

Mending clothes

Why

- It's probably more authentic to have repaired clothing than not to, especially for lower status kit or 'second best' higher status kit.
- It's quicker than making new kit.
- It's cheaper than buying more fabric for new kit.

Darning – to repair small holes or reinforce weak areas

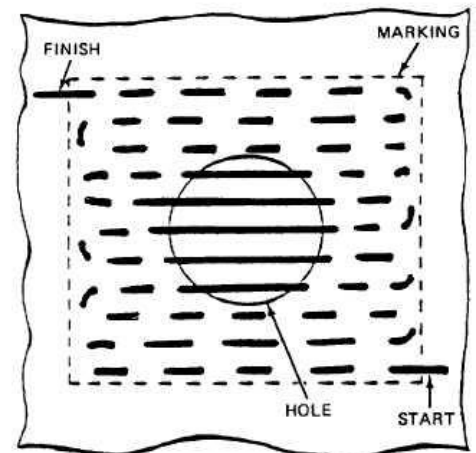
Before you start:

- Use a darning egg or something ball shaped to support the back of the cloth – a lightbulb works well.
- Find some thread that is a similar thickness and matches the colour of your cloth (or not, if you want it to stand out. If you keep your scraps when you make kit or have large hems you can unravel a bit of thread to use that will match exactly.
- If a hole, trim the edges to make them neat.

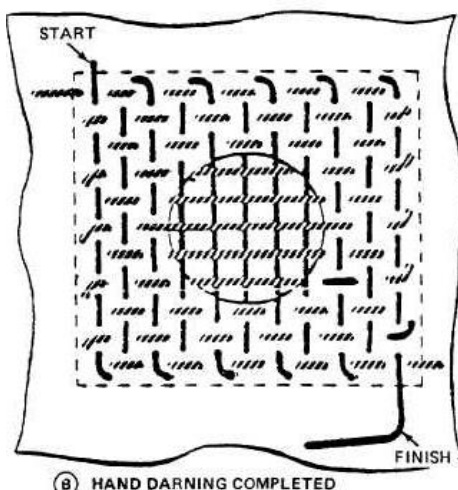
The sewing part:

- 1) Working on the back/inside of the item, mark a square, diamond or circle around the hole/weak area with a chalk, pencil or running stitches. Make it large enough so your threads will be firmly anchored in a sturdy part of the cloth.

NB Diamonds or circles are better if the fabric surrounding the hole is weak as it will put less strain on individual weft or warp threads.



- 2) Fill the marked area with tiny running stitches as in the picture to the above.



NB Keep your stitches small and your rows as close together as possible. Leave a little slack when you turn to go back the other way so that if your darn shrinks in the wash it won't distort the surrounding fabric.

- 3) Do another set of running stitches at 90° to the first set. Weave your threads in and out of the first set to create a woven area.
- 4) Finish off by rubbing the spot to help felt it all together.

Darning a tear

Notes

- Mend tears as early as possible before they get any worse.

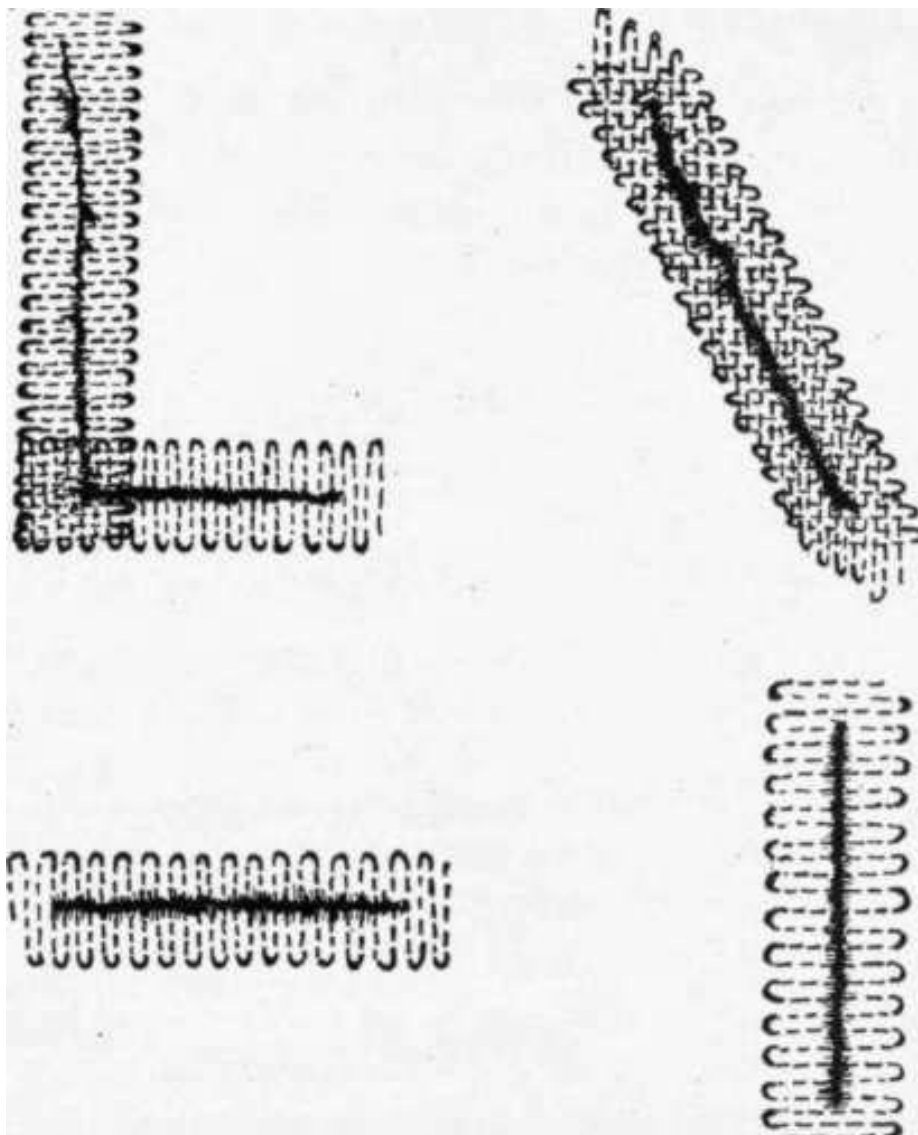
Before you start:

- Find some thread that is a similar thickness and matches the colour of your cloth (or not, if you want it to stand out). If you keep your scraps when you make kit or have large hems you can unravel a bit of thread to use that will match exactly.

The sewing part

- 1) Work on the back/inside of the item. Do tiny running stitches backwards and forwards across the tear and for a cm or so to either side.
- 2) As in ordinary darning, leave a little loop at the end whenever you turn to go back the other way so that if your darn shrinks in the wash it won't distort the surrounding fabric.

Examples:



Mending a tear in sturdy fabric

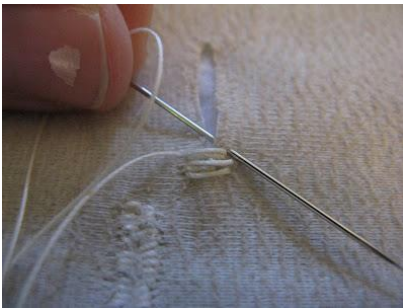
Notes

- This is a simpler and quicker method than darning, but only works when the fabric surrounding the tear is still in good condition. It is also a lot more obvious than a darn.

Before you start:

- Find some thread that is a similar thickness and matches the colour of your cloth. If you keep your scraps when you make kit or have large hems you can unravel a bit of thread to use that will match exactly.

The sewing part

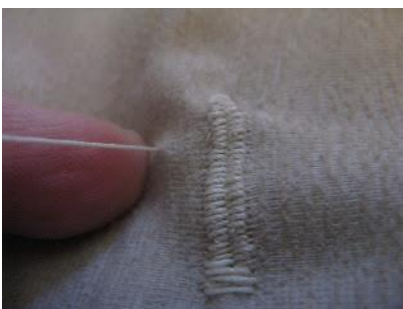


- 1) Sew a few stitches just below the base of the tear to stop it splitting any further.



- 3) When you get to the tear, put your needle down through the tear then up through the fabric.

- 4) Then do the same but in the other direction.



- 2) When you get to the far end put a few stitches just above the top of the tear (as you did at the beginning) to stop it splitting any further.

Patching – to repair larger holes or reinforce weak areas

Notes

- Although most people instinctively sew a patch to the outside of a garment, it can be far more subtle to patch on the inside and this is the more traditional way of doing it.
- If an area is wearing thin, but there isn't actually a hole yet, sewing a large patch on the inside of the garment can help to strengthen the area and prevent a hole forming.



Before you start:

- Find a scrap of cloth of a similar thickness and colour to the garment.
If a woollen item - patch with wool, if linen - patch with linen. Cut a patch large enough to cover the hole/weak area plus a few cms around the edge.
- Find some thread that is the same colour as the garment.

The sewing part:



1) Hole



2) Trim edges of hole into a neat rectangle.



3) Turn garment inside out and sew the patch over the hole.

NB If you line up the patch neatly so the threads are running in the same direction as those in the garment it will be less visible.

Try to do shallow stitches that won't be visible on the outside of the garment.



4) Turn garment right side out, fold under the edges of the hole and stitch them to the patch.

Provenances

NB I haven't done a great deal of research on this, but there are more than enough examples out there that justify patching, darning and reinforcing clothing.

Patches

Caps from Viking Age Dublin:¹

- Wool cap (DHC32) - a large patch has been sewn to the inside of the right-hand part over the ear area. The sides of the patch have been turned under and it has been slip-stitched to the inside of the cap. NB patch does not match the original textile.
- Silk item, probably a cap (DCH38) – item made from 5 different types of silk in varying colours and has two patches both 4x3cm. NB patches only sewn to cap along their long edges, not on short edges. Patch C has a double folded hem (17 stitches to 30mm).
- Silk cap (DCH39) – two patches one on top of the other reinforcing area where tie attaches. Stitched in place with black wool. Double folded hem sewn on by oversewing stitch.
- Possible wool cap or scarf fragment (DCH43) – possible patch 55mmx150mm in same material as original item. Both sides folded under to form a hem.
- 10th century naalbinded sock at York³ - found with a large hole under the heel. An outline in wool stitching suggests a large rectangular patch. No sign of the patch remains suggesting it might have been made of vegetable fibre e.g. flax.

Darning

- Silk cap (DCH40)¹ – two areas darned with silk thread (15x13mm and 10x15mm). Darning worked at a slant with second row approx. at right angles to the first. Appears to be reinforcing a weak area not covering a hole.

Non specific mending

- Hedeby Hood² (9-11th century) - The fragment of cloth recovered from layer 3 of the Hedeby excavation in 1937, has been reasonably identified as part of a hood. The fragment measures approximately 55cm long by 20 cm wide. The hood was probably in use for a long time, as the fragment is very worn and has been mended several times.

References:

1: E. Wincott Heckett. 2003. "Viking Age Headcoverings from Dublin" (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy)

2:<http://www.rosieandglenn.co.uk/TheLibrary/Costume/CnTGuides/Viking/HedebyHood.htm>

3: Penelope Walton, 1989: Textiles, Cordage and Raw Fibre from 16-22 Coppergate, Penelope Walton, (Archaeology of York), Council for British Archaeology