

Background and references to the reproduction of the costume worn by Princess Elizabeth in the 1546 portrait at Windsor

Smock

Made in linen and edged with knotted blackwork. The most practical of all the garments in this costume, the smock was made to be worn next to the skin and washed regularly. In later life Queen Elizabeth was given embroidered smocks as New Years presents along with the usual quota of embroidered and jewelled items which were designed to be seen.

Stockings

Stockings at this date were not yet knitted but made from fabric cut on the bias for stretch. They could be made in wool cloth, linen or silk. The first knitted stockings appear in Elizabeth's accounts as New Years gifts in 1562. The great Wardrobe accounts for 1560-61 mention eleven pairs of cloth hose, lined in the tops with tapheta. Colours are not always specified but in 1574 Elizabeth's hosier, Henry Herne delivered 10 pairs of cloth hose, three coloured and 7 black. We decided to make the reproduction ones black on this basis.

Garters

An entry in 1564 lists 6 pairs of taffeta garters edged in gold fringe. A pair of knitted stockings worn by Elenora of Toledo when she was buried in Italy in 1562 survive complete with knotted silk garters.

Shoes

Shoes are rarely seen in the visual references left to us, a helpful glimpse is provided by Holbein in both his English Lady walking, 1540 and an Unknown English Lady C1535. The styles are essentially the same as those worn by the men at this date.

Petticoat

It is clear from household accounts of this period that a lady's outfit above her smock consisted of a petticoat, kirtle and gown. Since we are not left with much in the way of visual information to work from there is an amount of conjecture as to exactly how these garments were constructed and what they actually looked like. Petticoats are usually listed as having 'bodies' as well as skirts, interestingly the Petre accounts suggest only one and a quarter yards of cloth for a petticoat. Although cloth was wider than silk it still suggests a fairly skimpy garment. Janet Arnold suggests that the upper part of the petticoat was merely there to keep the skirts up and therefore could be almost as minimal as a pair of braces. The petticoat we have made to go with this costume has a red taffeta bodice and a red wool skirt. This combination is based on an entry in Mary I accounts for 1554 - '...a peticoate of scarlet, the upper bodyes of crimson tapheta...'

Petticoats mentioned in contemporary accounts from Thomasine Petre to Mary I are always red, it may have been thought that some kind of healthful benefit could be derived from wearing red close to the body, one of Henry VIII's physicians advised that scarlet be worn next over the shirt (cunnington 1970, 26)



Gallery of English Costume, Manchester c.1560-80



Red knitted silk stockings worn by Elenora of Toledo, 1562. Palazzo Pitti, Florence

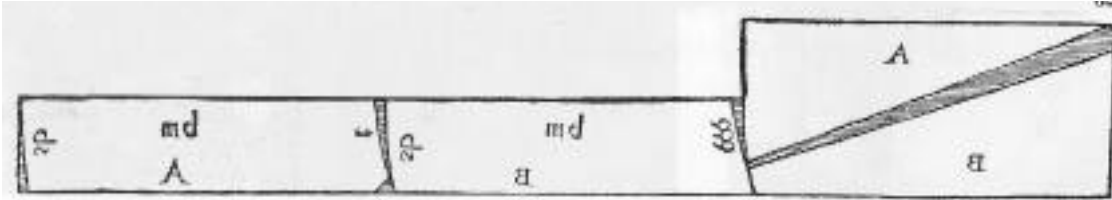


Detail of a Holbein drawing of an English lady walking c1540. British Museum

Farthingale

The names 'farthingale' and 'verdingale', come from the spanish word 'verdugo' used to describe smooth twigs put out by a coppiced tree. However, neither 'withies' or 'osiers' are mentioned in Elizabeth's accounts, only 'ropes' either made of cloth twisted and tightly stuffed into casings or 'bent ropes' which were made of grass of a reedy or rush like nature.

The first farthingale mentioned in England was in the Royal Wardrobe accounts in 1545 for Princess Elizabeth... 'satten de bruges crimson pro una verdingale' so that may of been the actual one worn by her, underneath her kirtle and gown, in the 1546 portrait. Entries in Elizabeths warrents of 1567 show that 'John Bate verthingale maker' supplied several silk farthingales edged in velvet.



Pattern for a farthingale from *Libro de Geometria, practica y traca*, by Alcega, 1589

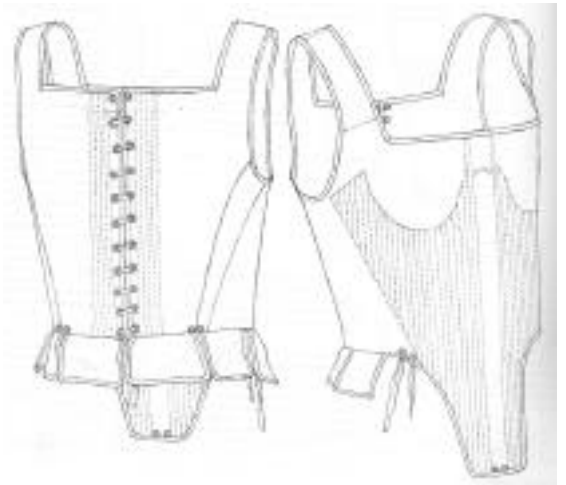
Kirtle

Janet Arnold suggests that kirtles were made with fitted bodices, cut separately from the skirt, with a waist seam.

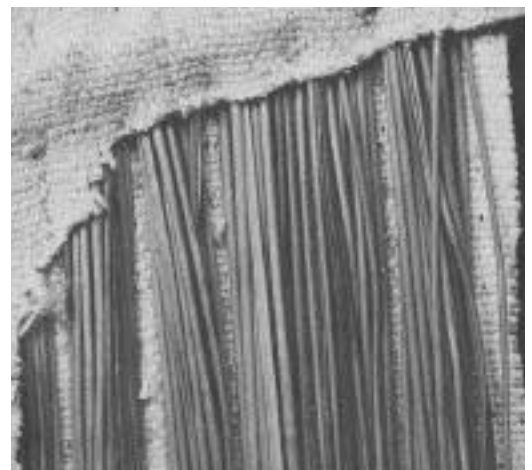
Experimentation in making bodices from this period has shown that back lacing creates a much more 'period' shape than front lacing. Although that wouldn't have much effect on the undeveloped shape of most ten year olds, there wasn't any difference in the cut of girls clothes and those of mature women at this time. Looking at the 1546 portrait of the 13 year old Elizabeth you can clearly see the shape of her bust through the gown bodice, this suggests that this area is not solidly boned.

The structure of the bodice on the reproduction kirtle is based on a surviving 'pair of bodies' c1598 in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich which are made in ivory silk over a linen lining. This pair of bodies is very solidly boned over the ribs at the front, but not over the bust. I have used a combination of steel, wood and plastic boning in the reproduction bodice, it is possible that the original would have been stiffened with bents as seen in an early C17th corset in the Rocamora collection, Barcelona.

Another very good reason for making the kirtle bodice back lacing is that this is the layer to which the jewels are attached and having no opening in the front saves any awkward break in the line of jewels. Close observation of the portraits from the first half of the C16th reveals that the jewels around the neckline are attached to the layer underneath the gown, and not the gown itself. This creates a very smooth fitting line with the jewels sitting nice and close to the body and not standing away from it, which is what tends to happen when the jewels are sewn to the top layer.



Pair of bodies c1598 drawn by Janet Arnold



Detail of the front of a linen corset, or pair of bodies, early C17th showing the bunches of stitching and the arrangement of bents between lines of stitching. Rocamora collection, Barcelona.

Kirtle cont.

The kirtle skirt is 'pieced', that is, the back of the skirt is made in silk taffeta whilst the heavy damask is used for the front section only. Kirtles mentioned in accounts are often 'let down' with cheaper fabric, or two fabrics are referred to, one being the hindpart, and another for the forepart. Mary I accounts for 1558 include '..a round kirtle and pair of french sleeves of tissue...the hinder part white satten and lyned with white tapheta'. Anne Buck suggests that this may well indicate some economy being exercised on the back of the kirtle which is always covered by a gown. A kirtle of 1570-80 in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nurnberg shows this in practice. The fabric used on Elizabeth's forepart and sleeves in the portrait appears to be white satin 'tissued' with gold. A fragment of such fabric can be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This fabric would obviously have been extremely expensive and not something to be wasted where it was not seen. Our version is silk, not gold but still cost £100.00 per metre, so using the far cheaper taffeta at the back is a very sensible idea!



Kirtle c1570-80 in ivory silk with ivory and silver silk at centre front and around hem decorated with spangles. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nurnberg.



Fragment of 'cloth of silver tissied with gold' in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London



Detail of Elizabeth's undersleeve in the 1546 portrait

Gown

The Gown worn by Elizabeth in the painting is described in the records of Edward VI's collection of Pictures 'the ladye Elizabeth her grace with a book in her hand her gown like crymson clothe of gold with workes'. The fabric we have used is not cloth of gold, but pure silk damask in red and gold (colour). The design of the damask is satisfyingly close to that of Elizabeth's, with it's chequer-board background. It is very difficult to find any back veiw[s] of people in the C16th. A drawing by Holbein of an Unknown English lady c1536 show both back and front of the same gown. There is no clue to the whereabouts of any fastenings or openings. Studying the portrait of Jane Seymour c1536-7, a row of what appear to be gold topped pins can be seen on the left side of her bodice. Regular entries in the written accounts mention that gowns have 'forebodies' usually of a cheaper material that matches the rest of the gown in colour. As with the cheaper 'hindparts' to Kirtles, this suggests that forebodies are parts of the gown which are not intended to be seen.

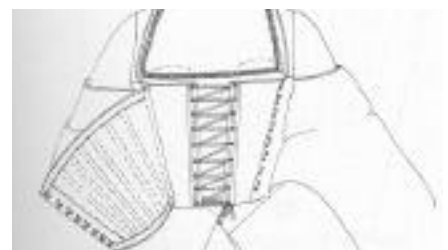
Jean Hunniset suggests a method of 'invisible' front fastening for these bodices in her book 'Period costume for Stage and Screen 1500-1800'. This is the method we have used in the reproduction as it achieves the smooth back shown in the Holbein and the use of Forebodies mentioned in the accounts.



Detail of Holbein's drawing of an unknown lady c1535 British Museum



Detail of a painting of Jane Seymour c1536-7 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



Drawing of Tudor bodice construction by Jean Hunnisett

French Hood

Elizabeth wears a very fashionable French Hood in the portrait. This style of hood was supposedly made popular in England by Elizabeth's own mother, Anne Boleyn who had spent time at the French Court. At the time (1520's) English ladies were wearing the much less stylish and flattering English Hood, such as the one worn by Jane Seymour in the 1536 portrait in Vienna. Jane Seymour herself considered them to be dashing for the young women who were under her charge at court and instructed them to wear the older style instead.

The foundations of the original hoods were made in buckram and stiffened with wire, which is exactly how we have made the reproduction.



Marking out the pattern for the reproduction hood in paper

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