

# Hands Deep in History: Pockets in Men and Women's Dress in Western Europe, c. 1480–1630

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*Pockets are now standard and accepted aspects of clothing, but their presence in dress has not always been so assured. This article examines the use of pockets in western Europe from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, demonstrating that pockets were adopted into clothing much earlier than has often been believed. It discusses the physical form of pockets in the dress of both genders and the types of garments into which they were inserted. It also explores the possible reasons for the uptake of pockets, the uses to which they were put and the sorts of objects which were kept in pockets, showing that pockets provided the wearer with an individual and personal space which they could use to transport a wide range of goods hands-free.*

**Keywords:** pockets, clothing, sixteenth century, Europe, fashion, accessories

## INTRODUCTION

Pockets are now relatively ubiquitous aspects of dress. Sitting here reading this article, the chances are that you have on at least one garment which contains a pocket or two, be it jeans, a skirt, a suit, a T-shirt or a cardigan. Pockets have permeated the wardrobes of both genders, even increasingly to be found in the gowns worn by celebrities on the red carpet. They are applied to clothes for both functional and decorative purposes, and such is the advantage which they provide that they can be used as a means of selling garments: in 2011, H&M launched a trouser collection for men with one style explicitly called the '5-pocket' trouser. We rely on our pockets as spaces in which to store and carry varied objects such as our keys, phones, loose change, tissues, or just put our

*Costume* 51.2 (2017): 148–170

Edinburgh University Press

DOI: 10.3366/cost.2017.0022

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hands. The expectation of their presence in clothing is now such that there can be a sense of loss and confusion when we unexpectedly find ourselves wearing a garment without pockets, uncertain of where to put our possessions.

But pockets have not always been such an assured feature of clothing, an accepted and expected part of our sartorial world. This article aims to historicize the pocket, exploring when and why pockets began to become such indispensable additions to both male and female dress. It focuses on an expanded sixteenth century, from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, and uses a range of sources, including objects, images and texts, to examine the form and function of pockets in Europe in this period: what garments they were placed in, what they looked like and were made from, what was held in them, and the reasons for and significance of their inclusion in clothing.

## THE STUDY OF POCKETS

Pockets have tended to stay out of the gaze of the early modern historian, their historiographical absence mirroring their frequent physical invisibility. Hidden away amongst folds of fabric, unlike the outfit as a whole, pockets do not appear to fit the usual narrative of early modern dress, that of display and the proclamation of an individual's actual or desired identity through their clothing. Nor have pockets been included in the relatively recent spate of studies on the cultural significance and applications of individual accessories or separable aspects of early modern clothing.<sup>1</sup> A considerable amount of research has been done into the material, social and symbolic lives of pockets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and particularly women's tie-on pockets, mainly due to Barbara Burman and her 'Pockets of History' project.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, sixteenth-century pockets have generally been overlooked by historians; either their very existence has been refuted in favour of a later start date for the adoption of pockets, or they have been brushed over in a paragraph or two in a wider work of dress history without any sustained analysis of their material forms or cultural associations.<sup>3</sup> There has, however, been a little more interest in the physicality and use of pre-eighteenth-century pockets outside of the academy, amongst those involved in the historical reconstruction of dress and the online costuming community.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst large numbers of later tie-on pockets survive, offering up a visibly interesting cache of objects and a sizeable body of material to analyse, references to sixteenth-century pockets, whether textually, visually or in the material remains of garments, are rather harder to come by.<sup>5</sup> It is not easy to determine how pervasive pockets were in the early modern period, as inventories and wardrobe accounts rarely record the presence of pockets, whether separable or included in garments, and for all the paintings which show a gaping pocket hole, in how many more was a pocket hole concealed amongst folds of fabric or elided altogether by the painter's brushstrokes and a lack of concern for the construction of clothing?<sup>6</sup> The fragmentary nature of surviving evidence for early modern

pockets means that this article has taken a broad geographical approach, looking beyond Britain alone to evidence from the wider European continent. This article is an introduction to the topic of sixteenth-century pockets, built up from years of small discoveries and serendipitous encounters in the archives whilst in the process of conducting other research, finding hints of pockets embedded in a myriad of different sources. A combination of portraits, prints, objects, letters, books and wardrobe accounts which depict or refer to pockets have been used to gain a sense of the physicality of pockets in this period and the uses to which they were put. In particular, this article has been aided by the recent rise of online digital resources, which offer searchable access to large databases of manuscripts and printed works, enabling references to pockets to be pinpointed more easily. Rather than endlessly trawling manually through the State Papers, for example, keyword searches on *State Papers Online* have been used to identify all the references to pockets that they contain. The utility of such tools depends on how well documents have been catalogued, whether a description or transcription of their contents is in-depth enough to contain the word 'pocket', and on how effective a programme's search function is. However, through the use of these online repositories of documents and literature, this article shows how changes in technology are opening up new avenues of research for dress historians, allowing small facets of clothing to be reclaimed from the archives and enabling large bodies of sources to be scoured in a way that previously would have been incredibly time-consuming.<sup>7</sup>

## THE FORM AND DEVELOPMENT OF POCKETS

The limited evidence available for pockets makes it hard to ascribe a definitive start date to their introduction into dress; this article is not trying to claim that pockets were an 'invention' of the long sixteenth century per se. Though pockets may have been in use before the late fifteenth century, it is from this point onwards that their presence becomes more noticeable, increasing in popularity and prevalence throughout the sixteenth century. It has been argued that tie-on pockets fell out of fashion with the adoption of the slender profile and gauzy fabrics of neo-classical dress at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> By the same reasoning, whereas the fullness of sixteenth-century dress for both men and women gave ample opportunities for the inclusion and concealment of pocket bags without unsightly bulges, the narrower medieval silhouette would have similarly restricted the placement of pockets in clothing. Some garments could have accommodated pockets even less than others, as in men's hose, worn skin-tight in the fifteenth century and described by the Venetian Cesare Vecellio (1521–1601) as being 'so closely fitted that they showed almost all their muscles, as if they were completely naked'.<sup>9</sup> In a chapter on 'The Grossenesse of former Times', the 1613 text *The Treasvrie of Avncient and Moderne Times*, a compendium of observations collated from a variety of European authors, said of the hose men used to wear that they were 'made close to their limbes, wherein

they had no menes for Pockets'.<sup>10</sup> However, in his work illustrating historical and contemporary dress from around the world, Vecellio indicated that pockets were a relative novelty of the end of the fifteenth century, writing of the 'reformed and more modest dress' of some Venetian women that:

I have found that in those times trains were not worn long but held up and attached to the belt or to the edges of pockets — which were being used for the first time, though their use continued for a very long time afterward.<sup>11</sup>

So what forms did pockets adopt in the long sixteenth century, and what types of garments were they placed in? Men's upper hose in this period grew in volume, becoming rotund and then baggy, so large that attempts were made to try and limit the amount of material and padding which could be used in their construction and concerns were raised that men were concealing weapons in their hose.<sup>12</sup> These increased dimensions of hose enabled the inclusion of pockets, which, according to Janet Arnold's (1932–1998) study of extant objects, were generally a pocket bag made of fustian or leather stitched into a vertical placket which was not always located along the side seam of the hose.<sup>13</sup> The wardrobe accounts for Elizabeth I (1533–1603) record that in 1575 Thomas Ludwell (*fl.* 1564–1582), one of her tailors, was charged with making a pair of paned hose for a Moorish boy of carnation stammel with 'pockettes of fustian'.<sup>14</sup> The hosier Henry Herne (*fl.* 1559–1592) also made a pair of hose for the boy 'with thre yerds of chaungeable mockeado with lase & silke lyned with lynen, wollen, cotten, canvas, heare, pockettes & Poyntes'.<sup>15</sup> A pair of *calze* were made for Cosimo I de' Medici (1519–1574) in 1570 of crimson twill with cotton pockets.<sup>16</sup> Svante Sture's (1517–1567) *pluderhose*, which he was wearing when he was murdered in Uppsala Cathedral in 1567, have a rather different style of pocket: a pouch with a drawstring top built into one of the flounces of the hose in between the panes.<sup>17</sup>

Some pocket holes are clearly visible in men's hose in paintings and prints, although, as with women's skirts, it can be difficult to determine what is simply a fold in the fabric and what is a pocket hole. Giovanni Battista Moroni's (1520–1578) portrait of Count Alborghetti and his son from *c.* 1545–1550 shows the boy wearing a pair of horizontally striped hose with a vertical pocket hole lined with the same fabric as the hose and trimmed with a pink binding.<sup>18</sup> Bindings and embroidery down the sides of men's hose were used to frame and advertise the presence of pockets to even greater effect in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as in Robert Peake's (*c.* 1551–1619) painting of Henry, Prince of Wales (1594–1612) from *c.* 1605 (Figure 1). Alongside actual pockets in the sides of hose, seemingly false pockets which were an elongated hexagonal shape decorated with buttons were playfully placed in the front of hose in the early seventeenth century. The parade costume of Christian II, Elector of Saxony (1583–1611), sports a pair of such pockets, as do figures in a number of paintings.<sup>19</sup> These buttoned, possibly imitation, pockets could be placed vertically as well as horizontally, with several sets in one pair of hose, as can be seen in a portrait of Lars Kagg (1597–1661) (Figure 2).<sup>20</sup> One painting



**Figure 1.** Robert Peake the Elder, *Henry Frederick Prince of Wales (1594–1612), with Sir John Harington (1592–1614), in the hunting field*, 1603. Oil on canvas, 201.9 × 147.3 cm. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest 1944, 44.27 Metropolitan Museum of Art.

of an unknown French nobleman from 1607 shows the sitter with both a set of vertical buttoned pockets in the front of his hose and a set of actual pockets in the side of his hose (Figure 3).



**Figure 2.** Georg Günther Kraill von Bemeberg, *Portrait of Lars Kagg (1597–1661)*, 1623. Tempera on canvas, 112 × 198 cm. Sweden: Skoklosters slott, 2264 Skoklosters slott.

Pockets were also placed in upper body garments for men, such as gowns, coats and jerkins, and some paintings even show small openings in the sleeves of doublets fastened with buttons which resemble pocket holes.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Ludwell made a jerkin for one of Queen Elizabeth's fools 'of black frise cut in panes and weltid with frence lyned with fustian with a pocket of fustian faced with taphata with buttons of silke'.<sup>22</sup> Another fool received a number of gowns from Ludwell's workshop, one of 'blewe damaske' and the other of 'olde Tyncell', both with 'two pockettes of fustian'.<sup>23</sup> Ludwell also made a gown of 'tufte mockeado' for a Moorish boy, which was 'lyned with white bayes with pockettes of fustian'.<sup>24</sup> Such pockets in gowns were most likely vertical insertions, as can be seen in the gown Ludovick Stuart (1574–1624) is wearing in his portrait by the studio of Daniel Mytens (c. 1590–1647).<sup>25</sup> But in jerkins, images show buttoned slits,



**Figure 3.** French School, *Unknown Courtier*, 1607. Oil on panel, 83 × 62 cm. London: Weiss Gallery Courtesy of the Weiss Gallery, London.

which may have simply been decorative or concealed a pocket hole, sitting horizontally or at a slight angle on the skirts and chest (Figure 4).<sup>26</sup> A leather jerkin recovered from the *Mary Rose*, a warship which sank off the south coast of England in 1545, has a pocket with a flap top fastened with three buttons on



**Figure 4.** This outfit features a vertical pocket hole on the sides of the hose, as well as buttoned pocket slits in the front of the hose, skirts of the jerkin and on the chest of the jerkin. Flemish School, *Unknown Young Boy*, c. 1600. Oil on canvas, 62.5 × 51.5 cm. London: Weiss Gallery Courtesy of the Weiss Gallery, London.

the inside of the left skirt, and there is evidence of pockets having been attached to the skirts of two other jerkins found on the ship (Figure 5).<sup>27</sup>

Women's clothes also contained pockets, although they do not appear to have been turned into decorative features and had their presence made overt through buttons and trimmings, as in men's dress. Integrated pockets were stitched into women's gowns and over-garments, most likely as vertical pocket holes positioned below the waist, as can be seen in a print of a Florentine woman by Pieter de Jode (1570–1634) (Figure 6), although a portrait of the young Anna Eleonora Sanvitali (1558–1582) from 1562 depicts her with a single bound horizontal pocket hole clearly visible on the left side of her skirt.<sup>28</sup> The adoption



**Figure 5.** Remains of a leather jerkin (81A2592) recovered from the *Mary Rose* with a pocket on one skirt fastened with a flap top © The *Mary Rose* Trust.

of farthingales by women in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries seemingly did not impede the inclusion of pockets in gowns. Janet Arnold has noted a pocket hole in a gown in the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen, intended to be worn over a wheel farthingale, whilst a letter from William Yardley to Edward Conway (*c.* 1564–1631) in 1599 spoke of a letter having been ‘putt into the pocket of A Frenche vardingale’.<sup>29</sup>

The wardrobe accounts of Elizabeth I show that pockets were often placed in her gowns, nightgowns, safeguards and cloaks. A ‘straight bodied Gowne of blak taphata’ made for the Queen in 1569 had a ‘Pockett of carnation taphata’, while a loose gown made in 1574 of ‘plaine blak vellat’ also had pockets made of ‘blak taphata’.<sup>30</sup> The records for the alteration of a gown ‘brought out of Fraunce’ for Elizabeth note that the gown included a ‘pockett of blak taphata’, but whether the gown had originally been made with such a pocket or whether the Queen’s tailor Walter Fyshe (*fl.* 1557–1586) had inserted it is unknown.<sup>31</sup> Pockets could be remade or added to a garment after its initial construction: in 1575, Fyshe had the task of ‘makeinge newe pockettes of blak taphata’ for a black wrought velvet cloak, and in 1580 of ‘making of a pockett for a rounde kyrtell of yellowe taphata’.<sup>32</sup> The fabric which pockets were made from generally did not match the rest of the garment, but they did often coordinate with trimmings, as in a safeguard of black tuft taffeta ‘borderid with blak sarceonett and pocketts



**Figure 6.** Pieter de Jode after Sebastiaan Vrancx, *Viri atque mulieris apvd Florentinos habitvs*, 1605–1610. Engraving, 22.5 × 14.9 cm. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, RP-P-OB-7740 *Rijksmuseum*.

of like sarceonett'.<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth's pockets were predominantly made of taffeta, but she also had pockets of grosgrain or sarcenet, and occasionally they were lined with fustian, presumably for strength.<sup>34</sup> Two pieces of yellow taffeta were found amongst the satin remnants of the burial gown of Eleonora di Toledo (1522–1562) which are thought to have comprised a pocket, whilst the pockets in the loose gowns and nightgowns of Mary I (1516–1558) were always made of black satin.<sup>35</sup> However, when a garment was made for someone else, whether a dwarf, a maid or a lady of the court, the wardrobe accounts of Mary and Elizabeth show that the pockets included were almost always made of either fustian or buckram, as opposed to a type of silk cloth.<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth's pockets were not necessarily made from offcuts of fabric: Baptist Hicks (1551–1629) delivered 'two yerds thre quarters of taphata for pocketts' to the Great Wardrobe in 1603.<sup>37</sup>

Women also wore tie-on pockets long before the end of the seventeenth century. There are a number of references in Elizabeth's wardrobe accounts to pockets having been made separate to any gowns, as in 'Item for makinge of Twelve Pockettes of silke grograine: Twelve Pockettes of taphata: and Twelve Pocketts of bridge satten' in 1579.<sup>38</sup> In 1608, Sir Thomas Edmondes (c. 1563–1639) sent Sir Robert Cecil (1563–1612) a parcel of goods from Brussels, which included '2 perfumed pocketts' alongside Spanish gloves and

scented candles, and there are extant embroidered pockets in the Museo del Traje in Madrid.<sup>39</sup> Similar pockets can be seen in several works depicting women — paintings, preparatory sketches and prints — by the artists Giovanni Stradano (also known as Jan van der Straet (1523–1605)) and Alessandro Allori (1535–1607), both based in Florence in the late sixteenth century (Figure 7).<sup>40</sup> These items perfectly match Burman and White's definition of tie-on pockets — 'large, discrete garments of a more or less rectangular or oblong shape, designed to be tied around the waist, over a petticoat and under a dress' — except for the fact that they are only visible because they are being worn externally, over the skirts.<sup>41</sup> This raises the question of whether such items should be seen as a type of bag as opposed to a pocket. Although decorated, they do not look as robust or secure as the purses which men can be seen sporting in formal portraits, and it is notable that Stradano and Allori's images all show women in domestic environments or states of semi-undress, implying that in some informal circumstances it may have been acceptable to wear a pocket above your clothes for ease of access. There is a terminological as well as a physical inexactitude to pockets, however. In his Italian to English dictionary from 1598, John Florio (1553–1625) defined a *tasca*, the modern Italian term for pocket, as 'a pouch, a pocket, a bag, a budget, a purse, a satchell, a hawking bag, a poake, a scrip'.<sup>42</sup> In the warrants for the wardrobe of Mary I, the term 'bagges' was used for what must have been pockets inserted into garments — as in the making of a loose gown of black damask with 'baggs of blacke Satten' — whereas in the warrants of Elizabeth I, the term 'bagges' generally referred to scented sweet bags.<sup>43</sup>

## THE ADOPTION AND USES OF POCKETS

In *Materializing Gender in Early Modern England*, Will Fisher argues that certain accessories and aspects of appearance in the early modern period — handkerchiefs, codpieces, beards and hair — were prostheses, integral yet detachable attachments to the body, which both shaped and compensated for a lack in the original body.<sup>44</sup> Fisher sees these features as not only outwardly marking a person's gender identity, but as actively constituting it. Pockets are not able to mould one's gender in the same way, although pockets can be seen in some images of women wearing hose and as an opening into which items could be inserted pockets did have a sexual connotation.<sup>45</sup> However, the notion of the prosthetic in general can be usefully applied to pockets to explain their increasing adoption in the long sixteenth century. Pockets were liminal and constructed temporary extensions to the natural or clothed body which supplemented its inability to store, carry and protect as many possessions as might be desired at once. Certainly, the idea of a 'prosthetic backlash', that there is a sense of deprivation when a prosthesis is removed, can be witnessed in relation to pockets.<sup>46</sup> People's dependency on pockets to hold items for them can be seen in an event from 1588, when Sir William Fitzwilliam (1526–1599) sent a letter to Sir Edward Denny (1547–1600), which was delivered when Denny was out



**Figure 7.** Women wearing tie-on pockets whilst incubating silk worms. Karel van Mallery after Jan van der Straet, *Vermis sericus*, pl. 3, c. 1595. Engraving, 20 × 27 cm. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1950, 49.95.869(2) *Metropolitan Museum of Art*.

riding and so ‘after he had lookde in it he threw it awaye’, much to Fitzwilliam’s chagrin. Denny’s explanation for his action was that he ‘thought [. . .] noe harme in it’, but he simply had on ‘a suit that had noe pockets’ and therefore could not hold onto the letter.<sup>47</sup>

Pockets allowed a person to continue to carry possessions on their body when their hands were otherwise engaged, such as in the world of work, whether that involved domestic activities or professional employment. Comparatively few images from the sixteenth century show people completing a task as opposed to merely sitting for a portrait, where their hands are often occupied with extraneous objects; however, the women wearing tie-on pockets in the pictures of Stradano and Allori are all busy ‘doing’, whether spinning, setting their hair or helping with a birth. Stradano’s ‘*Vermis sericus*’ series of prints on the production of silk also features men and women wearing both tie-on and integrated pockets as they go about their work (Figure 7).<sup>48</sup> These images and the extant jerkins from the *Mary Rose* indicate that pockets were not just restricted to the clothing of the elite. Although the more limited evidence available for the dress of the lower classes means that the commonality of pockets amongst artisans and labourers cannot be traced, it would seem that the practical functionality of pockets encouraged their adoption by non-elites. Women’s outfits appear to have

contained fewer pockets in total than men's, but was this due to the nature of their clothing, or was this a sign of their more restricted duties and therefore potentially lesser need for pockets?

However, pockets were not the only means by which people could carry objects around with them; other alternatives both preceded and continued alongside pockets. Some of these were created for purposes of containment, only they were worn externally and so contributed to the decoration of one's person and display of one's status, as with bags, purses and girdles. Other garments and accessories, such as sleeves, hatbands and muffs, could also be used as containers. A portrait of William Pope (1573–1631) by Robert Peake shows him with his gloves tied into the strings of his cloak, whilst Vecellio claimed that the married women of Piedmont carried their handkerchiefs in the bottom of their over-sleeves.<sup>49</sup> Another apparent alternative to the pocket was the codpiece.<sup>50</sup> Vecellio stated that soldiers in the time of Charles V (1500–1558) had a very large codpiece 'which they used in place of a pocket', and the *Treasury* corroborates this by noting that when men were still wearing skin-tight hose, instead of a pocket,

[...] they hadde a large and ample Cod-piece, which came vpppe with two wings, and so were fastned to eyther side with two Pointes. In this wide roome, they had Linnen bagges, tied with like Points to the inside, betweene the Shirte and Cod-piece. This serued as the receipt for Pursse, Hand-kerchers, Apples, Plummes, Peares, Orenge, and other fruits.<sup>51</sup>

The character of Panurge takes an orange out of his codpiece on one occasion in François Rabelais's (c. 1494–1553) *Pantagruel*, and a few men can be seen with items other than their genitals spilling out of their codpieces in a couple of images, implying that some men, especially labourers and soldiers, did indeed prize possessions in their codpieces.<sup>52</sup>

Although unlikely to be looted, the codpiece was not necessarily the most convenient receptacle in which to hold items, however. The *Treasury* argued of men carrying pieces of fruit in their codpieces that,

[...] did it not seem verie Inciuill, that sitting at the Table, hee should make a present of such, preserued (for som time) in so sweet a Closet, euen as now adaies, some (as mannerly) vse the like out of their Pockets? [...] Surely, in my poore opinion, the fashion of Pockets made in the Doublet Sleeue, or in the hose, is much more honest and commendable.<sup>53</sup>

For the sixteenth century saw the rise of new codes of manners and civility, as expressed in conduct manuals. Not only was there less shame in removing an item from a pocket rather than a codpiece, but pockets could also be used to hide things from view. Conduct manuals advocated the need to keep certain bodily functions, such as blowing the nose, discreet, and pockets provided an ideal space within which to squirrel away a soiled handkerchief, although clean handkerchiefs were a sign of display and can be seen emerging from at least two female pocket holes in paintings.<sup>54</sup>

Giovanni della Casa's (1503–1556) *Galateo* advised against taking items out of your pockets to fiddle with when someone else was talking to you,



**Figure 8.** Detail of Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne, *Prince Maurice and Frederick Henry at the Valkenburg Horse Fair*, 1618. Oil on panel, 54.2 × 133.5 cm. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, SK-A-676 Rijksmuseum.

but, although there was a general preoccupation with physical uprightness in concerns about civility, there do not seem to have been warnings explicitly against keeping your hands in your pockets.<sup>55</sup> A working man can be seen standing with his hands in his pockets in Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne's (1589–1662) 1618 painting *Prince Maurice and Frederick Henry at the Valkenburg Horse Fair* (Figure 8), and a number of men and women from Eastern lands, predominantly the Ottoman Empire, are depicted in late sixteenth-century costume books with their hands in their pockets, although the accompanying texts do not offer any comment on this habit.<sup>56</sup>

By keeping possessions hidden from view, pockets gave their owners a sense of privacy and protection for their belongings. Letters and other documents, the objects most needed to be kept confidential, are the items recorded as having been most commonly carried around in pockets. But pockets were not inviolable spaces, with men tending to have their pockets searched when they were captured or killed. A letter from Thomas Randolph (1525/26–1590) to Thomas Radcliffe, the Earl of Sussex (1526/27–1583), in 1570 from Edinburgh spoke of a man called Moone who 'is yet stayed to be examined agayne vpon some newe occasion of a letter founde in the pocket of his hose in Sipher after thother were delivered'.<sup>57</sup> Even placing letters in the pockets of garments then

stowed away did not stop those pockets from being ransacked: Henry Killigrew (1525–1603) wrote to Francis Walsingham (c. 1532–1590) in 1582 that he had searched Archibald Douglas (c. 1540–c. 1602) and found a packet of documents ‘in the pocquette of his hose that were in his chest’.<sup>58</sup> However, it seems that one seminary priest brought before Sir Vincent Skinner (1543–1616) in 1603 may have tried to pre-empt an examination of his pockets, as ‘vppon serch I could fynd nothing but some papers in his pockett which he had torn into very small peces’.<sup>59</sup>

Items could be lost from pockets of the owners’ own volition. One letter from 1606 advised the recipient to ‘Burne my letter I pray you Lest you Loose it out of your pockett’, whilst a letter giving news from Edinburgh in 1594 noted that the King of Scotland, James VI (1566–1625), had ‘latelye loste a letter out of his pockett which letter being found & returned to him he comaunded the fynder to keepe secrett the contents’.<sup>60</sup> But pockets could also offer protection from thieves seeking to snatch a person’s possessions. Some extant leather purses have multiple hidden compartments within them, but these would have offered little extra security if the purse as a whole was taken.<sup>61</sup> The visibility and elaborate decoration of purses worn around the waist advertised their presence and the potential wealth of their owners, while purses worn on long strings under the skirts could easily be cut, as in Bruegel’s painting of the *Misanthrope*, making pockets a potentially safer, less obvious alternative.<sup>62</sup> However, criminals soon adapted to the use of pockets, both using them as spaces within which to secure their purloined goods and developing the art of pickpocketing.<sup>63</sup> Simon Godin, a merchant jeweller from Lyons, had a parcel of jewels ‘robbed out of the pocket of his cote’ in 1550, and in 1585 a school for pickpockets was discovered in an alehouse near Billingsgate:

There was a schole howse sett vpp to Learne younge boyes to Cutt purses, there were hung vp two devises, the one was a Pockett the other was a Purse, The Pockett had in yt certen Cownters & was hynge abowte with hawkes bells, and over the toppe did hange a litle sacring bell, and he that could take owte a Cownter without any noyse, was allowed to be a publique Foyster, And he that could take a peece of sylver owt of the Purse without the noyse of any of the bells, he was adiudged a Iudiciall Nypper, nota that a Foister is a Pickpockett, and a Nypper is termed a Pickepurse, or a Cutpurse.<sup>64</sup>

Although pockets were not necessarily used primarily for the transporting of money, due to the use of credit payments, pockets did gain a metaphorical association to finances. Empty pockets could therefore be used to satirize a country’s financial situation. Sir William Lovelace (1561–1629) wrote to Dudley Carleton (1574–1632), the English ambassador to the Netherlands, in 1617 of a print from the Low Countries ‘which was his Majestie in his dublet & hose with both his pocketts drawne out hanginge Loose’, and another letter to Carleton a couple of years later also mentioned a supposed print of James I and VI, ‘with his pockets hanginge owte empty of money’.<sup>65</sup>

A range of items were held in early modern pockets, including letters, books, keys, combs, rosaries, money and handkerchiefs. One letter from Stephen



**Figure 9.** John Souch, *Lady Anne Lawley*, c. 1625. Oil on canvas, 197 × 160 cm. London: Weiss Gallery Courtesy of the Weiss Gallery, London.

Gardiner (c. 1495–1555) to William Paget (1505/06–1563) in 1546 wrote of how he had heard of a German man who was supposed to be delivering letters to the French king, but pulled a piece of cheese, a piece of bacon and a lump of bread out of his pocket before finally drawing out the requisite letters.<sup>66</sup> Pockets testify to the impact of increasing consumption in the Renaissance; people were buying more goods and had more things which were meaningful to them, which they wanted to keep safe, private and to carry around with them. But not every item was small enough to be enclosed in a pocket. This can be seen in a portrait by John Souch (c. 1594–1645) of Lady Anne Lawley, where the size and stiffness of the gauntlets of her gloves and her fan would have been unlikely to have fitted into a pocket, whereas the small book in her hand and the watch dangling from her waist could have been housed in a pocket (Figure 9). Did the use of pockets encourage the production of portable, personal objects or vice versa? Certainly, some objects were created with reduced dimensions so that they could easily be carried on one's person, such as books. Fynes Moryson (1565/66–1630) advised the traveller to always carry 'some good Booke in his pocket'; for one Scotsman travelling in Ireland in 1602, that apparently meant a Latin primer.<sup>67</sup>

The proximity of a pocket to the body not only implies a potential emotional attachment to its contents, but references to what people stored in their pockets can also provide a sense of what they believed to be important or necessary

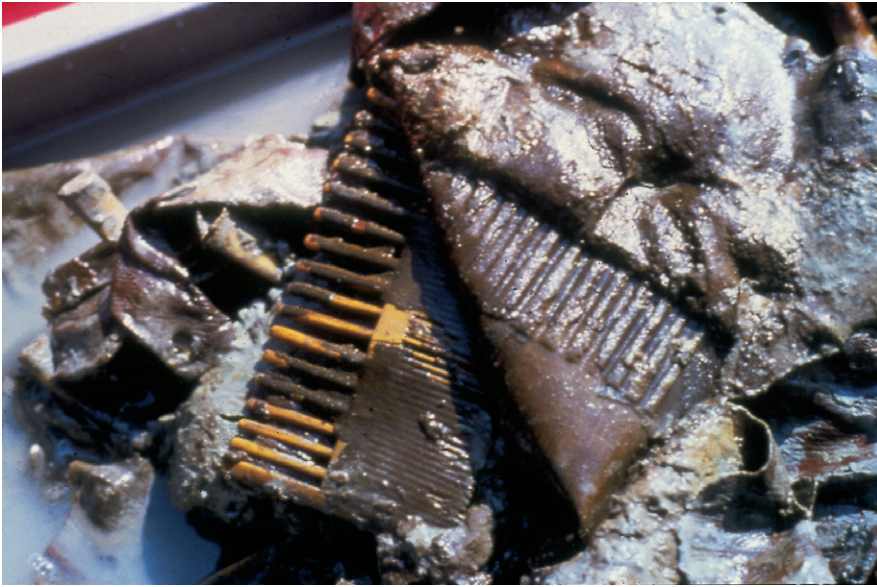


**Figure 10.** A comb discovered inside a leather jerkin from the *Mary Rose* © The Mary Rose Trust.

to carry on their person at that time. This can be seen in particular in relation to the archaeological remains found on the *Mary Rose*. Although many objects were moved by the sea or have been lost, the separation between items which were stored away in chests and those which were found next to bodies indicates differing priorities for objects — what was wanted on the body or close at hand during the working day? Books, dice and money had been stowed away in chests, whereas rosaries and paternosters were found on bodies. Some items were located both in chests and on people's persons, such as knives, combs and pocket sundials, with one comb being found in the lining of a jerkin in what is thought to have been a pocket, showing a sense of individual choice and agency (Figure 10).<sup>68</sup>

A limited number of sources do give some indications of the objects which were placed in sixteenth-century pockets, but there is an expediency and individuality inherent in pockets; they simply provide a space, and it is then up to the personal needs, requirements and wishes of the individual as to how they use their pockets and what they place in them.<sup>69</sup> For just as the items which we carry around in our pockets today and our reasons for doing so are eclectic, personal and subject to the circumstances of that particular moment, there is no reason to assume that it was any different for early modern men and women. Rather than being a site for conspicuous consumption and the display of one's identity through clothing, pockets were an area in which clothing could be truly individualistic and personal, not in relation to any public self-fashioning, but to private needs and desires, showing how individuality could be expressed in

the way clothing was used, not just its appearance. Although there were some decorative aspects to men's pockets and to women's tie-on pockets, pockets were a primarily functional part of dress which the wearer could use — or not — as their own particular situation dictated. Thus it is not the case that, as some have argued, it is only in the modern era that dress can be interpreted as expressing individual choices and wishes.<sup>70</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Piecing together fragments of information from a wide variety of sources, including objects, texts and images, reveals that pockets did not only come into existence in the late seventeenth century, as has often been previously assumed. Instead, this article has shown that pockets can be found in the garments of both men and women, paupers and princes, in a range of forms from at least the end of the fifteenth century. Supplementing and sometimes preferable to other ways of carrying items on the body, pockets affected people's capacity to store and transport goods on their person as they went about their daily business, whatever that might have been, demonstrating how what people wear can have an effect on their ability to physically and materially negotiate the world around them. As more sources for the study of pockets come to light, it may be possible to discern further any regional, gender and occupational differences that may have existed in the prevalence, form and use of pockets, thereby deepening our understanding of the connections between dress and people's work and activities. Though we tend to think of a person's identity being expressed through the more external and visible aspects of dress, pockets demonstrated their wearer's individuality through their contents and the very matter of their inclusion in garments, as they allowed people a space in their clothing which was truly their own to use at will. Thus they show that early modern dress could be about practicality and utility, not just outward show. While this article has been an introduction to the topic of pockets in the long sixteenth century, as more researchers begin to spot the references to pockets in their own sources and digital resources make ever-increasing numbers of documents available, our knowledge of the construction and uses of early modern pockets will continue to develop. Pockets may be small and often hidden, but they are an aspect of dress well worth considering and historicizing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the feedback received on earlier incarnations of this work from Angela McShane, Elizabeth Currie and the audience at the 84th Anglo-American Conference of Historians at the Institute of Historical Research where I presented a paper on this research. I also want to thank Susan North and Alice Dolan for their comments on a draft of this article, as well as the editors and reviewers of *Costume*. The research for this article was supported by the AHRC.

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- catalogue for the Museo del Traje in Madrid suggests they have three objects that resemble early tie-on pockets (inv. nos CE000790, CE000792, CE001151). Museo del Traje, 'Bolso (faltriquera)', < <http://museodeltraje.mcu.es/index.jsp?id=48&ruta=4,17,48&referencia=MT00790> > [accessed 10 August 2016]; Burman, 'A Linnen Pockett', pp. 157–58; Van der Krol, 'Ty'ed', p. 5.
6. For example, the description of Eleonora di Toledo's burial dress in the accounts of the Medici Guardaroba does not mention a pocket, although the gown is thought to have contained one. Landini and Niccoli, *Moda*, p. 75.
  7. For example: *State Papers Online*, < <http://gale.cengage.co.uk/state-papers-online-15091714.aspx> >, which contains the calendars of the State Papers and other documents, as well as digital copies of some actual manuscripts; *The Cecil Papers*, < <http://cecilpapers.chadwyck.co.uk> >, which contains digitized and transcribed versions of the manuscripts housed at Hatfield House; *Historical Texts*, < <http://historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk/> >, which contains digital copies of books and other early modern printed texts; *Literature Online*, < <http://literature.proquest.com> >, which enables the text of plays and other literary texts to be searched; *British History Online*, < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/> >, which contains online versions of the calendars of State Papers and other materials.
  8. Van der Krol, 'Ty'ed', pp. 14–16; Foster, *Bags*, p. 33; Wilcox, *Bags*, p. 49. Burman has argued that tie-on pockets were not abandoned at this date and continued to be used into the nineteenth century. Burman, 'Pocketing', pp. 450–52; Burman and White, 'Fanny's Pockets', pp. 37–39.
  9. 'tanto bene affettate, che mostrauano quasi tutti i muscoli loro, come se fossero stati ignudi'. Cesare Vecellio, *De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diuerse parti del mondo* (Venice, 1590), p. 69v. The English translations of Vecellio used throughout this article are from Cesare Vecellio, *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas: Cesare Vecellio's Habiti antichi et moderni*, trans. by Margaret F. Rosenthal and Ann Rosalind Jones (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), p. 122.
  10. *The Treasurie of Avncient and Moderne Times* (London, 1615), p. 371.
  11. 'io ritroui in quei tempi non essersi vsate le code molto lunghe, ma questa s'vsaua di portar alzata, & attaccata alla cintura, ouero a i fori delle tasche, che cosi cominciarono ad vsarle da principio, & durò questa vsanza per assai tempo'. Vecellio, *De gli habiti*, p. 92v; Vecellio, *Clothing*, p. 144.
  12. *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. by Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), II, pp. 189, 281–82; Boucher, *A History*, p. 240.
  13. Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion 3: The Cut and Construction of Clothes for Men and Women c.1560–1620* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 54, 75–76, 86–87, 89, 91. The fact that pockets were not always placed along the side seam of hose can also be seen in Alessandro Fabri, *Diversarum nationem ornatus* (Padua, 1593), book 2, pl. 22.
  14. British Library, Egerton MS 2806, fol. 83v.
  15. Ibid., fols 84–84v.
  16. Roberta Orsi Landini, *Moda a Firenze 1540–1580: Lo stile di Cosimo I de' Medici* (Florence: M. Pagliai, 2011), p. 80.
  17. Arnold, *Patterns*, pp. 58–59.
  18. Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Portrait of a Man and Boy (Count Alborghetti and Son)*, c. 1545–1550, oil on canvas, 98.1 × 83.5 cm, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 95.1371. A similarly bound pocket hole can be seen in Follower of Frans Pourbus the Younger, *Portrait of Othon d'Arckel aged 10*, oil on panel, 86.4 × 66.2 cm, illustrated in Sotheby's Amsterdam, Old Master Paintings, 15 November 2005, lot 107.
  19. It is hard to tell from paintings whether such pockets were simply a decorative feature or actually masked a pocket hole. Certainly, a catalogue entry for Christian II's hose describes them as containing false pockets. *The Noble Art of the Sword: Fashion and Fencing in Renaissance Europe*, ed. by Tobias Capwell (London: Wallace Collection, 2012), p. 90; Parade Costume of Christian II, Elector of Saxony, c. 1600–1609, Rüstammer, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, i.7. For examples of paintings, see: Flemish School, *An Unknown Family Group*, c. 1605–1610, oil on canvas, illustrated in *Tudor and Stuart*

- Portraits 1530–1660* (London: Weiss Gallery, 1995); English School, *Florence Poulett, daughter of John, 1st Lord Poulett, and her husband Thomas Smyth of Long Ashton, Somerset, c. 1630*, oil on canvas, 197 × 160 cm, illustrated in *Icons of Splendour: Early Portraiture 1530–1700* (London: Weiss Gallery, 2004), no. 18.
20. See also Georg Günther Kraill von Bemeberg, *Portrait of Johan Nieroth*, 1623, tempera on canvas, Skoklosters slott, 2257; Georg Günther Kraill von Bemeberg, *Portrait of Herman Cappel*, 1623, tempera on canvas, Skoklosters slott, 2255; Georg Günther Kraill von Bemeberg, *Portrait of Jörgen Pålman*, 1623, tempera on canvas, Skoklosters slott, 2254; August Erich, *Moritz von Hessen-Kassel with his Family*, 1618–1628, oil on canvas, 230.5 × 422 cm, Staatliche Museen Kassel, GK 1165. The increasing length of such buttoned details implies they were decorative features more than functioning pockets, for example British School, *Henry Carey, 1st Viscount Falkland, c. 1625*, oil on canvas, 192 × 145 cm, Hardwick Hall, National Trust, 1129172.
  21. C. Willet Cunningham and Phillis Cunningham, *Handbook of English Costume in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 119; Circle of Marcus Gheeraerts II, *A Courtier and his Lady, c. 1590–1595*, oil on panel, 90 × 75 cm, illustrated in *Tudor and Stuart Portraits*, no. 11; British School, *Sir James Lancaster*, 1596, oil on panel, 115.5 × 90.1 cm, National Maritime Museum, BHC2828.
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  27. *Before the Mast: Life and Death Aboard the Mary Rose*, ed. by Julie Gardiner (Portsmouth: Mary Rose Trust, 2004), pp. 39–40.
  28. Girolamo Mazzola Bedoli, *Anna Eleonora Sanvitali*, 1562, Galleria Nazionale di Parma.
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  30. Egerton MS 2806, fols 17v, 64v.
  31. *Ibid.*, fol. 39v.
  32. *Ibid.*, fols 79, 151.
  33. *Ibid.*, fol. 151v. There are several other instances of pockets being made of the same fabric as borders in Egerton MS 2806. However, because the outer lining fabric is not always mentioned in the warrants of the Great Wardrobe, it is hard to tell if the fabric used for pockets was the same as that used to line the garment. Certainly, in one instance a gown of black velvet was recorded as being lined with black saracenit whilst having pockets made of taffeta. Egerton MS 2806, fol. 95v.
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54. Hans Eworth, *Joan Thornbury*, 1566, location unknown, illustrated in Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe*, p. 188; Leandro Bassano, *Portrait of a Widow at her Devotions*, c. 1590–1600, private collection, illustrated in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis (London: V&A Publications, 2006), p. 201; Will Fisher, ‘Handkerchiefs and Early Modern Ideologies of Gender’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 28 (2000), 199–207; Bella Mirabella, ‘Embellishing Herself with a Cloth: The Contradictory Life of the Handkerchief’, in *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, ed. by Bella Mirabella (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2011), pp. 59–82; Erasmus, ‘On Good Manners for Boys’, trans. by Brian McGregor, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. by J. K. Sowards (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), xxv, 269–89 (pp. 274–75); *Galateo of Maister Iohn Della Casa*, trans. by Robert Peterson (London, 1576), pp. 5–8.
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  61. Purses, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, T 4099, T 4100, T 4101, T 5623.
  62. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Misanthrope*, 1568, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples; Foster, *Bags*, p. 12; Van der Krol, 'Ty'ed', p. 77.
  63. Burman, 'A Linnen Pockett', p. 160; Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 186–89. A man can be seen having his pocket picked in Bartolomeo Manfredi, *Fortune Teller*, c. 1616–1617, oil on canvas, 122.2 × 154 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts, 79.30.
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