

# Shoes

By Baroness Kaleeb the Green Eyed

York ice skate



Unbeknownst to me I have chosen an other difficult to research topic of Anglo-Saxon shoes. It turns out that most shoes do not survive burial. There is very little metal near the feet, so metal salts do not preserve any materials. Having said that, there is a little information in general terms available.

By the end of the migration era and the beginning of the Conversion era the Anglo-Saxons had learned how to do vegetable tanning.

((Cameron 2000, 70-3(Rogers, 2007, 221.)) Early shoes appear to have been made from a single piece of leather wrapped around the foot. Later shoes are made from two pieces of leather, the sole and upper are separate. This is the style I have chosen. The shoes do not appear to have a thicker piece of leather for the sole and upper. I did not understand enough of what I was buying when I purchased my leather. It is a piece of elk. I loved the color and did not look closely at the tanning process. I believe it is chromium tanned. Having said that, I have made my shoes in a manner consistent with the Middle Ages. I used what I had available.

The shoes from the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 burial and the Anglo-Viking York site use turn shoe construction. The shoes I have made are sewn with the same turn shoe construction, where the hide side of the leather is sewn toward the inside of the shoe and turned inside out when it is finished. This places the more sturdy portion of a hide in contact with the ground. The shoes should last for awhile, if I do not walk on concert. The Anglo-Saxons did not use nails in their shoes, like the Roman style and neither have I.

Most shoes were sewn with sinew during the early Anglo-Saxon Eras. It was not until the Middle Ages or much later that shoes were sewn with waxed linen. Real sinew is very difficult to acquire, so I have used artificial sinew. It was the stitching material recommended by Marc Carlson on his Medieval Shoes website. I have used long lengths of thread to do my stitching, with the hopes that I will not run out. Knots are uncomfortable. I have used a shoemakers stitch or saddle stitch to hold my shoes together. The needle pierces the leather all the way through. The second stitch I have used is a lapped seam with a stab stitch. It is sewn in the direction which is the least likely to collect rocks and grit as I walk. I have tried to keep my stitching as tight as possible to prevent some of the elements from entering my shoes.

A few of the women's graves from Castledyke, Stanton Harcourt and Finglesham had a single lace tag made of metal. These finds are a little unusual and my collection of books did not have any pictures. In the descriptions the tags sounded a bit like a small cone of bronze or copper or a tab. Without more information, I have chosen not to put tags on my shoes, even though it would have been a fun way to show wealth. I also found a reference to laces for shoes which might have been linen and tablet woven. Again from the written description it was unclear if the laces held the shoes closed or if they held linen socks up.

I feel that making shoes should be just like sewing. But it is not for some unknown reason. As a result the next time I barter for shoes it will not be for lesson, rather it will be for a pair of finished shoes.