

Survey of Eyelets and Buttonholes

14th - 16th Century

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We begin to see buttonholes used on clothing inconjunction with buttons as closures in the 14th Century in Europe. Since buttons were at various times used as decoration and not closings, this distinction becomes important.

14th Century Buttons --

In the London finds which date to the 2nd quarter of the 14th C. there are several strips of button hole edgings. These are backed by a facing. It is thought that the ones that are lacking the facing, although there originally was one, had linen or bokeram (a cotton fiber) facings where as the ones with extent facings are all silk. The facing was held in place with a running stitch along the length of the inner edge. The outer edge was hemmed into place. (Crowfoot, pg. 161)

The 14th C buttonholes were cut prior to being worked. The cut was at right angles to the garment opening. The stitch used was what is called the buttonhole stitch and direction of stitching varies. The thread for the stitching was a Z-twisted, S-ply 2 ply silk thread. The thread was carried from one button hole to the next. There is no evidence of running threads or other supporting threads around the hole. Neither is there any evidence of bar tacks or other supports at the ends of the slit. (Crowfoot, pg. 170-1)

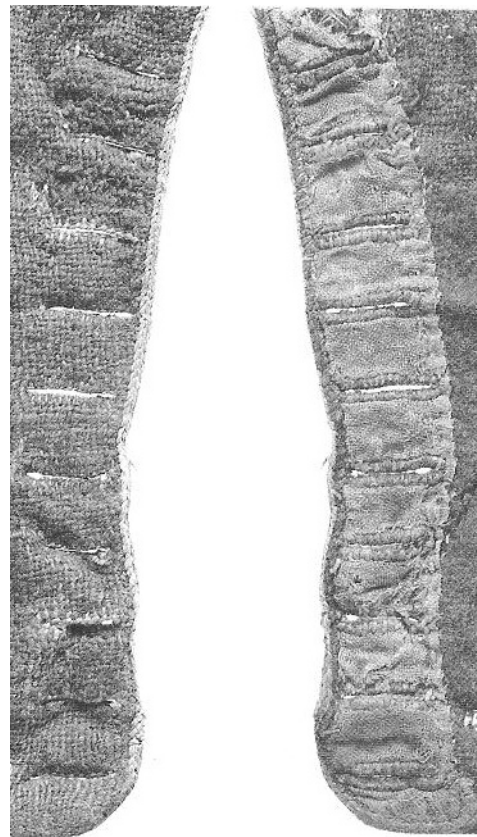
Size of the holes varies. Those that have been identified as occuring on sleeves are 7-10 mm. Others that may be fronts of garments are 12-14 mm. Holes for hoods are 11-14 mm in length. The stitches average 1-1.5 mm in depth and about .5 mm apart. Slightly larger stitches are seen on larger holes. (Crowfoot, pg. 171)

14th Century Eyelets --

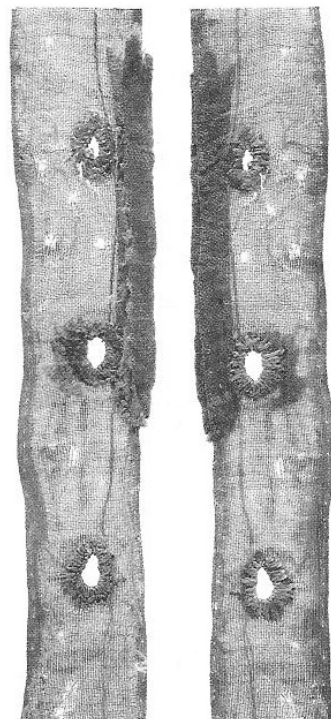
Eyelets predate buttonholes, but are similar in nature in the 14th C. Eyelet holes in a tabby woven silk facing were found in late 14th C. London excavations. The strip had been held in place with running stitches on 3 edges. The six eyelets are evenly spaced 22 mm apart. The eyelets are worked with a 2 ply silk thread with the stitching going around the eyelet twice with a buttonhole stitch and then continuing to the next eyelet. (Crowfoot, pg. 164-5)

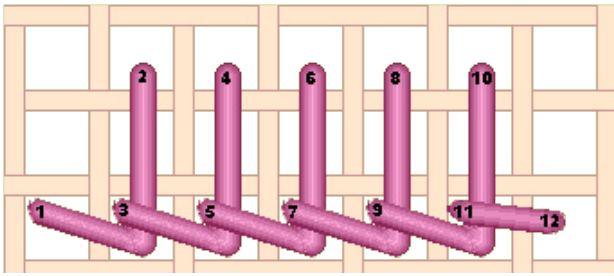


Buttonholes Left to Right - buttonhole silk with thread cording and tacks, linen thread with tacks, 2 ply silk thread.
Front - eyelet with 2 ply silk

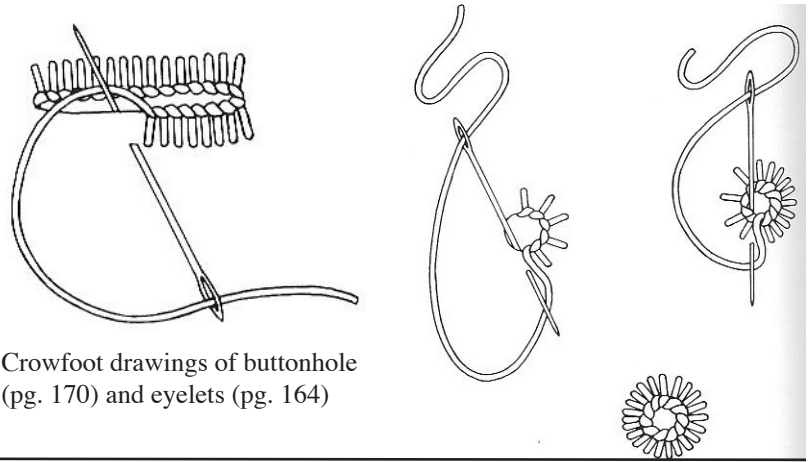


Above - sleeve detail of #64 from Crowfoot pg. 168. Below - silk facing with eyelets, front and back, pg. 164.





Buttonhole stitch diagram from Johanna Cormier
http://webstitch.designwest.com/needle_stitch.html



Crowfoot drawings of buttonhole
 (pg. 170) and eyelets (pg. 164)

16th C. Eyelets --

The basic method of constructing eyelets does not change from the 14th - 16th C. The hole is made with an awl in the cloth. The hole is sewn open with one or 2 circles of buttonhole stitch. For some garments the hole is reinforced with the stitching being over a metal ring. For example, the 2 eyelet holes in the waistband of the breeches of Cosimo I (c. 1574), are worked over metal rings while the matching eyelets in the doublet are not. (Arnold, pg 55)

16th C. Buttonholes --

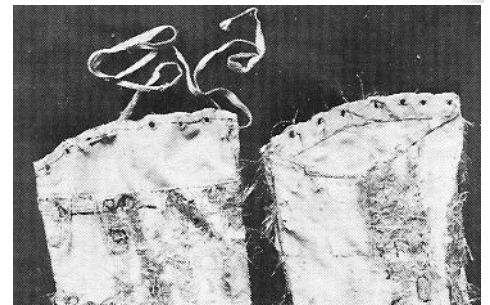
There appear to be 3 styles of buttonholes - plain, with tack ends, and padded. The basic 14th C. buttonhole seems to have carried through to the 16th C. and can be seen on extant garments.

A survey of garments shows that some have the ends tacked with a bar tack at each end. This is a simple back and forth stitch perpendicular to the buttonhole itself and located at the end of the hole directly over the last stitch and extending about 1 mm to the outside of the hole. This is added after the buttonhole is sewn and usually of the same thread as the sewing thread. One example commented that the difference in thread, may have been a later attempt at mending the garment. For examples of bar tacks see page 3.

Where additional reinforcement is required, buttonholes were padded with cording.

These could be padded a little or a lot as shown in one doublet on page 3. For these a layer of cording, or multiple layers of cording, is laid along the edge of the buttonhole and the stitch is worked over them. When this is done, the stitching is also done very close together as to create a satin look. With one or 2 circles of cording, the ends can be obscured under the bar tacks. For dealing with greater amounts of cording, you can see on page 3 where each cord is individually tacked down just outside of the buttonhole and incorporated in the decoration.

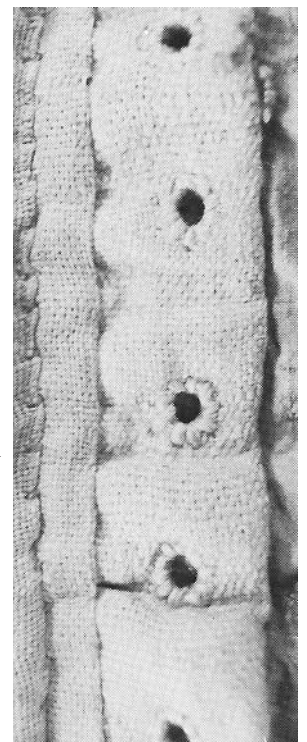
Buttons on the doublets shown were small. Arnold shows a couple in actual size being 1/4" - 3/8" in diameter (Arnold, pg. 81 and 54 respectively). The buttonholes were proportional in size and designed for a tight fitting garment.

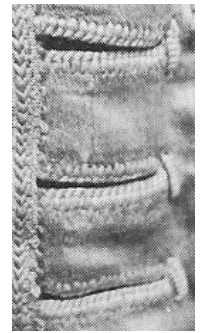
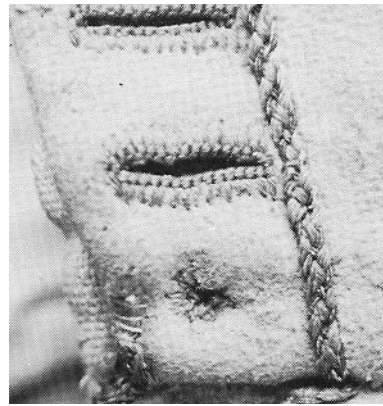
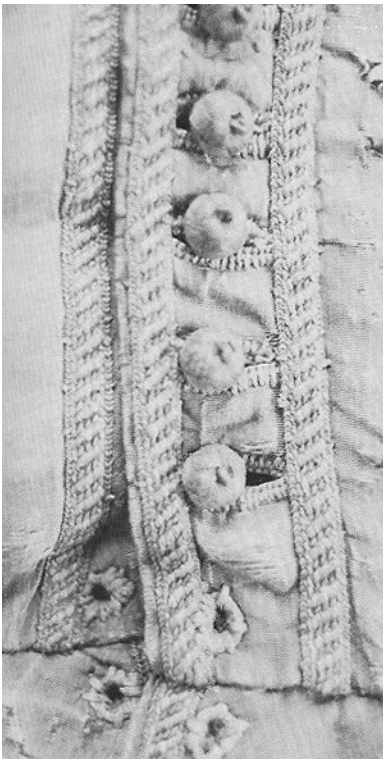


Left - Arnold - #312, pg. 44 & 109 - Detachable sleeve tops in pale pink linen, lined with silk taffata, with eyelets at top to attach to kirtle, 1570-80, Germany.

Above - Arnold - #170, pg. 26 & 82 - Doublet with buttonholes and eyelets at waist, 1610, Scotland.

Below - Arnold, #164, pg. 25 - Green shot silk doublet, c 1610, Germany - detail of eyelets at waist - linen lacing strip with eyelet holes in linen thread.





Left - Arnold - #161, pg. 25 - Detail of front of a doublet - green shot silk doublet, c. 1610, Germany.

Above - Arnold - # 168, pg. 25 & 82- Detail of a doublet, buttonholes and eyelets at the waist, c. 1610, Germany.

Above center - Arnold - #150, pg. 23 & 24 - Detail of inside of collar on green satin doublet, c.1605-10, Germany.

Above right - Arnold - #148, pg. 23 - Detail of left front of green satin doublet, c. 1605-10, Germany. Note: bar tacks on right with tacks on left, if any, under trim.



A Note on Additional Forms of Closings --

Hooks and eyes begin to replace eyelets and points on doublets for both men and women in the later part of the 16th C. although hooks and eyes were used on other garments earlier. In some cases the hooks and eyes are added into the existing eyelet holes. (Arnold pg. 24, #151 & #152.)

On outer garments and robes, frogs are used, such as those shown below. In addition, some robes have simple cord loops sewn into the seams. The loops are made from a continuous cord.(Arnold pg. 98, loose gown from Hardwicke Hall, c. 1600-1610)

Above - Arnold - #120, pg. 20 - Detail of red satin doublet, lined with white linen and padded with cotton wool, c. 1560, England. Note: the padded button holes with each cord individually tacked down.

Below - Arnold - # 324, pg. 45 - Front of a gown with froggings made from twisted black silk cording, c. 1570-80, Germany.



Bibliography --

Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion*, c. 1560-1620. Published by Drama Book:New York, 1985. ISBN 0 333 38284 6.

Elizabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard, and Kay Staniland, *Museum of London, Medieval Finds from Excavations in London 4, Textiles and Clothing, c 1150-c. 1450*. Published by HMSO:London, 1982. ISBN 0 11 290445 9.

J.L. Nevinson, "Buttons and Buttonholes in the Fourteenth Century", in *Costume*, Number 11, Journal of the Costume Society, 1977. Pages 38-44.