

# Wrapping a Wimple

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## Version 1.a

This is *not* an official publication of Regia Anglorum, and some of the methods recounted are controversial and are objected to by various members of the society. However, it deals with a subject that has not covered, and its contents have been reviewed by members of the society and obeys the restrictions that have been formulated by the society's authenticity office. At any time, if the regulations—at [http://regia.org/members/docs/Authenticity\\_Regulations\\_2012%20v.1.2.pdf](http://regia.org/members/docs/Authenticity_Regulations_2012%20v.1.2.pdf)—change, those decisions take precedence over anything in this paper; and please consult with your group's Authenticity Officer before actually making a wimple or other head covering.

Future editions—alterations, new methods, etc.—is planned. Please fill free to make suggestions and comments!

## Introduction

Gwen Nowrick says that “Women covered their heads in tenth and eleventh century England, as it was considered positively indecent for a woman to show her hair. The most common type of head covering illustrated was the wimple (O.E. *heafodgewaede*, *wimpel*, *wrigels*), a length of fabric, possibly slightly shaped, which was wound round the head.” However, there is no universal style or even a limited number of styles. Kate Rushbrook notes that “my understanding is that everyone wears their wimples differently and manuscripts support this. Find something that sits relatively comfortable, covers the hair and the chest and that will be fine.” She adds that the style chosen “largely depends on personal wearing preference and length of cloth,” and warnings are given by many wearers that any wimple should work with the bearer's face.

Rosie Montgomery, not a Regia member, reminds us, “Contrary to popular belief, your wimpel need not be uncomfortable.” And Gary Golding, society AO, says, “Essentially as long as the overall look resembles the manuscript evidence (and follows the rules above) then it is considered authentic. Simple as that. It really isn't a battleground, it's just a great way for Regias ladies to experiment and find a style that they feel comfortable wearing and that looks right with the rest of their kit.”

 <p>Prudentius Orosius, 1050</p>	 <p>Caedmon Ninth Century</p>	 <p>Psychomachia, 11C</p>	 <p>Imago Sanctae Æpelðry þe Abbatissæ Ac Perpetuae Virginis 10C</p>
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The above are examples from several period sources.

A proper headcovering should consist of a base layer—a cap, a headscarf, a hairband or even a sprang hairnet—that is covered by an outer covering—wimple, snood or veil—that is pinned in place. Note that veils can be any shape that works for the wearer—rectangular, semi-circle, rounded corners, fringed edges—and the larger the veil the more wealthy the wearer. Wimples are "basically a type of very simple rounded hood without any pointy corners and fairly tight fitting," covering at least some of the shoulders. Snoods are the same, gathered loosely beneath the chin.

Gavin Archer, who has studied period illustrations of wimples, warns, "From what I can tell after looking at probably 95% of the surviving AS images is that veils go all the way through but the more simple wimple (or hood wimple as known) is more common between 980 and at least 1042AD, possibly even to 1100AD."

Gary Golding, speaking of female head coverings, notes that they "are, and always have been, one of Regia's main authenticity battlegrounds I'm afraid...but don't panic, they really don't need to be." The purpose of this paper is to offer a few of the most common ways of wrapping a wimple. These are not the only ways that a wimple may be worn or wrapped, but they have been tried and proven methods that make good points with which at least to begin.

## General Notes

The Authenticity Regs note that "All women and girls who have passed puberty must cover the tops of their heads. A simple headscarf is sufficient for "domestic" purposes, such as working around a fire. However, for "going out" or performing high status activities (such as embroidering or music) a more formal style of head covering must be worn over a cap or scarf. This may take one of two forms. The first form is of that of a 'hood' style wimple, the second that of a long scarf or veil. Both forms should frame the head and neck, concealing all of the hair and covering the upper chest and at least the tops of the shoulders."

We have spoken already that styles vary according to shape of the face and many other factors besides. As Hazel Uzzell notes, "The Anglo-Saxons' were people, like us...sometimes in our quest for 'authenticity' we can forget this. No two women would wear the length of cloth we call a wimple the same way." With that in mind, there are still some other things that are common and that should be considered when choosing a wimple.

Wimples will generally be made from linen, although wool is also acceptable. Linen was not easily and inexpensively dyeable using the methods of time and so were usually a natural off white color; dyed linens should not in any case be bright and colorful and should be worn only with posh clothing.



Dress pins and textile from 16–22 Coppergate, York

Pins of brass and bone can be used for securing wimples. These were "simple straight wimple pins (a bit like hat pins)." Authenticity regs say, "Women must not secure their wimples or veils with string or braided ties Anglo-Saxon manuscripts don't seem to show wimples or veils being held in place by external ties or braids. Wimple pins should be used instead."

Kate Rushbrook and Frankie Emily Gibson note that they wear caps under the wimple, using the cap as an anchor to which a more complicated wimple can be secured. Rushbrook adds "My own way of doing it now is put a cap on, put the centre of the wimple wrap at the top of the head, with a pin above both ears which hold the wimple to the cap. Then drape the ends of the wimple over the opposite shoulder and pin to the shoulder of the dress."

Gavin Archer reminds wearers that “AS head covering tend to leave the neck bare. Also most of the images show a looser style of cloth on top of the head, except perhaps in the Hexateuch.”

Society AO, Gary Golding, notes that “The headband style are to be avoided, we only have one manuscript picture of them and all the other evidence seems to show the other styles instead. The webpage does show one but that is all being edited to be inline with the new AO regs now.” These regs, which make several notes on head-coverings for women, are available at [http://www.regia.org/members/docs/Authenticity\\_Regulations\\_2012%20v.1.2.pdf](http://www.regia.org/members/docs/Authenticity_Regulations_2012%20v.1.2.pdf).

## Gibson Method

Frankie Emily Gibson notes that in her impression “as a lowly peasant, I take my wimple (an elongated D of linen) and centre it on my hairline with the straight edge forward and the curve to the back. I then fling opposite sides over my shoulders and knot the ends at the back.” This method gives a look remarkable similar to the images shown for women in the late eleventh century era of William II but is a later style.



<http://www.fashion-era.com/hats-hair/hair-1066-1327-women-s-hair-calthrop.htm>

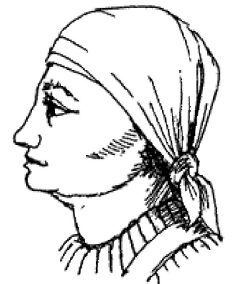
## Nowrick Methods

Gwen Nowrick, the owner and designer for Black Swan fashions of Historic Enterprises, gives a number of methods for winding and wearing a wimple. Here are two:

### Method One

“The first piece to put on is the scarf, which is triangular in shape. Place the middle of the straight edge against your forehead, rather low over your eyebrows. Make sure the hem faces you, so it doesn’t show. Bring the ends around the back of your skull along your hairline. and tie or pin. You can either go ‘under’ the tail and allow it to hang free, or go ‘over’ the tail so it forms a skullcap. By starting low, you will be able to push it up to a comfortable place on your forehead, rather than trying to drag it (and your hair along with it) down into space.”

Society authenticity regs notes that “Head scarves are allowed to be worn when working in the Wic (in the home). When away from the Wic women should wear a wimple or veil.”



<http://regia.org/members/basclot5b.htm>

### Method Two

“Hold the veil so the long ends are over your shoulders and the short width runs from to back. Position so that 1/3 of it is over your left shoulder, 2/3 of it is over your right. Adjust it front to back so the front edge hangs near your eyebrows. Bring the left front corner to the front, allowing the left shoulder and back around to the front over your right shoulder. Adjust until you’re comfortable.”

Regarding this method, Clare Williams says, “never seen a ms that shows the cloth starting from the front—tails are always at the back. Presumably, this will be corrected on the Regia page.”



<http://regia.org/members/basclot5b.htm>

More methods from Gwen may be found at [https://fbcdn-sphotos-b-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-ash4/293699\\_10151620898151208\\_683220181\\_n.jpg](https://fbcdn-sphotos-b-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-ash4/293699_10151620898151208_683220181_n.jpg).

## Hijab

A hijab is a large piece of fabric which conceals a Muslim woman’s head and upper torso. Wearing hijab is based on the

Quran. Although it is sometimes used to inspire medieval wimples, Gavin Archer points out that “although the Hijab is close it isn’t exactly right as it’s too concealing and tight to the head.” Kate Rushbrook says, “I did used to wear mine quite tight, like a Muslim hijab and got told that was wrong as it was too tight around the chin, but other than that pretty much anything goes.” When following these instruction, then, make certain that the wimple is not too tight. And Hazel Uzzell warns: “Be careful which wrapping style you choose. Some Hijab styles look nothing like wimples. I would advise going to Google images and look for Hijab Styles, then choose the nearest.” She adds that in her opinion, most styles are inadequate for our purposes.



Even those largely acceptable styles above are mostly too tight and in inappropriate colors!

The method below is from [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_5659573\\_wrap-hijab.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_5659573_wrap-hijab.html). There are other methods for wrapping a hijab that may be found at <http://www.hijabstoreonline.com/index.php?page=page&id=1>.

- 1 Fold a hijab scarf diagonally. Fold the scarf in about three-fourths. Place the scarf evenly over the top of your head with the point hanging down the middle of your back. The folded edge should cover your hair line. Secure both sides of the scarf with a pin beneath your chin. Lift the left edge of the scarf, draping it across to your right side and behind your head. Pin the edge in place at the crown of your head. Pin the right corner to the scarf on your left side.
- 2 Wrap your hijab with the Two-Sided Flop method. The website Madiha’s Hijab Styles and Wraps describes the process. Pull your hair back into a short ponytail or into a bun if your hair is long. Hold a scarf with the left side longer than the other. Holding the scarf lengthwise, fold about four inches over. Drape the scarf over your head with the fold at the front and about an inch below your hairline. The right side of the scarf will only be long enough to wrap around your bun or ponytail. Pull the long end of the scarf across and around your neck. Tie both ends at the nape of your neck. There should be only about four inches of one side of the scarf loose in the back. Fan out the remaining fabric and wrap it around your bun. Fold the fabric around and under your hair. Pin in place beneath your bun.
- 3 Drape a scarf over your head. Pin one side at the front to the shoulder of a blouse or dress. Pick up the remaining end, pulling it across your neck to your cheek. Use a favorite pin to hold in place to the section of scarf already draped on your head.

## Nun’s Wimple

A nun’s wimple is the white linen head covering worn under the robes of a habit. Through history, habits and the associated wimples worn by nuns have varied based on cultural preferences and religious requirements. Geography and the specific religious order play an important role in the design of a nun’s wimple. Crafting a simple wimple, either for occupational needs or costumes, requires only basic sewing skills. The following instructions is for a simple draped hood style, suitable for medieval styles that do not require framed wimples.

This method is taken from <http://www.ask.com/q/how-to-make-a-nun%27s-wimple>.

- 1 Measure the circumference of the face. Starting at the chin, wrap the measuring tape up and around the face along the hairline and back to the chin. Note the measurement as “face.”
- 2 Measure from the chin down to the chest. The exact measurement depends on how long the cape portion of the wimple is expected to fall. Note the measurement as “bib.”



Hildegard of Bingen, 13th century

- 3 Measure from the top of the forehead at the hairline, down the back of the head to the shoulders. The stopping point on the shoulders should equate to where the cape portion is expected to fall. Note the measurement as “head.”
- 4 Fully open fabric. If needed, iron out the factory crease to help the fabric lay flat. Orient one selvage edge as the front for pattern placement purposes.
- 5 Use a fabric pen to draw a line at the front edge of the fabric equal to the face measurement plus ½ an inch seam allowance at each end. With seam allowance, total length of face line should equal face measurement, plus 1 inch.
- 6 Start at one end of the fabric pen line and measure down the fabric a length equal to the bib measurement, plus 1 inch for seam allowances. Mark measurement with a fabric pen. Repeat for the other end of the fabric pen line.
- 7 Measure from the center of the fabric pen line, down the fabric, a distance equal to the head measurement, plus 1 inch for seam allowances. Mark the measurement with a fabric pen. This mark should be further down the fabric than the marks measured at either end of the fabric pen line.
- 8 Cut along the fabric pen line. Turn and cut from each corner of the fabric pen line to the bib marks.
- 9 Start at one bib mark and cut a semicircular line from one bib mark to the other. Be sure to arc the semicircle so that the scissors pass over the head mark. This allows for additional material to drape around the shoulders once the wimple is completed.
- 10 Using a 1/2-inch seam allowance, fold over all raw fabric edges and pin in place. Sew a hemline around the entire fabric’s circumference.
- 11 Wrap hemmed fabric around the face, as it will sit when worn. Pin sides together under chin so that face opening is neither too tight nor too loose.
- 12 Remove wimple and finish pinning front seam from initial chin pin to fabric edge. Sew along seam line using a 1/2-inch seam allowance. Test the finished wimple to ensure proper drape and fit along faceline.

## Medieval Wimple Veil

Typically made from linen or wool, medieval wimples attached to veils to provide head and chest coverage for medieval women. Wimples protected a woman’s modesty, obscuring her from view and served as a practical safeguard against long hair catching on fire. While wimples are worn in tandem with veils, each must be put on separately. Wimples go on over your other dress so you don’t wrinkle the fabric while getting ready.



New Minster Charter, 966

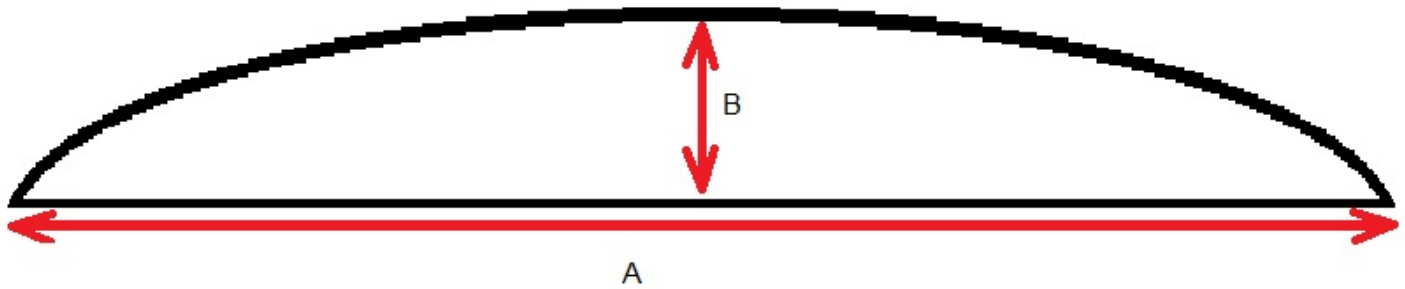
This method is taken from [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_8756875\\_wear-medieval-wimple-veil.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_8756875_wear-medieval-wimple-veil.html).

- 1 Place your veil on top of your head so it sits centered on your scalp and rests over the crown of your head.
- 2 Secure the veil with bobby pins, pushing the pins up into the veil to hold it. Put one pin just behind each ear and another in the back of the veil. If you’re worried about the veil slipping, use as many pins as you need to secure the veil to your head.
- 3 Put the wimple across your shoulders so one end falls just over the left shoulder. Pin the wimple to the fabric on the side of your veil or to your chin strap if you are wearing one. Bring the other end of the wimple up over your head and down to your right shoulder, crossing toward your chest area.
- 4 Drape the wimple so it covers your neck. Secure the wimple under the same pin you used to clip the left side so that it covers your neck and chest securely.
- 5 Pass the wimple back around your shoulders and neck again, if it is long enough. Pin the wimple at your right shoulder.
- 6 Allow the wimple to hang over your right shoulder and onto your chest.

*Do not use bobby pins!* This is an anachronistic recommendation for people doing renaissance faires, SCA and other such cosplaying. Hazel Uzzell adds, “She seems to be referring to the same thing by two different names and she has nothing to pin her head covering to apart from her hair, which is not going to last too long.”

## Rhydian Jones’ Wimple Pattern

Here’s wimple pattern we came up with at Harewood after talking to several people with a tape measure and a pad of paper/pencil,



A= length of outstretched arms  
 B= 1/4 to 1/3 of A

## Concluding Remarks

For being such ubiquitous item, the subject of wimples is a varied and ambiguous one. There is no single right method. As Clare Williams says, “wimples are a very difficult thing as peoples bodies aren’t the same so one size does not fit all—plus it’s a question of context and style. I have different shapes and sizes of wimple for different things, from uberwimples for riding to an undyed hood for messing about on the wic...” There are, however, wrong methods and, in fact, wrong styles. On the one hand, these are methods that are good to start from, but the adventurous and accuracy-conscious person is advised to study illustrations of originals and not be hesitant to explore new, different and flattering ways to make wimples for themselves. Just be certain that any result shared styles with the originals and are approved by the group AO! Good luck!

Thanks to Caroline Williams, Catherine Stallybrass, Clare Williams, Frankie Emily Gibson, Gary Golding, Gavin Archer, Gwen Nowrick, Hazel Uzzell, Kate Rushbrook, Louise Archer, Sophia Helen and Julie Watkins with article.

## Definitions

**CAP:** A kind of soft, flat hat without a brim, often tied or perhaps pinned in place, such as the Coppergate or Dublin style caps.

**HEADBAND:** A two- or three-inch wide band worn as a basis to pin a veil to. May have some decoration and long ‘tails’ that hang down the back. Often hides the fringe.

**HEADSCARF:** A simple square of cloth tied at the back of the head.

**HOOD:** A covering for the head and neck with an opening for the face.

**MANTLE:** An un-split garment of approximate cone shape, with a hole for the head at the point. It is worn like a poncho, and should reach mid-calf when worn loose. When a mantle is worn, the head covering must sit over it. The front of the mantle may be belted with a wide sash made from the same cloth as the mantle in order to free the arms.

**SNOOD:** Similar to a wimple but more tube like in shape. Covers the hair and most of the throat and neckline.

**VEIL:** A piece of cloth that is wrapped around the head as a covering and is usually pinned to a cap or band beneath. Veils cover the hair, the fringe and most of the throat and neckline. An uber-veil is a very large cloth wrapped around the head and pinned in place, has lots of folds and long tails that hang down. A big posh veil basically.

**WIMPLE:** A simple shaped head covering that is sewn together like a small hood. Covers the hair and most of the throat and neckline.