cut out the leather – you should now only have two pieces (sole and upper) – if you have more, you've probably been a bit too gung ho with your knife.

Don't forget to reverse the pattern or you may end up with two left (or right) feet.

Before launching into the sewing make several slits in the ankle part of the upper – this is for the thonging to pass through, which will tie up the boot. It's probably best to measure this out – I suggest if you have about six loops around the ankle at equal distances.

Sewing time

The first sewing to do will be the upper – lines AB and BC in the diagram above. If you have thin leather you can basically push the needles through the leather as you would any fabric. If the leather is thicker you may need to use your awl to make the holes first, and different types of stitches may be applicable - unfortunately to describe all the stitching methods possible is beyond the scope of this article. You can also experiment using scrap leather to see how your seams will look.

The sewn upper should be rough side outwards prior to sewing it to the sole (which should also be rough side outwards). You should have marked the stitch positions around the edge of the sole using your stitch marker.

Next of course is to sew the upper to the sole. Don't attempt to do this in one go – sew around the toe and heel first, then sew the sides. If all goes well you will now have an inside out shoe. [REPEAT for the other shoe!]

Turning the shoe

Hopefully you will be able to reverse the shoes without too much drama – but if it's a little difficult you can wet the leather to make it more pliable.

Finishing the shoes

One authentic way to finish the shoes is by dyeing them by rubbing in liberal amounts of cod liver oil. It soaks in nicely (particularly thinner leathers) and gives them a nice natural brown colour. After your shoes have dried off, put the thonging through the loops, put the shoes on, and off you go to amaze all your re-enactor buddies.

Calendar of Events

April

Sunday the 1st Huscarls Meeting at Gregson park, Hamilton starting at 2 pm

Saturday the 7th Multi-period Training Day
Sydney Park, St Peters, Sydney 3:00p-6:00p

13th to the 16th The 2001 Medieval Conference -
Bowraville NSW
<http://soldiersnoblesmerchants.org/conf2001/>

Sunday the 29th Huscarls Meeting at Gregson park, Hamilton starting at 2 pm

May

Saturday the 5th Multi-period Training Day
Sydney Park, St Peters, Sydney 3:00p-6:00p

Sunday 6th The Medieval Games 2001 Lawnton
Showgrounds in Brisbane. 7am till 7pm
(07) 3880 0120

Sunday the 13th Huscarls Meeting at Gregson park, Hamilton starting at 2 pm

Sunday the 20th Sword Workshop with Steve Hand call 0408 296914 for details

Sunday the 27th Huscarls Meeting at Gregson park, Hamilton starting at 2 pm

➤ **Have an event coming up, then tell us so we can list it here. By sending us a notice means hundreds of Dark Age re-enactors will also find out about it**

