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# I Introduction

In the SCA, people choose costumes that fit their character and inclination. Many stick to basic T-Tunics for comfort and ease of manufacture; some people prefer Italian Renaissance styles, and some the dags and cotehardies of late Medieval dress. But one thing that almost everyone will agree upon is that Elizabethan costume is one of a very difficult, time-consuming and formidable fashion to sew.

Wearing an English Elizabethan dress requires foundation garments and other paraphernalia. You can't throw an Elizabethan gown over your head and run, like you can with a loose surcote or T-tunic. Therefore many people steer away from Elizabethan garb as a costume choice, preferring something that doesn't require as much effort and storage space.

What many people don't realize is that Elizabethan costuming isn't the horrifically complex art that the finished product makes it appear. To make a court gown does require time and effort and lots of pieces of clothing, but if you take each garment one at a time and build your outfit from the inside out, even those without much experience with a sewing machine can make something which will produce a gratifying number of oohs and aahs. In fact, the everyday dress of the Elizabethan marketwomen is in many ways as simple to make, and as comfortable, as the clothing worn a century before.

But before you begin on your court gowns, kirtles and sleeves, you need to have the basic underpinnings required for upper-class Elizabethan costume. It is often these underpinnings—smock, corset, farthingale, roll, and so on—that turn so many people off of Elizabethan costuming, believing it more trouble than it's worth. Once you have the foundation garments, however, you can make any number of bodices and outfits to wear over them; and the underpinnings are not as difficult to make as you might think.

This manual contains information on finding materials for, making a custom pattern for and sewing together a corset, farthingale (cone-shaped hoop skirt), smock, and bumroll, information on knitting a pair of period stockings, a list of places to find period fabric, boning and other materials, and other useful introductory information about the hidden aspects of Elizabethan costume that aren't visible to the naked eye.

This is a second, updated edition of the original *Elizabethan Underpinnings*. Mailorder addresses, email addresses and other resource information has changed in the last six years, and new research on Elizabethan costume has dramatically increased what information we have on underpinnings during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

If you are interested in continuing down the path of Elizabethan costume after reading this Compleat Anachronist, visit the **Elizabethan Costume Page**, <http://costume.dm.net/>, to find materials, resources and inspiration to start you on your way. Many of the articles that form the basis of this manual are online there.

# 16th Century Costume Timeline



1515



1535



1545



1555



1565



1575



1585



1595

Here, for reference, is a chart showing the changing silhouette of Elizabethan dress from the beginning to the end of the 16th century.

# Overview of an Elizabethan Outfit

There's not enough room in this booklet to cover the topic of all Elizabethan costume. To understand what went underneath, however, it's necessary to have a basic understanding of the different elements of costume in Elizabethan England.

This is a listing of the main elements of Elizabethan dress. By the term "Elizabethan", I mean the dress worn by the English during Queen Elizabeth's reign, or approximately 1560-1600.

There was a very wide variation in style between 1560 and 1600—indeed, the entire silhouette of fashion transformed itself during the 40 year timespan. The variation between the clothing worn by the nobility and that worn by the common folk was almost as great.<sup>1</sup> In addition, women of the 16<sup>th</sup> century had a number of different ensembles to choose from, just as modern women do. There's no "one" Elizabethan outfit.

Therefore, I'm narrowing this overview down to one lady, at one time and place. Meet Cecily Hawkins, a minor noblewoman living in London in 1575. She's going to Elizabeth's court today, and has decided to wear her most fashionable

gown: A French gown, with a low, square neckline, a tight-fitting bodice, and a full skirt gathered to the waist.

Putting on an upper-class English Elizabethan gown is a complicated process, and when you include hair and make-up, can take half an hour or more. Several writers of Elizabethan times lampooned the extraordinary amount of time required for a woman to complete her toilette and dress. Phillip Stubbes' rant on women's dress, written in the 1580s, is an entertaining & informative example.<sup>2</sup>

Cecily has a number of servants to do her hair and put on her shoes after she dresses. If you are unfortunate enough to lack servants to help you dress, you should do your hair and put on any underwear, stockings and shoes before starting. Once you're dressed, these things will be much more difficult to do. Although the Elizabethan noblewomen didn't wear underwear per se, several modern re-enactors do; when wearing Elizabethan dress in hot weather, shorts can prevent chafing.

After stretching and washing her face and hands, Cecily is ready to dress.



## Fyrste: A Smocke



The first thing Cecily puts on is her *smock*, also called a *shift*. This innermost layer of clothing, worn by all women of all classes, was a basic linen undergarment worn to protect outer clothing from sweat and body oils.

But which smock to wear? Cecily has different kinds of smocks; some are cut close to the body with a low, square neck and close-fitting, ungathered sleeves. Others have puffy sleeves gathered to cuffs and a body gathered to a close-fitting neckband. Since Cecily's wearing her low-cut French gown rather than a gown with a high bodice, she chooses a linen smock with a low, square neck, decorated with black-work and narrow lace around the neck opening.

For more information on the history and variety of Elizabethan smocks, see the section on Elizabethan Smocks.

## Ye Stockyns



Next, Cecily opens her clothes chest and looks through her *stockings*. Women's stockings of the 1570s came to just above the knee. Cecily has several pair of cloth stockings for everyday wear. These are made of bias cut wool in a number of colors and weights.<sup>3</sup> She also has three pairs of expensive knitted hose, two of wool jersey yarn, and one of fine silk thread. Today, she decides, she should wear her silk stockings. Cecily's stockings are kept up by a garter, a thin ribbon tied just below the knee.<sup>4</sup> See the section on Knitting Period Stockings for more details.

## A Paire of Bodyes



Now it's time for the *corset*. Cecily's corset, which she calls a "pair of bodies", is a close-fitting bodice stiffened with reed and whalebone. Cecily doesn't wear a corset every day—although she's a buxom woman, her *petticoat bodies* gives a fashionable enough silhouette for relaxed home wear—but for court, she needs a corset to give her the flat front line required for her French gown. For today, she slips a busk of horn down the front of her corset to make it very stiff and straight. Look at the sections on the History of the Elizabethan Corset, Corset Materials, Corset Patterns and Making a Corset to find out more about this garment.



## A Spanishe Verdingal

Cecily's *Spanish farthingale* is next. This is a cone-shaped hoop skirt which gives the A-line shape that has become so fashionable at court over the past decade. She has some farthingales stiffened with rows of rope, which give a softer line, as well as some stiffened with willow withies, which create a very rigid shape indeed. For court, she chooses her willow-hooped Spanish farthingale made of red taffeta.



Her maid, Joan, slips it over her head and ties it to the corset at the sides. This keeps it from slipping down and moving, and helps transfer the weight of heavy skirts to her torso rather than having it rest all on the hips. Cecily feels a chill draft creep under her hoopskirt, and belatedly wishes that she had put on a warm, flannel petticoat under her farthingale<sup>5</sup>.

For more info on the farthingale and its evolution throughout the Elizabethan era, look at the sections on the History of the Farthingale and Making Elizabethan Farthingales.

## A Rowle

Should she wear a “rowle” to Court or not? Cecily debates the question. Some women wear small, padded crescents around their hips to make skirts spring out more. The French gown Cecily plans to wear has pleats that are stuffed with batting and stiffened buckram near the top, to give them more spring<sup>6</sup>, but perhaps a bumroll would give an extra “oomph” to her skirt. She decides to wear one, and Joan ties it around her waist. Look at the section on Rolls and French Farthingales for more information about this item.



## Ye Kyrteell and Forepart

Cecily has a number of different kirtles. Many are separate skirts, although some of her “kirtles” are actually entire undergowns, meant to be worn under different styles of outer gowns.

For this French gown, Cecily plans to wear a kirtle skirt over her farthingale. Cecily has her maid Joan take her red satin kirtle out of the press. Cecily chooses one that will go well with the red velvet gown: a red satin kirtle, with a forepart of black taffeta and white sarcenet puffs, embroidered in gold. It has matching sleeves, like several of her





other foreparts<sup>7</sup>. Joan laces the matching sleeves into the armholes of her gown, while Cecily waits impatiently.

### **A Partelet**

Cecily had planned to wear her favorite shirt under her gown. It gathers to a high neck and has poufy sleeves which gather to cuffs. It's entirely covered with blackwork embroidery. As she's wearing sleeves that match her forepart, however, the shirt isn't an option; there's no way the gathered and heavily decorated shirt sleeves would fit comfortable under the outer sleeves. Instead, she chooses a white silk partlet embroidered with a network design in black silk "blackwork" embroidery. This partlet ties under her arms, and fills in the low neckline of her gown quite nicely.



### **Gowne and Sleeves**

At last! Time for Cecily's gown and sleeves. Joan helps her into the French gown, makes sure the partlet is evenly tucked around the neckline, and laces it closed in front as the other maid, Maud, fiddles with the fashionable large shoulder rolls to make sure they're straight. Most of Cecily's gowns fasten up the front, either with lacing or with hooks and eyes. The skirt of the gown is shaken out so that it lies evenly around.

### **Ye Shoes**

Cecily has several shoes to wear. They all have thin leather soles and uppers of leather, velvet or other fabrics. They are lined with wool, taffeta and satin<sup>8</sup>. Some are slip-on shoes, similar to modern espadrilles. Others look rather like modern mary janes, with a low-cut top and a strap across the instep.<sup>9</sup> Cecily decides to wear her red leather "latchet" shoes. These shoes have two side-flaps that fasten over a central tongue, tying with a yellow ribbon. She slips out of the slipper-like pantofles<sup>10</sup> she's been wearing to keep her feet off of the cold floor, and steps into her shoes.

### **Hedde Wear**

Cecily sits down before her mirror with a sigh of relief, as Maud and Joan busy themselves with her hair. Joan places a linen cape over her gown, to keep hair and hair oils (Cecily rarely washes her hair with soap) away from the costly gown<sup>11</sup>. She then brushes the knots from her mistress's hair with a bone comb. The front hair is rolled into two puffs, using some false hair to add body, and the rest is braided into a thick brown braid. Joan then threads a blunt needle with a ribbon, called a "hair tape", and proceeds to "sew" the braid to Cecily's head to keep it in place<sup>12</sup>. She then fixes a small bag, or "caul", over the braid.

After looking through her various headwear—a rather out-of-date french hood, a small flat cap, and several hats of differing shapes, sizes and colors—Cecily decides to wear a tall hat of white and gold brocade, embellished with several white feathers and a beautiful hatpin of enamelled gold.

## Painte for the Face

Meanwhile, Maud has been preparing Cecily’s makeup. Cecily doesn’t often wear makeup, but for an appearance at court it really is required. She prefers white lead for a foundation base. Although some folk warn that it’s bad for the skin, she’s never noticed any bad effect. Maud applies the white foundation to Cecily face and bosom, and then applies red “ceruse”, or vermilion, to Cecily’s lips<sup>13</sup>. She also puts a touch of ceruse on the cheeks.

## A Ruffe-bande

Cecily orders her fancy white linen neck ruff with the gold lace edging and spangles to be brought from its band-box. It was set into neat, crisp figure-eights just the night before, by a local woman known for her starching ability and knack with setting ruffs. It has matching wrist ruffs. Joan and Maud hook them onto Cecily’s neck and wrists.

## Jewelry

Cecily chooses a rich carcanet, or jeweled choker, of garnets and pearls to wear around her neck. It has a pendant depicting a dolphin, decorated with diamonds and emeralds. She chooses ruby and pearl earrings, and Joan slips some

bodkins tipped with pearls into the puffs of her hair. Not quite satisfied with the effect, Cecily also dons a long gold chain and has Joan fix a large pendant to the front center of her bodice. Like most other women of her station, Cecily believes that more is always better when it comes to decoration.

## Safeguard & Cloak

It’s a rather cloudy day and there’s a slight chance of rain. Joan keeps nagging Cecily to wear some protective clothing, so Cecily has Maud put a “safeguard”, or protective outer skirt<sup>14</sup>, over her gown to keep any mud or water from it during her horse ride across town. A waist-length cape protects her bodice and sleeves.

And Cecily is finally ready to go to court!



*Fig 1: Portrait of an Unknown Lady, c. 1565-1570. School of François Clouet.*

# History of the Elizabethan Corset

Body-shaping through the use of garments has been practiced in many different fashions throughout the centuries and around the world. In Japan, the obi wound tightly around a woman's torso served much the same flattening and smoothing purpose as an Elizabethan corset; the "giraffe-neck" women of Africa use a series of metal rings to lengthen their necks to extraordinary proportions.

When people think of 16th century dress, the first thing that comes to mind is the corset. The corset represents a fundamental shift in the concept of clothing and tailoring. Until the late 15th century, body shaping was accomplished by the seam placement, and tight lacing which were responsible for the monobosom effect of 15th century kirtles and Italian renaissance gowns of the same era<sup>1</sup>. At most, there was some form of stiffening on either side of the laces to keep the seam straight, and perhaps an interlining of stiff or heavy fabric through the bodice of the gown. In the 16th century, a change occurred: instead of shaping clothes to the body, as had been done throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the body began to conform to the fashionable shape of the clothing worn.

There are several myths about wearing corsets, many of which spring from Victorian corsetry rather than Elizabethan. In the 16th century, the corset was not meant to draw in the waist and create an hourglass figure; rather, it was de-

signed to mold the torso into a cylindrical shape, and to flatten and raise the bustline. There is one 16th century reference to a small waist being fashionable, but on the whole it was a fashionably flat-torsoed shape, rather than a tiny waist, that the corset was designed to achieve.

Another common myth revolves around the discomfort of corsets. This, too, stems from the tightly-laced waists of the 19th century; the corset worn in Elizabethan England, when fitted and laced correctly, is quite comfortable. Some well-endowed women consider then more comfortable than modern underwire bras, and many people with back problems have remarked upon how much a boned-tab Elizabethan corset feels like a supportive back brace.

As the corset was hidden underneath the other layers of dress in the 16th century, finding out about it is difficult. Up to the 1520s, the raised and slightly rounded shape of the fashionable gown could be achieved by a well-fitted kirtle. A German woodcarving of 1520 shows a woman wearing a gown with a definite crease and fold in the fabric under the bust<sup>2</sup>. In Holbein's sketches of the 1520s and his portraits of the 1530s, however, stiffening is definitely required<sup>3</sup>.

This flattened bosom could have been achieved by Tudor bodices and stomachers were stiffened with buckram (glue-stiffened canvas) to achieve the fashionably flat shape<sup>4</sup>. Looked at from

a practical standpoint, however, it saves time and labor to have one stiffened undergarment to wear under several gowns then to stiffen every gown individually. Having an undergarment to take the strain of shaping the body also helps to extend the life of the outer gown. In addition, tightly-fitted and supportive undergowns worn underneath a decorative outer garments were found through Europe for the entirety of the preceding century<sup>5</sup>; it is only natural that this established trend should have continued.

How did the corset evolve into a separate garment? In the 15th century, a tightly-fitted kirtle worn under the outer gown was used to shape the body into the fashionable form. It's likely that it was the bodice of this kirtle which was first stiffened with buckram, and then with stiffer materials such as reed or bents, as the fashionable silhouette became flatter and flatter during the 1520s and 1530s.



Fig 2: Drawing after Hans Holbein's Portrait of Jane Seymour, c. 1535.

During the 1530 and 40s, the decorative skirt of the kirtles worn under gowns underwent a change: instead of an entire decorated underkirtle, a separate, decorated "kirtle" skirt could be worn under the outer gown<sup>6</sup>. When this happened, we can theorize that the by-now-essential stiffened kirtle bodice was retained as a separate garment: the "payre of bodies", or corset as it is now known.

There are also references in early 16th century Spain of a "vasquina" bodice being tied to a farthingale or stiffened skirt<sup>7</sup>. Add stiffening of some kind to this separate under-bodice, and voila—a corset is born.

## Written References to Corsets

One problem with finding written references to 16th centuries is that the term "pair of bodies" could denote both a corset and the bodice of a gown. One needs to take the context of the reference into account. If it is a "pair of bodies with sleeves", most likely it is a gown which is being discussed; if materials such as whalebone or bents are mentioned, it could conceivably be a corset rather than a bodice. If it is mentioned with petticoats or farthingales, other undergarments of the time, then chances are it is a corset rather than a bodice. In the 1550s, the first reference to a separate undergarment is found in the wardrobe accounts of Mary Tudor<sup>8</sup>.

- *Item for making of one peire of bod-ies of crymsen satin*
- *Item for making two pairs of bodies for petticoats of crymsen satin*
- *Item for making a pair of bodies for a Verthingall of crymsen Grosgrain*

Satin appears to have been Mary's fabric of choice, and crimson was one of the prevalent colors in her wardrobe. Sewing a stiffened bodice to a petticoat or farthingale would be a practical way to lessen the bulk underneath the outer gowns, keep the farthingale from slipping out of place and help distribute the weight of a heavy gown more comfortably. References to petticoats often mention bodices sewn to them<sup>9</sup>.

Queen Elizabeth had several pairs of bodies listed in her wardrobe accounts<sup>10</sup>. The following listings, according to Janet Arnold (author of *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*), most likely referred to a corset-like garment.

- *A payre of bodies of black cloth of silver with little skirts (1571)*
- *a pair of bodies of sweete lether (1579)*
- *a pair of bodies of black velvet lined with canvas stiffened with buckeram (1583)*
- *for altering a pair of bodies...the bodies lined with sackcloth and buckram about the skirts with bents covered with fustian.*
- *a pair of french bodies of damaske lined with sackcloth, with whales bone to them (1597)*

As we can see, several different materials were used to stiffen bodies: leather, buckram, bents, and, as the 16th century neared its end, whalebone.

In the later 16th century, "French Bodies" was a term commonly used for the stiffened undergarment. In 1577, they were worn in France:

*French women have inconceivably narrow waists...over the chemise they wear a corset or bodice, that they call a 'corps pique', which makes their shape more delicate and slender. It is fastened behind which helps to show off the form of the bust.<sup>11</sup>*

A quote from the late 1590s give us an idea of what they were stiffened with:

*I will have a petticoate of silk, not red but of the finest silk there is...it shall have a French bodie, not of whalebone, for that is not stiff enough, but of horne for that will hold it out, it shall come, to keepe in my belly...my lad, will have a Busk of whalebone, it shall be tyed with two silk points...<sup>12</sup>*

Here again a petticoat has a bodie "to" it, indicating that the two were worn—and perhaps even fastened—together.

French bodies show up regularly in tailor's bills of the later 16th century. Here are some listings found in the bills of Tailor's Bills of the 1590s<sup>13</sup>:

- *2 pair of French bodies (1591)*
- *3/4 [yard] of canvas for mistress Knevittes bodies (1591)*
- *whales bone for the bodies*
- *an elle of canvas for my mistress's Frenche bodies [and] six yards of green binding lace to them (1592)*
- *2 yards of sacking for a pair of French bodies (1594)*
- *a whale bone bodye (1590)*

and lastly, here is a reference to a pair of bodies made for Queen Elizabeth's dwarf, Tomasen: "*a payer of French bodies of damask lined with sackcloth, with whales bone.*"



## Pictures of Corsets

Descriptions are well and good...but what did the period pair of bodies look like? Unfortunately, pickings are slim. As the pair of bodies was an undergarment, it wasn't depicted in period paintings. In fact, I have found only three paintings from the time period which show a pair of boned bodies.

The first is a portrait of Elizabeth Vernon, Countess of Southampton, dated to c. 1600. It shows the countess en deshabille wearing a pink boned pair of bodies underneath her opened jacket. A ruffle of gathered fabric runs around the bottom of the corset, and it laces up the front.

The second is somewhat later—it dates to the 1620s, but still provides useful information on corsets of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. “Kitchen in-

terior with the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus”, by Pieter Cornelisz van Rijck, shows a kitchen maid dressed in smock, corset, petticoat and apron. Like Elizabeth Vernon's corset, this one is also very flat, laces up the front, and is boned with narrow, vertical channels.

## Extant Corsets

Fortunately, we have more to go on than paintings. There are currently two known corsets from the 16th century, and two stomachers dated to the early 17th century, which we can look at as examples.

The first and best known example of a 16th century corset is the German pair of bodies buried with Pfaltzgräfin Dorothea Sabine von Neuberg in 1598. This corset is shown in detail on page 47 and 112-113 of Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion 1560-1620* and in Jutta



*Fig 3: Drawing after a Portrait of Elizabeth Vernon, c. 1600*



*Fig 4: Drawing after a detail from van Rijck's "Kitchen Interior", c. 1628*

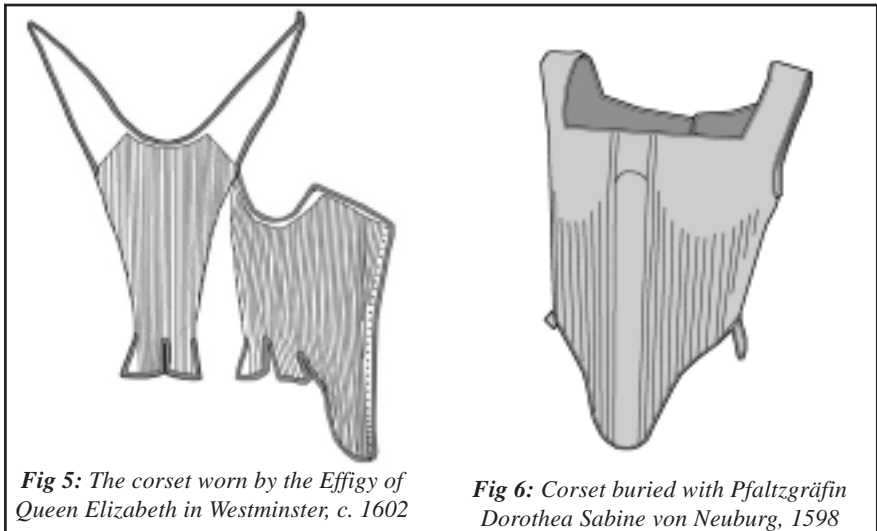
Zander-Seidel's book *Textiler Hausrat*. It is made of three layers of cream-colored fabric, the outer layer being silk backed with linen and the inner lining of linen, and has channels backstitched between the two layers into which whalebone was inserted. It has tabs at the waist, as well as small eyelets at the waistline through which the farthingale (stiffened hoop skirt) or petticoat could be fastened to the corset.

A pocket sewn down the front of the German corset allowed a stiff busk to be slipped into the corset, to provide a completely flat front. The armholes are rather far back, as are the armholes of most garments of the time; a stiff, upright, and what modern people would call unnaturally rigid posture was considered a mark of good breeding.

This was a German corset, and therefore cannot be considered an example of English Elizabethan fashion; nevertheless, it is the earliest surviving corset we have.

The busk which would have been slipped into the busk pocket, was a long, flat piece of ivory, horn or wood, elaborately carved in later centuries, which helped to give a pair of bodies a rigid, smooth shape. In 1579, Henry Etienne mentioned this item in a letter: "The ladies call a whalebone... their stay, which they put under their breast, right in the middle, in order to keep straighter."<sup>14</sup> This stay, or busk, could be tied into place by a busk-lace to keep it from shifting up or down. The busk-lace eventually became an intimate favor, given by women to the men they loved<sup>15</sup>.

The second corset is English, and was put on the effigy of Queen Elizabeth in 1602. It currently resides in Westminster Abbey, along with a detailed write-up and dating of the corset by Janet Arnold which is kept in the Westminster Library<sup>16</sup>. There is a photograph of this corset in Norah Waugh's book *Corsets and Crinolines*. As the book was printed prior to the corset's



**Fig 5:** The corset worn by the Effigy of Queen Elizabeth in Westminster, c. 1602

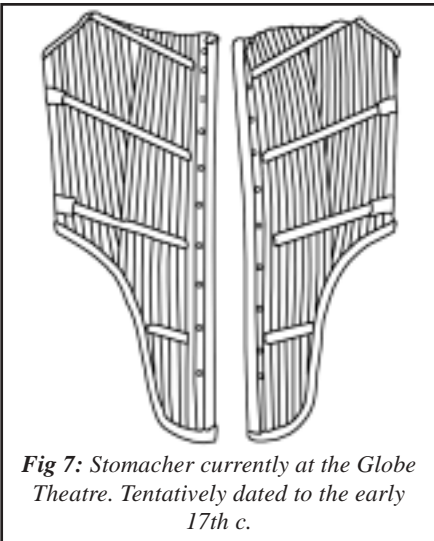
**Fig 6:** Corset buried with Pfaltzgräfin Dorothea Sabine von Neuburg, 1598



re-dating to c. 1602, it is included with 18<sup>th</sup> century corsets.

This corset was also stiffened with whalebone. Unlike the German corset it had boned tabs and a wide, scooped neck which hinted at the shape the corset would attain during the next two centuries. It laces up the front. Interestingly, the front edged of this corset curves in below the bust and out over the bust. Due to the front lacings, it has no busk; instead, two heavy strips of whalebone run down either side of the front lacing.

Aside from these two items, all we have are two 17<sup>th</sup> century stomachers, one currently in the Globe Theatre in London and the other in the Rocamora Collection of Barcelona, which were both cut down from corsets. They are virtually identical in proportion and construction; both are made of a heavy, coarse linen, are boned with thin reeds, and are braced with horizontal cross-braces of whalebone down either side of the front center lacings.



*Fig 7: Stomacher currently at the Globe Theatre. Tentatively dated to the early 17<sup>th</sup> c.*

## 16<sup>th</sup> Century Corset-making

Based on the extant corsets we have to examine and on the construction techniques found in other garments of the period, we can draw some conclusions about how these items were made in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Professional tailors often mention corsets in their bills and accounts<sup>17</sup>. Like French Farthingales, petticoats and kirtles, “whaleboned bodies” were an item readily available from a lady’s tailor. As with many other garments of the time, women who couldn’t afford a tailor could easily make a corset at home from sackcloth and the small reeds readily available to all for stiffening.

The effigy corset was made of three pieces—two front pieces and one back piece—which were made and finished separately and whip-stitched together along the side back seams before wearing. This technique would allow for easier size changes: if the wearer gained or lost weight, the back could be removed and a smaller or larger piece added.

These corsets and the two stomachers were constructed by placing layers right sides out, sewing the boning channels, and then binding the edges with a strip of leather or fabric. The modern “sew right sides together and then turn right sides out” was an uncommon technique of the time.

The binding on the two corsets and on two extant stomachers of the time was placed right side against the outside edge of the corset, stitched down, turned over to the wrong side, and either hem-stitched down along the edge or

stab-stitched through to the front of the corset, following the seam line of the outer binding edge. In the case of the two stomachers, the raw edge was left unfinished on the inside. Binding strips could be made of ribbon, of fabric cut on the bias, or of fabric cut on the straight.

The boning channels on the Pfaltzgräfin's corset and two 17th century stomachers were backstitched, which would add strength and flexibility to the seams as well as adding a more finished look. The seams on the effigy corset were stitched with a running stitch.

Lacing holes had a row of boning to either side of the holes, in all cases. The holes were poked with an awl and whip-stitched around the opening for strength.

In all pictures and extant corsets and stomachers, the boning runs straight up and down across the entire front.

The quality of material varied widely, as can be seen from the different listings for corsets: sackcloth for less exalted bodies and for lining more expensive pairs of bodies which were covered with damask, satin or taffeta. The quality of construction varied as well. On one of the stomachers, there were four backstitches per inch; the Pfaltzgräfin's corset was made with smaller stitches and finer thread, as was the Effigy corset.

## **To sum up**

During the 16th century, corsets were made out of linen, linen-cotton blends (after 1570), or, in the case of nobility, an outer layer of leather, satin or other silk and inner layers of linen. Whale-

bone, horn and reeds were the most commonly used materials for stiffening the pair of bodies, although heavy corded rope cannot be discounted as a possibility. The boning was slipped into channels between the outer and inner layers of the corset, which could be either running-stitched or back-stitched. Corsets could lace at the center front or center back, through eyelets reinforced with a buttonhole or whip stitch. A corset could have unboned tabs at the waist, a ruffle of fabric sewn at the waist, or boning extending down into the tabs. It could even be fastened to a petticoat or farthingale, either tied to it with points (laces run through eyelets) or perhaps sewn.

From practical experience, the boned-tab corset is immeasurably more comfortable than a corset with no tabs or unboned tabs. The straps of the Effigy corset are also more comfortable than those of the Pfaltzgräfin corset, as they don't cut into the armhole as much and are cut on the bias. For the ramrod-straight court gown, a back-lacing corset with a busk is required. For more informal gowns, or gowns without a deep point in the front, a front-lacing corset is fine. Front lacing corsets are more comfortable and easier to get into, although it's a good idea to have back lacing for adjustment. Lacing the farthingale to the corset eliminates shifting, makes the whole garment move better and is more comfortable (in my opinion). A petticoat with a heavily boned bodice is a convenient alternative to a separate corset and skirt. It eliminates bulk at the waist, as well.

# Materials

Corsets serve one primary function: to give the body a “fashionable” shape. The rebellious body tends to resist unnatural shaping; therefore, the main requirement for a corset is strength. Aside from the shapes of the pattern pieces themselves, the two factors involved in a corset’s shaping strength are the fabric of the garment, and the stiffening used.

## PERIOD FABRICS

### Linen

The corset, being primarily an undergarment, could very likely have been made from the material most period undergarments were made of: linen. According to all material evidence to date, most chemises, smocks, and other undergarments of the middle ages and renaissance were made of linen or a linen/wool blend<sup>1</sup> (or silk for those who could afford it), and some 16th century corsets are specified as being lined with canvas or buckram, both of which were linen-based fabrics at the time. It’s a good material for corsets. Why?

- Linen breathes well, an important consideration in a garment as tight-fitting as a corset.
- It’s strong and durable, and resists seam and fabric strain better than, say, wool.
- It’s able to withstand the repeated washing necessary for a garment worn close to the skin.
- It has a natural stiffness of texture (when new and tightly woven) that complements the corset’s function.

- Lastly, it was cheap. (stress: Was.) Linen was the cotton broadcloth of period times, used for much basic and utilitarian garb.

### Silk-based fabrics

Like all utilitarian garments, the pair of bodices was fancied up by the upper classes. **Satin, taffeta and sarcenet, velvet and brocade** were all used by Queen Elizabeth, according to the wardrobe accounts of the Master of the Queen’s Closet<sup>2</sup>. The corset of the Pfalzgräfin Dorothea, which Janet Arnold examines in her book *Patterns of Fashion 1450-1560*, had an interior lining of linen but was a silk satin on the outside. From what references are available<sup>3</sup> it seems silk satin and taffeta were the most commonly used fabrics for richer folk.

For a corset, you’d want to use a strong, heavy silk (such as a baroque satin, for example) rather than the light and flowing fabrics found in most fabric stores under the category “silk”. These aren’t sturdy enough unless backed with linen, buckram, or some other sturdier fabric. In addition, never use chlorine bleach on it.

So, why use silk for a corset?

- It’s an incredibly strong fabric
- It’s period
- It breathes wonderfully
- You can wear the corset as an outer garment and show off the fabric, though it’s not a period practice.

## MODERN EQUIVALENTS

### Cotton Duck/Drill Canvas

Unfortunately, pure linen is nowadays harder to come by and silk satin sells for \$20 a yard. For purely utilitarian use, with no thought for period authenticity or pretty looks, the best fabric to make a corset out of is cotton canvas, specifically “duck” or “drill” fabric. It can be found in any fabric store, usually for \$4-5 a yard. Undyed, unstriped duck or drill in a cream or white color is best, if such is available, as it is both more period looking and less likely to bleed onto other garments when it gets damp or sweaty. This fabric:

- Is the strongest and most durable fabric you can find for a corset; it stands up to repeated washings, and corset boning has a hard time poking through it
- It’s stiff, and doesn’t crinkle or scrunch; this helps keep a smooth corset line
- It’s cheap.
- You can get it in any fabric store

For someone wishing a fancier corset, perhaps one which can be worn over a chemise and skirt as an outer garment (it’s not perfectly period, but it looks nice) the general practice is to use canvas drill or some other plain, strong, cotton-based fabric for the inside lining, and a fancier cloth for the outside layer. There’s a wide variety of fabrics to choose from. Modern fabrics made to resemble their more expensive, originally silk-based counterparts—brocades, shot silk, velvet and satin to name the big four—are period-looking, beautiful possibilities for outer layers of corsets.

**Upholstery fabrics and brocades** are usually quite strong and unlikely to rip, though they have more give and stretch to them than canvas does. However, depending on what the cloth is made of—synthetic or natural fabrics, and what kind of dye is used—there may be problems with shrinking while washing, bleeding of dyes, and (this is a problem with synthetic fabrics) a lack of breatheability while wearing it.

This might seem like a small consideration, but when you’re wearing a corset at high noon under heavy clothes, it seems much more pressing. My tapestry corset, though it looks great, is a sweatbox compared to my cotton canvas one. Also, extended contact with some rubber and plastic-backed upholstery fabrics can be a health hazard due to fibreglass content.

Prices range from around \$8 to \$15 a yard, depending on the type of brocade you’re buying. Check the fabric store remnant tables for scraps of upholstery fabric; a corset doesn’t take much, and the prices are cheaper.

**Satin** is a good choice for a fancy corset. Although it can be a slippery pain to sew, the smooth fabric is strong and looks quite nice on its own. If you’re going to use satin, the most period type is the heavy stuff known as “bridal” or “baroque” satin. Avoid hammered satin. Also, acrylic satin (as opposed to polyester satin) will tend to rot and discolour when repeatedly exposed to sweat.

**Shot silk**, that stiff, rustly fabric found in the bridal section that changes color when it moves, was used in Elizabethan times where it was known as “change-

able taffeta”. It’s not as strong as silk or cotton canvas, and also tends to rot when exposed to sweat, but looks nice. At our local Jo-Ann’s, it costs \$8 a yard. Discount fabric stores or warehouses would have it at a lower price.

**Velvet.** If you’re going to use velvet for your corset, use cotton velvet or velveteen if you can find it. Not only will it be more durable and less likely to acquire shiny flat spots, but it looks more like period velvet and—drum roll please—you can toss it in the washing machine, something that silk, taffeta, satin and shot silk *really* don’t appreciate. Keep in mind, though, that wearing the corset under a dress is going to flatten the velvet eventually. Also remember that velvet is hot. At most retail stores, cotton velvet costs \$12-14 dollars a yard, and velveteen costs \$10-11 dollars/yard.

**Silk** is another choice for the outer fabric of a corset. China Silk, that flimsy, flowing fabric that most people immediately think of when they hear the word “silk”, was not found as an outer garment during Elizabethan times. Back then, silk was either a gauzy, translucent fabric used for veils and undergarments, or a heavier fabric with a slight shine and the approximate weight of a baroque satin or taffeta; it is this latter type that a corset would be made of. Silk can be woven to create a number of different textures and fabrics; when choosing a silk-based fabric, stay away from nubbly and rough-textured ones, which weren’t in use during Elizabethan or Tudor times.

**Corduroy**, the cordury with the small wale (small ridges, not the big ones), is

also a cheap and nice-looking alternative to other fabrics. It’s cheap and sturdy, and good for daywear. (I’m looking for a reference for this as we speak)

## FINDING THE REAL THING

For all you die-hards out there who really want a linen, silk satin, or honest-to-god silk brocade corset, check out Appendix A for a list of places that sell specialty fabrics Thai Silks, in my experience, has the best buys for hard-to-find silk velvets, satins and taffetas.

## BONING, BUSKS, AND OTHER HARDWARE

Much of the information and suggestions for boning materials in this section came from people on the early costuming e-mail list. I have not, personally, used any boning aside from spring steels, polyester boning, feather boning and hoop skirt boning.

## PERIOD BONING

The earliest material that we know was for corset stiffening was **Buckram**, a glue-stiffened canvas used to stiffen bodices and stomachers in the first half of the 16th century<sup>1</sup>. Using several layers of buckram sandwiched between the outer fabric and lining is the most documentable stiffening method for early 16th century dress. For true corset boning, however, bents and whalebone are the two primary materials mentioned in the later 16th century.

**Bents**, or narrow reeds 1.5 to 2 mm in diameter, might seem a bit flimsy for a boning material. When used in bundles

over a large area of a corset, however, they provide very good support equivalent to that of many modern plastic bones. Reed is my favorite material for boning, as it breathes better than any other boning material, is much lighter than any other boning material, and is cheap and easy to replace.

Narrow reed of this kind can be found for pennies a yard at many basketry supply stores, or you can harvest reed of similar shape and length yourself, if you live near an area where they grow.

**Whalebone**, the substance which will probably be associated with corsetry for all time, was the boning material most often mentioned and is an excellent source of stiffening. It isn't "whalebone" at all, actually, but rather a flexible substance known as *baleen* which whales use to sieve out plankton and sundry other sea creatures to eat. Although illegal to import and not used in modern corsetry, whalebone would

be a corsetmaker's dream because of its flexibility, toughness and resilience. In addition, it could be cut with scissors or knife and filed with a nail file. Whalebone bones during Elizabeth's time were around 3/8 of an inch thick, which gave an impressive amount of support.

**Rope** has been used for boning reproduction corsets with tremendous success, although there is currently no primary evidence to support its use in 16th century pairs of bodies. It provides a smoother line with slightly more curve to it than either whalebone or reed. Hemp rope was used for stiffening farthingales of the time, and it is entirely possible that it was used as stiffening for under-bodices and corsets as well. It breathes very well, although it is somewhat heavier than reed bents, and can be washed. For corsets with boned tabs, however, it lacks some of the support required.

**Horn** is mentioned as a material for corset boning as well. It is a very stiff and thin material indeed. I have never seen it used, due to the difficulty of procuring enough material of the right shape and size, but it was used in the 16th century.

## MODERN BONING MATERIALS

As whalebone is no longer an option for corsets and not all of us have the ability to go out and harvest our own reed, the vast majority of corsets are boned with modern substitutes for 16th century materials. What you use to bone your corset is limited only by your imagination, your desperation, and your budget. When it comes right down to it, any-



**Fig 8:** A recreation of the *Effigy Stays* (c. 1602) using reed bents for boning.



thing long, flat and stiff can conceivably be used as boning.

**Spring Steel Boning** is one of the most common materials used for boning that you can find. Granted, it's also the most expensive; but in my opinion, the price is worth it for several reasons. First, it's extremely strong, yet not very thick. Second, it comes coated in a rustproof covering, so you can sweat in it and wash it and not worry about rust stains; and it also comes in 1/2 and 14/ inch widths. You can buy single bones cut to length between 4 and 22 inches long, or buy a roll of steel boning, some tin snips, a file and some tipping fluid to make your own.

Unfortunately, steel boning is hard to find locally. You can find places that sell it mail-order in the Mailorder Resources appendix. Greenberg & Hammer have the cheapest prices for steel boning that I've found to date.

**Artificial Whalebone** is, aside from reed, my favorite material for boning corsets. It attempts to replicate the tensile nature, thickness and spring of real whalebone, and succeeds to a considerable extent. It comes in several different widths, and can be cut to length with a pair of scissors. With the aid of a hot iron, you can also bend it from side to side. It is not quite as stiff as spring steel and will tend to mold somewhat to the shape of your body over several wearings, but it is washable and convenient to use. It is even harder to find artificial whalebone than spring steel; the only three companies in America that sell it (to my knowledge) are Farthingales in Toronto, Grand Garb in Virginia and Sewing

Central in Columbus. All are listed in the Mailorder Resources appendix.

**Rigilene and Feather Boning** can be found at all local sewing shops. Rigilene, also called poly boning, is a thin length of plastic covered with a paper or fabric sleeve. Feather boning is a light mesh which can be sewn to fabric itself. Poly boning is passable, at best; a corset should be solidly boned if poly boning is used, as it will easily bend and warp at the waist and under the bust. Feather boning provides very little support, and should be avoided if any other material is available. If you do use it, sew the boning diagonally, fanning out from the center front to the sides. This eliminates many of the creases or folds that the lightweight feather boning might otherwise not be able to prevent.

**Hoop-Skirt Boning**, the material found in wedding dress petticoats, can be used as a cheap material for boning—though I don't recommend it. It's basically a long strip of glue-stiffened fabric with steel wires along the edges for stiffening. It rusts when exposed to sweat or water, which can leave rust stains on the corset, and it can crack when bent. It does have its uses, however; as the middle of the ribbon is only stiff fabric, you can punch grommet holes through it. You get a very straight edge that way, with no puckering or gapping, for minimal effort. Hoop skirt boning is available at some local fabric stores.

**"Found" Boning** made of all manner of materials can, with a bit of creative energy, be made to serve as decent corset boning. One of the most popular are the wide plastic zip-ties found at hardware stores. They are cheap, stiff,

and similar in a number of ways to the artificial whalebone mentioned above (though they are not as springy).

Timber strapping, also found at lumber yards and hardware stores, has been used for boning corsets, although the ends need to be filed and covered to avoid impalement, and they have a tendency to rust. Bamboo skewers (with the points snipped off) are another boning material I have heard mentioned. It works well enough when an entire corset is boned, but will snap at the waist if not re-inforced by a wooden busk.

The list of materials I've seen used is nigh endless: sanded down saber saw blades, the metal bits from hanging files, bamboo from sushi mats, electric cable cord and more. As long as you make sure that the ends are rounded and won't poke you, the list of possible boning materials is endless.

## BUSKS

The busk is a long, flat piece of wood, ivory or whalebone which was inserted down the front of the corset to give the bust and torso that truly flat look which men find so appealing. Depending on the length of your torso, the decade of the dress you're making, and how far down you want the corset's point to be, the busk can be anywhere from 10 to 16 inches long<sup>1</sup>. The busk length that I usually use is 14 inches long (the Pfaltzgräfin Dorothea's corset is this long, and the length works well for the English Elizabethan gowns I wear), and is 3/8 of an inch thick. It tapered from a width of two inches at the top down to around one inch at the rounded bottom<sup>2</sup>. Busks are not absolutely

necessary to a corset, especially if you have a lot of stiff boning in it and are small busted, but they do help greatly in achieving the period silhouette.

Stories concerning the origin of the busk vary. Some believe that it was originally created as an aid to flattening the torso and creating the straight-fronted silhouette characteristic of the time, but there's an entertaining story floating around that the wooden busk itself was created as an aid to a popular Elizabethan dance, the Volta, and gave men something solid to hold on to when they were required to lift and toss women wearing full court dress. There is a 16th century reference to gowns stiffened solely by a busk, or "stay", which suggests that the busk may possibly have existed prior to boned corsets.

To make a busk, you will need:

- a saw (preferably an electric band saw, though a hand saw will do)
- a ruler and pencil
- a vibrating electric sander, or sandpaper with which to sand by hand
- a hand or electric planer, to plane the busk down to the desired thickness
- a hand or press drill with a 1/4 inch bit (or something of similar size) to drill holes in the top of the busk for laces to run through.

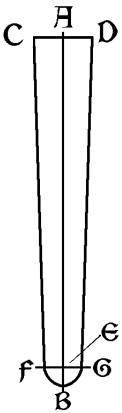
## The Busk Pattern

Measure the length of the busk you want. If you're making it for a corset you already have, take the measurement from the front center top to the bottom tip, subtract half an inch, and use that. If you're not sure, use 12 inches as your



length. It's best to have the busk reach down to the most protruberant part of your abdomen, so that it doesn't dig into your stomach when you bend over or sit down.

On a piece of posterboard, cardboard, or paper, draw a line the length of your busk, and label the ends A and B. At The A end, measure out one inch on



either side of the busk and mark. Label them C and D. Measure in half an inch from the B end of the line, and mark it; label that point E. With your ruler on point E, measure out from the line 1/2 an inch on either side; mark those points F and G.

Connect points C and D: this is the top of your busk. Connect points F, B and G

with a curving line; this is the rounded bottom point of the busk. Connect points C and F, and D and G, which are the sides of your busk. Voila. Now cut out your pattern.

## Choose your Wood

Busks were, in the 16th century, made from ivory, whalebonem horn or wood. Unless you have pet elephants or whales to hand, wood is the way to go and what we'll work with here. If you're searching for the period look the hardwoods oak, ash, cherry and walnut are lovely and strong woods to use. Of the four, I've found oak to be the strongest and least likely to break.

If you don't have these woods available, any hardwood will do. You can even use high-quality plywood, which is remarkably flexible. Just avoid soft woods like pine, spruce or fir, which aren't strong enough to withstand the stresses a busk os placed under. You will need to procure a piece of wood at least two inches wide and 3/8 of an inch thick.

## Make the Busk

Plane the piece of wood using a hand or electric planer, down to 3/8 of an inch thick.

**Trace the pattern** onto the wood, with the wood grain going lengthwise.

**Cut along the pattern** with a band saw or hand saw, slightly to the outside of the pencil mark.

**Sand the Busk.** Sand the sharp edges and top corners of the busk using sandpaper or a vibrating sander, until they are smooth. Sand the rounded bottom until it's smooth and even. Sand the outer side (this side which will face the front of the corset) of the busk until the corners are mostly gone and that side has a rounded shape when looked at end on. Finally, sand the whole thing with 400 grit sandpaper to make it nice and smooth.

**Drill the holes** using a small 1/4 inch drill. Drill two holes side by side half an inch from the top. This step is not necessary, but many period busks had holes drilled through them and a ribbon laced through the holes and corresponding holes in the corset to tie the busk firmly into place and keep it from creeping up. The busk-lace was given as an intimate favor by women to men they

cared for. In fact, the small bow found on many modern brassieres is its direct descendent.

**Oil the busk** using an old rag and some linseed oil (which is period) or some other finishing oil, or even polyurethane, to finish the busk. This will seal the wood, strengthen it, and bring out all the color, grain and shine of the wood you chose for your busk. If you're feeling perfectionistic, wait until the linseed oil has dried and then polish the busk using 400 grit sandpaper and some more linseed oil. You'll be amazed at the satiny smoothness you obtain.

## MODERN SUBSTITUTES FOR BUSKS

For those of us who don't have wood-working tools and don't have the fortune required to buy an honest-to-god ivory busk, here are some alternatives. If you put your mind to it, you're sure to find something that will do the trick. I even used a wooden spoon once—a temporary measure, but it did the job.

Order one from the many Mail-order places that sell them. Alteryears, which is listed on the mail-order sources list, sells ash busks of many different lengths.

You can use two pieces of spring steel boning in place of the busk, sewn next to each other. They don't provide the absolute stiffness of wood, but they are reasonably firm and solid.

Find a wooden ruler and file the corners off the bottom end. Even a metal ruler will do, if you cover the sharp corners with tape. This is a quick fix

solution—wooden rulers aren't that strong—but it will work. Lexan plastic is another alternative substance.

Use one of the front-opening steel busks used in 19th century corsets—two lengths of spring steel, one with tabs and the other with corresponding knobs, which can be opened and shut in the front. They cost around \$14, and can be found at many of the places on the Mailorder Sources list. Though blatantly non-period, they're a godsend when you have to put a corset on by yourself. Sew them in so that the metal knobs are to the inside, so that they won't cause bumps down the front of your gown.

## GROMMETS

Elizabethan corsets didn't have grommets, those metal rings through which the corset laces lace. They simply poked a hole in the fabric and sewed a button-hole stitch around it, or used metal rings on either side of the lacing holes and sewed through the fabric and over the rings for reinforcement<sup>1</sup>.

Most people nowadays use Dritz grommets from the local fabric store. I've used these myself. Although they're not the best quality, they'll do the job and are the easiest way to go for someone who's never made a corset before.

If you want to get slightly fancier, try sewing over the grommets with fabric. It looks period, at least, and makes the holes much stronger. You can find better quality 00 (double-ought) grommets through Greenburg and Hammer (\$7.00/gross), which is on the Mail-order Sources List (Appendix A).

# Making a Corset Pattern

Although corset kits and commercial corset patterns are available from places like Alteryards, an Elizabethan corset is simple enough to make that creating a custom pattern is cheaper and less of a hassle. I came up with this pattern, and it works well enough for me.

For convenience's sake, this pattern is strapless. There are instructions on adding straps if you wish, but I have found the strapless corset to be more than adequate in achieving a period silhouette. The lack of straps allows it to be used for very wide-necked Tudor outfits as well as Elizabethan.

## 1.) Take your measurements.

Fill out the corset measurement form in the back of this section. The following instructions refer to this form.

1. Take the front length measurement (measurement **1** on the measurement form you just filled out), and draw a vertical line of that length down the right side of your piece of paper.

2. Take measurement **2a** (one half the bust measurement) from the form. Draw a horizontal line of this length from the top of the front measurement out to the left.

3. Locate the midpoint of the horizontal line. Measure two inches to the left, and measure down from there the number of inches you wrote down for Measurement **5** (bra cup size) on the form.

4. Mark this point A. Take that same

measurement **5**, and measure down that far from the left end of the horizontal line. Label this point B.

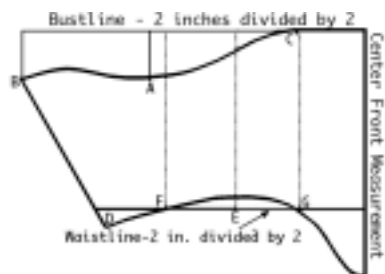
5. Take measurement **2c** on your form (1/8 the bust measurement). Measure from the front center out leftwards this many inches and mark this point C.

6. Draw a gently curving line to connect points C, A, and B. This is the top of your corset.

7. Take measurement **4** on your form (waist to underarm). Measure this distance down from point A. Mark this point, and draw a horizontal line all the way across the paper.

8. Take Measurement **3a** (1/2 the waist measurement). Measure out this far to the left along the waistline, mark, and measure down one inch. Label this point D. Connect D and B to form the back center of your corset.

9. Divide the waist line between D and the front center of the corset, and mark it point E. Divide each half of the line in half again, and mark these points F (to the left of E) and G (to the right of E).



10. Draw a curving line from the bottom front center of the corset to point G. Make sure the curve at the bottom of the front center is wide enough to fit the point of the busk.

11. Measure up from point E one inch, and mark it. Draw a gentle curve from Points G, to this mark, back down to point F, and then from F to D. This finishes the pattern.

### **Adding Straps to your Corset**

The above pattern finishes the body of the corset. You can add straps to the corset, both to provide more bust support and to prevent the corset digging into your hips; others have experienced these problems with strapless corsets, although I have not.

I prefer straps attached to the back of the corset, which narrow to a point that is tied to the front neckline just in front of each arm. (See the Effigy Corset pattern in “History of the Corset” section for a visual example of how these straps.)

### **Now Check the Pattern.**

Using this half-pattern, fold a piece of sturdy fabric (like duck or canvas) in half, lay the front center of the pattern against the fold, and trace around the pattern. Cut it out of the folded piece of cloth, open the fabric up, and fit it around you to see if it fits. Having a friend help makes this process easier.

Make sure that the front comes up high enough, and that the underarm curves and hip curves are deep enough so that they won't rub against your arms and hips. You may have to move the underarm/hip curve slightly to the front

or back to get a perfect fit. Mark any changes you want to make on the fabric with a pen.

Make sure that the pattern comes up high enough in the front. It should not close completely in the back; there should be a one to two inch gap, some of which will disappear when you lace the actual corset on. If the top back meets, mark it and trim it so that there is a one to two-inch gap.

If you made a corset pattern with straps, have someone pin them together at the top of your shoulders. Make sure that they are pulled tight enough to provide the bust support you want. If they're too close or too far apart for your liking, change their placement on the pattern. Mark each strap where it meets over the shoulder. Take the piece of fabric off, and transfer any changes to the paper pattern. If you have a corset with straps, place the paper pattern beneath the fabric and cut off the paper strap on the pattern at the place where it met the other strap over the shoulder.

### **Other Pattern options**

I have a corset pattern generator online which will take your measurements and generate a to-scale pattern for you, along with detailed instructions on drafting it. If you run into problems, you can try it out at <http://costume.dm.net/custompat/>

If you want a professional pattern to work from instead of making one yourself, both Margo Anderson Historical Patterns and Mantua Maker Patterns sell excellent corset patterns, based on authentic originals with a variety of options to choose from: straps, boned tabs, and front lacings, to name a few.

# Corset Measurement Form

Fill your measurements in on the lines below. Use the diagram to the right as a guide to placing the measuring tape for taking measurements. The center front measurement is the measurement from the top of the Corset to the bottom point of the corset front; for a Tudor or Early Elizabethan corset (1530-1560, this bottom point is only slightly below the waistline, between 9 to 12 inches long. For late elizabethan corsets, this point is 6 to 8 inches below the waistline, making the center front measurement 13 to 16 inches long. This center front measurement will differ by body type and size. 12 inches is a good average center front corset measurement.

**1. Center Front Measurement:** \_\_\_\_\_ in.

1500-1550: 11 in., 1550-1580:13 in.,

1580-1600: 15 in

**2. Bust Measurement-2 inches:** \_\_\_\_\_ in.

**2A.** 1/2 Bust: \_\_\_\_\_ in.

**2B.** 1/4 Bust: \_\_\_\_\_ in.

**2C.** 1/8 Bust: \_\_\_\_\_ in.

**3. Waist Measurement-2 inches:** \_\_\_\_\_ in.

**3A.** 1/2 Waist: \_\_\_\_\_ in.

**3B.** 1/4 Waist: \_\_\_\_\_ in.

**3C.** 1/8 Waist: \_\_\_\_\_ in.

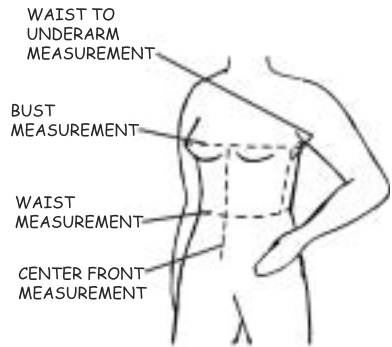
**4. Waist to Underarm:** \_\_\_\_\_ in.

## 5. Bra Cup Size

(use numbers below): \_\_\_\_\_ in.

(A=1, B=1.5, C=2, D=3,

DD & above=3.5)



# Making an Elizabethan Corset

## What you need:

- A pattern
- The corset material-1 yard
- The lining material-1 yard, (same as the corset material unless you're using a fancy outer fabric)
- 16 grommets (unless you're poking holes and binding them with thread)
- 2 yards of lacing—satin ribbon, shoe-lacing, whatever. 2 yards may seem long, but it makes it easier to get into the corset by yourself.
- 2.5 yards of 1-inch-wide ribbon of your choice (for variations 1 & 2). As an alternative, you can use bias tape or a one-inch strip of the corset fabric or some other fabric in place of the satin ribbon.
- A busk
- boning

You can choose to make a corset with no tabs, a corset with unboned tabs (similar to that shown on page 13) or a corset with boned tabs (similar to that shown on page 14). A corset with no tabs is the easiest to make, but can bite into the waist. A corset with unboned tabs looks nicer, and helps to keep your skirts from sliding under the corset. A boned tab corset is by far the most comfortable option, but takes more handwork and time.

What follows are two sets of instructions: the first will make a corset with no tabs or unboned tabs, and the second will produce a corset with boned tabs.

## Making a no-tabs or unboned-tab corset



**1) Cut out the fabric pieces.** Lay your fabric on a flat surface, folded in half. Make sure that your fabric is folded the straight (i.e., that the threads of the fabric are running straight up and down next to the fold, and not at some angle.) Place the center front side of your corset pattern against the fold, and pin it to the fabric. If you have fabric weights, by all means use those instead.

Using a pencil, chalk, or some other non-permanent material, trace the outline of the corset pattern on the fabric. Cut around the pattern tracing, leaving 1/2 an inch of seam allowance along the bottom waist and the center back. Around the top of the pattern, leave no seam allowance—cut the cloth right along the edge of the pattern. If you're making a corset with straps, leave a 1/



*Step 1: cut out the outer and inner layers of the corset*

2-inch of extra fabric at the ends of the straps as well.

Do all of the above to the lining fabric you're using. When both pieces are cut out, lay them one on top of the other and compare; trim away any small differences between the two pieces.

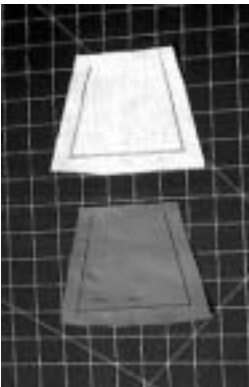
**2) If you are making a corset with tabs, now you cut out the tabs for the corset.** Cut out a piece of cardboard or paper in the shape of a trapezoid. The top should be two inches wide, the bottom three inches wide, and the sides should angle out from the top to the bottom. Lay the tab pattern on the same cloth you used for the corset. If the outer and inner material is the same, you'll be cutting out 16 pieces from the cloth; if you're using a different material for the lining and the outside cloth, you'll want to cut out 8 pieces from each kind of cloth.

**3) If you are making a corset with tabs, now sew the tabs together.** Cut out the number of tab pieces you'll need (as specified above), leaving 1/2 an inch of fabric around the tab as seam allow-

ance. Match pieces of the lining and outside material together, right sides together. Starting at the top corner, sew a seam down the side, across the bottom, and up the other side of the tab, 1/2 an inch away from the edge. Trim the extra seam allowance close to the seam, especially around the corners, and turn the tab inside out so that the edges are finished. Iron it as flat as you can.

**4. Sew the corset together.** If you are making a corset with no tabs, this is easy; simply place the outer fabric and lining right sides together, pin, and sew down the center back line, all along the bottom edge, and up the other back side and you are finished.

If you are making a corset with tabs, you must sew the tabs to the bottom layer of the corset at this point. Placement is very important in this; it's easy to get the tabs sewn on wrong side out. Lay the outside fabric of the corset flat, with the side you want showing face up. Starting one inch in from the back center on either side, lay the tabs, right side down, along the bottom edge of the cor-



*Step 2: cut out the tabs*



*Step 3: sew the tabs*



*Step 4: sew the bottom of the corset*



set. They should be upside down, so that the raw tops of the tabs are even with the raw edge of the fabric. Lay four tabs on either side. The tops of the tabs should be as close to each other as possible, with the wider bottoms overlapping slightly. Now lay the lining fabric on top, with the side you want against your body facing down.

Pin the bottom edge, making sure that the outer fabric, tabs, and inner fabric are all smooth and even with each other. Sew a seam 1/2 an inch away from the edge down one center back, all along the waist edge of the corset, and up the other back side, stitching the tabs and the two layers of corset fabric together.

Trim the excess close to the seam, and turn the pieces right side out. Iron it flat.

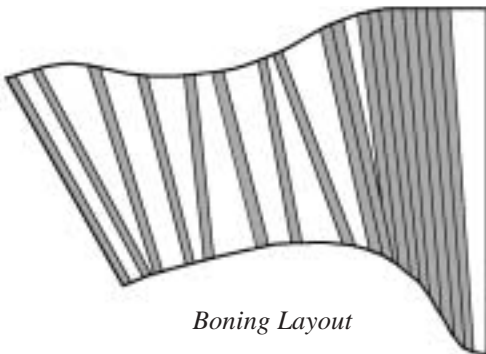
**5) Mark and sew the channels for the boning and the busk**

Once you know what material you're going to use as boning, mark channels slightly wider than the boning material on the inside of the corset with chalk/washeable marker/etc., using the boning layout below as a guide. Exact placement isn't necessary, as long as it's symmetric. If you have the busk you're going to use, lay it on the inside of the corset and trace around it; otherwise, follow the chart. If you need a lot of support, place boning in every channel. If you don't need a lot of support, place boning in every other channel.

Sew along the marks to create channels for the boning. Straight pins are useful for ensuring that both layers lie flat and even. Sew from the top of the corset to the waistline on all stitching, or from



*Step 4: The Corset turned right side out*



*Boning Layout*



*Step 5: Mark and sew the boning channels*



the waistline to the top—this avoids wrinkling and twisting the fabric. Test the first channel to see that it is indeed wide enough for the boning before doing the rest.

### 6) Add the Boning

Slip the boning and busk into the channels. At the center back, slip one bone right next to the edge, leave a channel free for grommets, and slip another bone into the channel on the other side.

### 7) Finish the top edge

Lay the strip of fabric wrong side up against the right side of the corset, with the edge of the fabric even with the top edge of the corset. Fold the end of the strip down so that the rough edge won't show. Starting at the edge of the back most tab, sew the fabric and the corset together 1/2 an inch away from the edge along the top until you reach the busk pocket seam. If you want your busk permanently in the corset, sew across the busk pocket. If not, stop sewing, and continue again on the other side of the busk pocket, all the way along the top. Fold the end of the fabric in before you

reach the end, so that the end is finished. If you left the busk pocket unsewn, hand-stitch the strip of ribbon to the front layer of corset fabric only.

### 8) Finishing Touches

Turn the fabric over and iron it (or not, depending on the nature of the corset fabric). Fold the fabric over the edge of the fabric to the inside of the corset, and hem-stitch it by hand. Leave the fabric behind the busk pocket unstitched.

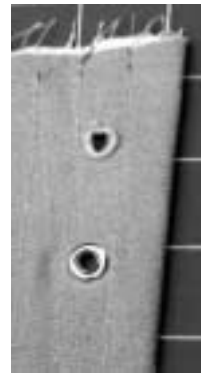
Slip the busk into place, and poke two holes in the fabric to match the holes in the busk if any exist. you can sew a buttonhole or whipstitch around the holes, making sure not to sew the two layers together. Once the busk is in place, a ribbon will go through the holes in the lining and through the busk, and tie together in a bow on the front of the corset to keep the busk from sliding out of place.

### 9) Put in the Grommets

Using a pen or pencil and starting 1 inch from the bottom edge, mark out 7 to 8



*Step 7: Finish the top edge*



*Step 8: example of grommet and sewn lacing holes*

(depending on the length of the corset) equidistant points up the back center edges of the corset. The points should be at least 1/2 an inch away from the back center edge, and approximately 1 inch apart. Following the instructions for your grommets, insert and pound the grommets into place. If you've never put grommets into an outfit before, I highly recommend practising on a piece of cloth before you do the corset. I recommend the nickel or brass-plated 00 (double-ought) grommets, available at Greenberg & Hammer for \$6.00 per gross, to the dritz grommets at the store; they're smaller, stronger, and look better.

If you're not using grommets, poke a very small hole in the fabric with an awl or pointed implement, stretch the fabric, and sew a buttonhole stitch around it. You can also sew a buttonhole stitch around the metal grommets, to make your outfit look more period. It is helpful to finish off the lace you're going to use to lace your corset with by rolling the ends small and either wrapping clear tape or thread tightly around them, or dipping them in wax. This makes it a lot easier to lace with, and reduces curses and mumbles behind your back. The flat laces used for ice-skates are the best commercial laces I've found.

10) Immediately rush to the nearest mirror And try your corset on for size! Then show it to everyone else in the house, graciously receive comments on how you must be dying inside something like that, and relax with a cup of tea. Or you can start on the gown to go over the corset.

## Making a Boned-Tab Corset



### 1. Alter the corset pattern.

To make a boned tab corset, you will need to add the tabs to your corset pattern. Lay your basic corset pattern out on a large piece of paper or a cut-apart paper bag. Trace around the pattern with a pen or pencil, and lift it away.

Starting at the back center of the new pattern, measure down three inches from the waistline and mark this point. Do this every few inches along the waistline. Stop when you're four inches away from the center front, and draw a vertical line connecting the point three inches below the waistline up to the waistline. Now connect the dots that you've drawn, to create a line parallel to the waistline but three inches below it. (See Diagram A)

This area between the waistline and the new bottom edge is what will become your tabs. Divide this below-the-waist section into 4 equal tabs, by drawing lines from the line you drew up to the waistline. Cut out this new pattern, snipping the vertical lines to create the separate tabs.

### 2. Cut out the fabric pieces.

Lay your fabric on a flat surface, folded in half. Make sure that your fabric is folded on the straight (i.e., that the threads of the fabric are running straight up and down next to the fold, and not at some angle.) This is very important to the stability of your corset-to-be.

Place the center front side of your cor-

set pattern against the fold, and pin it to the fabric. If you have fabric weights, by all means use those instead. Using a pencil, tailor's chalk or other non-permanent marker, trace around the corset pattern. Draw the lines dividing the tabs, as well. Lift the pattern away.

Cut around the pattern tracing. Leave no seam allowance; cut on the lines you drew. That's right, this pattern doesn't have any seam allowance. If the fabric you are using tends to fray, be sure to use fray-check along the edges. You will be handling this fabric a lot, so fray check will be necessary. Also, do not cut the tabs. We'll be waiting till the very end to do this, so that the separate tab pieces will not fray or stretch. For now, leave the tab section as one piece.

Open out your corset pattern, and, using your pattern, draw the tab dividing lines for the other half of the corset.

Place your corset fabric that you've just cut out on your lining fabric. Pin the two together, or use fabric weights. Cut out a lining the same size as the outer fabric. There is no need to mark the tab dividers as you did on the outer fabric.

If your outer material is relatively flimsy (i.e., thin silk or taffeta), cut another layer out of a sturdier fabric to place between the lining and the outer fabric. The boning will be slipped between these two inner layers, saving the outer fabric from wear and tear.

### **3. Mark and sew the channels for the boning and the busk**

As you can see from Diagram B, the pattern of boning for this type of corset is different than that used for the other corset variations. Once you know what

material you're going to use as boning, mark channels slightly wider than the boning material on the outer fabric of the corset with chalk/washable marker/etc. Exact placement isn't necessary, as long as it's symmetric. If you have the busk you're going to use, lay it on the inside of the corset and trace around it; otherwise, follow the chart.

if you are using a weaker boning material, such as corset reed or poly boning, you will likely want to sew boning channels completely around the corset, leaving no space unboned. Otherwise the tabs will quickly bend at the waist. If you are using wide artificial whalebone or spring steel boning, one bone on either edge of each tab is sufficient.

Sew along these boning channel marks to create channels for the boning. Straight pins are useful for insuring that both layers lie flat and even. Sew from the bottom edge all the way to the top, and backstitch at both ends. Test the first channel to see that it is indeed wide enough for the boning before doing the rest.

This is by far the most tedious part of making a corset. Here's a tip to speed it up: instead of running every stitch from the bottom to the top, Run one stitch from the bottom to the top, backstitch, lift the presser foot with the needle in the fabric, rotate the corset 180 degrees, move the needle to the beginning of the next channel, put the presser foot down, backstitch, and sew down the next channel. Note: This may cause wrinkling in the channels if your outer fabric or your lining is a willow or slightly stretchy fabric, or if your channels are exceptionally wide. Test this technique first to make

sure it doesn't make your fabric wrinkle, pucker, or pull off the grain.

#### **4. Add the Boning**

Slip the boning into the channels, and make sure that the busk fits. The boning should be the entire length of the channel, from the top to bottom edge.

#### **5. Cut the Tabs**

The time has finally come to cut apart the tabs into separate pieces. First, I recommend running a very fine machine stitch along either side of each tab mark, narrowing them to a point at the waist where the tab ends. This will create a pointed shape about 1/4 inch wide. Dab fray check down this shape and let it dry before snipping carefully up the middle between the two seams. This will help keep the tab edges from fraying, and the boning material coming out, until the bottom edge is finished.

#### **6. Optional: Test fitting**

No body is alike. Everyone “squishes” differently, and every fabric stretches ever so slightly. In addition, thick boning materials can make the circumference of a corset shrink. If this is your first corset and you don't do this final fitting, your corset will most likely not fit you exactly. To make sure your corset will fit after all the work you've put into it, I recommend you try it on at this point, before finishing the edges. To do this, you need a pair of lacing strips.

If you plan to make more corsets or bodices in the future, lacing strips are a good investment that you will use over and over again. Take a five-inch-wide strip of canvas that's about 30 inches

long, fold it in half lengthwise, and iron. Cut this strip in half to create 2 15-inch-long-strips. Now set grommets an inch-and-a-half apart, close to the folded edge, down each of these strips.

To fit the corset, stitch the strips with a basting stitch to each back edge of your corset. Make sure the folded edge of the strip is even with the edge of the fabric. Lace the corset on, snugly but not too snugly. You may have to tighten the laces two to three times before everything's where it should be. Your bosom should be elevated during lacing, and when lacing is complete, it should feel secure but not be squeezing out of the top of the corset. Let the person wear the corset for 10 to 15 minutes, moving around, turning, sitting and lifting their arms. This allows the fabric to stretch if it's going to, and allows the wearer to discover any uncomfortable areas or trouble spots.

Check that the space between the back edges is the same at the top and bottom of the corset. Ideally you want two inches of space between the back edges. Often the top back will be closer together than the bottom. If this is so, pinch the fabric at the side back top into a downward “dart” to make the back edges even. If you find that the corset is too loose, mark where you think the back edges of the corset should be, unlace the corset, remove the lacing strips and sew them on at this newly marked edge, and try the corset on again. You may find that the tabs dig into your hips, and need to cut them slightly longer.

Once you've determined any changes that need to be made, take the corset off and remove the lacing strips. If you

found that the corset was slightly too big, cut a bit off of the back center to the newly marked edge. If it was too small, stitch an additional bit of fabric to each back side piece to the width you need, and add more boning channels and boning.

## **7. Finish the edges.**

To finish the edges, you want a strong material as the boning material will be pressing directly against it. A fine leather is the best material, though it can be very hard to work with. You can use a bias-cut strip of the outer corset fabric, a contrasting fabric, or a sturdy ribbon as well. The strip should be an inch wide if it's leather, and an inch and a half wide if it's fabric.

A friend gave me the following tip: if you are using leather to bind your corset, you can save your fingers by putting a leather needle in your sewing machine and running the leather strip through the machine with no thread. This will create evenly spaced holes that you can easily get your sewing needle through while stitching the binding to your corset.

Lay the edging strip wrong side up against the right side of the corset, with the edge of the fabric even with the edge of the binding. Stitch the binding with a backstitch to the front layer of the corset about  $\frac{3}{8}$  an inch away from the edge. If you're using leather, stitch the edge of the leather to the corset  $\frac{3}{8}$  an inch away from the edge. If you used corset reed or broomstraw, you're lucky—with care, you can machine-stitch the binding to the corset through the boning material.

Stitching around the points of the tabs can be fiddly, and is best done by hand. Once you've stitched the binding all around the bottom edge of the corset, wrap it around to the inside over the edge of the corset. Tuck the raw edge of the binding under if it's fabric (with leather, you don't need to worry about fraying), and whip-stitch the binding to the inside layer of the corset.

Repeat this process with the top edge and the back center edges. If you want your busk to be removable, be sure to stitch the binding material only to the front layer of the busk pocket fabric when you are stitching it to the right side of the corset top. Do not stitch the binding down on the wrong side of the corset behind the busk pocket.

## **8. Put in the Grommets**

Using a pen or pencil and starting 1 inch from the bottom edge, mark out 7 to 8 (depending on the length of the corset) equidistant points up the back center edges of the corset. The points should be at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch away from the back center edge, and approximately 1.25 inches apart.

Following the instructions for your grommets, insert and pound the grommets into place. If you've never put grommets into an outfit before, I highly recommend practising on a piece of cloth before you do the corset.

If you're not using grommets, cut a very small hole in the fabric, and sew a buttonhole stitch around it. You can also sew a buttonhole stitch around the metal grommets, to make your outfit look more period.

Long corset laces (basically 4-yard-long flat shoelaces) are sold by some costume supply places like Greenberg & Hammer. Alternately, you can use ice-skating laces from a used sports store, or make your own lace out of a strong material such as linen tape or waxed linen cord (sold by Wooded Hamlet).

It is helpful to finish off the lace you're going to use to lace your corset with by rolling the ends small and either wrapping clear tape or thread tightly around them, or dipping them in wax. This makes it much easier to lace with, and reduces curses and mumbles behind your back.



*Fig 9: Effigy corset reconstructed from the original. © 2000 Sarah Powell.*

## 9.) Finishing Touches

Slip the busk into place, and poke two holes in the fabric to match the holes in the busk. You can sew a buttonhole stitch around the holes, making sure not to sew the two layers together. Once the busk is in place, a ribbon will go through the holes in the lining, through the busk holes, and tie together in a bow on the front of the corset to keep the busk from sliding out of place.

If you will be wearing your corset with a farthingale, sew pairs of holes at the front side waist and back side waist of the corset. When your farthingale is finished, run a short lace through these holes and through matching holes at the front sides and back sides of the farthingale, and tie them in bows. This is how corsets and farthingales were worn in the 16th century: as one unit. Lacing the two together prevents the farthingale from slipping awkwardly down, helps support the weight of heavy Elizabethan skirts, and makes your outfit move more gracefully. If both farthingale and corset open at the center back, you can put them on and take them off as one unit, which saves time.

## 10.) Immediately rush to the nearest mirror

And try your corset on for size! Then show it to everyone else in the house, graciously receive comments on how wonderful you look, and relax with a cup of tea. Or you can start on the farthingale to go with the corset!

# *Wearing & Caring for your Corset*

I know, it sounds rather anticlimactic after you've gone through the process of making the thing. But putting a corset on in the right way prevents some aches and pains.

First of all, an early Tudor and Elizabethan corset was not meant to diminish the waist. It was used to that purpose by a few young fashion victims of the time, but its primary goal was to flatten the chest and to provide a nice, smooth, cylindrical torso. If you pull it really tight in order to make your waist smaller, you'll end up with a waist two inches smaller than it was beforehand, a lot of discomfort, and an aching back by the end of the evening. It's the point of your bodice and the size of the bumroll that gives the illusion of a small waist.

Elizabethan corsets, when worn correctly, are not only bearable but actually comfortable. For large-busted women, they provide more bust support than any underwire can dream of. They also provide terrific back support.

When wearing a corset, always put on your chemise or smock before you wear the corset itself. Wearing a corset against the skin gets it all oily and sweaty and gucky, no matter how machine-washable it is; and lacing on a corset that reeks of sweat is, hands down, one of the top ten most unpleasant things you'll ever do.

Next, find someone to help. It is possible to put on a corset by yourself, but help is always great. The corset can be laced up from the top to the bottom, or

from the bottom to the top. Wherever you end is where the most pressure will be on the corset; if you're worried about the corset slipping down your waist, lace from the top to the bottom. If you're worried about your bosom slipping down, lace from the bottom to the top.

In period, only one lace was used for lacing bodices and corsets.<sup>1</sup> It was tied around one grommet hole, laced across, laced up diagonally, laced across again, and so on, forming a zigzag pattern. There's no reason not to do this, save that two laces are stronger than one and that the one-lace method sometimes ends up with the two sides of the corset uneven with each other, if you're not careful. If you're lacing with two laces, simply lace the corset up like you would a shoe.

Lace the corset loosely, then have the person being laced pull on the ends of the laces while the lacer tightens them. Many people will have to do the "Elizabethan Lift" when the corset's about halfway laced, to move their bustline up to the correct location. Tie the ends in a bow (a double bow, if you're insecure) and tuck it inside the corset.

On the subject of cleavage: The Platter Effect, though period, was used primarily by lower-class women of an unsavoury persuasion. If you're dressing as an honest peasant woman, a middle-class woman or a noblewoman, it's considered polite (and period) to keep your ladies securely and decently tucked into place.



One lacing method is to lace the corset from top to bottom, criss cross, tying the ends together at the waist and pulling the two loops at the bottom to tighten the corset before tying the loops together in a bow.

To get into a corset yourself, you'll need a really, really long lace. Lace the corset when you're still out of it, from the top to the bottom, as loosely as you possibly can. Then put it on over your head like you would a shirt, and pull the laces to tighten it. Twist, contort, and jump up and down a lot, and eventually it will be securely laced.

Another method which is extremely useful (although not perfectly period) when getting into your corset by yourself is to add a front-closing busk to the right or left of your wooden busk, or even in place of it, though it isn't as stiff as wood. These front closing busks are made of two pieces of 1/2 inch wide spring steel boning, one of which has knobs riveted to it and the other of which has corresponding steel tabs which hook over the knobs. They were used in 19th century corsets, and can be obtained from a number of the places on the Mailorder list (Appendix A) for around \$10. Simply lace the corset closed to the tightness you desire, and from then on, open and close the corset using the steel busk in the front. I myself have found this addition to my corset to be a godsend.

## **Cleaning your Corset**

How you clean your corset depends on how it's made. A machine-washable corset:

- Is made of a fabric which won't shrink, bleed dye, or do funky stuff in the washer or dryer. Cotton fabrics (pre-washed) are machine washable, as are some brocade fabrics, cotton velvet, and linen. Silk in any form is not, never was and, barring a technological breakthrough, never will be machine-washable. (I learned this the hard way). Satin, Shot-silk and taffeta, and many upholstery fabrics are also not machine washable.

- Has a removable busk which can be taken out before washing, or doesn't have a busk at all.

- Has stiffening that won't rust in the wash: coated spring steel or plastic boning are the two machine washable materials. Timber strapping, hoopskirt wire, and any other boning which contains metal should NEVER be machine washed.

If your corset meets all of the above criteria, congratulations! You can throw it in the wash. Remove the busk if it has one, and wash it on gentle in cold water. Lay it flat to dry.

If your corset is not among the select few which can be machine washed, tactics are quite different. To remove a spot, use woolite or some other mild soap and a damp washcloth or toothbrush. Try not to get any metal boning wet, as this can result in rust spots on your corset. Fuller's earth is said to be good for spot removal and for removing stains and smells. You can also let the corset air dry outside in the sun for a few days (unless you're worried about the fabric fading) to get rid of any sweaty reek. As a last resort, you can always have it dry cleaned.



# History of the Spanish Farthingale

The Spanish Farthingale was a bell-shaped hoopskirt worn under the skirts of well-to-do women during the Tudor and Elizabethan era. From the 1530s to 1580s, the farthingale played an important part in shaping the fashionable silhouette.

The Spanish Farthingale, as its name suggests, originated in Spain. The name “farthingale” itself is an English corruption of “verdugado”, the Spanish word for twig, which refers to the rings of willow and cane used to hold the hoopskirt rigid.

The first depiction of a farthingale is in a picture dated to 1470. It is a Spanish painting portraying Salome holding the head of John the Baptist on a plate. Her outer skirt is tucked up to reveal a boned farthingale made of a rich brocade, with

several double rows of brocade containing willow bents evenly spaced along its length.

Tradition holds that the Spanish Farthingale arrived in England in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, introduced by Katharine of Aragon, Henry VIII’s queen. At the time of her arrival, it was noted that they wore “benethe ther wast certayn rownde hopys, beryng owte ther gowns from ther bodies after their conray manner”.

Clear pictorial evidence of the farthingale, however, didn’t show up in England until c. 1540. By this time, hoopskirts worn by English noblewomen begin to appear in court paintings and portraits. The famous portrait of Lady Jane Grey (aka Katharine Parr) wears a classic late Tudor gown complete with farthingale. A similar gown is shown



**Fig 10:** Drawing of Salome after a detail from “Banquet of Harod” by Pedro Garcia de Benabarre”, c. 1477



**Fig 11:** Claude de France. Gown style is c. 1545. Collection Gaignieres, Paris.

below worn by Claude de France. It is in 1545 that written reference to the farthingale also first appears: “VII virg. Satten bruges crimson pro una verdingale.

The conical silhouette of the farthingale stayed for the most part the same through the 1550s and 1600s, and well into the 1700s. Several portraits show gowns which are obviously worn over farthingales. Some few pictures even show the farthingale itself, such as a watercolor drawing of a woman and child from *Il Libro del Sarto*, an Italian Tailor’s pattern book of the 1570s and 1600s, shown below.

This picture, and others, show farthingales which weren’t much wider than that worn by Jane Grey 25 years before. Court farthingales, however, could be wider. A sketch of Queen Elizabeth,

created by the artist Hilliard in 1588 depicts a fashionable, if perhaps somewhat exaggerated, Spanish farthingale of the later 16th century.

Although paintings showing the actual construction of a Spanish farthingale are rare, and no surviving farthingales remain for study, there are references to them in Mary Tudor’s wardrobe accounts, Queen Elizabeth’s wardrobe accounts and other inventories through the 16th century. Spanish farthingales were made out of buckram, canvas, fustian, taffeta, satin, grosgrain (a ribbed cloth) and silk, and guarded & embellished with satin, brocade or taffeta. Interestingly, a significant proportion of farthingales mentioned are red or crimson.

Stiffening materials mentioned are various kinds of rope, including hemp rope, ropes made of twisted rag, and ropes made of bent (small reed) twisted together. Other popular materials were whalebone (first mentioned in 1580),



Fig 12: Woman with Child from f103r of *Il Libro del Sarto*, c. 1580.



Fig 13: Drawing after a sketch of Queen Elizabeth by Nicolas Hilliard, c. 1588.

and osiers. Some farthingales may also have been stiffened by starching the farthingale itself.

There is also a reference in Mary Tudor's accounts to a forepart fastened directly to a farthingale, rather than a kirtle. Some farthingales also had bodices attached to them, presumably for support (and most likely to flatten and shape the torso, as well.)

Juan de Alcega's *Tailor's Pattern Book*, published in 1589, provides invaluable information on laying out, cutting, and sewing together a Spanish farthingale. This pattern used 6 Castilian Baras (5 1/2 yards) of silk fabric, which was 22 inches wide. Below is a diagram and description of how to make his Spanish Farthingale.

The rectangular front piece (piece A) has the two gores marked A sewn to either side of it to create a flaring triangular front half. The two triangular gores are sewn to the front by their selvage (finished) edges. The two triangular pieces marked B are sewn to the large B back piece on their bias sides (the sides cut at an angle). Then the back

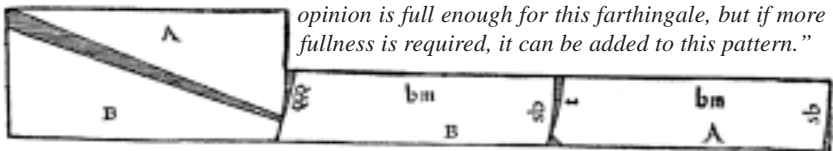
half is sewn to the front, the straight selvage edge of the B gore being sewn to the bias-cut edge on the A gore.

This results in no bias seams being sewn to each other and eliminates the sagging which two bias seams sewn together would inevitably experience. Once everything is sewn together, the skirt is gathered to a waistband. As the triangular B gores are wider, and contain a few inches of fabric at the top, the back will have more fabric to be gathered than the front. One would assume that this farthingale tied together at the sides, as the only seams are at the sides, the side front and the side back.

If this farthingale were worn by a woman who was 5'2", there would be 10 inches of fabric left to make the cases for the osiers. Arnold suggests that once the farthingale was sewn together, the fabric was pinched together in a folds every few inches and a seam stitched one and a half inches away from the folded edge to create casings on the outside of the skirt. The bottom edge would be turned up, and a seam sewn 1.5 inches away from the bottom hem to create a casing round the bottom. 2

### Alcega's Instructions for Making a Spanish Farthingale

*To cut this farthingale in silk, fold the fabric in half lengthwise. From the left, the front (Piece A) and then the back (piece b) are cut from the double layer. The rest of the silk should be spread out and doubled full width to intercut the gores. Note that the front gores (A ) are joined straight to straight grain, and the back gores (B) are joined bias to straight grain, so that there will be no bias together on the side seams and they will not drop. The front of this farthingale has more at the hem than the back. The silk left over may be used for a hem. The farthingale is 1 1/2 baras long (49.5 inches) and the width round the hem slightly more than 13 handspans, which in my opinion is full enough for this farthingale, but if more fullness is required, it can be added to this pattern."*



# *Farthingale Materials*

## **Fabric**

Most re-enactors use cotton duck or drill to make their farthingales, which is cheap and available in any fabric store. In fact, any non-strechy and strong fabric will do when making a farthingale. A farthingale of modest size requires 3 1/2 to 4 yards of fabric, depending on the width of the fabric and the pattern used.

If you wish to make a farthingale using taffeta, be forewarned that acetate taffeta is much weaker than its predecessor, silk taffeta, and will not support the wear and tear and strain put upon a farthingale unless it is backed with a heavier fabric, such as cotton duck, drill, or canvas. If you do want to use silk satin, silk canvas or silk taffeta for a reproduction farthingale, Thai Silks has a wide variety of fabrics suited to this need. They are listed on the Mailorder Resources. A woman of lesser means would likely make her farthingale out of a heavy linen or linen-silk blend. Wool, as it stretches, is not a good fabric for a farthingale.

## **Boning**

Most recreation farthingales are made using hoopskirt boning rather than cane or willow bents. Hoopskirt boning is 1/2-inch-wide stiffened canvas or plastic with spring steel along the edges. It is very stiff and can hold out the heaviest of skirts, yet is lighter than other boning materials. Because it is flat, rather than rounded, it doesn't create the bumps or ridges sometimes seen with

farthingales made of period materials. It doesn't crack, as osiers and bents can do. Hoopskirt materials can be cheaply bought (\$10.25 for 12 yds of boning) from mailorder costuming supply houses such as Greenberg & Hammer, which are listed in Appendix II (Mailorder Resources).

Many people choose to sew casings to a spanish farthingale and slip the hoopskirt boning into the casings; as hoopskirt boning is a flat material, this is possible. This allows the boning to be removed and replaced if it gets bent out of shape. For round materials such as rope and reeds, the boning material must be sewn into the tucks as you go.

You can find willow osiers from the following basketry supply stores:

Plymouth Reed and Cane Supply  
1200 W. Ann Arbor Rd  
Plymouth, MI 48170  
Phone: (313) 455-2150

English Basketry Willows  
RFD 1, Box 124A  
South New Berlin, NY 13843-9649  
Phone: (607) 847-8264

W.H. Kilby & Co. Ltd.  
1840 Davenport Road  
Toronto, ON, Canada M6N 1B7  
Phone: (416) 656-1065  
Fax: (416) 656-1700

# Making a Spanish Farthingale

It is relatively easy to make an authentically cut farthingale based on the 1589 pattern and instructions in Alcega's Tailor's Pattern Book. The instructions below will give you a farthingale to fit your height, but the width of the farthingale may be a bit small for your taste (It measures only a yard wide across the bottom) .

There are two ways one can make the below farthingale: one can make it with casings sewn on for hoopskirt boning, or make it with tucks into which the boning material is sewn. This article contains instructions for making both.

## Measurements

To make a hoopskirt using Alcega's pattern, you need two measurements: the length, and the circumference of your waist.

For the first measurement, measure from your waist to the ground. Add five inches to this measurement (As the farthingale will be flaring out from your legs, it will need to be slightly longer).

If you are planning to sew the boning into tucks, add 12 inches onto this measurement for the tucks; if you'll be using casings with hoopskirt boning slipped into them, don't add 12 inches. Call

this final length measurement **measurement A**.

For the second measurement, measure around your waist, add two inches, and divide this measurement by two. This will be called **measurement B**.

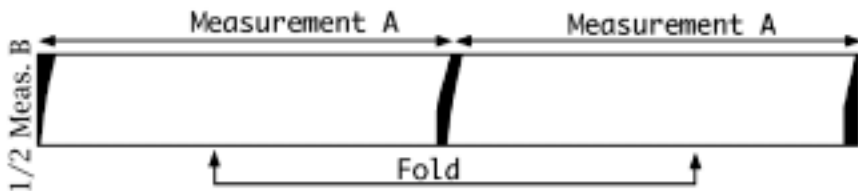
## Lay Out the Pattern

Some people prefer to make a paper pattern first; I prefer to draw directly onto the fabric, as the pattern is very simple. It is basically two rectangles (for the front and back) and four triangles (for the side gores.)

For the front and back sections, take a piece of fabric that is the width of measurement B and twice as long as measurement A.

Fold it in half lengthwise, and draw slightly curved lines to divide it in half. (see diagram below.) Cut along the slightly curved lines. These will be your front and back sections.

For the four gores, cut out two rectangles of fabric the length of measurement A and the width of measurement B. Place the rectangles on top of each other, and draw a diagonal line from one corner to 5 inches in from the other corner (see diagram on the next page.) The triangle with the blunted, 5" wide top



will be sewn to the back, creating a wider back waist which will be gathered into the back waistband.

Take your front square piece (as both the front and back pieces are identical, either will do), and, starting at the bottom, sew a triangular A gore on either side. **Important:** Sew the triangular gore to the front piece using the straight side (the edge which was against the edge of the fabric) and not the diagonal bias side

Now take the back center squarish piece of fabric, and sew the two B triangular gores to either side of it, starting at the waist and sewing towards the hem. **Important:** Sew the B gores to the back piece by their bias diagonal side, not the straight side.

Now sew the front and back together at

the side seams. As the farthingale will tie together at the waist on either side, leave enough of the sideseam unsewn at the top on either side so that the farthingale will be able to fit over your hips (6-12 inches ).

Here is where the instructions differ, depending on whether you are sewing on boning casings or sewing the boning material into tucks.

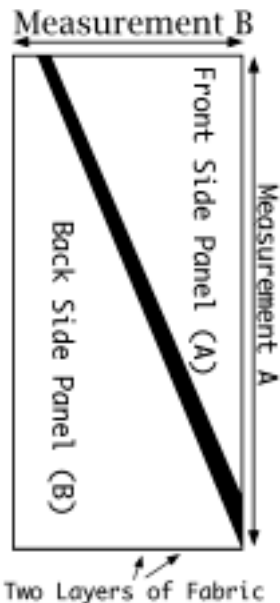
Lay out the farthingale on the ground. Make sure the bottom edge is even all the way round. You will have to trim the point of the two triangles at the side seams.

Using a pencil or marking chalk, measure up 6 inches every foot or so along the farthingale's bottom and mark. Connect these marks to create a line running 6 inches above the bottom edge of the farthingale. Starting at this drawn line, measure up 6 inches and mark, to create a second parallel line. Repeat this three times to create 5 parallel lines. If the topmost line is higher than the side opening, omit it and only mark 4 parallel lines.

### Boning Casings

If you are going to sew boning material into casings, fold the bottom edge under and sew it down 3/4 an inch from the edge to create the bottommost casing. Leave two inches unsewn at the right side seam, where the boning will be inserted.

Take boning casing or twill tape. Starting at the center back of the farthingale, line the right edge of the tape up with the bottommost line that you drew. Leave the first two inches unsewn, and start sewing two inches in from the side



seam. Sew the edge of the casing or tape down, keeping it even with the line drawn on the farthingale. Leave two inches unsewn at the end. Now sew the other side of the casing down to create the first channel.

Take another piece of boning casing or twill tape and repeat this process with the next line above the casing you just sewed. This time, start at the left side seam. With the third casing, start at the right side seam, and with the fourth, start at the center back again, and so on round the farthingale.

When the channels have been sewn, take hoopskirt boning, round off the end so that it doesn't catch in the fabric, and slip it into the bottommost casing. Work it around until the boning has made it back to the opening. Cut off the hoopskirt boning 1 foot past where it enters the channel, and work the rest of this into the casing. This will create a 1 foot overlap in the boning, which will keep it from bending at this point.

Repeat the process with the remaining channels, until your hoopskirt is entirely boned.

### **Boning Sewn into Tucks**

If you choose to use rope, hoopskirt boning or any other sort of boning sewn into tucks, first be sure that you added that 12 inches onto your farthingale pieces. This 12 inches will become 6 1" wide tucks. Next, make sure that you have a zipper foot on your sewing machine. A zipper foot is essential to create snugly fitted boning casings.

First, turn your farthingale inside out. Starting at the bottom edge of your farthingale and at the right side seam of

the farthingale, wrap the raw edge around the boning material and stitch it down. If you can, fold the edge under so that it is finished.

For the next channel, place the boning material on the inside of the farthingale, and pin along the first drawn line to keep the boning material in place. Continue this until the entire channel has been filled and pinned. If you are using rope, cut the rope ends flush with each other; if you're using hoopskirt boning, cut a little extra and overlap the ends.

Starting at the center back, sew along the pinned line. If you are using cane, rope or other wide boning material, you may have to take the foot of your sewing machine off to get the boning casing under the needle.

Repeat this process with the next three casings, making sure that the boning material breaks at the left side, right side, and then the back again. This is especially important with rope boning; if a rope-boned farthingale has the ends of the rope at the same location in every channel, the farthingale will bend at that location.

### **Finishing the farthingale**

You now have your farthingale finished at the bottom, and boned. Now it's time to finish off the waist seam. First, you'll need to mark where the waistband will be. Step into your farthingale, preferably with someone to assist you, and lift it to the proper height. The side seams should be unsewn far enough to let you get into the farthingale. If not, use a seam ripper to open them more.



The front bottom edge should be four to five inches from the ground. Adjust the farthingale so that the hem is at the proper height front and back. It may help to tie a string around the top of the farthingale at your waist point, and tug the fabric under the string until the farthingale's bottom edge is at the correct location. Once you've done this, mark the fabric where it's even with your waist. This will be where the waistband goes.

Take the farthingale off, making sure the waistline is clearly marked all the way around. Trim the excess fabric off, 1/2 an inch above the line you marked.

Turn under the edges of the two side openings, and finish them by machine or by hand.

Pleat or gather both the back and the front sections until each measures one half of your waist measurement.

Take a 2 inch wide band of fabric or ribbon and lay it, right side down, against the right side of the front section of your corset. Sew the two together 1/2 inch down from the raw edge of the fabric. Turn the strip of fabric over so that it covers the raw edge of the fabric, fold it under on the inside of the waistband, and stitch it down. Repeat this process for the back. This will create a very narrow waistband, more a way to finish the edges than a separate band, as most waistbands of the 16th century were.

You can choose to sew ties to each side opening, or use large and sturdy hooks and eyes. I recommend ties, as they are more forgiving of weight loss and gain. If you will be wearing this farthingale

with your corset, you can opt to stitch small pairs of eyelets at the front and back sides, stitch eyelets at the same location on your corset, and thread narrow ties through both pairs of eyelets to tie the corset and farthingale together. This will keep the farthingale from slipping out of place, will help distribute the weight of your skirts more evenly, and helps your garments to move as one.

## Other Farthingale patterns

If you would rather use a tested, tried and true farthingale pattern rather than making your own, I recommend two: The farthingale pattern in Margo Anderson's "Elizabethan Underpinnings" pattern set, and the farthingale pattern put out by Mantua Maker. The Mantua maker pattern has instructions for sewing rope or boning into tucks; Margo Anderson's pattern uses boning channels sewn onto the farthingale. Both patterns are based on Alcega's basic farthingale pattern, and have clear and detailed instructions. They are available from several costume supply shops, including Grand Garb and Sewing Central (both listed in Appendix A.)



# Bumrolls & French Farthingales

A bumroll, which, as its name suggests, was a roll tied around the bum, was an essential piece of fashionable Elizabethan underwear from the 1570s onward. It was tied around the hips to make a woman's skirt swell out becomingly at the waistline before falling to the ground. Like all items of women's fashion, it was the victim of scathing satire and clerical condemnation, but it was nevertheless used throughout the later 16th century and into the 17th, and considered an essential aid to fashionable dress<sup>1</sup>.

There is no mention of rolls or bumrolls in the first half of the 16th century. Pictures show skirts which swelled noticeably out from the waist, but this was accomplished by stuffing skirt pleats with padding or batting to make them

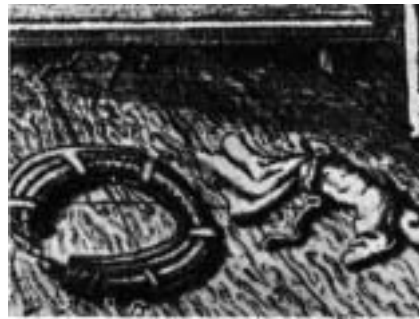
swell out, (there are mentions of "stuffing for pleyts" in some early 16th century documents.) This practice continued throughout the 16th century, even after bumrolls appeared.

The "rowle" appears more and more frequently in inventory records and tailor's bills from the 1570s onward. It was at first worn in conjunction with the Spanish farthingale.

In the 1580s, a new, dome-shaped skirt became more popular. This style originated in France, and the "French Farthingale", an large roll or series of rolls sewn together, soon replaced the Spanish Farthingale. By the 1590s, this French Farthingale had expanded to impressive dimensions. A fashionable woman's skirt spread out vertically before dropping straight down, giving the effect of a walking birthday cake to many noblewomen. Often a woman's skirts were pulled up and pinned to the farthingale with farthingale pins, creating a pouf which lay on top of the farthingale and created a yet more plat-



*Fig. 14: Detail from Dancers at the Louvre, c. 1585, illustrating the new, dome-shaped French farthingale.*



*Fig 15: Detail from a Dutch drawing showing a french farthingale and stockings. c. 1600.*

ter-like appearance to a woman's skirts.

But what does this bumroll or French farthingale look like? An educated guess can be made, based on examination of existing portraits, references to rolls and French farthingales in Tailor's bills and inventories.

Cotgrave defined the french farthingale as "the kind of roll used by such women as weare no Vardingales." Several descriptions of these farthingales remain to give us an idea of what they were made of: they were stuffed with cotton and rags and stiffened with whalebone, wire or ropes of bent (small reeds.) Buckram (stiff canvas) is the most commonly mentioned material. It could be starched as well. Here are a couple of sample references to rolls:

- "[for] making of thre rolles of hollande clothe with wyers bounde with reben (1585)

- making of a rolle of starched buckeram with whales bone (1586)

- "itm for a Roll of bukram" (1590)

A Dutch print dated to the late 1590s is one of the best known pictures of what an end-of-the-century French Farthingale, or "Rowle", looked like. This woman is trying on a tapered crescent around her waist, with bands of stiffening sewn around the roll to keep its shape. Another portion of the same print shows a bumroll with stiffening running along the outer circumference.

Sometimes narrower rolls were sewn together to create the wide silhouette of the fashionable skirts. Below is a detail from a c.1600 dutch print of a woman in bed with her lover. On the floor one can see her cast-off french farthingale and stockings. A painting dated to 1625 of dancers at the french court show them wearing something similar: a broad roll worn around the waist, with several bands of whalebone around the outside edge.



Fig 16: A Dutch print, c. 1600, showing women trying on rolls.

# Making a Roll

## Materials

To make a roll, you need:

1. A yard of material. It doesn't matter what kind of material you use, as long as it's not too stretchy. The best modern fabric to use is cotton duck or drill fabric, available at the local fabric store for \$4.99 a yard. For the more avid recreationist, linen and silk are both acceptable fabrics.

2. Stuffing. Cotton or polyester batting (available at the local fabric store) is the best material to stuff your bumroll with. It gives a smooth, round and firm roll. You can also use scraps and cut-up rags to stuff your bumroll with. This will take a bit of work to make it non-lumpy, however. Wool batting can also be used, although this will produce a much warmer roll

3. One yard of ribbon, silk or cotton which is 1/2 to 1 inches wide, to tie the bumroll closed.

## Making a Pattern:

A bumroll pattern is very easy to make. You'll need a tape measure, a cut-open paper bag or large piece of paper, and a pencil.

First, measure around your hips three inches below your waist. **The bumroll must be worn around the upper hip, not around the waist, to achieve the proper look.** Subtract four inches off of this measurement. This will be the inner circumference of your bumroll.

Lay the tape measure in an oval shape on the paper, and trace around it

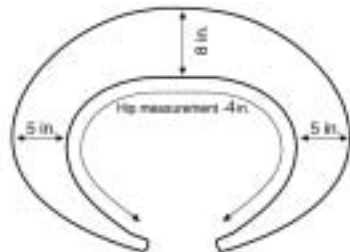
(smoothing all wiggles and lumps, of course) so that you have a partially open oval which is the above measurement—hips minus 4 inches (see diagram below).

One tip for achieving the proper oval shape is to take a length of tin foil, squish it into a tube, and wrap it around your upper hip. Carefully take it off of your hips and lay it on the paper to use as a guide. This will create a bumroll perfectly shaped to you.

From the top of the oval, measure up 8 inches and mark that point with a pencil; from the right, measure out 5 inches and mark. Connect these two points with a smooth curve, and continue that curve until it almost reaches the front bottom point of the bumroll.

Connect the inner and outer ovals with a line from point to point, and your pattern is finished.

This pattern creates a bumroll of substantial size. I am 5'11" and not small; this pattern is in proportion to my size. If you want a smaller bumroll, make the outer back and side measurements proportionally smaller to achieve the effect you want.



## Sewing the Roll Together

Once you have a nice smooth pattern, cut it out and lay it on two layers of fabric. Pin it or trace around it, and cut around the pattern edge, leaving 1/2 an inch or seam allowance between where you cut and the edge of the pattern.

Now take the two pieces of your bumroll and lay them right sides together. Cut your yard of ribbon in half, and place each half between the two layers, with the ends of the ribbon matching the edge of the fabric, and the body of the ribbon between the two pieces of fabric. Beginning near the middle inside of the bumroll, sew 1/2 an inch away from the edge all the way around. Sew the ribbon and the two pieces of fabric together at the points, but make sure that the ribbon doesn't get caught anywhere else. When you come back to where you started sewing, leave a 4-6 inch space unsewn. This is necessary for turning the bumroll inside out.

Once the bumroll pieces are sewn together, clip the seam allowance. Make simple clips along the inside, but clip little notches along the outside edge. This helps the seams to lay flat without wrinkling or puckering.

Now turn the bumroll right out, pulling on the ribbons to get the points completely turned. Stuff it with batting. Don't stuff it very firmly--To achieve a natural swell at the waist, rather than the effect of a continental shelf, stuff the roll only about halfway full. This will give a more authentic look at the waistline.

Using a needle and thread, sew the opening through which you stuffed the

bumroll closed. You can knot the ends of your ribbon, wrap them in scotch tape, dip them in wax, or even put metal points on them.

## Making a French Farthingale

If you are interested in making a late-Elizabethan French Farthingale, You can use these instructions but enlarge this pattern to one that is 12 inches in diameter in the back and 8 on the sides,

Instead of stuffing the bumroll loosely to compliment the bell-shaped spanish farthingale, stuff it quite firmly, as it will be the primary support for your skirts. Once the bumroll is complete, you can stitch rings of plastic boning or artificial whalebone around the French Farthingale to help the roll keep its shape. You can also stitch a length of whalebone along the outer circumference of the farthingale.

Another alternative for a later period French or Drum farthingale is to make several narrower bumrolls and stitch them together to create a wider profile. Make the first bumroll the size described in these instructions, and make the next two rolls of a size that will fit around the outside of the previous bumroll. Sew two or three strips of artificial whalebone around the edge of the outermost roll for a more sharply-defined edge.

# Elizabethan Stockings: History & Construction



During the first half of the 16th century, stockings, or “hose” for both women and men were made of bias-cut fabric. Linen, wool and wool blends were used by the lower classes, and silk fabrics such as sarcanet, taffeta, and other rich stuffs by the upper classes. Women’s stockings came to just above the knee, and were fastened below the knee with a garter. They could also be embroidered about the tops and at the ankle.

The first mention of knitted stockings appears in King Henry’s Inventory, c. 1545; but these were very likely rare and precious. Knitted stockings are also mentioned in the Earl of Pembroke’s Wardrobe accounts (c. 1561), and in Queen Elizabeth’s records: she was given two pairs of knitted silk hose as a New Years gift in 1562, and another two pair the following year as well<sup>1</sup>.

Although cloth stockings continued to be made for the queen throughout the next two decades, knitted stockings became all the rage in England for both men and women; Stubbes, in 1583, describes the following:

*They have nether-stockes to these gaie hosen...of Jarnsey, Worsted, Crewell, Silke, Thred, and Suche like, or els at the least of the finest Yearne that can bee got, and so curiously knitte with open seame downe the legge, with quirks and clocks about the ankles and sometime interlaced with golde or silver*

*threds, as is wonderfull to behold....<sup>2</sup>*

Nobles had stockings knit of fine silk, but poorer people also had knit stockings, though they used bulkier yarn and a coarser gauge and servants wore cloth stockings up until the end of the 16th century. Cotton ribbon seems to have been Mary Tudor’s garter of choice, which makes sense; it’s less slippery than silk or satin. Queen Elizabeth and other nobles, however, had garters made of silk. The garters were fastened with a small buckle, or tied together at the ends.

White or cream was one of the most popular colors for period knitted stockings, as is brown or black. The nobility, however, wore more gaily coloured hose: Eleanora of Toledo had a pair of crimson stockings, and (as Stubbes mentions above) knitted stockings could also contain gold or silver thread. It’s been recorded that Queen Bess’s cousin Lettice shocked the nobility by flashing a pair of purple stockings during a dance.

The essay below on knitting period stockings is courtesy of **Lady Rosalinde De Witte** (MKA Donna Flood Kenton)<sup>3</sup>:

## DESCRIPTION

Here’s a description of the Gunnister stockings. I have no date for them, but a version of them is used by Plimoth

length of the foot is about 11 inches, the circumference of the top 9 inches. The feet of both stockings are worn away, and have been replaced by other material. There are holes at the knees, some roughly mended. The woolen yarn is heavy, spun S, 2-ply. It is dark-brown in colour, a mixture of various shades of brown fibres, including some black. The spinning and knitting are very even. "The work is done on four needles, 7 1/2 inches and 10 rows per inch. 114 stitches are cast on at the top, and 7 rows of garter stitch follow. The remainder of the stocking is worked in stocking stitch, except for the clocks at the ankle and a panel down the back.

"One stocking has the foot replaced by the leg of another stocking. The wool is almost identical to that of the whole stocking but the yarn is fine, 2-ply Z, 10 stitches and 15 rows to the inch. It is worked in stocking stitch on 4 needles except on the top, which is worked below the casting-on with 1 plain row, 1 purl row, 4 rows of rib of 1 plainstitch, 1 purl stitch, 1 plain row, 1 purl row and down the back of the stocking where 2 lines of a single purl stitch is separated by 2 plainstitches. 18 inches of the length of the stocking remains. 6 3/4 inches below the top the decreases start, and increases and decreases for the calf can be seen. There is no foot to the stocking, and there are holes in the leg. It is roughly four layers thick on to the bottom of the whole stocking by 3 strands of thick S spun yarn.

"The foot of the other stocking has been replaced by a very coarse rep, folded double. What is probably the warp is a dark brown lightly spun 3-ply S yarn, the weft a heavier, light brown 2-ply Z

yarn. The count is 6 x 17. It is roughly sewn on to the stocking by a 2-ply thread with stitches 2 inches apart."

This description is from "The Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland — Publication of the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh, 1951-52."

From this description alone, you can probably come up with some kind of stocking, but just in case, here's directions on how to make stockings that fit.

### STOCKING SIZE

First, you'll need a bunch of measurements:

- Circumference of your thigh where you want your stocking to end
- Circumference of your knee
- Distance from the top of the stocking (where you took the thigh measurement) to knee
- Distance from top of stocking - minus 2 to 3 inches for the welting at the top of stocking
- Circumference for thickest portion of calf
- Distance from knee to calf measurement
- Circumference of ankle
- Distance from calf measurement to ankle
- Circumference of instep
- Length of foot

Should you choose to guesstimate here, *The Workingwoman's Guide* (1838)

offers the following proportions:

### GENERAL PROPORTIONS FOR STOCKINGS

- Ascertain the proper breadth of the



stocking.

- From the top to the bend of the knee is one square, or the length of the breadth.
- From the bend of the knee to the beginning of the calf is one square or breadth.
- From the beginning to the end of the calf, is one square or breadth.
- For the small of the leg, one square or breadth; for the heel, half a square; for the narrowing on each side of the instep, one quarter of a square; from the heel to the narrowing of the toe, one and a half square; for the narrowing, a quarter of a square.
- Observe, that the squares always relate to the breadth of the stocking, at the time the next square is begun.

This same “guide” also says: “It is difficult to make very correct scales for different sized knit stockings, as so much depends on the quality of the worsted and of the pins, as also on the knitter.” Hence, the thoroughness of these directions.

## KNITTING GAUGE

Next, you need to figure your knitting gauge. Decide what yarn you intend to use, and what size needles you want. Knit a sample swatch by casting on 30 stitches and knitting in stockinette stitch (knit one row, purl one row) for 3 inches. Do not omit this step — I can personally guarantee that you will knit to regret it.

From your sample, carefully determine your gauge, both width-wise (stitches per inch) and length-wise (rows per

inch). The most accurate way is to place a straight pin (it won’t distort the knit) into the sample about one third of the way across. Measure from that point one inch. Place another pin, and count the number of stitches. Do a similar procedure to measure the number of rows per inch. Don’t make the mistake of trying to make your sample smaller and measure from the edge. You don’t get an accurate measurement at the edges. You must measure from the inside to get the best measurement.

## Convert Measurements to Stitches

This is pure mathematics. If you have a measurement that is 10 inches wide, and you knit at 5 stitches per inch, you will need 50 stitches at that point. If you need to knit for 2 inches long, and you knit at 7 rows per inch, you’ll need to knit 14 rows to get 2 inches. Round out to even numbers for your widths.

## Decreases and Increases

*Thigh-To-Knee Decrease:* Take the number of stitches at the thigh, and subtract from it the number of stitches for the knee. That’s how many stitches you will need to decrease when you work from the thigh to the knee. Because you decrease 2 stitches at a time (one on each side of the center back), divide this number by 2 to determine the number of times you must work a decrease row. Because you must knit 2 to 3 inches even for stability and welting at the top of the stocking, you’ll want to look at the shorter measurement from thigh to knee. Determine the number of rows you need to knit to get from thigh to knee. Now you have the number of rows you need to cover the distance, and you know how many of those rows need

to be rows in which you decrease. Divide total rows by decrease rows to get even spacing.

*Knee-To-Calf Increase:* Use the same procedures outlined above in reverse.

*Calf-To-Ankle Decrease:* This uses the same principle as the Thigh-To-Knee, but you need to make a decision first. You may choose to evenly distribute the decrease rows all the way down the calf to the ankle, or you may choose to put the majority of the decreases near the calf, and fewer (or none) as you get closer to the ankle. Either way is appropriate. Look at your leg, and figure out the best way to handle it. Once the decision is made, you can proceed as above.

**Welting**

Welting is simply several rows of stitching to help give strength and stability to the top of the stocking. The simplest form is six or eight rows of garter stitch, and is more common in the earlier stockings. By 1838, a knit 3-purl 3 rib was common, as was any variation of that (knit 4-purl 4; knit 5-purl 3). Basketweave (k 3, p3 for 3 rows; then p 3, k 3 for 3 rows) was also used.

**Center Back Panel**

Something has to mark the center of the back, so you can keep track of rows. The simplest way is a single purl stitch down the center. They were often more elaborate, to also allow for a little give. Some known variations:

- a six stitch panel (2 purl, 2 knit, 2 purl) or (1st row: k1, p1, k2, k1, p1. 2nd row: p1, k1, k2, p1, k1) or (1st row: k1, p1, p2, k1, p1. 2nd row: p1, k1, p2, p1, k1)

- a five stitch panel (1st row: p1, k1, p1, p1, k1. 2nd row: k1, p1, p1, k1, p1)

Feel free to design your own panel.

**Clocks**

Clocks are designs at the ankles. Sometimes they are just on the outside of the ankles; other times they are on both the inner and outer ankle. The Gunnisters have them on both sides.

You can put one design at the ankles, or you can put two or three on top of each other. The Gunnisters have 1) a moss stitch diamond, 2) an moss stitch inverted triangle, and 3) a broken knit 2-purl 2 ribbing only on the sides of the ankle. These are fairly common because they are nice geometrics. Floral motifs have been found, but are less common, probably due to their intricacy.

The easiest way to design clocks is to chart them. Using knit and purl stitches for contrast, basically just figure out what you want. From the chart and your calculations, you can figure out where you'll need to start them on the stocking.

```

k k k k k k k p k k k k k k
k k k k k k p k p k k k k k
k k k k k p k p k p k k k k
k k k k p k p k p k p k k k
k k k p k p k p k p k k k
k k p k p k p k p k p k k
k k k p k p k p k p k k k
k k k k p k p k p k k k k
k k k k p k p k p k k k k
k k k k k p k p k k k k k
k k k k k k p k p k k k k k

```

moss stitch diamond



k k p k p k p k p k p k k  
 k k k p k p k p k p k k k  
 k k k k p k p k p k k k k  
 k k k k p k p k p k k k k  
 k k k k k p k p k k k k k  
 k k k k k k p k k k k k k

inverted triangle

### Heel and Foot

The only heel I am certain is an accurate style is from the same book, *The Workwoman's Guide* from 1838. The drawings show it as a pointed flap.

One half of the total number of stitches are knit as a flap long enough to go down and around the heel. At that point, several decreases are evenly spaced in the same row, reducing the total number of stitches by 20%. The heel is bound off and sewn.

Take up the instep stitches and pick up stitches all around the foot.

Decrease as needed along the foot to the toe. Decrease for the toe resemble the modern mitten. Simply decrease evenly until there's only a dozen or so stitches left, then fasten off.

I do have reference to a similar heel in a Tudor stocking, which I am told is in the V&A. I have not seen it, nor do I have any more information on it, other than it exists.

I can't imagine that a seam under your heel is going to be very comfortable. You'd have to be very careful about weaving it. Also, this will likely never show. This being the case, feel free to use your favorite heel, foot, and toe. If you know of any more heels, please let me know so I can add it here.

Okay, now it's time to put this all together.

### DIRECTIONS

I used just shy of 4 ounces of a medium sport weight on size 4 needles for each 25 inch stocking. Plan on eight ounces for the pair, but if you want them longer, you will need to buy extra. It takes nearly the full 4 ounces for one stocking. This gave me a gauge of 5 stitches and 8 rows per inch.

- 1. Cast on the required number of stitches for the thigh. I cast on over two needles, just to make sure that the cast-on is loose enough. If yours is tight, like mine, you might want to do that.
- 2. Work 1 to 1.5 inches in your chosen welting. Start your chosen center back panel and continue this panel until you get to the heel. Work another .5 to 1.5 inches in plain stockinette stitch.
- 3. Start the decreases to knee. For a nice, neat appearance, don't decrease immediately beside the center back panel. Keep one knit stitch before and after the panel. You may want to decrease by knitting two together in the back of the stitches on one side of the panel, and in the front of the stitches on the other side. This keeps both decrease stitches slanted in the same direction (either toward, or away from, the center back).
- 4. At the knee, knit .5 to .75 inches plain. Then start the increases to the calf.
- 5. Once you reach the calf, knit .5 to .75 inches plain. Then start the decreases to the ankle.
- 6. Start your chosen clocks in the appropriate place. They will probably start

about 2/3 of the way down the calf, and should bring you right down the ankle, to the start of the heel.

- 7. Divide the stitches in two. Put half the stitches aside for the instep. Either follow your favorite sock pattern from here, or continue along. Work the heel flap on the other stitches until the flap reaches under your heel, almost to the middle of your foot. Decrease every 4th or 5th stitch in the next row, and bind off. Fold the heel flap in half, and sew it up.

- 8. Pick up all the stitches on the instep. Looking at your measurements for your instep, figure out how many more stitches you need. Pick them up evenly along the heel rows. You'll probably need to pick up one stitch every other row, maybe even 75% of the rows.

- 9. Knit plain for 2 rows. Then start decreasing for the foot. Generally, you decrease 2 stitches (one on each side of the instep) every other row until you are back to the number of stitches for the ankle, then knit straight for the foot. Your foot may not be shaped that way, so decrease only as many as you need, or perhaps every third row.

- 10. Knit even until you are two inches from the end of your toes. Start decreasing every other row, by knitting together every 7th and 8th stitch (or something like that), then every 6th and 7th stitch, every 5th and 6th stitch, and so on, until you are down to only a dozen or so stitches. Cut the yarn, leaving a 15 inch tail. Run the tail through all the stitches, take them off the needles, and pull tight. You may want to run the yarn through the stitches again, then weave in the ends.

1 Arnold, Janet, *QEWU* pg. 208

2 Stubbes, quoted in *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*

3 Lady Rosalinde (AoA, OSC, OBT, and past editor of *Tournaments Illuminated*) has been a fiber junkie for as long as she can remember, knitting, designing, and teaching various needlework for over 25 years. Currently, she's working on small projects with hand spun yarn for purses and pouches for her three medieval daughters (and herself) and trying to build a 1280-ish spinning wheel. She's also a part-time writer and a full-time mom.

# Elizabethan Smocks

The smock, also called a “shift” in the 16th century and commonly called a “chemise” by many re-enactors, was a simple linen garment worn next to the skin to protect clothing from sweat and body oils. As the clothing of the middle and upper classes was not the kind one could pound on a river rock or scrub regularly with ashes and lye soap, the smock was vital to Elizabethan costume.

Smocks were made of fine linen, as fine as the wearer could afford. Many of the better smocks were made of what we now call “handkerchief-weight” linen. Lawn, cypress and holland were three 16th c. varieties of fine linen used for quality smocks. These smocks hung to just about knee to calf-length, on average.

There were several varieties of smocks worn in the 16th century. Although portraits of the time only show the cuffs and collar areas of smocks, we are lucky to have several surviving 16th century smocks to look at. All of them were made using basic construction techniques that had been used for centuries: two long rectangles (with triangular side gores) made up the body, and two long rectangles formed the sleeves. Simple, rectangular collars and cuffs and diamond or square shaped underarm and neck gussets completed the smock.

## Necklines

The necklines of smocks varied widely. Some had a low, squared neck, sometimes edged with lace and deco-

rated with blackwork. These necklines were worn under the low, square necks of Tudor gowns (1530s & 1540s) as well as the Elizabethan gowns of the 1570s. Some smocks had higher, rounded necklines, such as those worn by marketwomen of the 1560s and 1570s. There are examples of smocks with high, flared necklines, such as the one shown below; these were worn later in the 16th century, and several examples are found in Italian portraits of the 1570s and 1580s. Low, V-shaped necklines (such as the one shown in Figure x) are more rarely seen.

Some smocks had wide rectangular body sections which were gathered to a neckband, such as that shown in fig.19.



*Fig 17: An example from Vecellio of an Italian woman's smock, c. 1590.*

Ungathered smocks could also have a neckband attached. Examples of smocks with collars are seen throughout the 16th century. In the 1550s, a small ruffle is often found at the top of this neckband; in the 1560s and 1570s, it grew to such a size that it was eventually replaced by a separate ruff. Small triangular gores are sometimes found at the sides of the collar band.

The low, gathered or pleated neckline was, despite its popularity with re-enactors, relatively rare in the 16th century. It is seen for the most part in Italy, Germany and the Netherlands, during the first half of the 16th century.

## Sleeves

Smock sleeves ranged from the simple to the complex. Working women throughout the 16th century wore smocks with simple, tube-like sleeves which they often rolled up while working. In the 1530s, we see several examples of very full sleeves gathered to cuffs. Often a ruffle was attached to the bottom of this cuff band. The sleeve usually joined the body of the smock at

a right angle; in some cases, the sleeve was pleated or gathered to the body piece. Diamond-shaped or square underarm gussets are found in the majority of surviving smocks.

## Smock Fastenings

Smocks with a collar had a slit up the front, often decorated, and fastened either with laces on either side of the collar or with hooks and eyes. The laces could be sewn into the collar, laced through small eyelets, or laced through eyes sewn to the inside of the neckline. These same fastening methods were used for cuffs.

There is no hard evidence that drawstrings were used for gathering smock necklines or cuffs in the 16th century.

On some smocks, the cuff was gathered and stitched to a ribbon that was used to tie the cuff, which looks like a drawstring cuff until closely examined.

Some Italian portraits show neck gathering which resembles drawstring gathering, but there has, to date, been no definite example found.



**Fig 18:** A woman's smock, c. 1570. Made of fine linen embroidered with black silk. V&A Museum.



**Fig 19:** A woman's smock, early 1600s. Made of fine linen embroidered with red silk. V&A Museum.

## Smock Decoration

For such a little-seen garment, the variety of decoration used was quite extensive. Smocks could be completely undecorated, or completely covered with embroidery of some sort.

Although some smocks for richer women were professionally embroidered, embroidering a smock was a way for a woman to show her skill at needlework. Many decorated smocks were the result of weeks of labor by industrious gentlewomen.

The neckband, neckline, and sleeves were the areas most commonly decorated. These were the most visible part of the garment. In some cases the sleeves and upper body were entirely covered with embroidery. Hems could also be decorated, although this is less commonly seen. Seamlines were sometimes enhanced with simple embroidery, for decoration and to strengthen the garment.

Blackwork embroidery is particularly prevalent on the neckbands and cuffs of smocks depicted in portraits. Other colors were also used for monochrome embroidery of smocks, usually red and blue.

Thin strips of bobbin lace could be used to edge the neckline and cuffs. Silk polychrome embroidery is seen on smocks in the later 16th century as well.

Couched cord, bullion and metal spangles could also be used to decorate smocks, although these methods of decoration were not used as extensively as embroidery. In some cases the neck and cuff gatheres were covered with a tablet-woven or embroidered band.

Whitework and pulled thread work were also used to decorate the neck area and sleeves of smocks. This gave a lace-like appearance to the white linen fabric. Sometimes the seams of smocks were enhanced by a band of needlelace inserted between the two sections of fabric being attached.



*Fig 20: A 16th century Italian man's shirt and woman's smock.*

# Making a Smock

A smock is, at its most basic, a T-tunic. Below are instructions for making a simple smock with a low, squared neck and ungathered, tube-like sleeves. The

## Materials

Handkerchief linen (3.5 oz weight) is the closest we can get to the sort of linen used for Elizabethan smocks. Heavier linen can be used for a lower-class woman's smock. Contrary to what many fabric store employees will tell you, linen is as machine-washable as cotton.

If you don't have access to linen, choose a cotton that resembles linen. For a very fine smock, a cotton gauze is a possible choice; cotton broadcloth and sheeting are also good substitutes. Avoid polyester or man-made fabrics, as they will be very hot and uncomfortable. Avoid sheer silk, as body warmth combined with sweat will discolor and break down the fabric. In addition, silk smocks don't stand up to washing as well as linen or cotton smocks.

You will need on average 3 to 4 yards of fabric for an ungathered smock, and 5 yards of fabric for a smock gathered to a neck and wristbands. Always pre-wash your linen or cotton in hot water before sewing a smock, as it can shrink up to one quarter in size.

## Measurements

The same set of basic measurements are used to make both smocks. Round all measurement to the nearest half inch.

**A:** Around the widest part of the hand.

**B:** around the widest part of the arm (usually the bicep)

**C:** Shoulder point to shoulder point.

**D:** Length from shoulder to mid-calf (or the length you want your smock to be)

**E:** The length from shoulder point to wrist bone.

**F:** Around the wrist

**G:** Around the base of the neck

Below is a layout of the smock pieces. The dimensions are based on the above measurements. For instance, if your measurement around the widest part of your hand (Measurement A) is 11 inches, the bottom of the sleeve (shown as "A + 2 inches") would be 13 inches. These pieces include seam allowance. In fact, the shapes are so basic that you may go ahead and cut them directly out of the fabric, rather than making paper patterns first.

## Things to Keep in Mind

It's advisable to finish the raw edges of your smock, to keep them from raveling over time. This is especially true for linen, which will begin raveling quickly. You can serge the raw edges, use French seams, or use a 16th c. seam finishing technique: turn the raw edges in toward each other, and whip-stitch them closed. Flat-fell finished seams are also very strong, and were used on 16th century smocks. If you plan to sew your smock by hand, both running stitch and

backstitch are found on 16th century smocks. The underarm area is a good candidate for backstitched seams, which are stronger and more resilient.

For the authentically minded, the underarm gussets should be one square instead of two triangles sewn together. The two triangles are easier to sew for beginners, or when using a machine. Square gussets must be set in by hand.

### Sewing the Smock

**1. Sew the Body pieces together.** Place the back and front body sections right sides together. Stitch the short side of the rectangles together half an inch away from the edge, all the way across. This will be the shoulder line. Don't worry about the neckhole just yet.

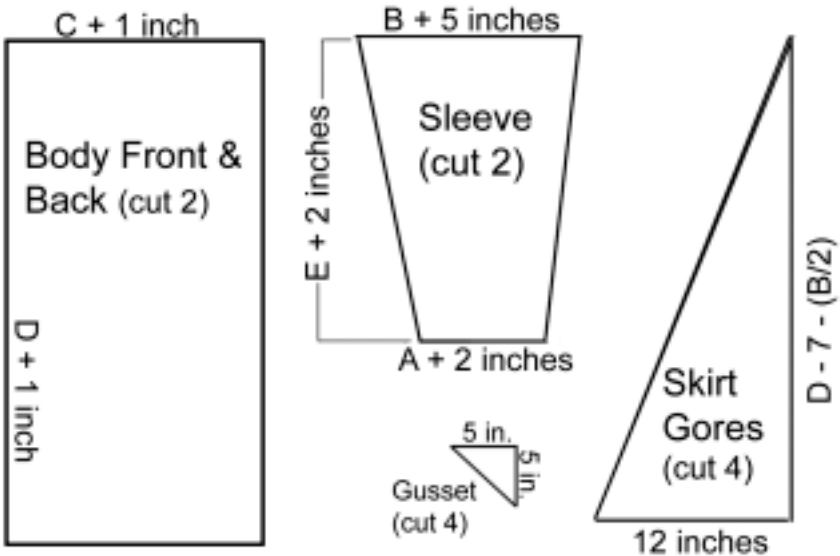
**2. Sew the underarm gussets to the**

**sleeves.** Take one of the triangular gusset pieces. Match up one of the straight edges with the top of the sleeve, as shown to the left. Sew the two pieces together 1/2 an inch away from the edge. Repeat this on the other side of the wide end of the sleeve. Do this to both sleeves. Iron the seams open.



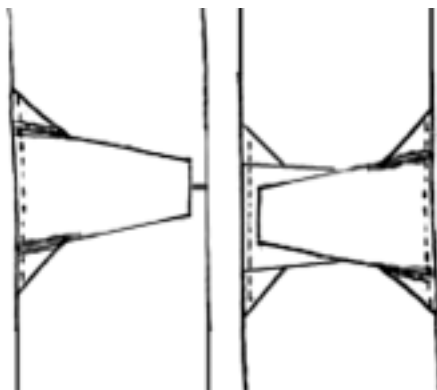
*Step 2: Sew the underarm gussets to the sleeves.*

## Basic Smock Pattern

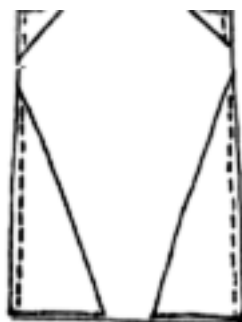




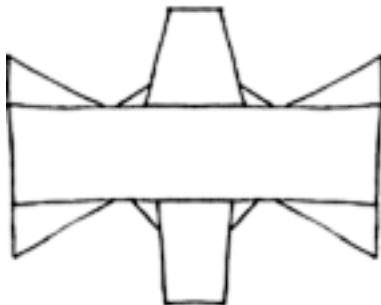
**3. Sew the sleeves to the body.** Lay the top end of the sleeve against the edge of the body piece right sides together, matching the center line of the sleeve with the shoulder line of the body. Sew the two together 1/2 an inch away from the edge of the fabric. Repeat the process on the other side of the body with the other sleeve. Iron the seams open.



**4. Sew the gores to the body.** Starting at one end of the body, match up one of the long triangular gores with the edge of the body as shown to the right. Sew the two together half an inch away from the edge. Repeat the process on the opposite side.



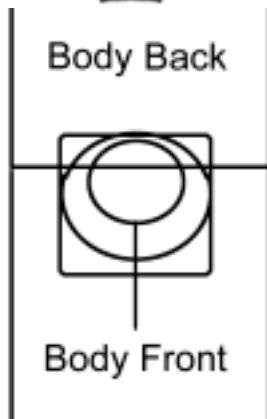
Then sew the other two gores at the opposite end of the long body piece. Iron all seams flat. You will end up with a shape like that shown below to the right.



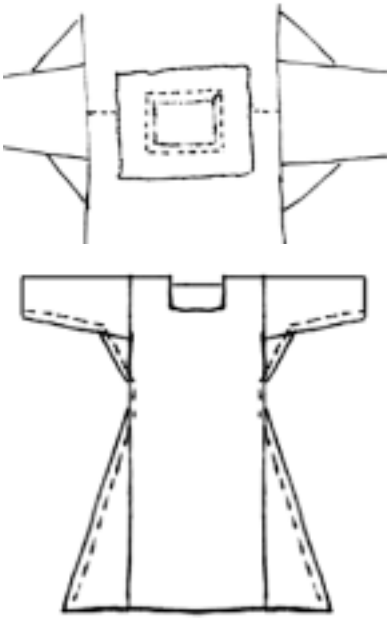
**4. Make the square neck opening.** It is easier to finish the neck opening before the smock is sewn closed. Take a square of fabric and draw the finished neck opening that you want upon it. The square should be large enough that it is at least 1.5 inches bigger on all four sides than the drawn neck opening.

Place the square on the right side (the outer side) of the smock, locating the neckline square so that it is centered and so that the shoulder line on the body comes to around 2 inches inside one edge. Pin the square to the smock along the neckline line, making sure that the two lie flat. Sew all the way around this neckline.

Cut out the center of the neckline, 1/2 an inch away from the seamline. Snip each of the corners. Then turn the re-







maintaining fabric to the inside of the smock, iron under the raw edges, and stitch down.

**5. Sew the Smock Together.** Fold the smock in half lengthwise, inside out. Starting at the wrist end of one sleeve, sew the bottom edge of the sleeve together, then the triangular gussets, then the side of the body, then the triangular gores. (See diagram to the left.) Repeat on the other side. Turn it right side out, and you have a smock!

All that's left to do is hemming the bottom and the edges of the sleeves.

# Appendix A

## Books on Elizabethan Costume

If you were stranded on a desert island with a needle, scissors and a lifetime supply of fabric, what Elizabethan costuming books would you want? Here is a list of the most useful and popular books on Elizabethan Costume, for both the beginner and the more advanced costumer. In print books can be ordered online at Amazon.com or similar stores, or ordered from a local book. Out of print books can often be borrowed through Inter-library Loan or found through online search engines such as <http://www.bookfinder.com> and <http://www.abebooks.com>

***Elizabethan Costuming*** by Janet Winter. Pub. Folger Shakespeare Library, ©1991 (in print)

This is the perfect book for someone who's curious about Elizabethan costuming, but has absolutely no idea where to begin. It gives step-by-step instructions for creating undergarments such as corsets and farthingales, talks about altering modern patterns into period bodices, and also covers headwear, sleeve styles, hair styles, jewelry, and accessories. Here you'll find a list of the amounts of fabric needed for various garments, information on period colors, information on what peasants and middle-class women wore, and also information on men's Elizabethan garments for all classes. Accompanied with many, many illustrations and full of practical advice, I would recommend this book to people who want to find out what Elizabethan Costume is all about before diving into more detailed tomes.

This book is more of a hands-on, practical guide than an in-depth book on Elizabethan costume research, and is aimed at those with little knowledge of Elizabethan costuming. Although it can be hard to find, it is in print at present.

***Patterns of Fashion : the cut and construction of clothes for men and women, c1560-1620*** by Janet Arnold. Pub. MacMillan, © 1985 (in print)

This is the essential book for those interested in authentic period recreation of Elizabethan clothing. Arnold shows photographs of actual garments from the time, and gives to-scale pattern layouts of them accompanied by detailed notes about on construction—number of stitches per inch, composition of the fabric, seam widths, and more. The beginning section is chock full of pictures and information about Elizabethan clothing. This is the book I use to check seam placement, sleeve construction, and fabric composition for garments. I learn something new every time I read it. If you want more authenticity than *Elizabethan Costuming* can provide, you'll find it here.

***Period Costume for Stage and Screen 1500-1800***, by Jean Hunnisett.

Pub. Unwin Paperbacks, © 1988. (in print)

Although this book is aimed at the theatre costumer, it contains invaluable information for the serious historical costumer as well. Hunnisett covers the basics on draping and fitting bodices, how to achieve the proper silhouette for a given time period, tips for creating everything from corsets to ruffs, and patterns for Tudor, Elizabethan and Jacobean underpinnings as well as the gowns and doublets seen in a number of famous Elizabethan portraits. The author's clear pictures and diagrams, as well as her step-by-step instructions for creating an authentic-looking garment, make this a real keeper for the Elizabethan Costumer.

This book assumes a basic knowledge of sewing and, aside from ruffs and loose gowns, concentrates on female garments. Although gowns and clothing created from the instructions in this book would look beautifully authentic, the stickler for "skin-out period authenticity" will want to cross-check the construction techniques described herein with other books as well, such as Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion* (listed above). *Period Costume for Stage and Screen* is in print, and available from all major booksellers.

***Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*** by Janet Arnold Pub. Maney &

Sons, ©1988 (in print)

This book is sometimes called the "Bible" of Elizabethan costuming. It's huge. It's expensive. And it's worth every penny. Written by the same women who wrote *Patterns of Fashion* (listed above), this book discusses and documents every aspect of women's fashion during Elizabeth's reign, concentrating on the Queen herself. It contains portraits and photos of period costume and accessories, Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe records and accounts (transcribed and annotated), as well as a truly awe-inspiring glossary of period costuming terms. And that's just for starters.

This book is aimed toward more serious Elizabethan costume researchers, rather than those interested in a basic intro to Elizabethan costuming. It would take many pages to catalogue all of the information contained in *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*. It is in print again, but quite expensive. It's rather hard to find, but can be ordered through Amazon.co.uk. If you don't want to shell out \$150, which is approximately what it costs, get it through interlibrary loan.

***A Visual History of Costume: The 16th Century*** by Jane Ashelford. Pub Drama Book Publishers, New York, © 1983 (out of print)

When I'm looking for inspiration and costuming ideas, I turn to this book. It consists of portraits of men and women, dating from 1500 to 1600, accompanied with a detailed description of the costume and accessories in each picture.

Many pictures in this book aren't found in the usual broad-spectrum "History of Costume" books, and depict everyone from washerwomen to queens. All in all, this is a really great research resource and idea book. It is unfortunately out of print, but may be found at used book stores, specialist bookstores, or libraries.

***Tailor's Pattern Book, 1589*** by Juan de Alcega. Pub. Quite Specific Media Group, © 1999 (in print)

After 36 years, it's finally back in print! A longtime grail of Elizabethan costume researchers, this book is one of the best sources for primary documentation of Elizabethan costume. It is a facsimile of Juan de Alcega's famous Tailor's Pattern Book, printed in 1589, containing the layouts for the entire range of Spanish fashionable dress. The original pages, covered with pictures of pattern pieces for doublets, coats, kirtles and mantles laid out on lengths of fabric, are accompanied by English translations and extensive annotations by the editor, Ruth Pain. It also contains information on fabric types/widths used during the 1500s, and equivalency charts for 16th century units of measurement. This book is available from <http://www.QuiteSpecificMedia.com>

***Tudor Costume*** by Herbert Norris. Pub. Dover, © 1997 (in print)

A reprint in one paperback volume of the two-volume book on 16th century costume first written more than 60 years ago. It is a good summary book on Elizabethan and Tudor costume, filled with hundreds of drawings of dress, jewelry, and other costume accessories. Some of Norris' information is out of date, and some of his conclusions dubious; this is a good book for quick reference and for general information on Elizabethan costume, but not a one-stop source for reliable 16th century costume information. Norris does contain a broad array of information on headwear, hairdressings, shoes, equestrian trappings, and other aspects of 16th century dress which most costume books cover only briefly. It's best used in conjunction with more reliable costume history books for those interested in authenticity.

***Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries,***

by M. Channing Linthicum. (out of print)

This out of print and hard-to-find book contains in-depth and extensively footnoted information on Elizabethan fabrics and colors, information not contained in any other book on 16th century dress. It also covers stage costume and costume in plays during the Elizabethan era, and diverges into such topics as the textile trade, quirks of fashionable dress and the evolution of dyes in Elizabethan England. Once I'd read it, I didn't know how I'd gotten along without it. More of a research resource than a practical book on Elizabethan costume construction, this book is a must-have for the serious 16th century costume historian.

***Lost from Her Majesties Back***, by Janet Arnold. Pub. Costume Society, © 1980. (in print)

This little book, published by the Costume Society, is a real gem. It lists items lost off of Queen Elizabeth's gowns during processions and the course of daily wear and tear, as well as gifts of clothing given to the Queen and by her to others. Includes a very handy glossary of period clothing terms, insightful commentary by the author, and a fascinating look at Elizabethan taste in fashion. (orange and purple, with gold trim?) This book is hard to find. You can either contact the Costume Society directly (listed at the bottom of this page), look for it in University libraries, or try to find it through interlibrary loan.

***Handbook of English Costume in the 16th Century*** by C.W. & P. Cunnington. Publ. Faber and Faber Ltd (out of print)

This books lays out English Tudor and Elizabethan costume simply and clearly, with several good-quality, attributed line drawings and footnotes. Although it's a basic book, it does a good job of covering all bases and contains more reliable information than other "Introduction to Elizabethan Costuming" books, such as Norris's Tudor Costume. It covers both men and womens' clothing and focuses more on the research end of the spectrum; there is little if any "how to" information in it. If you're looking for a reliable basic book that's not as daunting as Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd, however, this is a good choice. It is out of print and quite hard to find to buy, but can be easily found through inter-library loans.

For a complete listing of books and articles referenced during the writing of this manual, check the Bibliography.

# Appendix B

## Mailorder Resources

### AlterYears

8960 E. Huntington Dr., San Gabriel,  
CA 91775

(626) 614-9400

Sales@AlterYears.com

<http://www.alteryears.com/>

*AlterYears (formerly known as Raiments) is the place to go for elizabethan corsetry supplies. They sell steel boning of all sizes, grommets, wooden busks, hoop wire, millinery supplies, and anything else the re-enactor could possibly desire. They sell patterns for a variety of elizabethan corsets and bodices, and finished corsets as well.*

### Amazon Drygoods

411 Brady St,

Davenport, IA 52801-1518

1-800-798-7979

info@amazondrygoods.com

<http://www.victoriana.com/amazon/>

*Amazon Drygoods is best known for their pattern catalog, but they also sell a lot of sewing supplies for re-enactors. They have Spring steel boning in 1/4 and 1/8 inch widths*

### Bevilacqua Fine Fabrics

Santa Croce 1320,

Venice, Italy

(39-041) 712-384

bevilacqua@luigi-bevilacqua.com

<http://www.luigi-bevilacqua.com/english/catalog.html>

*\$500/yard hand-loomed voided velvets and reproduction silk brocades. Some of the most beautiful renaissance fabrics in the world today.*

### Burnley & Trowbridge

108 Druid Dr.,

Williamsburg, VA 23185

757-253-1644

jasburn@aol.com

<http://www.burnleyandtrowbridge.com/>

CATALOG AND SWATCHES \$4.00

*We have added to our inventory, linsey woolsey, several hemp products, many fustians as well as the usual assortment of wools and linens. Also available all manner of notions (including boning) patterns and books related to costumizing and textiles.*

### Corset Making Supplies

PO Box 15743,

Philadelphia, PA 19103

215-868-4274

supplies@corsetmaking.com

<http://www.corsetmaking.com/>

*They currently provide busks (including hard-to-find spoon busks!), corset patterns and books, boning, bone casing, lacing, bone tips, grommets, and more with new supplies constantly being added.*

### Dharma Trading Co.

PO Box 150916,

San Rafael, CA 94915

1-800-542-5227

catalog@dharmatrading.com

<http://www.dharmatrading.com/>

*White & natural colored silk & cotton, all weights, at very low prices.*

### English Basketry Willows

412 County Road #31,

Norwich, NY 13815-3149

(607)336-9031

bonwillow@ascent.net

<http://www.msu.edu/user/shermanh/galeb/wcatwill.htm>

*Sells Willow reed for making real willow-boned farthingales*

## **Enhancements Costume Supply**

PO Box 8604,

Anaheim, CA 92812-0604

(714) 638-4545 (FAX)

*12 bones of any kind (steel, spiral 1/4" or 1/2") for \$4.00 or .35 each. Sizes can be mixed.*

## **Farthingales**

309 Lorne Ave. East R.R. #3,

Stratford, Ontario N5A-6S4

519-275-2374

lsparks@farthingales.on.ca

<http://www.farthingales.on.ca/>

*One of the few carriers of artificial whalebone and spoon busks on the continent. They carry various types of boning in both metal and plastic, as well as corset fabrics, corset lace and hoop-steel. Catalogue & swatches are available. As they are from Canada, their prices are very good for Americans.*

## **Fabrics-store.com**

6325 Santa Monica Blvd. #102,

Hollywood, CA 90038

(323) 465-8050

cs@fabrics-store.com

<http://fabrics-store.com/>

*My current favorite online site for cheap linen in all sorts of colors (as little as \$5.50/yd)*

## **Grandd Garb**

PMB #236, 555 Rt. 18 South,

East Brunswick, NJ 08816

732-390-0506

webmaster@grannd.com

<http://www.grannd.com/>

*Some of the items they carry in stock are corset supplies including boning, hoop steel, steel busks, eyelets, trim, lace, buttons, clasps, patterns, jewels and accessories. One of the few purveyors of Artificial whalebone in the US.*

## **Greenberg and Hammer**

24 W. 57th St.,

NY, New York

212-246-2835 or 1-800-955-5135

*Steel and plastic boning, super-size hooks & eyes for bodice closings, and every theatricle costume item imaginable. Their prices are the cheapest I've found anywhere.*

\*

## **Hedgehog Handworks**

P.O. Box 45384,

Westchester, CA 90045

1-888-670-6040

An impressive array of hard-to-find boning, buttons, metallic thread, costuming books and useful accessories for the historic costumer or re-enactor.

## **JAS Townsend & Son**

P.O. Box 415,

Pierceton, IN 46562

(800) 338-1665

jastown@halcyon.com

Steel boning in 1/4 inch widths (\$.35/ea), as well as a vast array of accessories and supplies for re-enactors of several periods.

## **Lacis**

3163 Adeline Street,

Berkeley, CA 94703

(510) 843-7178 9am-6pm pst

Fax: (510) 843-5018

staff@lakis.com

*Lacis is known more for lace, needlework and other textile supplies, but they have a good selection of boning, busks, hoopskirt-wire, and other corset supplies.*

### **Manny's Millinery**

26 W. 38th St.,  
New York, NY 10036  
(212) 840-2235

*Best & cheapest millinery supplies I've found. Millinery wire and buckram in all weights, dozens of different hat shapes, head blocks, spray sizing, spring steel millinery wire, millinery glue, hat racks, etc., etc. \$25 minimum on all orders.*

### **Silk Road Fabrics**

3910 N. Lamar Blvd.,  
Austin, TX 78756  
(512) 302-0844  
Webmistress@srfabrics.com

### **Textile Reproductions**

Box 48. West  
Chesterfield, MA 01084  
(413) 296-4437

*Though they specialize in 18th and 19th century fabrics, they do have unusual and hard to find silk and linen fabrics. They also have linen, worsted and specialty ribbons & tapes.*

### **Thai Silks**

242 State Street.  
Los Altos, CA 94022  
1-800-722-SILK ( 1-800-221-SILK in California)  
<http://www.thaisilks.com/>

*Their price list is free; for a \$20 deposit you can get samples of every kind of silk they have (@400 types!) If you order within a certain time, you'll get the*

*deposit back. The best mailorder source for rare silk fabrics, including silk-wool and silk-linen blends.*

### **Timeless Textiles**

110 Mill St. Suite #9,  
Middletown, PA 17057  
717.930.0928  
info@timelesstextiles.com

*Specializes in natural fabrics and historical cloth and patterns for re-creationists. EXQUISITE brocades.*

### **White Fox Trading Company**

*Researched & authentic printed fabrics for period dress; they concentrate mostly on 18th & 19th century fabrics, but have some appropriate for Elizabethan clothing.*

### **Wooded Hamlet Designs**

4044 Coseytown Rd.,  
Greencastle, PA 17225  
(717) 597-1782

*Ribbons & trim of linen, a variety of silks, metallic gold & silver, & wool. I use their silk ribbon to tie points, as it's the only silk ribbon I've found that doesn't slip. They sell waxed linen cord and linen tapes (great for lacing corsets). They also sell linen & silk thread, buttons, and other old-fashioned needleworking supplies. Catalog & swatches available.*



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# Endnotes





