

Historical costumes

At the top floor of Kalmar County Museum the studio for making historical costumes is situated. In this studio we make and take care of all the clothes that are used by learners, adults, tourists and people from different organizations in the Time Travels and historical events.

We have somewhere between 2000 and 3000 historical costumes in the wardrobe, costumes from all time periods: Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Middle Ages, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The latest dresses are from the 1980s and 1990s. Almost all of these costumes have been made in the studio and are used in the educational programs. About 10% of the clothes are gifts or have been bought in second hand shops.



We have costumes for children, youngsters, adults and seniors in different sizes. There are costumes for rich and for poor, for working people and noble men, for queens and beggars.

The sewing studio at Kalmar County Museum started in 1996. Before that, between 1986 and 1996, the participants in the Time Travels did not dress up in historical costumes.

A lot of skillful women are working together with me to make and mend the costumes. You have to like sewing by hand. The sewing machine became common in Sweden only in the late 19th century. So all the costumes before 1900 are made completely by hand.

The ladies working in the studio stay from a couple of months until several years, shorter or longer periods. Sometimes they are unemployed or have some kind of handicap. The policy in Sweden is to help people to have something meaningful to do while you are looking for a job or recovering from an illness. We often have interns from schools for tailors, dressmakers and designers, mostly girls but sometimes boys as well.



When there is a need for new costumes from a particular time period I get an order in the Educational Department, for example 20 boys 20 girls age 10-16, 10 women, 10 men, 2 noble men, 1 noble lady, one beggar, let's say from the early 16th century.



I make my research from local finds, books, art, paintings, sculptures etc and talk to other textile experts, archaeologists or historians. When we work with later time periods there could be photos or even patterns. Often I make an illustration and then draw the pattern. Original patterns from the 19th or 20th century I always have to make of a bigger size to fit the people of today.

The material is very important. It has to look good. If there was no cotton at the time of the Time Travel we don't use cotton. In the Stone Age we only have skin and fur and everything is made by hand. In the Bronze Age people in the Nordic countries started to use wool, and in the Iron Age also linen.



In the 18th century cotton was used by noble ladies. But cotton became common only in the late 19th century. Nylon was introduced in the 1950s causing almost a revolution in the way people dressed, "wash and wear".



In the Time Travels staff from the sewing studio often help the participants in old textile techniques, typical of the time period.

Kerstin Lönnberg
 Costume Designer
 Kalmar County museum

kerstin.lonnberg@kalmarlansmuseum.se

Kerstin Lönnberg is head of the studio for historical costumes at Kalmar County Museum, Sweden.



What time is this do you think?
 If you don't have the correct costume you won't come to the right time in the Time Travel. You will get lost on the way. And maybe never come back to 2010...