Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

READING MUSEUM SERVICE

FOURTEENTH CENTURY PEASANT MAN AND WOMAN H42B

This box contains two figures dressed in typical peasant clothing from the fourteenth century.

The word peasant comes from the French word *païsant* meaning someone from the countryside, although this name wasn't used at the time.

Peasants worked outside on small strips of land that they held from the lord of the manor and some of them worked on the lord's strips as well. Work began as soon as it was light. The work was hard and physical and they needed to wear clothes that didn't interfere with activities such as ploughing, sowing seeds, digging the earth, cutting wood and working with animals.



Peasants' clothes were handmade and simple. This was partly because they couldn't afford expensive materials and also because an act of parliament in 1363 ordered that:

All labourers and lower classes of people shall wear no kind of cloth but blankets and coarse wool, nor use any girdles than such of those made of linen.

The types of materials used included various types of rough woollen cloth and leather made from the skin of sheep. These materials were dyed at home and typical colours would have included brown, green, blue, grey and yellow.

Peasants usually only owned one set of clothes and they were almost never washed. The smell of smoke from inside the house acted as a kind of deodorant to hide the smell!

A peasant's home didn't contain much furniture except for a few stools, bags of straw for beds and a chest to store the clothes in.

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Peasant Man



It was common for both men and women to wear hoods when working so that the head, ears and neck were protected. The man here is wearing a brown hood that also covers his shoulders. This is known as a *chaperon*.

The green knee-length tunic is fastened around the middle with a rope. This style had not varied for hundreds of years and so must have been quite comfortable and practical for manual labour. Attached to the rope belt is a knife, which he would have needed when working in the fields, as well as the wooden fork he is holding.

He is also wearing a pair of brown hose, which are similar to thick tights. He has strips of material bound around the bottom to stop mud, rats and other horrible things going up the legs.

Peasants wore boots when working in the fields, although some sources show that people were bare-footed for certain tasks.

In the winter, peasants would have worn woollen cloaks, hats and gloves. Despite this, many peasants died during this time of year from being outside in the rain and cold.

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FOURTEENTH CENTURY H42B
PEASANT MAN AND WOMAN

Peasant Woman

Women worked just as hard as men. They often worked alongside men in the fields helping to plough and dig, but they also had duties such as milking cows, looking after the animals, cooking and brewing ale. You can see the women working hard in this picture.



This lady is wearing a heavy brown hood with a thinner white hood underneath concealing the hair. The thicker material would have been itchy around the face so the white linen would have helped to make it more comfortable.



She is wearing a long dress made of thick material with a sleeveless tunic and an apron to protect from spillages. Her sleeves are short to prevent them getting in the way of work. Woollen stockings were worn underneath the dress but these were itchy as well.

It was the woman's job to make the clothing for the family. She did this by spinning wool into threads and then weaving them into cloth.