

# Consummate Clothing



\*Buy from sustainable/ethical retailers

Towards a More Sustainable and Ethical  
Wardrobe



By Nev Sweeney et al

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## 1.0 Introduction

The clothing we wear can have a negative environmental impact before we buy it, while we own it and after we dispose of it.

'Fast Fashion' results in clothing that is made for the absolute lowest price possible ensuring the clothing is made in unethical sweat shops which exploit workers, that huge amounts of resources are consumed to make them and ending in large amounts of unsold clothing that must be disposed of by burning or in land fill.

The raw materials to make and dye the cloth have their own negative consequences, whether it is consuming fossil fuels to make synthetic fabrics or consuming water, taking up agricultural land and requiring large amounts of fertilisers and pesticides for 'natural' fibres like cotton. The dyes used to colour the cloth are also toxic and once their job is done, the excess finds its way into local (usually third world) waterways.

Unfortunately, the damage does not stop once we have bought a garment. Over-washing, with harsh detergents in washing machines which are rough on the clothes results in microplastics/microfibers being released into the environment along with the detergents we use to clean our clothes. These practices also result in reduced clothing life, so we need to buy more clothes sooner. Of course, when clothing does reach the end of its life, it is highly likely that it will end up in landfill, which generates its own set of environmental problems.

Even if the clothing is donated to charity, the charities that receive the clothing are now overflowing with poorly made, cheap clothing, often donated unwashed and in poor condition. This means that all of this donated clothing except the very best finds its way overseas where it supplants the local textile traditions or winds up in landfill or incinerated where it pollutes the air and water.

OK, so we know that there is a problem, but what do we do about it? It seems reasonable to use our purchasing power and behaviour to reduce our environmental impact as much as we can but that presumes we know where to start. That is what this eBook is about, giving you some places to start and information to think about while you plan a way forward to a more sustainable and ethical future. At least as far as your clothing is concerned!

## 2.0 Conducting a Sustainable Household Clothing Audit

As mentioned above, now that we know there is a problem, but what do we do about it? It seems reasonable to use our purchasing power and behaviour to reduce our environmental impact as much as we can but that presumes we know where to start. The premise of this section of the eBook and the associated [Sustainable Household Clothing Audit Form](#) which is available as Appendix 1 of this eBook. It gives us a way to review how sustainable our practices are at the moment regarding the clothing we buy, wear and dispose of, then helps us work through what we need to do to improve.

You may want to work through the [Sustainable Lifestyle Assessment Matrix 2021](#) first to understand the bigger picture of sustainable living or if you just want to focus on clothing alone (and it is a great place to start, everyone wears clothing of some description, unless you want to get arrested!) give the clothing audit a go. It can be as simple or formal as you like, filling the form out as you go or just running through things in your head and working out where you go from there. I recommend the more formal method so you have a record of where you are starting from which you can come back to later, re-do and get a feeling of how far you have come.

I also suggest that you share this with your family, or the people you are living with, so improvement can be on a united front.

### Instructions

Go through all of the questions one section at a time and mark the number most appropriate for your answer from “always” = 3 down to “never” = 0 by circling, crossing out or whatever. Some questions may appear to support a more yes/no answer so to reflect this it would be best to mark 3 for yes and 0 for no. If the question is not applicable to your situation, strike it out and when counting up the maximum possible number to work out score do not add 3 for that question.

To calculate your score add up all of the potential answers and multiply by 3 to give the maximum possible score, and then add up all of the scores from your answers. Divide your answer score number by the maximum possible score and multiply by 100, this will give you your sustainable clothing score as a percentage. The number itself does not mean much, but acts as a base upon which to improve.

### 3.0 Buyerarchy of sustainable/ethical clothing



The trail towards sustainable and ethical clothing begins with how and where we buy (or don't buy) our clothes to start with. Following is the buyerarchy (or buying hierarchy) of sourcing clothing that is sustainable and ethical. At the top, is the most desirable method of clothes sourcing all the way down to the bottom, while still acceptable, is the least favourite method.

Please note that the buying of cheap and nasty 'fast fashion' clothing, available from mass-market retailers (you know who you are!) does not appear anywhere on the buyerarchy and is definitely not recommended. Items of fast fashion are poor in quality, produced in third world sweat shops. They are a waste of resources, and your money!

#### 1. Shop in your wardrobe

The idea behind this is to make use of what you already have, rather than going out to buy new stuff. Look through your closets, drawers and clothes rack to see what you



might have hidden that you haven't worn in a while. Take a fresh look at what you have, save yourself some money and help save the planet.

## **2. Upcycle your old clothes**

This part of the buyerarchy does require a bit of kit and a bit of skill, but old clothes can become new again by using some age-old ideas to freshen them up. Sewing on applique, either home made or bought in for the purpose can add extra flair. Mending your clothes boro-style using layered fabric patches works too, and embroidery can add a touch of style to any garment. It is just a case of looking at what you have then using your creativity to freshen up that old pair of jeans!

## **3. Swap your unused/unloved clothes**

Just because they are no longer a garment you love to wear doesn't mean they can't be a go-to piece of clothing for someone else. Swapping your clothes can be as simple as getting together with friends or family and checking out the contents of each other's wardrobes. If you are looking for broader swapping opportunities you could attend a clothing swap event put on at a sustainability hub, community hall or library, organised by the local council, permaculture or environmental group. Can't find a clothes swap event near you? Consider putting one together yourself, it is lots of fun, and you get new clothes!

## **4. Buy second hand on the web/op shops**

Back in the day if you wanted second hand clothing, op shops (Opportunity shops run by charities) were the way to go, but these days there are other options available. There are websites offering good quality second hand clothes like Swap Up - <https://swapup.com.au/> , Lulu's Fashion Flair - <https://lulusfashionflair.com.au/> ) or Designer Wardrobe <https://designerwardrobe.com.au/>. I am sure there are lots more, these are just the first three that came up on a quick search. To be fair, fellas, these websites do seem to be aimed at the ladies. Of course, op shops are still around they

are run, for example, by the Salvation Army (the Sallies or Salvos), St Vincent de Paul (Vinnies) or Anglicare with outlets in many suburbs. These days there are also newer privately run second hand clothing shops selling vintage and retro styles like Di Nuovo, Irreplaceable Store and Reunion, all clustered around inner Sydney. Do a search for second hand clothing shops in your area, you will be surprised at what comes up.

## **5. Rent (there's an app for that!)**

When I was a young lad, the call for rented clothing was mainly for the 6<sup>th</sup> form formal or when you got married, at least for guys like me. These days there are all sorts of opportunities, again mainly for the ladies, to rent high end glamour clothing for a fixed period (they seem to be 4 day or 8 day hires), then returned once the need is over or you get tired of it. I found this website most helpful <https://www.brittslist.com.au/article/online-places-rent-borrow-clothes-australia/> or at least I would have if I was female and looking to rent an ensemble. That is not all however, you can rent rather than buy clothing that you will only use for a short time. These include baby clothes (eg Curious Kind <https://www.curiouskind.com.au/>), and Pregnancy dresses (eg Mama Rentals - <https://mamarentals.com.au/collections/maternity-dress-hire-sydney>.)

## **6. Make your own**

While I think this is a great idea, this one is a bit fraught! You need to get hold of the supplies like fabric and thread, gear like a sewing machine (not that hand sewing is impossible, but it takes time) and have the knowledge and skill to use both. I am still amazed by the tales from an earlier generation, like my mother-in-law who made my wife and her sisters clothing until they were in their teens. If you have the gear and the supplies at least there is YouTube to help you out with learning how to sew and maybe you still have friends or relatives that can clue you in enough to get started.

## **7. Buy from sustainable/ethical clothes retailers**

If you do have to buy new clothes, and sometimes it is unavoidable, then please leave the cheap and nasty 'Fast Fashion' garments alone. Spend a bit more and get better quality that lasts longer and does not have modern day slavery and/or environmental degradation in their supply chain. To identify which brands are worth supporting I have found the 'Good on You' website to be of great help and they have a list of the most ethical and sustainable brands in Aus and NZ so the work has been done for you -

<https://goodonyou.eco/most-ethical-and-sustainable-clothing-brands-from-au-and-nz/>

They also have an app for the phone that provides lots of information on sustainable clothing. Their home page is - <https://goodonyou.eco/> . There is also the hard copy book 'The Better World Shopping Guide' that rates a whole stack of products and retailers from Star performers and A list, all the way down to F or X at the very bottom. The latest edition is number seven and clothing appears on pages 78 and 79.

Buying online – While this is not a bad practice in and of itself, buying clothing online, especially from an El cheapo fast fashion supplier means you do not get to check the quality and fit of the garment before you buy. This can result in disappointment for you when it arrives, which you then express by returning the clothing for a refund. It is a sad fact that in a lot of these cases the clothing, even if it has never been worn, is sent straight to landfill or incineration rather than being returned to stock, because that is the cheaper way for the supplier. Food for thought.

It is worth taking the time to work out where it is best to shop on the buyerachy for you, but that may vary from time to time and under different circumstances. However, if you can stay on the buyerachy, you'll be striking a blow for a more sustainable, more equitable world.

## 4.0 Managing Your Clothing

### 4.1 Angie's Capsule Wardrobe

About 6 months to a year ago (Early 2022) I decided I wanted to do a capsule wardrobe. It's not the first time I've wanted to do this but the previous time I did it, I bought a whole bunch of cheap clothes that didn't last very long and this time I wanted to do it better.



So I started looking up capsule wardrobe. The definition seemed to be a few clothes that all go together well. That means, all the same colours, neutral tones and not too many overlapping types of clothing. Since there will be fewer clothes to wear, I would need better quality stuff.

What I wanted and looked everywhere for was a formula. There were a few out there but mostly they seemed so boring and not really fitting to what I needed. I searched everywhere, and that's when it hit me. There wasn't a formula. Mainly because it's so unique. I was someone working from home, but needed nice tops as I show off my top half on camera. I needed comfy clothes otherwise I would not wear them. I didn't go outside much, I didn't need a uniform or much nice stuff. I don't go to the snow. So I found a formula for building the formula.



The process I followed was:

1. Look at all the different styles out there and choose one. I love 1950s dress and also comfy clothes. Sometimes things like overalls fit with that style too.

2. Look at all the clothes that i currently have and cull anything that didn't fit me anymore or didn't fit with my style or with my need.

3. Make a list of what I was missing to fit my need.

4. Buy clothes that were quality that fit my style and need.



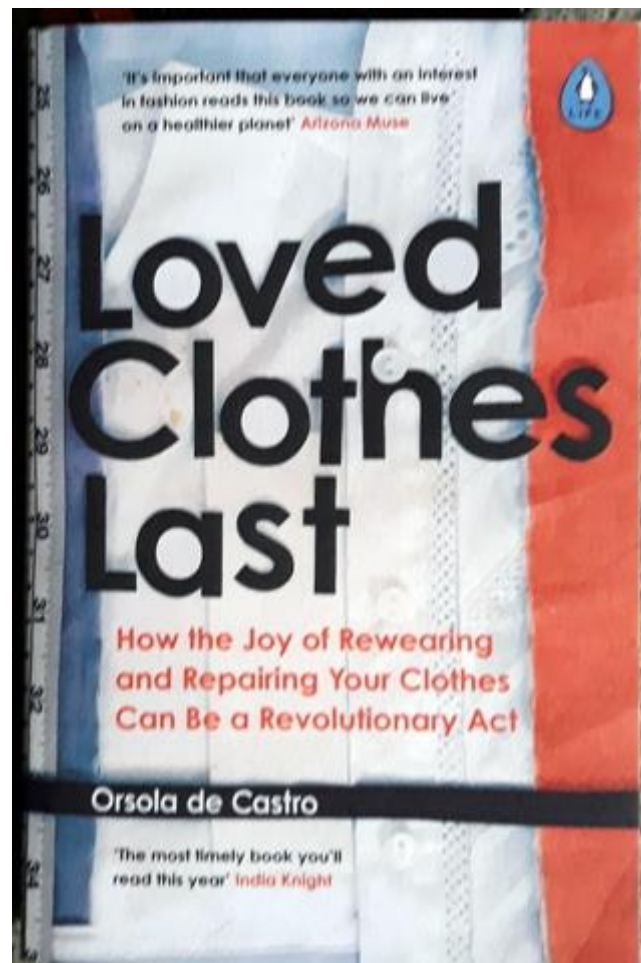
Sometimes things do cost a bit, but this is slow fashion, and they need to be quality to last a while. I decided to do one for summer and one for winter and just put each one away as needed, though the lines have blurred a little as this summer has been colder for so long and the weather is intermittent so that's not worked as well.

It is still a work in progress. I still have things I need. The other thing I have decided to make things as I can sew well. I should be able to make things that are cheaper but still good quality as I can control the quality.



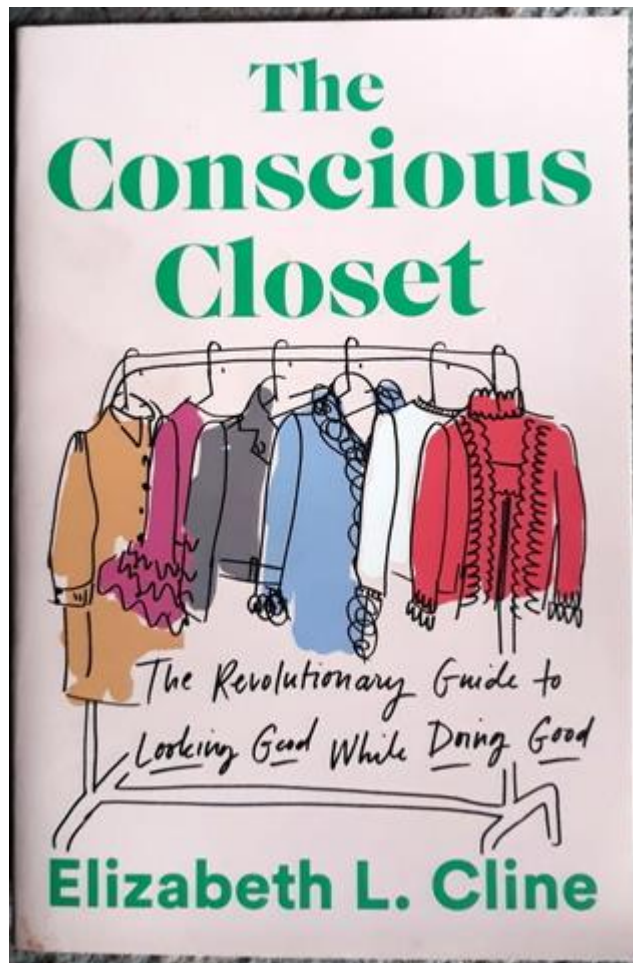
## 4.2 The Old Man and the Capsule Wardrobe

Some years ago after reading a couple of books (check out these) on clothing and the many and varied environmental impacts of such, I became interested in a number of strategies to deal with these impacts, including the idea of a capsule wardrobe. My elder daughter's article on her capsule wardrobe is available above.



Recently I figured it was time to put my money where my mouth is and see about developing my own capsule wardrobe, but first I thought getting terms right and looking at the whys and wherefores of capsule wardrobes would be educative. At least for me!





### What is a Capsule Wardrobe?

**Wikipedia's** definition is – “A capsule wardrobe is a small collection of clothes that can be put together in different ways and includes everything one would normally need to wear.”

**Sustainably Chic Blog** – “A capsule wardrobe is a limited selection of interchangeable clothing pieces that complement each other. These are often classic pieces that do not go out of style and are primarily composed of neutral colors. A capsule wardrobe allows you to create a variety of different outfits with a small selection of clothes.”

**Modern Minimalism.com** – “A capsule wardrobe is simply a collection of clothing composed of thoughtfully curated, easily interchangeable items designed to maximize the number of outfits that you can create. Essentially, a capsule wardrobe allows you to create a variety of different looks with a small selection of clothes.”

So the idea is that you have a lower number, of better quality clothes, that can be combined into a wide range of outfits that fit your style.

The thing is, this concept is designed more for women rather than some old bloke like me, and although there have been articles on the capsule wardrobe written for men, the vast majority are written for women. Personally, I find this to be a very useful concept for both sexes.

### **Why does it have environmental benefits?**

I love the idea of a capsule wardrobe because it runs directly counter to the paradigm the world fashion industry: 'Fast Fashion'. If you haven't come across the concept before, the intention of fast fashion is for the industry to produce ever greater amounts of cheaper (read 'shoddier') clothing. This 'cheap' clothing is made in countries where the workers are not paid a living wage and work in hideous conditions. We as consumers then buy, wear a couple of times then discard to landfill, the cheap clothing, thus making more and more money for the fashion industry, winner! (for them!).

The majority of the fashion industry has a crap environmental and safety record anyway, but now more and more non-renewable resources are being consumed and landfills around the world are being choked by all these shoddy clothes from rich countries. There are a whole stack of environmental and social justice issues associated with fast fashion, and if you think I am overstating the problem, google it, there is a lot of stuff out there.

Conversely, if we put together a small selection of clothes that are of good quality, that are comfortable to wear and go well together as a capsule wardrobe, this directly short circuits the desires of the fashion industry. If enough of us do it (even grotty old gronks like me!) this sends a direct message to the people in charge that their paradigm no longer works!

## Are there other benefits?

Indeed! Other benefits of the capsule wardrobe are –



*An empty drawer is its own reward!*

- Financial advantage – Obviously, not continually discarding old clothes and buying new ones will save a heap of money, regardless of how cheap the clothes are!
- Space, time and stress advantage – you won't have to find a place to put all of those new clothes you keep buying and time to go buying them. (Because you won't be buying them!). There is also less stress when packing to go on holiday.
- Stress advantage – less clutter = less stress
- Decision fatigue (analysis paralysis) advantage – A capsule wardrobe makes it easier to work out what to wear and what goes with what because you have set it up so that it all goes together. (Or so I've been told. This has never been a problem for me, I just wear stuff!)

## How to do it

Supposing you have read what I wrote in my previous article and you have decided you want to set up a capsule wardrobe, here is how I did it. The generic process suggested by those which I have read can be broken down into the following steps -

1. Consider your personal style

2. Conduct a clothing audit/edit/review
3. Dispose of the stuff you are not going to keep
4. Maintain your capsule wardrobe

## **The steps**

### **Step one – consider your personal style**

This was perhaps the quickest and easiest part of the process for me: I don't have a 'personal style'. If I were to call what passes as personal style for a mature gentleman such as myself it would perhaps be 'shabby chic' or more correctly, just 'shabby'! I wear stuff. If we are going out somewhere and I want to confirm what I am wearing I will ask Linda. Perhaps the only thing I do is to avoid track pants when attending a more formal occasion, but that is pretty much it!

For you, you might want to look a bit more deeply and decide the sorts of clothes you like to wear and feel comfortable in, then decide how that will work for you in the larger context of a the complete capsule wardrobe. But don't ask me, I have no idea!

### **Step two – edit/audit/review your current wardrobe**

This one has a number of sub-steps –

- Work out approximate numbers in each of your clothing categories,
- Pull out your clothes and arrange in these categories,
- Review and edit (audit?) each category into keep and non-keep,
- Review your choices

## **Sub steps**

### Working out the numbers

This is a very personal thing and will depend on your lifestyle and ideas around clothing. Being a retired old gronk, most of my numbers were worked out around the days in the week and how long I was likely to wear a particular set of clothes. Generally we wash our clothes more often than we need to, but more detail on that is available here. I have seen a number of Capsule Wardrobe lists on the 'net, everyone has their own version to suit themselves and this is mine. The categories and ideal number to go in each category are as follows –

Item	Ideal
Polo shirts	8
Dress shirts	5
Formal Jacket	1
Flannelette shirts	5
Dressing gown	1
Shorts	5
Track pants	2
Jeans	6
Cargo pants	2
Formal black trousers	2
Underpants	8
Socks (pairs)	12
Ties	4
Thermal undershirts	1
Jackets	4
Jumpers	4
Total	77

### Pull out and arrange

There are a couple of ways of doing this, one is to pull out absolutely everything, dump it on the bed (or some other place big enough to take it) and sort through it as a job lot all at once, or do it piecemeal, a draw, box or closet at a time over a number of days. I chose the former, Linda chose the latter.



So that is what I did! I went through all my drawers, stuff under the bed and my wardrobe, dividing them up into piles based on the categories in the above list. With the great mound of clothing now on the bed I could begin the process of editing my wardrobe.

Review and edit (audit?) each category into keep and non-keep

So this meant that I had to work my way through each pile and create three new piles, the piles being – Keep, donate, discard. More detail on the non-keep piles later. Keeping notes on the number of pieces of clothing, I found out I had this many!

Item	Current	Ideal
Polo shirts	21	8
Dress shirts	15	5
Formal Jacket	1	1
Flannelette shirts	9	5
Dressing gown	2	1
Undershorts	3	0
Shorts	7	5
Track pants	2	2
Jeans	12	6
Cargo pants	2	2
Formal black trousers	3	2
Underpants	15	8
Socks (pairs)	29	12
Ties	14	4
Thermal undershirts	5	1
Jackets	6	4
Jumpers	9	4
Totals	174	77

I sorted through each category, starting with the most numerous first, and then looked at each garment to decide which pile it would go on. I then ran straight into a problem I did not expect – I had an emotional attachment for some of my clothes! Some of my clothes I associated with a time, an event, a workplace, an activity or a person.

Regardless of the fact that I had not looked at a particular piece of clothing in ten years, let alone worn it, I was loath to let it go!

In the end I had to ask myself (seriously) whether I would wear it or not, and if the answer was 'no' it had to go, regardless of my attachment to it! Of course there were other reasons for disposal, some were in too poor a condition, and most were not repairable, some looked OK but were so old that the fabric was so thin as to be almost see through, and others, I just didn't wear any more. Some of the flannelette shirts were very old and nowhere near as warm as the newer ones I had bought. In the end I was able to whittle down my clothing piles to the point where I could discard almost 100 clothing pieces that were no longer needed.



*The donate pile*

### Review Your Choices

This is the dangerous part! It is really easy to be checking through the pile of discards and back track on your disposals, returning them to the 'keep' pile. Stay strong!

Remember why you put it in the discard pile in the first place. If you do really think it was a mistake, and there are valid reasons to keep it, return it to the 'keep' pile – but don't get carried away!

### **Step 3 - Disposing of the non-keep stuff**

So I could now move on to the disposal part of my capsule wardrobe activity. This was not as simple a choice as it was in years gone past, when we would bag everything up and take it to the Sallies, or Vinnies or whatever, and they would make use of it. If it was not good enough to wear it would be turned into rags and sold back to industry.



One of my first jobs was in the laboratory of a paint manufacturer and we always had a few bags of rags around for clean-up. But the world has moved on!



Due to our friend, fast fashion, the charities are now overflowing with poorly made, cheap clothing, often donated unwashed and in poor condition. This meant that many tonnes of this donated clothing found its way overseas where they supplanted the local textile traditions and/or to landfill. If you are interested it is worth looking this article called 'Dead White Man's Clothes' [Dead white man's clothes: How fast fashion is turning parts of Ghana into toxic landfill - ABC News](#) and the associated documentary by the ABC's Foreign Correspondent [The Environmental Disaster that is Fuelled by Used Clothes and Fast Fashion | Foreign Correspondent](#)

So it seemed that there are a number of ways to divest myself of the unwanted clothing. If it was in good nick I could sell it, give it away or donate it, if it was not in good nick it could be upcycled, recycled or dumped. Of these options my two 'Go-to's' were to donate the good stuff and to recycle the not-so-good-stuff although we would hold back some of the not-so-good-stuff for upcycling. Landfill, for me, was not an option.



*'Donation' pile*

We have a large Salvation Army centre near us so all of our clothing that was of such a quality and condition that we would be prepared to give to a friend, went to the sallies. Ok, in terms of recycling, that presupposes one knows where to recycle ones clothes. I did some research and there are a number of options, but most will cost you. I was willing to pay (within reason!).

The first option I investigated was Upparel, their process is –

- You buy a label from them starting at \$35, depending on what you want to recycle,
- Get yourself a box and then place up to 10kg of textiles to be recycled in the box, then attach the label to the box. For every 10kg box, you buy a separate label.
- Once the box(es) have been filled and labelled, contact Upparel to arrange a pick up or take the box(es) to the post office.

- More details are available from their website [UPPAREL Clothing Collection Pick Up Australia & New Zealand](#)

I had previously sent off a bag of old socks in poor condition for recycling to them and was happy with the result.



*'Recycle' pile*

The second option, which wound up being the one I took, was with a local textile recycling company which I found through the Planet Ark website ([Planet Ark - Planet Ark Recycling Near You](#)). They have the imaginative name of Textile Recyclers Australia Pty Ltd. They are less than 20 minutes from our place so I elected to bag up our clothing we wanted to recycle, then drop it off (calling them first to arrange a time). The bag weighed 9kg and they accepted it for the cost of about \$2.60 per kilo. Their entry on the planet ark website is accessible here - [Textile Recyclers Australia Pty Ltd](#)



Just recently I have become aware of a free service operated through our local(Penrith) council called 'RecycleSmart' that allows people who sign up to recycle two 35 litre plastic bags of difficult to recycle materials per month. This includes soft plastics and particularly in our case, textiles. I would suggest that if you want to recycle some textiles that it would be worth contacting your council and asking if they are working with RecycleSmart and offer this service. I believe that they are working with some other councils as well as Penrith. If they are not, ask them why not. Hopefully if enough people are asking the question of their local councils, this service will be able to spread to areas where it is currently not available. The Penrith Council link is here - [Recycle Smart - Penrith City Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/recycle-smart)

There are options for getting rid of clothes you no longer want or need, but it is no longer a case of 'one size fits all' and for the system to work the way it is meant to, we need to do our part as well, and help out those wonderful charities and NGOs that help us to manager our wardrobe.

## 5.0 To Wash or Not to Wash?

### 5.1 Is that the Question

I can hear the comments now, “Do you mean we shouldn’t wash our clothes now?” That is not the question, the question is: do we wash our clothes too much? Nobody wants to be thought of as ‘dirty’ and so of course we all fill up our washing machines on a regular basis. How often we should wear clothes before washing will vary, depending on the type of fabric, type of clothing and what it was used for, but quite often they will not need to be washed after every wear.

Why is that important, you may ask? For a number of reasons –

- Washing synthetic clothing causes them to shed microfibers or microplastics that are very difficult to remove once they get into the environment. It has been estimated that at 35%, textiles are the greatest single contributor to microplastic pollution in the oceans, resulting in 22 million tons of microfibers entering the ocean every year.
- Washing clothes in washing machines with harsh chemical detergents will reduce their life, meaning they will need to be replaced sooner, using more resources.
- Australia is a drought country and somewhere around 13% of our household water supply is consumed in the laundry. (Hint: front loaders consume up to 75% less water than top loaders).
- Washing clothes consumes electricity and as a result in most cases produces greenhouse gases, how much varies with the type of washer (front loaders use up to 85% less energy than top loaders) the temperature of the water and whether the clothes are dried on a line or in an electric clothes drier.



So in summary, the negative consequences of clothes washing can be increased microplastic pollution, reduced clothing life, increased water and energy usage and the consequent production of greenhouse gases.

Washing clothes less often is a no-cost strategy for reducing our environmental impact, you don't need to buy anything to wash your clothes less.

How often should you wash your clothes? I have done a bit of a run around the net, to see what suggestions are out there, and from who. There appears to be a pretty consistent consensus with some articles of clothing, and variations within others, so it has been quite an interesting exercise, which is summarised below.

When reading the summary table –

- 'garment' is pretty self-explanatory,
- 'source' number is where I found that particular list and the key to which number corresponds to which source is noted below the summary table.
- The numbers in the table refer to the number of times a garment should be worn before it is laundered. Variations in the number of wearings take into account hot weather and soiling during use.
- Where there is no number, only an asterisk (\*), that garment type does not appear in the list from that source.



In all cases it is wise to conduct a 'sniff test' before committing a particular garment to either the wardrobe or the laundry. Even if the garment in question is ok to commit to the wardrobe, hanging it up to air overnight before placing it back in your clothes closet is a good idea.

Garment	Source							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Shirts and blouses	1 to 2	1	1 to 2	1 to 3	3 to 4	1	3 to 4	1 to 3
Dress pants & slacks	2 to 3	3	1 to 2	5 to 7	5	6	2 to 3	5 to 7
Jeans	4 to 5	3	5+	3 to 4	seasonal	5	3	4 to 5
sweaters	up to 6	3	*	1 to 3	5	3	*	2 to 5
Suits, blazers casual jackets	5 to 6	3 monthly	5+	3 to 4	4 to 5	*	3 to 5	5 to 6
Workout clothes	1	*	1	1	*	1 to 2	*	1 to 3
Sleepwear	2 to 3	3	3 to 4	3 to 4	3 to 4	3	3 to 4	3 to 4
Underwear, socks, undershirts	1	*	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bra's	3 to 4	3	3 to 4	3 to 4	*	*	2 to 3	3 to 4
Tights	*	1	1 to 2	1	*	1 to 2	1	1
Dresses & Skirts	*	3	1 to 2	5 to 7	*	6	2 to 3	5 to 7
Swimwear	*	*	1	1	*	1	1	1
Shorts and Khakis	*	*	*	1 to 3	*	*	3 to 4	2 to 3

Sources:

1. **Whirlpool** – washing machine and other appliance manufacturer (US)
2. **Good Housekeeping** – Women’s magazine (US)
3. **Canstar Blue** – Consumer review and comparison website (AUS)
4. **Dropps** – online purveyor of laundry detergent pods (US)
5. **GQ** – Men’s magazine (US)
6. **Lifehack** – Website providing tips to simplify your life (UK)
7. **American Cleaning Institute** – Industry group for US Cleaning product manufacturers (US)
8. **Moralfibres** – Eco-blog covering all aspects of sustainable living (UK)

So there you have it! Obviously how often you launder your clothing is a very personal decision, but a decision that has a real-world impact on the environment. The important thing is to think before you wash rather than just dump it all into the dirty clothes hamper.

There are also some techniques which can be used to extend the time between washes and these will be covered in a later article.





*A bit of under cover drying space can be handy too!*

## **5.2 Freshening Between Washes**

OK, so now we know the ‘official’ estimates of how long a particular garment can be worn without being washed (see above), is it possible to move towards the longer estimates, or even exceed them? Of course, the answer is yes!

And if nothing else you will guarantee yourself a seat on the train, bus or tram! But seriously folks.....

The words ‘fresh’, ‘freshness’ and ‘freshen’ are beloved of advertisers, and not without good reason, because they have very pleasant connotations. So it is important to be aware that there are a number of techniques that can be used to improve clothing

'freshness' between wears and so potentially increase the number of wears between washes.

The techniques are as follows:

**Overnight airing** – This is easy to set up and doesn't require much in the way of cash. I set up ours by using our ironing hanger rack, which we don't use anymore. I installed it in the bedroom (see photo) and as soon as I remove my clothing, rather than dumping it in a heap (as I used to do) I hang them up separated by a few centimetres. Hanging your clothes up overnight gives moisture and odours from things such as food or sweat an opportunity to dissipate rather than set into the fabric. Thus they need breathing room, rather than just being jammed back into the wardrobe.

Hanging the clothes up straight after taking them off also gives wrinkles (on the clothing, not you) a chance to fall out while they are still warm from being worn.



**Hand washing** – (that is to say, washing of garments by hand, not handwashing, Covid style) A quick and delicate hand wash, particularly for underwear can extend their life, reduce the need for a full wash and/or eliminate the need for running the washing machine for just a part load. Just run some water into the sink, add in some soap and put in the underwear. Let the garments soak for a while, then scrub, rinse and hang to dry overnight. Next morning you are ready to go! This technique can be particularly valuable when you are travelling with limited clothing options.

**Brushing** – Stains, dirt and grime tend to sit on the surface of tightly woven fabrics like tweed and brushing the area once any gunge has dried with a stiff clothes brush will remove them, and you are ready to go again!

**Steaming** – Steaming clothes which have been clothes also releases odours and creases giving the clothes new life, as well as seriously reducing the bacteria count on the fabric, which can provide some peace of mind in these days of Covid. There are two methods of achieving this, the first one requires a piece of electrical equipment – a small portable steamer. Just fill it up with water, plug it in and run the bit where the steam comes out over your clothes. Job done.

If, however you don't have and don't want to get hold of a steamer, a similar effect can be achieved by hanging clothes in the bathroom while you have a hot shower. Hang the garments as close as you can manage to the shower head without getting them wet, and leave them there, even after you have finished showering but while the bathroom is still foggy. It won't be quite as effective as a steamer but will still improve the freshness of the clothing.



There are also steam cleaners (see pic of ours above) which can double as clothing steamers (using water only) with the correct accessory.

**Spot cleaning** – The idea behind this technique is, rather than chucking a garment into the wash when it has a spot of food or dirt on it, treat the soiled area and re-wear. It is worth having a small sponge on hand when going out so that if some soiling occurs, dampen the sponge with warm water and wipe the area over. If some liquid has been spilled onto the garment the dry sponge can be used to soak it up, then rinsed, and used to wipe the area over while damp to remove any remaining material. If a sponge is not available, dab water (with or without soap) onto the soiled area and rub, then run the spot under running water.

**Freezing** – Putting your garments into the freezer overnight kills odour causing bacteria and thus freshens the clothing. As a bonus the freezing kills any moth eggs or other bugs you have picked up. Place the clothing into a freezer bag and then put it into the freezer, leave overnight, then remove from the freezer and hang up to air, voila!

**Alcohol spray** – where more persistent odours are encountered (food, cigarette smoke, perfume, body odour) spraying the clothing before hanging with a dilute alcohol solution can help. The best alcohol is vodka. Vodka is 37.2% alcohol (or at least the vodka we have is!) and should be diluted one part Vodka to 4 parts water, giving a finished solution of a bit under 10% alcohol. We are not drinkers but I used to pick up the cheapest vodka I could get when I did trips to New Zealand for work back in the day. It was duty free and handy to make tinctures and extracts with, even our own vanilla essence.



Place the diluted vodka in a spray bottle and give the clothing a spray all over prior to hanging up overnight.

**Lint roller & fabric shaver** – Your clothing does not look fresh and clean if it is covered in lint, hair and fabric pills (plus, dare I say it, dandruff!). Running over your clothes

quickly with a lint roller before going out will remove most of these problems and give the clothes a fresh sharp look. To remove pilling a fabric shaver may be required or a fabric comb, which is drawn over the surface of the fabric to remove any pilling.

**Stain treatment** – in a similar way to spot cleaning, a stain which has happened can be treated rather than requiring the whole garment to be washed. Stains should be treated swiftly if they occur to prevent them setting into the fabric and becoming permanent, but that will be the subject of another article.

## 6.0 Clothing Repair and Maintenance

### 6.1 Clothes Repair Kits

#### 6.1.1 Putting Together a basic Clothes Repair Kit

In the same way that growing your own food may be regarded as a radical act, so is repairing and maintaining your clothing instead of throwing it out if it is damaged and buying a new item. Both actions go against the system that sees us as consumers and nothing more. To be able to repair your own clothing (saving you money and saving the environment) you need three things: skills, tools and supplies. This series is about the second and third of those two requirements.

- **Hand Sewing Needles** - For clothing repair and general sewing the variety known as sharps are most commonly used, an assortment of sizes being handy to have. There are packets of assorted sizes of sharps, darners and embroidery needles that are available at ridiculously cheap prices from our supermarket chains.

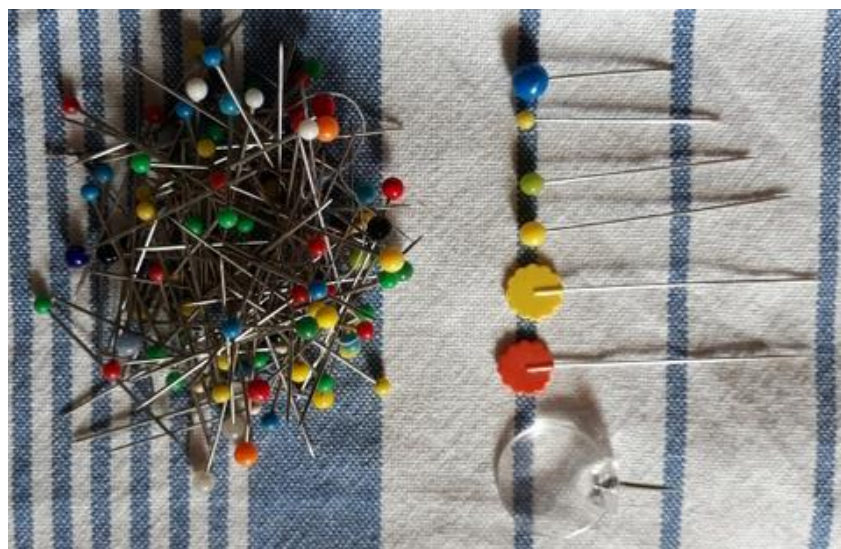
- Sharps – are general purpose hand sewing needles with small eyes (can be fun to thread up when you are old like me!)

- Darners – designed for.... Wait for it! Darning! That is to say they are used to darn holes in fabrics and knitting. They have a larger eyes, and a more rounded point that prevents yarn from splitting.

- Embroidery needles – can also be used for general purpose mending and they have larger, easier to thread eyes than sharps.



- **Pins** - The standard 25mm long dressmakers pins are ideal for clothing repair, nickel plated steel is the most common material of construction and is sufficient for most jobs but stainless steel is better because it will not rust and will last longer in use. Some plastic headed pins are also worth having because they are easy to see and comfortable to work with. Over time, pins can become blunt and cause fabric snags, but do not discard them because they can be sharpened.





- **Safety Pins** - While they should not be used for permanent repairs having a selection various sizes of safety pins in the mending kit will allow emergency repairs to be carried out quickly and efficiently.



- **Thread** - Polyester thread can be used on most fabrics and so is the best for clothing repair. Five colours will cover most repair jobs: black (or dark brown or blue), white, red, a medium grey or tan shade and some transparent monofilament thread that allows repairs to be carried out on any colour fabric. A 500 metre spool of each is a good. It is a good idea to also have a card or two of waxed linen thread for heavy duty clothing repairs and repairs to thick cloth such as canvas, it is available from saddleries and hardware shops.



- **Thimble** - This is used to protect the middle finger while hand sewing, and allow greater force to be used when pushing a needle through fabric. They come in several sizes to ensure a snug fit so make sure you get one that fits you.



- **Needle Threader** - This is a loop of thin wire fixed to an easily grasped handle, the wire is pushed through the eye of the needle and the thread inserted in the loop thus formed. When the loop is pulled back through the eye the thread is pulled with it, threading the needle. This can be extremely handy if the lighting is poor, you can't find your glasses or you're trying to fix a rip in your trousers with cold wet hands. There are also more complex designs of needle threaders where the thread goes in one end, the needle eye in the other, push a little lever and presto! Needle threaded!



- **Seam Ripper** - This useful little tool makes it easy to remove stitching, cut seams open and rip hem, the pointed end then being used to remove the cut stitches. It can make the job easier if you need to make alterations, replace a zipper or fix it when some stitching goes wrong.



- **Scissors** - Buy the best quality scissors that you can even if you have to mortgage your spouse to do it! They should last a lifetime if treated with care and used for sewing only. A small oilstone should also be bought to keep them sharp. 15 centimetres (6 inches) is a good length and they should have one sharp point for clipping, snipping and trimming. The technique for sharpening scissors can be seen [here](#).



- **Sewing Gauge** - This is a 15 cm ruler with a sliding marker or a stainless steel clip used for making small measurements and keeping distances constant while marking hems, button locations and pleats etc.





- **Glue Stick** - Can be used to form a temporary bond for hems, trims, appliques and zippers so that pinning or basting is unnecessary.



- **Liquid Fray Preventer** - (eg Fray Stop) A colourless solvent based liquid polymer solution that prevents fraying and unravelling along the cut edge of a fabric. It can also

be used to control ladders in panty hose and tidy up buttonholes that have become frayed. If you don't have any, clear nail polish will work too.

- **Beeswax** - Hand sewing thread is run across this to apply a waxy lubricating film to cut down on knotting and tangling. It is usually sold in a container with slots in it for this purpose but a white candle stub can also be used and is just as good.

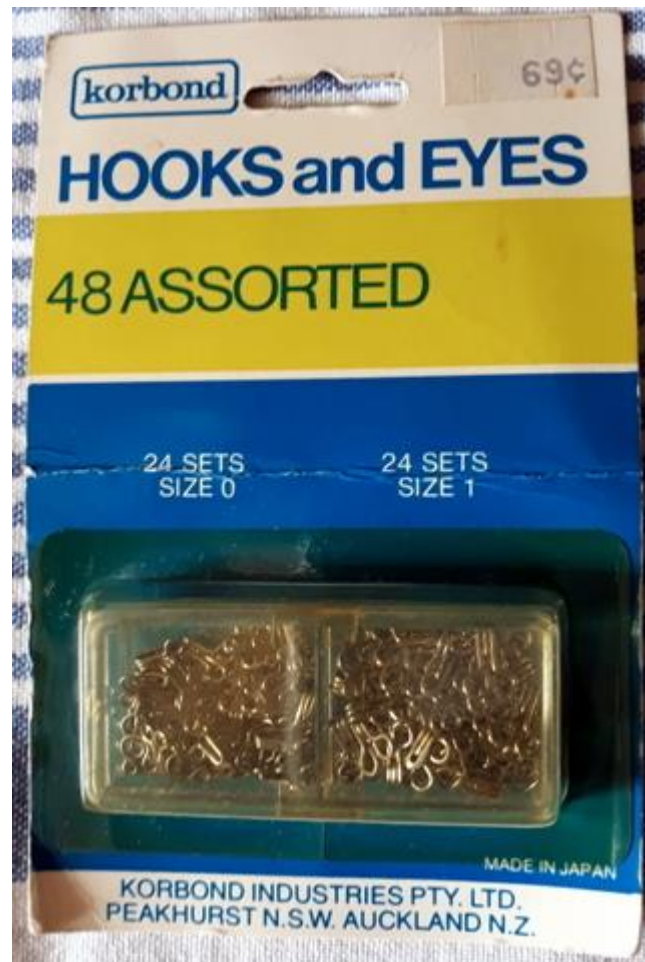


- **Buttons** - It is well worth keeping a jar of assorted old buttons for replacing ones that go astray. If you do not regularly cannibalise worn out clothing for their buttons the prime source of supply at a reasonable price is the local Opportunity Shop. A supply of recycled buttons can also be worth their weight in gold by keeping the kids out from under your feet on a wet afternoon!

For an article on the humble button jar, click [here](#)!

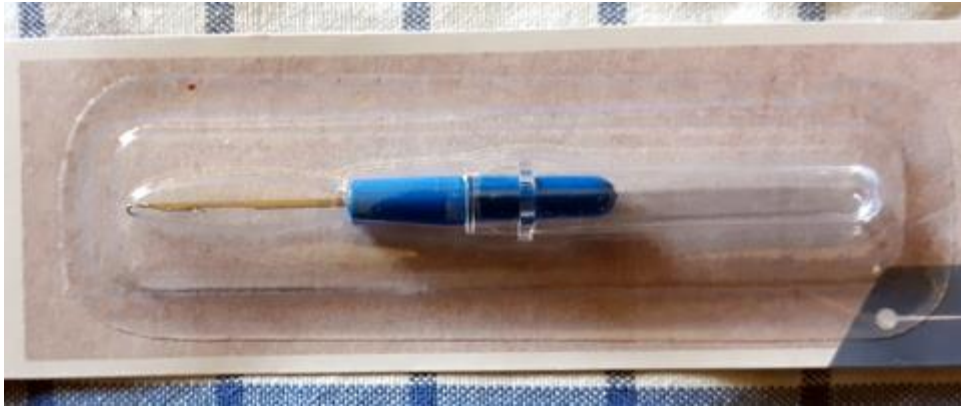


- **Hooks, Eyes & press studs** - Keep a varied supply of these on hand in nickel for light fabrics and black finish for dark fabrics. Both large and small press studs are useful and it is worth having some of both.



- **Knit Fixer/Latch Hooks** – These tools are used to fix ladders (dropped stitches) in knitwear. They are also used to repair snags, picks and pulls in woven clothing without creating rips or tears. It is simply a case of pushing the latch hook through the fabric or wool, picking up the snag with the hook, closing the latch and pulling the defect through to the other side of the fabric.





- **Crochet hooks** – These are also used to fix snags, picks or pulls as described above but may be easier to find than a latch hook. They also have the benefit of being able to be used to make crochet items as well.



All of these bits and pieces do not take up a whole stack of space, and can be easily fitted into decent sized plastic container, a sewing box or if all else fails a shoe box. The container should be kept handy to facilitate those quick repairs when life gets too much for our clothes.



### 6.1.2 Putting Together a More Advanced Clothing Repair Kit

The items in this 'advanced' kit allow more and different fabric/clothing repairs to be carried out. This kit contains everything in the basic kit (above) and the following additional items.

- Dressmakers Shears - These shears have longer blades and larger handles than the scissors and so are more comfortable to use for long cuts. They are used for, among other things, cutting excess fabric from hems and seams.



- Tape Measure - 150 cm is the ideal length for a tape measure and it should be made of flexible plastic or fibreglass that won't stretch. It should have protective metal tips on both ends and have measurements on both sides. It is used for body and garment measurements.



- Yard (metre?) Stick or Skirt Marker - A skirt marker is a ruler that stands up on a base and has a sliding marker allowing chalk or pins to mark the distance from the floor accurately to ensure even hems.



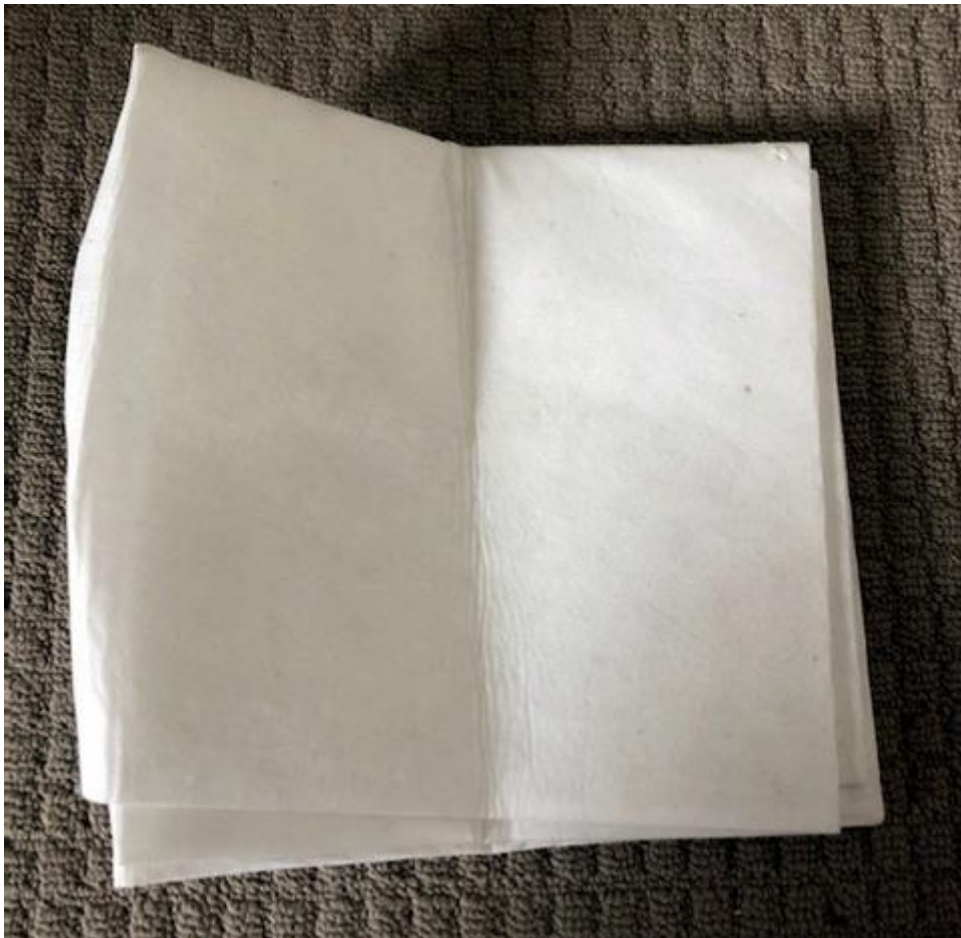
- Tailors chalk - Comes as wedges in a special holder or in the form of a pencil, various pastel shades are available. They are used for marking fitting alterations, pleats, buttonholes etc.



- Elastic - Comes in various widths but 6mm ribbed elastic is probably the most all purpose. It can be used to resuscitate saggy underwear, shorts, tracksuit cuffs and ankles or anywhere your elastic lets you down.



- Fusible Web or Fusible Interfacing - This is a nonwoven (web) or woven (interfacing) bonding agent available in strips and sheets. To use it, cut to size, place between two layers of fabric and then melted by running a hot steam iron over the area, this bonds the two layers of fabric. It can be used to hold a hem, trim, facing or material patch in place without sewing. Fusible web or interfacing should not be used on some synthetics so read the instructions on the pack carefully and test on a scrap of material if possible first.





- Iron-on Patches and Appliques - Used in a similar way to fusible web but usually applied to the outside of the garment to cover rents, tears and holes. Iron-on appliques are an easy and attractive way of repairing holes and tears in children's clothing.



- Steam and Dry Iron - When used to apply the two items above, the iron becomes a tool for clothing repair. Fusibles require water to bond properly so a steam iron should be used in conjunction with a damp press cloth.





- Press Cloth - A lint free press (or ironing) cloth should be used when applying fusibles and when pressing on the right side of the fabric and working with delicate fabrics such as wool or silk, or synthetic/mixed fabrics that can be prone to melting or scorching. While commercial ironing cloths are available it is just as easy to use baking paper, a bath towel or cotton tea towel.
- Table Top Ironing Board - Can be set up on a table to make small ironing jobs easier.(While we have a full sized ironing board, we have found that the table top one works just as well or better for the smaller stuff we use it for).



- Portable Sewing Machine - This battery powered little wonder is often seen for sale cheaply through mail order suppliers. It can be used to hem skirts and slacks, repair rips and sew on patches.



- Darning Mushroom – This is to me, old kit but I was surprised to find them readily available from sewing suppliers. A darning mushroom is used to keep curved items of fabric (eg socks) taut to facilitate mending. The handle may evidently be used to darn glove fingers!



- Embroidery hoop – This is also another piece of equipment which is used to keep fabric taut and smooth to facilitate repairs. They work very well on woven fabric, that is to say non-stretchy fabric, but do not work so well on more stretchy knitted fabrics.



- Long nose pliers – while these may seem to be more at home in the garage or car tool kit, they are actually very useful in pulling a needle through tough fabric then making repairs, such as with jeans or sometimes when sewing in zippers.



- Thread cutter – these are used for..... cutting threads! They are ideal for notching fabric and clipping yarn ends as well as thread cutting.



### 6.1.3 Putting Together a Sewing Machine Clothing Repair Kit

The items making up the sewing machine clothing repair kit also include the contents of the basic and advanced clothing repair kits detailed above.



*Our \$20 sewing machine which Linda picked up at a trash and treasure market, initially it would not sew backwards but I was able to fix it easily.*

## The Machine Itself

Obviously one of the basic requirements for a sewing machine clothes repair kit is a sewing machine! (Funny about that). The sewing machine does not need to be a super-beaut, top of the line techno-sewer, but should have several basic features that will make clothing repair easier. These include –

- **Straight stitch** - Pretty basic and any machine you buy should have it. It is used to repair seams and carry out basic sewing including adding pockets and attaching lace. In general terms, shorten the stitch for lightweight fabrics and lengthen the stitch for heavier fabrics.
- **Zig zag stitch** – This will increase your options, it is also great for seams, hems, to finish edges, can be used with stretch fabric, to reinforce fabric, apply elastic and can be used to easily repair holes in your clothing by fixing patches.
- **Overlock stitch** – You might be lucky enough to have a machine with overlock stitch, which can overcast the cut edge of fabric, preventing it from unravelling

Any other more fancy stitches that come with the machine will be a bonus



- Free Arm – The section immediately beneath where you place your fabric for sewing is opened up. This section often holds your extra bobbins, oil bottle, needle ‘feet’ varieties, extra tools e.g. mini screwdrivers, and can be removed by sliding out. The ensuing ‘free arm’ allows, allowing tubular fabric clothing parts like pants legs or sleeve cuffs to be slid over it, making repairs easier.



- Bobbins – if the sewing machine is new it should come complete with appropriate bobbins but if second hand it may or may not. These can be easily bought from sewing supply shops. To save time when mending, wind several bobbins each of the five standard mending colours beforehand: black (or dark brown or blue), white, red, a medium grey or tan shade and some transparent monofilament thread.



- Feed Cover Plate – When machine darning, depending on the setup of your machine, you may need a feed cover plate which covers the feed dogs. Alternatively check your machine to see if there is a built-in adjustment to lower the feed dogs and if so a feed cover plate is not needed.



### **Sewing Machine Needles**

As with hand sewing needles, a variety of needles will allow more versatility when repairing fabric and clothing, so it is worth having a few of each type available. It is also recommended that the needles be changed regularly because a dull or burred needle can damage the fabric, however sewing needles (Not ball point) can be easily sharpened with a bit of effort.

### **Good to have**

- **Ball point needle** - This will work with knit fabrics and polyester/cotton blend threads.





- **Sharps needle** - For quilting or especially thick materials you need a sharps needle, designed for extra strength and puncture power.
- **Stretch needle** - For tricky stretchy materials which tend to bunch and gather, a stretch needle is your friend.

#### **Optional**

- **Quilting needle** - Like the sharps needle, this is for quilting where there are lots of layers of wadding, but it's a shorter length. This gives a more even stitch at faster speeds
- **Leather needle** - Designed to go through tough leather or suede.

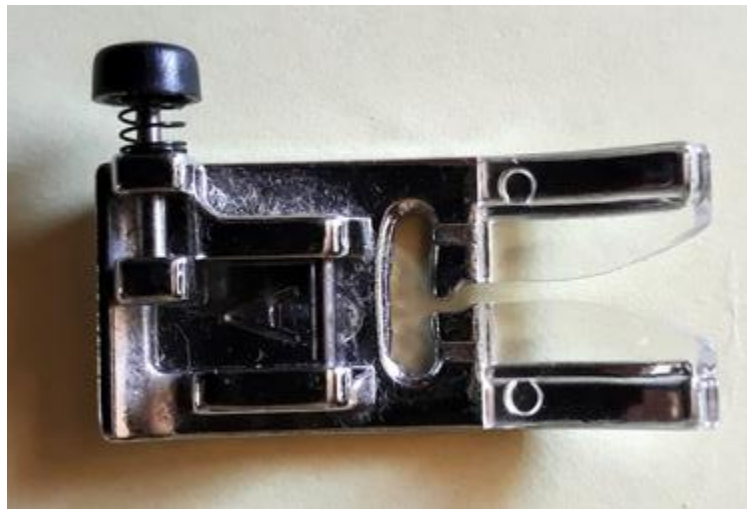


### **Needle Sizing**

Needle sizes are generally expressed as two figures which may be separated by a slash. One figure will be between 8 & 19 and is American sizing, the other figure will be between 60 & 120 and is European sizing in either case the larger the number, the thicker the needle. Three sizes that are good to keep on hand include lightweight needles size such as 11/70 (sheer woven fabric), a medium weight needle such as 14/80 (T-shirt material) and heavyweight needles such as 16/90 (denim and corduroy).

## Presser Feet

Presser feet are attachments to your sewing machine which hold the material flat as it is fed through the machine and the fabric is stitched. There are a myriad of presser feet (foots?) that do specific jobs like sewing in zippers, buttons or machine darning. They are specific to the type of machine you have. Some presser feet to consider adding to your kit include –



**Straight Stitch Presser Foot** – This is the basic presser foot and should be supplied with every sewing machine, it is used for sewing in straight lines when sewing regular seams.



**Zig Zag Foot** – Another basic foot, it is usable with all needle and fabric types. In addition to sewing straight and zig zag seams, it can also be used for decorative sewing including gathers. If the machine is fitted with stretch stitch, it can also be used for stretch patching for worn out knees and elbows.



**Darning & embroidery foot** - this is a highly versatile accessory in the clothing repairer's toolkit. It is used to repair tears and holes in clothing. When in use to allows stitches to move in any direction and the feed dogs will need to be covered or lowered. The darning and embroidery foot allows thread painting, free motion quilting and sewing in a monogram.



**Zipper Foot** – this is generally used when replacing a defective zipper to sew the new zipper in place. It is narrower and makes it easier to sew close to the 'zip' part of the

new zipper. It can also be used for decorative sewing such as inserting piping or cording.



**Blindstitch hem foot** – This foot is used for stitching blind hems (who knew?). That is to say, it is used for repairing hems on pants and skirts such that the hem is not visible from the right side of the fabric.



**Button foot** – As one would expect, the button foot is used to replace buttons but can also be used to attach decorative buttons, hooks and eyes, sewing on ribbons and trim, and attaching finished bows.



**Overcasting foot** - this foot is used to prevent edges unravelling when used with an overlock or zig zag stitch.

All the above presser feet may not necessarily be available for all machines. They will vary from machine to machine and so will not be interchangeable from one machine to another.

#### **6.1.4 Putting Together a Portable Clothing Repair Kit**

If you've ever heard the old proverb 'a stitch in time saves nine' you will understand that maintaining your clothes in the short term can prevent damage becoming worse in the longer term. That means having what you need with you when you are out and about so that you can deal with the problem immediately to stop tears, holes or missing bits becoming worse.



There are lots of cheapie clothing repair kits available all over the shops and the internet. They are usually small, light and inexpensive. The problem is that the quality of what is in them can be lacking, they only have small amounts so if you have a major wardrobe malfunction you still may be left high and dry, and they may not contain what you need in every situation.



The answer is to put your own together. That way you can be assured you will only include good quality items and there will be enough to do what you need. Also, since you put it together yourself, you will know what is in it, so the chances of grabbing your kit in hope only to be disappointed are considerably reduced. Here are my suggestions

–

- A small pack of hand sewing needles,
- A good length of each of four repair thread colours: black (or dark brown or blue), white, red, and a medium grey or tan shade., wrapped around a length of cardboard, about 2 metres works quite well,
- A needle threader to be used for repairing knit snags,
- A glue stick for emergency tacking,
- A selection of buttons to replace any that get popped off
- Half dozen to a dozen safety pins, because there is not quicker or more secure fix for an embarrassing clothing tear than a series of safety pins.
- A small pair of scissors or a thread cutter – a lot of the smaller size cheap scissors are rubbish and can let you down. A good, sharp thread cutter will be able to do everything you ask of it and more.
- A thimble

Other items you may wish to include if there is room include a tape measure, seam ripper, latch hook and/or fabric pencil.





It may be a while before you need to use your kit, but when you do need it you will want the contents to be in a serviceable condition, so it is important to have your kit in a robust container. Ideally the container should be metal, hold everything you want in the kit but, fit easily in the pocket or handbag and be easy to open so that the gear is accessible. I have found that an unused glasses (spectacles) case is ideal for the job and most of us will have one or more floating around in a drawer somewhere.



To keep some essentials like a few pins available within the kit, you can secure a fridge magnet to the inside of the top of the glasses case to hold the items magnetically.



## 6.2 Sharpening Sewing Pins and needles

This is not the sort of issue that will spark protests or save the earth by itself, but it is something small that anyone who sews can do to minimise the environmental impact of their activities. They do this by sharpening their used pins and needles rather than tossing them to landfill. While it is not critical, it can be an indicator of our capacity to preserve resources rather than discarding them when they become worn.

Obviously, in terms of sharpening sewing machine needles, this would only work on needles that were sharp to begin with and applying these processes to ball point needles, for example, would not be recommended!



### **Why is it a problem?**

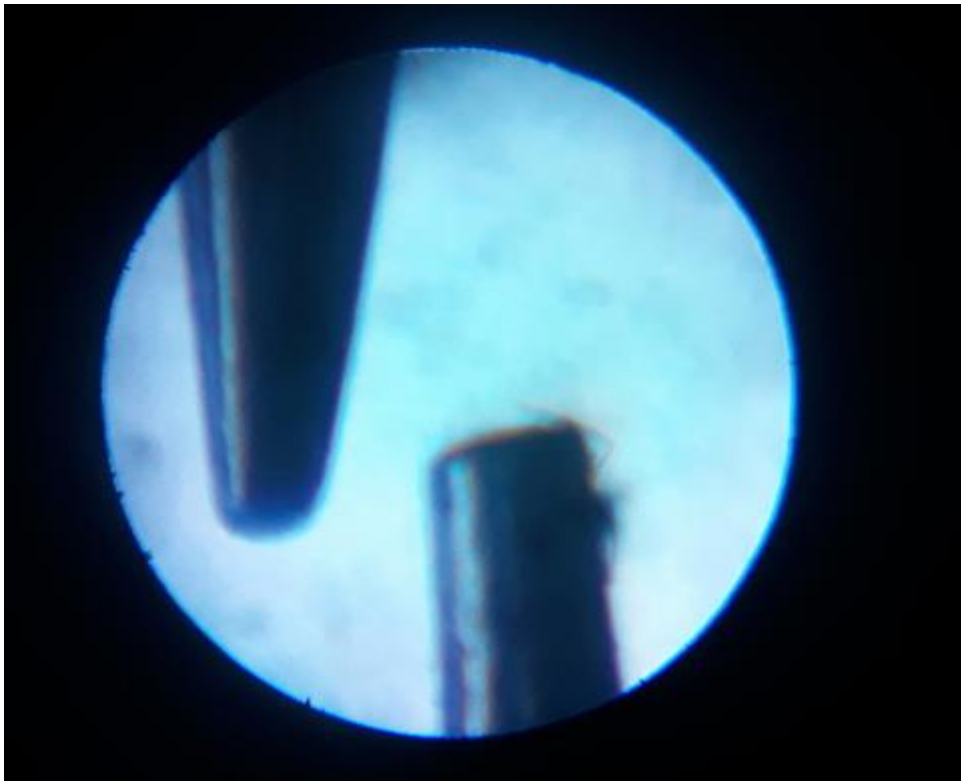
Using blunt pins and needles can cause problems with the material being worked on, including snags and damage to the fibres of the fabric due to trying to force a blunt object through it. It can also leave holes in the fabric. Blunt needles also require more effort to push the pin through the fabric and so can cause problems with the sewing machine motor. The Janome website recommends needles be discarded after 8 hours of sewing.

### **How do you tell?**

The ladies in my life who do this sort of work informed me that they could tell if a pin was blunt by the amount of force required to push it through the fabric. My daughter provided me a collection of new and used (blunt) pins to play with, but after some fooling around I had to admit to myself that I had no idea which was which. If I couldn't tell the difference then there was no way for me to judge the effectiveness or otherwise of the techniques for sharpening pins and needles that I found on line.



After some consideration, I decided to drag out my old high school microscope and give it a go. I was concerned that, seeing as it only had 100x, 200x and 300x magnifications the magnification may be too great to be useful, but in the event the 100X magnification worked very well. In fact, when I was able (after some jockeying around) to get the point of a dull or used needle and an unused needle under the microscope, there was a significant difference. While the unused pin point looked like ..... a pointy pin, the business end of the used one was in fact flat across the front. (see photo below). This was really interesting, bearing in mind that both pins looked exactly the same with the naked eye.



### **Sharpening Techniques**

From what I could see, there seemed to be three types of sharpening techniques noted on the online sites –

- Applying a lubricant of some description such as soap or oil. Since this was easing the pin or needle through the fabric and not altering the sharpness of the pin, I did not look at this technique.
- Plunging the needle into an abrasive material through a fabric covering. One example of this is the small strawberry shaped attachment to a pincushion which is filled with emery powder and designed as a pin sharpener. A pincushion filled with extra fine steel wool is also included in this category.
- An abrasive of some description – I have seen the emery board used to shape fingernails and nail files mentioned in this context, but I suspect that fine wet and dry abrasive or a fine sharpening stone would work just as well.

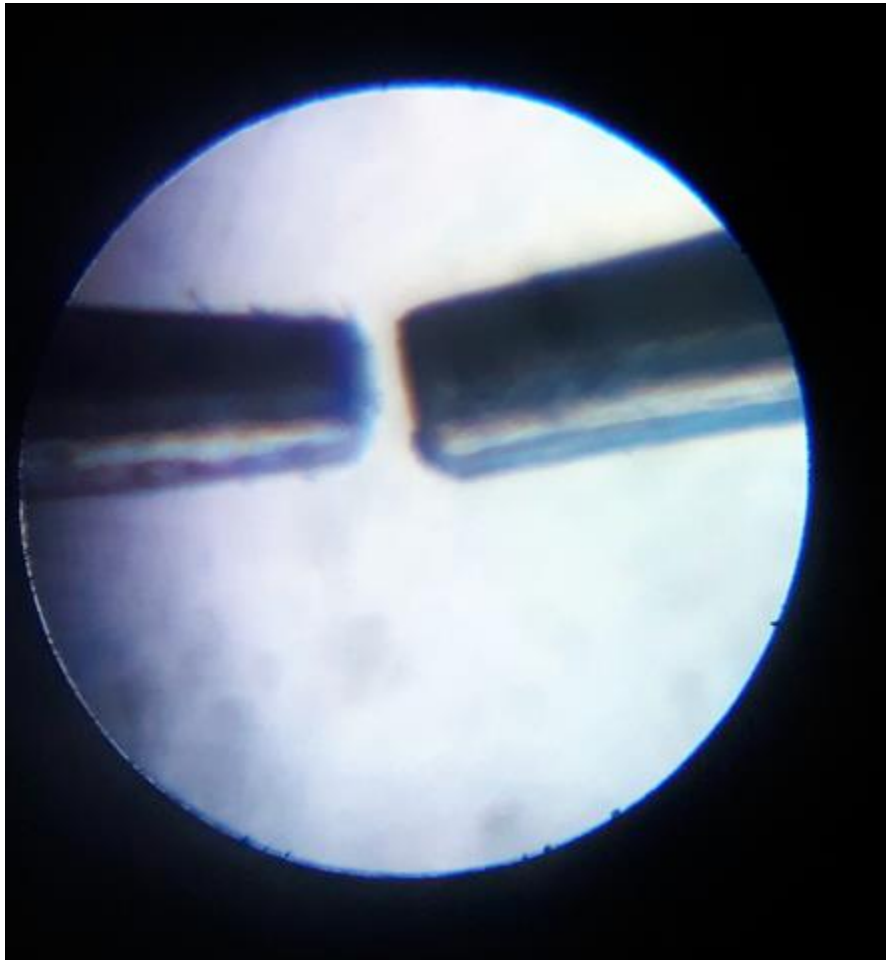


To test the second two techniques I decided to check the pins under the microscope and select used ones, sharpen them as directed with each technique, then compare them to a new pin under the microscope.

### Checking the techniques

The first technique I checked was using the abrasive in fabric and in this case I used one of the emery dust filled strawberry sharpeners and some fabric stretched over extra

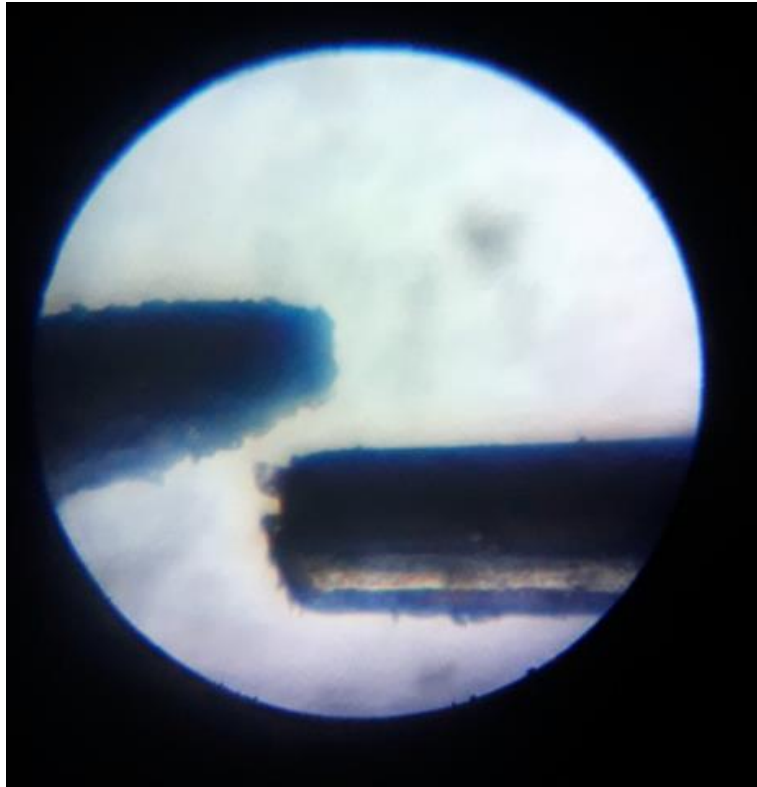
fine steel wool to form a pin cushion of sorts. The process was to plunge the pin through the fabric and into the abrasive half a dozen or so times then re-check under the microscope. In both cases the effect was the same – while the pin was not sharpened, the edge of the flat end of the pin was rounded off somewhat so that would go towards reducing the effort to push the pin through the fabric. It did not, however, go back to being as sharp as a new pin.



(Late final Extra! I was doing some reading last night and no less of an authority that the “Readers Digest Complete Guide to Sewing” (page 12; 1984 edition) states that the little emery filled strawberry thingy was to CLEAN pins and needles, not sharpen them. Somebody got their facts wrong!)

The second technique involved rubbing the end of the pin over an abrasive surface, in this case an emery board and a nail file. I held the pins at an angle of about 15° to 20°

to the abrasive surface and rubbed the point of the pin back and forth a few times on each. In both cases this re-sharpened the pins really well, to the point where they were almost the same as a new pin and allowed them to be returned to service.



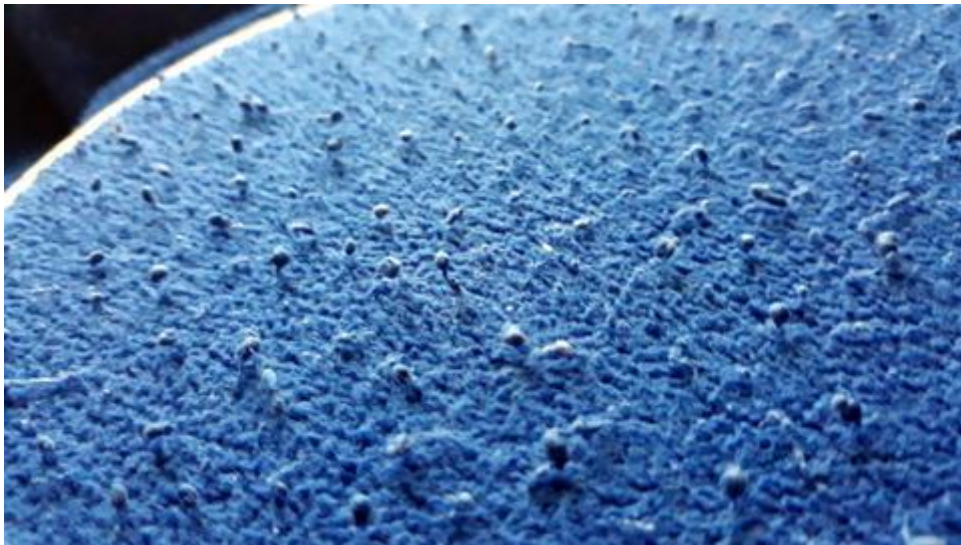
## Conclusion

With the right techniques it is not only possible, but easy and quick to sharpen pointy sewing equipment (pins and needles) such that they can be returned to service rather than discarded. A small win to be sure, but a win nevertheless reducing cost and waste associated with that most honourable of activities: sewing.





### 6.3 Pilling on Fabric – Prevention and Cure



Pilling on clothes are a series of small ‘lumps’ or knots (for want of a better term) that form due to normal wear and tear, quite often on knitted rather than woven fabrics but cotton, synthetics and mixed fabrics can all pill at some stage. Pills generally occur where groups of short or broken fibres get together to form these lumps. While they can occur anywhere, they are most likely to be seen in areas of high wear such as on the rear of pants, under the arms and around shirt collars and cuffs.

Back in the day, I used to work for a company that made tanning auxiliaries and our operations manager was a font of wisdom about many related things. He told me that piling in woollen clothing was usually cause by ‘crutchings’ (short wool shorn from around the rear end of the sheep) being included in the yarn. Just sayin’!

While piling does not affect how well the clothing wears, it can look untidy and give the garment a tired, worn and dirty look, so removing them can freshen clothing in general, but also between washes. It is worth inspecting clothing for pilling on a regular basis.

## **Can Pilling be Prevented?**

There are a number of things you can do to prevent pilling, mostly they are good ideas anyway, because they reduce wear and tear on your clothes thus extending their life –

1. Use the gentle cycle on your washing machine if you think the garment may be subject to pilling or if it has suffered from pilling in the past which you have dealt with.
2. Sort clothing before washing so delicates can be washed together and not with more abrasive fabrics like denim.
3. Avoid using a tumble drier – There are a whole stack of reasons why this is a good idea including reducing energy use, reducing wear and tear on your clothing and reducing the likelihood/incidence of pilling in your garments.
4. Don't overload your washing machine – overloading your washing machine (cramming in too many clothes to try and get them all through in a hurry) not only reduces the efficiency of cleaning your clothes, it also increases wear and tear and the likelihood of pills forming in susceptible garments.
5. Avoid bleaches and other harsh chemicals that take a toll on your clothes and may result in pilling, and they also increase water pollution.

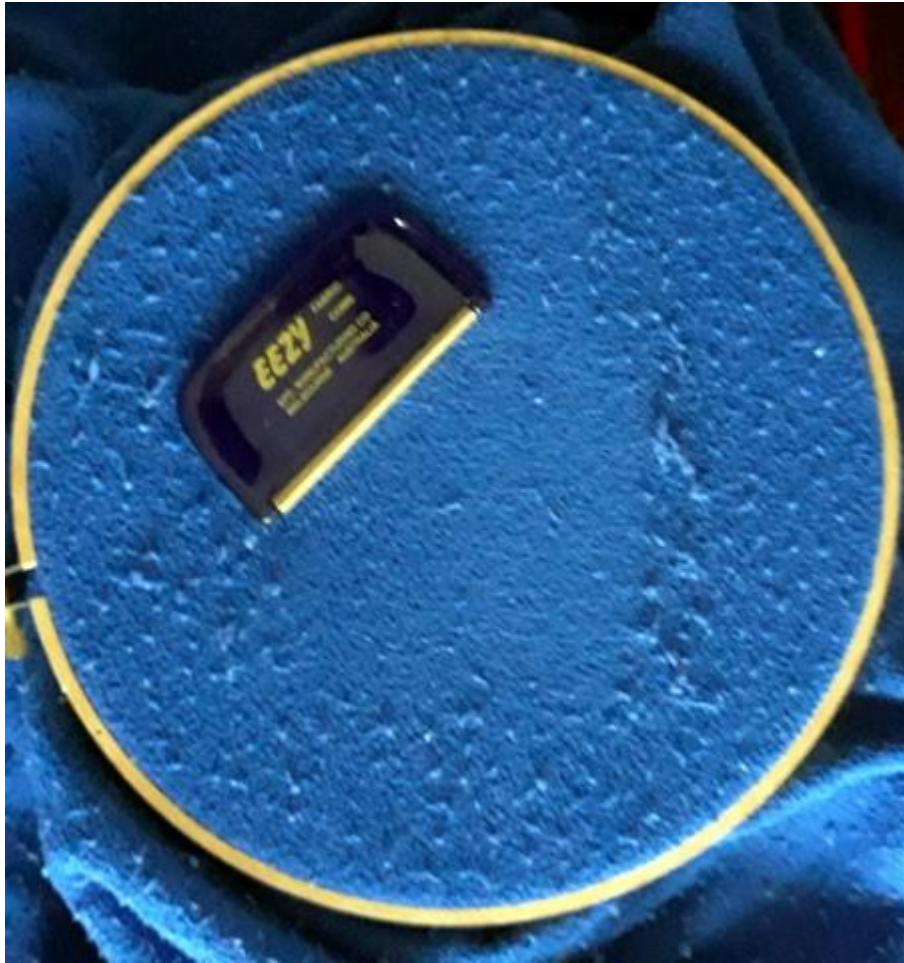
## **How do you deal with pilling once it has occurred?**

I found four methods of removing pilling and I thought I would check them out to see if any of them worked. The good news is that all of them do, but with variable efficiency. To test the techniques, I grabbed hold of one of our microfibre sheets that has developed extensive pilling, and believe me badly pillled sheets like this one are very uncomfortable to sleep on!

I borrowed one of Linda's embroidery hoops and then used it to stretch out a part of the pillled sheet, so that I could easily try out the pill removers without having to hassle with the whole sheet, obviously this would not be required for a piece of clothing.



1. Lint shaver - I have been aware of the existence of lint shavers for a very long time, but never used one – they seemed to me to somewhat gimmicky and unlikely to get the job done. Well, wasn't I surprised! In terms of area covered versus time it was certainly the most efficient! It also captured the cut off pills in the shaver itself so there was no need to go back and clean them off the fabric as a separate operation. The lint shaver I got was NOT expensive, it was a cheapie from an el cheapo shop, but it worked very well. The main disadvantage was that it was battery powered, probably not a big issue if used once in a while on a small patch of fabric, but I will see how long it lasts when I attack our badly pillled sheet.



2. Eezy Fabric Comb – This is another one that I had seen around but never owned, much less used. It turned out to be almost as efficient as the lint shaver, but requiring a second pass to remove the pills every so often, and it did not require batteries!



3. Disposable Razor – The razor I experimented with was no spring chicken but I suspect that once it was no longer suitable for skin, it would still work well on fabric. It was a bit less efficient than the Eezy comb, requiring a second or third pass more often to get all the pills but on a small area that is unlikely to matter much. It is also something that you are more likely to have just hanging around the house than the first two.



4. Straight Razor – On those (rare) days I don't want to look totally like a homeless person, I use my straight razor to shave my neck and trim the edges of my beard up. So having it already, I had to try and see how it went on pill removal. It worked fine but I had to concentrate to keep the angle right, and I was a bit concerned that I would end up cutting a hole in the fabric, or worse, me! It did do the job, although perhaps not as manoeuvrable as the previous offerings if operating in restricted space.

While pilling is not a garment killer, it can be annoying on your favourite shirt, blouse or jumper so it can be worth spending a bit of time to prevent, and to have the gear and knowledge to be able to remove them should they occur.

## 6.4a Restoring Motorcycle and Flying Jackets

*This article was written by my friend **Bill Tarplee** in the early '90s, printed first in a motorcycle magazine (I'm not sure which one) then reproduced in Volume 9 Issues 1 and 2 of Australasian Survivor Magazine, from which I have reproduced it, with permission.*

Whether you regard them as safety equipment, or just a comfortable garment or simply a very stylish piece of apparel, the old style motorcycle and flying jackets are well worth having. In good condition they are a tough, warm and attractive piece of clothing. Yet while we spend lots of time and money restoring and re-creating old bikes and other machinery – and there are a myriad of magazines on how to do this, we can so easily overlook the other articles of equal historical and personal interest.

My old leather jacket has travelled about three motorcycle miles less than I have. It has justly earned as deserving a place in automotive history as ever my ES2 or B31 ever could. Thus it was with some alarm that I noticed the way time had ravaged its once glossy surface.

I could probably have lived with that, had it not been for the stitching. I raised one arm a few weeks ago, and the sleeve parted from the jacket. That was serious. Apart from anything else, I am not prepared to ride a bike unless I am wearing real leather. Believe me, the jackets of 1960 were real ones. They are just too good to throw away.

The problem I faced was how best to repair my faithful travelling companion. I thought for a moment of approaching a boot maker (if you could find a real one these days). A saddlemaker – yes, there are still a few – could have done the job. However, you'd have to sell a Vincent to pay for it. That just leaves me with one person to do the job; me.

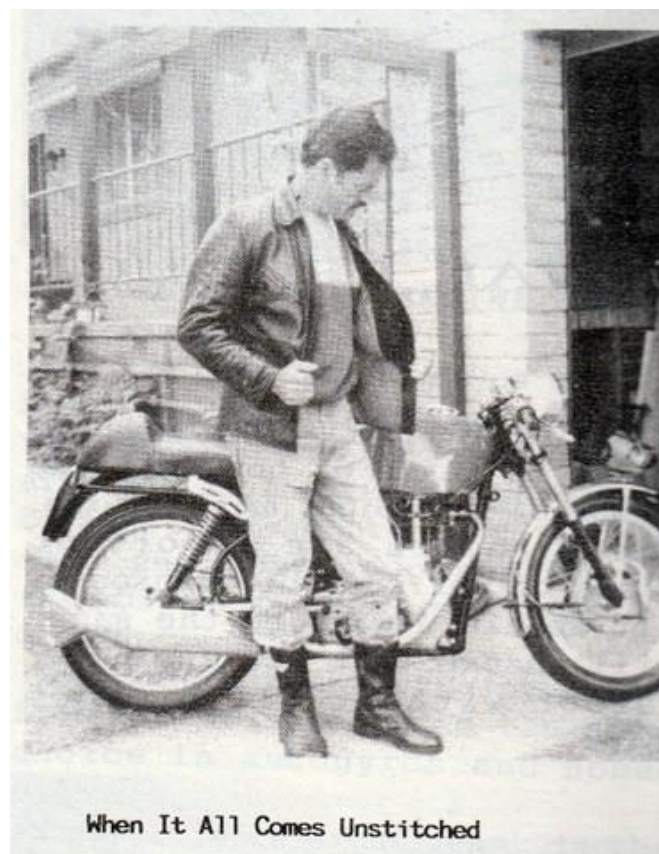
Now, your interest may not be the same as mine – I was restoring a jacket for my own use, you may be interested in setting up a business side-line restoring these jackets for

others. Whatever your interest, the skills I learned restoring my jacket will be of survival benefit to you.

I thought about the problem for a while, then checked around the sewing machine shops. A few enquiries and \$60 later and I was walking away with an old Singer Sewing machine. Unlike most modern machines, the old Singers were designed for hard sewing jobs. In fact the further you go back, the more solid and versatile they were. Machines of the 1920s sewed leather easily. If you ever get the chance, look at an accessory list from that time.

Anyway, this is all about how you salvage a valuable old garment. Do it yourself, save, and end up with a job you want; not what somebody else tells you that you can have. Or do it as a commercial exercise for others – either way, there aren't any NEW jackets like these being made.

### **Analysing the Problem**





The first step in salvaging any jacket is to survey the damage. Look the garment over and note what needs repair, what needs replacing. As an example, my jacket needed repair but the leather was basically sound. I did not need to replace any parts. Should you need to replace sections you will have to locate a source of similar weight leather. In my case I made some basic notes and sketches as to how the lining had been joined to the jacket. My memory isn't fantastic and I wasn't 100% confident of getting the new lining back into place without notes.

My advice before removing the lining from the jacket is, mark the lining in several places. Get a biro and draw lines from the lining to the leather. Also mark material where it is joined to other pieces of material. Mark both top and bottom of each panel. Do this on both the left and right hand side, plus top (collar) and bottom. Just have sufficient biro mark to show where leather and material join.

### **Removing the Lining**

The next step is to remove the lining. Get a razor blade or sharp knife. Cut between the leather and the material and sever the threads. You want to remove the lining (whatever there is of it) in one piece. You want the facing panels out as well.

The facing panels are the strips of leather that run down the inside of the jacket. They are joined at one edge to the zipper, and at the other edge to the lining. Try to remove them so that they are still joined to the lining.

You do not want to remove any panels around the collar. Try to leave that leather intact. If there is any special joining feature here, note it down. Mostly the lining just tucks under the collar.

When the lining is removed it will look pretty much like a shirt that is inside out. You want to study it carefully and see just how the panels are joined, and to what. Make whatever notes you need so that you will remember how things are joined.

## **Marking the Evidence**

The next step is to mark each panel where it joins the next panel. For example, the sleeves in my jacket were made from two pieces of material. In other words they weren't just simply tubes of material. In the same way, the lining across the back has two pieces, plus a piece for each side. Across the top was a shoulder yoke of material.

It doesn't matter how many pieces there are. What is important is that you know what attaches to what – and where. Go over the garment with a biro. Mark the top and bottom of each panel with an obvious mark, and number them. For example, at the top of the left sleeve you might have A1 and A2 (with a biro mark on each to show where they joined together). At the wrist you might mark A3 and A4 (and another biro mark.

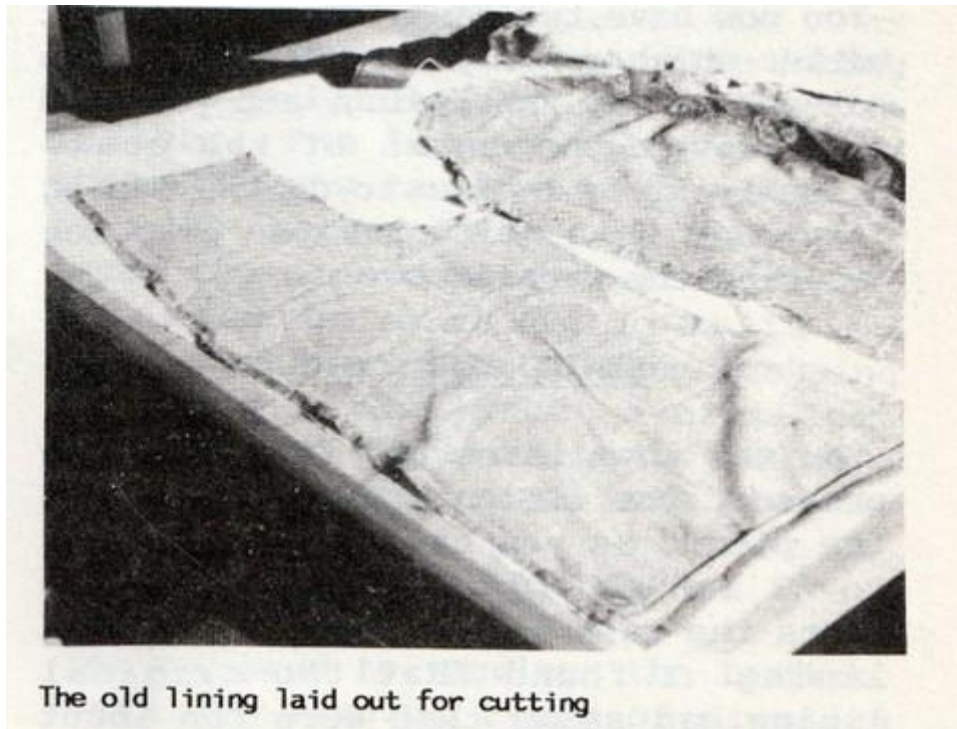
These two marks are important. Initially the material would have been cut from a flat sheet. Over the years it takes a curved shape due to your wearing the jacket. Then you get to cut a new lining from flat and unstretched material. While you can cut out the shape, it will not want to follow the same lines. Hence the need to show what joins what – and where.

## **Selecting the Material**

Before we get down to cutting out, we should look at the lining. My old lining was some sort of English flannelette. It must have been fairly good quality because I bought the jacket in 1960 and a lot of the lining was still left when I replaced it. That is the important part. Get the absolute best lining you can afford. If you can find it (and afford it) get a heavy weight silk or other decent lining material. I used flannelette and already I am thinking that it is not going to last like the last lining did.

To line my jacket took two metres by a bit over one metre of flannelette. Buy at least two metres of whatever you choose, but be sure you can go back and buy more. If in doubt, buy two and a half metres (assuming it is at least a metre wide). That should be sufficient for a hip length jacket.

## Cutting out the Lining



I found the best technique is to lay the lining out on several layers of paper on a large table. (or spread a sheet or towel over the table first). Make sure that the lining is correct side up. Frequently you will find that the pattern, gloss or weave of a material is such that it has a 'good' side.

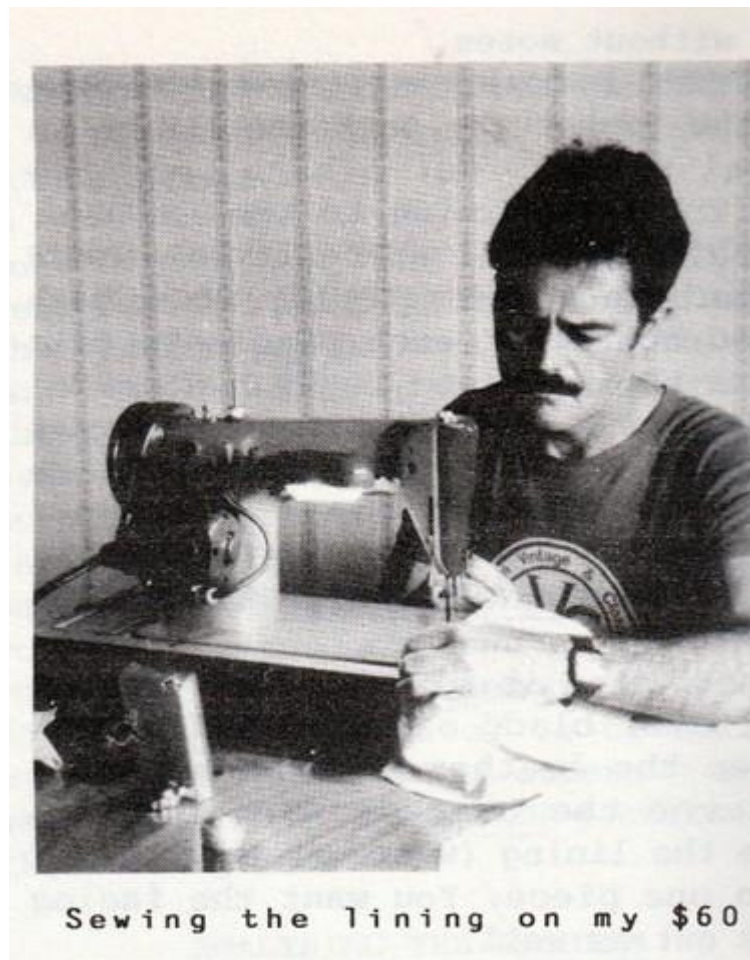
Place each piece of unstitched lining on the new lining (making sure that they too are the right side up) and place them so you will get them all to fit – with a bit to spare if you can. Then take a hot iron (for flannelette, for silk or rayon you will want much cooler). Iron each piece of old lining down on the new material.



This will remove creases from the old lining. More important, it will cause the old lining to stick to the new. You can then cut out the shape accurately without distortion. Leave the old on the new (pin together so that they won't get separated).

You now have two tasks, and it doesn't matter which order you tackle them. You have to sew up the lining, and you need to go over the seams of the coat. Probably it is better to do the lining first, as this will give you practice in using the machine.

## Sewing the Lining



You sew the lining up, following the order of the lining you removed. Join the pieces as you have marked them A1 to A2 and so forth. Try to keep the seams the same size as on the original lining. I found that the original lining had seams that were run in about 12mm from the edge. I don't know why they did that and I was tempted to sew them at 6mm. However, once I'd sewn up four seams I'd have increased the size of the lining by 24mm, and perhaps made it excessively baggy. Take care to copy the original.



Sew up the body of the lining as one task, then make up the two sleeves as a separate task. When you come to sew the sleeve into the lining take care. You will have to turn the sleeve inside out, then pin it into position so that it is lying inside the jacket. Then when it is sewn into place and pulled through it will be right way around.

When you have finished the lining you will have a rough looking shirt that is inside out. Before you go any further try it on and be sure that it fits without any tight spots. Also be sure that you haven't any gaps in the sewing, or run off line anywhere.

### **Facing Panels**

The next step is to sew on the two facing panels. These are the leather strips that tie the lining to the jacket at the front. There is a left and a right side so don't get mixed.

Also remember that the glossy side of the leather has to face into the jacket so that it is right side out.

### **Resewing the Jacket**

You may find it necessary to resew all seams of the jacket. Now had it not been that I had to repair the seams I'd never have replaced the lining. This is the time to go over the leather and repair any doubtful seams.

For this purpose you will require 'leather point' needles. They are designed for sewing leather and are readily available from any large store that carries sewing accessories. You will need at least one packet. I broke four needles before I finished my project. Which raises the point. When you are sewing leather be sure to wear eye protection. If you break a needle the bits will fly. You would not want to get hit in the eye with a piece of flying needle.

You will need to adjust the length of the stitch so that the machine is running on fairly wide stitches. Narrow stitches will use more cotton and produce a much stronger seam. However, they can be too close and cut the fibres. You could wind up with a 'tear along the dotted line.....'result. With wide stitches this is less likely. This is important when you are dealing with older (and maybe drier) leather.

Sewing the leather was quite simple, though slow. I found that the machine could cope with the thickness quite well. However, it could not cope with the weight. You can't be sewing a sleeve with the rest of the jacket dangling over the table. You have to support the jacket and take some weight off the sewing foot.

You will also find it necessary to keep stopping so that you can turn the leather around as you sew. All this is hard on the little electric motor so be careful you don't overload it and burn it out. Some motors are fitted with fuses but care and caution will save the fuses.

## **Inserting the Lining**

Sewing the lining into the jacket is quite simple. Push the sleeves down the sleeves, straighten the lining in relation to the jacket. You may find it necessary to pin the lining in several places. Pins aren't always easy on leather, so you'll probably find it easier to use clothes pegs.

Some jackets may vary, but on the ones I've studied you sew the collar section first. Because this is an area that carries quite a bit of strain, I sewed it twice.

I pulled the lining down and turned the end back up inside the jacket as was done with the original. I clamped leather and material together using clothes pegs, I then stretched the side panels out and pegged them to the jacket edges. This showed me that everything was going to fit reasonably well.

I sewed the lining in at the bottom, then put in the zipper.

This left only the sleeves. The lining must be a little loose inside the leather. The lining folds back on itself so you can adjust the length, then the leather folds over the lot. I found the sleeves the most difficult because the working area is so restricted. You have to keep stopping and rolling the jacket over to get fresh sewing. While it was a bit of a nuisance, I double sewed both sleeves.

## **Final Finishes**

You may need to recolour the leather. There are several types of dressing that you can use for this purpose. Use is dependent on the state of the leather.

Where the leather is unscuffed but has lost colour, you can use the spirit type stains.

The best one used to be Raven Oil. This gave an excellent gloss to smooth leather.

The other type I have used is 'Meltonian' Colour Change. This is a thicker, water based product that fills in scuffed areas and leaves a fairly glossy finish. It is very easy to apply



and only a single application would be needed. You'd probably need two of the little bottles for a jacket. I used half a bottle to do a pair of riding boots.

To finish off you may need to apply a leather dressing. There are a number of good ones around, and they are all easy to use. With a good dressing you will have increased the life of your jacket by scores of years.



## **6.4b Sewing Machines and Zippers**

*This is the second part of the article written by Bill Tarplee about how he reconditioned his favourite motorcycle jacket (see above) and covers his comments regarding using the sewing machine and installation of the zipper.*

### **The Sewing Machine**

Sewing machines are noted for being temperamental. Frequently this reputation is wrongly deserved. If you know a few basic rules you shouldn't have too many problems.

The best idea would be to talk with your mum, wife or girlfriend. They will actually show you what I'm Describing here.

### **Clutch**

Most sewing machines have a clutch on the driven wheel. This is a chrome knob that rotate a half turn to lock the driven wheel to the sewing mechanism.

The idea is that you de-clutch before winding cotton onto the bobbin. This way it doesn't disturb the thread line or cause any tangles around the needle.



### **Winding Bobbins**

Have a second reel of thread for winding bobbins. This reel sits on a post on the machine bed. The thread goes from a reel, under a tensioning clip, and up to the bobbin mechanism. You make several turns around the bobbin and pass the free end through one of the holes in the side of the bobbin. Fit the bobbin into the bobbin holder, and run the thread over or through the line laying mechanism. There is usually a chrome

lever under the bobbin holder. Lift the lever until the tyre on the bobbin winder comes into contact with the driven wheel. Start the machine and wind the bobbin(s). It is better to have too little cotton on them than too much.



### **Thread Run**

When machines go temperamental it is usually because the thread has been run incorrectly.

Thread runs along from the reel at the right to a metal hook at the top left. From there the thread passes down and around between two metal discs held together by spring and tension nut. (This is the Tensioning Device, which I will mention in a minute). The

thread passes clockwise around and between the plates, until it come up to a spring wire loop. This will elevate and allow the thread to pass over a notch on the front tension plate. Release the spool and the wire will revert to its state of rest.

The thread then passes through the eye in a rocker arm at top left. It passes through from right to left.

The thread runs down the end of the machine, going under several thread guide clips. There will be at least one on the oscillating sewing leg. The thread then passes through the needle eye.

**MOST IMPORTANT** – the thread must pass through the needle eye in the correct direction! This is usually from right to left. You will have untold sewing trouble if you run the thread the other way.

### **Bobbin Holder**



The bobbin holder is concealed beneath a sliding plate alongside the sewing foot. . The bobbin should unwind anti-clockwise. Drop the bobbin in its holder, holding the thread end. Clamp the bobbin with one finger to stop it from turning and run the thread through a little slot at about 8 o'clock. Pull 50mm of thread from the bobbin and leave it loose.

You then hold the loose end of the top cotton, and turn the machine over by hand. Once the needle has bottomed and lifted, pull on the loose end. This will raise the loose end from the bobbin. Pull both cottons until you have a good 100mm of cotton beyond the sewing foot. Always start with at least 100mm free, or the needle will invariably unthread.

## **Tension**

Tension is the one area that can have you tearing your hair out. It should not be a problem if adjusted properly AND PROVIDING THE THREAD RUNS ARE CORRECT. You often find that 'tension' troubles are actually thread runs that are incorrect.

The top thread is under variable tension. This is to allow the top thread to pull the bottom thread to the centre of the material. In simple terms there are three thread forms. If the lower thread runs straight with the top thread looped across it at each stitch, then there is sufficient tension.

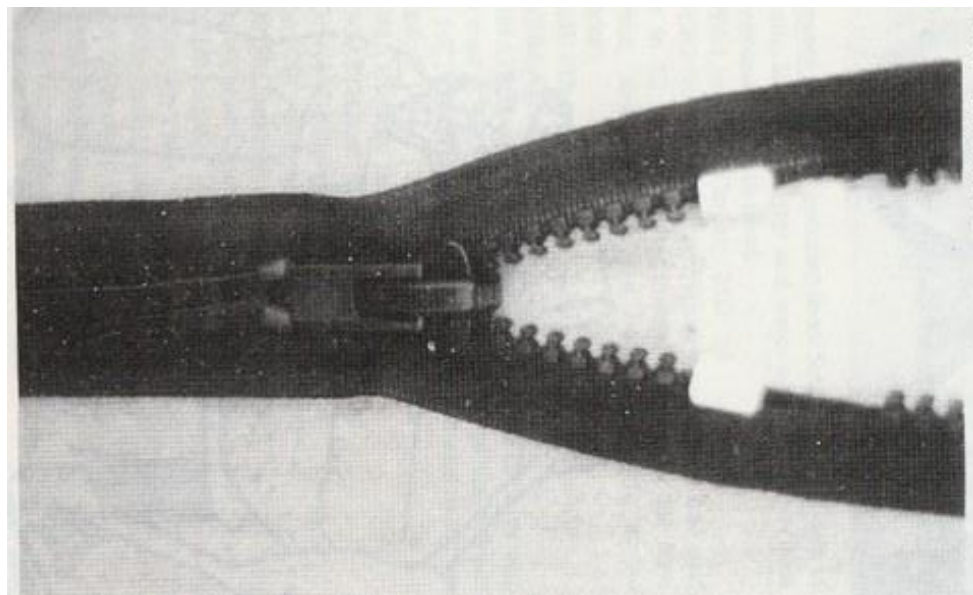


Ideally the tension knob should be set around 4 or 5 on most machines. You should not be able to see the thread from the other side pulled up to the side you're looking at. I found that I needed no adjustments between sewing leather and sewing flannelette. I did find though that I couldn't use one reel of thread that was extra thick and strong. I just couldn't get the tension right. So much for the theory!

### **Zippers – What to Use**

Zippers are one of those devices that you never think about until they give trouble. Then, of course, it's too late.

The best current range of zippers seems to be those used on diver's wet suits. These are a large toothed nylon zipper. They seem to be at least as strong as any metal zipper, and give far less trouble.



I bought a replacement zipper from my local dive shop. It cost me \$5. It was too long, being designed to run from crotch to throat. It is better to be too long than too short.

I calculated the length I needed from the old brass zipper. I marked the teeth I wanted removed, then split them off with wire cutters. The nylon breaks away, leaving the underlying material intact.

I made up a pair of stops from aluminium sheet. You must have something to stop the closer running off the end of the track. Aluminium is easy to use and it doesn't rust.

### **Sewing the Zipper in**

The first insert is easy. The zipper material is sandwiched between the jacket and the lining. You actually sew it in twice. First time you sew the zipper material to the inside of the jacket, going almost to the top. This will locate it against the jacket. Then you sew the lining leather onto the zipper material. This gives you the two lines of sewing, and you won't have the zipper getting out of line. I found that you just can't control three pieces of material if you try to sew them at the same time.

You must start from the bottom and sew up the jacket. Be sure to allow the zipper teeth to project sufficiently. I found that the first time around I had the teeth in too close to the edge of the jacket. It was a nice, neat looking job, only I couldn't do it up! Make sure the teeth are a good mm or more from the edge of the jacket. You now have to work out where the zipper must be located on the other half of the jacket. It is important to make sure that they two halves line up. It is possible (but highly undesirable) to insert a zipper so that one side of the jacket is lower than the other. Once you know where the zipper goes, sew it in as with the first insert.

### **Finishing the Zipper Off**

There are two things to do. Firstly, the material at the top of the zipper should project beyond the stop for at least 30mm. When you have sewn almost to the top, this tail is turned at right angles and tucked inside between the facing and the jacket. The sewing machine then sews beyond this point, locking the tail in.

The second point is to double, or even triple sew the leather at the start and finish of the zipper. These are usually the areas to give way first. Double stitching should prevent this.



## 7.0 Miscellaneous

### 7.1 The Humble Button jar



Back in the days before fast fashion and the consumer society, when clothing was valued, we used to use and re-use materials, throwing away as little as we could manage. In our house, when clothes became worn to the point when they were no longer usable, they would be destined for the rag bag, but any buttons were removed first and saved. This is analogous to the ['Box o' Bits'](#) in the garage, and allowed buttons in particular to be saved. This gave rise to the button jar.

These recycled buttons had a number of uses:

**Repair** – it is a pain in the umm... posterior when a button comes adrift, and there is no spare in place on the garment. Enter the button jar! A mix of different sizes, shapes and colours will mean that it is likely you will have something close, if not identical, to effect a repair. Also, EVERYONE should learn the skill required to sew a button on!

**Reconfigure** – I have had a shirt for a while which tended to drive me crazy because the buttons were too small for the buttonholes so that it tended to come unbuttoned at inopportune times and make me look like a slob (well, more than usual). Linda was able

to extract a full set of buttons from her button jar which were just big enough to stop them pulling through the buttonhole. Problem solved!

**Play** – Man, is there anyone who doesn't like playing with buttons? I did when I was a kid! Obviously you need to be a bit circumspect with younger kids who are likely to insert them in inconvenient orifices in themselves or others, but a bit of common sense goes a long way! I remember a toy we would make with a button and loop of cotton or string, which could then be used to spin the button around. A whizzing button is lots of fun, trust me!

**Manufacture** – of garments from scratch using bought in, repurposed, stored or recovered fabric. By saving the buttons for repurposing you will have a series of buttons enough to make a new garment without having to go to the trouble and expense of buying new ones. Not to mention all the benefits of recycling!

**Craft** – Buttons can be pressed into service to help make dust collectors like felt Christmas trees with buttons glued on in lieu of decorations or buttons glued onto a frame to make a patchwork button picture (if that is your thing). A clock with buttons instead of numbers to measure the passing of time anyone?

**Games** – buttons can be used as counters in any number of homemade board games (eg draughts/checkers: if you don't already have a board it is easy to make one) or to replace counters and other paraphernalia which have gone missing from bought in board games, thus increasing their life.

**Motivation** – One of the threats my mother would use if I did something I wasn't supposed to or failed to do something I should have, was that she would "cut my bottom off and sew a button on". If that's not motivation I don't know what is!

**Education** – Use buttons to show your kids how the ancient calculating machine – the abacus – was made and used.

**Weddings** – when my daughter got married, rather than use perishable flowers as bouquets for the bridesmaids she crafted balls out of polystyrene and buttons, with a single colour of button for each bouquet. They were much longer lived and more striking than just flowers.

**Jewellery** - small buttons can be crafted into earrings, larger buttons can be made into rings to wear on your fingers and any size buttons can be strung together with ribbon or twine to make a bracelet.



So, now you know the value of the humble button jar, the obvious question is – how do you get one? For me there are 3 answers –

**1. Start your own** – you can do this by removing buttons from clothing which has been worn to death and is headed for the rag bag or is to be repurposed. Over time you will

build up your very own stash of buttons for the button jar. Also, you do occasionally see old button stocks for sale cheaply at haberdashery shops or the like, and you can use these to build up your stocks quickly as well as preventing the out of fashion buttons being sent to landfill.

**2. Buy one** – Due to the fact that button jars are just not valued the way they should be these days, I quite often see button jars for sale in second hand shops like the Sallies (Salvation Army) or Vinnies (St Vincent De Paul Society) etc. While I suspect the button jars I have seen were donated by people who no longer value them, it is possible that the shops put together their own using buttons salvaged from clothing destined for use as rags.

**3. Inherit one** – If you have any elderly (usually female) relatives, let them know you would be honoured to receive any button jars/boxes they have if they no longer use them and you will ensure they will not go to waste. My wife has a button jar (or box actually) that was my mothers, given to her by my father and rest assured we will be passing our button jars down to our girls when we get to the point that we can no longer use them.

So, don't just sit there reading stuff on your computer, get out there and collect some buttons!

## **7.2 Making a Wearable Blanket**

We spend a lot of time, effort and (dare I say it) money on heating our homes in winter to keep them comfortable, even here in mild Sydney the winters still get below freezing at night, well at least where we are it does! The thing is though, if you FEEL comfortable, it doesn't matter what temperature the room is, so if you can keep yourself warm you don't need to waste all that energy heating the space around you. The classic thing is to dress up warmly even if you are inside, but we have found that by

making a few small modifications to a blanket, you can carry the heat with you wherever you go.



We have been using a commercial wearable blanket for several years and it is great, particularly when you are sitting still for any length of time whether it be in front of a computer, the TV, a sewing machine or just while you read. I say we have been using a commercial wearable blanket because we only had the one, and rather than fight over it, we have made ourselves a homemade one. We made some mistakes but we'll cover those so hopefully you won't make any, or at least you can pick some new ones!

### **The Blanket**

Which blanket you use is obviously pretty critical to the whole enterprise, the commercial one is acrylic and while that doesn't sound too promising, it is wonderfully warm and has just enough stiffness to make it hold its shape well. The one we modified is a double layer polyester blanket and while it is softer to the touch it doesn't hold its shape well, and required an extra press stud on the neck to keep it on. It also takes longer to warm up, but once it is warm it is just as comfortable as the commercial acrylic one. It would be worth trying out a wool blanket to see how well that works.



The blanket needs to be a maximum width of 1600mm or about the width of a single blanket, any wider than this and the front tends to hang down and trip you up when you try to walk. For the length, it needs to be as long as the height of the person who is going to wear it, this makes sure you get good coverage but are still able to walk while wearing it. It is unlikely that you will find a blanket exactly the right size, so get the width right then trim the length to size and sew on bias binding to the cut edge to keep it from fraying.

### **The Tools & Fittings**

To make a wearable blanket you don't need much, but you do need a few specialised tools and bits and pieces –

- A set of press studs – a pack of 20 should do the trick
- A punch and anvil to set the press studs in the blanket (you can get a set with the press studs but you get less studs in the packet)
- A hunk of steel to set the anvil on to absorb the shock when setting the press studs.
- A hammer, just about any kind will do, but I used a small ball pein hammer.

- Some chalk to mark where the holes will be in the fabric (we couldn't find the tailor's chalk so I used regular blackboard chalk and it worked fine. Needless to say once the job was finished I found the tailor's chalk)
- Tape measure
- Something to make small holes in the blanket with and therein lies a tale!



It was my intention to use a leather maker's rotary punch to make the holes in the blanket, which makes sense in theory but soft cloth is not firm leather and it just did not work. That wasn't a problem though because I had a plan "B", a series of small hollow (AKA belt) punches and one of these would do the job. So much for plan "B"...I beat the living daylights out of the punch and it just wouldn't cut through the spongy material. Fortunately, my older daughter was helping me and she has considerable sewing experience, she said to use a sharp pair of scissors and push them through to make the hole. It worked like a charm so ignore plans "A" and "B" and just head straight for the scissors.

### **The Process**

1. Assuming you have your blanket, it has been cut to size and hemmed or bias binding attached to the bottom of it, lay the blanket out on the floor so it is flat and grab your tape measure. Then...



- Make chalk marks along both edges of the blanket about 100mm to 150mm apart, starting at the bottom corner, for about half the length of the blanket, then
- Make one more chalk mark on each side about 25mm towards the top
- Make three chalk marks along the top edge starting at the top left corner and spaced 150mm apart, then
- Make three more chalk marks along the top edge starting at the top right corner and spaced 150mm apart.

2. Using a pair of very pointy, very sharp scissors make a hole at each chalk mark 15mm in from the edge of the blanket.



3. To make sure the press studs go in the right way around (some of ours didn't) try setting them out next to each chalk mark so that the studs are the right type (male or female) and orientation (face up or face down). This reduces the work and thought later on



when you are madly installing the studs.

4. Set the press studs in the blanket in accordance with the diagram (In Appendix 2) using the accompanying tool and putting a lump of something heavy and flat (such as the cobblers last that I used) underneath it to act as an anvil and setting the studs with a couple of sharp hits.

5. When the studs are all in, hold a test fitting for the person who will be wearing it and see if there is any adjustment needed. As previously mentioned ours was a bit floppy and needed an extra stud higher up on the neck to keep the blanket from slipping off Linda's shoulders.

Note – The commercial ones make use of long zippers, particularly on the lower part of the blanket around the legs. We didn't use a zipper for a number of reasons –

- They are much more complicated to fit and require sewing expertise that I did not possess.
- A long chunky zipper of the type required would have added considerably to the cost.
- If the zipper stuff up (and they eventually do) they are almost impossible to fix and in most cases require replacement.
- If the zipper goes the blanket is bugged until you fix it, if one stud lets loose you are still good to go.
- If you catch your feet the studs may let go in time for you to stop a fall, if you catch your feet in a blanket with a zipper, you are going face first into the floor.

We love our wearable blankets, we wore them recently to a Permaculture meeting held in a (coolish) school hall and they kept us toasty, even if one of the ladies did chicken

us "Mr & Mrs Blanket"!



## 8.0 Resources

*There are thousands of books out there on sewing. Over the years we have collected lots of them, but these books that are not the usual type of sewing book, they focus on repair and remaking of clothes and some other clothing related subjects where there is an overlap between clothing and sustainability. We have found them handy!*

**Modern Mending** – Erin Lewis-Fitzgerald – Affirm Press (AUS) 2020 ISBN 978 1 925927 29 0 – I would like to state at the outset that we love this book and have found it very useful. The book is divided basically into three parts. The first, introductory, part talks about what to consider before commencing the mending job, what tools are required (including making travel kit) and a little about woven and knitted fabrics. The second part covers the various techniques to be used including stitching, patching, darning, buttons, zippers etc. The third section is a series of case studies on how a particular project was mended. There is also a small section at the end of the book on miscellaneous subjects like clothing care and maintenance, mending for other people, resources and recommended reading. Lots and lots of colour photos.

**Mend it Better** – Kristin M. Roach – Storey Publishing (US) 2012 ISBN 978 1 60342 56 3 – The book is a series of chapters of various sizes covering various aspects of clothing repair. Initially there is some introductory info on the evolution of sewing, how to decide if a garment is worth mending and making a mending tool kit including making a mending bag and a mending tool clutch. Techniques of stitching is also covered. This is then followed by chapters on specific mending subjects including surface fixes, seam fixes, hems, darning, fasteners and closures and zippers. There are also chapters on more fancy clothing such as lace, leather and stretch fabrics, applying decorative accents and clothing care and prevention of problems. Lots of colour photos, some coloured line drawings.

**Clothing Care and Repair** – Singer Sewing Reference Library (US) 1985 ISBN 0 394 73417 3 – This is part of the larger Singer reference library and is reasonably comprehensive. It covers clothing care techniques and reading care labels, stains and their treatment, washing and drying including machine drying, hand washing, laundry mishaps, dry cleaning and ironing. There is a small section on designing and organising closets for clothes storage. There is a section on clothing repair covering tools, terms and techniques and detailed information on such issues as buttons, split seams, tears, cuts and holes, hems, zippers and pockets. There is also a section on customising and updating existing clothing, but updating is to the '80s style, unless there is another edition. Lots of colour photos.

**Remake it: clothes** – Henrietta Thompson – Thames & Hudson(UK) 2012 ISBN 978 0 500 53632 4 – This is evidently part of a series but I can only find reference to one other book on 'Home'. This one is interesting. There are a series of techniques about remaking clothes and accessories throughout the book, step by step line drawings, with some interesting ideas. Unfortunately in between the good information there are a whole stack of photos of people/clothing (called "design examples") that look like the came straight off a fashion show, the sort of fashion show (you've seen 'em on TV) where regular people on the street would point at the offerings laugh and say "I wouldn't be caught dead in that!". Waste of space in my opinion. Anyway, there is still good info here if you look for it. BTW, want a hat made from bubblewrap?

**Mend It!** – Maureen Goldsworthy - Mills & Boon Ltd (UK) 1979 ISBN 978 0 8128 2695 1 – The book is broken up into a number of sections covering various repair techniques. Darning both by hand and machine is covered, as is patching by hand and by machine. Repairing knitted fabrics is covered, broken down into single weft knitting, double weft knitting and warp knitting. The section on repairing specialised materials covers leather and suede in detail, pile weaves, laminated fabrics, felt, vinyl, sheer fabrics, lace and fur. The final section comprising the last half of the book is about repairing garments covering such issues as camouflage, panel replacement, seaming out, split seams, hems, buttonholes, cuffs, elbows trousers, shirts underwear and more. The book contains a few B&W photos and lots of line drawings.

**Fabulous Fit!** – Patricia Perry (Ed.) – Butterick Fashion Marketing Company (US) 1977 ISBN 978 0 88421 055 9 – This one is a little different from those above, and it is more about getting existing clothing to fit better, rather than going for a whole new wardrobe if you lose or put on weight. It does come from the time when only women wanted well-fitting clothes and there is nothing about men in there. Still, the techniques discussed can be useful for maintaining fit on our changing bodies. Subjects covered include measuring the body and translating into a pattern, combining pattern sizes or styles, fitting collars, sleeves and darts, handling special fabrics and solving fitting problems. (Be warned: 70s fashions inside). Some colour photos in the middle, but mostly line drawings.

**Sewing Green** – Betz White – Stewart, Tabori & Chang (US) 2009 ISBN 978 1 58479 758 6 – The book is in 3 chapters. The first chapter is about ‘thinking green’ and covers repurposing sewing materials, dealing with second hand clothing, deconstructing and a review of new eco-friendly sewing materials. Chapter 2 is a series of 25 sewing projects using repurposed, second hand or eco-friendly materials such as turning a shirt into a striped café apron, lounge pants from a bed sheet or slippers from a recycled sweater. There are lots of things to make from rugs, to cushions to a draught stopper, produce bags, shopping bags and even a heat therapy pillow with repurposed material of course. The final (small) chapter covers tools, techniques and resources. There are also eco-logic and eco-innovative stories scattered through the book on reducing textile waste, sewing lounges, green sewing spaces etc. Lots of colour photos with the odd plan/line drawing.

**Second Skin** – India Flint – Murdoch Books (AUS) 2011 ISBN 978 1 74196 721 0 – This one is more a ‘big picture’ type of book than being about detailed techniques. It starts with the role of cloth and clothing and their impact on the ecology, a review of some of the newer (and some old) natural fibres, how they are produced also there is some discussions of synthetic fabric and dyes. There is a discussion on planning your clothing wardrobe to get the most out of it, making clothes and maintaining clothes, which contains some interesting ideas, but also not much on detailed techniques. Repurposed and repurposing fashion, and dyeing are also covered. There are lots of colour photos

of clothing and one chapter is set aside as a 'gallery' of photos of clothing – the problem is that while they are interesting as concepts, they are not the sort of thing that average people wear. (See Remake It above) Lots of colour photos.

**Making Simple clothes** – Ida Hamre & Hanne Meedom – Adam & Charles Black (UK) 1980 ISBN 0 7136 2051 X – This book is also a bit different. It basically talks about taking a flat piece of cloth, and then using a number of techniques, turn it into simple clothing based on ideas through history going back to the Bronze Age. The book takes a style of clothing and shows diagrams of the various permutations by traditional cultures. Styles include the kanga, peplus, jellaba, poncho, Bronze Age blouse, tunic, anorak, caftan, kimono and waistcoat. The book then discusses taking body measurements and translating them into a garment. I guess the book is exactly what it says on the tin; how to make simple, traditional clothes from cultures all around the world. No colour photos but lots of line drawings.

**The Illustrated Hassle-Free Make Your Own Clothes Book** – Sharon Rosenberg & Joan Weiner – Studio Vista (UK) 1971 ISBN 0 289 70348 4 – This book was evidently reprised by the authors in 2008 but my copy is the original. The book goes through most of the basics – tools sewing machines, terms and hints, stitches, embroidery, materials giving a page or two to each item, initially. Then, in similar style, it covers recycling scraps and waste materials, remodelling old clothes (into '70s styles), fixing rips and making bags, ponchos and stuff from other stuff! The book then gets serious and covers clothes for women (definitely 70s style) for 76 pages, then clothes for men (for 5 pages!), mainly just drawings. They then do 'AC/DC clothes' Unisex clothes, I think, for 15 pages. Kid's clothes they give 2 pages to, as well as some other miscellaneous stuff like shawls, scarves, ties, stuffed toys, pouches and bags. Simple clothes explained simply with lots of line drawings.

**Loved Clothing Lasts** – Orsola de Castro – Penguin Random House (UK) 2021 ISBN 978 0 241 46115 0 – If you are interested in clothing issues like fast fashion, clothing repair, maintenance and cleaning and sustainable fashion, this book is for you! The book talks about mending being a revolutionary act and why it is a good thing as well as a number

of clothes mending in language simple, so that even an idiot like me can understand. When to clean and not to clean clothes is discussed as well as cleaning and stain removal processes. Also covered is various fabrics and yarns, their environmental consequences and how to care for them. Then the book talks about environmental and social justice issues with our current clothing system and how they may be addressed. I read the book cover to cover and love it, it really opened my eyes, along with *The Conscious Closet* below. Some black and white photos and line drawings.

**The Conscious Closet** – Elizabeth L. Cline – Plume (US) 2019 ISBN 978 1 524 74430 4 – Like *Loved Clothing Lasts* above this book changed the way I look at clothing and is well worth adding to your library. Part one of the book covers why you should put together a sustainable clothing wardrobe that suits your style, and put together a clothing re-use plan and a number of ways we can correct the fast fashion cycle. Part two gives the details on setting up your sustainable wardrobe using what you have and part three covers buying extra clothing sustainably to complete your wardrobe. Part Four (titled ‘The Sustainable Fashion Handbook’ covers fabrics, their environmental issues and how to obtain them sustainably and which clothing brands are ethical and sustainable. Part five details how to care for your clothes to make them last including techniques for cleaning and mending to get the most out of them. Part six covers the fashion revolution, ideas and techniques to help solve the root cause of our fast fashion problems. Some black and white photos and line drawings.

**Overdressed, The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion** – Elizabeth L. Cline – Portfolio/Penguin (US) 2012 ISBN 978 1 59184 461 7 – This was in my library for some time before I read it, and I read it after reading ‘*The Conscious Closet*’ by the same author. In general terms this book covers the environmental and social issues with fast fashion and what we can do about it. It is USA-centric but still worth a read. The author discusses the how and why of the way the fashion industry (clothes making anyway) is now concentrated in Asia, and what that looks like from her experience. The book has no illustrations.

**Kangas: 101 Uses** – Jeanette Hanby & David Bygott – Ines May Publicity (KENYA) 1985 ISBN 978 99667 146 02 – This book, or booklet really, of 89 pages takes the idea, developed on the east coast of Africa in the mid-19th century of making a garment (mostly for women) from a single piece of fabric 160cm (62”) by 107cm (42”). This booklet details (as it says on the label) 101 ways that the fabric can be used as a dress, skirt, shawl, swimsuit, headpiece, cape, hood and lots of other (sometimes funny) things. The book is composed almost entirely of line drawings that show how the Kanga can be configured into all these possibilities. Fascinating!

**Wear, Repair, Repurpose** – Lily Fulop – The Countryman Press (US) 2020 ISBN 978 1 68268 434 4 – This is a great book on how to repair and upcycle your clothing. After an introduction covering the author’s story, fashion sustainability, donating vs recycling and slow fashion, the book is divided into three main parts. Part one gives an overview regarding mending techniques, materials and tools you may need, and fabrics. This is followed by basic sewing skills like needle threading, knot tying and hand sewing. Part two discusses mending projects, that is to say, how to carry out specific repairs like taking in a seam, hemming and patching holes, darning and Swiss darning. Part three talks about upcycling projects, things you can use worn out clothing for like making pom poms or tassels using yarn made from old T-shirts, knitting or crocheting a bag or pillow cover from the same yarn, applique or quilting. The book has lots of line drawing and colour photos.

**Mending Clothes** – Zera Meyer – Self Published in (AUS) 2022 ISBN 979 8 80767 900 – Chapter one talks about the basics of clothing mending including what it is, why it is important and types of mending. Chapter two covers hand sewing stitches, chapter three is a number of tips to make mending easier, chapter four covers darning, Swiss darning, pattern darning, patching and embroidery. Chapter 5 covers cloth mending projects, specifically repair of jeans using various techniques, and repairing shirts, socks and sweaters. There are a couple of weird bits - specifically a page asking the reader to give a good review on Amazon and how to do it, in two places. I also found some of the wording bit strange and difficult to understand, maybe an editor is needed. The book has quite a few black and white photos. Not a bad book, it is worth a look.



## Appendix 1 - Household Sustainable clothing Audit Form

Sourcing					
No	Item	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1.1	We buy clothes through opportunity shops (Sallies, Vinnies etc.)	3	2	1	0
1.2	We 'think before we buy' new clothes	3	2	1	0
1.3	We share clothes (friends, family or using apps) rather than buying new.	3	2	1	0
1.4	We wear what we have rather than buying new	3	2	1	0
1.5	We avoid buying clothing on-line	3	2	1	0
1.6	We buy ethically / sustainable clothing brands when buying new clothes	3	2	1	0
1.7	We buy from small business/ artisanal clothing/ local manufacturers where possible	3	2	1	0
1.8	We sew/ make our own clothes	3	2	1	0
1.9	We consider the upcycling/recycling potential of a garment in the decision to buy	3	2	1	0
1.10	We buy clothes that are well made and will last	3	2	1	0
1.11	We rent clothes we will not wear for a long time (eg baby clothes, pregnancy clothes, party clothes)	3	2	1	0
1.12	We apply the '30 wears' test before buying a new garment (Ask, will I wear this garment 30 times?)	3	2	1	0
1.13	We refuse excess packaging and bring a reusable shopping bag when buying clothes	3	2	1	0
1.14	I have a capsule wardrobe	3	2	1	0

Fabrics					
No	Item	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2.1	We check the label to determine the fabric it is made from before buying new clothes	3	2	1	0
2.2	We consider the cleaning requirements for the fabric of new clothing before we buy it	3	2	1	0
2.3	We do not buy fur (natural or synthetic)	3	2	1	0
2.4	We buy clothing made from organic cotton	3	2	1	0
2.5	We buy clothing made from fabric composed of recycled material	3	2	1	0
	We know how to care for -				
2.6	Synthetics fabrics eg Polyester, nylon, acrylic.	3	2	1	0
2.7	Man-made fabrics eg rayon, viscose,	3	2	1	0
2.8	Natural Fabrics eg cotton, wool, linen, hemp, silk, leather	3	2	1	0
2.9	Blended fabrics eg polycotton	3	2	1	0

cleaning					
No	Item	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
3.1	We only wash clothing when it is necessary	3	2	1	0
3.2	We make use of spot cleaning to freshen up clothes rather than full wash	3	2	1	0

3.3	We use steaming to freshen up clothes rather than a full wash	3	2	1	0
3.4	We use brushing to freshen up tightly woven fabrics like tweed or wool	3	2	1	0
3.5	We use freezing to freshen our jeans and other denim-wear rather than a full wash	3	2	1	0
3.6	We use hand washing to extend the life of delicate fabrics	3	2	1	0
3.7	We treat stains individually rather than in a full wash	3	2	1	0
3.8	We use commonly available materials such as salt, bicarb, vinegar and methylated spirits rather than harsh chemicals to treat stains	3	2	1	0
3.9	We line dry clothes rather than tumble dry	3	2	1	0
3.10	We wash in cold water	3	2	1	0
3.11	Was wash machine full loads of clothes	3	2	1	0

Mending					
No	Item	Always	sometimes	rarely	Never
4.1	We mend rather than discard clothing where possible	3	2	1	0
4.2	We have the tools we require for most mending jobs (needles, thimble, darning mushroom, sewing machine)	3	2	1	0
4.3	We have the consumables for most mending jobs (thread, buttons, patches, zippers, spare fabric)	3	2	1	0
4.4	We have a travel mending kit so we can carry out repairs if we are away from the house	3	2	1	0
	We can use the following techniques for clothes repair -				
4.5	Hand sewing	3	2	1	0
4.6	Machine sewing	3	2	1	0
4.7	Darning	3	2	1	0
4.8	Button replacement	3	2	1	0
4.9	Applique, sew on a patch	3	2	1	0
4.10	Needle felting	3	2	1	0

End of life					
No	Item	Always	Sometimes	rarely	Never
6.1	We send clothing to landfill as a last resort	3	2	1	0
6.2	We upcycle clothing where possible	3	2	1	0
6.3	We use fabric recovered from old clothes in crafts eg quilting	3	2	1	0
6.4	We use fabric recovered from old clothes for cleaning rags	3	2	1	0
6.5	We donate unwanted clothes in good condition to opportunity shops	3	2	1	0
6.6	We pass on unwanted clothes to friends or family	3	2	1	0
6.7	We unravel clothes to make new yarn/thread where this is possible	3	2	1	0

Total possible points (P) =

Total points achieved (A) =

Score % =  $A / P \times 100$

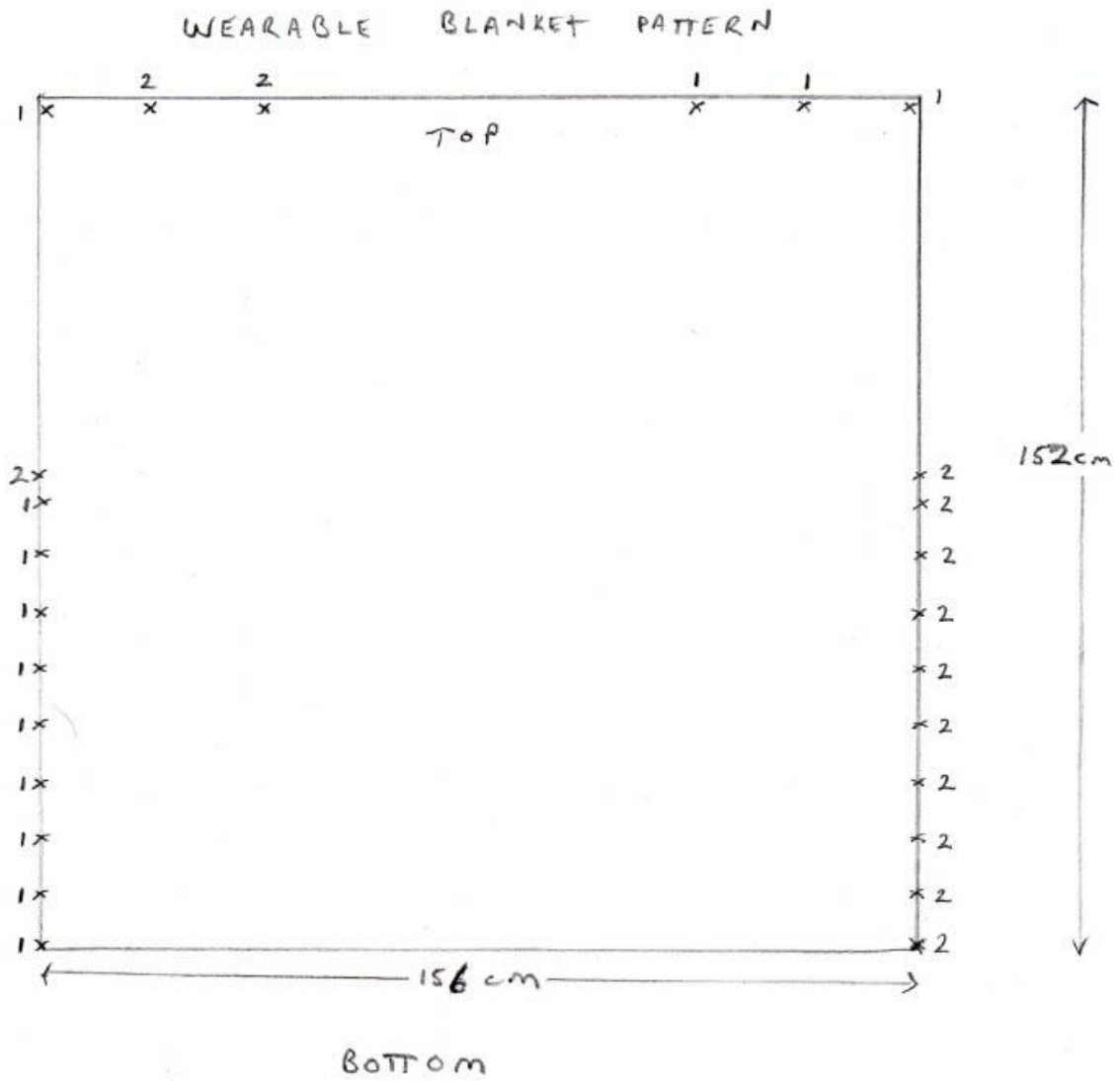
Date audit was completed:

### Instructions

Go through all of the questions one section at a time and mark the number most appropriate for your answer from “always” = 3 down to “never” = 0 by circling, crossing out or whatever. Some questions may appear to support a more yes/no answer so to reflect this it would be best to mark 3 for yes and 0 for no. If the question is not applicable to your situation, strike it out and when counting up the maximum possible number to work out score do not add 3 for that question.

To calculate your score add up all of the potential answers and multiply by 3 to give the maximum possible score, and then add up all of the scores from your answers. Divide your answer score number by the maximum possible score and multiply by 100, this will give you your sustainable clothing score as a percentage. The number itself does not mean much, but acts as a base upon which to improve.

Appendix 2 – Wearable Blanket Pattern



- 1 = FEMALE PRESS STUD FACE UP
- 2 = MALE PRESS STUD FACE DOWN