

**Nils Sture's shirt, as from the new book of Janet Arnold : "Patterns of Fashion 4, the cut and construction of linen shirts, smocks, neckwear, headwear and accessories for men and women c. 1540-1660".**

*By: Dorothy Jones*



*Mikkel Sehested. Sct. Peders kirke  
Næstved. 1570-79.  
Foto: Erik Fjordside  
[www.livinghistory.dk](http://www.livinghistory.dk)*



*Jørgen Skram 1583. Tjele kirke  
Foto: Camilla Luise Dahl  
[www.livinghistory.dk](http://www.livinghistory.dk)*

Seven years ago I made an example of a type of garment which had been worn by fashionable Danish noblemen and rich merchants in the late 16th century. I used all three of the Swedish Sture patterns from Janet Arnold's book, *Patterns of Fashion 1560-1620*. I combined elements from each whilst retaining the correct pattern shapes and using the correct sewing techniques. Also, I visited the museum in Uppsala and took photos of the exhibited garments for reference.

Cutting and sewing the garments, both doublet and pluderhose, proved to be a fantastic learning experience. My one regret now is that I used thick brown cotton velvet (old curtains) and didn't buy a silk

velvet material for its construction. The other materials I used, the silk for the puffs in the pluderhose and the linen for the lining, proved to be perfectly suitable. Also, I did not use leather for the foundation breeches but heavy linen.

I used my, then 15 year old, son's measurements so I could see how the finished outfit 'worked' on a living model. To complete the outfit he needed a shirt. An inquiry to the Livrustkammer in Stockholm resulted in my receiving a copy of the booklet, *Stureskjortorna*, by Anna-Maja Nylén.



After having studied the patterns I made a shirt using similar measurements but modified slightly to accommodate the different width and slightly coarser type/grade of linen I was using. The measurements for the sleeves for the Nils Sture's shirt seemed however to be quite odd. That they were 'slim-fit' was logical as the doublet to be worn over it had very tight fitting sleeves. What intrigued me was that the sleeves were much longer than a 'standard' sleeve-length and as these obviously were not big blousy sleeves as seen in Hollywood musketeer films the question arose: what was the point of the extra length? The reason could of course be that tight fitting sleeves need generally to be a bit longer to allow the elbow to bend.

After sewing the shirt I was impatient to see all of the garments worn together. At this point the answer to the question began to dawn on me as one tired teenager on a hot day tried on the garments. It turned out to be something of a battle to get the doublet on over the shirt. And it was so peculiar just how much longer the shirt sleeves were than the doublet sleeves.

*Erik Bjørnsen, Århus domkirke.  
1570-79.*

*Foto: Erik Fjordside  
[www.livinghistory.dk](http://www.livinghistory.dk)*

The next stage was to starch and set the ruffles at both neck and wrist. I am no expert in this skill and having to do this while the ruffles were attached to the shirt made the process even fiddlier than when dealing with a traditional ruff. Ready for a second trial we/I immediately realized the reason for the extra 20 cm length of sleeve. With unstarched ruffles at the wrist it had been difficult enough to get the arm and shirtsleeve pushed down into the doublet-sleeve. Now it was impossible. The starched and set wrist ruffles could quite obviously not fit down the double-sleeve when it was part of the shirtsleeve.



It soon became evident that a particular technique needed to be used and the extra 20 cm. shirt-sleeve length was indeed necessary. Before putting on the doublet the shirtsleeve had to be pulled to its full length over the hand. The ruffles were then carefully turned inwards, like petals on a flower at night, so they are the width of the doublet-sleeve. With the ruffles first, the hand can then be pushed right down to the wrist opening of the doublet and the ruffles opened out again. The length of a hand is approx 20 cm's, the same extra length the shirt-sleeves have.



The ruffles on Nils Sture's shirt at both neck and wrist are just over 4 cm's wide. It must have become clear to both the laundresses and starchers and the people wearing these shirts that separating the ruffles from the shirts would make life easier. So perhaps in Nils Sture's shirt we see the moment just before a significant change took place. Practical measures had to be taken to allow the fashionable increase in the size and shape of neck and wrist ruffles to continue. In order to evolve further they had to become detached from the garment and go it alone: in this way the ruff was born.



*Peder Pedersen, rich merchant from  
Køge. 1583.*

*Foto: Erik Fjordside*

[www.livinghistory.dk](http://www.livinghistory.dk)