Reinventing the Wheel

Drafting & Constructing Tudor Foundation Garments
for Stage and Public Festival Use

By J. Odell

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This Book is dedicated to:

most particularly
to the pathfinders among them

Address to the Reader

YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE. I certainly do not. But I can tell you who I think you *might* be.

I think that you *might* be a theater student, or, perhaps, a member of a small amateur theater group. Or, just possibly, a member of a Shakespeare society or a participant in one of the many Renaissance Fairs and Festivals around the country. You *may* have some connection with the Society for Creative Anachronisms, or even be an employee of a small professional theater such as a waiver house. It is also possible that you are an amateur/professional costumer who makes costumes on commission. You could even be an archivist connected with some studio or craft union workshop, who believes that my collection may be useful in rounding out your collection (in which case I feel no end gratified). You may be any age from your teens on up, and I am supposing that you are probably female — although that last is far from a requirement to make use of the information, and I could be all wet in the supposition anyway.

I also think that you have seen enough costume dramas set in the Tudor era to have very definite ideas about what a "proper" Tudor costume should look like, but that you have not, until now been able to find any clear instruction on how to produce the desired effect. I think that you are impatient with the sort of mindset which is content with building a Tudor gown over a merry widow and leaving the matter at that. I am inclined to think that you want your costumes to be shaped the way the Tudor gowns in the BBC's costume dramas seem to be, or at least to have your resemble them closely enough to satisfy a general audience. I also believe that you are resigned to putting up with some degree of inconvenience while you are in full costume, but that you are quite unwilling to extend this tolerance so far as to include pain.

I also expect that you already know how to sew. I don't imagine that you've ever gotten involved with honest-to-ghod *patternmaking*, let alone tailoring. But I would like to think that you could purchase a standard, commercial dress pattern and run it up without needing a dictionary to figure out what the directions mean. In your costuming — if you have previously been involved in costuming — I expect that you have at various times traced the neckline of one pattern onto the bodice of another, added the sleeves from a third, and gathered or pleated a straight length of material on for the skirt. You will find nothing more difficult than this kind of thing in the directions used in this collection. Or, at least, I shouldn't think so.

I hope that you are not actually mathphobic, but even if you are, you will only need math when you are making a bum-roll or farthingale, and it is all simple arithmetic which you can do with a pocket calculator. You need not fear that you are going to have to deal with algebra or anything on that level. I'm not trying to turn you into an engineer. Particularly not for making corsets, which should be fitted on the bodies that are going to end up wearing them.

I *would* like to caution you about one thing, however, before you start. The instructions for making a neo-Tudor corset spread over more than one chapter. Please try to read *all* the way through *all* of the instructions before you actually plan out your design and begin work. Some of the variations, mentioned at the end of the section, are rather difficult to incorporate into work which has already been started.

A FEW AMATEUR GROUPS which have been instrumental in the development and spread of the information herein, or which may reasonably be supposed to be a good source of related information, are appended here. Some of this information may well change without warning, but the web presence will probably remain current for some time.:

The Society for Creative Anachronism (the S.C.A.):
Membership; $20 per year

Member Services Office
P.O. Box 360789
Milpitas, CA. 95036-0789

(800) 789-7486
http://www.sca.org

Information regarding the Renaissance Pleasure Faire:

http://www.renfaire.com/RPFI/index.html

The International Costumers' Guild:
Membership; $15 per year

Corresponding Secretary
c/o Jess Miller
7348 Milwood Av #1
Canoga Park, CA. 91303-3426

http://www.costume.org

This last is loosely connected with science fiction fandom, and attracts costumers specializing in several types of costuming (media reproduction, historical period, fantasy, etc.), of both amateur and semi-professional standing. It currently has fourteen chapters in the United States and Canada. A new member will find him/herself receiving the newsletter for the nearest chapter, as well as the guild's quarterly magazine.

Acknowledgments

IN ADDITION TO THOSE PERSONS to whom this book is dedicated, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude, and my indebtedness to those persons who have given me such assistance as:

The various past and present members of the Society for Creative Anachronisms, who provided information of what had already been done.

Ms. Candace Bratmon; who explained what the hoops in a hoopskirt are for.

Ms. Ann Davis; who translated theory into fact.

Ms. Katherine Godwyn; who pointed out sources.

Mr. Donald Hetsko; who claimed that he thought a farthingale was something that sat in a tree and sang.

Ms. Kathleen Lear; who introduced the Renfaire Corset to the costumers of the Society for Creative Anachronisms bavck in the late 1970s.

Ms. Victoria Ridenour & Ms. Adrian Butterfield of "A Stitch in Time"; for information on later developments & refinements in the field.

Mr. Ian Miles Slater; without whom the work would even more unmistakably be the work of a top-grade illiterate.

Ms. Nez Smith; who stalked the unfamiliar through unknown territory.

Ms. Karen Trimble; without whom the collection might still be a bundle of illegibly scribbled-upon sheets.

Ms. Karen Skorem and Sandra Smith; Porfreaders extraordinare.

And most particularly, to Ms. Kathleen Sky; who, at the time of the writing, provided primary information on the local development in amateur costuming, corrected and enriched the text, coaxed me out of hypothetical gum trees that I'd managed to strand myself at the top of, generously pretended to be an idiot in good cause, and generally mopped up.

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Part I

Which Consists Mainly of Explanation

ONE OF THE MOST discouraging factors of costuming books, for the practically minded, is the lack of immediately usable directions for producing specific garments. For example, with the exception of Norah Waugh's Corsets and Crinolines, there are very few clear directions available for making period foundations. Unfortunately, Ms Waugh's book presupposes such a high level of costuming experience that the novice is apt to find her directions inaccessible. Nor are special problems or adjustments for specific figure types discussed in it.

While there is not a complete dearth of information on Tudor foundation garments, there is a decided shortage of material which exists in a form that the typical beginner could feel relatively comfortable with. Many of the best authors of the more traditional sort produce their best work on, or deliberately limit their research to, those periods earlier than the Tudor era. Those whose work is of the hands-on-examination-of-surviving-examples variety, must, perforce, exclude or stint those eras which are too distant to have provided a large enough body of surviving material to reasonably work from.

Most of the researchers who have dealt with the Tudor and Elizabethan period have concentrated on the visible outer garments and relegated the foundations for them to a well-meant but confusing jumble of conflicting hypotheses. The "simple costuming for the small stage" authors, for their part, generally seem to realize that they are on shaky ground and tend to ignore the problem — as if in hopes that it will go away, while the theatrical school texts appear to relegate it to the lecture-workshop phase of the class.

I cannot pretend that this collection will successfully avoid all of the potential pitfalls that text is heir to. In common with virtually all other authors, I have my pet hobby horses to trot around the field upon. I, too, will probably end up repeating some bits of information without reexamining them thoroughly. And my drawings cannot fail to appear "dated" by and by. Nor can I suppose that there might not be some people for whom the methods which I recommend, simply will not work to satisfaction.

However, I *can* promise that, in this collection, the novice costumer will find detailed, step-by-step formulae for proven, tested methods of creating patterns for both corsets and farthingales. In particular, s/he will find detailed, comprehensive directions for fitting a Tudor corset. I can also promise that the garments produced by these methods will, if the directions are followed correctly, present a workably accurate silhouette of the dress of the Tudor period and will perform adequately under normal, and somewhat adverse conditions (118° in the shade on a dusty, open hillside is a fairly adverse condition by anyone's standards). There is also information concerning possible modifications for several of the basic methods.

These basic methods were, to the best of my understanding, all devised by amateur costumers for "public festival" purposes. Which is to say that they were intended to be worn by people in costume mingling with a general crowd. Therefore, they were designed to be seen from all angles simultaneously; at ground level, in close (conversational) range, in broad daylight. A costume element which will stand up to this sort of scrutiny cannot depend upon "faking it". It must actually perform the function which is represented. When the role of the person so costumed is a physically demanding one, the costume must also be able to take the strain without coming apart or damaging the wearer.

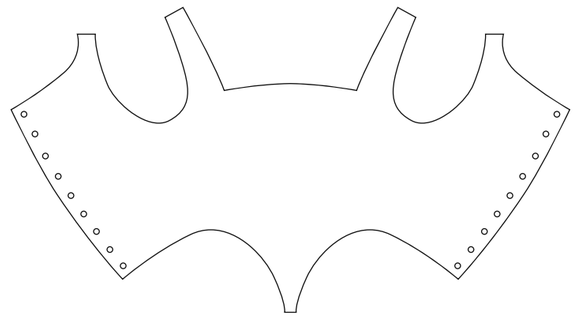
I have deliberately limited my range to the Tudor period for two reasons. In the first place, this is what I have actually worked with myself. I have made, and worn, foundations relating to this period and have, therefore, some familiarity with the principles of how and why they work the way they do. In the second place, this period is, in my opinion, the most inadequately supplied with usable advice and directions. The period is also unique in its aesthetic composition. The demands made upon a costumer by the characteristic flat front are peculiar to this period alone. Despite the somewhat similar line of Stuart and 18th century dress, there is nothing quite like the straight, flat, primitive shape displayed

in a Tudor portrait.

In the third place, and comprising a very great part of the reason for my narrowness of focus, is the fact that this period is one with which almost every theatrical department or company will eventually lock horns. Sooner or later, you are all going to be doing Shakespeare. And, eventually, the novelty of performing Shakespeare in modern, or "eclectic" (or classical or medieval) dress will pall, and you will find yourselves trying to do the thing up "properly" in Elizabethan. Nor is it only Shakespearean, or even only theatrical personnel who may find this information valuable. Given the popularity of "Renaissance Festivals", even the most prosaic of us may feel called upon to dress up like a member of Good Queen Bess's court once a year.

Ironically, although the shape of a Tudor corset is probably one of the most difficult to relate to aesthetically, its very primitiveness ensures that it should be one of the simpler to reproduce.

I append the following examples as an illustration of the truth of this statement. The first diagram [*Figure 1:1*], shows the layout of a Tudor corset. Only the shoulder seams have needed to be unstitched in order to enable the garment to lie flat on a table. Compare this example to the second diagram [*Figure 1:2*], a layout of the detached pieces of one half of a modern merry widow, no single one of which will lie flat if joined to another. Consider the two, and ask yourself which would be the easier to construct. Reflect also upon the fact that up until the 19th century, although



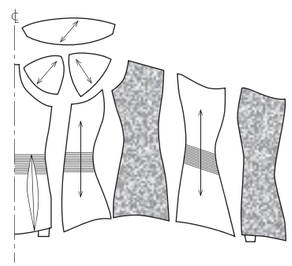


Figure 1:1 - Layout of a typical Tudor corset. Straps have been detached, allowing the pattern to lie flat.

Figure 1:2 - Layout of one-half of the pieces of a typical early 1970s merry widow. The shaded pieces are cut from an elastic fabric. The non-elasticized pieces are reinforced at the waist by pieces of satin ribbon running along the inside of the garment.

professional staymakers flourished in every major city, the average woman of the middle classes and below generally made her own corsets at home.

Prior to the 19th century, a corset pattern was scarcely distinguishable from a bodice pattern. With 175 years of specialized undergarments behind us, we have tended to lose sight of this simple truth. It is no minor consideration.

Heretofore, comparatively few of the existing research works regarding this period show any evidence of having been written by anyone who has ever actually attempted to wear the foundations described. For that matter, a very high proportion of the existing works on the subject appear to have been written by men. Not that there is anything wrong with this. But, although a person may certainly manage to come up with an accurate hypothesis regarding a subject through theorizing alone, without practical experience, it is difficult to present the results with conviction. If one has never been, and is never likely to be in a position to test one's theories out, it is going to be equally difficult to produce further evidence to substantiate them. This is particularly unfortunate as it relates to period foundation garments.

For it must be admitted that no other facet of fashionable paraphernalia is so hedged about with apocryphal mumbo-jumbo and honest misinformation as that of foundation garments. The fact that the surviving contemporary information regarding the subject is so frequently of a suspect nature does nothing to clarify the issue. After all, let us assume that if — given an absence of other depictions in photographs and portraiture — the majority of one's sources regarding, say, a mode of headress were all originally printed as satirical cartoons and comments in PUNCH, one is not likely to gain a very exact notion of the probable dimensions of the average example. When the bulk of one's information on corsets consists of satirists' cartoons, sentimental moonings, "amusing anecdotes", moralists' ravings, doctors' warnings, advertisers' exaggerations, grandmothers' complaints, artists' idealizations, and sundry unwholesome letters to sundry publications' editors originating from the minds of persons adopting such *noms des plumes* as; "Martingale", "R.O.D.", or "A Susceptible Bachelor", one is entitled to consider its content as something less than altogether trustworthy. Yet it is these sources upon which we must, of necessity, base our understanding.

Despite the demonstrably practical intent of this collection, the reader cannot fail to note that there have been included not only a lengthy separate chapter, but, in addition, several lesser digressions of an historically speculative nature, throughout the text. These grew out of the body of the collection. Concern over the practical aspects of reproducing a given effect tends to entail an attempt to analyze the possible causes which originally produced it. For better or worse, the end results of these are, therefore, included as background.

My own conclusions are in the nature of educated guesses from a person having an average level of theoretical knowledge backed up by a smattering of practical experience. While the bulk of my information derives from preexisting sources, it is quite possible that the addition of some of the more recently postulated theories to the traditional blend, may have enabled a fresh enough perspective from which to draw some new conclusions. It is in this spirit that I offer these conjectures. I do not insist that they are beyond question. At my most optimistic, I hope that if any of these tentative conclusions are substantiatable, that they might prove helpful to later investigators. Or, if they cannot be substantiated, I hope that they may yet be of some value as entertainment. Even if one is not a professional historian, one can still indulge in the highly enjoyable historians' game of reasoning backwards. History, after all, has never been the sole property of the professionals. Nor should it.

As to provenance; the basic prototype corset presented in this collection was originally produced in the mid-1970s for use in California's Renaissance Pleasure Faire, and is referred to throughout the collection as the "Renfaire" corset. The variations described in chapter six were gathered from several sources, many of them untraceable. The process for drafting out and constructing the Spanish farthingale was originally devised by me in the late 1970s in connection with my participation in the Society for Creative Anachronism. The diverse processes presented herein for drafting out patterns for the cartwheel farthingale as well as all varieties of bum-roll, were also devised or formalized by myself specifically for this collection and tested by local amateur costumers.

EVERY SECOND COSTUME book inflicts some form of historical survey or background study on its readers, so you might as well get it from me too.

If there has been one detail which has plagued amateur costumers more than any other throughout the 20th century development of the Tudor corset, I believe that this detail is the bodice's waist point. There have been problems in stiffening, problems in fitting and innumerable other problems. And all of these problems, in their seasons, have been solved, evaded or ignored, but the bodice point remained. Up to, and even after the development and popularization of the Renfaire corset, when the "terrible Tudor" had been partially tamed and made safe for novices, the bodice point remained. Despite disaster, difficulty and extreme discomfort, however silly or stylized an interpretation may have been adopted, the bodice point virtually always remains. It is the peril which lurks for everyone, no matter how wary — or otherwise.

However, by the time the Renfaire corset was developed, the more expert of the amateur costumers involved were beginning to get a handle on the reasons for their difficulties. In nearly all of the instructions for Tudor corsetry which had been devised up to that time, the treacherous issue of how deep to make the waist point had been very ambiguously dealt with, leaving most of us with the impression that the issue was an aesthetic one, dependant upon personal taste. This was most unfortunate. Most modern women, if left to their own devices in this matter, will almost certainly be guaranteed future discomfort. Their bodice points will almost certainly stab them whenever they sit down.

The operative consideration on this matter, is not personal taste, but personal proportions. What one ought to be considering is not what angle or depth of waist point seems prettiest to you, but the size and shape of your abdomen, or, not to put too fine a point on it, your belly. And, not putting too fine a point on it is the chief difficulty. This danger is not all that apparent while one is standing around being fitted in a plain brown paper wrapper. But it is something which becomes painfully evident when one has finished one's steel boned corset, sits down in it and receives an instant hysterectomy.

This will invariably be the result when the point of a corset has been made too shallow. Unfortunately, when the average woman designs a costume with a pointed bodice, if she is guided solely by aesthetic considerations, she will almost unfailingly design a costume with a point that is too shallow for her comfort. The aesthetic consciousness of the 21st century is too far removed from the functional realities of the 16th to 18th centuries for this to be otherwise. We have forgotten, over the past 200 years of technological and social upheavals, that the point of a bodice originally had a structural function.

It is only natural for us to wonder why. Why will a highly educated modern woman's aesthetic sense lead her to design a corset which will stab? For that matter, why do most beginning costumers assume that a Tudor corset will be so many things that it is not? Or even, why, after 400 years of being virtually indispensable, is the corset a dead relic? We do not have corsets today.

"What on earth is she talking about?" you may be asking yourself, "Of course there are corsets." And of course you are right. There are certainly orthopedic corsets — a variation on the theme with which I do not feel myself qualified to deal. There may even still be — fetishist specialties aside — in various obscure shops patronized by the elderly and/or the obese, certain devices to which the name of "corset" attaches quite appropriately. They are stiffly boned, occasionally they lace up, and they contain the minimum of elastic. But these vestigial remains of the era (circa 1912) are very few, and extraordinarily far between. More generally, what is intended by the modern speaker when s/he refers to a "corset" is the garment which goes by the name of a "merry widow", or possibly what was referred to in the '50s as an "all-in-one". While both of these, most particularly the former, bear a specious resemblance to a corset, they differ from the original in both performance and intent.

A "true" corset, in the context in

which I use the term, is a device which imposes an artificial, stylized shape to the human body. In this sense, neither the merry widow nor the all-in-one apply. These garments do not actually impose a stylized shape. They are simply a means of figure "control".

We do not, I repeat, live in a corseted age. The underlying purpose of modern foundation garments, is to stabilize the natural, young, slender form. In support of this statement, I would like to point out that generally a young, slender form without foundation garments is barely distinguishable from one with them, so long as both are modestly clothed and neither is in motion. As one becomes more removed from this young, slender ideal, foundation garments attempt to counterfeit as close an approximation of the ideal as may be produced from forms which are elderly, obese, or out of proportion or condition. To this purpose, modern foundations lift, stabilize, smooth, or restrain. Intentional distortion is a rarity. (The most readily accessible case in point(s) being the Nike missile bosom of the '50s.) Indeed, the technology which goes into the manufacture of modern foundations virtually renders them incapable of real distortion. Distortion may only be imposed by materials which are less resilient than the human body. Mere elastic seldom meets this qualification.

At no period during the reign of either the "ancient" or the Victorian (in my terms, the "decadent") corset could this test have passed any but the most careless scrutiny. A fact which made not only one's aspirations to fashion, but even one's economic status and pretensions to respectability publicly evident.

The whole secondary purpose of the corset — once corsets became generally accepted — was to impose the distortion specific to that particular era.

The age of the corset lasted roughly four centuries, over which the garment's effect became progressively more ostentatious even as the garment itself, particularly in its final stages, became less visible, and finally disappeared altogether. The roots of 20th–21st century aesthetic consciousness, however, developed during these final stages.

The eventual demise of the corset, was brought about by no cataclysm of social or economic upheaval. Nor was it due to any blinding surge of social "enlightenment". The garment finally expired of technological hypertrophy. Various economic and social changes which attended its deathbed were helpful contributing factors, most of which have since served mainly to discourage it from making a subsequent revival.

It was long standard practice among costume historians to regard WWI as the great watershed of western fashion. And although the historian's stance regarding this viewpoint has become somewhat less emphatic over the past couple of decades, the underlying assumption has not been seriously challenged. For my own part, I contend that while the era of the 1914–1918 war did indeed mark the end of the age of the corset, the real watershed of western fashion came about at a time in which western society was less immediately concerned with dreams of expanding German dominance than with out-and-out revolution. In fact, with two revolutions revolving in concert. One of these revolutions was centered squarely in the middle of Dame Fashion's own principal court. The other erupted in the arena where she went public. Fashion was assailed, therefore, at both its creative and its productive wellsprings. The first of these revolutions was, of course, that of the French. The second was the one in Industry. Neither fashion nor corsets were ever quite the same afterwards, being at once both more powerful, and, ironically, more vulnerable, and much, *much* more confused.

TO STEP BACK to the beginning: Before there were corsets, the medieval, like the ancients, and for that matter, like ourselves, commonly exercised means of figure control. In its most primitive form, this is believed to have consisted of binding, or wrapping areas of the body (the breasts and belly, mostly) with strips of cloth for the purpose of restraining movement. In some cases — certainly among the ancients — this was also intended to make one appear to be nearer to a slender ideal. Some costume books have implied that this wrapping method was retained in parts of Asia until the present century. I cannot substantiate this claim from personal knowledge. At various times or in various countries, these binding strips are also credited with having been of fine leather rather than cloth. Again, I cannot substantiate this claim. The operative principle would be the same, regardless.

For the most part, this was sufficient to the need. It made it more comfortable for a woman to do her work, and since the clothing of the time was made to cover, rather than to fit, it made little difference visually. Fashion, as we think of it, was in hibernation. The previous incarnation of Fashion, which had contributed no small amount to the grandeur that was Rome had, with Rome's fall, been dispensed with by the general population. The variety and scope of Renaissance fashion was not yet even a gleam in a painter's eye.

To the medieval mind, a gown was a gown, a shift was a shift, and a kirtle was a kirtle, because they "always" had been. And for all anyone knew or cared, they always would be. Whatever hunger for novelty the average person experienced could be fairly easily appeased by differently colored or embroidered decoration, or by draping one's kerchief in a new manner.

This is assuming that the hunger for novelty was not already satisfied by the simple luxury of getting something new to wear in the first place. And, since one's clothing never went out of style, garments would be worn until they fell apart, and then one either made do or did without because yardage was too valuable a commodity to waste. In most cases, life was already too much of a challenge to leave the average person with enough time or energy to think about their clothing in any terms other than those of warmth, comfort or decency. Among the wealthy, clothing might be worn until one was heartily sick of it. At which point it was passed on to the servants or one's poorer relations, and kept in circulation.

Well, it is generally held that around some time in the 12th century someone got the bright idea that specific clothing could make people look beautiful. Prior to that, all clothing had been reasonably expected to do was to make people look prosperous, which had been considered attraction enough. In any event, the general reaction to the concept that "clothes can make people beautiful" was fairly straightforward. Everyone who subscribed to it started wearing their clothing too tight.

Since a slender ideal happened to be in favor at the time, the traditional, clumsy wrappings were gradually abandoned in favor of an underbodice of linen into which the wearer was tightly sewn, laced or otherwise fastened, and which no doubt was found to be not only less bulky, but a more effective solution for the basic problem of restraining the vulgar wobble (leotards anyone?). Despite the fact that clothing was now cut skimpily, fit had yet to become an exact science, and the result, I would imagine, would be that clothing, being put under more stress, would not have lasted as long. This would entail more frequent replacements. (Please remember, that knitting was still some way into the future, these styles were accomplished with woven fabrics.)

This would certainly have fed into a nice little cycle of increased consumerism among those lucky ones who could afford to consume. Nevertheless, a garment still remained in style for the whole of its functional life, which would still have been measured in years, if not decades, rather than mere seasons.

Still, although the main premise that clothing could produce beauty had been formulated and accepted, the mechanism of fashion was not yet complete. Fashions still did not precisely "change". People displayed an increased readiness to sport variety in headdress and accessories as well as more decoration in the clothing which they wore. But the invention of deliberately close-fitting styles had merely, in the long run, provided an option. Within a generation or so, a gown might be tight *or* loose. It did not have to be one or the other. And it was an option which, as time passed, was less often taken. Clothing of the 13th century was again loose fitting.

By the 14th century, however, something had happened. Technology had begun to get off its starting blocks and the travel and foreign trade which had attended the Crusades was becoming ever more active. Cities were growing. Feudal landholders were gradually loosing power, while kings and their courts were as gradually finding it. As the monarchs and their courts became stronger and as the cities that collected around them grew, a potentially powerful merchant class was also on the rise. Cash had become both more plentiful and more important.

In such an atmosphere, the rigid social system which had hitherto prevailed, started to break down. One could no longer tell at a glance who was who. That well-dressed man might not be a noble after all. For that matter, that noble probably hasn't got access to

as much ready cash as this wealthy merchant. All of this was very unsettling, particularly to the nobles. One could not really treat a merchant, who might very well have more money, and potentially more power than one's self in the same manner as a dependant serf. On the other hand, someone whose whole education, wealth, position and influence, was owed to the fact that he was his parents' child, and the product of up to centuries of selective breeding, will understandably show a strong resistance to the notion of viewing as an equal some other person of low, or even downright obscure birth who has merely managed to make himself rich. The noble was not in an enviable position. While he could not forgo dealing with the merchant, the merchant's lack of legislated dependence (such as the serf's) was vaguely threatening.

As the noble became increasingly aware of his own dependence upon the merchant for those luxury goods which enhanced his own status, the threat became a good deal less vague. The urban poor, meanwhile, were being given a salutary lesson that one didn't, in fact, have to be born noble to become powerful. When you've seen a man whose grandfather worked alongside your own holding the upper hand in a bargain with a titled landholder, that landholder becomes, indisputably, a human being like yourself rather than a strange, awesome creature of practically another species. Clearly, the time-honored assumption that wealth equates a God-granted superiority was no longer enough. It was imperative that the nobility discover some manner in which to demonstrate that its authority was not merely some accident of hereditary privilege, but that it was innately ordained and not to be questioned.

The most obvious course to take would simply have been to dress even more gaudily in an attempt to outshine these moneyed mongrels. No doubt this was a course which was attempted. Unfortunately, since it was one which could only be accomplished by acquiring, from the merchant, all those luxury goods which could not be manufactured on one's own estates, and to which the merchant had, therefore, even greater access, it was a course which promised a very limited success rate. Attempts at sumptuary legislation, regulating the lifestyles of people according to social class or income level were equally unsuccessful, except for a source of public income from the imposed taxes on excessive finery.

Eventually someone seems to have taken the brilliant step of looking about for some visible, portable, pre-existing symbol of which the noble was already in possession, and which all the money of the parvenu theoretically could not buy. The requisite distinction turned out to be right under the searcher's nose. Which gives us one possible explanation for that 14th century phenomenon that almost all histories of western costume have made hay of; namely, the alleged fad for dressing up in one's family's armorial bearings. This practice would certainly have demonstrated to all spectators, in no uncertain terms precisely *who* one *was*, and, incidentally, whom everyone else was *not*.

This, of course, is assuming that such a fad ever actually existed. Which is by no means certain. We must remember that it is quite possible that this was only an artistic convention, used in illuminated manuscripts to indicate who the illustrations were intended to represent. To be sure, parti-colored clothing was certainly popular in the 14th century. What is uncertain is whether it had any direct relationship to heraldic devices.

If so, it would have been an effective stop-gap, but short of adopting family uniforms for all time, it behooved the nobility to devise yet other methods of distinguishing themselves from plebeian rivals. Since "real" superiority could no longer be measured by the weight of one's purse, it became necessary to give a little attention to intangibles. Intangibles such as beauty, or, at any rate, that attenuated appearance believed to be the result of much inbreeding. If one happened to have inherited it, that is.

Or, perhaps, one chooses to emphasize such other accessible intangibles as education, or — even better — one's "culture" and "refinement". And another possession of the noble was adjudged suitable for display; leisure. Although the merchant had money, he didn't have a great deal of leisure time, since his cash had nothing to back it up but his own business acumen and energy. The noble's wealth, on the other hand stemmed from his landholdings, and docilely, weather and God permitting, renewed itself each year by other men's labor. The noble's primary official commitment was to provide the monarch with men-at-arms, and was typically free to amuse himself as he chose until called upon to do so. While land might provide less disposable cash, it enabled a fairly steady income. Moreover, this was an income whose maintenance required a less demanding service and far less risk than the merchant's perpetual money-grubbing. Especially if one also had a money-grubbing bursar or steward to manage one's estates. The display of this precious attribute utilized the noble's greatest traditional privilege and weapon of all; patronage. As a patron, one does not purchase mere goods or services. One becomes a part owner of genius. Now *there's* superiority for you!

Professional creativity was the final element missing from the equation. The great goddess Fashion stirred in her sleep and woke. The curtain, figuratively speaking, was about to go up on the Renaissance.

Once you undertake the partial, or full support of a professional genius in return for his services, (namely to produce works of art for the purpose of validating and immortalizing your inherent superiority to other persons) you gain a valuable edge on the competition. This edge won't be particularly broad, since the upwardly mobile merchant class, not being content merely to follow, will actively pursue. And genius is not excessively particular about just whose money pays for its support. But the edge could generally be maintained.

In much of Italy, however, even this method of maintaining distance got out of control. Since Italy was not only the crossroads of the (trade) world, but was lacking in any unified government, money eventually came to outweigh even the importance of owning land, until the most powerful families and patrons were the great commercial and financial houses. Who, by that time, had acquired country estates to boot. By this point, the only thing to do was to ennoble them or, more accurately, to allow them to ennoble themselves. Once this was done, the bankers had (astonishingly!) become dukes.

Professional genius does not operate in a vacuum. It looks for inspiration, it combines elements, it adapts, occasionally it invents. The easiest direction for someone searching for inspiration to look is backwards. Hence the motifs of historical or mythological character which permeate the art of the Renaissance. The artist was not seriously attempting to recreate any era of the past. But the device of depicting his patron, or members of his patron's family, or court, in the character of legendary saints, heroes, and pagan deities was a valuable stock in trade. This was a logical extension of the time-honored custom of including a portrait of the donor of a religious painting as a witness to some momentous religious event, but it could be applied to very different contexts. The court artists of Henri II of France, for example, were to not only portray the King as Jupiter, and Catherine d'Medici as Juno, but the Connetable de Montmorency as Mars, the Duchess of Ferrara as Themis, and, most frequently, the King's mistress, Diane de Poitiers, as Diana—or for the more discriminating, as Venus dressed as Diana, from the Aeneid.

Attention so called to the classical and historical sources of such subject matter was bound to inspire curiosity among those of its intended audience who were not already familiar with them. Those who were wealthy enough and idle enough to satisfy such curiosity did so, raising the standards of what was considered to be a "gentleman's" education thereby. Even today the simplest way to appear to be well "educated" is to display a sufficient familiarity with these less functional aspects of civilization to seem comfortable taking cheap shots at them. As one might expect, with each subsequent innovation, the appetite for such novelties grew.

ALL OF THIS is a very surface rendering of commonly available data, and there are many points and factors which I am well aware that I have not touched upon. Although it was plain that, insofar as "classical" influences

Plate B–1; ***Augustus as Commander,*** *20 B.C. The classical ideal was athletic and sturdy, not too unlike that of today, i.e., mesomorphic.*

were concerned, the Renaissance was a period in which art readily imitated art, life was a good deal slower to take up the practice. The clothing and fashions of the High Middle Ages, could scarcely be at greater variance with that of classical Greece and Rome had there been a deliberate campaign to the purpose. Nor did this lack of resemblance end with the clothing. The ideal body type had changed drastically.

The classical ideal had been of a healthy, stalwart type, generally tall and long-limbed, with broad shoulders, displaying an athletically muscular slenderness. It had a rather small, neat skull and a thickish neck, ribcage and waist. *[Plate B–1]* Both sexes displayed large hands and feet, emphatic, although not unduly exaggerated buttocks and a swaggeringly erect posture. As befits deity, or powerful statesman, a classical subject characteristically stands very solidly upon its base with his or her considerable weight well supported by the legs and hips. The spine curves in a slightly sway-backed alignment, the chest and ribcage expanded and carried well forward, the shoulders and hips well back. The head is held in a proud, thoughtful, condescending or even aggressive manner. The abdomen will not be particularly prominent.

By the eve of the Renaissance, these rudely healthy bully-boys and their consorts appear to have become rather hopelessly *déclassé*. The idealized medieval body type reached its apotheosis in the art of the 15th century, after which it mellowed gradually, reappropriating various classical elements until it was superseded by the style of beauty admired by the followers of the Baroque.

Plate B–2; ***Adam and Eve,*** *Hans Memling 15th c. By the high middle ages, the cultural ideal had wandered far from that of the classical era. This is a more well-padded example than typical.*

In Italy and southern Europe, where a more monumental scale seems to have remained desirable throughout the middle ages, the classical mode, although abandoned, had never gotten quite so far out of reach as in the more austere north. Still, the difference is less one of type, than of degree. What held true of the elements in Northern beauty, was recognizably present in contemporaneous Italian examples. *[Plates B–2* and *B–3]* This pre-Renaissance body type is, perhaps, most widely known as the "International Gothic". To modern eyes the female version in particular is a masterpiece of ungainly distortion. The fact that these renderings are intended to represent the ultimate in humanoid physical perfection, appears to be — considering the subject — as inescapable as it is (to us) laughable.

The first thing we notice is the fact that the ideal woman is no longer essentially a boy with breasts. *[Plate B–4]* In both sexes the weighty solidarity of the classics has dissipated, leaving an ideal which is all but completely weightless. Subjects seem superimposed on their environment rather than supported by it, and it scarcely surprises us when a figure suddenly takes wing and ascends into heaven at the painter's whim. The overall appearance is often one of rather spindly boniness, particularly of the limbs and neck. Skulls are large now, and while hands and feet usually remain long, they have lost their grace and appear merely clumsy. Men's shoulders can vary from sloping to abnormally straight. Their chests are usually wide, and waists narrow. They sometimes have almost no hips. Men's bellies vary from nonexistent to somewhat prominent, depending on the stance the artist has chosen to depict the subject, which itself may vary from a characteristically slouching "gothic" stance to an unnaturally ramrod straight posture. As the Renaissance evolved, this shaded into what was again a strutting, swaggeringly aggressive posture, differentiated from that of the classical eras only by a more pronounced backward incline. I shall not concern myself further with fashions in male dress or posture. Since this collection is intended to be of assistance to women in producing their own proper Tudor foundations, I think it only fair to concentrate my attention primarily upon women's concerns.

The ideal gothic woman's configuration is to modern eyes, a curiously deformed amalgamation. She has improbably round, tiny breasts attached at an impossibly high position. Ribcages were generally worn short, high, and narrow in the 15th century, and pelvises were worn comparatively small and as low as could be arranged. Shoulders seem to have been dispensed with whenever possible, and arms were inclined to be knobby and sometimes incongruously long. Thighs occasionally had some substance, but shins and calves never seemed to, and were generally rather stubby into the bargain. But what astonishes all modern beholders more than any of this is the fact that she seldom appears to possess a waist. She has a ribcage, or a reasonable facsimile, and unquestionably she has a pelvis, but hardly any waist intervenes between the two. In its place, the ideal woman displays an elongated, sometimes narrow, but always monstrously rounded belly! This belly, contrary to expectations, cannot have always been intended to represent pregnancy. Certainly not when the characteristic seems to be at its most spectacular in the representations of accredited virgins (the unfallen Eve, Mary, both at annunciation and with the child already in her arms, martyred virgin saints and secular brides. It *has* been pointed out to me, however, that the internal chronology of a medieval painting is next to impossible to decipher. There exist, I am told, paintings of the annunciation which show, in the background, the figure, or at least the shadow, of a cross.)

Plate B–3; ***The Marriage of St. Francis with Poverty,*** *Stefano di Govanni Sassetta, 15th c. The Medieval ideal in southern Europe, although less exaggerated than its northern counterpart, was basically the same. The stance of the period was highly effective in accenting this preferred body type (note posture line).*

This curiously slouching "gothic" stance is perfectly adapted to display this body type. Nor would it have been a difficult stance to maintain. One swings one's pelvis forward, collapses in the middle and sags backward from the waist, droops one's head forward for balance and there you are. Your shoulders have fallen back and down, your breasts, particularly if you are high-busted to begin with, come several inches closer to brushing your chin than usual, and the sharp curve between pelvis and spine assures that your belly will appear to be at least half again its usual length and prominence. You also will not appear to have much of a waist. You will certainly not appear to have much of a waist if you are in the habit of wearing tight, high-waisted, high-armholed bodices with voluminous skirts gathered on to them with much of the fullness in the center front. You will also appear to be, if not ten, at least six months pregnant. You will not, however,

Plate B–4; Are you a boy or a girl? Except for what looks like an appliquéd bosom and the feminine hairdressing, this might almost as well be intended to be a teenaged boy.

The height of the waist in the back view is particularly curious. Usually, the level of the average female waist divides the torso into almost two equal parts. A man's more typically divides the bottom third of his torso from the upper two. ***Wounded Amazon,*** *Roman copy of a Greek original 5th century B.C.*

appear to be likely to ascend into heaven at the whim of a painter. In fact, you will not look as though you are going to be getting anywhere in a hurry. This stance offers a great future in inertia.

What fails to occur to most people is the inescapable fact that if this was the body type and stance which was fashionable throughout the period during which the corset was developed, then, consequently, *this* was the body type that the corset was invented to display. Nor was fashionable stance or body type swift to change to any marked degree after the corset was adopted. Despite various mannerist experimentations with the clothed body as an apparent exercise in geometric shapes, the idealized female nude in art, although she, like her male counterpart, grew progressively more heroic in scale, and "classically" meaty of build, she continued to sport high, small breasts, low, comparatively narrow hips, a long spine, and no waist. *[Plate B–5]* She also continued to lean over backwards. Indeed, one of the most characteristic elements of a Tudor—and even more particularly, an Elizabethan— portrait, is the almost universal preference of their subjects for loftily "leaning away" from the observer. By the end of the era, the classical nude's shoulders, however, had gained some degree of breadth, and considerable padding.

It occurs to me to insert a further comment with regards to the work of Michelangelo. A second look at this sculptor's female nudes reveals that his women are — as are those of many of the classical sculptors — typically shaped

Plate B–5; ***An Allegory,*** *Agnolo Bronzino, 16th c. The Renaissance ideal has regained much of the bulk and massiveness of the classical æsthetics which were again in vogue. The torso is virtually cylindrical. Once again, mesomorphic.*

like very young men with unconvincingly *appliquéed* breasts. Whether this was done in imitation of the ancients is impossible to say. One conclusion to be drawn is that due to social mores, the man might not, in fact, have worked from female models. Another is that he may have been so enamored of some classically-inspired theory of beautiful proportion — which incidentally happened to coincide more exactly with male than female proportions — that he felt impelled to "improve" his subjects shapes. While this sculptor's work is the most likely to be familiar to the reader, this practice, and its effects are not confined to this one artist's work.

OKAY. SINCE THE corset was unquestionably invented during this particular era, it follows it must have been invented for a reason. What sort of reasons seem to us to be most likely?

It is *reasonable* to suppose that the tightly fitting underbodice of the 12th century had been retained even after looser fitting gowns had become more prevalent. Even if for no better cause than that the earlier method of wrapping the body for work or comfort had probably been forgotten by all but the poor, whom no one wished to imitate. The specialized underbodice would have been more secure, and comfortable, as well as more efficient. If we can accept this premise, it also seems safe to assume that when clothing again became tight-fitting in the 14th century, the noticeable improvement in tailoring may well have reflected advances which had been taking place "under wraps", as it were, throughout the intervening two centuries. (To say nothing of the advantages granted by that clever new invention, the button.)

As the fashionable waist began to rise, and as the bosom began (ideally) to be carried at higher levels, the simple, snug fit for comfort began to require some further sophistication, or at least some outside help. As the 15th century progressed and merged into the early 16th we read of bodices stiffened with paste or made of alternate materials — in Italy, boiled leather was spoken of — and finally, boned. It is during this period that the distinctions between corsetry and figure control begin to become unclear and an identifiable, mechanical distortion becomes evident. This distortion was of a fairly simplified type and in isolated instances could have been attributed to clumsiness on the part of the painters. *[Plate B–6]* However, this distortion, namely the curious line of the bodice, representing the upper torso in a single smooth curve, is not an isolated instance. Whether this is due to boiled leather underwear (the distortion being almost exclusively confined to portraits in the Italian manner), fashionable stylization on the part of the painters — a not at all unlikely possibility— or to yet some other cause, I would not care to hazard a guess. Certainly this is not a natural line for the body. However, in other paintings which do not utilize the convention of displaying the subject in profile like a psuedo-Roman coin, this distortion is either far less, or totally absent. Nor is it certain that the effect was brought about by any form of undergarment. The visible, outer gown alone would be sufficient to produce it. It is not at all impossible that although a lady may well have been as stuffed into her bodice as a sausage is its skin, the resulting distortion was more incidental than intentional.

At some point in the process, however, someone got the bright idea of adding whalebone. I suspect that the original intention of the addition was to discourage a closely fitted bodice's tendency to ruck up into the horizontal folds which are otherwise inevitable.

It would be interesting to know for certain what purposes whalebone served in the periods prior to its use in corsetry. One simply cannot suppose that some genius woke up one morning and said to him or herself, "By golly, I bet if we went out and killed a whale we might find something that would stiffen a bodice properly!" Or even, "By golly, I bet if we put our minds to it we could invent *some* market for all of those fibers and bones and fins and things that are left over after turning a whale into whale oil!" But since corsetry and other, similarly highly structured fashion items were invented, it's difficult to think of the stuff in any other context.

Incidentally, it may surprise some amateur costumers to discover that the magical myth of whalebone — that mystical substance which by its arcane powers can turn the waist of a woman into that of a wasp — is largely unfounded. If I had a nickel for every time I have heard, or for that matter spoken, that familiar refrain, "I couldn't get it as stiff or flat as all the pictures show. But *they* all used *whalebone*!" I could, if I wished, be able to buy some. Which — considering that the stuff is contraband in this country — is saying something. Actually, I do own one bone

Plate B–6; ***Portrait of a Lady****, Alesso Baldovinetti, 15th c. The peculiar line of the bosom is an obvious distortion from nature, it is also one frequently met with in the art of the period. Whether it is due to artistic shorthand, or is a literal representation is uncertain. It is also uncertain whether it was produced by undergarments, since the outer gown alone would have been sufficient to produce such an effect.*

out of a Victorian corset which I was told in all sincerity is genuine whalebone. It is certainly no sort of metal. It is about the same width and thickness as a contemporary, narrow, flat steel bone, and is considerably *less* stiff or firm than any steel bone of its size. I, having willingly swallowed the great myth of whalebone, was quite nonplussed by this discovery. Although I didn't go so far as one disappointed confederate who suggested that perhaps when an Elizabethan said "whalebone", he really *meant* the whale's bones (which even she realized was thoroughly silly, as soon as she heard herself saying it).

For those few persons who are uncertain of just what is meant by the term "whalebone", and who are feeling confused in consequence, "whalebone", "whalefin", or, to use its proper name, "baleen", is a transitional substance between hair and horn. It is essentially an agglomeration of hair covered with enamel (like a tooth) which grows in the upper palate of the proper breeds of whale (e.g., humpback, blue, etc.). It serves the animal in the place of teeth and is used to strain the small crustaceans etc. upon which the whale lives, from the mouthfuls of sea water which he takes in to catch them. Since the "hair" fibers are parallel and uniform, it is possible to split an entire plate of baleen — which may be up to 13 feet long — evenly, to just about any thickness. Baleen may also be shaped by softening it in hot water, or applying steam, and if held in a given shape until cold, will retain it. This last attribute was not known until the 19th century. (Steam-

molding became a routine process about mid-century.) Insofar as regards comparative lightness and flexibility, baleen could not have had an equal until well into the industrial revolution. (By the way, the hypothetical genius statements above are completely facetious. Baleen has been known in western Europe since at least the 12th century. The actual bones of a whale, or any other animal, are far too stiff, and more to the point, too brittle to have ever been used for corset bones.)

I could not begin to guess what width or thickness of baleen was used when it was inserted into its first bodice. Presumably the seamstress or tailor used whatever width or thickness they happened to have on hand for whatever lost-use-of-whalebone they had originally purchased it (stiffening some form of headdress is one theory). Obviously, someone decided to experiment. In any case, a light boning of the seams and lacing edges of a bodice would not have distorted the body shape, and it would have helped to keep the fabric from rucking up too badly (and may well have been used for just that purpose ever *since* the 12th century, for that matter!). However, at some point in time, someone must have filled the front of a bodice with a virtual palisade of whalebone. *[Plate B–7]* If this was an attempt to keep the fabric smooth, it was a clear case of overkill. That much whalebone was more than sufficient to merely restrain fabric. It would have restrained the body as well. At first, this must have seemed like a merely incidental distortion. But it was not destined to remain so. For one thing, this distortion produced the highly desirable effect of actually *raising* the bosom. At last there was hope for the heavy-busted. Even for the more modestly proportioned, the resultant clean, smooth line was certain to be admired, and once admired, actively sought. Enter the corset — or more precisely, the "whale-boned body".

An important point to try and remember is that the technology of the period — at least insofar as corsetry is concerned — was extremely primitive. The knowledge that baleen could be steam molded was still some 300 years into the future. Even the comparatively simple discovery that placing the bones into the garment at an angle would produce a more graceful line, would have to wait for the 18th century before becoming widely known. What appears to have been standard 16th century procedure, was to position the bones straight up-and-down around the torso, or at least across the front of the bodice, rather like a retaining wall. This produced a very straight surface which, while it had little to do with the actual shape of the human torso, made an emphatic design statement, and provided a nice flat plane for displaying embroidery, jewelry or other decorations.

Plate B–7; ***Feudal Life: The Bath,*** *French tapestry end of 15th c. The lady at the left of the group is wearing a gown which has been stiffened enough to produce the flat front characteristic of the following era. The lady on the right wears a gown of earlier style, which does not display the flat front, but appears to be otherwise identical to the stiffened garment. Either or both may have been cut with bodice and skirt in one single piece.*

We do not have any very concrete idea of the corset's actual pattern of development during this stage of its history. Most women were still independently directing the design and production of their own clothing and trying to copy what they admired in others' without any clear instructions as to how to accomplish this. I do not doubt that there was considerable blundering about before they even individually got their acts together, let alone reached a consensus. It was well into the 16th century before a more or less standard product emerged.

Keeping to the realms of theory, although it seems probable that the original underbodice continued in use into the 16th century, the earliest whale-boned bodices appear to have been stiffened outer garments. The upper back and shoulder portion of these "bodies" was necessary, not only to attach the sleeves to, but to keep the garment in place, since the waist was still worn rather high. At this period, the original stiffened bodice would have ended at the waist, front and back. Which soon made for difficulties. While an unstiffened bodice may have tended to bind slightly when the wearer sat down, and would have rucked up into folds at all times, a stiffened bodice would announce its presence to the wearer more forthrightly. It would have dug into the waist, making some evasionary tactic desirable.

Another point which often fails to be taken into account is the fact that, at its inception, the whaleboned bodice was a luxury item. A great deal of inconvenience will be put up with for the sake of status. Nor would the problem have been completely intolerable, in any case. Yes, it is a nuisance to have the edge of your bodice gouge you when you sit down or bend over. But your undergarments pad the area somewhat, and the sway-backed stance then fashionable, would have lessened the impact. There are considerably worse things in life after all. Still, since there is a problem, it is within the rules to see if it can be neutralized. A certain amount of experimentation was bound to have gone on.

One of the earliest evasions was to shorten the bodice slightly, in an attempt to raise the edge of the boning above the area being poked. This attempt would have been a failure, it would have only resulted in the wearer being gouged higher up. Another possible dodge may have been to keep the bosom area snugly fitting, and to loosen the waist a bit. This would not have been very satisfactory either. The looser area would have shifted about annoyingly and may have chafed. The breakthrough came when some mastermind, rather than trying to shorten the front at the trouble area, extended it over the abdomen, so that when the wearer sat down, the boning, instead of digging into the belly, slid over it. A point, or tapered curve was almost imediately found to be the most efficient shape for this extension, since it could be given the necessary length without hampering the movement of the legs. At some period, either concurrent with, or immediately after this development, it was discovered that the elongated bodice worked most efficiently, and was most stable, with the addition of a heavy rigid support running its full length at center front. This support was called a "busk" and could be made of wood, horn, ivory or other such material.

Although the fully boned bodice was primarily an upper class garment, the Tudor and Elizabethan eras were characterized by a great deal of upward mobility (particularly in England), and the middle classes — probably even the urban laboring classes — were in the habit of imitating their betters to the best of their ingenuity. One such dodge during the later portion of the Tudor era is said to have been to insert a triangular piece of wood into the front of the bodice. While I doubt very much that such a sham would have held up to more than a cursory observation, it would have indicated that the wearer was at least making the attempt. Since this would have been a fairly simple dodge to have put into effect, one suspects that it, or some similar range of variations would have gradually filtered into all classes with pretensions to respectability.

Of course, this sort of thing travels fairly slowly. By the time every country dairymaid sported a wooden busk, or "stomacher", the gentry had probably abandoned the original style, but the precedent had been set. From this point — whenever it finally came about — all "respectable" women wore corsets. Reports of wooden corsets are no doubt due to the confusing 16th century practice of indiscriminately referring to almost any device intended for supporting a bodice as a "busk". Sources making this reference are generally not from persons of the higher, more knowledgeable, social orders. One of the most frequently quoted sources, is Philip Stubbs' Anatomy of Abuses. Stubbs was a ranting puritan, male, and possibly no more than middle class. Hardly the ultimate authority on the best sort of corsetry. Of course, what he was most incensed about was the spectacle of the common female aping her betters, and, in passing, the fact that these "betters" were not setting a higher-minded example.

As a general rule of thumb, bodices, in the Tudor and Elizabethan period developed thus; They were rather short, and either cut in one with the skirt or were made with a round waist, and not even always boned during the reign of Henry VII. They were almost invariably

boned and cut separate from the skirt during the reign of Henry VIII, growing gradually longer during his reign. The first pointed bodices were worn during this period, and gradually came to replace the earlier, round waist. During the short reigns of Edward VI and Mary I, the bodice was invariably pointed and continued to lengthen. During Elizabeth I's reign, it was very long, pointed, and came to utilize the separate stomacher with ever greater frequency. The Elizabethan bodice continued into the Stuart era during the reign of James I, the only significant variation being that the neckline changed from square to rounded.

Throughout these periods, the stiffened outer bodice was most general, but separate corsets as undergarments also came into use. These were, again, first popular with ladies of the higher nobility. These corsets reputedly had tabs attached at the waist, to which could be fastened the farthingale and petticotes.

It would be very easy, at this point, to continue with a general chronology, loftily ignoring whatever has not previously been mentioned. You should only be so lucky. Instead, I will now mount one of my hobby horses and indulge in a little exercise in equitation. The subject/object of this particular exercise is one with which all students of costume, or collectors of old wives' (or old archivists') tales will already be all too familiar and which persists in haunting the story of Tudor foundation garments. I refer, of course, to the notorious metal corset.

Few articles of wear have become as hedged about with improbable statements as the corset, and the metal corset

Plate B–8; ***The Corset,*** *Herbert Norris, 1938. This drawing was all too clearly made by an artist who had absorbed the artistic sensibilities of the 19th and early 20th centuries.*

seems to be particularly vulnerable in this respect. Even some of the best researchers have been content to repeat the most arrant nonsense regarding this device. The following is a particularly striking example, from Herbert Norris:

"During the second decade of the sixteenth century, corsets were made of thin iron deliberately designed to constrict the figure." (there is a reference here to a drawing made, purportedly, from an existing corset of about 1530 [Plate B–8])*"It is somewhat clumsy, being constructed of iron. Such corsets (or cages) were in two parts, a front and a back, and consisted of a series of perforated bands of metal, which could be covered with soft leather, silk or other material. They were hinged at one side, and the other fastened by hooks, bolts, or sometimes slots for padlocking. These corsets, besides achieving a slender waist, had certain disciplinary advantages, for it was recommended that a husband should padlock his erring wife in her corset, and keep her locked up until she promised to behave herself. Disuse of such corsets in modern times is much regretted by some! Corsets of steel were first made by the Italians, and Catherine de'Medici brought some in her trousseau when she came to France in 1533 as the bride of Henry, Duc d'Orleans, afterward King Henry II. These Italian corsets were similar in shape to those shown in* [Plate B–8], *but by the use of supple steel the waist was greatly reduced. At once, corsets of this kind sprang into favor, and during the greatest part of the 16th century they formed the model on which the figures of the great ladies of Europe were moulded. The same type of corset was adopted in England about 1533, and continued in use until the 1580s. Catherine de 'Medici's waist is said to have measured sixteen inches in circumference; but that of her daughter-in-law, Mary Stewart, only fifteen."*

(History of Western Costume, Vol. III, Book I, pg. 283, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1938.)

Now, as much as I respect most of Mr. Norris's work, this is really too silly to ignore. *Who* recommended that a husband lock an erring wife in her corset? Not the church, certainly. Considering its general track record, the church of the period would more probably have been frothing at the mouth over the very existence of such an "article of vanity" as a metal corset. There were no newspapers, or other regular publications to carry advice columns. I never heard of any king proclaiming it, and, trust me, this would have been too bizarre an edict for the historians to have ignored. The universities would have been utterly indifferent to the whole discussion. What had *they* ever cared about what women chose to do? Assuming (with *extreme* difficulty) that such a recommendation ever existed, just where is it supposed to have come from?

One slim possibility is that, if Mr. Norris was not merely having his own little joke, some satirist might have invented it. It was reputedly a witty age, after all. And, if a piece of satire later resurfaced, and was taken a good deal more seriously than it had originally been intended, it wouldn't be for the first time. (The knight in plate armor's block-and-tackle for mounting his horse, is one example. Pure myth.) If any such piece of satire did exist, it might have obliquely been lent some degree of credibility from the positive inundation, during the 19th century, of the similar context of overtly sadist and/or fetishistic correspondence published in the letters columns of some of the leading "Ladies' Magazines" of the day.

And, as long as we are on the subject of abnormal psychology, one will have to admit that the source of such babbling, whenever it may have occurred, shows far greater than random probability of being of exactly such a character. Sexual perversion is not the exclusive property of industrialized societies. The issue of whether the metal corset might have been a penance garment also cannot be completely ignored. While I doubt that the practice could have been at all widespread, the likelihood of a few isolated instances is not altogether unreasonable, however improbable. Particularly given the excesses known to have taken place in the name of religious devotion, and given the iron corset's peculiar suitability for displaying that form of pride which demands to be paraded as a masque of humility.

Less objectionable, and even less believable, are the statements regarding Catherine de'Medici and Mary Stuart's waist measurements. If I may be allowed to pour a little cold water on this picturesque notion, I would like to point out a couple of incontrovertible facts. First, that a circle having a circumference of fifteen inches has a diameter (not radius, mind you, diameter) of 4¾″. And that, second, Mary Stuart is known to have been nearly six feet tall.

In view of these two pieces of information, Mr. Norris's sources sound as though they must be something less than altogether reliable. Nor is Catherine de'Medici's alleged sixteen inch waist any more plausible, notwithstanding her shorter stature. With these considerations in mind, a healthy skepticism might also be applied to the often-quoted (although not by Norris) *thirteen* inch waist which was allegedly decreed for all ladies of the French court by this same Catherine de 'Medici. These statements are obvious fabrications. But fabricated where? And from what? Or why?

Beginning with the alleged 13″ waist decree, it is well known that Catherine was notoriously disliked, feared, and disapproved of during her own lifetime. In the eyes of her many ill-wishers, nothing which she said or did was likely to be held to her credit. This attitude infects the sources of nearly all historical research. With this in mind, it hardly seems unlikely that exaggerated, unkind and unreasonable statements should be attributed to her, even long after her lifetime. In fact, the Medici woman has had excruciatingly bad press for the past 400 years, and has figured as a favorite villainess in hysterical/historical novels ever since the genre was developed. Other sources quote the measurement variously as 15″, or as 45cm — approximately 17¾″. Which leads one to question the actual terms used, as well as the existence of this alleged edict. Centimeters did not exist in the 16th century. One wonders what obscure measurement has been translated as inches. In fact, how big *was* an inch in 1575? The governments kept changing the standards.

In all due respect, while some form of this decree may exist somewhere, I submit the view that it is most likely to

Plate B–9; ***Diane de Poitiers****, School of Fontainbleau(?) c. 1550. The æsthetic ideal of the 16th century appears to display a basic unconcern for tiny waists. This lady was by all accounts a famous beauty and mistress to the king.*

be found in the world of Victor Hugo, or Sir Walter Scott.

Which brings us to a matter of some debate. Was a tiny waist even considered desirable for its own sake? The idealized images of feminine beauty of the time emphatically do not bear this theory out. *[Plate B–9]* Just how likely is it that artists, regardless of their "classical" training or preferences, would all deliberately set out to glorify a body type which was popularly considered unattractive? Is it then to be supposed that the Tudor taste aesthetically delighted in an image which, at the same time, no one in her right mind aspired to? This is only slightly more plausible. Certainly, when the various excavations and discoveries of the late 1700s brought to light so many previously unknown examples of classical statuary, western Europe was suddenly agog with admiration for the beauty of, say, the Venus de Milo, despite the fact that the fashionable woman of the period would no more have coveted her small head, thick waist and heroic ribcage, than she would have painted herself blue. To be sure, the Mannerist movement had its schizoid elements, but it isn't really in human nature to hold two such conflicting ideals of female beauty, clothed and unclothed, at one and the same time. Nor were the Renaissance nudes — however classically inspired — in the same category as the Venus de Milo, to wit, priceless artifacts of a vanished culture. They were contemporary art, expressly designed to appeal to the popular or rather, to the noble taste.

Still, at the same time, there is the fashionable Mannerist practice of depicting the clothed figure almost as an exercise in geometrical design. While this practice was by no means as universal as the heroic proportions of a Renaissance nude, it was certainly common enough, particularly in France, England and Spain. Could a consideration that "of course" the portrait of a queen could only be conceived of as a clothed figure — and as an elegantly, fashionably clothed figure at that — have colored the issue? This is only barely possible, and I am by no means convinced. Indeed, if one closely examines a mannerist painting, even these bodices turn out to be less narrowed, than simply elongated, and when they are narrowed, they have generally been narrowed overall, rather than just at the waist. The distortion seems particularly grotesque due to the unreasonable extension of the bodice point over the lower torso. *[Plate B–10]*

Plate B–10; ***Bal celebrating the Marriage of the Duc de Joyeusse*** *(detail). French school c. 1581–82. When the actual waist of even a mannerist painting is located and examined, it turns out to be far from small. This exercise may be undertaken in virtually all full-length paintings of this period with virtually the same result.*

Ultimately, the only reconciliation which I can make between the unquestionably authentic and numerous existing remnants testifying to the content of 16th century visual taste, and the alleged verbal report quoted above is that Norris simply was not quoting genuine 16th century sources, but reports of far more recent origin, that of the mid-19th century, to be specific. Which in fact turns out to have been the case. In other words, we've been sold a bill of goods, ladies, and most of our sources right along with us.

Authentic 16th century reports seem to indicate that for most of her life, Catherine de'Medici was decidedly stocky, and in later life became grossly fat. The kindest description, that of Catherine as a 14-year-old bride, refers to her as having a "handsome" figure. Not an adjective to inspire visions of sylph-like slenderness. The most common reaction to Mary Stuart seems to have been; "My God, she's tall!" One will admit that there indeed *are* references to Mary's "youthful slenderness". Since she was 5'11" tall, fine-boned, and had the usual sudden growth spurt in adolescence, you'd better believe she'd be "youthfully slender". A less flowery, if more horticultural description would probably be "beanpole". But there seem to be no specific references to her having had an exceptionally tiny waist.

Plate B–11; ***Lucretia Valier****, Lorenzo Lotto, early 16th c.*

Plate B–12; ***La Bella,*** *Titan c. 1536.*

Which casts considerable doubt upon Mr. Norris's, or anyone else's conclusion that the iron corsets of the 16th century were deliberately designed to constrict the figure. It also does not support his contention that by the use of more supple steel, the (Italian) waist was greatly reduced. In the first place, although steel is certainly more supple than iron, and that thinner strips of it could have been used in corsetry than of the brittler metal, I frankly take leave to doubt that in a corset design consisting of horizontal bands of metal passing around the body, as shown in Plate B-8, it would matter a tinker's dam whether the metal used were steel, iron, brass, copper, tin, zinc, lead, silver, or any alloy of the above, insofar as efficiency in reducing the waist is concerned. Suppleness is a quality which only improves a design wherein flexibility is desired. For a series of hoops passing around an object for the purpose of constricting it, flexibility is not the operative factor. The only reduction which could have resulted from the use of steel rather than iron would have been in the overall weight of the corset due to the possible use of thinner pieces of metal.

In the second place, a metal corset, hinged on one side and latched — by whatever means — on the other, would not have been able to produce the effects of tight-lacing at all! Tight-lacing is a *cumulative* process. One begins with a corset which is a size too small and laces it as tightly as one can stand it. As the body adjusts to this, the laces are drawn ever tighter until, finally, the corset closes. Then one starts over again with a smaller one. It takes months! The iron corset as shown in Figure B–8 was obviously designed to completely enclose the torso from the outset. It could not have been worn at all if it had to be left open, let alone left open and then be expected to exert the pressure necessary to constrict the figure. The statement is patently absurd.

In the third place, well, I would like to direct your attention to the above examples of Italian painting, clothed, obviously corseted, and originating in the country which Mr. Norris contends developed better and more efficient corsetry through the use of steel rather than iron. *[Plates B–11, B–12]* With all due respect, I think Mr. Norris had blinded himself with specious science.

Which leads one to wonder how Norris, who in general was an excellent researcher, and whose theatrical background and intentions equipped him with a rare eye for seeing practical methods to visually reproduce period effects, could have placidly repeated such information as the above without registering its inherent nonsensicality. The gentleman was hardly a neophite.

Mr. Norris began writing his series of costume books in the early 1920s after an established career in the London theatre, and continued with it until his death in the 1940s. We can therefore

assume that he was born no later than the final third of the 19th century, possibly earlier. Now, what does this tell us?

Well, for one thing, it assures us that he himself grew up in a corseted age. That he may have read, or that he at least knew of the sado-fetishist correspondence printed in the columns of even quite respectable magazines, concerning the general Victorian obsession with the 16″–18″ waist goes without saying. Even at this distance of time we are aware of it. But, having grown up during, or very soon after this age, it is probable that he, even more than we, would "know" that "obviously" the purpose of any corset was to restrict the waist. The idea that the garment may have evolved virtually ignoring this particualr function would have been inconceivable to him. After all, "everyone" knows what a corset is for!

Plate B–13; ***Polaire,*** *1908. This early 20th century French entertainer was reported to have had a 13–14 inch waist. Even considering that Polaire was a small, slight woman, this claim seems scarcely credible. Still, her waist was grotesquely small, and I believe that she had indeed managed to achieve a measurement well under 20 inches. Polaire was also rumored to have had her lower ribs surgically removed in order to have attained this waist size. This rumor is almost certainly apocryphal. Since this photograph is a publicity shot, the possibility of it having been deliberately retouched must also be taken into account. That Polaire is quoted as having declared herself to be "the ugliest woman in France" indicates that the grotesque element in her appearance cannot have been unintentional.*

In addition, the 19th century had not yet recovered from what can only be called a state of euphoria brought on by the overwhelming number of inventions and discoveries which had burst upon the world in little more than one generation's lifespan. This resulted in a mindset which was inclined to view the possibilities of any technology through a roseate haze which ignored and/or transcended considerations of natural limits. It was no accident that the popular literary genre known as "science fiction" was invented in this period, and is indicative of the attitude that given time, "science" could make literally all things possible. Given this atmosphere, even the unlikely notion that Victorian teenagers routinely boasted 17″ waists seems to acquire some degree of mythopœic possibility.

At all periods, including our own, there is a minority of the (female) population whose bone structure, musculature, and general physical proportions are such that they are indeed capable of constricting their waists to a circumference of less than 20″. During corseted eras, some of these women have unquestionably taken up the practice of tight-lacing. *[Plate B–13]* At various periods this minority has gained considerable notoriety and influence. But the percentage is small, and has probably remained fairly constant. It has never been a majority, although there have been intermittent eras when they were widely imitated. In the most frequent cases by ladies who claimed to have 18-inch waists because they purchased and wore 18-inch corsets — and laced them over a gap of several inches in the back. I submit that the true tight-lacer is an exact analog to today's anorexic. The comparative psychology is chillingly similar.

Well, all right, since the device clearly did exist, what *was* the purpose of the 16th century metal corset? Was it, to some intent, for status value? Having a metal corset made and fitted specifically for you, must have been even more exclusive than filling your bodice with whalebone, but the weight and awkwardness would probably tend to discourage the practice. Another possibility which comes to mind is that it may have been intended to serve in the capacity of that which it most closely resembles, that of body armor. Catherine de' Medici's grandfather had been deposed as ruler of Florence, and the family had no small amount of difficulty in overthrowing the republic which had supplanted it. As one of the last, if not the last, of the direct heirs, Catherine was in a position of considerable risk, and the notion of a sword and cudgel-proof bodice may not be quite as far-fetched as it seems. The possibility does exist. But it is not high.

Although the term, "corset" originally referred to an item of body armor, there is very little reason to run away with the idea. The term "corset", meaning a device intended to impose an artificial shape upon the body, did not come generally into use until the 19th century, and the later garment was clearly named for the former with a typical 19th century fondness for picturesque terms.

It is also faintly possible that the existing examples were never intended to be worn at all, being publicity pieces displayed as signage, or, one suspects, "creative" projects undertaken by young metalworkers in a burst of high spirits, intended for irreverent display rather than for use. Much in the manner that 19th and early 20th century student machinists *would* keep spontaneously producing those vulgar nutcrackers in the shape of a pair of female legs.

But since the 1940s or so, the most consistent and reasonable theory for the existence of the metal corset, has been that these were primitive examples of orthopedic devices.

I see little reason to challenge this. Even wearing a solid metal corset seems preferable to degenerating into a hunchback or cripple. As to the corsets themselves, the workmanship of existing specimens is very high. They originally had a lining of some sort. (If we continue the analogy to body armor, this would have been leather or quilting.)

When one stops to consider it, the combination of ignorance of nutritional science during this era, and the challenge of attempting to maintain a halfway balanced diet year round, in an age whose only methods of preservation were drying, smoking, pickling in brine, stewing in sugar or salting down, *would* have resulted in dietary-related malformations, such as rickets, being fairly common. Occasionally such malformations would have occurred among the daughters of even the upper classes. Another possibility is that this may have been a measure taken to offset the effects of osteoporosis in post-menopausal women, as is sometimes believed to have been the case with Queen Elizabeth I.

The theory that these may have been orthopedic devices would also account for the extremely small number of them still in existence. Unlike whalebone, which can be taken out of a worn-out bodice and re-used, a metal corset isn't really good for anything else. Yet if the total number of even fragmentary examples known to exist exceeds three dozen, I would be very surprised. Which, to represent the entire upper-class female population of all western Europe over a period of half a century, is a meager showing indeed. (And, I would wager that none of the ones known have a waist measurement of under 20″.)

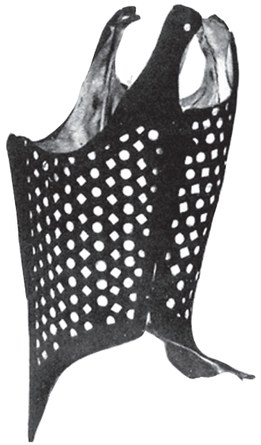


Plate B–14; ***Iron corset, early 16th c.*** *This corset is made to completely enclose the torso. The front is fairly low, indicating either that it was not designed to contain the bosom, or that it was intended for an immature figure. Such corsets are now believed to have been intended for orthopedic use.*

As to more concrete data, the Assistant Keeper (Dress) of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Department of Textiles and Dress writes, in response to my inquiry:

"The dimensions of our own metal corset [Plate B–14] are: Length of back — 37cms (14 13/16″), Length of front — 27cms (10 5/8″), Length of side — 21cms (8½″), Bust — 75cms (29½″), Waist — 56cms (21 13/16″)."

Which, allowing for incompatibilities of length would be snug, but wearable by a modern size 5 or size 3jp. Each of whom, according to commercial pattern companies' computations have 22″ waists and 30″ busts. If the number of small sizes characteristically stocked in retail establishments is indicative of anything other than wishful thinking, these must be by no means unusually rare. Remember also that there is no indication of the age of the lady that the V&A's metal corset was made for, either. She could have been a child.

IN OUTERWEAR FASHIONS, two specific innovations made their appearance during the Elizabethan era, and might as well be mentioned here, before continuing with the chronology. One, a doublet bodice for women, made high-necked with a standing collar band,

such as that of a man's doublet, was a flash in the pan insofar as general use is concerned, but has been retained, in principle, for sportswear, most particularly in riding dress, up to the present day. The second innovation, was the separate stomacher, which was to become an all but universal feature of European women's dress for the next two centuries.

Elizabeth I's death made little impact on English fashion, which came to a pause, aound that time. Although continental fashion continued to evolve by gradual degrees, English dress — not for the last time — remained relatively in stasis (only abandoning the cartwheel farthingale) until the marriage of Prince Charles Stuart to Henrietta Maria of France, in 1625, exposed the English to the styles of the Cavaliers.

Plate B–15; ***Woman in a Mask,*** *Jacques Callot, c. 1625. The characteristic, short-bodied gown of the early Baroque was — compared to most fashions of this early a period — uncharacteristically short-lived. It was worn for barely 15–20 years, a lifespan more in keeping with the late 18th century, than the early 17th*

Roundheads and Cavaliers! Now there is an evocative phrase. Rustling silks and fluttering ribbands, (lindsey-woolsey and steeple hats), bucket boots, rosettes and plumes, billowing satins and fine lace, absurdly short, doll-like bodices and — corsets. Although the bodice was now short and dainty, it was still heavily boned. It was also still laced to a long, rigid stomacher. *[Plate B–15]* While this stomacher was no longer as grotesquely extended as the one in use during the last days of Elizabeth, it was still a major practical and decorative element of dress. Heavily embellished with embroidery, jewels, rosettes, lacing or any combination of the above, it was the focal point of the ensemble. And its busk was still designed long enough to be able to glide easily over one's belly.

As for the Roundheads; even they do not too strenuously resist the march of time. The Puritans now heartily approved of corsetry (which goes to show what a long way we've come, socially, since the early days of Elizabeth I, when Philip Stubbs was pamphleteering!) They saw in this subtle mortification of the body, a praiseworthy loftiness of spirit. Not for them the "loose", negligent, rumpled and licentious dress of the Cavalier. To be "straight-laced" was a virtue of no mean order. To be "staid" was to be respectable. For the "whale-boned body" of the Tudors had yielded unnoticeably to the "stays". Or rather, to the "pair of stays". Literally, two side pieces with a long, rigid, straight-busked stomacher between them.

The short-bodied gown of the early Stuart era lasted scarcely a generation.

Plate B–16; ***Danae,*** *Rembrandt van Rijn, 17th c. The Baroque ideal, comfortably well-fleshed and endomorphic. This endomorphic ideal was, with minor adjustments in favor for most of the periods from the 17th to the early 20th century.*

By 1645 it had almost universally been replaced by a bodice with a more or less natural waist. Whether a stomacher which was only firmly anchored in its upper portion and floated out in space below had shifted about insecurely, or whether some fundamental element of sociological or psychological note had proved to be inherently unsatisfactory in the mode, who now can say. For whatever reason, the charming and exquisite Cavalier styles, even on the Continent, were remarkably short-lived.

From the contemporary art of the period, we can see that by the mid-17th century, a subtle change is becoming evident. The traditional fascination with the female belly is finally beginning to wane. In the bodies of the art nudes of the day, bosoms are beginning to ripen. And while it would be too much to claim that these idealized ladies are acquiring waists, they are developing hips. *[Plate B–16]* Part of this seems due to the fact that posture is changing. The "gothic" slouch of the past two centuries, no longer suits the public taste as well as it had and, unconsciously, once the long "mannerist" bodice is abandoned, the upper torso slowly begins to return to a generally erect position. Since the long busk remains in use, the obligatory sway-backed stance cannot be completely abandoned. The immediate result is obvious. For the first time since the classical periods, women have acquired behinds. It will take some time for this stance to become universal. Some Dutch paintings, for example, are still displaying the "gothic incline" as late as the 1670s.

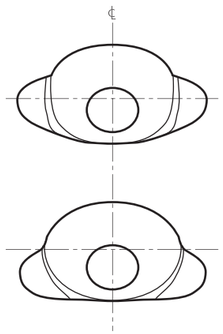


Figure 2:1 - To draw back the shoulders greatly increases the apparent width and prominence of the chest The upper sketch shows a natural shoulder carriage. The lower shows the shoulders drawn back in the manner of the 17th and 18th centuries

Of course, as you straighten up, your shoulders also come forward, and this is not admired. A woman's shoulders, in the beau ideal, are supposed to slope. So, the straps of the stays are repositioned to draw the shoulders back and down. This has the effect of throwing the bosom into even greater prominence. *[Figure 2:1]* Taken in conjunction with the rediscovered behind, this makes a piquant new combination, which can be given even more striking contrast by again lengthening, and for the first time, narrowing the waist. So we now have the Restoration ideal, long-necked, narrow-shouldered, aggressively bosomed, with a long narrow upper torso, a little belly (the belly still had its adherents, after all), wide hips and round behind. *[Plate B–17]* The dress of the period enhanced these features with corsets designed to raise the breasts and lengthen the torso. The shoulder straps of these corsets often rested not on the shoulder, but at the top of the upper arm. Drooping sleeves and lace flounces exaggerated the slope-shouldered look. Overskirts exaggerated the buttocks by being split and drawn up into a bustle. The wider neckline, which by the 1680s had spread into a shallow oval, allowed for a splendid display of jewellery, but rendered a woman incapable of raising her upper arms.

Plate B–17; ***Duchess of Manzarin,*** *late 17th c. The endomorphic woman (narrow-shouldered, wide hipped) was now corseted and upright. The gothic slump has been superseded by the sway-backed stance which was to be characteristic of the remaining 250 years of the corset's reign. The straps of her stays now prevented a woman from raising her arms.*

This was the first major idiocy perpetrated on the consumer (and by this time virtually all women but those desperately poor, were consumers) since the whaleboned body had given way to the stays. It was, mercifully, too extreme to last. As a status symbol, it would have pointedly demonstrated the wearer's inability to work. Ergo, the middle and lower classes would, from the beginning, have been constrained to adopting some less hampering variation, at least in everyday dress. By the beginning of the 18th century, the shoulder straps were again on the shoulders, although a more moderate variation of this wide neckline was retained in the formal court dress of the French court until the revolution.

The opening two-thirds of the 18th century appear, to our eyes, to be a period of extraordinary visual stability. The Baroque pomposity of its opening years shaded into the dainty trivialities of the Rococo with less an atmosphere of change, than one of simple relaxation. The ideal body type became dainty and plump, with short neat limbs offsetting a small, curvy torso. *[Plate B–18]* Nymphs and Venuses tended to shield

their midsections from view, either by drawing an arm or a veil or some other prop across the area, or by bending over from the waist and playing with their

*Plate B–18; **Venus Consoling Love,** Francois Boucher, mid-18th c. The Rococo ideal was dainty and curvatious. She did have a waist, but not an inordinately small one.*

*Plate B–19: **Maria Luisa of Parma, then Princess of Astrias,** (detail) Mengs, c. 1765. The 18th century stays pulled a woman's shoulders back into an unnatural position which threw the bosom into prominence.*

feet. Evidently women were still known to possess bellies, but no longer wished to admit to it. At some point during this era, it was discovered that by placing the bones of a corset at an angle, rather than up and down, they would curve around the figure, producing a closer, smoother fit. In corsetry for the upper classes, the rather complicated cut which had been believed to have been necessary up until that point, was abandoned in favor of a system wherein the cut was fairly simple, and the shaping was mainly determined by the placement of the bones. An added bonus attendant upon this new technology was the discovery that, in the more informal atmosphere of the Rococo era, a corset with only half as much boning, by using the new system, could still provide all the shaping which was really needed. Consequently, half-boned stays became the norm, with the heavier, fully-boned stays reserved for only the most formal of occasions. It was as though the negligent ease of the Cavalier period, which had been so soon abandoned, had been revived in a more acceptable form.

To the modern eye, the stays of the Rococo period are rather charming. There is a degree of gracefulness in their shape which we interpret as a more "natural" or more "comfortable" form. In fact they were more tightly laced and potentially more damaging than the stays of the 16th and 17th centuries. The phenomenon of the "tight-lacer" was no longer a novelty by the 18th century. Furthermore, most modern observers fail to recognize the savagely drawn-back shoulders of the style. *[Plate B–19]* A

*Plate B-20: **Wilhelmina and Fredrick the Great,** (detail) Antoine Presne, around 1715. The drawn-back shoulders are even more exaggerated here, as is the unnatural prominence of the chest in a child of this age (six or seven). It is to be hoped that this is at least in part due to painterly distortion. The neck edge of the bodice stands in a slight ridge above the body, since it has been cut just a little too high.*

very straight, narrow back was admired throughout the period, and a woman's shoulders were wrenched back to a degree which a modern woman would find painful, and virtually crippling. Since an 18th century woman had been imprisoned in her corsets since infancy, she grew up accustomed to having her shoulder blades pinned to her spine. *[Plate B–20]* Nor would her ribcage have developed normally.

It is not until the final quarter of the century that we begin to see a significant

*Plate B-21: **The Morning Walk,** (detail) Thomas Gainsborough, late 18th c. The "informal" fashions of the late 18th century dispensed with much Rococo clutter. The waist was beginning to be drawn more tightly. The neckline was beginning to be cut lower. Most strikingly, after 100+ years the stomacher is suddenly absent.*

change in either ideal body type, posture, corsetry or fashion. Archaeological excavations in Pompeii and other classical sites had resulted in bringing a large number of "new" examples of classical art to light. As in the Renaissance, civilized Europe became voluble in admiration. The impact was not, at first, as great as it had been in the Renaissance, nor so great as it was later to become. Nevertheless, a great deal of the Rococo clutter which had accumulated over the past few decades began to be cleared away. Paradoxically, the form that the gathering reaction against the relaxed informality of the Rococo took, was to carry the signature features of the Rococo, the aforementioned relaxation, informality, and — compared to the Baroque — simplicity about twice as far in the same direction. The awful truth was that the Rococo, after so many years in favor, rather than continuing to represent a break with court formality, had come to be identified with it.

Amidst a welter of gratuitous sentimentality and spurred by a nitwitted glorification of the "noble savage", the French court began looking for a style which would demonstrate their support for the now fashionable "simple" values. In the time-honored manner of people dissatisfied with the fashions and aspirations of their own upbringing, they adopted what they believed to be representative of the dress of another country, or condition. To be precise, the more sporting and rurally-orientated dress of the English squirearchy, the dress of the French planters in the Americas, and eventually, that of the nursery. The rest of Europe, as always, followed suit. *[Plates B–21, B–22]*

Two new elements of this period which immediately strike the eye are the "pouter-pigeon" bosom, and the fact that the bodice, as often as not, dispenses with the waist point. The torso is no longer being lengthened, and the waist hovers uncertainly about its natural level. The "pouter-pigeon" effect was produced by cutting the neckline of the corset in a low scoop rather than the traditional square. The bosom, being less securely restrained, projected more than previously, and was carried slightly lower. *[Plate B–22, B–23]* This effect was exaggerated by the use of the fichus and scarves which accompanied it, and by the posture of the period.

As the waist grew shorter, so had the

*Plate B–22: **The Duchess of Alba,** (detail) Francisco de Goya, late 18th c. More and more informal, and more and more insincere. Nothing was ever quite as simple as this looks.*

*Plate B–23: **Madame Coppia,** P. P. Prud'hon, c. 1790, The neckline was cut in a low scoop and the bosom, no longer as well supported, was more prominent than ever. Compare with Plate B-19.*

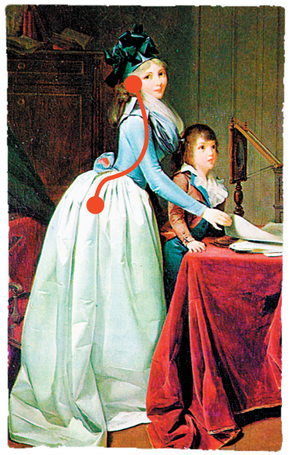


Plate B-24: The Optics Lesson, Louis Leopold Boilly, c. 1796. Stance has become very artificial, partly from trying to avoid being stabbed by one's (now shorter) busk. Compare posture line with Plate B–44. Tight-lacing is no longer a novelty, but is far from being universally adopted.

stays, and the busk was now at a length which could stab. Which indicates that somewhere along the way, people had begun to forget why it had been lengthened in the first place. Since a fashionable lady could no longer escape her busk by adopting the "gothic incline" and remain fashionable, she took the opposite course of leaning forward, with a pronounced arch to her back, very similar to the stance adopted 100–120 years later in the Gibson girl era. *[Plate B–24]* This posture was topically designated the "Grecian bend" although it had little to do with the stance of any classical era. This curious posture was often balanced by an overskirt which again was bundled up into a bustle. The stays now, in addition to the usual bones and busk, often included one or two horizontal bones running across the front which would have enhanced the "bow-window" effect.

The fashionable art nude now threw her head and shoulders back, arched her spine, and stuck out both bosom and bottom. She was also growing taller and longer-limbed. *[Plate B–25]* Despite the illusory "ease" in fashion, the shoulders were still cruelly drawn back. Posture and body type were both pretty well established by the late 1780s. Ironically, if the idealized versions of this body type in art are to be believed, this "simplicity" required a greater degree of tight-lacing at the waist than the more traditional Rococo. Doomsayers, doctors and moralists had a field day.

The truly short-bodied gown was a product of the 1790s. The stays, by this time, were very short indeed, with sides and back eventually climbing well above the natural waist, and even the busk shortened to about navel level. Combined with the fashionable pouter-pigeon bosom and the still narrow shoulder line, these must have been extraordinarily unpleasant garments to wear. Their attendant discomforts would have been only partially offset by the liberation of the waist. With social conditions becoming ever more turbulent, and a retreat into the more functional dress of the recent past an ever less acceptable (and even dangerous) option, it is not too surprising that the travesty which the stays had become were, at about this period, abandoned by a significant minority of the female population.

*Plate B–25: **Rosalie Duthé,** Antoine Vestier c. 1780. The ideal form is beginning to lengthen, and stance is beginning to be exaggerated. This is early in the transition. The waist is rising, but the taste for tight-lacing hasn't yet infiltrated the ranks of art nudes.*

NOW I'M SURE we have all heard about the Neoclassical period (which description applies loosely to the Directoire, the Consulate, the first Empire and the English Regency). So of course we all know that no woman of this era would have been so gauche as to have worn stays. That, in fact, all women burned their stays and advocated freedom. Sorry, but just about everything we "know" is wrong.

In point of fact, outside France itself, only the very vulgar or the very eccentric ever went so far as to abandon foundation garments. Stays were advertised both in every issue of the women's fashion publications — which had by this period become quite numerous — and in the general newspapers. Which would seem to indicate that somebody was wearing them, and a good many somebodies at that. What is more, they were wearing them for the very good reason that the fashionable ideal of the day could not really be attained without some artificial help. *[Plate B–26]* The ideal now was very tall, high-waisted and long-limbed. It was also narrow-hipped, flat bellied, although not necessarily flat-bottomed (as long as the sway-backed stance encouraged by the too short busk continued, some emphasis on the buttocks was inevitable), and possessed breasts which were round, high, prominent, and — for a change — widely separated. *[Plate B–27]* Not unlike the lemon-breasted ideal of the late 1940s. These characteristics remained relatively constant throughout the Neoclassic eras. In only one detail did the image change. This was (finally!) in the posture of the shoulders. Gradually, the narrow, stiff, constraint of the 18th century gave way to what was a comparatively natural stance. Although the shoulders were still set back in what we might consider to be an almost "military" bearing, the degree was now within the range of the plausible. At all times, however, it was still preferable, if not imperative for a woman's shoulders to slope.

*Plate B–26: **The Countess of Blessington,** Sir Thomas Lawrence, early 19th c. The posture is referred to as the "Grecian bend". The bosom may be kept in place by one of the new "divorce corsets". This is the only period during the reign of the corset wherein a woman's bosom — while clothed — was to show this sort of separation. Position of the shoulders begins to look almost natural.*

Obviously, a young, slender figure needed only minimal help to achieve the ideal, and an item providing such help did in fact exist. This was a bandeau sort of affair, consisting largely of straps which was designed to lift and separate the breasts, rather like a modern bra. This was probably fairly comfortable, if you were young and slender, although a modern woman would miss the elasticized back of the present day version. With this garment was worn a tight, knitted tube-like affair which covered the body from the ribcage to about the knees. This "invisible petticoat" was intended to smooth and narrow the lower figure. It was not really a corset, and did not contain bones. It would have greatly hampered movement, however. Some ladies are said to have adopted tights during this period, which later developed into drawers. I must say that this doesn't sound altogether likely, given the general outrage attendant upon a female adopting any form of bifurcated garment, but it is at least possible. Either would have been considered quite shockingly indecent (circus entertainers began wearing tights sometime around this era. It is less certain that "ladies" did). Both the bandeau and the invisible petticoat would conform to my definition of "figure control" and seem to have been in use through some ten or fifteen years during the "Napoleonic" era.

*Plate B–27: Study for **Venus and Adonis,** P.P. Prud'hon, about the turn of the 19th century. The physical ideal of Plate B–25 carried to its logical extreme. Tall, slim and sinuous. The ectomorph returns to favor. But what a difference from the middle ages. This model would be regarded just as favorably today.*

For the more fleshy of figure, or the less daring of disposition, there were two main options. The earliest was to retain the original (not the exaggerated) short-bodied stays. But as the period progressed an alternative form was developed which was to supplant the stays for all time. This garment borrowed elements of both bandeau and invisible petticoat, combined them, and made the whole package rather more businesslike. This was, of course, the genuine (or, in my terms, the decadent) corset. Depicted in many cartoons, the most famous being this one by Gillray, *[Plate B–28]* it was worn by both women and obese men, although the male version was to fall out of usage before mid-century. It consisted of a long linen undergarment which was corded, lightly boned and laced down the back. This "corps" or "corset" differed from the earlier stays in two important particulars. For one thing, it extended over the hips by means of gussets. This was completely new. Although the old-fashioned stays had at times extended in a point both

Plate B–28: ***Progress of the Toilette — the Stays,*** *James Gillray, 1810. The shape of things to come. The 19th century corset was based upon this principle until the true corset was superceded in the 20th century by articles of mere "figure control". At this point the heavy busk was still in evidence.*

front and back, they had always been cut to curve up over the hips, which had generally been further exaggerated by full skirts in either hooped, paniered or bustle effects. Obviously, this was totally ineligible in an era which idealized a short waist and narrow hips. The other innovation had to do with the means of accommodating the bosom. The fashionable bosom of the day was high, wide-spaced, and carried well in advance of the ribcage. In the "ancient" stays, the bosom was accommodated by widening the bodice above the waist to allow room for it, with a heavy busk shoring it up from outside. The Regency corset, however, fitted snugly around the ribcage to directly under the breasts, which like the hips were accommodated by gussets. The bosom, therefore, had acquired a roundness which had not previously been allowed it. The heavy busk, which was still in use, now ran between the breasts and helped to separate them. One short-lived form of corset was referred to as a "divorce" corset, and utilized a well-padded triangular metal plate which was positioned between the breasts for separation.

This mode did not last. By the time the Regency corset had taken its final form, it was fairly late in the period, and the affectedly "simple", "pure" line of the classical revival had for some time been growing progressively more ornamented and complex.

By the middle of the 1820s, the waistline was pretty much back to natural level, balanced by wider, more elaborately decorated skirts and sleeves. These made the waist look a good deal smaller by contrast. The novelty of this realignment of proportions was striking enough to be deliberately exploited. All three of the component elements promptly went into escalation. Skirts and sleeves became wider; waists became narrower. *[Plates B–29, B–30]*

One discovery which was made almost immediately, was the fact that as the corset became ever more businesslike, the difficulty was not to keep it from sliding down, but to prevent it from riding up. That, in fact, the shoulder straps served no useful purpose. "Why did they only discover that now?" You may be tempted to ask. Well, in the first place, the straps always had served a purpose — to drag the shoulders back. Prior to that, the whaleboned body generally *was* the bodice, and the shoulder area was a necessary part of the garment. But now, for the first time in "modern" (post 1650) sartorial history, a woman's shoulders were actually being exaggerated. The puffed and ruffled sleeves of the Restoration had issued from some distance down the arms, and while the broad oval of the neckline had uncovered the shoulders, it had not attempted to broaden them.

Plate B–29: ***Evening Dress, 1825.*** *The beginnings of a new silhouette. Shoulders and hems have been broadened, making the raised waist appear smaller.*

Plate B–30: ***Evening Dress, 1830s.*** *The new silhouette en excelsis. The Bourgois ideal triumphant.*

The neckline was again a broad oval, but the shoulders were not so completely uncovered as they had been 150 years earlier. And the actual point of the shoulder appears to have been the place from which the stiffened and padded sleeve now erupted. Which meant that the shoulders really were being visually expanded. Nor was it aesthetically desirable for corset straps to intrude into the neckline. Which may be another reason why, almost as soon as the waist of the corset began to draw in, the straps, and indeed the whole upper back of the corset were discarded, never, during the rest of the reign of the corset, to be restored. A woman's arms and shoulders were no longer imprisoned by her corset. Nor was their posture so rigidly enforced. Any reader of 19th century "girl's books" such as those of Louisa May Alcott, or of the contemporary accounts on fashion, training and female educational methods will recall the tremendous number of criticisms of, and methods designed for eradicating, round shoulders. Indeed, a grandmother (born 1770) condemning her descendants' bad posture (circa 1840) with stern avowals that in *her* girlhood such a thing would have been unheard of, would have been speaking no less than the direct, literal truth. It would, in fact, have been a physical impossibility.

Another thing which had very nearly become a physical impossibility, was that a middle-class woman should construct her own corsets. Prior to the 19th century, a corset had been merely a stiffened underbodice with tabs at the waist, and although professional staymakers had flourished in every urban center, the average woman had generally made her own. This was no longer feasible, and the business was now permanently in the hands of the professionals.

The 19th century corset also set into motion the mad extravaganza of eclectic oddity which was 19th century fashion. When a gown is superimposed over a corset which keeps the torso immobile from armpit to hip, the cut of the bodice, and indeed the whole dress, becomes virtually irrelevant. Except at neck, shoulders and sleeves, clothing is no longer made to fit the wearer, it is made to fit her foundations.

There was no single ideal body type sustained over the Victorian era, for fashion in bodies had become as changeable as that of gowns. There were certain constant factors, however. Sloping shoulders, continued popular up to the last decade of the century. A full, round bosom was another constant, although once the Neoclassic eras had passed this became a uniform bolster rather than two separate breasts. Hips and buttocks tended to be somewhat enlarged and limbs were always rounded. Throughout the whole of those eras which we designate as Victorian and Edwardian, the tiny waist reigned supreme. This tiny waist was now accompanied by an almost equally tiny diaphragm. This last feature had scarcely been known prior to the tight-laced era of the 1780s.

Traditionally — by which I mean during the 17th and 18th centuries — the gown had also been made to fit the corset. But this practice had undergone a considerable shift in emphasis and implication. In an era when a gown is virtually nothing more than a pair of sleeves, a "corset-cover", and a skirt, women may be left free to invent and design their own clothing, and can still be safely depended upon to come out all looking much of a muchness. Their options are primarily their choice of materials, and the style of the trimming. But in the 19th century, a gown was unquestionably a gown, and it no longer bore even the dubious relationship to the body of its wearer of resembling the garments that shaped that body. A home dress designers' options had now become rather dauntingly broad. It isn't in the least surprising that it was the 19th century in which fashion became, beyond question, the property of the grand couturier. After all, *someone* had to make the definitive statement of what women were supposed to be wearing at each given point in time.

Because a woman didn't dress for *herself*, you know. It was up to her to cover the public relations and all the rest of it for her family, either as the mistress or the daughter of the house. Now that fashion was no longer just a matter of what trims, what textures, what colors and accessories, but of a whole "total statement", it was too big, and altogether too "dangerous" for anyone to take into her own hands who wasn't already a bona-fide eccentric. To do so was to take the chance of disgracing your sponsor by looking outlandish.

For nearly the first third of the century, however, the machinery was not altogether in gear. There were indeed, a few big-name designers and other prominent personalities left over from the "ancient regime" or from the Regency who were still capable of "setting" the mode. The regular fashion publications were also numerous and helpful in weeding out some of the more inadmissible possibilities, and for proffering more reasonable suggestions. But the industrial revolution was propelling a progressively greater number of people into the ranks of the bourgeois — who, of course, wished to be thought "genteel", but were not from backgrounds which the established gentry were willing to accept as social equals. The existing market was also still a little too thin of ideas to be able to satisfy the number of people in need of them. Nor were these ideas being stated in a sufficiently authoritarian manner to either quell the potentially headstrong or to reassure the timid.

By the beginnings of what we refer to as the "Romantic" era, the suitability of the ideas available was also a very real consideration. In revolutionary France the immediate impulse had not been to create new styles. Indeed, the revolution's salient feature was its determined negation of any condition, attitude and/or value which had supported the "ancient regime". It took as its symbolic personification, the Parisian sans-culotte, the worker, or small tradesman who characteristically wore long trousers rather than the knee-breeches (culottes) of the upper classes.

As with much of the counterculture of our own past 40 years or so, its movers and shakers were a consciously vulgar lot, angry people, often described as dirty, unkempt, and foulmouthed. These rebels, however, did not merely "drop out", scream abuse, and parade their own perceived moral superiority under their outraged elders' noses. They were armed, and determined to impose their standards upon the whole of France, through a "Reign of Terror and Virtue".

It was only after the chaos of the first five or six years had abated, and the Directoire had managed to impose something like order on the embattled country that anyone had a chance to consider, in practical terms, the power of fashion, or its profits. The French fashion "industry" had long held the distinction of being leader to the rest of Europe, due to the prestige of the French royal court. France's international commerce establishment had always richly benefitted thereby. Post-revolutionary France set about to assume this function, deciding, in addition, that a "new" society with "new" ideals required "new" costumes.

That the Consulate cold-bloodedly commissioned the painter David to design new clothes for the eventual Empire ("But mommy! They've got nothing on!"), does not detract from his achievement, for the end product was spectacular. The resulting "complete change" of style helped to conceal the awkward fact that the Revolution had ended up establishing a new, far more powerful and efficient, version of French Absolutism; the cast had changed, but the play was much the same.

Contrary to popular belief, the French Revolution was not, except for a few weeks in 1789, a true Peasants' Revolt. It started as an attempt to balance the French budget and got completely out of hand when the old aristocracy refused to agree to pay taxes like everyone else. An ultimately incompatible alliance of bankers, lawyers, minor clergy, impoverished nobles, and assorted idealists and malcontents declared themselves to be the legitimate government in its place. In the course of suppressing resistance to what were originally rather moderate reforms, they found themselves committed to eliminating the whole aristocracy, the figurehead king, and a major portion of the social and commercial apparatus which had supplied their demands, and so represented, or was claimed to represent, the loss of other business. Under these definitions, an "aristo" was not a member of the nobility as such, but someone who supported its rule, including servants, seamstresses, and that portion of the urban working class which had made its living by providing the wealthy with luxury goods and services.

When the elimination of these "Enemies of the Republic" had gone far enough — or when the victories of the new Republican Armies, under commanders inspired by the fate of defeated generals, had taken the edge off their panic — the more conservative members of the Revolutionary leadership took matters in hand. Like a good deal of the rest of French society, peasants included, they were more concerned in keeping their personal gains than in promoting Spartan rigor or Roman virtue.

David's commission was no sinecure. His assignment was no less than to produce the first sudden national style change since the Ionian chiton replaced the Dorian in Athens at some time prior to the Persian war. The resulting psychological ramifications have colored the outlook of fashion ever since.

Had the Revolution been put down — however brutally — at its inception, the country could probably have been forced into a return to previous conditions. That the Revolution was allowed to "run its course", assured that, if nothing else, the people were feeling themselves vindicated in their motivations, and although upset, resentful at the lack of present prosperity (never mind why!), and generally irritable, they will not meekly return to their former business at the direction of a not terribly secure new government.

Therefore, David's proposal must offer a rationale whereby, without sacrificing the "freedom" that they have allegedly gained, the public can still be induced to follow some orderly form of government, even if this entails a great deal of overjustification and a totally artificial "national dress".

There is also no time to be lost. Whatever proposal is made must be in a form which may be mobilized at all levels of society with the greatest dispatch. In the interests of society, a national unity must be achieved, at least insofar as national image. The mass appeal must be universal, for the economy demands that whatever you sell the nation you must also sell the world. Some striking innovation is clearly called for, and humanity, particularly an insecure humanity, is notoriously resistant to sudden innovation. The problem, therefore, is how to give the people more of the same, while convincing them that it is something new and different.

For at least a decade before the Revolution, French fashion had displayed a progressively growing informality and infantilism. A pack of aristocratic airheads, using the writings of Rousseau — which they did not understand — as an excuse, had begun to drivel on about the innate nobility of the savage, the child, and the peasant. In this they were no doubt encouraged by Voltaire, who had understood what Rousseau had been driving at, but who happened to be carrying on a feud with him at the time, and was more than pleased to spread disinformation about the man's ideas. This had produced such outré anomalies as duchesses in dimity and a queen playing milkmaid. In addition, an epidemic of Anglomania had produced dukes dressing up as English country squires and a general, if unrealistically sentimentalized, emphasis on the "simple life".

It is just possible that the inherent insult to the peasant, in making a perceived mockery of his life while callously ignoring his needs, and the lack of concern for his increasingly desperate lot during a whole string of bad harvests, may have been one more nail in the aristocratic coffin. In emulating their lessers, the upper class had unwittingly brought itself "into range", for Saturnalia.

Hand in hand with this, the Neoclassic movement, with its own rhetoric of "simplicity", had been gathering steam since the 1760s. The Revolution itself had been full of phygian caps, classical allusions and references. The people should be willing to listen to more of the same. It sounds well, and they are accustomed to it. It's "accessible".

And, finally, there are few things as appealing to the masses as a licence to impropriety.

David's proposal was an extraordinarily efficient utilization of the above considerations. It also managed to satisfy nearly all the conditions and requirements of the problem at hand. His solution was a sham, of course. A dangerous and expensive sham for which much of Europe paid. But one must admit that it admirably met the requirements.

For the spectacularity of David's end product was of the purely theatrical order. Its promotion a masterpiece of media hyperbole. No realistic solution to the problem could ever have been so soothing to the post-revolutionary malaise as this chosen, strategic retreat into governmentally authorized role-playing, and fancy dress (Costumes by David...).

For this — let it be known — is the modern recreation of Republican Rome (not as it was, perhaps, but as it *ought* to have been...) and we must all dress the part, address each other as "citizen", conquer the world, become an Empire...

Thus, we transform aggression, resentment and undirected hostility outward into national pride and a "manifest destiny". It has frequently been quoted (or misquoted) that if Adolf Hitler had not existed, it would have been necessary for the Germany of post WWI to have invented him. For post-revolutionary

France's ersatz Rome, it was necessary for the age to try to reinvent Ceasar.

It succeeded.

It must be admitted, however, that insofar as it pertained to male dress, David's proposal was a dismal failure. Quite predictably so, too. A toga was not really suited to an 18th century gentleman's pursuits, and they weren't having any, thank you very much.

That innovation was altogether *too* striking. No living Frenchman had ever worn anything remotely like it, and he wasn't about to either! It comes as no very great surprise that the only man of the "new France" to show any marked enthusiasm for dressing up in costumes was Napoleon Bonaparte himself — a fortunate piece of casting. The average Frenchman, faced with too great a change to be contemplated, reacted in traditional human fashion by reverting to the last outfit in which he had felt secure. This turned out to be the costume of the make-believe "English country squire" of the Anglomania craze a decade earlier. My cynical side prompts me to wonder if this might not have been due to a double-bluff on the side of the Directoire. It certainly kept the tailors in business, and, given the temper of the times, had they come out and told citizens to go back to dressing like English country squires they might have laid themselves open to charges of attempting to restore the society of the "ancient regime".

As regards female costume, however, David's proposal was a howling success. It was easy to produce, in essentials, by even the most humble. A shopgirl could dress in the same general manner as that of a social leader. It suited the rhetoric, every woman looked relatively "equal", and the fact that it was a simple line demanding little trimming did not place too great a strain upon the capacities of the greatly depleted sources of such luxury items as lace, and other such embellishments. That this simple line was one capable of much elegance, was in its favor as well, and the mass appeal was sufficient to ensure imitation outside of France itself which was all to the good. To cinch the deal, the new design had the hidden bonus of not being a significant departure from the ones preceding it. It merely carried their main characteristics to a logical extreme, and offered a new rationale for doing so.

The "Robe Anglaise" of the 1780s had already discarded many of the conventions of preceding 18th century fashions despite its obvious relationship to them. The "Robe Creole" was similar, but even more of a departure, its bodice sometimes even dispensing with the waist point, which had been in use for some 250 years. The "Robe à la Infant" had invariably dispensed with the point, usually in favor of a wide ribbon sash, tied in a huge bow. *[Plates B–21, B–22]* Sleeves had grown progressively easier in fit, although a true puff had not quite developed yet. Necklines were less and less complex — that of the "Robe à la Infant" consisting of a simple drawstring — colors had become paler and trimming had grown more and more scanty. The favored materials, rather than the heavy satins and brocades of a decade earlier, had been pale colored or printed cottons. David carried this informality to the extreme of the bedroom, and infantilism to the extreme of a christening robe, and then had the gall to declare the result to be a "chiton". His main contributions were open-toed strap sandals (extremely racy at that time, believe me!), Grecco-Roman hairdressing, accessories and jewels.

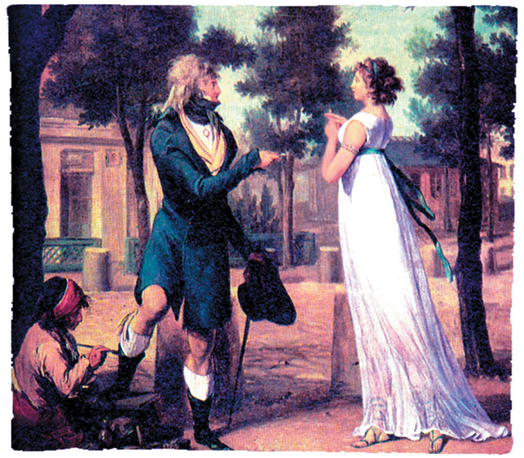


Plate B–31: ***Point de Convention,*** *Louis Leopold Boilly, c. 1801. The Neoclassic style never got much closer to the real article than this, which is still pretty distant. Rumors of nudity were rather overstated.*

Plate B–32: ***Mlle. Riviere,*** *Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, early 19th c. An upper middle class interpretation of classical simplicity. Quite modest by today's standards.*

"Nudity!" was the astonished outcry. But nudity is a highly relative term. Yes, a fashionable gown now gave the impression of being unstructured and unsupported, but this, as we have already seen, was much to exaggerate the case. Necklines *were* certainly as low now as at any period previously, and were sometimes as low in back as in front (which *was* new), making the stability of the sleeve cap questionable. It would not have been unknown for a sleeve to slip off the shoulder altogether, producing a display of the shoulder point, which a decade earlier would have been considered positively obscene. Even the broad shallow oval neckline of French court dress, had retreated from its Restoration era origins to assure that the actual point of the shoulder had been kept decently covered. The exposed elbow had been another 18th century no-no, and arms were now bare. All in all, the general level of nudity displayed was about equal to that paraded by any bridesmaid circa 1972 without anyone batting an eye. *[Plate B–31, B–32]*

The transparency of these garments has also been much overrated. Yes, gowns were made of thin cottons, later of satin, or lightweight silks. They were also generally worn with only one petticoat (as well as the "invisible" one). Therefore, it would have been readily possible to have made out the shape of the wearer's legs if she happened to stand in front of the light. Again, this was a standard feature of a Nixon era bridesmaid, and I can't recall any particular outcry over it then. Not even from the fundamentalists.

However, in post-revolutionary France — and the rest of Europe — fashionable people heartily embraced the opportunity to play that delightful social game of, "Oh! See how *wicked* we're being!" With the classical allusions and decorative motifs to provide the redeeming social value, David, and indeed France, had a best seller on their hands. They had produced a fashion ideal which appealed equally to the vulgarian, the libertine, and the intellectual. About the only group with any particular degree of disapproval was the bourgeois, who were accustomed to having their sensibilities overridden in such matters. (And acustomed also to generally make a profit from the enterprise, whatever their personal reservations regarding it.)

Of course, this time round, when France firmly reestablished itself as fashion leader to the western world, it was only as fashion leader to the female sector of this world. Once the average Frenchman opted to go on pretending that he was a hearty, sporting English country squire, he thereby passed that particular torch to the Brits, who, after all, had so much more practice at it...

NONE OF WHICH has anything to do with corsets. The point is that fashion, from that day on, has *had* precious little to do with corsets. Despite the fact that for nearly another century the corset remained an indispensable framework upon which to mount fashion.

Although a couple of elements pertaining to specific styles of corsets did manage to impose themselves upon fashion consciousness (specifically the "spoon busk" of the late 19th century, and the straight-fronted s-bend of the "Gibson Girl" era of the early 20th century), for the most part, it became the fashion in clothing which dictated the shape of the corset, rather than vice-versa, as had traditionally been the case.

Among the myriad technological advances of the 19th century, was the discovery that whalebone could be steam moulded. It now became possible to produce an exact, stable, moulded curve rather than the smooth arcs, flatish angles and straight-sided cones and cylinders of the 16th–18th centuries. It also became possible to produce more and more heavily boned corsets. At the outset, the fashionably rounded bosom was accommodated by simple gussets. But as the century progressed, the cut of a corset again became more complex, and by the early 20th century was very sophisticated, indeed. By mid-century, garter tabs had become a standard feature, and were of considerable assistance in keeping the corset from riding up. Meanwhile, the fashionable silhouette vacillated to a greater degree during the period of 1810–1910 than it had

over any comparable time period, ever.

Modern aesthetic consciousness is not derived from the 19th century corset. It is derived from 19th century fashion. And in that terrain there is no truly steady ground. The lunatics had taken over the asylum, and to all intents and purposes, they have been running it ever since.

When David and the Directoire opened the door to costume in everyday life, they set the stage for rather more than a continent-wide production of "The Eagle's Triumph" starring Napoleon Bonaparte as Caesar. They opened the door for all kinds of dressing up, and fashion hasn't progressed in a linear direction since. At first it started trying to go backward, then it ended up going in circles. At its inception, the simple, "classical" line was one of tremendous impact, but its simplicity could pall fairly quickly. After all, when any shopgirl can dress in the general manner of a duchess, a duchess has to find some way of making it clear to all that she is no mere shopgirl.

Plate B–33: ***Evening Dress, 1822.*** *The gown is described as being made up in the MacKenzie tartan.*

Plate B–34: ***Evening Dress, 1827.*** *The hat is described as being àla Mary Stuart, if you please.*

Politically-minded France turned her attention to her military campaigns. Suddenly David's Grecco-Roman base is enlivened by the "Egyptian" influence, and, with other campaigns, by "Italian" or "Spanish" or other influences. Various details of sleeves or trims were named for generals or battles or other topical events. All of this was just terribly in accordance with tradition. French fashion is renowned for taking its names from topical references. However, there were yet other influences at work, and these influences, in retrospect, are more apparent in England.

In England, throughout the 18th century there had been a veritable passion for "reforming" anything that didn't fight back, and quite a few things which tried to. The "Age of Enlightenment" had brought out a tremendous interest in education. Working-class children, and even adults, for that matter, had been taught to read in Robert Raike's Sunday schools and other such earnest endeavors. The notorious preference of the common reader is the novel (a literary form which seems to have raised its head as soon as there was a sufficiency of working-class readers to welcome it). By the 1790s the novel and the circulating library were flourishing. In particular, the "gothic" novel and the novel of "sentiment" had reached tremendous heights of popularity.

But novel reading was not yet altogether respectable, and was attacked by both evangelical and utilitarian critics. It is with no surprise that we learn that one of the literary enticements offered by these critics as an alternative, was history. While history never superseded fiction in popularity, it nevertheless enjoyed considerable success. Particularly among the middle classes who wished above all things to be considered by all to be not merely respectable, but "cultured" and "refined" as well.

Once you combine the popular manias for the gothic, the sentimental and the historical, you end up with the cult of Mary Stuart. When you take people who have gotten off to a good start at dressing up in "classical" fancy dress in the French manner, and then destroy their pipeline to the idea factory by having their two countries at war, you get people dressing up like Mary Stuart.

Plate B–35: ***English and French Costume,*** *Le Bon Genre, 1815. "Costume" is right. This French cartoon was intended to lampoon the British drift toward "historical" dress during their years without proper (i.e. Parisian) supervision and guidance.*

Or at any rate you get people who fondly believe that is what they are doing. *[Plates B–33, B–34]* You get plaid fichus, tam-o-shanters, and Stuart caps. You get puffed and slashed sleeves. You get laced bodices, and stomachers, and as soon as the waistline drops to within anything approaching normal range, you get pointed waists. And you decide to keep them, because you think they're sweetly pretty.

Plate B–36: ***Morning Dress, 1828.***

Of course, as soon as the war is over and Napoleon is off to Elba, the English flock over to Paris, take one look at the Frenchwomen, and hitch their waistlines back up under their bosoms. *[Plate B-35]* But the cultural exchange is not all in one direction. Paris and the French may not be ready for cinched waists just yet, but they also have a claim to Mary Stuart. She actually *was* their Queen for a few years. Indeed, one begins to wonder if the subsequent and wide-spread fascination for Mary Stuart hadn't some foundation in the ambivalence experienced by the French over the memory of a far more recent queen to have come to an untidy end through the kindly auspices of Mme. Guillotine.

In any event, the joys of non-classical history had now been revealed. In 1814 Sir Walter Scott virtually invented the "historical" novel and the middle classes decided they could have their literary cake and eat it too. Artists discovered a ready-made audience (and market) for paintings on historical subjects.

In the meantime, the Industrial Revolution was underway and it wasn't just in France that society as it had been known was breaking up. Luddites, the Corn Laws and the Enclosure Acts notwithstanding, England weathered the storm. But it was a close call. And it wasn't, by the end of it, quite the same England. And as industry increased, progressively more people were being escalated into the relative prosperity of the bourgeois. What did they do when they got there?

To state the matter baldly, they took over society. Or, to be more accurate, they successfully imposed their virtues upon everyone in range. Unlike the virtues of the *hoi polloi* of France's revolution, these virtues turned out to be *very* good for business.

The tastes of this swollen middle class also began to impose themselves. Not only in England, but on the continent as well. (In America, for lack of any genuinely aristocratic competition, it became positively bumptious) The first evidence of this was a spate of rather vulgar exuberance. *[Plates B–30, B–36, B–37]* No elegant simplicity for the nouveau riche. They'd had enough of simplicity when they couldn't afford anything better. And let's have none of this running about in public in a dress that's little more than a nightgown either — no one can convince us that *that's* respectable.

Plate B–37: ***Day Dress, 1829.***

Also, we find that it is not enough to merely display our newly acquired wealth. We must also demonstrate that we truly deserve it — due to our innate superiority. At the very least, we have to make it plain that we are putting it to good use by becoming ever more "refined" and "cultured".

Literary allusions in dress were expected to demonstrate one's "culture". This was all in keeping with tradition. To adopt elements in dress from characters in plays had been common throughout the 18th century. Usually this had taken the form of accessories or surface decoration. Such fads would be all over the place for a single season, and then would die away, the play which sparked them having vanished in the interim. Books, however, stick around a lot longer. But since

novel reading was looked upon askance, the educated and refined aspects of history had the initial edge in social approval and status.

The new middle classes joyfully embraced their roles as "ladies and gentlemen" and raced to dress up in suitable costume for the occasion. Make-believe was in full swing during the 1820s and '30s and the clothing of the era (rather tellingly referred to as the "Beidermeyer" era) has a frank artificiality to it which is rather engaging and almost impossible to take seriously. The "pretty" the "romantic" and the frivolous were carried to laughable excess and the equally affected simplicity of the Directoire was a dead issue. The provocative quality of the Romantic era also was of a far different character from the frank but elegant licentiousness of the Napoleonic age. The bourgeois maiden might flirt, but a far greater level of visible propriety (also clothing) must hedge her about. A glimpse of ankle — skirts being on the short side — and exposed shoulders in evening dress were about the extent of what it was permissible to put on display. All intervening areas were a celebratory triumph of artifice.

I have deliberately dwelt at considerable length on the period from approximately 1780 to 1835. It was during this period that I believe the concepts were formed which have shaped the subsequent development and progress of fashion up to the present day. It is my contention that European fashion prior to this period, although it had its moments of aberrant behavior, had generally developed slowly, and in a fairly linear manner. The relatively sudden appearance and demise of the short-bodied "Cavalier" style being the only major anomaly. But after David's proposal, fashion history irrevocably became costume history, and has remained so. The focus was changed, had regressed, and fashion began deliberately to imitate, not the existing styles of some other country, as was traditional, but the vanished styles of another age. Even the culturally enriching creative influence of the Renaissance had not attempted this.

Plate B–38: ***The Execution of the Queen of Scots,*** *Skelton after John Opie, 1795. History in everyday dress. Can anyone out there convince me that this is supposed to be Mary Stuart rather than Marie Antoinette?*

Plate B–39: ***The Offer of the Crown to Lady Jane Grey,*** *John Singleton Copley, 1806–7. History in everyday dress. Note level of gown's waist.*

Far too little attention has been paid to the implications inherent in this shift of paradigm. In the first place, people were attempting to imitate what they did not, in fact, know. In the second place, they were attempting to imitate *what did not actually exist! [Plates B–38, B–39, B–40]* Popular history was a recent fad. Visual history was an unknown study. Scholars and historians had studied the lives and events, the people and the politics. They had not studied the clothing. Most of the surviving art and visible relics were still locked away in private ownership.

This was far more evident in France, where the majority of Europe again looked for inspiration. The French are described as a practical people, why should they trouble their imaginations over what garments their great-grandparents chose to wear, or why. This odd new phenomenon of dressing up in historical garb, was, after all, of some bizarre English origin.

The English are, in general, a more fanciful nation than the French. The first stirrings of this particular trend had begun to appear much earlier than anyone might have expected. In fact, hints had begun to show up as early as the mid–18th century, when, attendant upon the growing popularity for the gothic/picturesque, certain luminaries of the genteel intelligentsia formed the pretty conceit of commissioning their portraits to be painted in what they fondly believed to be "Cavalier" dress. The most familiar example of this sort of whimsy is Thomas Gainsborough's painting of "The Blue Boy". *[Plate B–41]*

Such costuming was not daily wear. Nor had these efforts any real connection with the period which they purported to represent. As even a very cursory comparison with a real subject from the intended era will make obvious. *[Plate B–42]* Yet, even so fanciful and eccentric a social circle as the English intelligentsia would hardly have taken up the wearing of fancy dress in daily life had not the French validated the practice. The resulting free-for-all was highly entertaining. The ignorance displayed all round made for some amazing backbends of logic, and some even more amazing results, by just about anyone's standards.

As I have pointed out above, until the 1780s clothing was basically the same shape as its foundations. So far as any statement on the matter can be made, in the general consciousness, the shape of each woman's corset was the shape of that particular woman. Even during the technologically advanced Victorian era, the corset was too ubiquitous and too firmly intrenched for the mind to admit alternatives. That children could be put into corsets from infancy contributed to the basic assumption that the shape of the corset was essentially the shape of the wearer — slightly "improved." Another assumption that was widespread was that any clothing was "naturally" the shape of the body. Despite the long-standing convention of the nude in art, the concept of the "natural" form was, itself, an abstraction. The practice of depicting historical, mythical and allegorical subjects in "modern dress" (or headdress, or surroundings) was largely responsible for this. A "Venus," for example was most unlikely to be the Venus of the Romans, and even less the Aphrodite of the Greeks. She was all too likely to simply be an elegant modern beauty who happened not to have any clothes on. Religious subjects were traditionally depicted in medieval drapery, and were still far too loaded a subject to be approached in a spirit of historically critical analysis — *yet*. The symbolism involved in such representations prevented anything beyond the most perfunctory recognition that the

Plate B–40: ***Edward IV on a Visit to the Duchess of Bedford is Enamored of Lady Elizabeth Grey,*** *John Downman, 1797. This moment in history, if you can believe it, took place in the mid-15th century. Somehow, when the historian reports that Lady Grey "petitioned" the king on behalf of her children, I never got the picture that this is quite what he had in mind...*

Plate B–41: ***The Blue Boy,*** *Thomas Gainsborough, 18th c. Cavalier dress as interpreted 100+ years after the fact.*

Plate B–42: ***Henry Rich, 1st Earl of Holland,*** *Studio of Daniel Mytens, c. 1640. The genuine article.*

figures as drawn were intended to represent human beings.

Thanks to archaeological excavations in Pompeii and other Mediterranean sites, the classical ideal was dramatically (and literally!) unearthed and, as stated above, was seized upon with all the enthusiasm that its novelty could provoke. To a sophisticatedly bored Europe foundering in a welter of outdated Baroque pomposity and far-too-familiar Rococo triviality, the elemental quality of the equally sophisticated Greek and Roman artifacts must have been electrifying. Neoclassicism gradually became the rage. Architecture registered "Greek Revival" elements and, much as in the Renaissance, classical motifs began to appear as decorative notes in houseware and clothing. Society was punctuated by half-educated aristocratic halfwits suddenly parroting half-baked hypotheses on the innate nobility of "simplicity."

Plate B–43: ***Ball Dress, 1828.*** *If this bodice point were functional, rather than decorative, the wearer would be stabbed by it as soon as she sat down or leaned over.*

David's imposed neoclassic look capitalized upon its purported enhancement of the natural form. In fact, a second, conscious look at both fashion drawings and portraits of the era will reveal that the forms beneath those outfits were anything but natural. *[Plate B–26]* The hype still clinging to the period, however, states that the ladies of the Napoleonic era "did not wear corsets," and we obediently ignore the evidence of our own eyes in accordance. This disconnection between publicity and product was to continue. The target consumer, having now attained to a whole new height of suggestibility, would usually see what he was told he saw, despite clear evidence to the contrary. This practice of believing that one could make a thing to be so (or not so) by merely stating that it was (or was not) so has contributed greatly to the 19th century's subsequent and enduring reputation for hypocrisy.

My basic premise is that given a society which was accustomed to carrying so disconnected a "body image" as to be able to overlook such obvious facts as; not only is a corseted body not the same shape as a natural body but that a body in a fledgling Victorian corset is not the same shape as a body in a pair of 18th century stays (or a Renaissance whaleboned bodice, or an earlier Renaissance linen underbodice), and, that given an attack of enthusiasm for all things historical combined with an abysmal ignorance of what historical clothing had actually looked like, the end result was less a recreation of history than an exercise in unbridled imagination. A single look at the various shapes, cuts, treatments and lengths of sleeves alone over the period of 1800–1840 is mind-boggling. Particularly when compared with the paucity of style in this particular area which had prevailed for nearly a hundred years previous.

A general overview of fashion plates through the 1820s and '30s, examining the designs which were seriously being suggested for people to wear, and, even more, the descriptions of what the designers sincerely believed they were recreating is both astonishing and laughable. "Renaissance" costumes *àla* Mary Stuart helped to bring in the pointed bodice. But the point was quite shallow at its introduction. The eye had, after all, been accustomed to a raised waist for nearly 40 years. *[Plate B–43]* Since it was now a totally decorative element, this shallow point offered no inconvenience, and since the point was a flattering line it was never long out of style throughout the rest of the century. For one thing, a pointed bodice helped to make the waist appear smaller, and if the 19th century had one overriding fetish, it was the tiny waist. Since the bodice point had no longer any structural significance, it could be lengthened or shortened at will without fear of impalement, since the wearer's corset already held her torso as rigidly unmoving as any mummy's.

This imaginative extravaganza could not last, of course. By about 1835 reaction had set in, enthusiasm had diminished, and the eager new middle class that had so wholeheartedly thrown themselves into playing at being "Romantic" "ladies and gentlemen" (and had been so obviously pleased with themselves at having finally attained a sufficiently prosperous position to be able to do so!), had "proved its point" and pretty much worn itself out doing it. Having aesthetically tried "everything", it lapsed into a comparatively apathetic sobriety until the rise of the great couturiers. The 1840s is one of the dullest decades in the whole century, judging by its dress. Once there were people with sufficient force of personality willing and capable of declaring to everyone else just what direction imagination in dress was going to take this season, the rest of society collectively breathed a sigh of relief, and stampeded into the prescribed mode.

Ironically, it was this very interest in history which killed the "fancy dress in everyday life" trend. When any subject becomes popular, sooner or later someone is going to get involved in legitimate research. Therefore, when you have swarms of painters and would-be painters, who know they have a ready market for paintings of historical subjects, all trying to do research, you get publishers and scholars who are more than willing to compile source books. Furthermore, when you have painters and would-be painters fumbling their way towards accuracy, you get well-educated art critics who are more than willing to point out, at considerable length, wherein said painters have succeeded or failed. So, when you have critics writing up lengthy and scholarly articles on a subject, and have a "cultured" and "refined" middle class reading them so that they may converse adequately enough on the subject to be able to convincingly display their "refinement" and "culture", you have a gradual growth of general public awareness as to what does and what does not belong to a given era. Once this is the case, it becomes rather difficult to sew a ruffle on your collar and claim that your dress is therefore "Elizabethan." In short, once history became an exact science, it was relegated to the schoolroom. The masquerade was over.

Besides which, not that many people were really all that eager to play-act any more. They had done all that. Nevertheless, at the back of everyone's mind was now the awareness that other options existed. Fashion was directed by commercial enterprises. By very elite commercial enterprises, to be sure, but nevertheless by businesses which intended to make a profit at it. No longer did social leaders set all fashion by their own innovations. No longer was fashion an invisible, mysterious, irrational and irresistible force. Fashion has never been so slavishly followed as it was in the 19th century, and never had there been so clear a line of demarcation between "fashion" and mere "clothing".

Plate B–44: Unidentified photograph, 1901. The "s"-bend posture of the turn of the century.

Nor had fashion ever been so enthusiastically attacked from so many platforms, nor so often flouted. The 19th century was an extraordinarily rich one for producing renegade dress movements. I shall not concern myself with the various health and hygiene movements, such as the all-wool fanatics, or the largely utilitarian Rational Dress Movement. Even staying within purely artistic realms, it is possible to list an impressive series of well-known alternative dress styles. There was, first, the "Bohemian" movement in France of the 1840s, and the early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their ladies in England in the late '40s and early '50s, who were simply not ready to stop playing dress-up. This shifted easily into the later Pre-Raphaelite phase of the late '50s and '60s, which evolved into the Aesthetic Movement of the '70s to '90s (and which bore a striking resemblance to many of the styles of the early 1970s. A resemblance which was quite deliberate on the part of the 20th century imitators). This in turn blended into the styles associated with the Art Nouveau's adherents.

Nor did alternate dress movements die out in the 20th century. The "bohemians" of the 1920s were the obvious antecedents to the "beatniks" of the 1950s and early '60s. There was even a rarely mentioned English trend — also of the '20s — which reputedly utilized the rather shapeless figure ideal of the era, but opted for a vaguely Italian Renaissance flavor with a slightly raised waist, long skirts, and slashed sleeves (rather like the subjects in a Maxfield Parrish

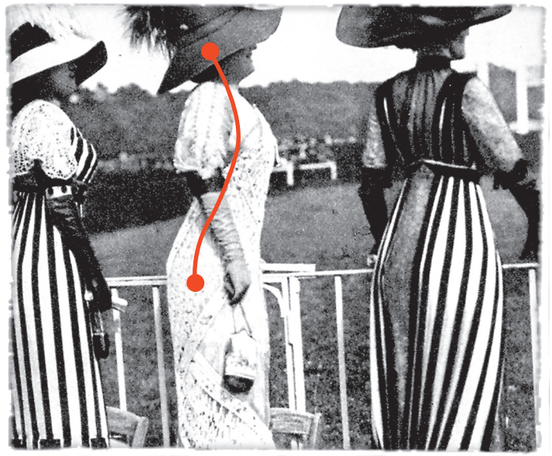


Plate B–45: ***La Journee des "Drags" a Auteuil,*** *J.H. Lartique, 1911. The "s"-bend is shallower, but still evident. The body type is slimmer, the waist slightly raised. What was fondly believed to be an "Empire" revival was in progress.*

print! Apparently Edith Sitwell had groupies and imitators).

I am not aware of any widespread movement active during the Edwardian period, although the self-proclaimed "souls" with their affected ethereal airs and bits of antique lace may perhaps qualify. And, although it was to be taken up by the masses almost immediately, the highly dramatic Poiret/Russian Ballet/Sheherazade outbreak immediately following a more conventional "Empire Revival" of the 1911–13 seasons was certainly "artistic" dress well within the meaning of the terms — as have always been such designs as the "Knossos" and "Delphos" of the Spanish designer, Fortuny.

We all need hardly be reminded of the myriad counterculture movements since the mid 1960s, all of these being recent enough for many of us to recall without prompting. Although not all of the above had an overtly political motivation, virtually all of them can be seen to have had at least as much of a philosophical base as they did an aesthetic one.

So.

And what has all this to do with corsets? Well, frankly, nothing. From the time of the great watershed of about 1780–1835, the corset has been relegated to being a mere adjunct to fashion, rather than its starting point. And as a mere adjunct, even if indispensable, it, became subject to every one of its laws. The tail was now wagging the dog.

There were, during the 1820–1920 period, more variations in the presentation of the female form than ever before, nearly all of which were popularly presented as period revivals or as vehicles containing overt reference to some prior historical era or other.

Perhaps this superfluity of variety and change was inevitable. Once fashion became known to be the property of professional designers, rather than a mysterious, and therefore unanswerable, force, it became a commercially obtained commodity with which the consumer could become easily bored.

Once the public was liberated from the exertion of providing its own designs and inspiration, and its range of expression became limited to a passive selection of commercially available options, its appetite for novelty began to grow ferocious, ever clamoring for fresh offerings. Waistlines fluttered from the bottom of the ribcage to the top of the hipbone and back again. About 1910 it climbed up under the bosom in a purported "Empire Revival", before sinking to normal level and rapidly dropping over the hips. The waist had been first compressed, and then was either less or more compressed, and ultimately ignored. Augmentation of the buttocks and hips came and went. Bosoms were expanded, contracted, raised and lowered at a designer's whim.

Plate B–46: ***Robe Sorbet,*** *Paul Poiret design, 1911. The shape and stance of things to come. The corset is dropping below the bosom in general, and in the House of Poiret had quite possibly already been dispensed with. A backwards inclining stance has already begun.*

As at the end of the 18th century, the corset of the fin-de-secle period became progressively lower cut, and, lacking support, the bosom also became lower and rather blowzy. In reaction to this rather uncomfortable and insecure development, a separate "bust-bodice" was introduced which is recognized to have been the forerunner of the modern brassiere.

With this part of its job — its original and essential function — superseded by a secondary garment, the corset continued to drop and also to lengthen. To smooth the required line of the "Empire" revival, the corset started at the lower portion of the bosom, and extended to mid-thigh, much like the original "invisible petticoat" (that must have been interesting to sit down in, let alone to wear for climbing in and out of a streetcar!). The waistline, being deliberately out of position, could no longer be compressed. Elastic inserts were added and used with increasing frequency, and, eventually, the entire garment was elasticized.

At this point, the reign of the corset was effectively over. After ruling Fashion for nearly four centuries, within 15 years of the day that its control of the bosom began to be superseded by the bust-bodice, the corset was obsolete. Its final iteration gradually abandoned by all but the most conservative, and unfashionable. It is interesting to note that as soon as the corset's reign ended, fashionable posture lapsed into a brief reprise of the very same "Gothic" stance which had been *de regeur* at its inception, which was now referred to as the "debutante slouch". It's almost enough to make one wonder if there may not be something in the concept of a "racial memory" after all. *[Plates B–44, B–45, B–46, B–47]*

The age of fashion, of course, was far from over. But today, in the wake of the 20th century's own additional cycle of counterculture movements, the disorientation begun so long ago by the followers of David is aproaching a critical mass. Fashion now is no longer even the sole property of the professionals. The professionals blew it in the mid '60s when they ill-advisedly turned their attention to "young" designs and "street style". Haute Couture was never intended for the young. Once again, as before the French Revolution, those in power let themselves be brought "into range" for a far less bloody, if just as violent, Saturnalia.

It really does not seem very likely that any single voice will ever again be quite authoritative enough to make itself heard throughout all of the now overpopulated class of the ideologically bourgeois, (which by the miracle of modern telecommunications now extends well below the poverty line).

Barring, that is, some post-appocalyptic disruption of the entire fashion industry, forcing all of us to live in mere clothing for an extended period of time. Leaving it, perhaps, to that single loud voice to, once again, call us all out of fashion's outer darkness, as is popularly credited to the "voice" of Christian Dior in 1947.

Still, given virtually instant media coverage, given the world wide web, given the deafening babble of conflicting voices, given the scale of economic risk undertaken by anyone who attempts to think for multitudes (Worth never had to think for more than one client at a time, and each creation was reputedly unique), and given the world-wide dispersion of the fashion industry, such a contingency seems as remote as Tamburlaine. Dior's "proclamation", in retrospect, becomes perhaps the last gasp of a dying order, unlikely ever to be repeated.

Who can say? Perhaps fashion will once again mutate into an inarticulate and irresistible force, issuing from some mass mind, unanswerable, implacable and remote, and for a sophisticatedly bored society foundering in a welter of options... what?

Plate B–47: Photograph, 1927. The "debutante slouch." Posture line has been slightly adjusted to offset the model's search through her purse. Compare with Plate B-4

HISTORICAL CONsiderations aside, it is not inadvisable to have some idea of just what principles are at work in the production of a garment with as many technical pitfalls as a corset. Even with as simplified and primitive an example as the corset of the Tudor period. So, before we start working with specific directions, suppose we take a good hard look at just exactly what effects we are trying to produce.

One of the first discoveries people make about wearing properly fitted Tudor corsets, is not that they are actively uncomfortable, but that after being in one for a few hours, they find themselves to be disproportionately tired out in relation to the amount of physical activity in which they have been engaged. I am inclined to believe that the restriction of movement is responsible for this. Modern people are not accustomed to having their spines held in the same position for hours on end, and they literally get tired from it. If you must, it is quite possible to lie down and rest flat on your back (or stomach, or even side) in a Tudor corset. I do not claim that it can be done *gracefully*, but it can be done. A bum-roll or farthingale would tend to complicate matters, however.

And, while we are on the subject of comparative comfort, I do hope that all of the ladies who have never worn a properly fitted Tudor corset are not suddenly going to assume that I, who have, can't possibly know what I am talking about, or that I must automatically be some sort of masochistic freak when I state that a properly fitted Tudor corset is not actively uncomfortable. I mean precisely what I say. Tudor corsets are restricting, yes. They are inconvenient, Lord yes! But "uncomfortable," in the sense that they *hurt*, no, *that* they are not.

The majority of you probably came by that particular notion from the experience of having, at some time or other, tried to wear a long-line bra or a strapless merry widow, and made the discovery that the nasty things pinch! Having made that discovery, you conclude — not without logic, I concede — that since a Tudor corset is even stiffer, it must be proportionately more uncomfortable.

In point of fact, the case is almost exactly the opposite. Since a merry widow is not truly rigid, if it is to do its job at all it must be made to fit substantially *tighter* than would ever be necessary in a rigid garment. A genuinely rigid framework, which can literally stand up by itself only has to be fastened securely enough to the human body to assure that said body isn't going to get away from it. There is no need for it to pinch.

A point to remember: it is dangerous to assume that because a process is modern, it will unfailingly be more effective than one which is frankly primitive.

Try not to be caught up in advertising hyperbole and hypnotize yourself into equating *convenience* with comfort, either. A merry widow is a relatively convenient garment. While wearing one you can bend and twist, lean and stretch, and every time you do it, or even breathe, the wretched thing will buckle, shift, gouge, pinch or bind. Modern "corsetry" despite all claims to the contrary, is — like its predecessors — designed to produce an effect. It is not designed for the purpose of being comfortable, just not permanently damaging.

A Tudor corset, on the other hand, is a frankly inconvenient garment. Once you are in it, you can only move as far as it will let you. When you encounter its limits, there you are, up against an unyielding object. This does not hurt, it just isn't going to work. You cannot get there from here. The corset is more stubborn than you are. Adapt to it. By this point, it isn't going to adapt to you.

The degree of inconvenience you will experience is erratic. You can stand, sit and bend from the hip without difficulty. (People did live in these things, after all.) You can dance, fence, eat dinner, breathe, drive a tiny two-person roadster with bucket seats, stage a dramatic faint, or bend over to touch your toes. You cannot bend down out of your chair to pick up a fallen napkin.

Even the compression of the bosom, which sends the ignorant observer into such a panic, in practice, translates into a sensation no more distracting than leaning against a wall. After all, there is no practical reason to compress the bosom any more than the degree necessary to hold it in place. To be sure, a large bosom is going to require more compression

than a small one. But, at any size, if a corset compresses your bosom more than actually needed for stability, your bosom is only going to embarrass you by trying to climb out of it.

Obviously I am not talking about those rare women who have abnormally sensitive breasts. Let me clarify this. I am not talking about sensitive nipples. I am talking about women whose breast tissue is highly sensitive to pressure. There are such people. Such ladies probably had best forego Tudor costume altogether. But don't assume that "of course" you are of their number. Try taking off your bra and lying down on the floor on your stomach. Now, really, how painful is that? Because that is pretty much what you are going to be feeling.

Those of you whose breasts become sensitive around the time of your menstrual period had better run this test about that time in order to avoid an unpleasant surprise later. Those of you whose breasts swell at this time may have some fitting problems. In this case, you will have to use your own judgement on just when in your cycle you want to do your fittings.

Where you will feel most of the constriction and pressure of a Tudor corset is in your back. Particularly in those areas towards your sides, and immediately above your waist. Those are the stress points. [*Figure 3:1*]

So, if you must, go right ahead and tell me that you can't wear a corset because you have a bad back, or because you tend to hyperventilate when you are frustrated or constrained. But please don't tell me that my Tudor corset *must* be uncomfortable because your merry widow manages to pinch.

Another reason why people claim that a Tudor corset is uncomfortable is that the one they did try wasn't made properly, or didn't fit them properly. Proper fit in a rigid garment is absolutely essential. While it is possible to wear a corset which was made for a somewhat thinner person, the result is never particularly happy. For one thing, a wide gap in the back means that the sides have more play and will tend to shift as you wear them. This will make the edges rub. [*Figure 3:2*] Even if the corset has been made without straps, your arms may not be emerging at the places which were designed to have arms emerge. A corset with straps may bind because the armholes are not quite in the right place. One of the nastiest surprises which you may have, however, is that, over time, the separation between the sides will not remain even. Since the area at and immediately above the waist is a stress area, unless the outer costume keeps everything in place, gradually the extra play provided by the longer laces will migrate to this region. When this happens, the bottom of the corset will spread farther apart while the top draws closer together and your bosom will receive too much compression and try to climb out of the corset to get away from it. [*Figure 3:3*] This is why, when we get to work on designing and fitting a custom garment, the directions tell you not to allow for more than about an inch of separation. If possible, plan for the sides to meet.

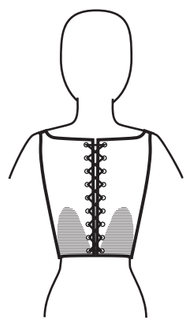


Figure 3:1 - The wearer will feel the greatest stress in the shaded areas. at the back of her waist.

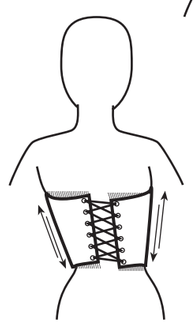


Figure 3:2 - When the corset is laced with a large gap, it shifts uncomfortably with movement.

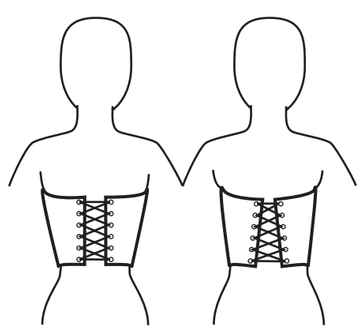


Figure 3:3 - The stress on the lower end of the lacings will cause the extra fullness to gradually shift into this area.

For temporary needs, such as a theatrical performance — as opposed to a public festival, which goes on all day, the migratory tendencies of the extra play in the lacing can be largely circumvented by utilizing the back spacer such as is mentioned in a later chapter, or by having the dresser use a lot of shorter laces, so that no one lace is responsible for more than one or two holes. You will still have to deal with the shifting and rubbing, however.

The length of the corset is an even more critical matter than the circumference. If the point is too short, it will jab you. While it is possible to partially avoid this, you are still going to come away from the experience with the idea that a Tudor corset is a troublesome and uncomfortable garment.

A point which is too long isn't much better. If the corset's torso is too long the corset may well be totally unwearable. A corset which is too long in the sides and back will dig into the tops of the hips and into the armpit. If it was made for someone who is larger-busted than you, it may be too high in the front as well, causing the edge of the neckline to stand above your bosom in a ridge. If the back is too long, it will certainly dig into the back of the wearer's waist when she sits and may even hamper the natural motion of the hips in walking.

As regards the aforementioned problem of drafting the waist point, a good jumping-off place is to extend the point one-hands-breadth (with thumb) below your navel, and to adjust from there. The finished point should be long enough to slide over the most prominent portion of your belly when you sit down or bend over rather than digging into it. It ought to be able to do this without being so long as to make contact with the pubic bone, but since variations in human proportions (and posture!) abound, I will not go so far as to promise that this will always be the case, but it isn't very likely. (Although even a corset point which could bump into the pubic bone is far less uncomfortable than one which gouges into the soft flesh of the abdomen.)

The reason a point may gouge is that, in sitting, the belly compresses, rises, and becomes more prominent. Since the busk is not flexible, it does not accommodate this change. Therefore, one will need to sit with pelvis rotated slightly backwards to compensate. If the belly may not project forward, the hips will project backward, or, rather, the ribcage will be carried forward, above the belly, rather than above the hips. This will arch the back somewhat. [*Figure 3:4*] This is the same principle which was later to be exploited into the Edwardian s-bend stance. The Tudor corset, with its more primitive technology, will not enforce this stance to so great an extent. Nor was the stance of the two periods at all recognizably similar, since the Tudors stuck out their bellies, while the Edwardians projected their seats.

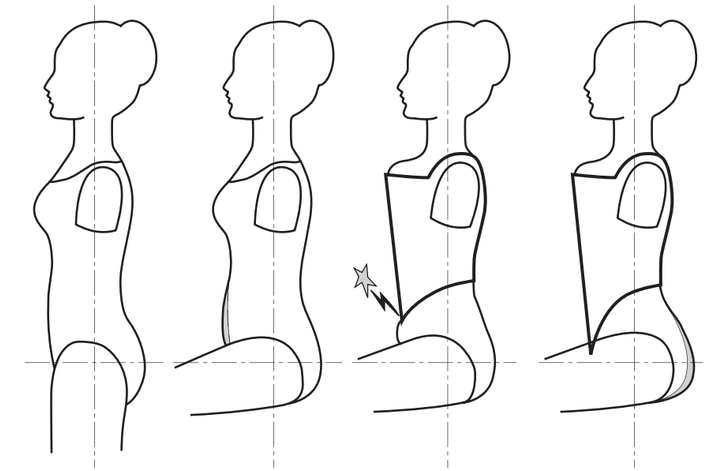


Figure 3:4 - The variations in the prominence of the abdomen brought about by position. The abdomen of the standing figure compresses and projects when the figure sits. If the busk is too short, the point will try to imbed itself in the belly. With a longer busk, the belly slides up behind the busk and the hips swing back to compensate.

In the finished garment, one does not find this variation in stance to be consciously strained or actively uncomfortable since it is not being maintained by muscular tension. You just lean against the corset and let it do the work. The resultant curve in the spine is the reason why the instructions will tell you to make the corset to end at your natural waist, rather than where your blue jeans ride. If the back of the corset is too long, the bottom edge will dig into your hips when you sit down. You will not find this comfortable at all. [*Figure 3:5*]

Incidentally, if you ever end up having to borrow a corset with too long a point, you will need to exercise a certain amount of caution in sitting. Consciously press your ribcage forward, swing your seat back, sit, and then relax until the end of the busk is braced against your pubic bone. Then forget about it. There isn't anywhere else it can go.

If you find yourself having to borrow a corset with too short a point (for of

course none of *us* would ever make that mistake in designing one) you will need to be every bit as conscientiously sway-backed. Unfortunately, in this case you will not be able to relax and forget about it without being stabbed. You may even find that the too-short busk will try to stab you while you are standing.

In both cases, you may find it more comfortable, when sitting, to adopt the "wide lap," i.e. to sit with your knees apart, spreading your skirts. There is no reason to suppose that this may not have been the actual stance of the period, since it would have aided to display the decorative kirtle when the skirt of the overgown was split. You may want to practice this ahead of time, since the balance may sometimes be tricky.

One scarcely needs to be told that the corset is not to be made longer than the torso, but in the event that you (or the designer) get carried away on a wave of "authenticity" and decide that, if the exaggeratedly long bodices depicted in some of the art of the late Elizabethan era were not merely the result of the painters not having quite come to grips with the techniques of perspective, you are going to need one that extends to mid-thigh (as in Plate B–10) — and don't laugh, there is no telling what a costume designer could decide to exaggerate for whatever reason or other, you may find yourself perched on the edge of your chair, wide-lapped, with the point extending below the seat's edge.

A third reason contributing to the prevailing belief that "Tudor" equates "extreme discomfort" is that someone has tried to be too clever. When dealing with a subject as lumbered with psychological (and philosophical and *physiological*) ramifications as corsetry, the modern person's overall aversion to the basic concept and its implications (restriction, discomfort, weight, heat, etc.) provides a fertile ground for evasive innovations. To be fair, some of these may be quite useful. Some are merely ineffective. Some, although effective, are a good deal more trouble than they are worth. And some are absolute horrors.

The commoner such inovations seem to be composed from varying proportions of ignorance, evasion and ingenuity. While none of these are necessarily to be deplored, all hold potential pitfalls. People have at various times ended up with results that have not only borne little relation to the Tudor line, but that were quite unnecessarily intricate, and vastly more uncomfortable than the standard Renfaire corset would ever have been to boot. In short, total failures. In these more recent days, one's failures more usually fail in no more than two of these three directions, or only fall short in one of them, ending up with what can at least feel like a partial success.

Part of the general confusion results when the developers of the qualified successes, encouraged by those factors in which their method has succeeded, start popularizing their methods, along with all of said method's real — or fancied — advantages. Since the world consists more of followers than leaders, others will pick up on these and after adapting them even further, pass the method on, either giving themselves credit, or innocently parroting the sales talk they were originally fed. Or they may reject the result, forgetting that they have altered the design, and start bad-mouthing what may have been a flawed, but generally sound system. Some of the methods which fall short, do so only from a lack of attention (or understanding) when it comes to details, and *could* be better. But in any case, it is all ultimately going to contribute to the generally popular view that attempts at Tudor corsetry are doomed to produce results which will be difficult/uncomfortable/ineffective.

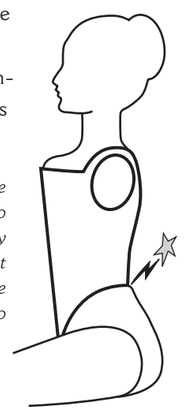


Figure 3:5 - When the back of the corset is too long, it gets in the way of the hips' movement when seated and the bottom edge cuts into the back of the waist.

Underlying this quagmire is a network of erroneous assumptions. The first, most important and most dishearteningly widespread, being that if a corset is needed, any sort of corset will do. This assumption has accounted for a remarkable host of oddities in the name of Tudor. These range from the modern merry widow, to the Gibson Girl, to "milkmaid" waist cinches, to yet other misguided inanities. A stiffened bodice alone doth not a Tudor make.

A second common assumption is the conviction that a process which is technologically up to the minute, will invariably be more effective than one which is outmoded. In some things this may be true, but it is hardly a safe line of reasoning to follow when what you are looking for is an outmoded effect.

Another unfortunate assumption is the aforementioned conclusion that a rigid Tudor bodice must necessarily be more uncomfortable than a modern merry widow. This belief encourages unnecessary evasiveness, and leads to fleeing when none pursueth. Related to this belief is the impression that convenience equates comfort.

A fourth false assumption is the certainty that a process which is unfamiliar is necessarily a process which is going to prove to be difficult.

And, finally, there is the determined faith that there is some method out there by which one may circumvent all inconveniences simultaneously. This last is more properly defined as a belief in magic.

When any or all of these assumptions are accompanied by an understandable ignorance of the operative principles and internal mechanics of Tudor corsetry, the results can be disastrous.

Which is not to say that modern systems will not work, or work well. Given that the Elizabethan corset mutated into other forms over 300 years ago, and the original methods used to produce it also evolved into more technologically sophisticated processes, and have, consequently, been lost, strayed or forgotten, all methods currently available to the costumer are, by definition, modern methods. Yes. *All*. Including the ones in *this* collection.

I agree that some costume historians have done a marvelous job of examining the surviving examples of 16th and 17th century bodices and such surviving written materials on their construction as remain to us. These historians have produced very convincing treatises on the actual sizes, proportions, materials and the uses and treatment thereof, as well as the probable methods used in constructing and embellishing these actual garments. But while their works are invaluable in showing how it *may* have been done, they tend to be rather less than helpful in explaining how to make a corset to order for a modern wearer, taking into consideration that person's proportions and requirements.

I do not claim that only one method, or set of methods — such as the altered bodice pattern — is valid or acceptable. But as a critical, perhaps *overly* critical, observer, my patience is wearing a little thin with standard unaltered bodice patterns stiffened with six to ten layers of pelon being touted as a "proper" Tudor line. To say nothing of the old-fashioned Hollywood dodge of putting every woman on the set into a pointy-cuped merry widow and then trying to claim that "Of course it's accurate! *All* of the actresses are wearing *corsets*!" This from people who — assuming that they have taken a good look at Tudor portraits in the first place — certainly ought to know better. In the interests of common sense, I append the following;

True Observation #1: *any* corset is going to be less comfortable than *no* corset. (Well, *duh!*)

Write this one out a hundred times. Or as many times as is necessary to make yourself believe it. You will need this mantra as an exorcism against attempting to practice "magic". Unnecessary evasiveness is only going to give you more complicated problems than the ones you already know you have.

True Observation #2:

Corollary #1; something unfamiliar is not necessarily difficult.

Corollary #2; just because something isn't difficult, does not in any way imply that it is not still *work*. (Consider bargello or counted cross stitch.)

Mere opinion: persons who furiously throw themselves into a job which takes three hours in order to avoid a job that takes two and a half hours are in no position to complain about how much time the job they didn't do would take.

Variation: persons who furiously throw themselves into two and a half hours of familiar work, in order to avoid two and a half hours of unfamiliar work need not be quite so self-congratulatory either. Neophobia and/or mental laziness are not virtues.

True Observation #3: the method which works for one person will not automatically work for everyone.

Observation #4: saying that a thing is so because one thinks it *ought* to be so, will not make it so. Unfortunately, it isn't always easy to recognize when you are doing this. (i.e., *caveat lector*.)

Observation #5: comparisons between processes which one has discovered, developed, or adapted oneself, and some other process with which one is unfamiliar, are necessarily suspect. Not necessarily *wrong*, mind you, but definitely suspect. (i.e., *caveat vendor*.)

Opinion: making variations in a process that you have adapted without

crediting yourself for them, and claiming that the result was "from so-and-so's method," is not particularly fair dealing. It's like giving someone a recipe without warning them that they are going to have to cut down on the sugar, or add arrowroot or allspice to achieve the same result that you did. (Which is presumably why they asked you for it!)

I will state here and now that of the various methods of corsetry which I will be examining in this collection, I can personally take credit for none. My only innovation was in the adaptation of a process not of my own devising. All of the variations included in this collection have, to the best of my knowledge, been devised by amateurs for purposes other than conventional theatrical productions. For the most part, they were designed for public festivals.

This last consideration is of some importance. In a standard, reasonable sized theater, such as a school auditorium, the audience can be seated no closer than three or four yards from a raised stage which is artificially lit. The details of a costume may not be particularly evident. At any rate, they will not be so evident as they would be at a distance of some three or four feet, at ground level, in the glaring noonday sun. I concede that this loss of detail will be more striking in such matters as the quality of the construction and materials than in the actual shape of the garment. Nevertheless, the eye can be, and frequently is, so dazzled by the ambiance of live theater, that the memory does not retain a true image of the outfit, which is later only recalled to mind as a "beautiful costume." Despite the fact that it may have been wildly out of period, shoddily constructed or completely inappropriate to its purported use. (Satin-clad shepherdesses, anyone?) Face to face, presupposing a marginally educated audience, such obfuscation is not possible. And, in this day and age, thanks to the high production standards of the BBC's costume shop and other professional sources, one can safely presuppose a marginally educated audience. The corsets herein discussed were designed to produce results which hold up to the closest scrutiny. Nor are any of the variations beyond the capabilities of the average seamstress, although some may require more careful attention to the details of fastening than others.

These are not "quickie" methods, however. This collection is not aimed at the simple-costuming-for-the-small-stage market. In all fair warning, this is an introduction to patternmaking. In that field, virtually nothing which is worth doing well can be dashed off in ten minutes. Not in patternmaking. And anyone who doesn't regard corsetry as one of those things which is worth doing well is probably going to live to regret it.

In order to produce reasonably accurate Tudor foundations, you must be willing to invest a certain amount of time. It will also require a certain amount of work. The work is not particularly difficult work. In fact, a lot of it it bears a rather distressing resemblance to "busy" work, and unfortunately, it is all necessary work. But, while you may find yourself to be somewhat bored, you can console yourself with the reflection that once you have got your corset and bodice pattern made, you will never have to go through all this tedium again. (So long as you make no drastic changes in size.) Or at least not until your friends so admire the result that they all decide to make Tudor costumes too, and want you to help them...

THE ALERT READER will have spotted a rather telling phrase in the preceding paragraph. The phrase was "reasonably accurate." Yet another can of worms under an entirely different label. Just what constitutes "accurate"?

Regardless of how delightful it may be to wander in a garden of bright theoretical images, when speculations are put aside, remembrances digested, and mechanical details examined, the question remains: how accurate is "reasonably accurate," for modern purposes?

Obviously any current theatrical or festival purpose will be a modern purpose. It will be displayed before a modern audience and critics. The end result must be able to satisfy both the demands of modern aesthetics and the prevailing taste for "correct" historical fitness in dress. However historically accurate, I seriously doubt that any actress is going to go so far as to adopt the gothic incline stance. Nor would her audience necessarily admire her for doing so. Modern aesthetics do not prize thick waists or disproportionately prominent bellies. Neither would modern viewers register the historically accurate significance from shoulders which are drawn back and down into an unnatural position. What they would more probably register, if anything, would be their obvious discomfort.

While it is possible to reproduce by current means any of the above details of stance or configuration — just as it is possible to recreate such Tudor facial idiosyncrasies as pale eyebrows and a tight rat-trap mouth — such reproductions of presumably historically accurate elements are not, in the long run, likely to serve the purpose of enlisting the viewers' sympathy or support for the characters so portrayed. Quite possibly, this will hold true even if the designers see to it that all members of the company are presented in like manner.

While most modern viewers have attained a fairly high level of sophistication regarding the recognition of visual data from historical contexts, contemporary aesthetics and prejudices are still fully in effect regarding any detail which viewers are likely to regard as nonessential. But not all such details are nonessential. Due to a familiarity with well-produced programs set in the Tudor era, modern audiences are well aware that correct historical costuming for the 16th century will display the characteristic flat front of that epoch.

Therefore, any production which omits this detail will be — however attractive or well-made the costumes used — concluded to have "not bothered" to do it up "right." Allowances for the omission will be made, but the omission will be noted. At the same time, such nonessentials as cosmetics (so long as a natural appearance is attempted) will probably slide past the eye, unremarked.

Unremarked, that is, until some five or ten years later, by which time enough change in contemporary usage will have taken place as to make any anachronism visible as an anachronism rather than being unconsciously edited out as a part of normal human appearance. The film, ANNE OF A THOUSAND DAYS is a strong case in point. Made in the 1970s, when reviewed today the critical will conclude that the costuming remains excellent, but the faces are all disconcertingly — or perhaps reassuringly — modern.

Which pretty well sums up the basic tenor of audience reaction. The modern viewer wishes to be respected insofar as not to have what he knows to have been the case in a given period of visual history ignored or unduly distorted. But he desires less to see actual history reenacted, than he does to recognize himself acting in history. Henry, Elizabeth, Mary of Scotland, Anne, all rule, all scheme, all suffer, manipulate, lie, or die, but it isn't Henry, Elizabeth, Mary or Anne that we see flitting about on a lighted screen. It is not even Mitchell, Jackson, Redgrave or Bujold who we really see struggling through the snares and mazes of 16th century kingship. It is ourselves.

Therefore, modern erect posture need not necessarily be subverted into gothic slump. Nor need the carriage of the shoulders be vigorously altered, the belly accentuated, or the waist deliberately thickened. On the other hand, there is also no need to genuflect to the persistent delusion that all 16th century noblewomen had 13-inch waists. But if you intend that your production be accepted as a "serious" attempt at historically accurate dramatic presentation, certain expectations must be met.

The bodice must be stiffened. Your audience will notice if it is not. The stiffened bodice must have the flat front. The viewer knows that this is part of the line. To omit it will merely leave the audience deciding that you are too ignorant, lazy or incompetent to reproduce the proper period (while others can and do). The bosom must appear to be compressed. The audience is aware that this is also inherent in the style. You need not compress the waist, or try to eradicate all traces of the corset itself, pretending that the body grows in that shape.

Any corset which is separate from the outer gown, as opposed to a boned outer bodice, will announce its presence by visibly displaying a ridge wherever a boned edge does not coincide with the gown's edge. Try not to let this upset you too unduly. This will be particularly evident with corsets which are made without straps. When a theatrical company has a large turnover in personel, it is probably going to find it more practical to use corsets without straps, since it really is easier for several people of about the same size, to make do with the same corset if it does not try to fit the shoulders and upper back. The strapless corset carries other bonuses as well. For example, the Italian styles of the 16th century have a practically off-the-shoulder line which would otherwise require a specialized corset design to accommodate. Freedom of the shoulderblades also does make a difference in mobility, which may be necessary for some stage business. Particularly for

musical comedy or spectacle, where the style of movement itself may well be anachronistic. Still, my own preference for the strapless corset does not blind me to the fact that there is going to be a quite visible horizontal ridge across the back, where the corset ends. The contours and movements of the shoulder-blades will also be visible.

There are some possible dodges to minimize the effect of this. For the early period, when the French hood was in wide usage, the veil may be made long enough to cover. Or the costume may be lined with some thick, heavy fabric to help soften the line (it will not eradicate it). In a repetory company composed of a few permanent members doing straight dramatic productions (Shakespearean or otherwise), in which each lady has her own boned underbodice with straps, this issue does not arise.

Of course one may take yet another stand on the issue and resolve to just ignore this particular detail. This is probably a shocking piece of apostasy, but I honestly cannot see that this is really worth agonizing over. The ridge is not period. Or, at any rate, there seems to be no evidence from which to suppose it may have been. But at the present level of public awareness, it is one of those nonessentials, which, unlike most of the rest of them, is noticeable only because we do not live in a corseted age. A Victorian corset characteristically displayed exactly this feature, yet the artists of the period, however naturalistic their style, took no notice of it in their renderings, much in the way that modern artists of the neo-representational schools placidly ignore pantie lines or the ridge of a bra back. It is the sort of detail which the eye that is accustomed to it painlessly edits out. The modern eye, not being accustomed to corset tops, will not play by these rules, (twenty years from now, who can say) but there is no reason to suppose that this will distract attention from the acting. In any event, the audience can see for themselves that the actress is wearing a corset. They are hardly going to be astonished to notice further evidence of its presence.

The Tudor line displays quite a few details which have not been retained in modern dress. Some of these have not been current since the traditional corset was abandoned in favor of the decadent, or Victorian, model. Of these characteristics, three seem to me to be fairly major:

The Flat Front.
[*Figure 3:6*]

This characteristic is so well known and so ostentatious that for many beginning costumers, it seems the only salient characteristic of a Tudor corset. While this is very far from being the case, there is some validity to this interpretation in that once the short-bodied gown of the Cavalier period had lengthened into, first a natural, and then a long-waisted line, the cut had acquired a degree of sophistication which produced a very shallow concave curve from neckline to waist point, rather than an absolutely straight line. But even this difference is less than might otherwise have been noted had not the stance of the two periods differed so greatly. I have gone into this in more detail elsewhere and need not repeat it here. In any case, the corsets of the Restoration are slightly more graceful looking garments than their more primitive forbearers. The absolutely flat front is peculiar to the Tudors alone. This front, with its rigid busk suspended between belly and bosom, covering an airspace beneath, when seen in profile, displays a rather thick, clumsy shape which the modern eye may find unattractive. The Tudor style, unlike that of the Italian Renaissance which preceded it, was not designed to be seen in profile. The sleeves of the gown, either by the large hanging turn-back of the earlier period, or the bombast of the later, will assist in camouflaging or drawing the attention away from this.

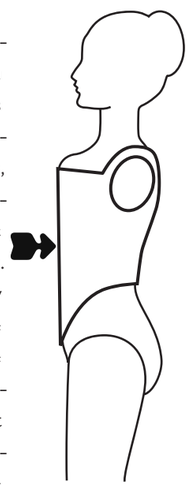


Figure 3:6 - The flat front.

The Raised Apex of the Bosom.
[*Figure 3:7*]

This feature, common to all corseted eras, is the one which, more than any other, distinguishes between a true corset, and a garment intended for mere figure control. In fact, so thoroughly unfamiliar are we with this particular phenomenon, that the term may well need further explanation.

In an era of figure control, such as our own, the apex of the bosom is understood to mean the nipple. So obvious is this assumption that there are people who find it difficult to imagine any alternate interpretation. During an era of corsetry, the nipple is an irrelevant detail of anatomy. In a (true) corset, the apex of the bosom is the corset's top edge, wherever it may happen to land.

Our own realization of this feature is somewhat hampered by the fact that the Victorian corset parodied the natural figure to the degree of showing an indentation under the breasts, tapering into the waist. The "ancient" corset, even in the pouter-pigeon form of the 1790s never showed more than a shallow concave curve from top edge to point. The Victorian corset also differed from most of its predecessors in that it never, after 1825 or so, made any exaggerated attempt to raise the bosom's apex to any significant degree above its natural position. Which, when taken in conjunction with the 19th century's habit of making day dresses high to the throat, tends to blur the distinctions and encourages us to forget that the apex of even a Victorian lady's bosom was merely an indication of where her corset happened to end, without regard to her private anatomy. [*Plate C–1*]

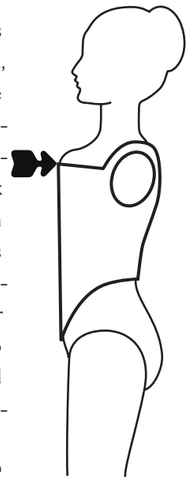


Figure 3:7- The raised apex of the bosom.

Prior to the 19th century there was not any question about this. Before there were corsets, or, rather, before corsets were universal, a woman wore a simple underbodice, which was cut very much like her outer bodice, and into this she was snugly sewn, laced, or otherwise fastened. The end result was a more-or-less smoothly rounded bosom which displayed no particular apex at all, merely an overall bulge of soft tissue packed into a fabric container — less a matter of shape than of surface tension. [*Figure 3:8*] The necklines of these bodices differed, but were generally lowish. Even so, the fullest portion of the bosom was carried at a lower position than the bodice neckline, as is the case today. In a few fairly rare paintings, where the outer gown is shown to be cut extremely low, the bosom, in either a chemise or a closely fitted inner bodice swells out above it. This is the line which careless costumers exploit for 16th to 18th century "milkmaid" costumes. Those are not particularly accurate. Consider that these paintings were generally painted in the studio, from live models who, when posing, were not actively engaged in physical labor. If they had been, just how comfortably would they have been able to get on with their work in clothing which offered no support?

With a corset, there is a different dynamic at work altogether. In a corset the body is contained within a garment made in an artificial shape, to which it must conform, since the materials of which the corset is made are less pliant than it is. If the corset is to do its job, it must shore up any portion of the body which is not firm enough to stand up by

*Plate C–1: **The Duchess of York,** by LaFayette, 1897. As can be seen by the behavior of the fabric of the bodice, the apex of a Victorian lady's bosom was dictated by the top edge of her corset, and had little to do with her anatomy. It can also be seen that although the fabric of the bodice is very light and soft and is, moreover, drawn into soft folds at the waist, the silhouette of the torso is as crisp as if it had been cut from a pattern, suggesting that the photograph may have been artfully retouched by the studio to make the waist appear smaller. The sale of such portraits of the rich and famous formed no small portion of a professional photographer's income.*

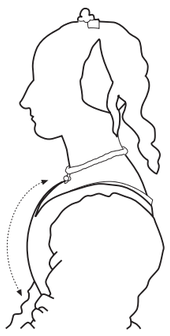


Figure 3:8-In the close-fitting, unstructured bodice, the bosom takes on the contours of a rounded bulge with the fullness below the neckline edge and without any specific apex.

itself, serving as a handy portable retaining wall.

I have already stated that the technology of these early corsets was primitive. There is literally no shaping in the bosom of a Tudor corset. By this period, tailoring had progressed to the point that a good fit could be made for the back and shoulders. Both are fairly bony areas which impose their own shape and cannot be easily altered. The bosom, on the other hand, has a tendency to take whatever shape is imposed on it, making any sort of either a stable or an accurate fit problematic. By far the easiest shape to impose, was no shape, i.e., the negation of shape inherent in a flat plane. This was found to work fairly well, with a few reservations. Short of surgery, it is not possible to make an existing portion of the body disappear. If it exists, it has to go somewhere. Therefore, some spatial provision for the bosom had to be made. The method adopted was to angle the intended flat plane so that it stood farther from the ribcage the higher it rose from the point of contact. The mature bosom, generally speaking, is a rounded portion of soft tissue, of which, due to the law of gravity, the fullest portion will normally be on the lower side. Being soft tissue, however, it will, within reason, take whatever shape its environment will allow. When the shape allowed to it is narrow at the bottom, and widening at the top, it will, without any particular objection, conform to the shape permitted, with the greater fullness shifting to a higher position. [*Figure 3:9*] Should this retaining wall be too low, the bosom will overhang it. Which is a rather ugly line. [*Figure 3:10*] If the wall is too high, the edge of the corset will stand in a ridge above the bosom, which is no better. [*Figure 3:11*] Within a certain range between the two, the corset will shore the bosom up to a level at which it is securely contained. Above the corset's edge, the uncontained tissue will swell into the rounded "peach basket" configuration which is much admired in period costume. The open neckline of the corset makes this possible.

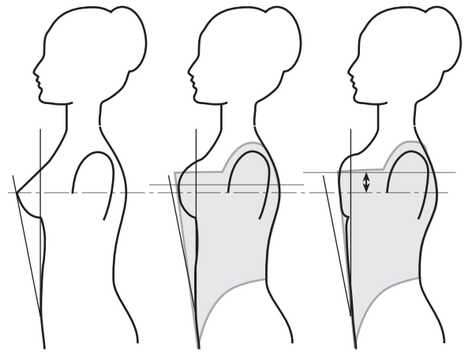


Figure 3:9 - As the bosom receieves greater compression from the flat, opposing plane, the apex rises to a higher position.

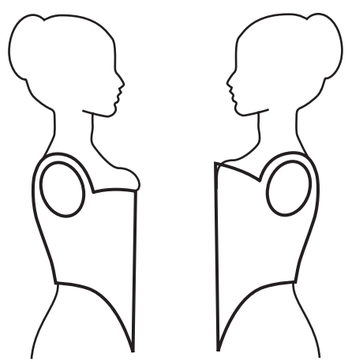


Figure 3:10 - Too low. *Figure 3:11 - Too high.*

During the Tudor period, the neckline of the gown almost invariably coincided with the top of the corset, i.e., the "apex" of the bosom. (No great engineering feat, since the "corset" generally consisted of an outer bodice having been stiffened with whalebone.) In the earlier half of the period, a high-necked ensemble was only produced by the addition of a separate, yoke-like addition over the shoulders and bosom which either was tied, pinned or sewn in place, usually with a very visible join line running horizontally along the edge of the neckline of the gown beneath.

The aforementioned doublet bodice of the later part of the period seems to have been a short-lived style which was almost at once reserved for active sportswear, disappearing from general daywear by the time of the Restoration. By the time of the Restoration, the bodice of an average day dress was again cut along the lines of the corset (by this time almost always a separate garment), with the chillier, or more prudish filling in the open neckline with a scarf. Throughout the Tudor period, the low necked bodice had often been worn over a high necked chemise or partlet, which usually had an embroidered neckband, and in the later portion of the era, a ruff.

The Nipped-In Sides. [*Figure 3:12*]

This effect, although apparent during all corseted eras, has not yet been noticed by the general audience. It may therefore, prove to be somewhat dispensable, unlike the other two features, above. However, it is a feature which is built-in to the altered bodice pattern featured in this collection, so we might as well examine it, and its causes as well. This effect becomes most noticeable when wearing a long-waisted corset with waist tabs. In the standard Renfaire corset, it may not be as evident.

This effect is again the result of the human body taking the line of least resistance against a less pliant material. The process operates as follows; when a rigid busk is propped between belly and bosom with an airspace between it and the midriff area, and a corset is essentially wrapped around busk, airspace and torso, and then drawn closed, the areas of most resistance are the bosom and belly, where the busk is solidly braced. The area of least resistance is the airspace, where the busk is not in contact with the body. The corset will draw the body and busk closer together, first, by causing the back to arch, and second, by placing slight pressure on the sides.

The second factor is about as simple to explain, but takes a little longer. The two points of stress in the corset are the center front, where it is anchored, and the center back where the lacings are exerting force to draw the garment closed. Between the immovable object, aka as the busk, and the irresistible force of the lacings, the sides of the corset play generally only a supportive role. Since the sides are being effectively pulled at from both directions, their natural response will be to try to span the distance between the two points in a straight line. [*Figure 3:13*] The body is in their way however, so the sides press in on the sides of the body in their attempt to travel directly between the center front and back. In a Victorian corset, which was designed to constrict the waist, this pressure was continuous, pressing in from all directions. This is not the case in the Tudor corset. The waist of a Tudor corset is made the same size as the wearer's waist. So her waist is not being roughly pinched. A slight pressure is being exerted on her sides, a fairly strong pressure is being exerted on the back of her waist and no actual pressure is being exerted at the front of her waist at all. As stated above, it is not possible for an existing portion of the body to simply disappear. In a Victorian corset, the unwanted fullness about the waist would relocate in hip and thorax. In a Tudor corset, since the torso is equiped with floating ribs, some of the width of the torso will be guided toward the vacant airspace at the front of the body, behind the busk, changing the shape, but not the actual size of her waist. No pressure is placed on her diaphragm, so breathing will be unimpaired. But her waist, normally an oval, will become more like a circle. The ever-present pressure on the back of the wearer's waist is probably much of the source of the weariness which the unpracticed corset-wearer experiences. These effects may be more extreme in persons who have large waists.

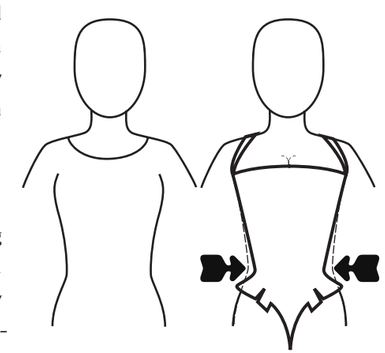


Figure 3:12 - The nipped-in sides.

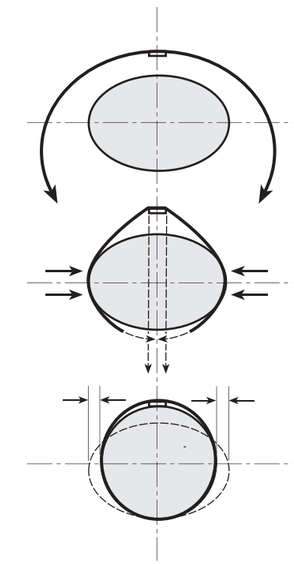


Figure 3:13 - As the corset is drawn around the body, the stress from busk and lacings causes a compression at the sides of the torso, which causes the waist to take a narrower, but thicker shape. The wearer's actual waist measurement generally remains unchanged.

One notable exception to this last process will be the case of the woman with an hourglass figure. (Or the slender lady with a large bust.) An hourglass figure is bad news in Tudor costuming. In this case, unless the wearer chooses to be *very* swaybacked, her waist measurement when corseted, may well be anything up to several inches larger than her real waist measurement. This will be because she may not be brought

into full contact with the busk of the corset, which will continue to contain both her torso and an airspace. There may be other exceptions as well but this is the only one which immediately comes to mind.

The visible effects of this process are the slight thickening of the waist in profile, mentioned above, and a strongly tapered line from armpit to waist when seen from full front or back. The pointed bodice will further enhance this line. The hips, in contrast, will display a sharper, and more pronounced curve.

It may well have been an exploitation of this effect which enabled adolescent boys to present a convincing appearance as women in Tudor and Elizabethan theatre, although, as stated above, the effect is less pronounced in slender individuals. Still, the aesthetic taste of the Elizabethan period, if I may remind everyone, at least according to all sources left to us from which to draw a conclusion, seems to have favored a style of female beauty whose configuration appears to have been long-waisted and broad shouldered — essentially a masculine configuration. Evidently, insofar as the clothed figure is concerned, the classical ideal of the boy-with-breasts had made a triumphant comeback. At least in 16th century English art.

In Summary:

You may stiffen a bodice to a fare-thee-well, but if the bodice you use is a standard, modern shape, it is not going to look Tudor, no matter how much time and effort you put into it.

Which returns us to the starting gate:
Q. How does one figure out what must be done to a modern bodice pattern in order to transform it into something resembling a geometric exercise — to say nothing of figuring out how one is going to deal with any garment as unforgiving as a Tudor corset —and still be able to get a proper fit?

A. Well, obviously, one starts (or somebody else starts) by making a lot of mistakes. With any luck, they manage to make most of the obvious ones and correct the process from there. With further luck someone else organizes the process into an accessible form and teaches a roomful of other people the steps which must be gone through. With just *fabulous* luck, one of those people composes a many-horn concerto on the subject of antique underwear and starts writing query letters to publishers. (It takes more luck than I posess to get it significantly further than that!)

Part II

Which Consists Mainly of Instruction

THE BEST MATERIALS to use for a standard corset are firm-woven, sturdy cottons. Canvas is good but there are lighter fabrics which are also quite sufficient to the purpose. A lightweight denim or duck is good. Trigger cloth is a little *too* lightweight. I recommend a natural fiber for the sake of coolness. Linen is excellent and authentic, but expensive. Some ladies who are connected with the Renfaire embroider the material before sewing the layers together or adding the casings, which is a very attractive touch. For traditional stage presentation this detail could easily be duplicated by some less time consuming method.

When dealing with a corset which is not intended to be visible, an additional consideration which I would like to bring up is that there is no absolute necessity for the waist point to be pointed. If the length is sufficient it may be rounded instead, which will lessen any tendency to catch in the folds of the skirt, or to prod the wearer (since the visible petticoat is likely to be worn over the corset anyway). Indeed, some of the 16th and 17th century Italian (and occasionally German) gowns depicted *had* rounded, as opposed to pointed, waists. (With a corset which will be seen, of course, one may hesitate to do this.)

Incidentally, a detail which has not previously come up, but which ought to be mentioned, is that *these corsets are intended to be worn over an undergarment!* This is particularly necessary in the case of the larger-bosomed lady, whose corset will be providing greater compression. The historical undergarment was a loosely fitting shift or chemise. In theatre, where the gown may have its own false shift, a light cotton knit, like a tee-shirt with the top trimmed away, a tank top with the straps removed, or a tube top will be sufficient to keep the corset away from your skin. This is particularly vital in the case of a leather corset which would otherwise *stick*, but it is useful with a cloth and boning corset as well. I would recommend that the shift also be of all natural materials since the heat generated by a synthetic fiber can be highly uncomfortable if the wearer is sensitive to synthetics, and she can end up breaking out in a rash from them. (I discovered one summer day that even a 35% polyester/65% cotton blend made me feel about ready to keel over. And I'd previously had no trouble with pure cotton!)

So, to work.

The classic Renfaire corset is beyond a doubt the most wearable and easily reproduced example which I personally have encountered. It is also the one which is most likely to be wearable by the largest range of figure types. It uses essentially 18th century corset technology made up in a 16th century shape.

What I mean by the term "easily reproduced" may also require some clarification. I do not mean that one can crank out six corsets in an afternoon. Nor do I mean that the process is foolproof. If one chooses to take undue liberties with the procedure, they may very well live to regret it. "Ease in reproduction," in this context, means that the process does not require a great many unfamiliar skills. Nor does it require an engineering degree, or even a calculator. This is not an example of the "Euclidian" school of pattern making. However, it *does* require a working familiarity with sewing — not tailoring or pattern drafting, necessarily, just basic home sewing — at least a full afternoon to work on the project, and a capacity for following instructions. A person who has never sewn on a button or mended a ripped seam is probably going to have difficulties. A person who can buy a commercial pattern and make it up according to the enclosed instructions will probably not. The fitting stages will be tedious, however.

The basic formula used in the Renfaire corset is that of altering an existing bodice pattern until it is the required shape. This is by no means as frightening as it may sound to the uninitiated. It is, by far, a simpler procedure than taking measurements and drafting out a series of geometric shapes, as is necessary in an independent, non-fitting garment such as the farthingale, but it is apt to be time-consuming. The altered bodice procedure is done in gradual steps. In fact, it is done in *many* gradual steps, with frequent bouts of fitting and modification, and it will probably take up a healthy chunk of that afternoon. (But, it only has to be done *once*.) Unfortunately

one unquestionable disadvantage to the method is that it cannot be done alone. You will need at least one, and preferably two helpers. (Make a day of it and all three of you can end up with patterns by the end of it.)

Regarding materials and equipment, you will need; in addition to a sewing machine and standard sewing gear (thread, pins, scissors, etc.) a simple — not princess — bodice pattern, preferably without vertical darts, in your size; something to mark with; some non-stretch yardage to work with (scraps are fine); some string; and several sheets of heavy paper (like stiff brown paper). You may want some pattern tissue, and you will also need a tee shirt, tube top, or the shift which you will be wearing under the finished garment, since that is what you are going to be fitting over. You may want a piece of lightweight, somewhat flexible cardboard as well.

The reader is advised to read all the way through this chapter, and the two chapters following before making finalized plans or actually starting work on the project. I will be touching on a good many variations — such as waist tabs — in the following two chapters, which you may well wish to incorporate.

If your pattern is already one for a bodice with a square neckline, hold it up to yourself and find where the waist's center front will come on your body. Measure from this point to a point one hand's breadth (with thumb) below your navel. [*Figure 4:1*] Extend the center front line of the bodice pattern to this length, or if you have a pattern which will not allow for this (few will), measure this extended center line and record the measurement for later use.

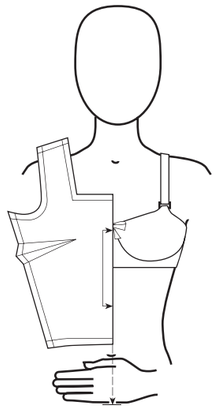


Figure 4:1 - Extend center front line to one hand's breadth below navel.

If your pattern does not have a square neck already, it will be necessary to give it one. Measure your body from the hollow at the base of the throat to the center point of the top edge of your bra (where the stupid little bow is). [*Figure 4:2*] Find where the pattern's neckline is intended to hit you and mark the difference. Or, hold the pattern up to yourself and mark the spot. [*Figure 4:3*] Trace a square neckline from another pattern at the proper height. Or fake one if you haven't another pattern on hand. At this point everything is still pretty flexible. [*Figure 4:4*]

One of the first steps is to find your true waist. A corset without tabs, which the basic patern is, must not be made longer than the true waist or the boned edge will dig in at every change of position. (A corset with tabs spreads the point of contact over a larger area rather than presenting a hard, narrow edge.) To find your true waist, tie a length of string snugly (though not tightly) around your middle, stand, walk, sit, bend, and let it gravitate where it will. Measure where the string ends up at center back and sides. [*Figure 4:5*] Mark this point on the center back and side seams of your pattern. If your pattern is designed for a garment with a raised waist, extend the side and back seams until they are long enough to reach. If there isn't enough room to extend the pattern, record the measurements for later use.

By now, if you *do* have a square-necked pattern whose waist has been marked at back and sides and lengthened at the front, you next make the curved line which determines the line of the waist point. This will be an approximation, so just draw a smooth curve intended to avoid binding your hipbones. A straight line from side waist to waist point will only bind your hips and make you look fat. On the back pattern piece, draw a new waist line between the points already marked which echoes the original curve of the waist seam.

If what you now have is a square necked bodice and a jumble of recorded measurements [*Figure 4:6*], don't worry about it. Just don't lose them or forget which is which.

The next step in any case is to remove the bust dart. Fold the bodice's front piece on the bust dart's center fold line across the entire width of the pattern (it will cross at an angle). Now make a second fold from the point where the stitching lines meet on the side seam, to the point where your first fold meets the center line. [*Figure 4:7*] You have just made a dart which extends the full width of the pattern piece. Pin or tape in place. You will notice that this proceeding has made two minor changes in the pattern. The first change is that there is now an angle toward the top of the center line.

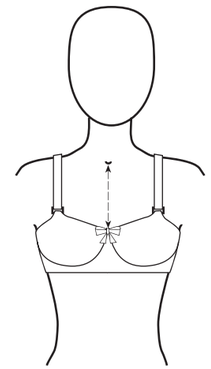


Figure 4:2 - Measure distance from bra center to hollow of throat.

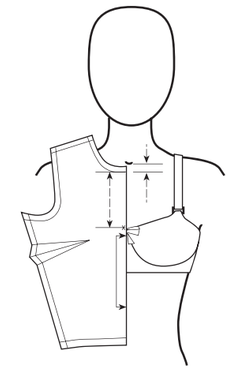


Figure 4:3 - Mark level of bra center on paper pattern. Double-check measurements.

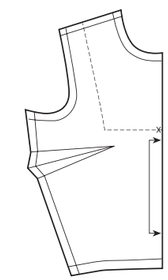


Figure 4:4 - Rough in a square neckline.

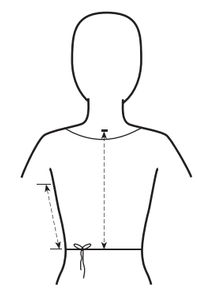


Figure 4:5 - Length at back & side.

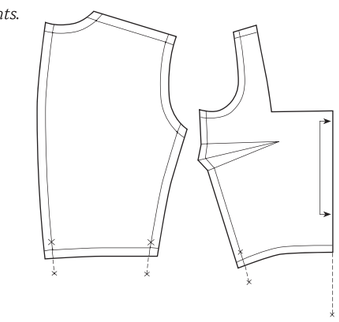


Figure 4:6 - Measure and record difference in length to those of pattern.

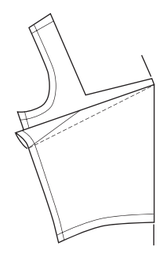


Figure 4:7 - Fold pattern to eliminate dart.

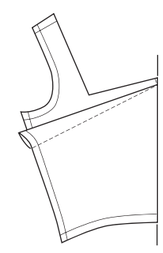


Figure 4:8 - Correct center front line.

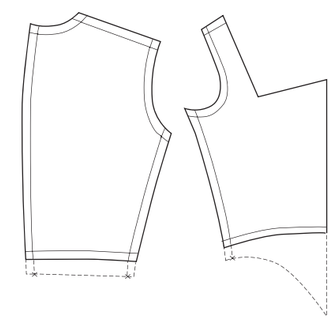


Figure 4:9 - Trace pattern onto tissue or muslin, extending lengths where necessary and roughing in waist curve.

This you eradicate by extending the existing center line beyond the point that the new dart meets it and extending the neckline to meet the new extension of the center line. [*Figure 4:8*] The second change is that the neckline, instead of running straight across, now comes to a higher point in the center. Oddly enough, if one consults one's fashion history books, right there in the copies of late 15th and early 16th century brass rubbings is the same neckline rising to a sharp point in the center. A little later, this modified into a neckline which rose in a smooth curve, higher in the center than at the corners. This seems to have been particularly apparent in France during the reigns of Francis I and Henry II. Whether this was the actual configuration of the gown, or an artistic stylization indicating that the neckline and front of the gown bowed out in a curve rather than being really, absolutely flat and straight across, is difficult to determine. If it *did* actually exist, it certainly wasn't brought about by eliminating a bust dart! If you do decide to use this style, you will need to be sure that the higher center of the curve does not stand in a ridge above the contour of the bosom. Nor, that the corners are so low that you overhang them. In any event, do not square off the neckline just yet. That will be done later.

Take your adjusted pattern — which now has an altered neckline, no bust dart, and, if you are lucky, a tentative waist line — and carefully trace it onto a new piece of tissue, newsprint or other paper. If the paper is crumpled, iron it; it *must* be flat. If you have been using a

pattern which is too short-waisted to actually adjust the waist length, take your adjusted pattern which has an altered neckline and no bust dart, and trace it onto the flat new paper or tissue, extending the center front line, the side seam lines on both pattern pieces (front and back), and the center back seam line. You *now* take your list of waist length measurements and mark each new line at the proper length. Transfer, as best you can, the original curve of the back waist seam at the new level and approximate the front waist curve from the new side waist to the extended front point. [*Figure 4:9*] Transfer all markings from the original pattern, such as the shoulder line and seam lines. Do not add a seam allowance to the new waist line yet. Don't bother with the bust dart, since it has already been eliminated. Ignore any other darts which the pattern may have; they will be eliminated in fitting. If you have a jumper pattern in your size available, you may wish to transfer the armhole from it to the tracing. (A jumper armhole is easier fitting than that of a dress or blouse, which in a stiffened bodice will be welcome.) If you have had to fake a square neckline in front, measure the width of its new shoulder strap at seam line and transfer this measurement to the shoulder seam line of the back piece. Draw a new back neckline from this point. [*Figure 4:10*] The new neckline should clear the large vertebrae at the base of the neck, but should otherwise be fairly high. A high back or shallow V-shaped back will help keep your shoulder straps, if you use them, from sliding off your shoulders. Sketches of the period indicate that the earlier reigns favored a V-shaped back [*Plate D–1*] while the later, Elizabethan split ruff or standing collar could only have been anchored to a back neckline which was high and rounded. If the back neckline of your pattern was designed to be low or squared off, this is a good time to re-draw it. You are now ready for the first fitting.

Take your scrap fabric, an old sheet or whatever non-stretchy material you've provided yourself with, and make a "muslin" or mock-up of the bodice. The center front line goes on a fold. You should have one front and two back pieces. (Cut on the straight grain of the fabric, anyh piece cut on the bias will stretch.) Stitch the side seams, mark the center front fold line, and back seam lines with ink or tape so that you won't lose them, and trim seam allowances from armhole and neckline. Pin shoulder seams and put the muslin on, inside out, over whatever underwear you intend to use with the corset. By this, I mean your shift or tee-shirt. You will not be wearing a bra unless you are one of the special cases to be discussed later. Have one of your helpers pin the back seam together.

Now we start fitting for your body. Check the shoulder straps and armholes. Do the armholes bind? Are they inconveniently low? A jumper armhole should be lower than a bodice armhole, but it should be a difference of millimeters, not inches.

Re-pin straps or trim armholes to fit, but not bind. If the upper back of the original pattern was designed to be darted to fit, re-pin straps and center

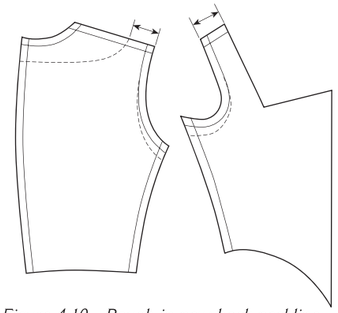


Figure 4:10 - Rough in new back neckline, if necessary, and "jumper" armhole.

Plate D –1: English Noblewoman, Hans Holbein, c. 1537. The "v-shaped" back neckline of the early Tudor period is visible in this drawing. This depth of neckline would not contribute to the stability of the shoulderpiece, however.

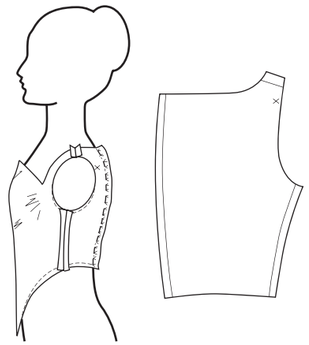


Figure 4:11 - First fitting. Mark hollow at back of shoulder's position.

back seam to fit smoothly without darts. If your pattern had vertical darts coming up from the front and back waistline, your muslin will probably be too loose at the waist. Carefully take in the excess at side and lower back seams until the back fits smoothly and the front does not hang loose. It should *not* be tight. Just fit it to be in easy contact around the waist. Try to keep the seams, particularly the side seams, as straight as possible. A slight curve in the back seam will be inevitable. Are the bottoms of the side seams at your true waist or only a little above it? If it is longer, trim it to fit. If it is *much* shorter, mark that it should be extended on the muslin. Do the same with the back seam. You can check the curve of the front point now, if you wish (you will pay closer attention to this area in the second fitting). Does it curve nicely over the hipbones? Has the point got a good working depth? It should come one hand's breadth (with thumb) below your navel. You should also be able to find a hollow at the back of the shoulder near the joint. Mark this point. [*Figure 4:11*]

You are now ready to fit for the proper line. There can be a very slight temptation among the overly enthusiastic to fit the corset tightly enough to make the wearer look flat-chested. If the wearer is not flat-chested to begin with, this is a bad idea. These corsets are neither flexible nor forgiving, and if one is made too tight, the wearer will not be able to take a deep breath. Nor will the flat-chested look continue for more than a very brief period. The soft tissue of the bosom follows the line of least resistance. Since, in this case, a steel-boned corset offers more immediate resistance than the law of gravity, her bosom will attempt to climb out of it. Since the corset is cut only just high enough to keep her bosom inside to begin with, this will result in a very noticeable overhang. This will be noticeable even if worn under a high-necked doublet, and she will *still* not be able to take a deep breath.

There is a far greater temptation among the overly timid to fit the corset so loosely that it barely touches the bosom and certainly does not compress it. This is an equally bad idea. If the bosom is not compressed at all, the corset will not fit securely and will shift and slide about. This means that it and its edges will rub, which can cause some very uncomfortable abrasions, particularly around the armholes. It will also offer no support to the bosom. An average sized, reasonably mature bosom is not likely to be comfortable for very long without any support at all.

Since the corset and the gown over it will be low cut, it will not be possible to wear a normal bra under it. Therefore, the bosom, being soft tissue, will follow the line of least resistance, and since, without compression, the steel-boned corset offers less immediate resistance than the law of gravity, this wearer's bosom will gradually slide down inside her corset, leaving the corset's top edge standing up in an ugly ridge.

If your company includes a lady whose breasts are genuinely hypersensitive, I realize that she will have to use this method anyway. As I have stated above, this is not going to be as efficient or as stable as moderate compression. One can partially thwart the bosom's tendency to sink down into the corset by an expedient known as the "vanity bar." In its original form this was a rolled piece of toweling placed horizontally across the inside of the front of the corset. By blocking off the path of retreat, the bosom has no choice but to remain at the proper level. For the lady who is small breasted and doesn't want to look it, the vanity bar will assure that the bosom, when compressed, will rise up in a satisfactory "peach basket" configuration. This is the same principle as that of "push up" pads used in a contemporary bra. It won't do as good a job of supporting a bosom as proper compression, but it is better than nothing.

I do not recommend that a lady who is flat chested and doesn't want to look it adopt the "just barely touching" method in an attempt to look more generously endowed. For one thing, this does not raise the apex of the bosom. Nor does it produce the "peach basket" effect which the audience is becoming familiar with and is going to expect. At best, the gown is going to be cut too low, exposing a large area of flat, possibly bony, upper chest. Even with a vanity bar, whatever bosom she has is going to be propped up rather than supported and if she is much past her early twenties, it is going to jiggle. At worst, she is going to look low-busted and fat. She will also be in very genuine danger of popping out of her costume whenever she raises an arm or happens to lean over. The lady with sensitive breasts will also be in such danger, but she hasn't a choice. She will

probably feel more secure if her costume is one of the covered up styles such as the Elizabethan "doublet," or utilizes the attached yoke with a collar favored during Mary's reign, an opaque partlet, or high-necked undershift. If the material of the upper portion of the costume is reasonably opaque, she might be able to wear a normal bra under her corset. If this is the case, her corset should be fitted over the bra in the first place — contrary to standard practice.

If one of the ladies in your company has undergone a mastectomy, she will have a specialized costuming problem. The following advice is speculative. It *ought* to work, but it has not been actually put into practice. She will, in any event, be obligated to adopt one of the covered-up styles mentioned above. As to fitting the corset, much depends upon how her prosthetic breast behaves when subjected to compression. If it reacts in all respects as a natural breast, the simplest method would probably be to fit the corset in such a manner as to provide compression for the remaining natural breast and to devise some method of anchoring the prosthetic to the corset to avoid any gradual displacement during wear. A vanity bar may well be useful in stabilizing the position of both the natural and the prosthetic breasts. The natural breast probably will derive the greater benefit of this addition. If the prosthetic does not react to compression in the same manner as natural breast tissue, the lady may choose to fit her corset to her remaining breast (again, a vanity bar will be helpful for stability) and to devise an added arrangement of padding to make the line symmetrical. Since this padding will be designed specifically for use with this corset, it could probably be permanently attached. An alternate solution would be to fit the corset to the prosthetic, giving it as much compression as it will take and still respond more or less naturally, and to wear the corset over her regular bra. In this case, as with the lady whose breasts are sensitive, the apex of her bosom will be lower than it ought to be and she may look thick through the torso. But that can't really be helped.

A lady who has had breast implants, either in the course of reconstructive surgery after mastectomy or as breast augmentation, had best ask her doctor whether compression is feasible. If she has already been cautioned against sleeping on her stomach, the answer is almost sure to be "no." If nothing has been said, the analogy of lying on your stomach on the floor is probably useful in describing to a medical advisor the effect of these corsets. If you are advised against adopting the normal compression, you will proceed in the same manner as a lady with sensitive breasts. A lady who has *recently* undergone breast reduction surgery will also need to consult her doctor before proceeding further. In this case, once she has fully healed from her surgery, she should have no problems in following the normal procedure.

In all such cases, people who adopt this "barely touching" fit will be well advised to forego making their corset without straps. You are going to need all the stability you can get. This also will probably apply to the lady with the mastectomy, even if she adopts the closer fit with padding.

To fit for the proper line requires at least one, and preferably two, helpers. One is the person who pins you up the back, and is indispensable. The second is the person who with the aid of a sheet of thin cardboard, stands in for the finished corset until you actually have one. This second person's job can be done at need by the person being fitted. Actually, I tend to prefer the self-help method since the person being fitted is the one best suited to know how much compression is comfortable. It can be difficult to provide one's own compression and still keep the fitting accurate around the armholes and shoulders, however. So be very careful in this regard. If the person being fitted is small-busted, the cardboard may be omitted if you choose, but a heavy bosom needs the more even surface pressure. With your muslin over what will be the underwear (tee shirt, or shift), hold the cardboard against your front and start shoring up your bosom as shown in the diagram. [*Figure 4:12*] If the person being fitted is operating the cardboard herself, she will need to be careful not to allow herself to go round-shouldered since that will affect the fit. Shore up and compress the bosom until it is held in place with some stability. Bounce gently up and down on your heels. The upper portion of the bosom will show some movement, but the bosom should not slide up or down behind the cardboard, and your cleavage will in most cases be a line, not a gap. The flesh above the point of contact with the cardboard will rise into the peach-basket configuration. This is what "proper" compression means, simply that the *mass* of the bosom is held in place. It is not crushed out of existence, and it is certainly not so firmly bound that even the portion of breast tissue which is not actively in contact is held taut and rigid. There should merely be enough compression to eliminate likelihood of the bosom either sliding down behind its retaining wall, or of popping or creeping up from behind it (regardless of how long the corset is worn, or however active you are directed to be while wearing it). Pin the muslin to fit with the proper compression. To avoid altering the armhole, now that you've got it right, taking in at the bust line is done at center back and center front, and any further fitting at the waist is done at center back and side seams. You may need to re-pin the shoulder straps, particularly if you are large-busted.

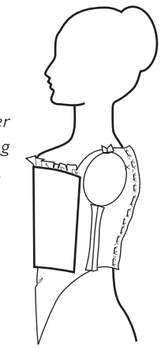


Figure 4:12 - Find proper bosom compression, using a piece of thin cardboard.

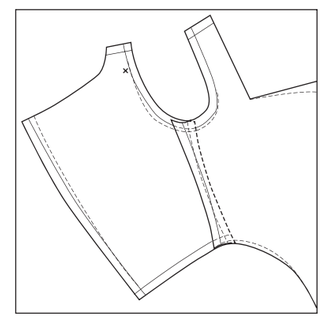


Figure 4:13 - Join pattern pieces, trace onto paper. Transfer all marks.

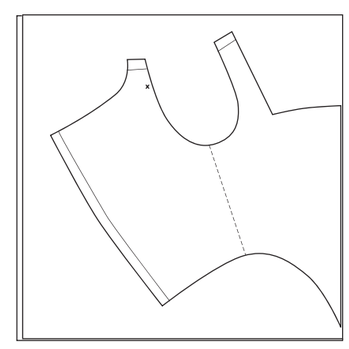


Figure 4:14 - Trace & transfer onto doubled paper for paper pattern. Transfer marks.

You can also check the neckline. Slide your piece of cardboard down your torso, maintaining the proper compression, until the top edge reaches a point where it is in its most becoming relationship to the bosom, not standing up in a ridge above it and not allowing the bosom to overhang. Mark the muslin along the top line of the cardboard. Keep in mind that if your muslin is *much* higher than the line you are drawing, the material may well be restraining the bosom already and the line you've drawn may be too low. If the neck of the muslin is already too low, figure out how much higher it needs to be and mark how much it needs to be raised on the muslin.

Once you have your muslin fitted snugly and smoothly, with the proper bust compression, and have checked to make sure that all new lines are marked, or otherwise indicated (you may want to re-mark them all now in a different color to avoid confusion), take the muslin off and disassemble it. The front piece should be either cut down the center line or folded in half. Transfer all the new markings to the paper pattern pieces.

You are now ready to start constructing a working pattern. Take your altered pattern pieces, front and back, with all the new markings transferred from the muslin, and lay them out on another piece of paper. Match the side seam lines of the front and back pieces and pin them down. It helps if you have a cutting board and some push pins. Trace carefully around the outside edge of the whole pattern, making sure to transfer (new) seam lines, shoulder points, reference notches and the side seam line. [*Figure 4:13*] Don't forget that there are still seam allowances on the pattern; you only cut those off of the muslin. Smooth out the armhole and waistline curves where the two pieces meet. Trim the seam allowances from the back and front neckline and armhole (if you are using a new neckline or armhole that you've just marked, trim along that line). Do not trim at center front or waist where there are no allowances, or at center back or shoulders where you still need them.

Now you fit the pattern again. Put this new paper pattern on a piece of folded, *heavy* paper with the center front line on the fold. Pin or tape down

and transfer markings. Trace around the edges again. [*Figure 4:14*] Be precise in all of this. After all, none of this rigmarole is beyond a normal person's capacity and slipshod work deserves the result it will get. When this second tracing is cut out and unfolded you should have what appears to be a complete paper pattern of your corset.

This next fitting is for the sake of precision and testing. The paper will not stretch, as the muslin may have. In fact, the paper corset is a dry run for the finished product since what you feel is pretty much what you'll get. This is a necessary confirmation of the results of your first fittings. While you or your corset stand-in does the honors with the piece of cardboard, have your fitter pin you into this paper mock-up. [*Figure 4:15*] Unless you are in need of very little compression, you will find that you must maintain compression with the piece of cardboard at all times, since, if you relax, the pins in the back will rip through the paper. Do the armholes bind? Does the waist edge dig into your hips when you lean slightly sideways? Does the waist edge dig into the back of your waist or your hipbones when you walk? Slide a yardstick down the front of the corset and — *carefully!* — sit down in it. Does the point try to dig into your belly? Is it prodding your pubic bone? Does the back of the waist bite? Is the mark for the hollow at the back of the shoulder still in the right place? Trim all edges as needed. [*Figure 4:16*] Check to be sure that any markings which have been trimmed away are re-marked on the remaining corset. Now, check the neckline by sliding the cardboard to the edge of the paper. Does it stand up in a ridge? Does your bosom overhang? If the first, slide the cardboard down to the point of contact and re-mark. If the second, slide the cardboard up until the bosom is contained and record how much higher the neckline must be. If you are planning to use the curved neckline mentioned earlier, the high center of the curve will slope down slightly at the corners. When you have finished trimming and assessing, take the pattern off, refold it on the center front line and match the trimmed areas for symmetry. (This is standard for most people. If, however, you have one hip or shoulder significantly higher than the other, you will want to leave things as they are. If you have this problem, you probably already know about it, and if you sew, you are probably familiar with having to deal with it.) Make sure your curves are smooth. [*Figure 4:17*] If you need to extend the corset at any point, go back a step and make a new paper mock up. To do this, you cut the paper corset you have just been using in half along the center fold and trace it onto a new folded piece of heavy paper, extending where necessary and transferring all markings. If you wish to use the curved neckline, work out the curve you want and trim. (Trim the cardboard to match.) The down curve of the corners of the neckline must not be excessive — ½″ to ¾″ ought to be quite sufficient.

Put the new paper corset on, or put the original one back on, and re-check everything. Move your arms, bend, make certain that no edges are binding you at armhole or waist. The stiff paper edges don't lie, particularly since you are wearing the same undergarment(s) which you will be wearing under the corset. Don't ignore the edges. If something binds now, it will bind worse in the finished garment. Check the neckline if you have had to make changes or even if you haven't. Bounce up and down a bit; is all secure? If you are using the curved neckline, does the curve seriously affect support or stability? If it does, correct it. Repeat these last three steps as often as is necessary, until you have something which satisfies you. I warned you that this was going to take time.

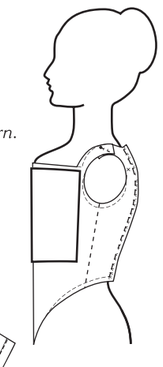


Figure 4:15 - Fit paper pattern.

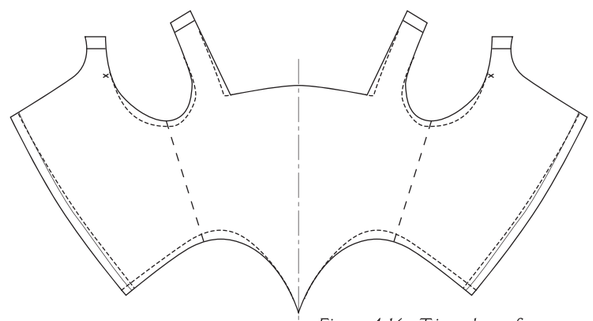


Figure 4:16 - Trim edges of paper pattern.

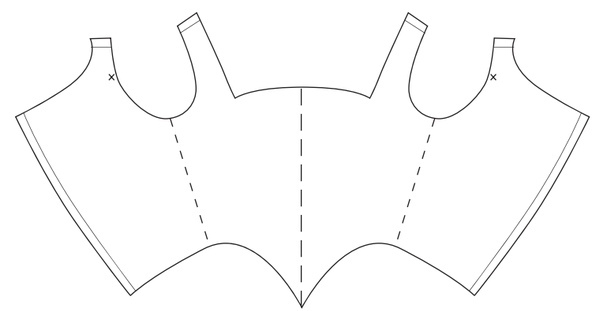


Figure 4:17 - Smooth curves & make symmetrical.

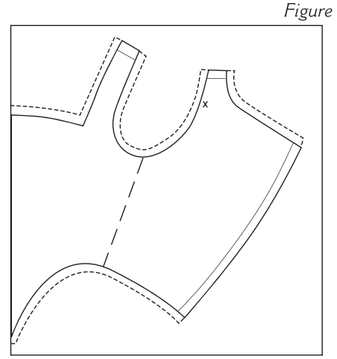


Figure 4:18 - Cut mock-up in half. Trace onto new paper. Transfer all markings. Add seam allowance. Cut out finished pattern.

When you have a paper corset which is satisfactory in all respects, take it off, smooth out the curves once more if necessary (if they wander at all, it's necessary). Fold it on its center line and transfer it and all its markings *painstakingly* to a single layer of paper or pattern tissue. (If you are allowing for an asymmetrical shape you will have to transfer to the final paper or pattern tissue without folding it in half. Sorry.) Before cutting it out, add ½″ to ⅝″ seam allowance at neckline, armhole and waist. [*Figure 4:18*] Then cut it out. Your corset pattern is made. Now you must establish your boning pattern.

This is a specialized enough process to merit its own chapter. Turn to the next chapter, entitled "Oh Bones, Them Bones," for further guidance. The rest of this chapter will concern itself with the actual construction of the garment. (If I may repeat myself, *do* read through Chapter 6 before actually continuing!)

YOU WILL NOW begin the actual construction of your final corset. Try to find a material with a good stable weave and as little bias stretching as possible. Measure the *width* of your corset pattern from center front line to the center back of the neckline. If the width is 22″ or less, which, if you are average size or smaller, it probably will be, you may use 45″ material without compunction. If you are larger and your pattern is wider than this, you will either have to find wider material or cut your corset across the grain of the fabric. The average person will need 1½ to 2 yards of material for her corset (1 to 1½ yards for strapless), thread, a package of ⅝″ seam binding in matching or contrasting color, (the fold-over variety, not hem tape), heavy duty grommets and whatever tools are necessary to apply them. You may also need adhesive tape (surgical variety) and/or epoxy, and you will certainly need as much of whatever kind(s) of boning you are going to use and, in some cases, something to cut it with. You will also need lacing.

Ready now? All right, since this is also a process with a lot of small steps, I am going to give you a numbered list of them in brief form.

1. Wash the fabric and dry it. This will take care of any shrinkage.
2. Iron the fabric.
3. Fold the fabric in half lengthwise, unless you are having to work across the grain; in that case, fold the fabric in half widthwise. (Unless you are asymmetrical, of course. In this case you lay the material out flat.)

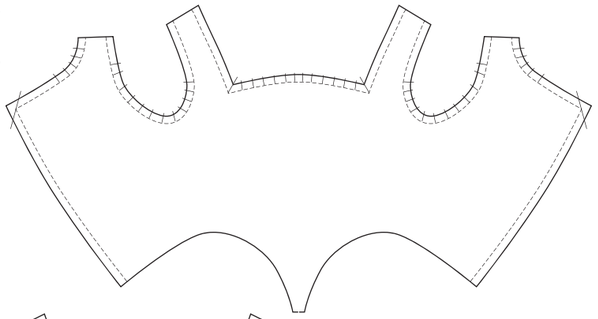


Figure 4:19 - Sew two layers together. Clip corners & curves to turn.

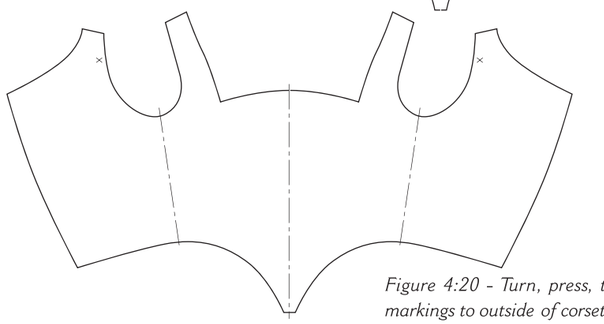


Figure 4:20 - Turn, press, transfer markings to outside of corset.

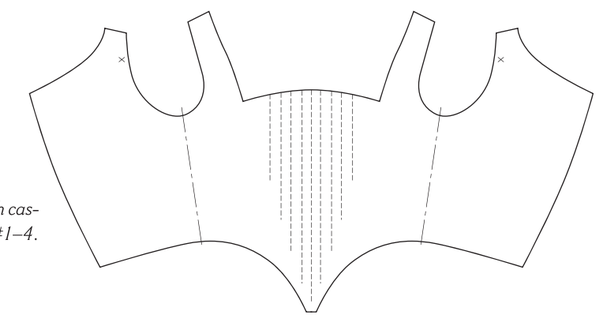


Figure 4:21 - Stitch casings for bones #1–4. Insert bones.

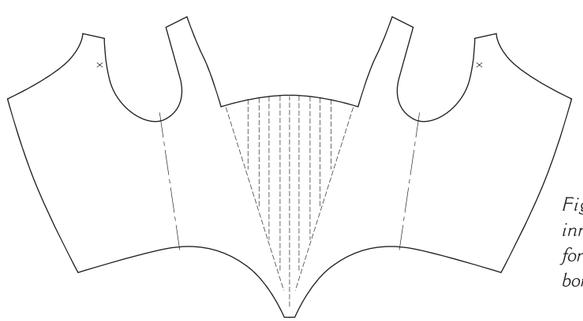


Figure 4:22 - Stitch inmost line of casing for bones #5 to anchor bones #2–4 in place.

4. Place your pattern on the fabric with the center front line on the fold and cut it out. You now have a full corset piece.
5. Repeat step 4 and cut out a second piece. You now have two full corset pieces.
6. Put your two corset pieces, right sides together, and sew along all seam lines *except* the tops of the shoulder straps and the bottom edge.
7. Clip corners, curves [*Figure 4:19*], turn right side out, and press.
8. Transfer the center front line, the marking for the hollow at the back of the shoulder, the side "seam" line and the bottom seam line (not shown) from your paper pattern to your fabric, using chalk, pencil, carbon, felt tip pen or whatever you prefer. [*Figure 4:20*]
9. Transfer boning pattern from paper pattern to fabric, or work out boning pattern directly on fabric now. See Chapter "Oh Bones, Them Bones" for instructions. For convenience the "standard" boning pattern is shown here for instructional purposes.
10. If you are not using commercial bones which are already the proper length, cut your boning to fit. See notes on cutting boning. Mark which bone is which and if necessary wrap cut ends in adhesive or duct tape or treat with epoxy. (Let epoxy dry and "cure" overnight.)
11. Sew casings for bones #1–4 (both sides) and insert bones #1–4 into their casings. [*Figure 4:21*] If you are using hooping, or any other curved material, place them so the curve of the wire bows away from your body.
12. Carefully stitch the innermost line for the casing of bone #5 along the bottoms of bones #1–4. It will be tricky, so go slowly, use a zipper foot. This will anchor bones #1–4 in place. Do it for both sides. [*Figure 4:22*]
13. Sew casings for all of the remaining bones. Insert all bones in their proper casings. [*Figure 4:23*] Obviously, if you wish you can cut bones as you need them rather than all at once. But by now all bones ought to be in place. Insert hooping bones so that the curve bows away from the body. The pull of the lacing will straighten the material out later.
14. Now, putting the practice of step 12 to good use, stitch the bottom (waist) seam line in exactly the same manner, carefully, with a zipper foot. Do not bother with trying to turn the raw edges inside the seam. Clip curves. [*Figure 4:24*]
15. Working from the inside, stitch a similar line along the top of bones #5–9, bone #12, and any other bone which is not braced at both ends against the edge of the corset or another bone. (As are bones #1–4) [*Figure 4:25*]
16. Take ⅝″ seam binding and bind the waist seam allowance about ¼″ below the seam line. [*Figure 4:26*] Turn seam allowance and binding to the inside of the corset and whip down. [*Figure 4:27*] This will give you a tidily finished edge and a little

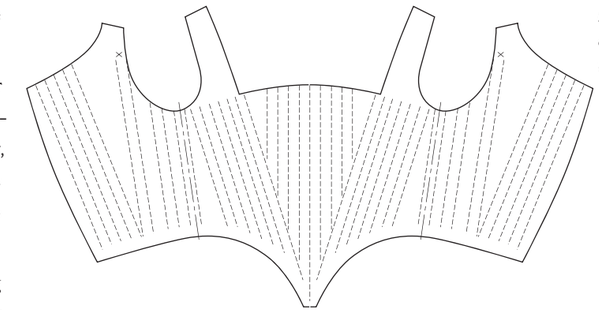


Figure 4:23 - Stitch casings for bones #5–15. Insert bones.

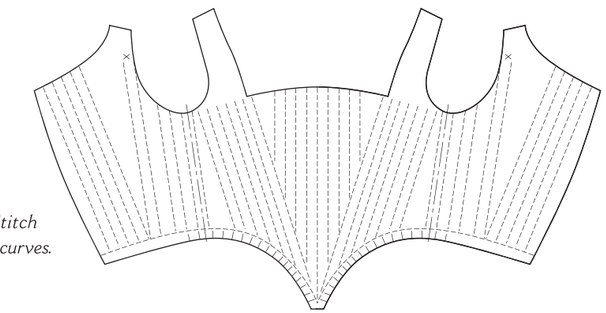


Figure 4:24 - Stitch waist seam, clip curves.

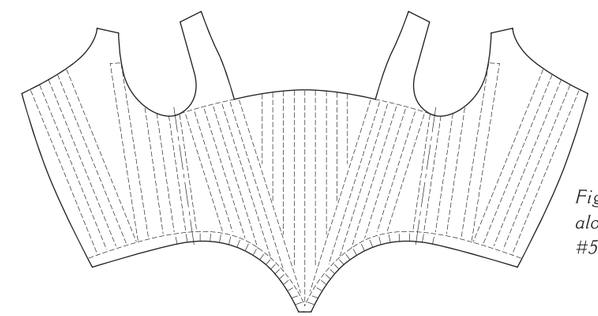


Figure 4:25 - Stitch along tops of casings #5–9 and #12.

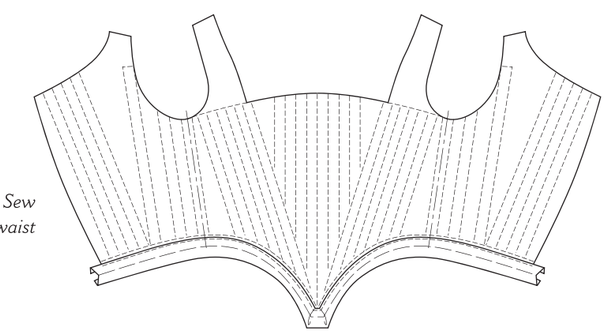


Figure 4:26 - Sew seam binding to waist seam allowance.

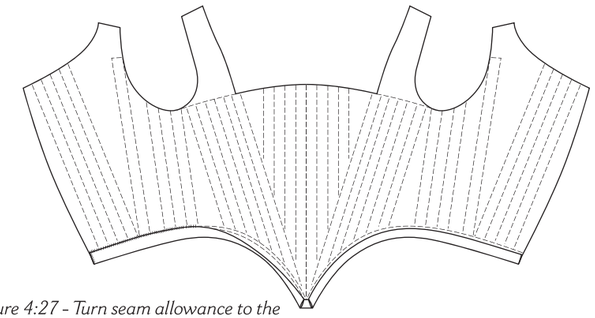


Figure 4:27 - Turn seam allowance to the inside of garment and whip in place.

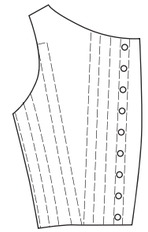


Figure 4:28 - Mark & install grommets.

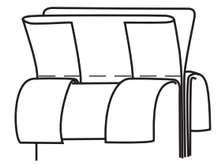


Figure 4:29 - Stitch right sides of strap together at seam line.

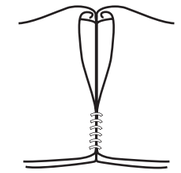


Figure 4:30 - Turn all raw edges inside. Whip lining edges together.

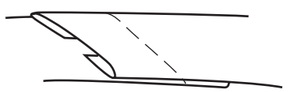


Figure 4:31 - Overlap straps. Stitch on seam line.

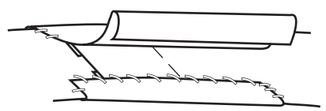


Figure 4:32 - Cover join with ribbon or trim. Whip in place.

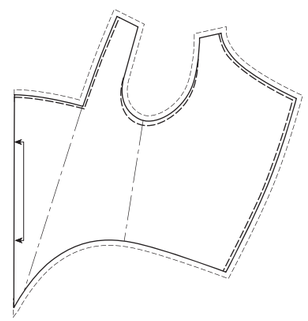


Figure 4:33 - Finished bodice pattern.

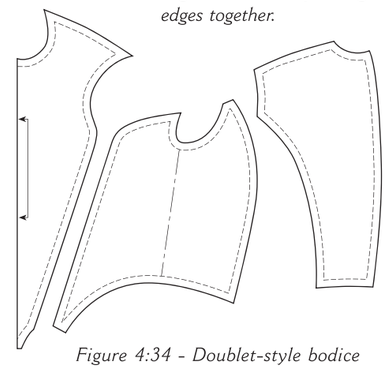


Figure 4:34 - Doublet-style bodice pattern for lady with large bust.

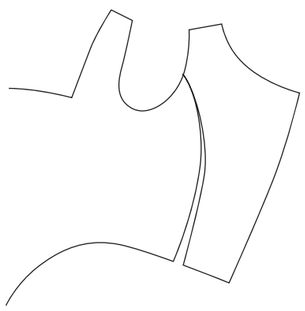


Figure 4:36 - Cut on line.

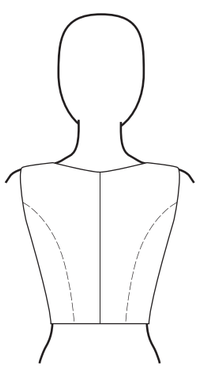


Figure 4:35 - Mark orientation of curved back seam.

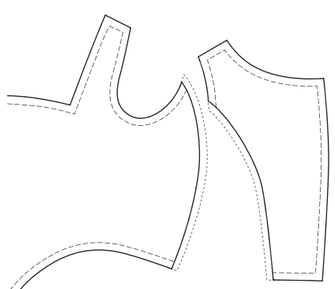


Figure 4:37 - Add seam allowance.

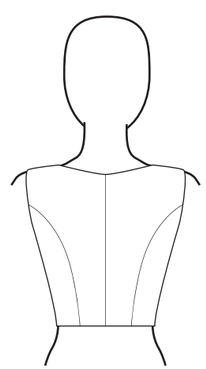


Figure 4:38 - Check new seam orientation.

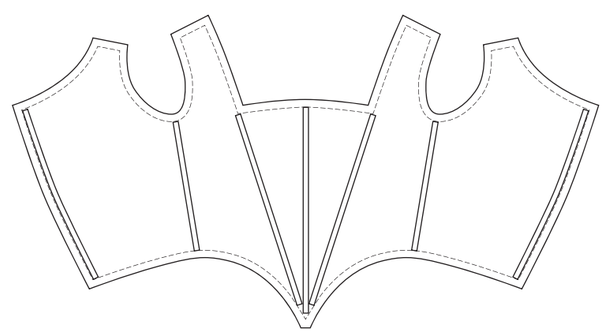


Figure 4:39 - Envelopes for bodice boning.

extra padding without more bother than is reasonable.

17. In the space between bones #14 and #15 mark positions for, and apply grommets. [*Figure 4:28*] Make a mark about ½″ from the top and another about ¾″ from the bottom. Then mark points about 1½″ apart between the two. Do this on each side. Then apply grommets where you have placed the mark. Position them as close to bone #15 as you can to provide maximum support. You should use the large kind of grommet that comes in two pieces rather than the lightweight little "eyelets" that you apply with a sort of pliers. The small ones pull out from cloth very easily and the little raw edges snag things like fabric or even skin.
18. Join the shoulder straps. You may either use the classic method of shoulder strap joining, which is machine stitching the outside pieces together, [*Figure 4:29*] turning all raw edges inside, and whipping them down [*Figure 4:30*] or by simply overlapping the two pieces at the seam line, stitching them down [*Figure 4:31*] and whipping a piece of ribbon all around to mask the raw edges. [*Figure 4:32*]

You have now got a finished "16th century" corset. That wasn't nearly as traumatic as you expected, now, was it?

Don't throw away your corset pattern just yet, however. You aren't quite finished with it. Take the corset pattern and transfer the center line of bone #5 to it if you haven't already. Now trace it onto a fresh piece of pattern tissue adding ¼″ at neckline and back seam, and adding as much as necessary to the armhole to change it from essentially a jumper armhole back to a bodice armhole. Adjust the seam allowances accordingly. Transfer the side "seam" line and the #5 bone's center line to the new piece. [Figure 4:33] This may be used as your standard bodice pattern, or you may use this as a pattern for your first muslin toward your final bodice, depending on the designer's intentions for the costume.

Drafting the "doublet" bodice of the Elizabethan period may offer a certain degree of intractability, which will increase in direct proportion to the bust size of the lady who gets to wear it. The reason for this is that the angle between the shoulder and the "apex" of the bosom is now very sharp and "peaks" on a level with the armhole. This is a configuration that a standard pattern company has never had to contend with. (I am speaking of the large-busted lady who has made her corset with the proper compression. A lady who has had to adopt the "barely there" fit will be about as low-busted as typical.) I append a diagram of the pattern which one such lady ended up with as a possible guide. [Figure 4:34]

A curved side back seam will pose little difficulty. Simply mark the orientation you want on the muslin [Figure 4:35], cut it apart at that point [Figure 4:36], cut out two new pattern pieces — adding seam allowances — [Figure 4:37] and sew them back together again. Then put it on and check to see if it has behaved properly. [Figure 4:38] Trim and fit until you are satisfied. Then trace a

new pattern from the successful muslin. Incidentally, people who cut the center front section separately, as the lady whose pattern I used as an example above did, will have to contend with a very bulky area at the waist point, due to all those seam allowances coming together in one place.

It is a good idea to make the bodice from three layers of fabric. The main costume fabric, a lightweight lining, and an interfacing. The interfacing can be muslin, or, if more firmness is needed, of the same weight fabric as the corset. On the inner side of the interfacing, sew tubes of ⅝″ seam binding or hem tape down the center front, the #5 bone lines, the side "seam" lines and the center back edges. [*Figure 4:39*] Into these tubes you slide featherboning. This further stiffening tends to insure that the bodice will not rumple or slide up over the corset. The featherboning at the back opening helps keep your hooks and eyes or lacings from crumpling up. If your bodice is intended to open in the front, you will put featherboning at each front edge and may be able to omit the center back bones entirely. If you intend to use a separate bodice and skirt, a coat hook at the center back waist with the eye at the center back of the skirt will help keep you from coming apart at the middle or from having your skirt slide about and get off-center. Making a triangular "pocket" inside the bodice for the corset's waist point will anchor the front [*Figure 4:40*]. Some hooks or snaps along the inside of the neckline's edge, with the eyes or backs of the snaps on the corset, will help keep

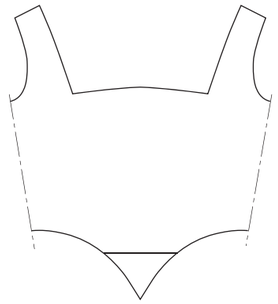


Figure 4:40 - "Pocket" for busk point on inside of bodice.

the two together if you are going to be flailing about a lot. If you are going to be wearing a round-waisted gown with a split skirt over your pointed corset, fastening the waistband of the decorative kirtle to the inside of the bodice with yet another coat hook and eye, will keep the kirtle from sliding down your front and showing a gap (which is unlikely, but possible). Your greatest danger is of ruining material by making a costume up from a corset pattern without altering the armhole. Using the larger armhole of a corset pattern for a gown means that there will not be enough material across the back or under the arm to allow for movement with a fitted sleeve. A full, ballooning sleeve may perhaps work, but a close fitting bell or straight sleeve will rip out in no time. Even a straight sleeve with a shoulder puff will not last long. Take notice, and don't chance it.

A note on lacings. If you have access to a friend, husband or dresser to lace you into your corset, you can use short laces or not, as you wish, as long as they cover the whole job and tie at the end with enough surplus to assure that you will be able to get them untied instead of having the ends lost in a knot that neither you or the person who tied it can unravel. You can also, if you wish, lace your corset bottom to top. But, if you are on your own, you will be lacing your corset top to bottom, and you will be using a lace that is probably at least three times as long as is necessary to merely hold it closed. The reason for these excessively long laces is that you will be putting it on while it is already partially laced. The method is clumsy, so don't be surprised if you feel an utter klutz trying to wriggle into it, but it will look just fine once you tighten the laces.

It works like this:

First, you start lacing it, top to bottom, leaving the back open wide enough for you to get your head, arms, and shoulders through the corset while the laces are in place. I found that I tend to need an opening about eight to ten inches wide to manage. You may find that you are not able to lace all the way to the bottom. Don't worry about it, just lace as far down as you can. Now, pull it on over your head.This is the clumsy part. When you've gotten into the corset, reach behind yourself and find the ends of the corset laces. Make sure that they have not gotten tangled up in the rest of the lacing (they probably will have), and if they have, untangle them. A mirror is a big help. Straighten your shift if you are wearing one, pull the sleeves through the armholes so they aren't bunching up inside, do whatever preliminary "meat packing" is necessary, etc. Now take the ends of your corset lacing and start to draw up the slack. Pull *down* on the lacing, not out from your back. [*Figure 4:41*] Lace up any remaining holes as you go, and pause from time to time to work the fullness of excess lacing down from the top of the corset to where you can get at it. Pause to arrange yourself in the corset, too, as it tightens. Resist any temptation you may have to leave it open wider at the top for "room." Remember, any play in the lacing that you leave is going to migrate to the bottom as time goes on and you will only have to stop later and readjust it. The corset was designed to close in the back, you might as well take care of that now. When the corset is closed, tie the lacing at the bottom and stow the excess laces in whatever manner seems good to you. I always tied the lacing in a single knot in back, then brought the lacing ends around to the front and tied them again in a firmer knot where I could get at it. It generally slipped slightly during wear, but not too much. (I also generally had it on for 14 to 18 hours at a stretch.)

Figure 4:41 - Draw lacings down, not out.

One advantage of lacing from top to bottom is that tightening or loosening the corset is much easier. This lacing direction is also recommended for the lady who is large-busted, since when using this method it is easier to pack more of herself inside the corset as it tightens up, which is an aid to stability and, unless the corset has been made too tight, discourages overhang. Lacing from bottom to top may be helpful for the lady who is small-busted but doesn't want to look it for with that method, the bosom is the last area to be settled. Later adjustments to the lacing will be more difficult in this case, however, because any looseness will gravitate to the bottom of the corset, away from the tied ends.

Or, despite the howls which this statement will provoke from authenticity diehards, since the corset is designed to close in the back, anyway, you could put a heavy-duty separating zipper in it. To do so, however, will mean that in an emergency the corset will not be usable by a person of slightly larger size (or the same person with any significant gain of weight) the way a laced corset might be. Nor will it be suitable for public viewing, and it will be awkward to get the zipper open or closed unless you either have a dresser, are *very* flexible, or you add a pull cord to the zipper tab so you can get hold of it. Lacing, by the way, can be purchased by the yard at some surgical supply, shoe repair supply or costuming companies. I would recommend that you do so, ribbon or cord is simply *not* as sturdy or reliable. I fake the aiglets by wrapping the cut ends in thread and dipping them in clear nail polish a few times, letting it dry between each dipping. The little tufted ends are trimmed off after the first or second dipping [*Figure 4:42*]. Then I dip them a couple more times and I try to be careful never to let the ends get wet thereafter. If you have a dresser to take care of lacing you up, long shoelaces will be suitable. Using two shorter ones tied top and bottom will work if long ones are not available.

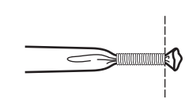


Figure 4:42- End of surgical lacing, wrapped in thread, dipped in lacquer and trimmed when dry. Cut at edge of thread wrapped portion, not inside of it. Re-dip.

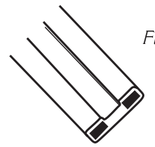


Figure 5:1 - Hooping.

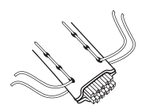


Figure 5:2 - Light Featherboning.

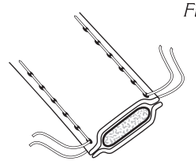


Figure 5:3 - Composition hooping.

STIFFENING HAS ALWAYS been a problem. Particularly back in the days of the first enthusiasm, when most of us were among the ranks of poverty stricken college students, or the underemployed, with intermittent or scarcely adequate incomes. Most of us also were unaware of what materials were available and/or suitable. Various things which have been used have been: pelon, buckram, coat hanger wire, hooping, feather boning — light and heavy, braided steel bones from commercial corsets, flat steel bones from commercial corsets (these used to be found at notions counters, or were cannibalized from corsets found in second hand and thrift shops), wood strips, aluminum strips, strapping tape, brass strips, and I don't doubt many other even odder items. My own adaptation made the garment of leather.

Taken more or less one by one, this conglomeration rates somewhat as follows:

1. Pelon or other interfacing: Nice for giving some stability to the bodice of the gown, but useless for shaping the human body; much too lightweight, lacking in durability, and tends to soften when washed.
2. Buckram: Useful for stiffening a gown which is not going to be put under much stress in the first place, but too fragile for anything which will receive stress, and capable of causing severe discomfort or genuine damage to the skin. (There is a rather gruesome S.C.A. story of a lady who interlined a bodice with buckram, trimmed it out of the seam allowances, put some masking tape over the edge and sashayed off to a revel. The buckram drew blood before the end of the evening. I would advise that this be kept for use in headdresses and some safer, more comfortable, more efficient material be used for corsetry.)
3. Coat hanger — or other round wire. The lady using it stated that she *hadn't* anything else. Upon the whole I would suspect that anything else might have been preferable. A round wire, as well as being liable to go into kinks and other distortions not easily eradicated, would not be very comfortable or efficient. Reshaping the human body is not a function for which it is designed. Flat wire, on the other hand, might work. You need to treat the ends with tape or epoxy, be careful of breakage, and be sure you use enough of it to ensure the line. This still may not be a sufficient method for the heavy figure.
4. Hooping [*Figure 5:1*]; "Hooping" is a specialized form of wire. It is approximately ½ inch wide and is composed of two strips of spring steel enclosed in a buckram-like casing. (Do *not* allow a salesperson to sell you a round wire for making corsets or hoops. It will not work.) Hooping used to be sold in 12-yard rolls for about $5.00 (those were the days!). Where it was sold by the yard it generally added up to being much more expensive. Try dance supply shops and yardage companies that are frequently used by studios and theatrical companies. Their yardage may be (and frequently is) exorbitant, but the hooping and some other such items are sometimes a bargain. If you do not see it on display (and you probably won't) you will need to find a salesperson who knows what is going on and *ask* for hooping, since it may not be kept on the open shelves. Hooping must be cut with heavy wire cutters. Jewelers' or electricians' diagonals are not strong enough. It is excellent for corsets as well as farthingales. For this reason it was the most commonly used boning material until comparatively recently.
5. Feather boning - Light [*Figure 5:2*]: probably not sufficient to the task. I suppose it might be tried, but don't be too disappointed if it doesn't hold up. Heavy [*Figure 5:3*]: A composition hooping and, while easier to cut, *seems* to be as usable as metal hooping, if it can be found. I have not seen it for years. When I did see it, it was about a half inch wide and enclosed in black or white cotton casing which was not to be removed. It was made of some sort of pasty material with plastic fibers running through it.

Good luck finding it. Note: there is also a medium weight feather boning which probably is also not heavy enough for hoops or the front panel of a corset but which may be fit for side or back bones or boning in the outer gown.

6. Coiled steel bones: these would work very well for sides and back, but are too flexible for the front panel. They are good for keeping the material in the gown smooth, though. This is the style of boning used in commercial merry widows and other contemporary corsetry.
7. Flat steel bones; These will work in the front panel. They are less flexible than their coiled counterparts. They are also suitable for sides and back. These bones come in two widths, the narrower are about ¼″ wide, the wider about ½″. These are usually given a thin covering of a white, epoxylike substance to discourage rust. You will want to use the wider sort for boning the front of the corset. You *may* decide to substitute a heavier busk at center front. This is the other chief type of boning used in commercial corsetry. It will be used as the standard example in this chapter's instructions.
8. Wood slats; Well, if you believe the reports of wooden corsets and are overwhelmed by a fever of historical accuracy, I suppose this is all right. It worked well enough in what we called the "orange-crate" corset. (So called because it *was* made with slats from a fruit crate.) finding wood slats of the proper grain and thickness may take a good deal more effort than simply buying metal boning to use, however. The slats which were used in the "orange-crate" corset were about ⅛″ to 5/32″ thick and about 1¾″ wide, with the wood grain running lengthwise. The slats were also slightly bowed in cross section [*Figure 5:4*], although I do not suppose this is necessary. (The slats were placed in the corset so that this curve bowed outwards, presenting the smoothest line, as shown in [*Figure 5:5*]. It will be necessary to sew the wood slats into the corset with snugly fitting casings since the more room they have to move around, the more likelihood there is for cracking or splintering. Sand them carefully and smooth all edges before using. You will also need to heavily pad the ends of the slats.

Figure 5:4 - Wood slat from the orange-crate corset.

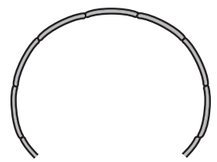


Figure 5:5 - The orange-crate corset in cross-section.

9. Aluminum strips; I should think that these would be a little thick for comfortable use. There are certainly better materials. I also suspect that one of the main reasons for their use was their immunity to rust. Again, there are better solutions. Which is not to say that I disapprove of aluminum in corsets — it makes great busks. But I'm unconvinced that it makes suitable boning.
10. Steel strapping tape; This entry is probably only of historical note, for I gather that a plastic material has crowded it out of the market. But this was the stuff which used to be used to secure large boxes to pallets for shipping. It came highly recommended by people who had used it. I never did myself, so the information necessarily is secondhand (as is the information on nearly all of the above) but I can imagine that it had definite advantages in price (some warehouses or shops in malls would let people take the used pieces from received deliveries — which could be fairly lengthy — for free), availability and, I was *told*, ease in cutting. Due to the sharpness of its edges, it was mandatory that the ends and *all* edges be well filed down to avoid having the bones eat through the casing. The ends needed to be taped or epoxied as well. (Note: the modern, plastic version of this material is *not* suitable for our uses.)
11. Brass strips; These are available at model train/plane stores and according to their discoverer may be found cut to size. I have never found it in pieces longer than 12 inches, however. This is of a good firmness and flatness — comparable to flat steel bones, and immune to rust. It was also reputed to be inexpensive, but that information is from 20 years ago. I would rather not count on that being the case today. Nevertheless, since flat steel bones were not always easy to find, and hobby shops tended to abound (in urban and suburban areas, at least), this used to be a good thing to keep in mind.
12. Recent developments: I will admit to having been slow to examine and reevaluate the polyester boning materials which have come onto the market in the last decade or so. Most of these are indistinguishable from the light feather boning with which I was familiar prior to their appearance. Much the same can be said for this version of the material as for its predecessor. It is suitable for stabilizing the outer gown and may also be suitable for the bones in the side or back of the corset, but it may be a bit lightweight for the central front panel. There is also a medium weight version, very nicely thin and flat (and riddled with holes) which comes without an outer casing. This version may actually be firm enough to use for corsetry, although I suspect that if it is used for the center front panel, the addition of a rigid center busk would be necessary to keep the point from curling up. I would not try to use this material for a farthingale, however.
13. Leather; There is a great deal to be said in favor of making a corset of leather, and I intend to say it, presently. However, there are also some fairly definite drawbacks. For one thing, this is *not* an economical method. I will discuss my experiences in the field at greater length in the next chapter which deals with variations.

The diagram at right [*Figure 5:6*] shows a finished corset pattern, like the one described in the preceding chapter, with the typical boning pattern that resulted from using cut hooping or strapping tape, since these were the materials most frequently used at the time the process was developed. As you can see, the boning does not extend into the shoulder strap area.

Some of the bones are more essential than others. By this, I mean that the extremely slender *may* be able to get by with only those bones necessary to support the line and to make the corset stable. These essential bones are those forming the front panel (#1–5), and the center back bones which support the grommets (#14 and #15). However, the outside bones of the side front segment (#6–9), the bone at the sideline and of the side back (#10 and #12) do add considerably to the success of the fit, and at least some of these should be retained. Ladies with average figures and heavier will be well advised to add bones in all of these areas.

It can also be seen, when comparing the recommended boning pattern to that taken from an early 17th corset [*Plate E–3*], that we are adopting a bit of 18th century technology. The bones of the side front segment are placed at an angle rather than straight up-and-down. This will emphasize the angled line from the corner of the neckline to the waist point. It will also tend to pull in toward the ribcage slightly — only *very* slightly — and help to make the waist look a *little* less thick and clumsy than it would otherwise. Modern aesthetics will no doubt approve of this result.

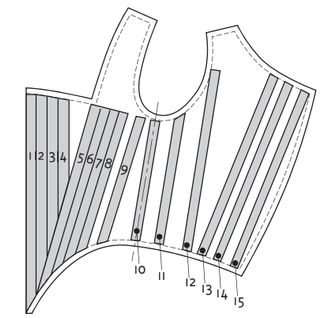


Figure 5:6 - Typical boning pattern.

Decide what type of boning material you intend to use, and figure out the width of the casings which you will need to hold these bones securely in place. Bones should fit snugly in their casings and not shift about. Although the front panel area of the corset — that area covered by bones #1–5 — will need to be stiffened with fairly heavy-duty bones, and the side front area (#6–9) probably ought to be, the side and side back bones are mainly for stabilizing the fabric and narrower bones may be used in these areas. For the lady whose figure is firm, these bones may be of a lighter material than those in the front panel. For that matter, even a lady whose figure is not firm may be more comfortable in a corset with a back and sides that use a lot of medium feather boning, than one that

has only a moderate amount of heavy steel. The lighter boning is also more suitable for use in a corset with waist tabs, which are a definite improvement in comfort. Heavy, stiff materials such as hooping are not suitable for waist tabs since the curve at the waist is too abrupt for them, and there is some danger of breakage (and injury!). Commercial steel bones are designed for this sort of use. The center back bones of the corset (#14 and #15) do have to be of some material stronger than feather boning since they support the lacings, and therefore the stress from the whole garment. Commercial corset bones of either type are usable, but the flat steel type (wide *or* narrow) are much better.

Since commercial steel bones have become far more readily available than they were some 30 years ago, and are specifically designed for the purpose of supporting corsets, the diagrams for drafting out a typical boning pattern have been redrawn to show the basic Renfaire corset's boning pattern as it might be produced using the wider style of flat steel bone throughout. The narrow style of flat steel boning, or the coiled steel boning might reasonably have been used for the sides and back instead. In fact, if you decide to go ahead and add waist tabs (as described in the following chapter) the use of the narrower bones, or the coiled steel bones is strongly recommended.

As a general guideline, the center panel is a triangular piece covering the area within the three points at waist center front and the corners of the neckline. [*Figure 5:7*] It raises and supports the bosom. The side front area sits parallel to the slanted sides of the center triangle and covers the area from the corner of the neckline to that point at the side of the chest where normally the upper outside edge of your bra cup or underwire ends. [*Figure 5:8*] The boning of this segment of the corset supports and guides the bosom in the manner of a primitive and less efficient "push-in" pad, guiding the breast tissue towards the center. When a corset is made without straps, this effect is considerably lessened, as I will explain in the section on variations. The side and side back section of the corset extends from the outside line of the side front section to just behind the armhole. [*Figure 5:9*] Bone #12 in the diagram is in line with the side "seam" line rather than the center back line. The boning in this area serves largely to keep the material from sagging or rucking up into horizontal creases, although it does smooth the figure somewhat, particularly the soft area at the back of the arm. In the strapless corset this area has considerable structural importance.

The center back area extends from bone #12 to center back. [*Figure 5:10*] The boning in this area is to smooth the garment over the shoulder blades, to keep the lacings from crumpling up, and to support the grommets. In the strapless corset it also helps keep the garment from collapsing.

You will probably choose to work out your boning pattern on your paper pattern and transfer it to your material later, but if you wish to work out the boning pattern on the material itself, you certainly may.

Whether drafting out your boning pattern on the paper corset pattern, or working directly on the fabric, it is important to remember that what you are working on is only *half* of the corset at a time. Please remember that when I say "Side-front panel," I mean the side front panel of the left side of the corset *and* the side front panel of the right side of the corset, even though the diagram will show only one half of the garment. After you've gone through the business of drafting out the boning pattern once, you will have to turn the corset over and transfer the information onto the other side as well. In the diagrams, I also omit the seam allowances for simplification.

Let me remind the reader that this is intended as *general* instruction. If you have discovered that your figure is significantly asymmetrical, you will be working each side of your boning pattern out individually.

The flat steel bones, which I am using as a standard example, are about ½″ wide, but not particularly thick. For a casing you should probably add no more than a sixteenth of an inch. Other types of boning have different requirements.

To repeat: I am going to be describing this step — drafting the boning pattern — as though all persons using it will be average sized ladies who are using the wide flat steel for all of the bones in their corsets, with very few comments regarding adaptations to other sizes or boning types. Obviously, if you are working at a larger size, you may need to add more bones. If you are working at a much smaller size, you may need to omit some. If you are using a different type of boning, the number of bones will vary as to whether the ones you use are wider or narrower than the wider type of commercial flat steel bones. Use your judgment and common sense. If the example shows an area which is fully supported by bones, you will wish to fully bone the corresponding area of your own corset. If the example shows the corset being "half-boned" in an area, you will probably want to follow suit there as well. This is not holy gospel; just basic instruction to be adapted to individual need.

Okay; we're going to draft a boning pattern. The first step is to check and see how wide a casing we are going to need. For ½″ bones, I am using 9⁄16″ as a basic casing size.

Next, you make sure that your centerline and underarm side "seam" lines are marked. Check that the mark at the hollow at the back of the shoulder is also present. All present and accounted for? Okay, mark the casing for the centermost bone(s), i.e., draw a line parallel with, and 9⁄16″ away from, the center front line, top to bottom. This is the casing for bone #1. (Remember, there are *two* bones #1, one on each side of the center line; this is all going to have to be transferred to the other side later.)

The next step sounds a lot more tricky than it is. Mark a spot one half the width of a casing from the corner of the neckline on the neckline edge toward the center front of the pattern, as shown. Now draw a line from this point to the point where the outermost casing line for the center bone intersects the waist seam line. [*Figure 5:11*] Now draw a line parallel to *this* line and 9⁄16″ to the outside of it This is the casing line for the outside bone of the central panel. Draw another line extending from the corner of the neckline (which slopes down) to blend into the armhole. This will mark the tops of the bones of the side-front panel. I will refer to this as the top boning line. This line should blend smoothly into the armhole.

Having now positioned bone the outside bone of the central panel, we backtrack and draw in the casings for the rest of the vertical bones of the central panel. Draw these lines parallel to the center front line at 9⁄16″ intervals reaching from top (neckline) edge to the inner (uppermost) casing line for the outside bone. [*Figure 5:12*] There will be a small triangular area in the outside corner which has no bones. This

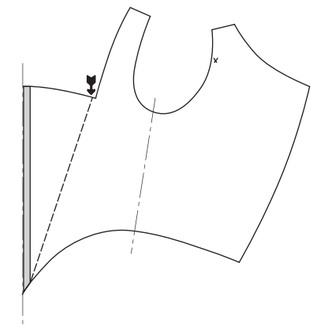


Figure 5:11 - Position for bone #1 marked. Inside casing for bone #5 added.

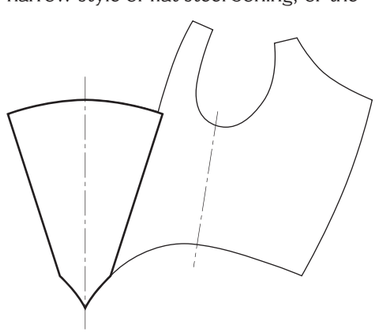


Figure 5:7 - Center front panel.

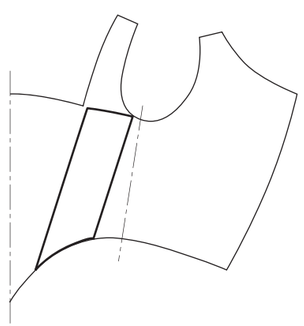


Figure 5:8 - Side front section.

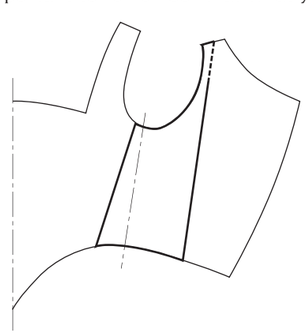


Figure 5:9 - Side and side back section.

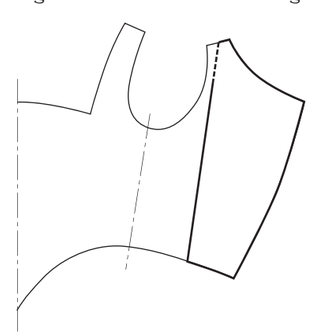


Figure 5:10 - Center back section.

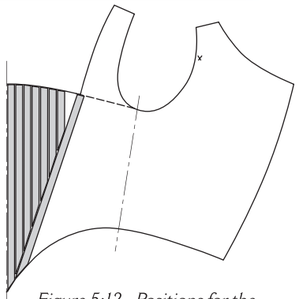


Figure 5:12 - Positions for the bones of central front panel marked.

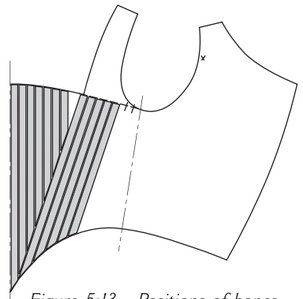


Figure 5:13 - Positions of bones for solid section of side front panel marked. Position of top of outermost bone of section marked.

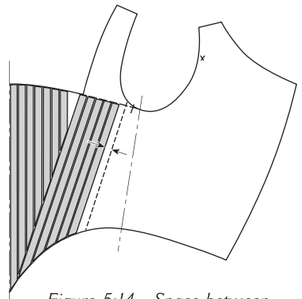


Figure 5:14 - Space between fully boned area and half-boned area marked.

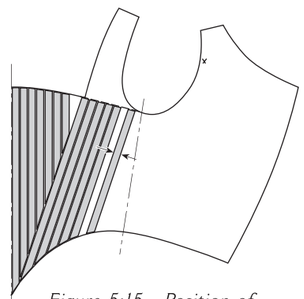


Figure 5:15 - Position of outermost bone marked.

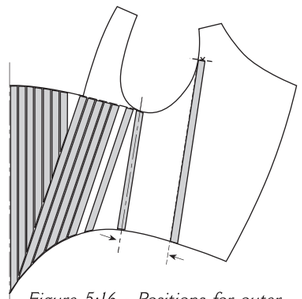


Figure 5:16 - Positions for outer bones of side back panel marked.

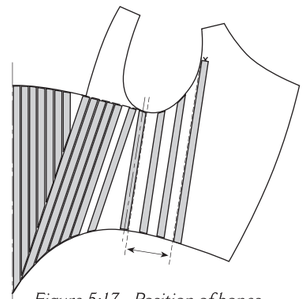


Figure 5:17 - Position of bones of half-boned side back panel marked.

generally does not matter. Commercial bones are available in lengths from 2 to 20 inches, in half inch increments.

Now you draw the casing lines for the bones of the side-front panel. Mark the points for the top of the panel's outside bone where the upper boning line blends into the armhole. Draw lines parallel to, and at 9/16″ intervals from the outermost casing line of the central panel to just about one bone's width from the points marked. [*Figures 5:13*] From this point the sample plan becomes what in the 18th century were called "half-boned stays", i.e., the stays were only about half filled with boning. The outside bone of the side-front panel fits into the area between the armhole and the waist seam, and is positioned just about where the top boning line meets and blends into the armhole line. Do as was done when drafting the casing for the outer bone of the central panel. Find the point at which the top boning line actually comes in contact with the armhole. Now make a point on the top boning-line 9/16″ toward the center front from there. Draw a line which is parallel to the casing lines of the rest of the bones of this section from this point to the waist seam. [*Figures 5:14*] Draw another line parallel to, and 9/16″ from this line. [*Figures 5:15*]

Check the angle of your top boning-line. Is it meeting the armhole too high? If the point of intersection is a sharp angle rather than a smooth tangent, it may very well be doing so. Double check by measuring the distance between where the point that the side "seam" line and the point where the outermost casing line of the side-front panel hit the armhole. If the distance is much more than an inch *and you are average size*, you probably have bone #9 too far forward and the top boning line is too high. Keep the lines in the same orientation (i.e., parallel to the casing lines of the outermost bone of the central panel) and bring the end of the top boning line into a position nearer to the side "seam" line.

Using the side "seam" line as a center-line, draw a 9/16″ casing which covers this position. (Remember that from this point, you may be using narrower bones with narrower casings.)

For plotting out the boning pattern of the side back panel, first draw a line at side back which is parallel to the side "seam" line and which clears the back edge of the armhole. Now draw another line parallel to, and 9/16″ (or whatever) toward the center back from this line. [*Figure 5:16*] These are the casing lines for the outside bone of this section. The top of this casing is a horizontal line at the point where we marked the hollow at the back of the shoulder. Any higher than this point, and the bone wanders into the shoulder strap, which is to be avoided. Now measure the distance between this bone and the bone at the side "seam" line. This area is to be "half-boned". Lay bones out on your pattern at regular intervals until about half of the area is covered. Mark the position of these bones. Keep them parallel with the side seam line. [*Figure 5:17*]

For the bones of the center back section, begin by drawing a line from top to bottom of the center back of the corset (i.e., from the corner where the neck seam joins the back seam to the corner where the waist seam joins the back seam.). This line will not actually coincide with the actual edge of the corset, but this does not matter. Now draw a line parallel with this one and 9/16″ away, forming a casing, and another, parallel line about 3/4″ from this line. This will give space between the two outside bones where the grommets will be installed. Draw another parallel line 9/16″ from this last one to mark another casing. [*Figure 5:18*] The rest of the back panel should also be half-boned. Plot out the positions for the bones of this section as you just did with the bones of the side back section. In this case, the bones are to be parallel with those at the center back opening. [*Figure 5:19*]

Now go back and do the whole thing over again for the other side of the corset. Check the symmetry of both halves (if applicable to your requirements). If you are using commercial steel bones you now measure the length of all the individual casings and make a list of how many bones in each length you are going to need.

A note on cutting boning: (or, no one said that *all* the steps would be easy!) Now that commercial corset boning is available, this particular skill is less in demand. Thank goodness. Cutting hooping requires two things; proper tools and brute strength. Hooping is probably the worst of the possible boning materials to cut, since to get anywhere with it requires heavy wire cutters. Which still do not make the job easy, only possible. Various other materials may require tin snips, metal or jeweler's saws, sewing shears, etc. I will, however, include the notes on this just in case someone gets stuck in the position of having to cut bones from a material which comes in a roll. This is not as simple a process as cutting hoops for farthingales, since for a farthingale, it doesn't matter what shape the cut ends finish up. For a corset, however, the shape of the bone ends do matter.

Due to some gradual loss of length which (somehow) manages to take place in the cutting process, it is not wise to try to mark the lengths of all of the bones before cutting. It is far more reliable to mark and cut each bone individually. To do this, you lay your boning material down on top of the casing (or full size diagram) that it will occupy. Position it with its end 1/4″ from one end of the casing or diagram, mark the other end with a pencil, slanting it according to need, and cut. In order to save yourself the drudgery of squaring off ends after each cut — which is a wretched job even when necessary — you will find that cutting wires top from top, bottom from bottom will, for the most part, work admirably. [*Figure 5:20–5:22*]

When working with material in a roll, you also need to be careful to cut your bones right side out. When you use a boning material, such as hooping, which comes in a roll, your bones will start out with some built-in degree of curvature. It is important that these curved bones be put into the corset so that they all curve in the same direction, namely outwards. [*Figure 5:23*] Try not to be put off by this. Even though the bones of your new corset may begin their lives bowing out like barrel staves, it *does not matter*. The pull of the lacing will straighten them out, and over time they will lose that original curve and become straight, permanently.

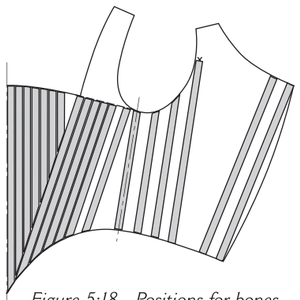


Figure 5:18 - Positions for bones supporting grommets of center back opening marked.

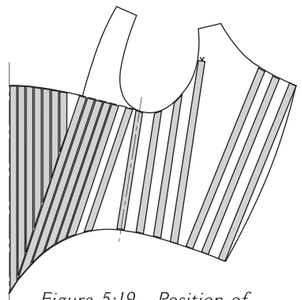


Figure 5:19 - Position of additional bones for center back panel marked.

Remembering to mark which bone is which as one cuts them is the sort of thing which one scarcely needs to be told, but this is also the kind of thing which can be forgotten in the middle of a rush. So just call this a friendly reminder.

Note 2: While it is certainly possible to cut commercial flat steel bones, it is a better idea to buy them the right length in the first place. I do not recommend that you try cutting coiled steel bones; they look as if they would snag on everything, and have a tendency to eat their way through the casings and start coming after you in the form of sharp little steel wires.

Whatever sort of boning you use, and whatever the tools you may use to cut it, if you are using a boning material which must be cut to fit before you can put it into your corset, something will probably have to be done to protect you from the cut ends. I am speaking primarily of bones from hooping or solid metal, although the heavy composition hooping may also require some additional protection. The polyester feather boning materials used in the outer costume, or the side and back of the corset, will probably not present a problem in this regard. The simplest method of dealing with this issue is to wrap the cut ends in adhesive (surgical) tape, or duct tape. For solid metal bones, however, there is another, and rather more efficient way to deal with the problem. First, one files down all the cut edges, then one builds up the ends of the bones (inside and outside) with epoxy, rather like the ends of bobby pins. [*Figure 5:24*] If one uses bones which have not had their ends cushioned in some manner they will rapidly dig their way through the ends of their casings, and will then start digging their way through you. So take heed.

Now, having gone into all of this in somewhat laborious detail, I have a rather serious confession to make. I personally have never made, or worn, a corset constructed using this process. My corset *pattern* was indeed determined by the method described in the preceding chapter. But my final *corset* was made according to one of the variations which I shall discuss in the chapter following. While I feel — I believe justifiably — pleased with my own speciality, the leather corset, and am a little prejudiced in its favor, there seems a generous sufficiency of other variant treatments as to be able to satisfy all but the most unreasonable.

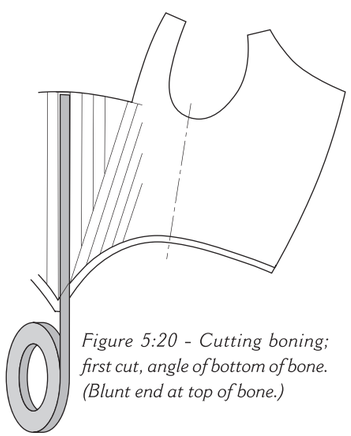


Figure 5:20 - Cutting boning; first cut, angle of bottom of bone. (Blunt end at top of bone.)

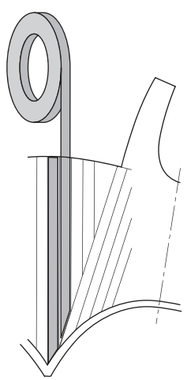


Figure 5:21 - Cutting boning; second cut, blunt top of bone.

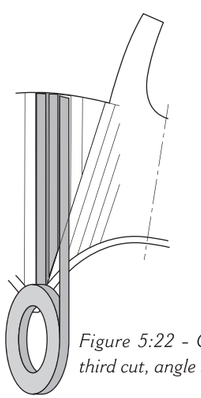


Figure 5:22 - Cutting boning; third cut, angle bottom of bone.

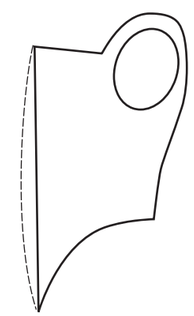
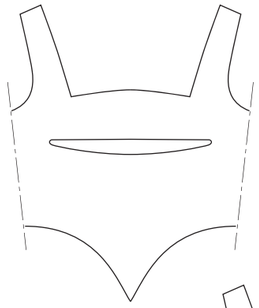
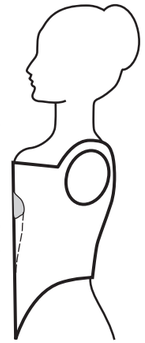


Figure 5:23 - Bones should be cut and positioned as though they were expected to bow away from the body.

Figure 5:24 - Epoxied end of solid metal bone.





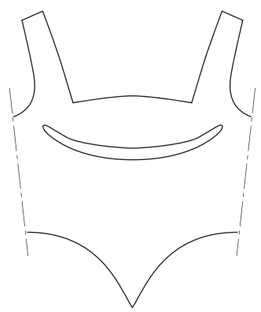


Figure 6:1 - The Vanity Bar.

Figure 6:2 - The vanity bar is designed to keep the bosom from sliding down inside the corset.

Figure 6:3 - The ends of a vanity bar can be curved up to serve as a primitive push-in pad.

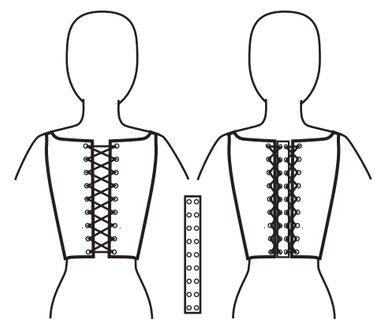
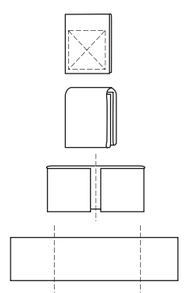
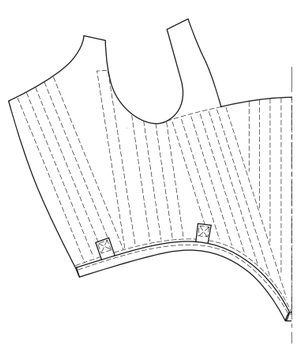


Figure 6:4 - The Back Spacer is designed to fill in the back gap of a corset which is a little too small.





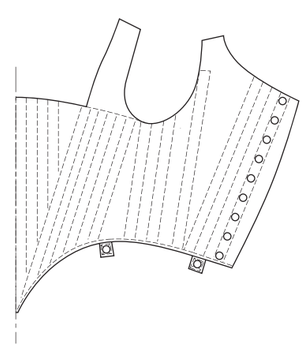


Figure 6:5 - Fold webbing to make grommet tabs.

Figure 6:6 - Position and stitch down grommet tabs before turning waist seam allowance to the inside.

Figure 6:7 - Finished grommet tabs.

WHILE THE TYPICAL Renfaire corset pattern is one in which undue liberties will be punished as they deserve, it is also one which comes supplied with a number of standard, or potentially standard, variations, and which may well be adaptable to others of which I have not heard. I shall walk you through some of the ones with which I am either familiar, or have been given reason to believe are feasible. Some of these have been mentioned in passing. Some require further development regarding the fastenings method. Some are particularly well adapted for repertory stock:

The Vanity Bar:

This is a device which may be added to a corset of any type, not merely the Renfaire model. It first made its appearance in 1973 with the "orange-crate" corset mentioned in the previous chapter. The concept originated in theatrical circles and was introduced to S.C.A. costumers at second hand. It is a padded roll which is attached horizontally across the inside of the corset front [*Figure 6:1*], under the breasts, and is designed to keep the bosom from sliding down inside the corset. [*Figure 6:2*] The original was made of toweling. It may also be positioned a *little* bit higher to serve as a primitive push-up pad. By swinging the ends of the bar into alignment with bones #5–9, one may also approximate the job of the push-in pads which are designed to enhance the cleavage of those ladies whose breasts are widely spaced. [*Figure 6:3*]

Back Spacer:

This is the most workable dodge for a person who is forced to make do with a corset which is too small. You put it on, lace it up, and have someone measure the width of the gap in back. Then make an addition that width with grommets matching the ones in the corset. Attach one side to the corset either by stitching it down or by lacing it up and use the other side for your regular lacing. [*Figure 6:4*] This is infinitely more stable than simply leaving the gap, and will frustrate the corset's attempt to spread at the bottom and close at the top. You will want to bone the edges of this spacer to keep it from crumpling up, and to better support the grommets.

Grommet Tabs:

These are to be used in the case of a corset which does not have waist tabs. They exist solely for the purpose of tying a bum-roll or farthingale to. They are composed of a strip of webbing about 3 inches long doubled over with the ends inside as shown. [*Figure 6:5*] When you have stitched the waist seam of the boned corset closed, and before you have added the seam binding, and turned and whipped down the edge, you go back and stitch a grommet tab on the waist seam.Go over the stitching again and lock stitch at each end. Then add seam binding. [*Figure 6:6*] When you have turned and finished the bottom edge, apply heavy-duty grommets in the tabs. [*Figure 6:7*] A grommet tab should be applied on each side between bones #9 and #10. If you can reach and work behind you, or have a dresser, apply another on each side between bones #13 and #14. If you are on your own and cannot work blind, apply one at each center back. (It's easier to reach.)

Waist Tabs:

While I will be going into the matter of waist tabs again with simpler methods in the section on the leather corset, the main dissertation will be here. I will now restate one very important point. You do not, repeat, *not* use waist tabs except with bones which will flex! By this I primarily mean commercial steel bones or lightweight featherboning. One way to check whether the material you have is suitable is to take a piece some 4 inches long and try to bend it to right angles. Then, let go of it. If it stays bent, don't use it. If you have to strain to get it to bend, don't use it. If it breaks, for heaven's sake, don't use it. Waist tabs, at least in my experience, are one of the greatest advances in corset technology going. The Renfaire corset is a very fine thing, and, properly fitted, should not dig into your waist. But, I'll tell you no lies, if you are thick around the middle, the edge will press. The waist tabs spread the pressure of the bottom edge over a larger area and, since the amount of pressure is the same with or without tabs, you will *feel* it less. The result is

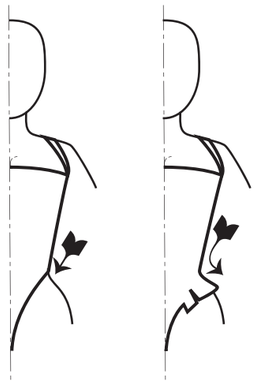


Figure 6:8 - Waist tabs are intended to lessen the impact of the pressure of the corset's edge.

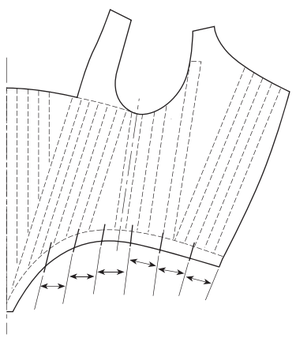


Figure 6:9 - Mark positions for tabs.

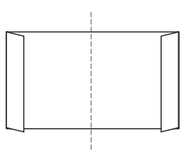


Figure 6:10 - Fold in seam allowances of tab. Press.

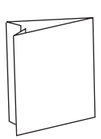


Figure 6:11 - Fold tab at center. Press.

like comparing the difference between pressing against the side of your body with the edge of a piece of cardboard and, say, the edge of your hand. [*Figure 6:8*] To make waist tabs, the simplest method would be to cut them in one with the body of the corset, as in the leather corset. This offers great opportunities for messing things up, however, since you have little or no seam allowance in those tricky vertical cuts. The least haphazard method would probably be to cut them out separately and attach as follows; (Boning will be the same for either method.)

(1) mark the area in which you will be using tabs for the number and position of the tabs you will be using. [*Figure 6:9*] Tabs need to be positioned so that the bones run into the tab rather than cut off at the waist where the tab starts.

(2) You then measure each tab space and cut each tab twice as wide as the space for it, plus ¾″ for seam allowances. (Waist tabs should be about 2–2½″ long. Add seam allowances at top and bottom to a total of 3–3¾″.)

(3) Press ⅜″ in at each (side) end of tab for seam allowance. [*Figure 6:10*]

(4) Press tab in half, widthwise. [*Figure 6:11*]

(5) Clip waist seam allowance of corset and corset lining where tabs are to begin. (Large dot) Clip corner at center back seam. [*Figure 6:12*]

(6) Clip and press waist seam allowance of corset and corset lining to the wrong side from large dot to center back seam. (Note: Diagram has been vastly simplified. You will essentially be working on the inside surface of a cloth tube rather than a flat piece of material.)

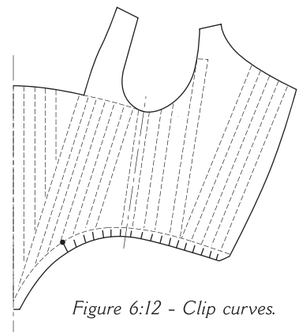


Figure 6:12 - Clip curves.

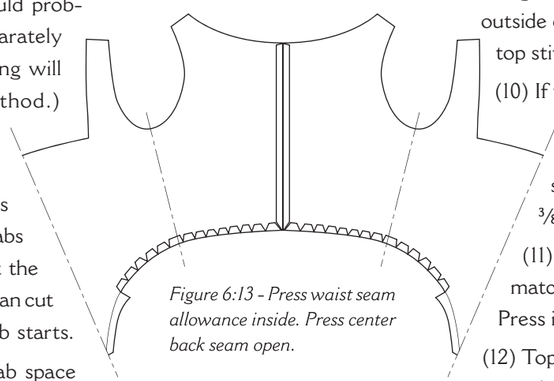


Figure 6:13 - Press waist seam allowance inside. Press center back seam open.

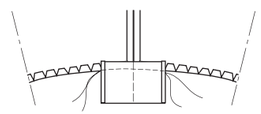


Figure 6:14 - Center tab on center back seam, matching seam allowances. Stitch in place.

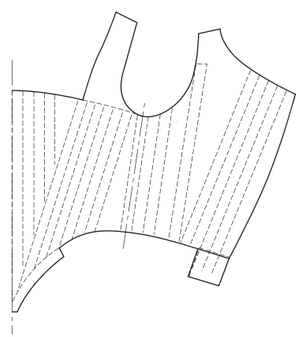


Figure 6:15 - Fold on seam, matching edges. Top-stitch seam of tab closed.

(7) Press bottom of center back seam open. [*Figure 6:13*]

(8) Place center fold of center back tab on center back seam, matching top seam allowance with waist seam allowances.

(9) Stitch tab to corset and corset lining along seam line. [*Figure 6:14*] (From the outside of the corset, this will look like top stitching.)

(10) If you wish, trim top seam allowance of tab (no narrower than ⅛″ or 5 mm). Trim waist seam allowance of garment to ⅜″ or 1 cm., as preferred.

(11) Fold garment right side out matching tab side seam allowance. Press if desired.

(12) Top stitch side seam of tab closed; extend into body of garment ¼″ or 1 cm to catch seam allowances.

(13) Stitch casings for bones. [*Figure 6:15*]

(14) Open garment to area just stitched.

(15) Position second waist tab with centerfold at caught seam matching waist seam allowances with tab's top seam allowance. [*Figure 6:16*]

Repeat steps 9–12 as in center back tab. If you are adding tabs farther forward than the area between bones #9 and #10, you need to take care that the bones of center front and side front can still be inserted around them. Note: you will not be using tabs beyond bones #7 since bones #5 and #6 need to be of the heavier, more rigid material, and are therefore *not suitable for tabs!* Waist tabs in the 18th century which were positioned along the sides of the waist point often had bones of their own placed in the position indicated by the diagram [*Figure 6:17*] and which would probably be suitable for tabs placed between bones #9 and #10. When the bones of a tab are in place, stitch across the bottom seam line to hold everything where it belongs. finish off the tab's bottom edge with the seam binding as described in the general instructions. [*Figures 6:18, 6:19*]

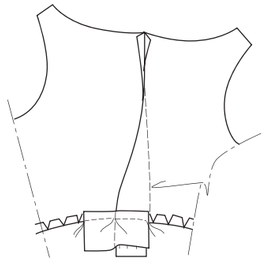


Figure 6:16 - Open to area just stitched. Position next tab, centering on area just stitched and matching seam allowances. Sew front of tab to corset. Sew back of tab to corset lining. Be careful not to catch previous tab

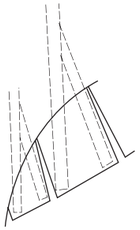


Figure 6:17 - Typical boning pattern of 18th & 19th century corset tabs.

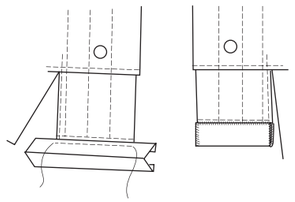


Figure 6:18 - Extend casings into finished corset. Position bones, stitch along seam line to anchor bones in place. Stitch seam binding over raw edge.

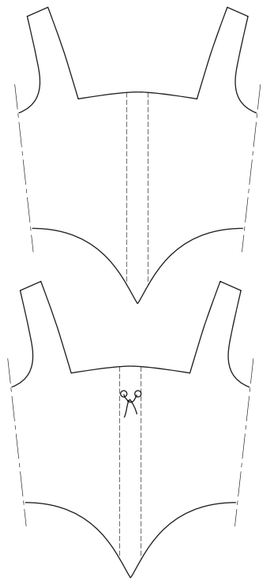
Figure 6:19 - Turn seam allowance to inside and whip in place.

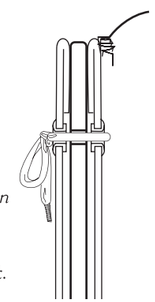
The center point of the corset also is finished off pretty much as described in the general instructions. When the bones are in place, stitch along the waist seam line across the front between the large dots, add seam binding, and turn inside and whip down as in the standard example. If you have cut your tabs in one with the body of the corset, you run your seam binding along your whole bottom edge. You will need to be fairly careful since there is no real seam allowance between the tabs. You may wish to add a couple of grommets in some of the tabs to which bum-rolls or farthingales may be tied. Note: if you intend to use separate bodices and skirts, it would be a good idea not to bring tabs any farther forward than about bones #10. (Or wear the corset inside everything.)

Removable Busk:

You may, if you wish, leave out the centerline stitching line and in place of two bones #1 use a solid busk of what-

ever material you wish. [*Figure 6:20*] This is unlikely to be necessary, although if your production has an undressing scene it might add a nice touch. (Remember Buckingham and Lady De Winter in the 1970s version of The Three Musketeers?) Busks, during the period, were made of wood, horn, ivory and other materials. Often they were carved and decorated. A busk was necessary for maintaining the straight line since, as I have stated in the chapter on first causes, whalebone is flexible. (Even in the late 19th century when steam-moulding produced a stiffer corset, the busks were generally of steel.) The busk was held in place by a busk lace somewhat as is shown. [*Figures 6:21, 6:22*] These busk laces are reputed to have been given to gentlemen to carry in the later tourneys as a token of their ladies' favor. A handsomely carved or otherwise decorated busk was considered an intimate, but acceptable, gift to a lady from an admirer. If you choose to use a tapered busk [*Figure 6:23*], you will have to alter your boning pattern to accommodate. I would reserve this style for slightly later periods than Tudor. For the leather corset, a separate busk is the only essential support. If you plan to use a busk, you may wish to have the casing for it open at the top for easy removal. The theory that a busk could be whipped out of the corset for the purpose of rapping an inopportune gentleman over the knuckles, however, is almost certainly apocryphal. A busk cannot be "whipped out" of anything. It can merely be withdrawn. When one considers the length and placement of a corset's busk, a far more realistic analogy would be to compare the action to the drawing of a short sword. Note: If you have, despite everything, chosen to make a waist-length variation which does not have a pointed waist, and intend to wear a pointed-bodiced gown over it, it will be necessary to use a busk down the center front of the gown. It will also be necessary to use a busk lace, or some other device to keep it in place, since when you sit, it will try to climb out of its casing.





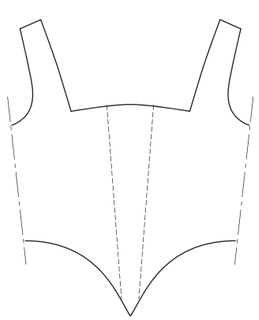


Figure 6:20 - Solid busk.

Figure 6:21 - Busk lace.

Figure 6:22 - Cross-section of busk with lace.

Figure 6:23 - Tapered busk.

Ties rather than Straps:

This is an element which was primarily used in the stays of the later periods and which will be a boon in companies where a great many people have to use a limited number of costumes. The front of the shoulder strap is trimmed down and a grommet, or perhaps more than one grommet, applied in the material remaining. The back of the strap is extended and tapered as shown and ties attached. [*Figure 6:24*] These ties are tied to whichever grommet is most comfortable for the wearer. As you can see, this makes it possible to adjust the fit of the shoulders for different wearers. If you wish, a grommet may be applied in the end of the back strap and a shoe lace or other tie used to hold the two together. [*Figure 6:25*]

Strapless Corset:

This is a quite reasonable compromise if your costumes have to be shared by a great many people. [*Figure 6:26*] There are disadvantages, however. It is not precisely period, and there will be a ridge running across the middle of the back. The push-in function of the bones #5–9 will be largely negated by the loss of the straps. What is more, if you are at all heavy busted, the corset will tend to slide downward (not very much, as I found out, but slightly), unless there are also waist tabs. Nevertheless, if your costume designer decides, in defiance of period accuracy, to have people in milkmaid shifts and corselets with the sleeves slipping off bare shoulders, or if the very broad necklines displayed in some paintings are copied, it will solve the problem of straps or ties showing. It will also solve that perennial problem of the heavy busted, namely, straps that dig into the shoulders. The lady with an average figure will probably discover that a strapless corset is very nearly as stable as one with straps. All ladies may appreciate the added mobility of the arms and shoulders, as well as the freedom (however inaccurate) from bones passing over the shoulder blades. In the leather corset, omitting the straps was pretty well obligatory, and, as I found out, lengthening the waist and adding tabs took care of any tendency to slide. This might also answer in a cloth-and-boning corset. In the earliest example of a strapless corset which I have been able to find [*Plate E–I*], an American example from the later 18th century, these techniques have been utilized. As you can see, although this corset has no straps, it still has a high back. If you choose to use this detail, I was informed by a pair of very fine costumers who went by the name of "Stitch in Time," and produced a corset of this type, that you should use flat steel bones for the back and force a permanent bend into them to follow the line of the body. Otherwise the back of the corset will stand away from the wearer's back. This eliminates both the ridge across the back, displayed by the low-backed corset, and the bulge at the back of the arm that most women have. It also lessens the number of different people who can wear that particular corset, however.

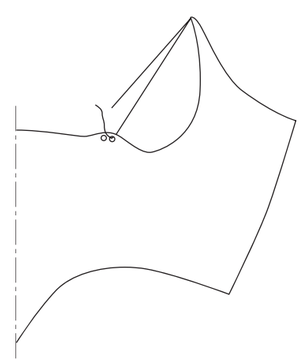


Figure 6:24 - Strap tapered to ties.

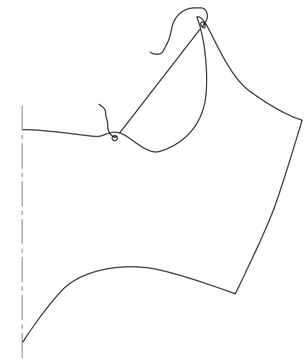


Figure 6:25 - Grommets & lace instead of straps.

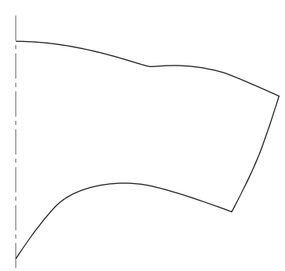


Figure 6:26 - Strapless corset.

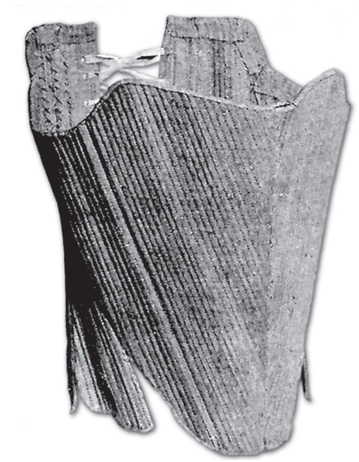


Plate E– I: Late 18th century American corset. This is the earliest example of a strapless corset which I have come across. It is probable that the lady who made it was more interested in being able to do her daily work effectively than she was in presenting the properly narrow-backed, narrow-shouldered appearance. The back is still high, however.

Usually, in a corset without straps, the front of the corset is trimmed along the top of bones #5–9 with the angle blending into the armhole, and across the back at about the same level as the top of a bra back, i.e., just below the shoulder blades. There is one problem which it would be a good idea for you to consider before removing the straps of one's corset. Without straps, there is nothing to keep the fullness of the bosom, when

compressed, from spreading out to the sides of the chest toward the underarm area. This will broaden the appearance of the upper chest area (which is not incompatible with the distortion of a good many of the Mannerist paintings), and make the angle from underarm to waist more noticeable. This much will, no doubt, be considered rather attractive by modern aesthetic taste. However, by spreading the upper portion of the corset into this slightly wider shape, the underarm edge of the corset may be moved into a less comfortable alignment in relation to the body. [*Figure 6:27*] This is particularly hazardous in the case of the large busted, since the redistribution of the bosom's fullness would tend to exaggerate this effect. A strapless corset has this problem. While the costume gown worn over the corset can probably be depended upon to help restrain this tendency, it is a consideration which should be kept in mind and, if possible, tested. To do this, you could try boning the back of a full corset only as high as the back of a strapless corset, run a line of stitching across the top of the boning to keep it in place and put it on without joining the straps. If the change in orientation makes the underarm bones jab the inside of your upper arms, you can pick out the stitching at the top of the boned section and waist seam and bone the whole back as in standard practice. Or, if you don't mind a possible ridge across the back (which you were resigned to anyway, if you were planning to make the corset strapless) just pick out the stitching at bones #12, #14 and #15 and replace them with long bones to support

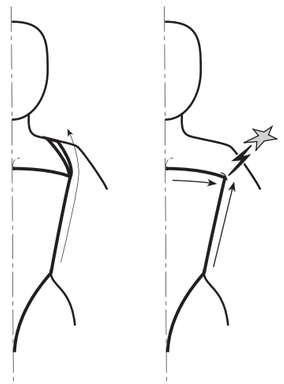


Figure 6:27 - The mass of the bosom, without the straps for control, may force the side of the corset into an angle which jabs the inner part of the upper arm.

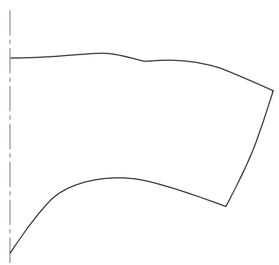


Figure 6:28 - Center of strapless corset lowered for lady with low bust.

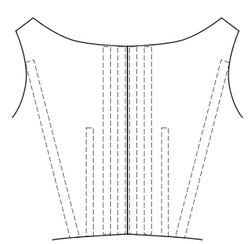


Figure 6:29 - Partially boned back.

the grommets and smooth out the back at its outer edges. This will avoid bones over the shoulder blades while giving you a full back. I personally do not like bones over shoulder blades since it is annoying. But I am told that the method stated above avoids this. One last problem which may arise is that a lady who is very low busted may end up having to make the sides higher than the front. [*Figure 6:28*] This will probably seem more awkward than it actually is, but she will definitely depend on the outer costume to keep the sides in line. She may find this undesirably troublesome and will wish to opt for the version with straps after all.

Partially Boned Back :

As just stated above, bones #12, #14 and #15 are their full length, but any other bones are omitted or end below the shoulder blades. The motion of the shoulder blades will be visible and if you use half-length bones there may be a ridge at the top of the boned area, but at least you won't keep knocking your shoulder blades against bones! [*Figure 6:29*]

Solid Center Plastron/Stomacher:

The central section (area covered by bones #1–4) can be made of a solid piece of metal such as 1/16″ steel, cut to size and shape with jig or handsaw, filed smooth and taped or epoxied all the way around. (Even filed edges will try to eat through the cloth envelope.) [*Figure 6:30*] You will probably wish to bend it slightly to curve around the body. [*Figure 6:31*] Actually, if you are

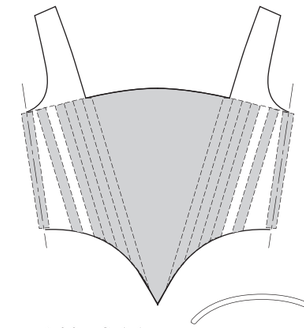


Figure 6:30 - Solid center plastron.

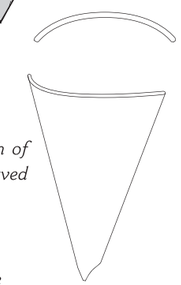


Figure 6:31 - Plastron of solid metal, slightly curved to go around body.

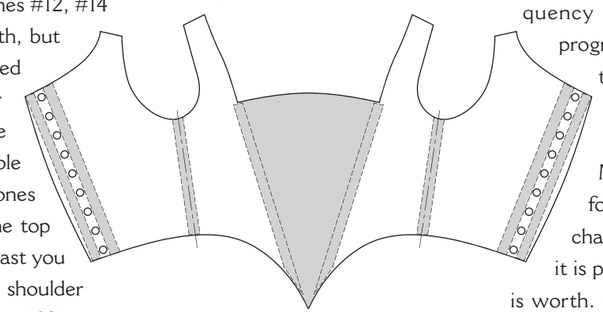


Figure 6:32 - Possible middle-class corset.

trying to show a sartorial difference between upper and lower classes, the stiffening of the bodice of a lower class woman would most probably have consisted of the solid central plastron (bones #1–5) and the bones #14 and #15 to support the lacings. Bone(s) #10 on the side seam itself may have also been used but I am not certain of that. [*Figure 6:32*] Just at present, it is uncertain whether an audience would recognize the significance of this more clumsy fit. We have realized that a 16th century bodice is a different shape from anything in use within living memory. But we tend to be so pleased with ourselves for having learned this fact that it is extremely difficult at this stage, to tell us anything that we don't already know. Oh well, 25–40 years ago most of us were capable of unblinkingly accepting a merry widow as proper period corsetry, too. Eventually, we are bound to tip to the fact that a Lady's dress was well-fitting but that a servant's dress probably was not, or at least not by the same criterion.

Separate Stomacher :

This style was used with greater frequency as the Elizabethan period progressed. [*Figure 6:33*] During the 17th and first half of the 18th centuries it seems to have become almost universal. My personal opinion is that for theatrical use, where quick changes and stability are desired, it is probably more trouble than it is worth. (Unless you are planning to simply bone the bodice and not make a separate corset at all, and even that will be awkward.) In any event, one makes the two sides and back parts of a corset, i.e., the areas supported by bones #5–15, omitting bone(s) #6. In the place of bone(s) #6 one applies grommets. One then makes up one's solid center stomacher which covers the area of bones #1–5. Note: there is an overlap at bone #5. If one wishes to have the corset or gown lace across the

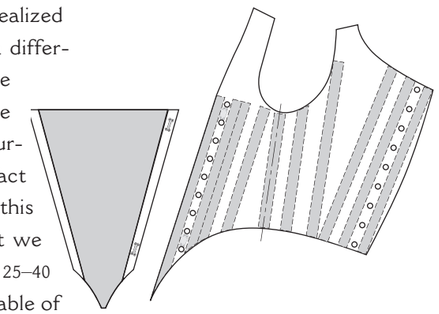


Figure 6:33 - Separate center plastron. Corset is designed to lace over the plastron.

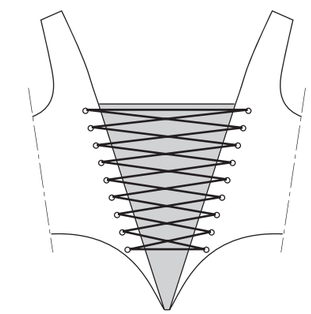


Figure 6:34 - Corset with visible lacing.

stomacher, the process is fairly simple. One adds a coat "eye" at the top and bottom of one side of the stomacher, and the matching hooks to the inside of the area in which the grommets are attached. This is to keep the stomacher from becoming displaced. One then laces the corset with exceeding long laces across the stomacher. [*Figure 6:34*] If, however, one wishes to merely attach the stomacher to the two sides of the corset without lacing crossing it (which I would also advise you to do if what you are planning to use for the visible lacing is anything fragile like ribbon or braid, I wouldn't trust anything like that to hold my costume together — or my shape in

shape — on any consideration) things get a little hairier. In this case, it would be better to make a separate strip with grommets and attach it to the inside of the corset along the outer casing line of bone(s) #6 as shown. [*Figure 6:35*] Bone(s) #6 are not omitted. The stomacher envelope is cut to match the area covered by bones #1–5, the solid portion is made to fit the area of bones #1–4. A line of stitching runs along the edge of the solid portion and grommets are applied in the edge corresponding to bone(s) #5. These grommets are laced to those inside the corset with bone(s) #5 covering the overlap. A line of hooks, snaps or other fasteners on the outside of the stomacher edge and the underside of corset bone(s) #5, or the outer costume may be helpful in keeping the edge from flipping up and displaying the lacing. In all of these cases, due to the inherent awkwardness of trying to lace together the insides of a garment while one is wearing it, it is a good idea to make the corset itself in its usual two pieces, lace the stomacher to the corset, put it on, and lace it up the back as usual. An alternative measure which you might prefer to try, would be to attach the grommet strip at the outside casing line of bone #6 to the outside of the corset and to fasten the stomacher over the edges of bones #5. In this case, the hooks or eyes are on the stomacher just next to the lacings to which the edges of the outer costume are fastened. Using the center back lacing for getting in and out of the corset is still likely to be easiest, however.

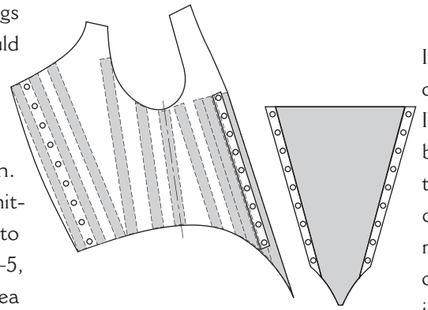


Figure 6:35 - Separate center plastron designed to be laced to corset at sides.

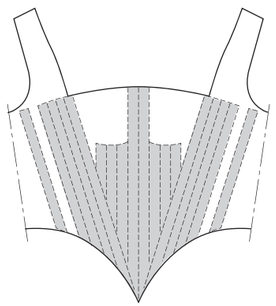


Figure 6:36 - Partially boned front.

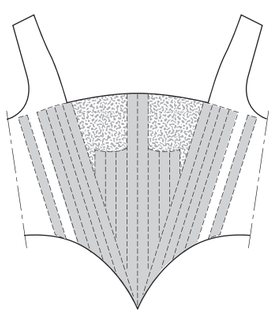


Figure 6:37 - Partially boned front with elastic insets.

Unboned Bosom :

I don't really approve of this particular dodge, but I will include it. [Figure 6:36] It operates much as the partially boned back. The boning of the front is lowered to below the point where it comes in contact with the bosom. Bone(s) #1 must continue to the top of the corset, or you will not have the straight line. It is only bones #2–4 which are shortened. They must not be omitted, however, or you will not get the flat front. You will have to experiment with how high the boning can come without jabbing you. It occurs to me that the vanity bar mentioned above may help to keep the bosom away from the bones. A further variation is to cut out the area where the boning has been omitted and replace it with a piece of heavy elastic. [*Figure 6:37*] Note: When I say heavy elastic, I mean *heavy* elastic or your work is all for naught. As I said, I don't really approve of this dodge but the lady with genuinely hypersensitive breasts might find it worth a try. If you have had silicone implants or recent breast reduction or any other type of breast surgery, you'd better consult your doctor before chancing it. The mastectomy patient can follow her own preferences.

The Leather Corset:

By which I mean a corset made of leather; not corfam, not upholstery fabric, not ultra-suede, not Naugahyde, but leather, and leather of a specialized type at that. [*Figure 6:38*] As a matter of fact, leather corsets have been worn historically, but they do not sound very pleasant. By the 18th century, all civilized women, save those in the direst poverty (who lived more like animals than human beings), were obligated to wear corsets, leather corsets were provided for female inmates of orphanages and other charitable institutions. Women in almshouses may also have worn them. Leather corsets were provided for these children, girls, and women for the excellent reason that such corsets were, at that time, cheap to produce, and virtually never wore out. A normal corset would have required whalebone and cloth which would continually need to be replaced. These charity corsets were made of shoe leather so tough that it had to be treated with shallow vertical cuts or scorings in order to enable it to curve around the body. (Ugh!) (Charity Costume, Phyllis Cunningham & Catherine Lucas) When one also remembers that the 18th century corsets (in Europe at least) were devised to drag the shoulders backwards into a cruelly unnatural stance, and realizes that these charity garments followed suit (although the straps were not cut in one with the corset, but laced to it), the thought of these institutional corsets becomes even less palatable. The 15-year old orphan who went out into domestic service and eventually became able to afford some whalebone and make herself a boned corset with a nice light wooden busk like a real lady's must have felt that she had died and gone to heaven.

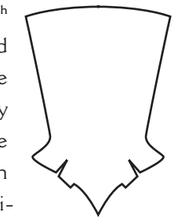


Figure 6:38 - The leather corset.

At this point, I am forced to become anecdotal. To the best of my knowledge, I was the first of the S.C.A. costumers in my area to make a functional corset out of leather. This came about as somewhat of an accident. When I needed a corset, hooping was temporarily not available. Being one of the truly hefty, I knew better than to expect to be able to make do with featherboning, or, indeed, anything of a less than thoroughly businesslike nature. At the same time, I had on hand most of a belt shoulder (approximately ¼ of a hide) of 7–8 ounce barktan. I had purchased this more than a year earlier for a project which had foundered, and I was unlikely to have any other need or use for it. "Well, okay." I decided, "I'll make a corset of that." and of course immediately began to see swarms of good rationalizations for doing so. There would be no fear of rust, and no casings to sew or edges to bind off. Nor would I have to worry about linings. In addition to this, there was the consideration that with some tooling or other decoration, the corset would be suitable for outer wear as a peasantish bodice in its own right. (I suppose that this sort of garb would not be discovered among any genuine data of the period, but we did consider ourselves the Society for *Creative* Anachronism, after all.)

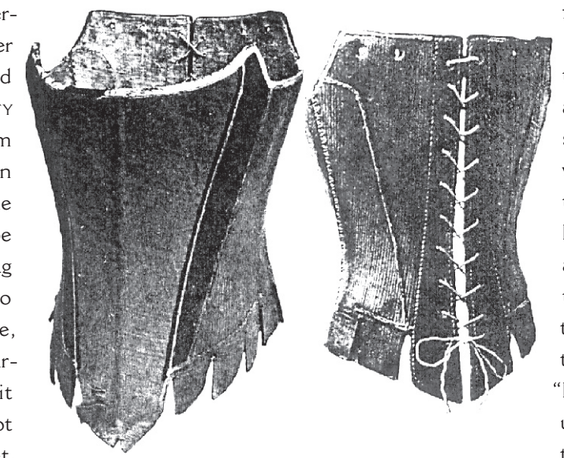


Plate E–2: - Leather corset from charity school. 18th c. The vertical scoring is to enable it to bend around the body. Shoulder straps would be added with laces or ties. Center panel is fabric covered to enable it to act as stomacher to dress.

So I set about to make up my corset in leather. The first two attempts were definitely misadventures. But since they serve to illustrate some of the commoner pitfalls for a novice, I will relate them.

My original consideration was that, after having once worn a corset with boning over the shoulder blades, there was no way that I would consider making this corset with built-in straps. I opted to make it up strapless and put eyelets front and back to add straps later. I also found that my pattern would not fit the leather. "Okay," thought I, "I'll cut it in two pieces and lace it up front *and* back." I also decided to go whole hog and make the attached waist tabs which the costume books always seem to mention. So I cut a set of tabs and attached them with eyelets

and ties, or "points." It was immediately apparent that some sort of stiffening was going to be necessary down the center front to keep the edges from collapsing. I found a type of aluminum weather-stripping in the shape of an "L" which was about ¾″ wide and into which the barktan fitted perfectly. I cut two pieces of this at the proper length and marked where the eyelets of the corset came. I then took this to a hardware store and had holes drilled where I had marked (I did not own a drill at that time). I then lined the holes in the metal and the holes in the corset up and glued the metal to the leather with leather glue. The lacings passed through both leather and metal in one motion and the front closed very nicely and was quite stable.

Then I put it on. Oh dear. I discovered that with the best will in the world, I had not been able to get sufficient compression with the paper pattern. The finished corset was too large. I trimmed 1 to 1¼″ off each side at center back and put in new eyelets. That was better, but of course the back was now too narrow and the scooped out sections for the armholes were in the wrong place. The straps did not work properly either. I moved the front of the armhole forward —could do nothing about the back — and since the event for which I wanted the costume was at hand, I tried to make do. While the corset was generally much admired and exclaimed over, (it was the first, after all) after having lived in it for two days I had made a few discoveries. First, the tabs, being cosmetic rather than functional, added nothing but bulk at the waist.

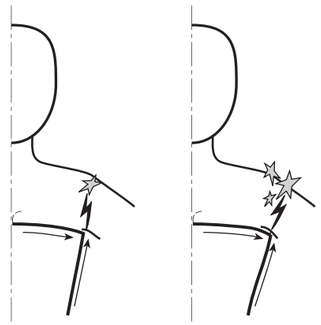


Figure 6:39 - Corset pressed into an uncomfortable angle from lack of straps.

Figure 6:40 - Corset pressed into an even more uncomfortable angle from being trimmed.

Second, that the waist was probably a little too high at sides and back and, while the point was long enough to be safe, it also could have been lengthened. Third, if the waist was long enough to keep it from sliding — and even with the waist too high it did not slide much — it wouldn't really *need* straps. However, it was plain that the corset, as it stood, was not a total success even if it was not a complete failure, and that if I wanted a *good* fit I really ought to try again.

The leather which was purchased for the second attempt was a type sold by the Tandy leather company and which went by the name of Nature Tand. This is now discontinued, the current product is called Live Oak. Although this resembles barktan, in that it is prepared by a vegetable tanning process and is dry and firm to handle, it is not nearly as hard or harsh to the touch as barktan, its color is pleasanter, and its surface is finer to the touch. The piece which I purchased was thicker than the barktan had been, 3⁄16″ (5 mm) thick in fact. Since it was more flexible than barktan the extra thickness was not out of place, although I have since made corsets from pieces which were lighter weight with good results.

The second corset started out yet another 1¼″ narrower at each side of the back, and had the armhole further forward; it was also, daringly, 2 inches longer overall. I realized that if it was too long, it could always be trimmed off. In leather, this would be a simple process, unlike the hassles of shortening a boned cloth corset. This second corset was cut in one piece without fooling about with a front lacing. This corset was, in general, a success. The longer length meant that it rested on the top of my hip bones and couldn't slide down. The bottom edge, while it pressed, did not bite and I could have lived with it. The leather in the armhole area was only very mildly uncomfortable. At this point I made my first mistake. I lowered the armhole, where it was trying to rub, by about ¼″ to ⅜″. I discovered my error at once. As I mentioned in the section on the strapless corset, the greater amount of breast tissue at the side of the torso angled the side of the corset out from the body under the arms, and whereas the armhole previously had merely rubbed [*Figure 6:39*], the lowered side now jabbed the inner arm at a very direct angle, and was very uncomfortable. [*Figure 6:40*] Having trimmed the area, however, there was no way to put it back and I was left having to hope that a costume over the corset would help control the problem.

Then I made a second, and fatal mistake. I oiled the leather. This sounds like a right and proper thing to do with dry leather, but, unfortunately, I used neat's foot oil, and I used far too much of it. Permit me to say that while neat's foot oil may be the finest thing in the world for horse harnesses, it is not the sort of stuff that you would want on something that you intend to wear close to your skin. So, there I was, with a corset reeking of petroleum distillates and permanently staining anything that got near it. It had been rendered completely unwearable.

Permanently.

I will spare you my reactions and responses to the situation at that particular point. Suffice to say that when I next made a corset, I was even more circumspect. For one thing, I decided to try to make waist tabs. This was accomplished by continuing the center back line an extra 1½″ to 2″ and cutting the bottom edge approximately as shown in the working diagram, blending into the existing waist seam line at or about the location of bone #9. This may also be done with the conventional cloth and boning corset. [*Figure 6:41*] Slits were then cut up to the waist line. Having been bitten at the armhole area before, this time I did not scoop out the armhole at all, intending to trim it ¼″ at a time or so until I got it right. To my very great surprise, I found, upon putting it on, that having the leather fit right up into the armpit was substantially more comfortable than the scooped out armhole had been in either previous version. This was chiefly because the edge of the corset now fitted into an area of the body where the body was designed to bend. I further discovered, after a couple of wearings, that the leather was soon naturally curved towards the armpit, moulding itself to the contour of the body. Since, even with antiperspirants, an armpit is a warm, humid environment, and since such an environment is inclined to promote the natural pliancy of leather, I feel, in retrospect, that I really ought not to have been taken quite so much by surprise at this. Unfortunately, I cannot recommend this dodge to anyone making a strapless corset in the standard cloth and boning manner. I have a strong, although I will admit, unsubstantiated, conviction that steel bones in cloth casings would not react in the same way as a solid piece of leather. The waist tabs on the other hand did turn out to need a slight degree of tinkering to bring them to their final form, but not much. Since the tabs only began to spread at their base, it was necessary to extend their slits up into the body of the corset about ½″. My corset was finished and this time I treated the leather with plain saddle soap.

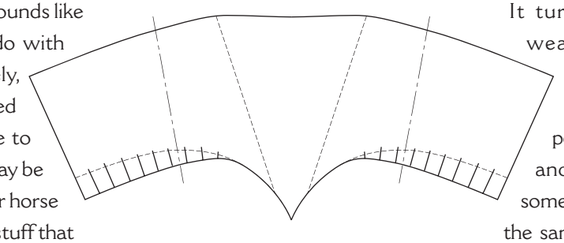


Figure 6:41 - Finished leather corset.

Figure 6:42 - Cross section of aluminum molding used for busk.

It turned out, after about two wearings, that there was yet another detail to be taken care of. Gradually the waist point was beginning to curl up, and it was plain that a busk of some kind would be a good idea. In the same hardware store which had provided the aluminum "L"-shaped strips of moulding I found another form of aluminum weather-stripping (both are sold as window moulding) which seemed imminently practical for the purpose. I append a cross section of the material [*Figure 6:42*], and it really did work out excellently. All that was necessary was to cut a piece to the same shape as the corset point and about ⅜″ shorter than the full length of the center front, and file the cut ends. A strip of thin soft leather from a scrap bin at a leather store, cut to size and glued in place made a perfectly adequate casing. The aluminum was lightweight enough to be held in place by this without need of any stitching. (I positioned the busk with the flatter, bottom side toward the corset.)

One of the unsuspected bonuses of using leather, I discovered, was the admirable way in which it responds to temperature. I wore this leather corset at the Renfaire with the temperature at 110°, and while my head, and my neck, shoulders and arms have felt broiled even through my shift, and petticoats seemed like a euphemism for Purgatory, the portion of the torso enclosed in the corset merely felt not *quite* uncomfortably warm. The leather had reached warm body temperature and stayed that way. Additional heat from the

atmosphere did not penetrate, and additional body heat radiated away. (Yes, my shift was soaked through when I took it off, but it had not been uncomfortable while wearing it.) The same thing happened during cold, blustery evenings after tourneys. The corset had reached body temperature and the cold did not penetrate. The only time I ever had a problem was when I tried wearing a shift that was 35% polyester. It was a hot day and I thought I was going to die. When the same thing happened on a cool day, I gave the shift to someone else. One's reaction to synthetic fibers in shifts can be unexpectedly strong.

As time went on, the tabs at the bottom spread until they acquired a permanent flair. This made no difference in performance. And, I will concede, there were days (when my shift was not properly straightened) that the "high armhole" was rather irksome. It was there, it was distracting, and it wouldn't go away. But at the end of the day when I took it off, my skin in the area of contact was not even reddened. Nor was the longer busk a problem. Which leads me to believe that each person has an individual range of busk lengths within which she will be comfortable, rather than one set position which cannot be altered a hairline without dire results. If you should gain or lose a significant amount of weight, this range will fluctuate — unless you gain or lose everywhere except in the belly. Upon the whole, although there was the ridge across the back, and the overall applicability to the period was questionable, this third leather corset was an almost unqualified æsthetic and practical success. It was also (saving only the stipulation stated in true observation number one back in the third chapter) genuinely comfortable to wear.

Hiding behind these obvious excellences were two others. The first was the consideration that, exclusive of ornamentation (I later tooled the leather), the actual construction of this final corset took all of one evening — 3½ hours. Total. Nor was I an experienced leather worker. (My total experience at the time consisted of two less than satisfactory corsets.)

The second excellence was discovered when a friend of mine also wanted a leather corset. She was about my size so I offered to let her try mine. By now, having some experience of how a corset should fit, I could tell with scarcely more than a glance that she needed to make hers about 1½″ narrower in the back and about 2″ shorter waisted. We cut her pattern from my corset. No altering patterns, no brown paper wrappers. By the end of that evening she had a corset. Poof! Abracadabra! She had a corset. About a year later I was commissioned to do a costume for another lady. Her present corset was not suitable — we had been in contact by mail and the person who had made hers up as per information had used the wrong weight of leather. "What the hell?" I figured, and we tried mine. She was considerably thinner than I am (most people are), and my corset overlapped by about 5 to 6 inches. I had just enough leather left to be able to manage to cut a blank which we then tried. A few fittings and trimmings and she had a corset. Within that afternoon. She was, incidentally, the lady with the hourglass figure whose corset demonstrated to me how difficult such figures can be when you are dealing in Tudor. The story does not end here. Her corset, or rather, a corset cut from and identical to it, has since proved to be usable by no less than three other ladies of widely dissimilar figure types with minimal or no alteration. In the period since, this corset may very well have been duplicated anew for others. Since the leather corset has no bones, there is no consideration of sections within the garment; therefore, the corset adapts merely to total body size, without reference to small ribcage/large bust, large ribcage/small bust, muscular build, clinically obese, or any other category which might otherwise be tempted to arise. One does lose the push-in effect of the boned corset with its slanting side front sections. One also loses the 18th century slanting side front's tendency to narrow the appearance of the mid-section. The strapless top may spread under the arms and produce a more acute angle from armpit to waist when viewed straight on, but in profile one's torso has a good chance of looking tubular, which although clumsy, is accurate to the period. As with the cloth-and-boning strapless corset, the lady who is low busted may need to leave the sides higher than the front.

For speed of production, comfort in wear, and flexibility of fit, the leather corset is almost without question the most eminently suitable form of corset for theatrical or public festival stock. But the operative word is "almost." Against its unquestionable excellences, there stand some distinctly undesirable deterrents. There is a ridge across the back. It is of highly dubious authenticity. And most important, there is the cost. A leather corset is about the most expensive form of corset which I have, or will, mention. And you cannot cut corners. In 1978, the cost of a leather corset averaged out to approximately $20 to $25. And this figure is misleading. The type of leather needed can usually only be purchased in pieces considerably larger than is needed for a single corset, which doubles or triples the actual cost. This price has only gone up in the intervening period. You pay for leather at much the same rate as you pay for steak. I do not know what a leather coerset will run today, in comparison with what it did in '78. Compare this to the price of a cloth and boning corset which in 1978, could generally be made for under $10, and which can still probably be managed for around $25–$30.

If you have the funds, however, and wish to undertake the expense of a leather corset, here are some general instructions. First, and most important, you would be about as well off throwing your money down a well as of trying to make a corset out of the wrong sort of leather. If the leather is too thin or too soft, your corset will simply collapse. What is more, if you are inside a corset which is collapsing, *it hurts!* It hurts because, instead of having the weight of your upper body evenly distributed over the whole garment, it has been concentrated and is now pressing down on one particular spot (usually at your sides just above your waist.) And there is no way you can get away from it. (Well, you *probably* could add straps but that can also get hairy.)

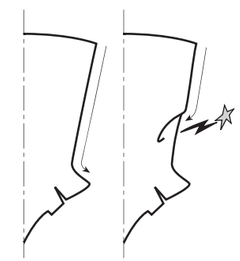


Figure 6:43 - Collapsing corset.

In order to make an effective corset, you need tooling leather. You need leather which is heavy enough and firm enough to support not only its own weight, but yours. Live Oak is suitable; I can make that statement without hesitation. It also feels nice. Barktan is also suitable. I do not like barktan; it has a nasty, hard, harsh feel, an ugly color, and is difficult to cut. But it is quite suitable for making corsets. Do not let my personal prejudice lead you astray, it is suitable; it is also slightly cheaper. Since both barktan and Live Oak are tooling leathers, if you so wish, you can carve and decorate the corset to your heart's content. I personally have not worked with other leathers successfully enough or with sufficient frequency to be able to state for certain what else might work. Latigo *ought* to be suitable, but the only latigo corset I have encountered was an example which failed. Latigo is not a tooling leather. It can be stamped, but it cannot be carved. The person who made the failed example may have used latigo that was too light a weight. I cannot say for certain. I *can* say that it would probably stain your shift, and quite possibly the outer costume as well. I can also say that "glove tanned" anything, no matter how heavy, is totally *un*suitable. It is too flexible. It will collapse and you will end up actually having to bone it or add straps. The accompanying diagram [*Figure 6:43*] shows the side line of a proper corset. The companion diagram shows a corset which is collapsing and the area of heavy pressure. If a corset which you have made develops this line, add straps. If this does not solve the problem, you have wasted your money.

You will also need to purchase tools. You will need something to cut the leather; a #19 X-acto® blade in a heavy-duty handle works fine. Barktan is denser than Live Oak and may need something stronger. You will also need something to punch holes for your eyelets or grommets. Other tools which you will appreciate are a French skiver, an edge skiver, an edge roller and a skife. Most of these should be available at any leathercraft shop. If you plan to decorate your corset you will need whatever tools are necessary to produce your design. For the busk casing you will need a strip of soft leather or cloth, and leather glue, as well as the material for the busk itself, and either tools or access to tools to cut it with. You may also want to dye or otherwise finish the surface, although for a garment which is intended to be always worn under a gown, saddle soap should be quite enough.

Preparing the pattern: We'll assume that you have your corset pattern already drafted out to fit you, without a boning pattern.

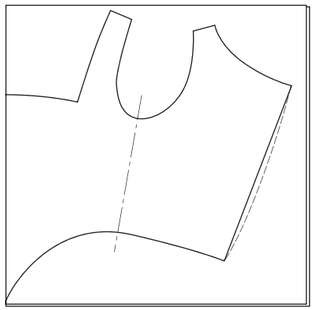


Figure 6:44 - Trace pattern to folded paper. Straighten back edge. Transfer side line.

Figure 6:45 - Measure distance from waist to shoulder-blade.

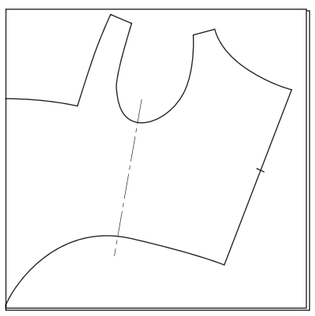


Figure 6:46 - Mark distance on center back line.

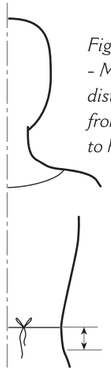


Figure 6:47 - Measure distance from waist to hipbone.

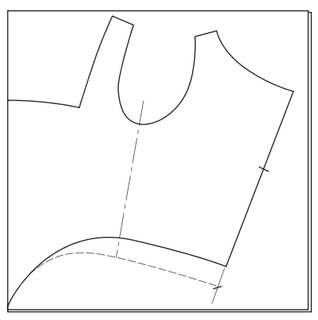


Figure 6:48 - Extend this distance at side and back. Rough in new waist edge.

(1) You lay it out on another folded piece of paper. Take a pencil and trace around the edge. [*Figure 6:44*]

(2) Find the bottom of your shoulder blades and measure distance from your natural waist. [*Figure 6:45*]

(3) Mark this distance on the center back lines of the pattern. [*Figure 6:46*]

(4) If you need to lengthen the waist, measure yourself from natural waist to top of hipbone. [*Figure 6:47*]

(5) Extend side "seam" and center back lines this distance and draw new waist line, intersecting the old one at the side of the waist point. [*Figure 6:48*]

(6) Measure yourself from armpit to hipbone. [*Figure 6:49*] Extend the side line. Mark this distance on the extended upper end of the side line.

(7) Rough in a curve from the corner of the neckline through the point just marked on the side line and the point marked earlier on the center back line. Try to make the curve as smooth as possible. Do not be alarmed if it encroches on the original armhole. [*Figure 6:50*]

Transferring the pattern and finishing it; cut out this new paper pattern, and lay it out on the flesh side of your leather, however it will fit. Take a pencil and trace around the edge. Transfer center front and side lines. If you are making waist tabs, extend center back lines another 2 to 2½″ and draw them in more or less as shown. [*Figure 6:51*] Rough in the cuts for the actual tabs. Do not put a cut line exactly in line with the side lines. Try to make the two sides symmetrical (assuming that your body is reasonably symmetrical, that is). Cut the corset out.

Finishing the Corset: Work on wrong side of the leather. Begin by cutting the tabs up to the waist line. Do not continue the cuts into the body of the corset just yet, although you may need to do this later. Take your skife and start shaving the leather down along the waist line at the base of, and just above, the tabs. Thin it to about ⅛″. You can also shave it down along the upper edge, particularly in the armhole area. Do not skive the center front waist point or the center back edges. Mark the positions for your eyelets or grommets. [*Figure 6:52*] (I always found eyelets perfectly adequate, and since mine were countersunk, the little raw edges never gave any trouble. But suit yourself.) Make the holes. Now take your French skiver and start gouging away at the holes until the leather is thin enough to apply the eyelets (or grommets). [*Figure 6:53*] Apply the eyelets (or grommets). Now put the corset on over whatever you intend to wear under it and fasten it up. Check the fit; does it need to be trimmed down in back? (Do your shoulder blades bump into the edge?) Does it need to come down a bit under the arms? (Expect to feel the edge, but it shouldn't cut.) Does the front edge need to be trimmed? (Is it standing up in a ridge above your bosom?) Sit down. Does the point slide comfortably over the belly or is it too long? Does it prod your pubic bone when you sit normally? (Expect it to if you slump.) For that matter, is the center point too wide? (Does it bind the hips?) Do the tabs need to be cut in a bit higher? (Walk a few steps; does it interfere with the movement of the hips? It shouldn't but it might.) For that matter, is the whole corset the right size? (The lacing ought to hold it closed and the fit be as described in the earlier chapters.) Take the corset off and trim as necessary. Extend the slits of the waist tabs into the body of the corset up to ½″ or so *only if necessary*. Put it on again. Repeat this fitting and trimming until you are satisfied. If necessary, re-skive edges and waist area if they have been changed. When you are satisfied with the fit (this is the point at which you decorate the leather, if you so choose), take the edge skiver and skive all edges to bevel them. You can try to skive the edges of the waist tabs too, if you wish, but it will be tricky. Turn the corset right side up. Edge skive the edges of the right side of the corset. Take your edge roller and finish all of the edges of the corset that you can get at. [*Figure 6:54*] (You'll have trouble with the tabs.) You may also wish to set grommets or eyelets in some of the tabs, as with the standard corset, to which to anchor bum-rolls, farthingales or whatever. If so, you manage them in the same manner as those at center back. To apply the busk, you first decide whether you wish to glue it permanently in place, or to make a casing that it will

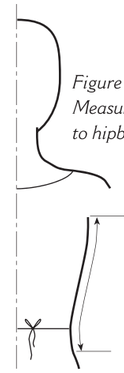


Figure 6:49 - Measure armpit to hipbone.

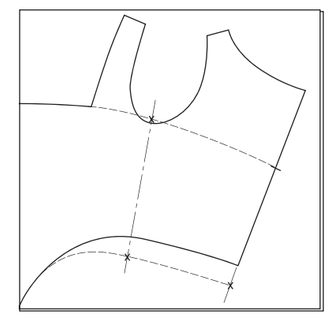


Figure 6:50 - Mark distance on side line. Rough in new top line.

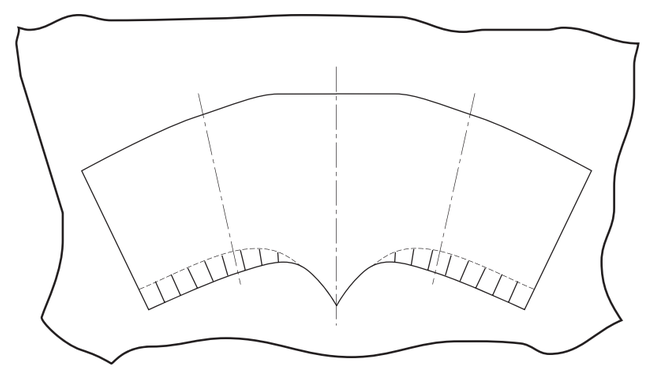


Figure 6:51 - Cut out pattern, trace on leather. Extend lower edge again for tabs. Transfer center and side lines.

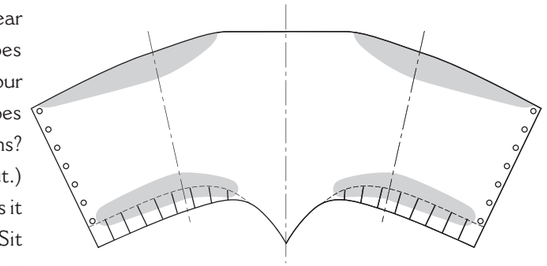


Figure 6:52 - Cut out corset, skive in grey areas, cut tabs, mark places for eyelets.

Figure 6:53 - Punch eyelet holes, gouge surrounding area with french skiver to countersink eyelets.

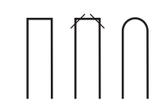


Figure 6:54 - Finish edges as shown; left to right, raw edge, beveled edge, rolled edge.

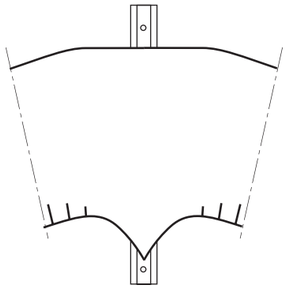


Figure 6:55 - Mark angle of point on busk material.

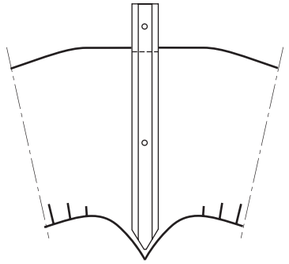


Figure 6:56 - Mark top edge.

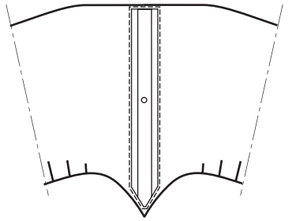


Figure 6:57 - Trace around busk on corset.

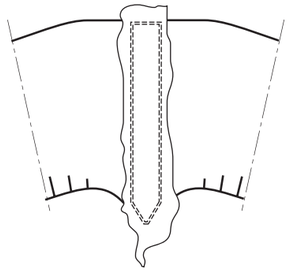


Figure 6:58 - Trace around busk on scrap leather. Add second line ¼″ from the first.

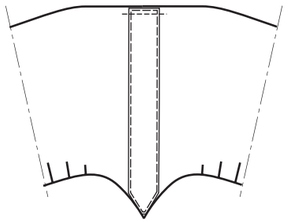


Figure 6:59 - Glue busk casing to corset. Trim down if you wish to make the busk removable.

slip in and out of. You then lay your strip of whatever you plan to make your busk out of under the center front of the corset, centering it at the center front line. Now you mark the shape of the point on the piece of busk. [*Figure 6:55*] You then cut it, or have it cut, to the proper shape. Now you cut it ⅜″ to ⅝″ shorter than the center front length of the corset. [*Figure 6:56*] file the cut edges smooth. Blunt the very end of the point and file that smooth, too. You lay the busk down the center line of the corset about ¼″ from the end and, taking a pencil, trace around it. [*Figure 6:57*] You lay your piece of soft, thin leather over the busk, wrong side up, and, being careful not to let the busk or the leather shift around, take your pencil and trace around the busk on that. Taking the soft leather, draw a second line ¼″ outside the first line. [*Figure 6:58*] Cut the casing out on this second line (scissors will probably do fine). If you are making the busk a permanent, immovable feature, lay the busk in position and glue the casing, right side out, over it. If you are planning to make the busk removable, glue the casing to the corset matching the pencilled lines. Trim the top of the casing about ⅜″ from the corset edge. [*Figure 6:59*] Allow the glue time to dry. You now have a corset.

Note: I am not convinced that skiving is really necessary if you are using the 7–8 ounce barktan. Most barktan is a thinner, denser leather than Live Oak. However, skiving the underarm edge would no doubt make it easier for the leather to mold itself to your body's contours.

A word of warning: Nice as the design concept may sound, do not cut the leather corset into vertical strips intending to lace it back together with colored ribbons. Its effectiveness is dependant on its being an unbroken band about the body. Anywhere (except for the center back) that is divided, it collapses and must be supported by a bone or other help. Even if the corset is solid in back, and the center front is divided, the opening will need to be braced. The only reason that a center back opening does not, is that the upper back of the wearer is firm enough to support itself and does not press down on the corset. This does not apply anywhere else. You may divide it down the center front and brace it with metal as I did in my first attempt if you insist on it. [*Figure 6:60*] But, regardless of popular imagination, 16th century peasants did not go about in apocryphal 18th century "milkmaid" corselets, or waist cinches, open down the front and laced across 5 inches of shift. (The clothing portrayed in the paintings of Lucius Cranach the Elder was constructed acording to different principles. Go read chapter 9.)

If your designer absolutely insists, something can no doubt be arranged, but it will not be authentic, and at least some of the audience may know it. Of course they will probably know that about *any* leather corset worn as an outer garment, anyway. You will need to use some support down any cut edges to keep it from caving in and you would be very well advised to add straps of ribbon or something to help support the sides. (Cutting the straps in one with the corset is potentially possible, but the shaping is a good deal trickier than one would think. Attaching the straps later may be a safer method.) You would probably be wise to lace the corset over a separate stomacher of perhaps a contrasting color. This stomacher will need its own busk.

So long as we are on the subject, a dyed, painted, gilded, tooled or otherwise decorated leather stomacher, with its own busk and grommets down the sides, should be usable with the corset designed for a separate stomacher listed above as well. There would be the slight problem of the bone(s) #5 popping up and showing the lacing underneath, but this may not be noticeable at any but the closest quarters, or it may not be as likely a problem in practice as it seems in theory. The separate stomacher is one of the variations which I only have someone else's word on. A leather stomacher may very well be laced over the corset as in the alternative form mentioned in that section. But being leather, the hooks which are needed to hold the costume gown to it could not very well be used. Unless some other method of attachment can be devised, this becomes an iffy proposition. Leather seems well suited for the style which rises in a curve at the center of the neckline but it might break down with wear.

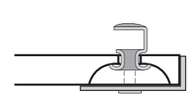


Figure 6:60 - The "L"-shaped aluminum weatherstripping used for bracing the edge of a center front opening. In this example, stripping is both rivited and glued to the leather. Lacing hooks have been countersunk and applied.

"Authentic" Boning:

This would only be necessary when there is a disrobing scene to be contended with. The standard corset utilized a post-16th century technology in the boning pattern, since, if Ms. Waugh is to be believed, in her excellent Corsets and Crinolines (and she seems to have done a pretty thorough job researching the subject), the practice of positioning bones at an angle in the garment does not seem to have come into general use until the 18th century. Therefore, for purposes in which absolute visual authenticity is required, the boning would go in in a straight up and down "picket-fence" manner as shown. [*Plate E–3*] As you can see, the straight bones cover the area in a very different manner from that of the slanted style. Waugh's illustration of a corset from 1600 (whether it represents a surviving garment or a composite, I cannot say) shows the boned panel ending along a diagonal side front line at its lower edges, and in the manner referred to as the "unboned front" earlier in this chapter along the

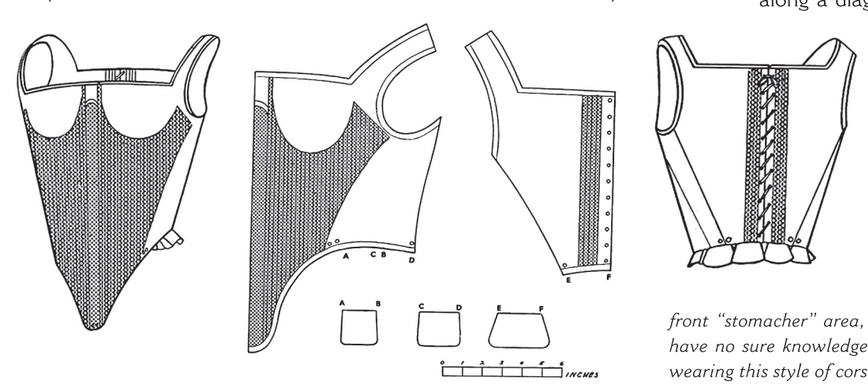


Plate E – 3: Early 17th Century Corset, Waugh. As shown, all boning is positioned in a straight up-and-down orientation within the front "stomacher" area, and to reinforce the lacing. I have no sure knowledge of the social class a woman wearing this style of corset might come from.

upper edge. Her diagram also depicts the solid busk replacing the two bones #1 of the basic Renfaire corset. You may wish to combine various elements.

The Narrowed Waist:

I cannot really imagine why anyone would be silly enough to want to make an Elizabethan corset which is too small, for them but I can't suppose it would be beyond human ingenuity to produce. I won't wish you luck, because I don't think you will have it. I won't give you speculative information on how to do it, either, but you would almost certainly need to use the variation with waist tabs since a straight edge would cut intolerably.

The reason a person's waist is the same size in the standard corset as normally, is that the original muslin had been fitted to the person's own waist from their first fitting. If a smaller waist is wanted, the waist of the garment must be narrowed. Let me make myself clear. I do not recommend trying this. Nor do I know of anyone who has done it sucessfully. (I should hope people had better sense!) Obviously, one will not be able to do a paper fitting, because the pins would tear through the material. Even a muslin fitting would probably not work very well since the tension of trying to pin the material around a body which is larger around than the material's width would probably just cause the pins to pull loose or the material to rip or stretch. For that matter, much of the paper fitting was intended to keep the waist from cutting or binding, and there is no way to stop this from happening in a corset which has been made too small *and* laced too tight.

EXPERIENCE IS UNDOUBTEDLY the best teacher. Such things as corsets really do need to be individually worked out. But, still, I hope that I have given the people in need of it enough to go on with. There are bound to be more variations than I and my informants have discovered. Nor has the last word on this, or any other, subject yet been written. While this book deals directly only with the Tudor and Elizabethan periods, some of its information will probably be helpful in dealing with later eras. You have my best wishes in your endeavors. For further information on this subject, I would like to refer the interested to Norah Waugh's Corsets and Crinolines, or to the more recently published work of Jean Hunnisett.

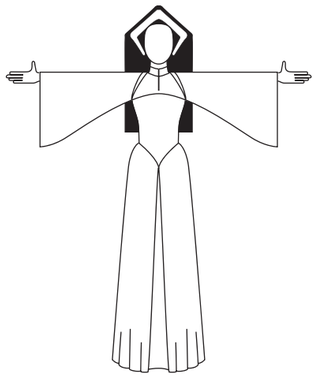


Figure 7:1 - Skirt without any support.

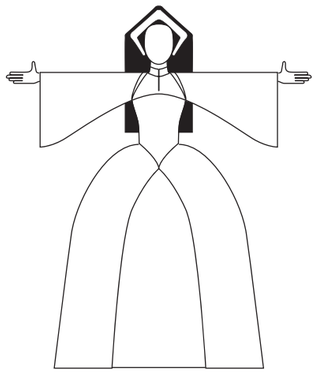


Figure 7:2 - Using tea-cozy dome crinoline.

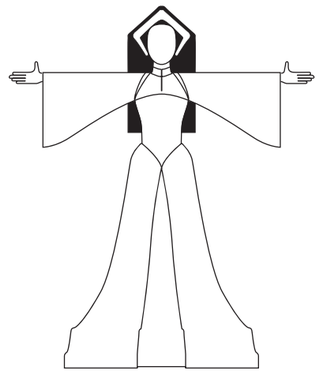


Figure 7:3 - Using bridesmaid hoop.

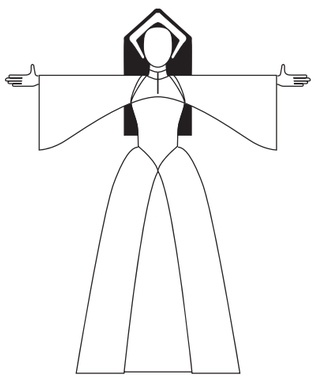


Figure 7:4 - The layered look.

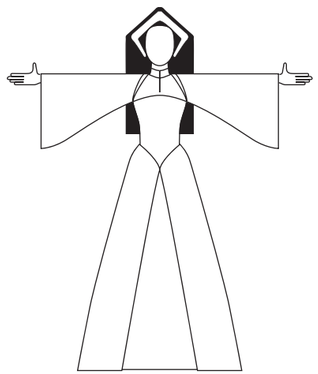


Figure 7:5 - Using petticoat with buckram or ruffles at bottom.

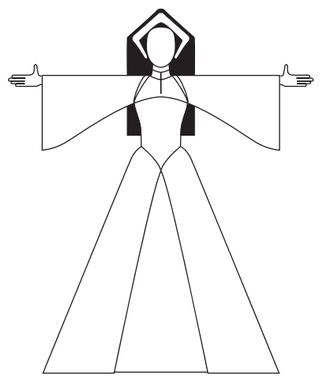


Figure 7:6 - Using the Spanish Farthingale.

Sing a Song of Six Skirts, Silhouettes Awry...

LAZY LANA MAKES a Tudor. She doesn't bother with underskirts or hoops. The skirt flops straight down around her ankles and she ends up looking like a drowned rat dressed in singularly opulent dishrags. [*Figure 7:1*]

Clueless Charlotte makes a Tudor. She realizes that it needs a hoopskirt. So she ambles down to her local Friends of the Widows and Orphans of the Korean Conflict Thrift Shoppe and finds a used one. It's a tea-cozy dome-shaped hoopskirt from the 1950s, but her Tudor is on a hoopskirt, all right? Well, it's on a hoopskirt. *All wrong*. [*Figure 7:2*]

Sloppy Shirley makes a Tudor. She also realizes that it needs a hoopskirt. She asks at her local bridal shops and finds one willing to sell off some of its rental stock which has gotten rather draggle-tailed and tatty-looking. She buys a bridesmaid's hoop which consists of two hoops at the bottom of an otherwise unshaped petticoat with an elastic waist. It sort of worked with the lightweight lining satin and organdy it was designed for, but Shirley's Tudor is velvet, so... [*Figure 7:3*]

The examples above may be safely classified as failures. Shirley's might be remedied by adding hoops above the two existing ones and wearing a crisp petticoat over it (or sewing ruffles to the hoopskirt or the dress lining — although not if you are going in for absolute period accuracy. They didn't wear ruffles in the 16th century.) Charlotte may be able to take some of the fullness out of the upper hoops. But I haven't high hopes for either. Lana's costume only needs the proper support added. Lana herself is probably incorrigible.

As to the qualified successes...

Slapdash Sarah makes a Tudor. She wears every skirt she owns under it. It's a bit bulky around the waist, but it doesn't look half bad. It is, however, as heavy as death and as hot as one of the alternative sequels. [*Figure 7:4*]

(Sarah's friend, Makeshift Margo combs her thrift shops until she finds a 1950s prom formal with a skirt composed of 97 rows of net ruffles. She takes the boning out of the bodice and wears it, spaghetti straps and all, as an underslip. It is lighter weight and gives much the same effect without the bulk.

Ingenious Ida makes a Tudor. She hates the thought of hoops, so she makes a petticoat with a knee-high band of buckram around the bottom. It doesn't spread her skirts as much as a hoop would, but she deliberately based her Tudor on the styles of the earlier half of the era. Although the buckram catches her behind the knee when she sits down, it actually looks damn good. Until the humidity kills it. [*Figure 7:5*]

(Ida's pal, Lucky Leah hunts her thrift shops until she finds a 1950s bouffant petticoat and removes the ruffles above knee level or thereabouts. If she's really lucky she finds one with ruffles only at the bottom to begin with.)

Anxious Alice makes a Tudor. She decides to make herself a hoop skirt. She researches costume books, pattern books, and asks people who have tried it earlier until she works out her pattern. She may use either the one that has a straight back and front with a triangular wedge at each side, or the one with 6–8 pie-shaped gores, or she may find some other variation. At any rate, it has a lot of pieces which all have to be cut and sewn together and Alice wasn't sure how the slope of the skirt was going to work out until she put the hoops in it (and had to take them out again and narrow the top two hoops because it was trying to look like a tea-cozy) and she hadn't any clear idea of how much hooping was going to be needed and had to buy more in the middle of the job. But, she made it, finished it, and wears it (under a petticoat — since the hoopskirt is made of canvas, mattress ticking, or whatever the book, or her advisors recommended, and isn't very pretty), and the final effect is perfect. It has, of course, all the advantages and disadvantages of a good hoopskirt. [*Figure 7:6*]

(Hapless Harriet had the same idea. She bogged down in the pie-piece cutting and gave up. She finally went to a bridal shop and rented a hoopskirt which she carefully looked over to make sure it had enough hoops and made a very full petticoat to wear over it to lessen the hoop ridges showing through. (Bridal wear isn't always designed for either the weight of medievals or the sort of

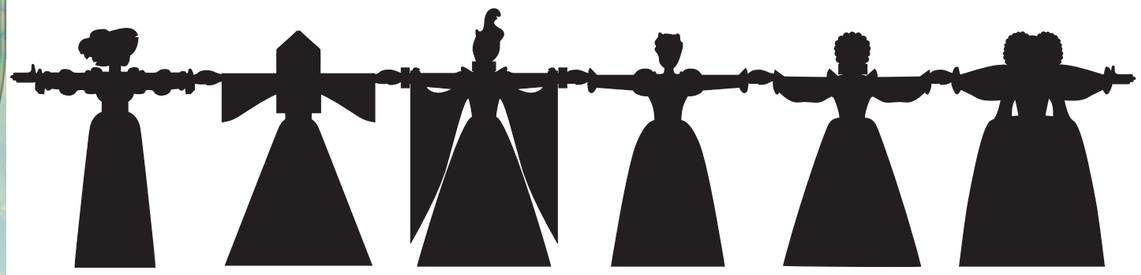


Figure 7:7 - Left to right; 16th c. German, early to mid–16th c. English, 16th–early 17th c. Spanish, 16th c. Italian, later 16th c. English, later 16th–early 17th c. English and French. The German and Italian modes were not dependent upon hoops. The later English used hoops which widened at the top, or a large bum roll or cartwheel farthingale, with or without hoops.

strenuous activity to which they may be subjected at a revel.) Or maybe it was a theatrical costume rental she used. I'm not clear on which. Either will do, but if you wear the costume often, this can get expensive.)

When I decided to make a Tudor, I made the hoopskirt first.

For our purposes, in the context of this chapter, what is meant by the term farthingale is the 16th century cone-shaped Spanish farthingale. (Yes, I know that the Spanish farthingale was more of a bell-shape than a strict cone. So will yours be, but I use the term cone to make as strong a differentiation as conveniently possible from the sort of tea-cozy dome which Charlotte — and others — have trundled about, to their detriment.) This is the general, all-purpose hoop which may be used as a foundation for nearly all styles within our period in which a hoop was (or could have been) worn. By this, I mean all Spanish-influenced mid-16th century to early 17th century modes. German modes of the mid-16th century appear to owe their distinctive shape to sheer bulk of petticoats, as do the earlier modes of most of Europe. The Germans do not appear to have adopted the hoop until late in the period, if even then. This may have been partly due to the lack of contact between Northern and Southern Europe during the religious schism of the Reformation. A secondary cause for this might have been the climate. A hoop holds one's skirts away from one's legs and feet, providing a great deal more contact with the (chilly) air as well as greater freedom of movement.

The 16th century saw progressive breakdown of national dress styles due to the socioeconomic changes brought about by the wide-spread collapse of feudal customs, and the rise of commerce, with its accompanying increase in wealth, information, improved worldwide communication, and cultural exchange. By the last third of the 16th century, although each country had its own interpretation of the theme, the silhouette of typical dress in Western Europe was almost indistinguishable, and Germanic modes were becoming much like any others, chapped kneecaps notwithstanding. England, though having a notoriously soggy climate, is not as cold as Germany. England was also in the process of changing its major heating source from wood to coal which is a more efficient fuel.

The Spanish farthingale, therefore, is suitable for (obviously!) all such mid-16th, and early (Velasquez) 17th century Spanish costume, and for English and French Tudors as well. If you choose to use hoops for them, the silhouettes of the later Italian and German modes need only the addition of a bouffant petticoat over the hoop (if a disrobing scene is not in question, I need hardly add). These styles had a strongly belled shape, but one which was still too slight to really require a bum-roll. Since the skirts of these styles appear to have been very full and closely pleated or gathered to the bodice, while some extra softening of the angle of the hoop is helpful, the greater bulk of the skirt itself will do most of the work. (Obviously, the heavier and/or limper the fabric of the skirt, the more help will be required.)

Earlier German and Italian modes, as stated above, were dependent upon layering. In fact, it is possible that prior to the invention of the cartwheel farthingale, Italian modes never became dependent upon hoops at all, which is remarkable considering that Italy had possibly one of the warmest climates of the major European cultural centers. It is difficult to make any clear judgment from studying portraiture of the period, since classical taste both in the more western and southern German, and the Italian, states appears to have united in preferring an altogether more, um, *stalwart* form of (feminine) beauty than that preferred by the (visually) more effete English, French and Spanish courts.

As one progresses further through the century, the addition of a small, medium, or large bum-roll, and, eventually, a cartwheel farthingale may be worn over the hoop, [*Figure 7:7*] although once one reaches the large bum-roll/cartwheel farthingale stage the temptation is to abandon the hoop entirely. This temptation may be yielded to, but I wouldn't advise it prior to the large bum-roll stage, since, for much of this time period, while there was or appeared to be a 90-degree angle between the skirt and the bodice, the hem of the skirt was still noticeably wider than the top. Also, as a practical consideration, even if you manage a hoop badly, if you've got to be going up and down stairs a hoop will keep a voluminous skirt from getting under your feet while you do it. It was not until the early Stuart (Cavalier) period that a smaller bum-roll appears to have been used without a hoop.

As a final note, during the relevant period, the middle and lower-middle classes undoubtedly attempted to dress above their station without possessing the means to do so properly. In the same manner that they attempted to imitate a whaleboned body by inserting a wooden stomacher into an otherwise unstiffened bodice, they may have worn farthingales, rather like Shirley's which consisted of one or two hoops at the bottom of a petticoat. It probably looked pretty tacky, and would have been a dead give away of the wearer's social level.

This is not, however, a full treatise on the history and development of the farthingale, nor of the sociological ramifications of its use. Neither is it devoted to the management of a hoop skirt once you own one. I do, however, have some very definite opinions regarding both.

For one thing, I do not believe that they were really all that widely used. At least, not this time around. In the 18th century, every gentlewoman and her personal maidservant may have had one. In the 19th century every cook and housemaid certainly had and wore a crinoline (to the peril of the bric-a-brac for the latter and to the risk — and occasionally loss — of her own life in the case of the former.) But in the late 16th and early 17th centuries I suspect that the status of the farthingale was closer to that which the crinoline enjoyed during its brief revival in the 1950s. It was, in all its frivolity, a status item. It was not, as it became in its other avatars, an indispensable adjunct to fashion, let alone a claim to respectability. As in the 1950s, most women, on most occasions, made do with petticoats. This, in a Europe where the only practicable form of heating consisted of open firepits in the middle, or fireplaces spaced at intervals along the walls, of a room the size of a basketball court, or of a hearth at one end of a smaller room such as a parlor, was probably no great hardship. For one thing, not everyone could afford a farthingale, and for the majority of people who might be able to manage it once, frequent replacements would not be a welcome necessity. And welcome or not, frequent replacements would be a necessity. The most common materials used in farthingales reportedly were whalebone, steel, cane or wood.

Whalebone would undoubtedly be the most durable, and would not be in need of replacement. However, in the lengths needed for hoops, it almost certainly would be costly, and the general run of people would probably opt for a cheaper alternate. Steel, well, I somehow doubt that steel would have been used for farthingales in the 16th and 17th centuries. For one thing, a farthingale takes an awful lot of hooping and steel hoops would have to be hand-forged. The metal would also tend (I should think) to be heavy, to cut through the casings enclosing it, and to rust. They would probably also be at least as costly, if not more so, than whalebone. No. I suspect that the research works which blithely state that steel was used in farthingales are either confusing the farthingale with the crinoline or are simply overstating the case. Which leaves us with cane, wood, and their ilk. These, I suspect, may have been the most frequently used among the moderately well-to-do, and the replacement rate would have been very high. Once cane (or any of the other above-mentioned) dries out, it becomes

highly brittle, and when your hoops become brittle, they split. This does not take long. Particularly when they are being given a strenuous workout.

Which leads me to suspect that they weren't given that strenuous a workout. I do not believe that the average gentlewoman wore her farthingale with all that much frequency. Nor do I believe that she wore a farthingale to undertake functions other than those which were largely conducted standing, in an open place. I do not believe that a typical, gentlewoman wore her farthingale to oversee the stillroom, to sit over her embroidery (or spinning or whatever), for travelling, for services in a home chapel (assuming one was available), to putter about the garden, or to sit down for a family dinner. A farthingale was a court garment. It was worn for state functions, and, by lesser folk, for such social functions as balls, probably for services conducted in public churches or cathedrals (always an opportunity for display) and possibly for social visits and calls. It was also, possibly, although I have my doubts, worn for formal banquets. It most certainly was worn when having one's portrait painted.

Within the S.C.A., after having worn a farthingale to one ball, one banquet, and one court, I will go on record as saying that for balls they are delightful, for courts endurable, and for banquets intolerable! To try to stuff a 3-yard hoop under a church hall table and onto a metal folding chair, particularly when there is another chair to the left of you, a chair to the right of you, a third opposite, and a fourth behind, is an exercise in futility only slightly secondary to stuffing an elephant into a phone booth. Extricating oneself from this situation is, if anything, an even less enviable endeavor. The ungainliness and discomfort of the display is rivaled only by its immodesty. But no doubt Renaissance banquets were held in surroundings allowing for a little more æsthetic distance from one's neighbors (literally and figuratively).

The purpose of a farthingale is to support and extend the skirt in accordance with the demands of the style. If it fails to do this, it is not a well-made garment. The single, most important factor in making a successful farthingale is the correct positioning of the hoops. No skirt is going to work right if the hoops which go into it are in the wrong places.

The following general information regarding hoops, and their correct positioning was presented in a workshop on hoopskirts conducted by Ms. Candice Bratmon during the 1970s.

Some fairly safe generalizations are:

(1) A successful farthingale will have at least six hoops.

(2) The bottom hoop will clear the ground by about three inches.

(3) To avoid the double-ridged effect — as in "Shirley's" hoops — there is a second hoop about two inches above the bottom hoop. The third hoop is about six inches from the bottom. In other words, three of the six hoops are in the bottom six inches of the farthingale.

(4) There is a hoop at the level of the wearer's hip joint. One reason for this hoop being placed at this particular position is that at this level — which is at the level of the point where the leg bends from the hip, not at crotch level — the hoop will be high enough to be well out of the wearer's way when she is seated. Sitting on one of your hoops can be rather uncomfortable. This hoop is also intended to extend the skirt at what is usually the broadest point of the female anatomy so that it clears the body, avoiding the dragged-over-the-hip look of Shirley's hoops, and helps insure the hip-to-hem angle of the slope by giving the rest of the skirt a level starting point from which to hang.

(5) There must be another hoop, a control hoop, level with the base of the wearer's fingers. This is so she can catch hold without having to grope, when she needs to maneuver the hoop or to sit down. This hoop is *not* at the level of her finger *tips*. [*Figure 7:8*]

(6) The sixth hoop is needed to sustain the angle of the slope, supporting the weight of the skirt and preventing it from sagging inward in the distance between the third, and fifth hoops. That long, concave curve of Shirley's hoopskirt above its upper hoop is an example. This hoop must not be exactly at knee level, however, since when the wearer is seated, a hoop that runs across the top of the knees will break the fall of the skirt making a noticeable ridge. A hoop slightly below this point will not be so noticeable. I am told that a hoop a little above this point also will not be so obtrusive. I would imagine that a hoop above the knee would require extra care in seating oneself, but have no definite information on this possibility, since no one of my acquaintance has constructed a farthingale with this hoop above knee level.

The avoidance of ridges is brought about by giving the skirt of the dress support over a continuous enough area to prevent its weight from sagging in any gaps and forming ridges. When a farthingale is in motion, however, it does not move in one piece. When it sways or twists it does so in sections and a certain amount of terracing is to be expected. [*Figures 7:9, 7:10*] This is, however, only an effect of actual movement. If a hoop shows noticeable ridges at rest, something is wrong with it. Or something is wrong with the costume you are wearing over it. Fabrics used during the era of the farthingale had a certain amount of body to them. When light weight, they were generally fairly crisp. When heavier, they were firm. Fabrics with an inherent softness, such as velvet, appear to have been most frequently used in overgowns over a petticoat of another material. If you have your heart set upon a crepe satin Tudor, wear a bit of extra support between it and the farthingale. A ruffled petticoat (with a ruffle at the level of each hoop, that is) works fine. Or ruffles sewn to the farthingale above the hoops. Since ruffles are not period, however, if there is any danger of them being seen, cover the ones on the farthingale or wear the petticoat inside-out. Or sew them to the lining of the dress, or decorative kirtle. Or, you can use a full gathered or pleated petticoat (decorative or otherwise) of some crisp material — taffeta comes first to mind, but you can probably find others — instead of ruffles.

I would now like to talk about something that I call an extension. The purpose of an extension is to avoid the dropping-off point produced by a skirt which slopes over the farthingale from waist to the bottom hoop and then plummets abruptly earthward thereafter (and looks ridiculous). If you are wearing the extra petticoat mentioned above, (either ruffed or not) a wide band of plastic crinoline braid or a series of bands of it at the hem should serve the purpose. This band should extend to within an inch of the ground and should start at least as high as the level of the second hoop from the bottom. A very crisp material may need no extra stiffening. Or, I suggest, you might wish to sew the band of crinoline to the lining of the gown (or in the case of a split skirt, the visible under-gown). I personally would advise against attaching it directly to the farthingale. You cannot send a farthingale through the washing machine, dry cleaners are expensive, and there is no way in which you can keep the extension from getting dirty. A detachable extension is a possibility, but I would tend to distrust it. The hoops may keep it out of range for *you* to step on, but other people are not subject to this limitation. Particularly in a crowd. Possible advantages to attaching the extension to the costume are that, in the first place, it will therefore be cleaned whenever the costume is cleaned. Secondly, it is highly unlikely that an extension would drag below a skirt that it is attached to. Third, it avoids another garment to keep track of, and finally, by weighting the hem of the costume, the skirt may be drawn more tautly over the farthingale, lessening its tendency to sag into ridges. It might also make the costume a little less quick to follow the farthingale into its terrace effect in strong motion. (I admit that this fourth point is unverified.) Some

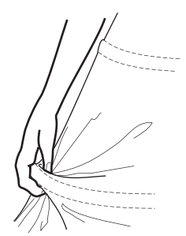


Figure 7:8 - The control hoop must be at a level where it is easy to grasp.

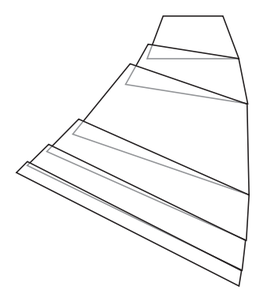


Figure 7:9 - Swaying hoop.

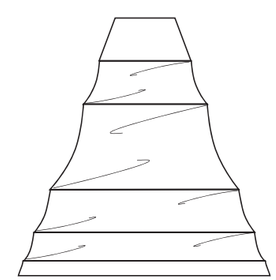


Figure 7:10 - Twisting hoop.

disadvantages are, that it pretty much means that all costumes must have a lining to sew the extension to, and that a clinging fabric will need the extra petticoat anyway. Also, it means that each costume must have its own individual extension; an extra petticoat would be interchangeable. An extra petticoat also definitely helps the gown to glide over the farthingale without getting caught up in the terraces, particularly if the petticoat is made of a somewhat slippery fabric. (The extra weight of gown and petticoat helps to restrain the buoyancy of the farthingale to begin with.) Whichever method you adopt, do resist the temptation to edge the extension with lace, particularly lingerie lace. Unless, of course, you *want* to be spending half of your free time repairing or replacing the parts which have snagged and are now trailing underfoot and in your wake. (It is out of period in any case!)

Although this chapter is not primarily concerned with the management of the farthingale, the following does seem to be in order. When seating oneself while wearing a farthingale, I would advise that you practice beforehand without the covering costume and petticoats in front of a full-length mirror (or smaller mirror placed at a lower level) if possible, since being able to observe just what the silly thing is going to try to do will help to second-guess and thwart it, if necessary (which it will be!).

For one thing, you will not be lolling back at your ease. You will much more likely feel perched on the edge of whatever. The material of which your farthingale is made will allow the hoops only a certain degree of leeway, and the sort of distortion which the act of seating oneself imposes is considerable. The obvious things to try to accomplish are: first, for the sake of modesty, (and dignity, let us not forget) to keep the bottom hoops from tilting up, and second, for the sake of comfort, to avoid sitting on the hoops any more than you must.

The easiest way of satisfying both is simply to sit on the floor. Or, as was in fact done, to sit on a cushion (and sew a fine seam, etc. «ahem») or a low stool which you have popped your farthingale over, bodily, and seated yourself upon, letting said farthingale simply collapse within itself around you and the stool, cushion or whatever. This is not, however, always practical. Particularly not in a crowded hall where you would prefer not having yourself and your costume stepped on.

To seat oneself on a standard chair (without arms), begin backing up against it. [*Figure 7:11*] As soon as the bottom hoops come in contact with the front of the chair legs, the back of the hoop is going to sink while the front will rise. [*Figure 7:12*] To thwart this, take hold of your control hoop and attempt, as soon as the bottom hoop comes in contact with the chair, to keep it in the same position above the lower hoops while you continue to back up inside of it. [*Figure 7:13*] The stress which is put on the fabric of the farthingale is such that this is not really possible unless the control hoop is raised above its normal position closer to the position of the hoop above it. So lift it slightly in the back to facilitate this. You do not raise the hoop very far. (Although you will probably choose to tilt it slightly, so that the back is higher than the front). Instead, you begin to lower yourself inside it. By the time you have lowered yourself enough to relieve the stress on the segment between the control and top hoops somewhat, the bottom hoops will be making a strenuous effort to bounce skyward. It is then necessary to lower the control hoop as well as yourself. Since you are still engaged in backing up inside the farthingale, this transfers the stress between the top and control hoops to the area between the control hoop and the hoop at about knee level. You lower yourself—and the control hoop—quickly now, still backing, trying to keep the major stress at the *back* of the farthingale, since any pull from above in the front will haul the front of the four lower hoops aloft. You will lower yourself just sufficiently to perch upon the edge of your chair. [*Figure 7:14*] The knee level hoop will be at the front edge of the chair seat under your knees (actually since you are only perched it will actually be at about a mid-thigh level) and the back of your control hoop will be on the seat of the chair just behind your own point of contact. In fact, it will be trying to get underneath you, as will the knee level hoop. The front of the control hoop is lying across your lap. The front of the knee hoop is across the front of your kneecaps. The front of the three bottom hoops are extended in space in front of your shins in a very insecure manner. To anchor these hoops you either reach down next to the leg of the chair (if your corset lets you), or if you can manage it, hook your heel under the back of the bottom hoop, and lift the back of the three bottom hoops up to the level of the edge of the chair seat. [*Figure 7:15*] Raising the back of these hoops will lower the front and avoid further unpleasantness. You may now slide yourself back on the chair seat as far as you are able. [*Figure 7:16*] It will not be very far, unless you have no objection to having the back of the knee hoop under your thighs. On a hard chair, you will rapidly have enough of this, but if the chair is cushioned, your endurance may well be greater. You will not do any irrevocable harm to the hoop by sitting on it, (Unless you've been possessed by a fever of authenticity and have made a farthingale out of cane, or rattan or some such) but it is very trying and not insisted upon.

To get up from the chair you first slide forward to the edge, and then stand.

Now, due to the fact that sitting in a hoop is so likely to be uncomfortable, I have taken leave to doubt that even formal banquets in the Renaissance period were greatly hampered by them. However, comfort has generally taken a back seat to display, even at the most

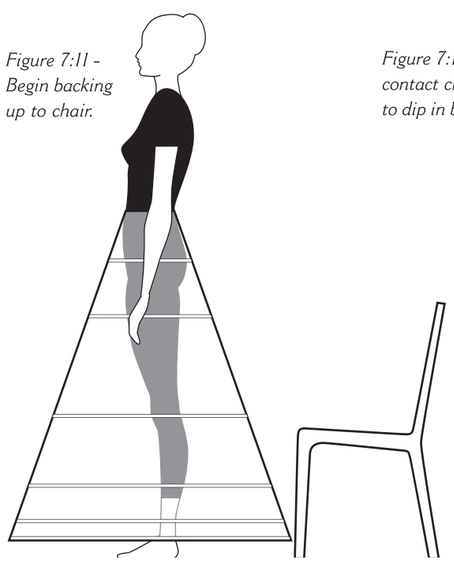


Figure 7:11 - Begin backing up to chair.

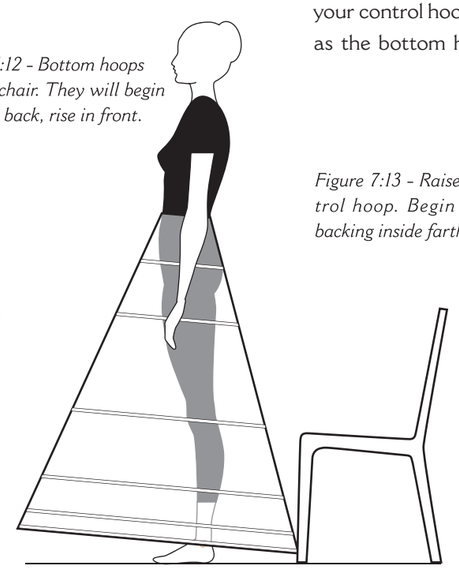


Figure 7:12 - Bottom hoops contact chair. They will begin to dip in back, rise in front.

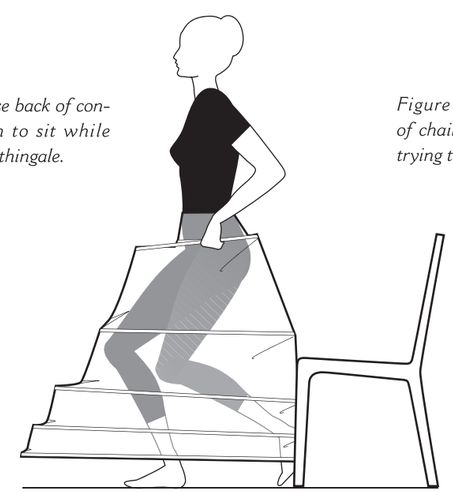


Figure 7:13 - Raise back of control hoop. Begin to sit while backing inside farthingale.

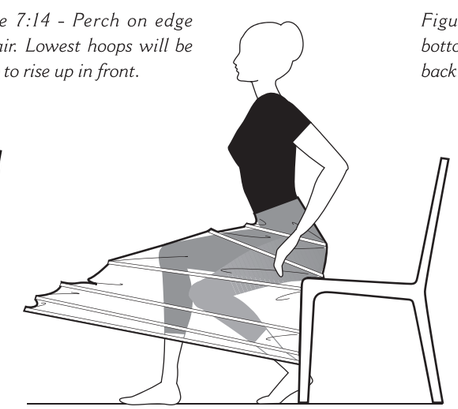


Figure 7:14 - Perch on edge of chair. Lowest hoops will be trying to rise up in front.

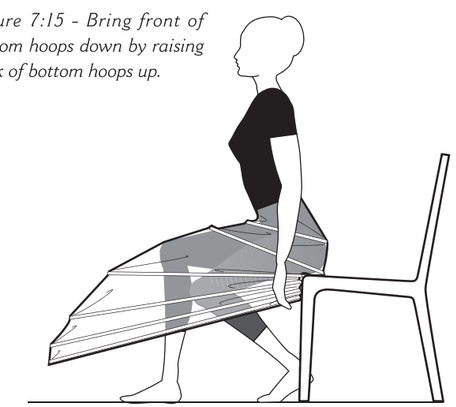


Figure 7:15 - Bring front of bottom hoops down by raising back of bottom hoops up.

enlightened of times, which I should think the Renaissance was not. Certainly, I do not extend my reservations on the subject to state banquets. (Actually, I am by no means certain that ladies would have even been in attendance at such functions, and in fact there is a very good chance that they may not have been.) State functions are, of course, court functions, and a court function was undoubtedly undertaken in court dress — which tends to exist at an ultimate level of impracticality, and although it may be more glaringly anachronistic in the present day, it undoubtedly had its quaint element even within the period in which we are interested. It should be remembered that most of the business of most European courts was conducted standing, which is undoubtedly the position in which a hoop shows to the greatest advantage.

A second reservation in regard to hoops has to do with the information given at Ms. Bratmon's (by now) long-ago workshop in which it was stated that the knee hoop might be placed above the knee, rather than below. Since, when seated, the wearer of a normal hoop skirt is sitting upon that part of the farthingale between the control hoop and hoop below the knee, I would greatly doubt that a hoop any higher than this would prove practical. To do Ms. Bratmon justice, she stated that her own farthingale did not have a hoop in this higher position. I don't know of anyone else who has made the attempt either, and despite my own reservations in the matter, the verdict must necessarily remain for the time, "not proven."

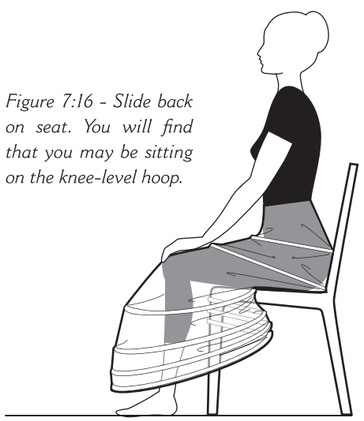


Figure 7:16 - Slide back on seat. You will find that you may be sitting on the knee-level hoop.

Incidentally, as stated elsewhere, when the petticoat and costume are added to the farthingale, their combined weight will help to restrain the hoop's buoyancy considerably. You will still need to exercise care in seating yourself, but the extra weight will slow down the hoops so that it will seem considerably less like a race for decency. I would still avoid chairs with arms, if possible.

The preceding applies to all farthingales, regardless of the method of construction. It does not describe or explain the making of the pattern. For this, there are a number of variations. The two most commonly encountered are, as Alice discovered, the one made completely out of pie-shaped wedges [*Figure 7:17*], and the one with a straight front and back and a large triangular section at each side. [*Figure 7:18*] Both will work quite nicely, the second being somewhat less complex. Both require a great deal of care in measuring and cutting the pieces to be certain of a smooth slope. I tend to sneer at the theoretically possible method of making the garment in gathered tiers. In my experience, nearly everyone who has tried it has ended up with a tea-cozy. In all seriousness, one would have to know exactly how large each hoop was going to be, how far apart, and be able to gather and stitch the damn thing with virtually mathematical accuracy and I still wouldn't care to make any guesses on how well it would turn out. Although the following method of drafting out the pattern will at least give you the numbers to work from. The pie-shaped gores, and the triangle inset methods both do work, however, with an ample number of examples to demonstrate this statement. Neither of which, however, explain or describe the pattern of my farthingale. My farthingale is made in one piece. With one seam.

Only.

My reason for working out this method was that I wanted a pattern that couldn't end up with an uneven slope. A pattern which couldn't end up gathering a slight error with every separate piece all adding up into a whacking great blunder in the total. A pattern which couldn't under any circumstances turn into a tea cozy, and in which I would be able to know beforehand exactly how much yardage and hooping I was going to need. I got one too.

This farthingale is made on the same principle as a third grader's construction paper teepee, or a cardboard witch's hat. [*Figure 7:19*] It fulfills all of the above requirements. It also, once the pattern is drafted, can be constructed very quickly. The calculator is optional.

I will take you through the process step-by-step. It will be much faster for you than for me, since, when I did it, I had no idea of what I was doing, or how it would work. You may feel secure on that point. It works just fine. As with the corset, it is a good idea to read through all of the instructions before starting work.

Take some graph paper in a size you feel comfortable working with, a compass, a protractor, and a straight edge. The examples which I will be using as demonstration were originally drawn 1″ = 1′.

We will say that there is a young lady who is 61 inches tall with about a 26-inch waist, a waist/floor measurement of 39 inches, with the bend of her knee 17 inches above the ground. [*Figure 7:20*]

First, take your graph paper and you make a vertical reference line (**VRL**) and your floor line (**F**).

Next, you draw a horizontal line at the height for the lady's waist (**A**) and another at the level she wants her skirt to end (**B**). The lady wishes her bottom hoop to clear the ground by the standard three inches. After making my own hoop to clear the ground by five inches (I am 5′8″ and was under the mistaken impression that a taller person should have a greater clearance), I have come to the conclusion that a three inch clearance is probably best for anyone regardless of their own height; it will clear all but the most uneven ground and not leave too great a gap requiring too much of an extension.

At this point you have to decide how large you want your bottom hoop to be. For most people three yards is about right. This lady, being rather small, should probably not attempt anything larger, and might even get away with something slightly smaller (be careful on that). A tall lady, on the other hand, might do nicely with up to a 3½ yard maximum. More than 3½ yards is probably not a great idea for anyone, but that is a general statement rather than a mandate. However, unless the lady is extremely tall, a larger hoop will probably only be unnecessarily troublesome, and really wider than the visual effect requires.

Now, taking your optional calculator, or a pencil and scratch paper, and your trusty formula, our old grade school

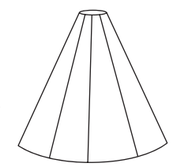


Figure 7:17 - Skirt made from pie-shaped gores.

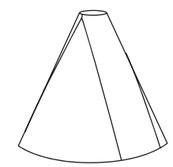


Figure 7:18 - Skirt with straight back and front and triangular piece on each side.

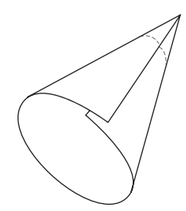


Figure 7:19 - Cone-style one piece skirt with only one seam.

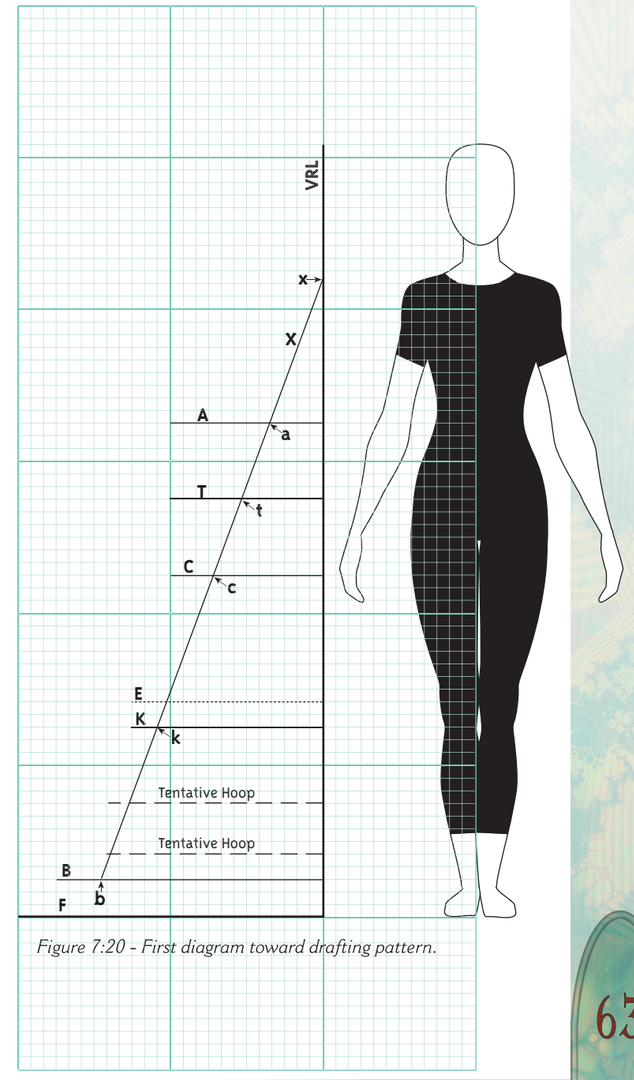


Figure 7:20 - First diagram toward drafting pattern.

friend/tool/nemesis, π(pi)D, find the diameter of the lady's waist measurement (26″) and of the three yard bottom hoop (108″).

As a refresher course for those who have made a point of never having to encounter πD, or, π anything since they left school, "D" represents the diameter of a circle while π is Greek shorthand for the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. For our purposes, π is 3.14. In order to find the diameter from a known circumference, it is necessary to divide the circumference by π, which we do. Our next step after that is to find the radii, one-half of the diameters.

26″ ÷ 3.14 = 8¼″ (approximately)
÷ 2 = 4⅛″ *
108″ ÷ 3.14 = 35″ (approximately)
÷ 2 = 17½″

Then make one mark on line **B** 17½ units from the **VRL** (point **b**) and one mark 4⅛ units from the **VRL** on line **A** (point **a**). Draw a line from point **b** through point **a** to the **VRL**, ending at point **x** (Line **X**).

At this point it would be a good idea to mark the lady's knee line as well (**E**) and the most comfortable level for the hoop at finger base level which for this lady seems to be 27 inches from the floor (**C**). This is also the time to mark the level of the hip joint which in this case appears to be slightly over 33 inches with (line **T**, point **t**).

If you wish you may also tentatively mark a position for the hoops two inches and six inches from the bottom (along line **X**) to give yourself some idea of the distance between this hoop and the control hoop. At some place in this area there will be another hoop. This hoop must not be placed exactly at **E**, but rather, a couple of inches below it (**K**).

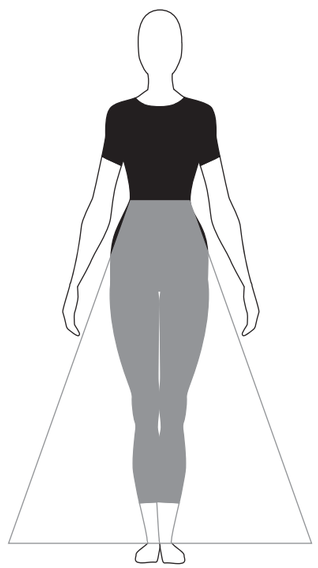


Figure 7:21 - The average woman is slightly too broad across the pelvic girdle to wear a skirt made from the first diagram.

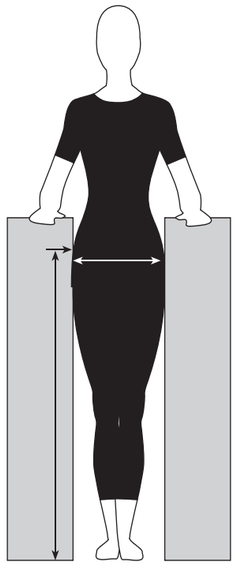


Figure 7:22 - Measuring the hip height and breadth.

This completes the first diagram for the basic, unaltered pattern. Comparatively few ladies will be able to use it as is. In drafting a pattern for a farthingale, there are two distinct figure types. The first is the narrow-hipped lady who could probably make her pattern directly from Figure 7:20. Anyone undertaking the somewhat futile-seeming task of constructing a hoopskirt for a child may also find that the unadjusted pattern is possible. (Anyone making a hoopskirt for a gentleman for full Tudor drag may find this the case as well. Don't ask me why anyone would want to make such a garment. I don't write your comedy routines). The second type is the typical lady who has a slightly broader pelvis. [*Figure 7:21*] For that matter, even the majority of us who *may* use the unadjusted pattern, generally don't want to. We are those of the figure type which may be described with less tact and more truth, not as narrow-hipped, but as thick-waisted. This is not a configuration which a modern wearer is eager to enhance. Nor does it ever look quite right for the period. If you *are* of the narrow-hipped type, who may use an unaltered pattern, you may want to make the following adjustment anyway. The angle of a pure, straight-sided cone is a bit harsh when used in this context. Consider adjusting the angle to that of the more gentle bell-shape which the modification produces. (The simplest method of doing this would be to apply the same adjustment as that used in Figure 7:25, above.

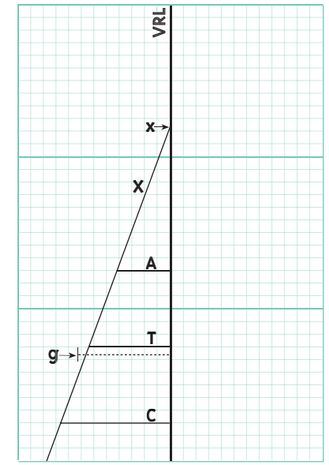


Figure 7:23 - Hip height and breadth marked on first diagram.

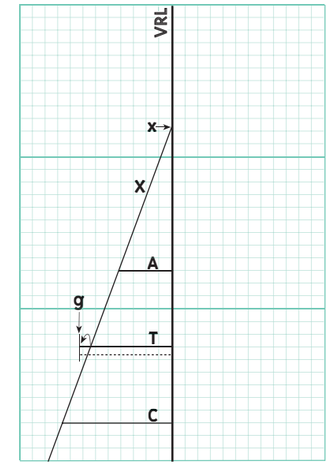


Figure 7:24 - Line T adjusted to accommodate line g.

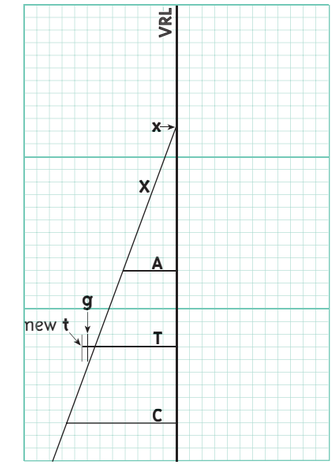


Figure 7:25 - Line T adjusted to accommodate hip breadth at its own level.

Its description follows.)

To do this it is necessary to take a couple of other measurements. One — the more vital one — is hip breadth. Do not confuse yourself by thinking that I mean your hip circumference. I do not. I mean the *breadth* of the pelvic area from side to side. The second measurement is the height of the widest point of the hip.

The easiest way to find the former (Assuming that you haven't simply got access to a couple of carpenter's "Ls" which are more or less designed for this sort of measurement taking) is to stand perpendicular to and with one hip touching a flat solid surface (like a wall), and to bring a second flat solid surface into contact with the other hip, (contact only; you don't want to be pressing against either surface) and measure the distance between the two surfaces. Standing in the opening of a sliding door and bringing it up against yourself is the easiest method that springs to mind. Or standing against the wall behind a standard swinging door if a sliding one is not available (careful of the knob). There are bound to be possibilities in any home or workshop, some easier to deal with than others. When you have sandwiched yourself, measure the distance between the two surfaces, and mark the height of your highest point-of-contact from the floor. [*Figure 7:22*]

Once you have the hip breadth and height recorded, the thing to do is to check it against Figure 7:20. Make a mark on your **VRL** at the level of your hip height. Draw a horizontal line parallel with the floor (**g**) out from this mark. Carry this line beyond line **X**. Divide your hip breadth in half. Mark this distance on line **g** from the **VRL**. [*Figure 7:23*]

For most ladies this mark will land a little lower than line **T** and a fraction of an inch beyond line **X**. This is the average female configuration. Now, a fraction of an inch isn't very much, and indeed it would certainly be possible for her to wear a farthingale which was designed with the top hoop too narrow, because the circumference of the hoop is already substantially larger than her hip circumference (the hoop projects as much fore and aft as it does side to side; a thing which few human bodies do.) But the hoop will be in continual contact with her hips and although it will certainly not dig, it will continually rub which would be annoying and ungraceful. The garment will just not move smoothly. As if that weren't enough, the continuity of the slope from waist to hem has been broken in a very unattractive manner.

Therefore, in order to allow the garment some clearance from the body, extend line **T**, and make a second mark at the same distance from the **VRL** as point **g**. [*Figure 7:24*]

If line **g** is at the same height as line **T**, extend line **T** and make a second mark, for new point **t**, about half an inch

*This does not work for the cartwheel farthingale, but since the waist of the Spanish farthingale generally needs to be gathered in with a drawstring or otherwise brought in to fit, it is appropriate here.

beyond point **g**. [*Figure 7:25*]

If line **g** is higher than line **T** (unlikely, but possible) proceed as with Figure 7:23, drawing your hip height line with point **g** above line **T**. You will make a new "virtual" point **t** on the new line using the same method as in Figure 7:24 and use it for redrawing line **X**. But you will retain your original line **T**, extending

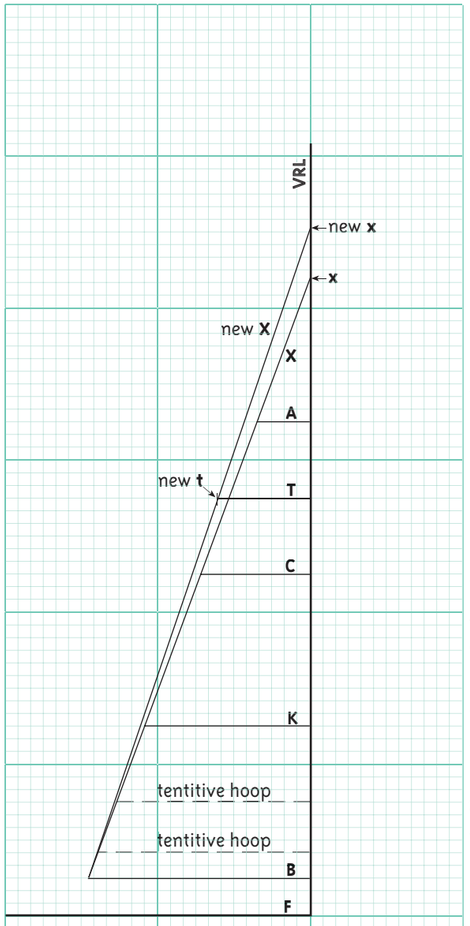


Figure 7:26 - Adjustment to first diagram designed to accommodate hip breadth.

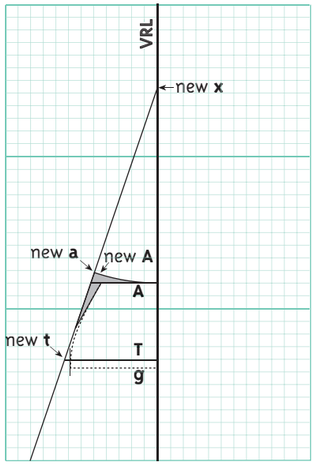


Figure 7:27 - Adjustment to line A is needed to add enough material to reach over top of hip at sides.

it to meet your new line **X**, and continuing to use this height for the top hoop's actual position.

Having found the point at which adjustment is to be made, take your straightedge and draw a line from point **b** through new point **t** and on to the **VRL** making a new point **x**. [*Figure 7:26*] Extend lines and transfer points **c**, **k** and **t** to this new line **X** at the same height from **F** as in the original diagram (there is no change at point **b**). Measure the distance from new point **t** to the **VRL**. Double it and apply πD to it to find the circumference for your top hoop and record this measurement. In this example the radius comes out to approximately 7¼.″

7¼″ x 2 = 14½″ x 3.14 = 45½″

When you have completed this diagram, you will be able to compute the sizes of all your hoops using this formula.

Now, it will be necessary to extend the distance along line **X** between points **a** and point **t** to reach over the extra distance which going from 2 dimensions to 3 requires. Take a compass and, using your new point **x** as radius, draw an arc from the point at which line **A** intersects the **VRL** to the new line **X**. (New point a) [*Figure 7:27*] The excess material (shaded area) may be gathered or darted into a waistband for the finished garment. (There may be some excess length to be trimmed off at center front and back.) Or, which I would think preferable, a casing with a drawstring may be used to finish the upper edge. A plaquet will be necessary since even with the excess material it is unlikely that the upper edge will be large enough to easily get in and out of.

Measure and record (translating into inches) the distances of points **b**, **k**, **c**, **t** and **a** from your new point **x** as they occur along your new line **X**. The simplest method is to cut a strip of your graph paper, and use it as a measuring tape, marking the length(s) on it.

We have now blocked out the angle and the variable hoop positions. It still remains to draw up the pattern itself.

Take a second piece of graph paper and draw another reference line (**H**). Mark a radius point (**r**). Draw a second line from this point, perpendicular to the first one. This is your centerline (℄). Taking your compass and referring to recorded distances, transfer points **a**, **t**, **c**, **k** and **b** to line **H**. Draw arcs from each point (lines **A**, **T**, **C**, **K** and **B**). Now, add the two remaining hoops. On line **H**, mark a point about two inches from arc **B**, (**n**) and another point six inches from arc **B**, (**m**). Draw arcs from these points (**N** and **M**). The positions of the waist, other reference positions, and of all hoops have now been marked. [*Figure 7:28*]

Divide the measurement of the intended circumference of your bottom hoop in half. (108″ ÷ 2 = 54″) Divide the circumference of your top hoop in half as well. (45½″ ÷ 2 = 22¾″)

Measure 54″ out from each side of your centerline along arc **B**. Mark.

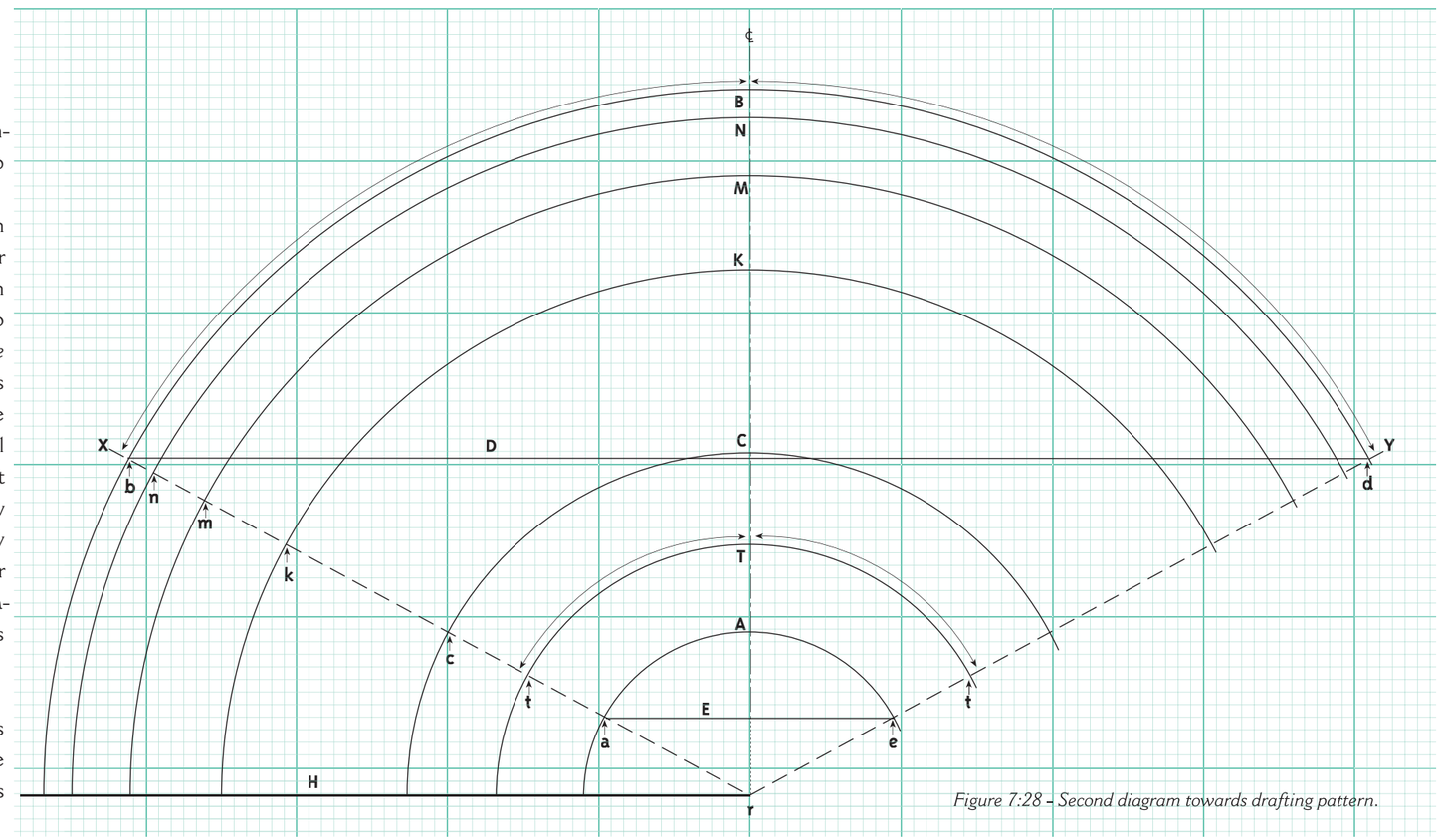


Figure 7:28 – Second diagram towards drafting pattern.

(points **b** & **d**,) Measure 22¾″ out from your centerline along arc **T**, marking this distance on either side of the ℄ as well. (points **t**,) Draw a line (**X**) from point **b**, through the nearest point **t** to arc **A** (point **a**) and on to the radius point. Draw a line (**Y**) from point **d**, through the second point **t** to arc **A** (point **e**) and on to the radius point. Draw a line between point **a** and point **e** (**E**). Draw another line between point **b** and point **d** (**D**). [*Figure 7:28*]

This completes your working diagram.

In the event that a line drawn from Point **d** through **t** and/or point **b** through **t**, do *not* meet at the radius point you may need to adjust lines **X** and **Y** for symmetry. [*Figure 7:29*] The two lines should still meet at the centerline and lines **X** and **Y** must be the same length.

Measure line **D**. Add at least one inch for seam allowances. This is the required length of your yardage. Measure your center line from arc **B** to the intersection with line **E**. This, with an extra inch or so for seam allowances, is the required width of yardage needed. We have encountered a potential disadvantage to this method. In many cases, the pattern will require wider than average material. Cotton sheeting may be found in wider measurements, and is a good weight for the purpose.

Or you can simply go ahead and use an old sheet. (Or a tablecloth. Or a lightweight bedspread. Nothing says that a farthingale has to be plain white, after all). Try thrift shops and be careful of holes or weak spots in the fabric. The material need not be heavy, but it must be firmly woven.

Figure 7:29 - Adjustment at Ps or Qs may be necessary to make 2nd diagram symmetrical.

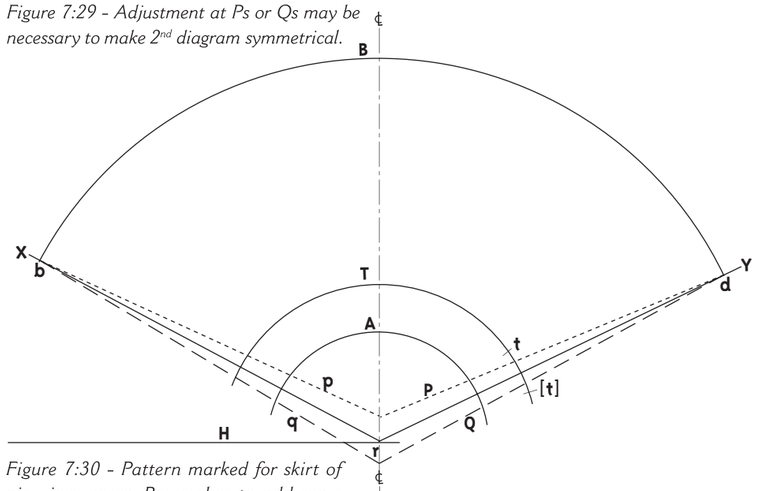


Figure 7:30 - Pattern marked for skirt of pie-piece gores. Remember to add seam allowances at each cut.

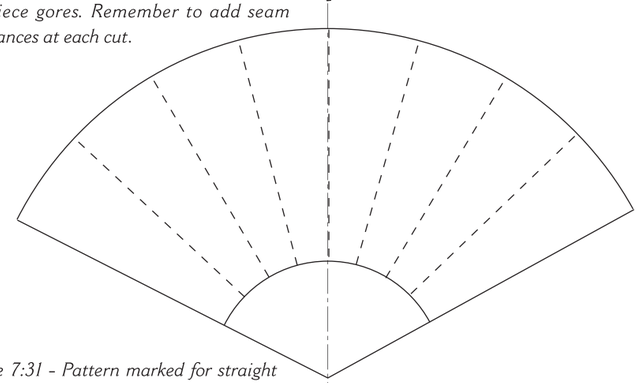
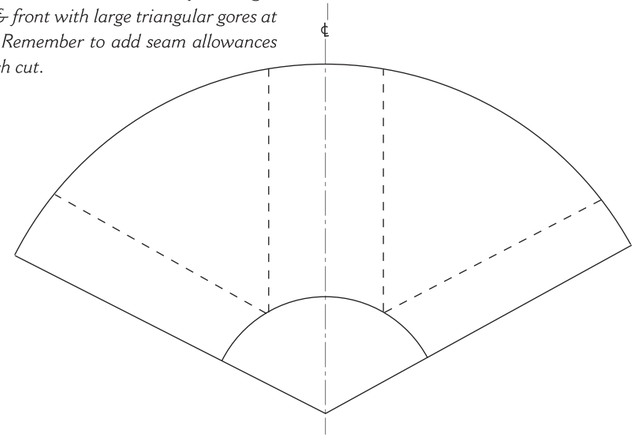


Figure 7:31 - Pattern marked for straight back & front with large triangular gores at sides. Remember to add seam allowances at each cut.



I have found only two significant disadvantages in this method. First, as just stated, there is a lot of wasted material in the cutting, and you might find yourself needing to purchase more material than you expected. The other disadvantage is that a farthingale made by this process will be on the grain of the fabric in one place only, and that is at the center back. (I found that it worked best with the seam down center front.) This will not really matter once the hoops are in, for the hoops exert no more pressure in one place than any other and will not stretch the material out of shape. However, once the hoops are in, they should be left in, since the mauling about of the material which is needed to get the hoops out and then back in again may distort the material along the bias. The temptation to remove the hoops will not, in any event, be strong. Once you have struggled through the chore of feeding six hoops into a hoopskirt, you will not be eager to go through that again. However, in a skirt which does not have this problem (as in the triangle wedge or pie-piece layout), by making the casings slightly loose one might be able to remove the hoops for (rare) washing or for packing the farthingale for long trips. It would not be done often, but it might be possible. (This is a speculation and is not verified.)

Therefore, you may, if you wish, mark your final diagram with the seam lines for one of the two other methods as in Figure 7:30 or 7:31, using your diagram for the final dimensions and hoop layout as a starting point. Remember that for *each* cut, you have to add *two* seam allowances. In this case, you will want to draw the whole thing out full size on pattern tissue first, rather than starting directly on your fabric. You may want to draw the whole thing out on pattern tissue in any case, but I will continue as if you are all confident enough to skip that part.

You are now ready to mark and cut out the material, and construct your farthingale.

For our test case here, we will need material at least 42 inches wide and 89 inches long (2½ yards, or, 90 inches ought to be perfect). Wash the material first to pre-shrink it. Iron if necessary and find the center of the piece.

Mark the center line across the entire width. Measure out from each side of this centerline the distance of one half

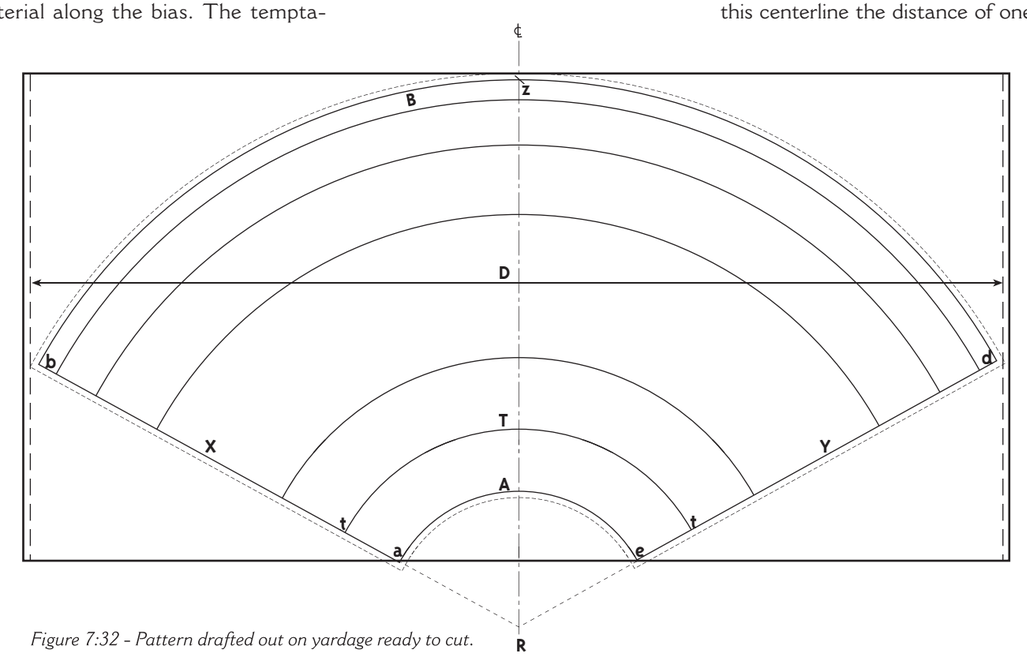


Figure 7:32 - Pattern drafted out on yardage ready to cut.

of line **D** above. Draw a line across the whole width of your yardage at this distance from the center, on each end of the yardage (dashed lines).

It helps to have a carpet to pin the yardage to, but taping it to the floor, or other work surface will also work. In any event, you need a flat surface at least as wide as your radius (in this case, approximately 50″). Pin or otherwise secure the yardage so that it lies flat and will not rumple. Be sure that your center line is straight.

Take your marking tool (watercolor felt-tip is good) and make a mark on your center line ½″ (or whatever seam allowance you prefer) from one edge of the material (point **z**). Measure across the material and extend your centerline beyond the other edge of the cloth to the distance required for your radius for arc **B**(**R**). Pin, or otherwise fasten the end of your tape measure, measuring string, or whatever to the carpet at this point in such a way that you will be able to sweep the tape in an arc without its becoming caught or detached. Using the tape as compass, draw arc **B** on your yardage. Measure the length of your arc between the arc's points of intersection with the lines you have marked at either end of the material (points **b** to point **b**) compare this distance with the desired circumference of your bottom hoop (108 inches). Adjust points **b** if necessary. (Any adjustment at this point ought to be minor.)

Now, using the measurements which you found when making your working diagram, mark the length of the radii from point **R** to the waist line (arc **A**)

Figure 7:33 - Hooping is fed into casings with an overlap on each side of the seam.

and the position of each hoop. Draw in the arcs corresponding with these radii. Then repeat the method you used in your working diagram above to find the positions of points **a** & **e** on your new arc **A**. Draw in lines **X**&**Y**. Double check everything for symmetry and measure between points **t** to be sure that your top hoop will have the proper circumference. [*Figure 7:32*]

By measuring the hoop lines in Figure 7:32 or by applying the same formula to the radii in figure 7:26 as was used for figuring the circumference of the top hoop, it is possible to estimate the amount of one inch twill tape and hooping needed for construction. In estimating the hooping, allow for approximately six to eight inches of overlap for each hoop, and add that to your total. [*Figure 7:33*] For this particular farthingale one would need approximately 14 yards of each (and an extra yard of hooping). You will also need adhesive tape, duct tape or other heavy cloth tape to bind the ends of the cut hooping.

Once your material is marked, I would add another step, which is optional. I would run a line of machine stitching (decorative by preference if your machine will do it, zig-zag if not) along each arc line and a line of straight stitching along all the seam lines (including waist and bottom. Then wash the markings out of your material. Add seam allowances, (this is *not* optional) and cut out. The lines of decorative stitching can be felt through the twill tape as the tape (or whatever you are using for casings) is stitched down, saving the trouble of having to look for your marks or (if your material is not slippery) of having to use pins. Decorative stitching also adds a nice visual touch to the finished garment.

A quick order for construction of the finished garment is:

1. Sew up seam, matching arc lines, and leaving enough room open at the top for a placket.
2. Finish off placket and raw edges of seam.
3. Sew casing at waist, inside.
4. Sew casing at bottom of skirt, inside.
5. Using your decorative stitching, or your markings as guides, sew casings for the rest of your hoops to inside of skirt. Important: Sew the edge toward the hem first,then ease in the extra fullness of the casing along the upper edge (experienced sewers know this already.) You might also attach tapes at waistline outside to use for tieing a bum roll or cartwheel form to, or for anchoring the farthingale to the corset.
6. Wash out markings if you haven't already. I suppose you could omit this step if you wish, certainly if your markings were only visible on the inside.
7. Bind ends of hooping with cloth tape, and begin feeding through casing. Allow for your overlap, and cut. Bind cut end. Finish feeding into casing and distribute so that ends extend on each side of seam as in Figure 7:33. Repeat with each hoop. Work top to bottom.
8. Run drawstring through waistline casing.

You have now got a farthingale. And a very good one, too.

Plate F – 1: Dutch cariacture, c. 1600. one of the clearest indications of the bum roll's appearance. It is uncertain whether it is an exact duplication, but it does not seem unlikely.

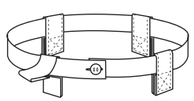


Figure 8:1 - Waistband with grommet tabs.

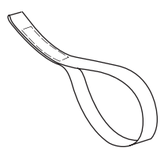


Figure 8:2 - Stitch together straps to go around the roll. Prepare for grommets.

Figure 8:3 - Straps may also be attached directly to waistband, if preferred.

DURING THE REIGNS of Mary and, later, Elizabeth, the somewhat restrained bell shape of the Spanish Farthingale was gradually replaced by an exaggeratedly big-hipped line. This line was interpreted in two different manners. The simpler of these was accomplished by the wearing of a "bum-roll" with one's farthingale. The bum-roll was a padded roll which was worn around the waist or hips, depending on its size, which helped to support the weight of the skirts. At first it seems to have been a fairly small roll worn high. Later it became very large and was worn rather lower. In this larger form, it may have been tied to the tabs of the corset to keep it from slipping. The bum-roll produced a rounded silhouette similar to a dome, although narrower at the base than the Victorian tea-cozy with which we are familiar [*Plate F-1*].

A second interpretation appears later than the simple bum-roll. This is referred to variously as the "French," "Italian," "drum-head" or "cartwheel" farthingale. This appears to have been a rigid framework which produced a very sharp-edged, angular shape and in all of the representations we have made a woman look rather as though she was standing in the middle of a round table-top, or an angel-food cake.

The bum-roll appears to have been worn by a wide range of social classes. The cartwheel seems to have been primarily an upper-class, and, just possibly, an exclusively court, garment. The early, smaller bum-rolls appear to have tapered to a very narrow roll in the front. The later, larger ones also seem to have tapered, but were still thick enough at the front to produce a very round line. In Holland, by the middle of the 17th century, the stomacher — or perhaps only a stomacher cover — of the outer garment appears to have been stiffened only to the waist, with the lower portion lying over the roll like an apron. In England this does not appear to have been done, although there are portraits which show the thick-fronted roll worn with a bodice having an almost round waist (some pointed effect still seems always to have been present) or with a doublet bodice with a peplum effect.

There seem to be two basic methods for making a bum-roll. Both are fairly simple, so I will include both and you can take your choice. The second looks neat and smooth like the ones in the cariacture at left, so you may wish to use that method for any bum-roll which may be needed for a disrobing scene. The first method requires more arithmetic. The second requires a lot of fussing about with diagrams and pattern pieces. (*Lots* of pattern pieces.) Use whichever you feel most comfortable with.

Let us say that you want a bum-roll about 8 inches thick. This is a pretty good size for the later period. Since this is a largish bum-roll, it will be worn lower on the hips than a smaller one. In order to keep from imitating your favorite rap singer, and having it try to fall off (or even succeed!) you may want to add some grommet tabs or ties so that it can be anchored to the corset to keep it from slipping. If you do not have grommet tabs or grommets in waist tabs, on your corset, you should make yourself a waistband. It should fit snugly around you over your corset. Take pieces of webbing (the soft kind that is used for the handles of cloth tote bags) long enough to go around you for the waistband, plus 4 pieces about three inches long and wrap them around the waistband at side front and side back as shown. [*Figure 8:1*] Stitch them in place. Apply grommets in the tabs.

With the large a roll, supporting straps are probably necessary. These can be made separately and added to the roll later if you wish. Put on your corset or waistband, tie your bum-roll around your hips and pass strips of webbing around the roll where they will line up with the grommets which you will be tying them to. Mark where this is on the roll. Stitch the webbing to fit around the roll with the ends extending far enough to reach the grommets in the corset. Fold the ends in ½″– 1″. Stitch as shown. [*Figure 8:2*] Topstitch and apply grommets. If you are using separate waistband instead of grommet tabs attached to your corset, you can also make these supporting straps long enough to stitch directly to the waistband itself. [*Figure 8:3*] When you have finished your straps, work them around the bum-roll to the places marked and whipstitch them in

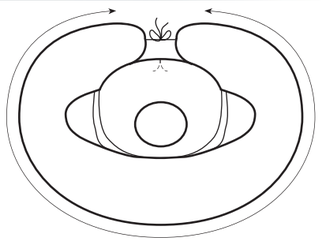


Figure 8:4 - The true circumference of a bum-roll is measured around the outside while it is being worn.

place. Straps (with or without grommets at the ends) can also be sewn into the seams of the roll itself and fitted to the proper length when the roll is finished.

We need to find out how much material is needed for the roll. To do this we first find out how wide the material has to be to go around the eight inch diameter of the roll itself. This is a simple matter of πD. Or, 8″x 3.14 = 25.12.″ Round this off and add an inch for the seam allowances, and you end up with 26.″ You need a piece of material which is 26 inches wide.

Now you need to find the length. Although you will be wearing this bum-roll around your hips, you will not be wearing it at the level of your seat. You will be wearing it up about the level of your hip joint. So, measure yourself around your hip joint. For example we will say that this measurement comes to 34 inches. Divide this measurement by π. This will give you your own diameter. Double the preferred thickness of your bum-roll and add it to this number. (You cannot simply measure yourself and cut the material to that length. When it is stuffed and gathered, you will find that it will come *nowhere* near to reaching around you.)Then multiply the total by π. This will give you the outside dimension of your bum-roll with you inside it. [*Figure 8:4*] 34″÷ 3.14 = 10.83″ (rounded off) + 16″ (twice the thickness of the bum-roll) = 26.83.″

26.83″x 3.14 = 84.2462,″which rounds off to about 84¼.″ We'll forget about the odd quarter inch. We need material which is 26 inches wide, and seven feet long (84 ÷ 12 = 7). It is a good idea to use something washable, since you will sweat into it and may eventually want to wash it out (not often though).

One and a half yards of 45″ material will cover this with some extra. You need a firm, non-stretch material for this but it need not be more than medium weight. Muslin will do. Divide the material in half across the piece. This will give you two pieces which measure 27 x 45.″ You can trim them to 26 inches if you wish, but the extra inch doesn't add much to the size of the roll (less than ¼ inch) so you can leave it if you wish. Trim 22″ from one end of each piece. Seam these cut ends together and finish off the edges as seems best to you. This will leave you with a selvage edge at each end. This is convenient, but not essential. Mark a ½″ seam allowance along each long edge of the material on what will be the inside of the roll.

The bum-rolls of this period tapered slightly towards the front ends so that the roll was thickest at its back. Let's say that we want the roll to be only ¾ as thick in front as in back, or six inches in diameter instead of eight.

First we find where the sides of the roll are going to be. This is simple enough, you divide the total by 4. 84″ ÷ 4 = 21.″

Draw a line across the fabric 21 inches from each end, on the inside of the material. Make marks ¼, ½ and ¾ the width of the material on these side lines. [*Figure 8:5*]

Now we need to know where the "functional" ends will be. The ends of this bum-roll will be roughly hemispherical. This means that at some point near the end of the fabric the sides of the roll will begin to curve into the center. [*Figure 8:6*] We need to find this point. Using our formula πD, we find that 6″ circle has a circumference of 18.84″. We will need this measurement later. At the moment, however, we are not dealing with a full circle. What we want is the circumference of ¼ of a circle. 18.84″÷ 4 = 4.71″, or just under 4¾.″ We

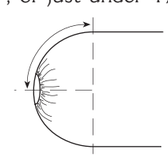


Figure 8:6 - The ends of a bum-roll are roughly hemispherical. This curve shortens the "functional" length of the roll.

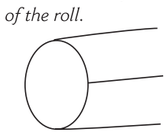


Figure 8:7 - The ends of the thick-ended bum-roll can also be finished off like a teddy bear's arms.

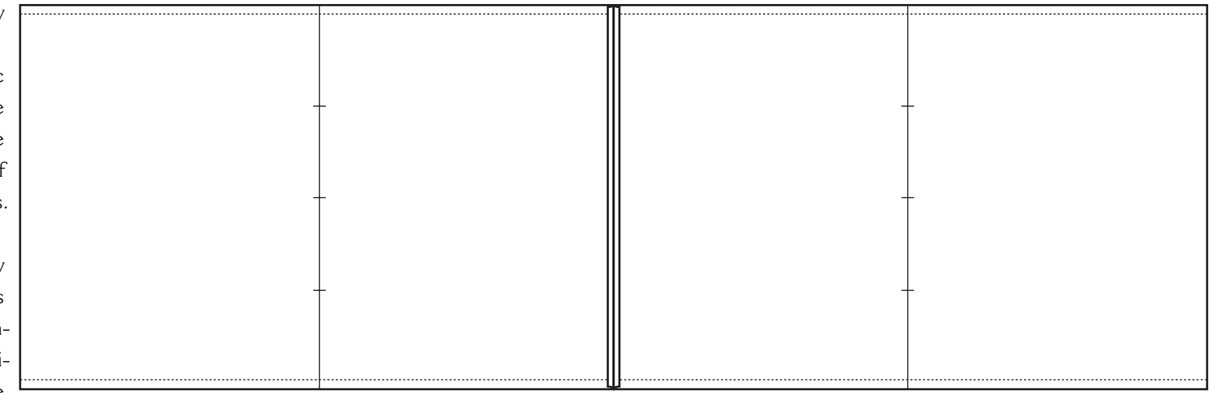


Figure 8:5 - The material has been joined, and the seam allowances, side lines and the width at ¼ intervals have been marked.

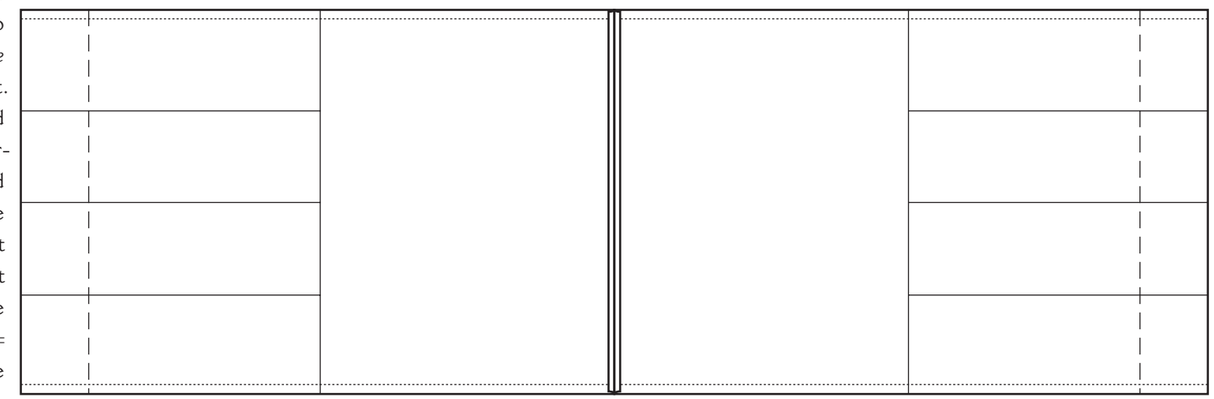


Figure 8:8 - Lines have been added 5 inches from each end, and the ¼, ½ and ¾ marks extended to the edge of the fabric.

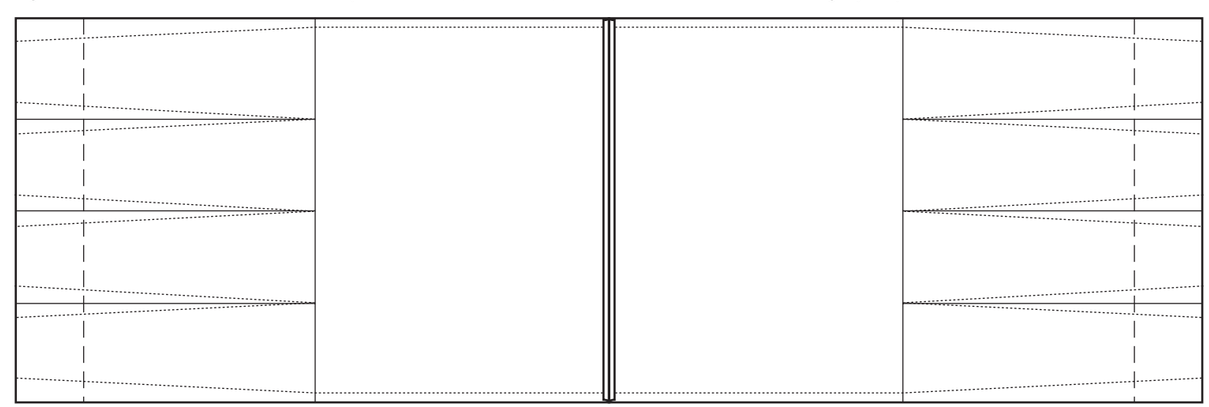


Figure 8:9 - Long darts and new seam lines have been drawn.

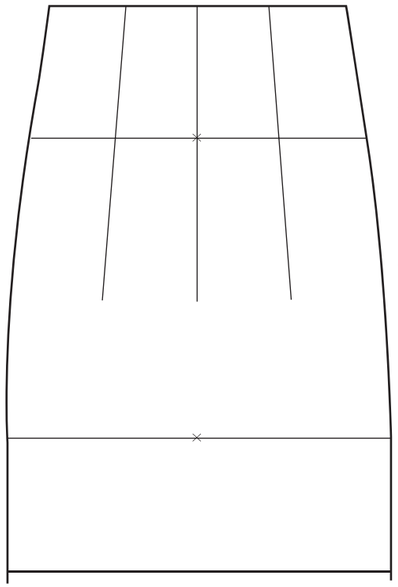


Figure 8:10 - Mark lines on outside of fabric. Do the same on each side. Mark center of fabric.

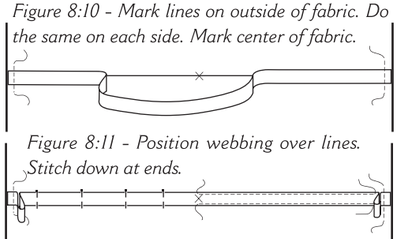


Figure 8:11 - Position webbing over lines. Stitch down at ends.

Figure 8:12 - Match center of material and center of webbing. Stitch from center to end.

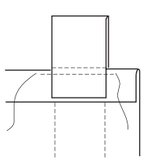


Figure 8:13 - Turn seam allowance to the inside. Stitch webbing across loops.

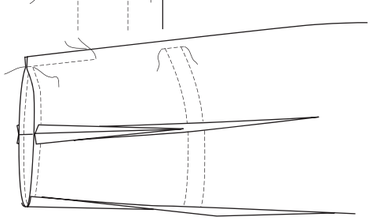


Figure 8:14 - Stitch half-way to webbing. Run gathering stitch around the ends of the tube.

will round that off to 5 inches.

Another way to finish off the ends is to leave your diagram alone and to cut two circles 7″ across (6 inches and ½″ seam allowable) and to finish off the ends of the roll like a teddy-bear's arms. [*Figure 8:7*]

Otherwise, draw a line across the width of the material 5 inches from each end. Divide the material's width into quarters, and mark on this line as you did on the side lines. Draw a line from each mark on the side line, through its corresponding mark on the line 5 inches from the end and continue to the edge of the fabric. [*Figure 8:8*]

Subtract the circumference of a 6″ circle from that of an 8″ circle. 25″- 19″ (rounded off from 18.84) = 6.″ We now divide this by 4, which comes to 1½.″ I daresay you realize what comes next. You divide your 1½″ in half and on the lines 5 inches from the ends of the fabric, you make marks ¾″ on either side of each of the six lines you have just drawn, and from the seam lines. You finish drawing these darts by drawing lines through these marks from the original points on the side lines. Continue these lines to the edge of the fabric. [*Figure 8:9*] Trim the fabric to ½″ from the new seam lines. Stitch the six darts just drawn. Trim them and press open if you wish.

On the outside of the fabric, draw a line across the width of the fabric half-way between the side and the center back. Make marks ten inches from the end of each dart and the seam ends and connect marks. [*Figure 8:10*] Check to see that the marks will match at the edges. find the middle of these lines and mark.

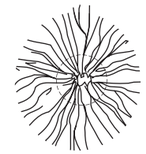


Figure 8:15 - Gather ends into center.

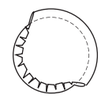


Figure 8:16 - Run a line of stitching ½″ from the edge of a 2½″ circle of cloth. Press edge under.

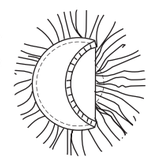


Figure 8:17 - Center circles over gathers. Stitch in place.

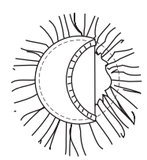


Figure 8:18 - Trim away excess fabric. Center a second circle over the first, on the right side of the fabric, and stitch down.

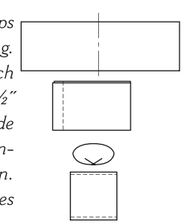


Figure 8:19 - Take strips of webbing about 4″ long. Fold in half and stitch across ends about ½″ from the edge. Turn inside out with the seam centered and the ends open. Stitch along open edges to make a flat piece.

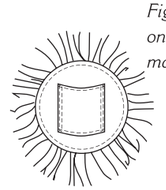


Figure 8:20 - Center tabs on ends and stitch down, making flat loops.

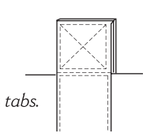


Figure 8:21 - Finish tabs.

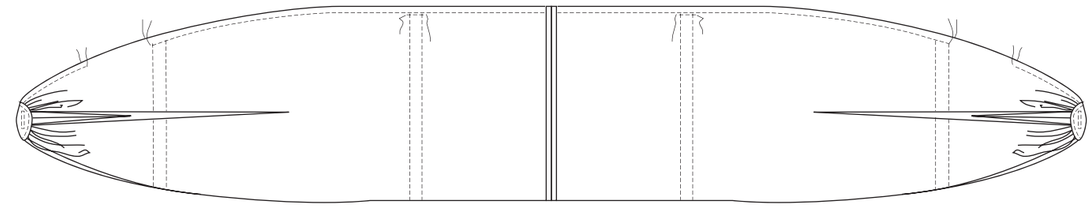


Figure 8:22 - Run gathering stitch webbing to webbing. Gather up seam to required length. Go over gathers with straight stitch to anchor. Turn right side out.

Take strips of webbing 4 inches longer than the length of these lines, i.e., 30 inches for the lines toward the side back, and 4 inches longer than whatever measurement you have for the line 10 inches from the edge, and match the ends of the webbing to the edges of the fabric at the ends of the lines and stitch down. [*Figure 8:11*] Find the middle of the pieces of webbing and join at the middles of the lines marked on the fabric. Working from center, pin the webbing to the fabric over the line. Stitch in place to seam line. [*Figure 8:12*] Fold the seam allowance to the inside. Stitch along the fold across the loop of webbing, making a tab. [*Figure 8:13*] Try not to catch the fabric.

Stitch the last inch of each end of the seam. [*Figure 8:14*] Gather, pleat, or dart the end of the material into the center. [*Figure 8:15*] Cut a 2½″ circle from scrap. Stitch around ¼″ from the edge. Press the edge under. [*Figure 8:16*] Center this circle over the gathers, pleats, or whatever, on the wrong side of the fabric and stitch it down. [*Figure 8:17*] Trim the fabric to ½″– ⅝″ from this new seam. Repeat with a second circle on the right side of the fabric. [*Figure 8:18*] Do the same at the other end.

Take two pieces of webbing about 4 inches long. Stitch the ends together. Fold the ends inside the loop and center them. Stitch the edges together. [*Figure 8:19*] Center one of these tabs on each end of the roll. Stitch the ends down. Stitch again about ¼″ inch closer to the center on each side. [*Figure 8:20*]

Turn inside out. Match all the webbings. Stitch the webbing ends together. Topstitch tabs for additional strength, as shown. [*Figure 8:21*]

Turn inside out again. Stitch ends of the long seam from the ends to about half way to the first band of webbing. Match center back seams. Subtract 10 inches from your hip joint measurement, 34″-10″ = 24.″ Run a loose basting stitch between the webbings and across the center back. [*Figure 8:22*] Gather the fabric into a 24″ length, including the length of the webbings. Go over this gathered seam with a straight stitch. Stitch a second time for good measure. Turn right side out through one of the openings.

Stuff the roll through the two openings. Use as lightweight a stuffing as you can since you are going to need a lot of it. The roll should be firm, but need not be rock-hard. Whipstitch the edges of the gaps together when finished.

Apply grommets in all tabs.Run shoestrings from the grommets in the bum-roll to the corresponding grommets in

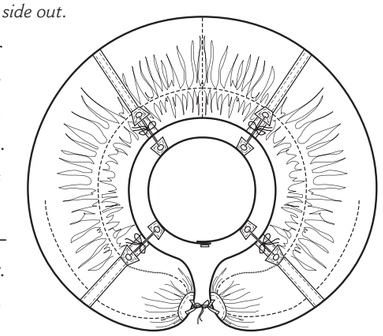


Figure 8:23 - When opening has been stitched closed, apply grommets in tabs. Hang roll from waistband or corset by cords. Run a cord between the flat loops at the ends of the roll.

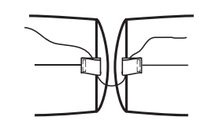


Figure 8:47 - With the "teddy bear's arm" end, loops for tying the ends together can be placed on the ends of the seam.

the corset or waistband, and between the flat loops at the front ends. The roll should hang high enough for its top edge to be about level with your waist. [*Figure 8:23*] In Plate F–I, it was obvious that no such straps were in use, so for a disrobing scene, you should probably omit them and hope for the best.

If you finished the ends of the roll in the teddy bear style, you can make a

couple of simple loops of webbing and attach them to the inside of the roll (over the inner seam) as shown. [*Figure 8:24*]

To produce a smoother, more tailored bum-roll takes a bit more fiddling. First, let's take another look at Plate F–1.

In a careful examination, you can see that most of the examples of bum-roll shown in the cartoon seem to be made in a great many sections, and to have a seam running lengthwise around their outside perimeters. It can be assumed that there may well be another such seam around the insides as well. Now while it may be reasonable to have some reservations about using a satirical cartoon as one's main source material, the fact that nearly all of the examples shown are of the same type, and that particular type a fairly plausible one, leads me to be willing to at least provisionally accept this as being a fair representation of what — at the time the cartoon was made — was a common article of dress.

Since this version of the roll has seams running horizontally along both inside and outside edge, if you do not choose to run supporting straps around the outside of the roll, you may choose to insert grommet tabs, or plain straps, into the inside seam. For this style of roll the grommets should be inserted at the ends of straps which will reach from the wearer's hip joint to within an inch or two of the wearer's waist. If you are using a separate waistband, it will be simpler just to use plain straps cut with some excess length and fit them to reach, and be stitched to the waistband itself as in Figure 8:3. An examination of the cartoon will also show that the teddy bear's arm style of finishing off ends was in use at this time, as well as a smooth, more rounded end.

We will reproduce our previous project, an eight-inch bum-roll tapering to six inches at the front, to be worn by a lady who measures 34″ around the point of the hip joint, where the bum-roll is to be worn. Our outside measurement of 84″ also remains the same. Therefore, we need to work out a basic unit from which to build the finished roll. So, first we go hunting the lowest common denominator. This particular step may be fiddled with from any number of directions, but in order to make things as simple as possible, we will start by just dividing the inside measurement (34″) into 2″ units. This gives us 17 units with no fractional numbers to have to futz with. Dividing the outside 84″ by 17 gets us 4.94″. We will round this up to an even 5″. The circumference of the 8-inch section of the roll remains rounded up to 25″, which divided in half has not changed since our last project. It is still 12½″. Our next step is to build this basic unit.

For the tailored roll, we will eventually need to be working on pattern tissue, or a large sheet of some other paper, and we are going to be giving it a considerable workout before we are through. But, first, we start with graph paper. Take a piece of graph paper and draw a center line on it, bracketed by two parallel lines two inches apart. [*Figure 8:25*] Then draw a line five inches long perpendicular to these lines centered at one end of the two parallel lines. [*Figure 8:26*] Take whatever you are using for a compass and set it to 12½″. Using the ends of the line just drawn as radii, draw two arcs intersecting the two parallel lines. [*Figure 8:27*] Draw lines from these intersection points to the radius points. [*Figure 8:28*] Connect the two intersection points. [*Figure 8:29*] Cut out the shape just drawn to use as a pattern. [*Figure 8:30*]

Now, take your large sheet of paper and draw a center line on it. Lay your pattern piece on it, matching up the

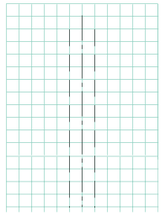


Figure 8:25 - Draw a centerline on your graph paper and draw two parallel lines 2″ apart on either side of it.

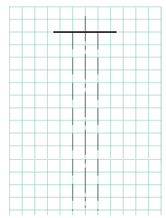


Figure 8:26 - Center a line 5″ long at one end of the lines already drawn, and perpendicular to them.

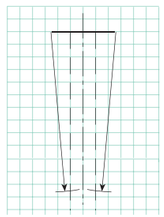


Figure 8:27 - Set your compass to 12½″ and, using the ends of the line just drawn as radii, draw arcs which intersect the two parallel lines.

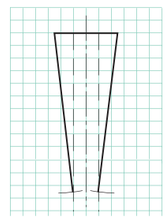


Figure 8:28 - Draw lines from your radii to the two intersection points.

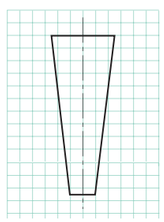


Figure 8:29 - connect the line between the two intersections.

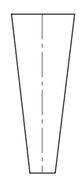


Figure 8:30 - Cut out a full size version of this shape to use as a pattern.

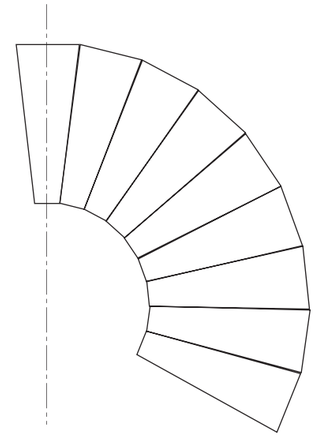


Figure 8:31 - On a large sheet of paper or pattern tissue, draw a centerline and trace around pattern piece, lining each copy up with the previous one. Draw nine segments.

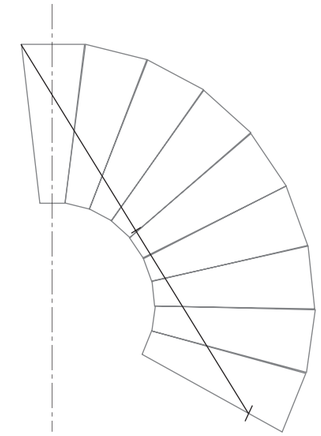


Figure 8:32 - Mark the length of one half of the circumference of the smaller end of the roll on the outside edge of the last segment. Draw a line connecting this mark with the outside corner of the first segment. Mark centerpoint.

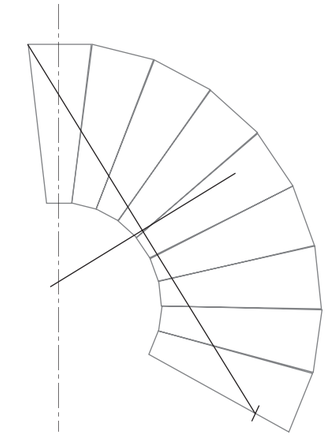


Figure 8:33 - Draw a perpendicular line through the centerpoint of the line just drawn which intersects the centerline.

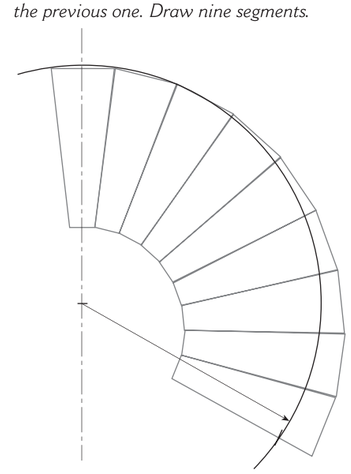


Figure 8:34 - Using this intersection point as a radius, set your compass to reach the outside corner of the first segment and draw an arc from the outside corner of the first segment through the mark for the smaller end of the roll.

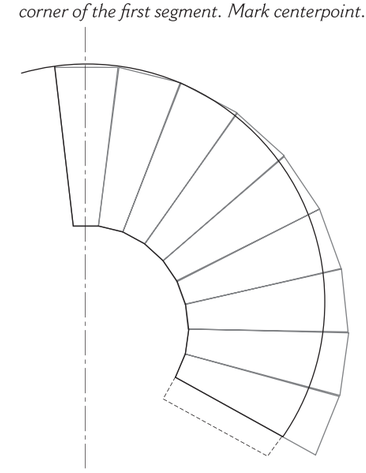


Figure 8:35 - Extend the outside end an additional 2″ to allow for a hemespherical end. (Optional.)

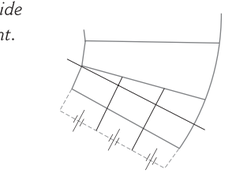


Figure 8:36 - Draw a line parallel to the end and 4″ from it. Divide the end section lengthwise into thirds. Mark the centers of these thirds, and make a second mark about ½″ on each side of these marks.

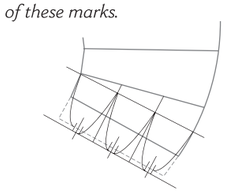


Figure 8:37 - Make a second line parallel to the end, and ½″—⅝″ beyond it. Using a french curve, rough in curved darts on each side of the divisions extending to the new outside line. On the seam lines, copy these curved lines, extending them to the original end line.

centerlines and trace around it. Lay the pattern piece next to the shape just drawn, matching up the sides and trace again. Continue adding segments to the shapes being drawn until you have

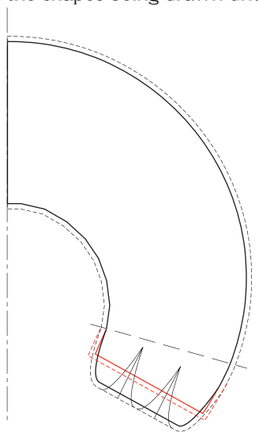


Figure 8:38 - Trim first segment at centerline, and add seam allowance. (End and seam allowance for teddy bear's arm style finishing shown in red.)

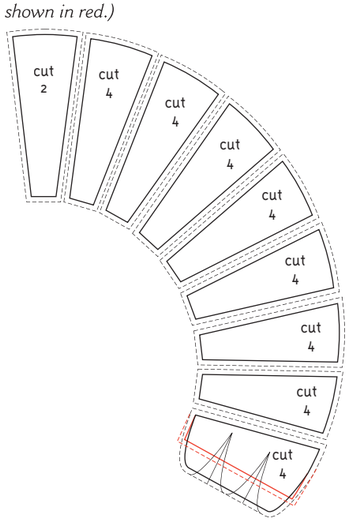


Figure 8:39 - If prefered, divide shape at segment lines and add seam allowances to all. (End and seam allowance for teddy bear's arm style finishing shown in red.)

nine adjoining segments drawn on your paper. [*Figure 8:31*]

The circumference of the six-inch ends of the roll has also not changed. It is still 18.84″ and divided in half is still rounded up to 9½″. On the outside line of the last segment added to your shape, make a mark 9½″ from the inside corner.

Next, we draw a line from the mark just made to the outside corner of the other end of our shape. Mark the center point of this line. [*Figure 8:32*]

Draw a line from this point perpendicular to this line intersecting the centerline. [*Figure 8:33*] Using this intersection point as a radius, draw an arc from the outside corner of the first segment to the 9½″ mark on the outside edge of the last segment drawn. [*Figure 8:34*]

In order to have the necessary extra material to be able to give the roll a hemispherical end, extend both this arc and the inside line another 2″. [*Figure 8:35*] This step is unnecessary if you are planning to finish the ends in the blunt, "teddy bear's arms" style.

In order to produce a smooth hemispherical end for the roll, we will need to modify the end of the shape as it is presently drawn.

First draw a line parallel to the new end line and 4″ from it. Divide the end segment of the shape into thirds lengthwise and mark the centers of these sections on the end line. Make another mark approximately ½″ on each side of these marks. [*Figure 8:36*]

Make a second line parallel to the end line and ½″ to ⅝″ outside it. Extend the section division lines, section center marks and the marks bracketing these

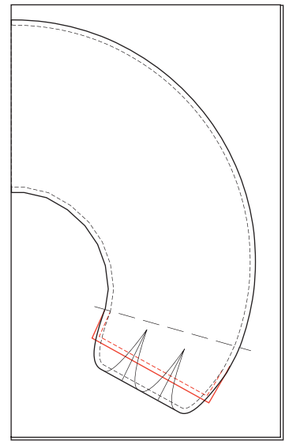


Figure 8:40 - Lay out your pattern on folded yardage. Cut two. (End and seam allowance for teddy bear's arm style finishing shown in red.)

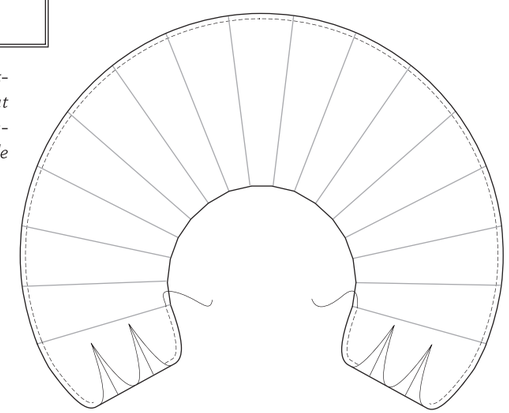


Figure 8:41 - Place right sides together, and stitch outside seam to edges of first darts. Stitch inside seam from dart to edge of first segment.

to this line. Take a french curve and rough in curved darts on either side of the section division lines, extending these to the new outside line at the marks bracketing the section center marks. [*Figure 8:37*] Try to make all four lines equal in length and shape. If you haven't got a french curve that is suitable, rough in a line on a second piece of paper which you cut out to use as a pattern piece. You can adjust the fit when you sew the darts. Duplicate the curves on the inside and outside seam lines, extending them only to the original end line, at the marks

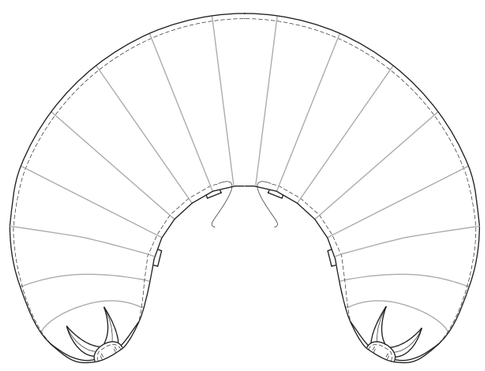


Figure 8:42 - Stitch darts and adjust curves to produce a smooth end. Finish end as with the first roll, easing in any excess. If you are sewing grommet straps into the inner seam, stitch them in place. Leave opening in seam in center back.

bracketing the section center marks. [*Figure 8:37*]

Add ½″ to ⅝″ seam allowance to the shape you have drawn ignoring internal (segment) lines, and cut out shape, trimming along centerline. [*Figure 8:38*] Alternately, you can cut out each segment of the shape drawn on segment lines and add ½″ to ⅝″ seam allowance to each of them. [*Figure 8:39*]

Fold yardage and cut out the bum-roll shape. [*Figure 8:40*] You will need two of these. If you are making the segmented roll, cut out your pieces as numbered in Figure 8:39, and piece together both halves. Place the two halves, right sides together and stitch the outside seam to the edges of the darts, and the end segments of the inside seam from the darts to the end of the first segment. [*Figure 8:41*]

(Sew up the darts and check the resulting shape. Re-do curves if necessary.)

Finish the ends of the roll (by whichever method preferred) as described in the directions for making the previous version of the large roll. Ease in any excess. If you intend to sew grommet straps into your inside seam, make a set of grommet straps (or plain straps) and insert the tabs (or straps) as shown. Stitch inside seam, leaving the center of the seam open [*Figure 8:42*].

Turn the roll through this opening and stuff. Whipstitch the seam closed. Add grommets to grommet straps if you have not done so already, [*Figure 8:43*] or put roll and waistband on, fitting straps up to waistband, marking lengths. Take off and stitch straps to waistband.

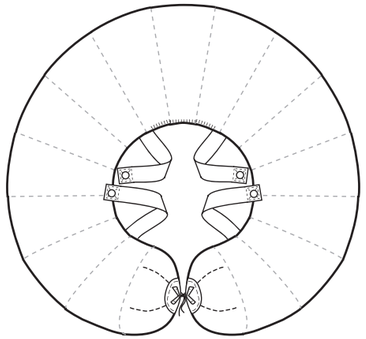


Figure 8:43 - Turn and stuff. Whipstitch the seam closed. Finish grommet straps (if used) as prefered.

NOW WE'LL SAY that we want to make the small roll worn in the early days of Elizabeth's reign. Let's plan for a roll some 4 inches thick, which tapers to pointed ends. Since this roll is much smaller it will be worn higher, around the top of the hipbone. We will say that the measurement around the top of the hipbone is 30 inches. [*Figure 8:44*]

First we find out the diameter of a circle with a radius of 30 inches. 30″x 3.14 = 9.55″, or lets say about 9½″. We are dealing a good less precisely than was necessary in the Spanish farthingale and, frankly, if you feel comfortable drawing the diagram freehand, you're welcome to do so. We will also round

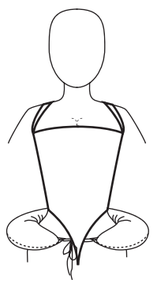


Figure 8:44 - A small bum roll is worn around the top of the hip.

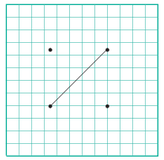


Figure 8:45 - Draw a "box" with corners 4½ squares apart. Connect two corners with a diagonal line.

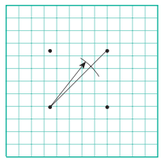


Figure 8:46 - With a compass, mark the diagonal line, 4½ squares from the bottom diagonal.

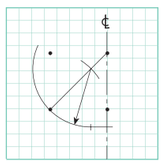


Figure 8:47 - Using the intersection just marked, draw a quarter circle with a 4½ square radius. Extend the lower edge to the center line.

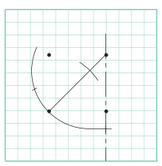


Figure 8:48 - Mark ¼ of waist/hip length on quarter circle drawn.

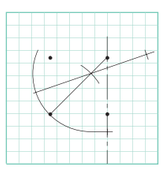


Figure 8:49 - Draw line from this mark, through radius point, extending 4½ squares in the opposite direction.

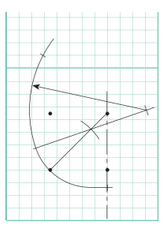


Figure 8:50 - Using this new point as radius point, draw a new curve tangent to the first and mark the length of a second quarter of the waist/hip length on this second line.

the measurement off to an even 9 inches for simplicity.

Take a sheet of graph paper that has a grid you are comfortable with and make a mark at one of the intersections. Using this mark as the lower right corner, mark the corners of a box which is 4½ squares (half of "your" diameter) long on each side. Draw a diagonal line across this box. [*Figure 8:45*]

Take your compass and set the radius to 4½ squares. Using the lower left corner, which the diagonal line bisects, as a radius point, make a mark on the diagonal line toward the upper right corner. [*Figure 8:46*] Using this mark as your radius point, draw a quarter circle as shown. Extend the right hand vertical line. This is your centerline. Extend the lower end of your quarter-circle to your centerline. [*Figure 8:47*]

Divide your upper hip measurement by 4. 30″÷ 4 = 7½″. Using whatever method you find most comfortable, measure the length of 7½ squares along this quarter circle from the centerline, and mark. [*Figure 8:48*]

Take your straight edge and draw a line from this mark, through your radius point and extend 4½ squares in the other direction. [*Figure 8:49*] Using this new point as a radius, adjust your compass and draw a new curve from the point marked on your quarter circle. Measure the length of 7½ squares up this new line, and mark. [*Figure 8:50*] This is the rough line for the inner dimension of the bum-roll.

Now we need to find the outer dimension. Multiply the intended thickness of your bum-roll by π. 4″x 3.14 =

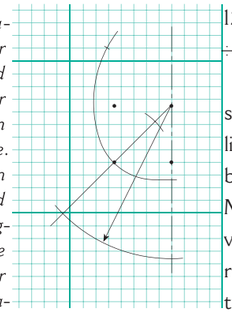


Figure 8:51 - Measure down the center line ½ the required circumference of your bum-roll's length from your waist/hip line. Draw an arc between the center line and the extended diagonal line using the upper corner of your original "box" as radius point.

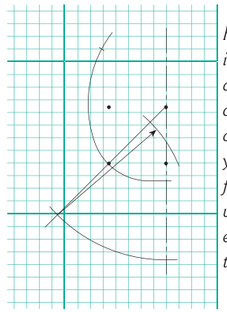


Figure 8:52 - Use intersection of this arc and the extended diagonal line as a radius. Set your compass to find the first radius used, above, and extend an arc from this point.

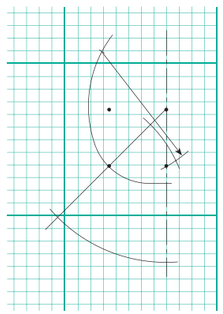


Figure 8:53 - Use marked end of waist/hip line as a radius point and draw arc to intersect the one just drawn.

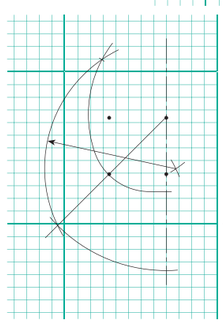


Figure 8:54 - Use this intersection as radius point and draw an arc to connect the two points just used.

12.56″. Divide this roughly in half. 12.56″ ÷ 2 = 6.28″ or a shade over 6¼″.

Make a mark on your centerline 6¼ squares beyond your waist/hip curve line. Extend the diagonal line 6¼ squares beyond your waist/hip curve line as well. Mark this point. Using the corner from which the diagonal line issues as your radius point, draw an arc between these two points. [*Figure 8:51*]

Now readjust your compass to the same setting which you used to draw the second half of your waist curve line. Set the pin on your diagonal line where the first half of your outer curve intersects it. Draw an arc in the direction shown. [*Figure 8:52*] Set your pin where you have marked the end of your waist curve line and draw a second arc, intersecting the one just drawn. [*Figure 8:53*] Without adjusting your compass setting, draw an arc between these two points using the intersection of the arcs as a radius point. [*Figure 8:54*]

Smooth out any clumsy intersections of compound curves. You may do this freehand. So long as we are freehanding, you may also want to flatten out the center back of your outer curve as well. [*Figure 8:55*]

Now draft the whole thing out again at full size on a piece of brown paper or pattern tissue. Draft it on a large, folded piece of paper, and when you have it drawn, cut it out in one piece. [*Figure 8:56*] For this particular example you will need two pieces of fabric 21″x 16″ large. One half yard of 45″ wide fabric will be fine. Fold your fabric in half and trace your pattern out on it. Add ½″–⅝″ seam allowance on all sides and cut it out. [*Figure 8:57*]

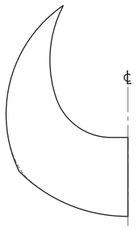


Figure 8:55 - Smooth out intersection of arcs (freehand). Flatten center back curve if you wish.

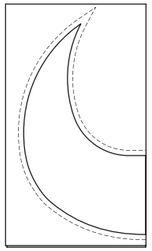


Figure 8:56 - Fold paper on centerline. Draft out ½ crescent shape at full size. Add seam allowance and cut out.

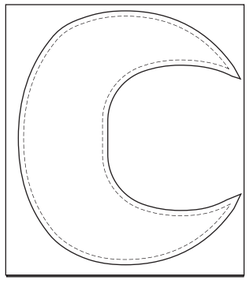


Figure 8:57 - Trace pattern onto doubled fabric and cut out.

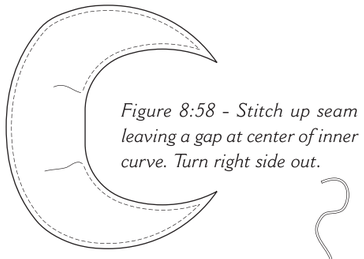


Figure 8:58 - Stitch up seam leaving a gap at center of inner curve. Turn right side out.

Figure 8:59 - Stitch across end of roll and add grommet.

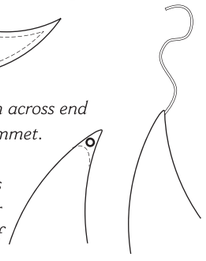


Figure 8:60 - Ties may be used rather than grommets if you wish.

Sew the two pieces together leaving a gap of about 6 inches in the center of the inner curve seam. [*Figure 8:58*] Turn right side out through this gap. Stitch across the points of the roll as shown and apply eyelets in the ends. [*Figure 8:59*] Or, if you would rather, you can sew ties made from shoelaces or tapes into the tapered end when you sew the two pieces together. [*Figure 8:60*]

Stuff the roll through the gap. Work the stuffing into the tapered end with the blunt end of a pen or pencil, if necessary. The roll should be firm and smooth. Whipstitch the gap closed.

I would like to add an emergency measure which one of the S.C.A. ladies came up with. If you suddenly find yourself in need of one of the small, early bum-rolls and have no time to make one, take an old pair of stockings or pantyhose, stuff the legs and tie them around. This method obviously will not do for a disrobing scene.

If you tuck the tied ends under the point of your corset, you ought not to have much trouble with it sliding about, and since it fits around the highest part of the hip, there ought not to be too much trouble about it slipping down. But if you have had to borrow one which is a little large, or if your skirts are very heavy, and tend to pull it down by their weight, take tapes or cords and just loop a length around the roll and tie it to grommet tabs on your corset or the separate waistband. You could stitch tabs into your inner curve seam, or attach tabs like those at the ends of the bum-roll made by the first method above if you wish. Wrap the unstuffed

roll around yourself and mark areas opposite the grommets in the corset or waistband to find where to put them.

WHICH BRINGS US to the Cartwheel farthigale. I have another confession to make. I, personally, have never attempted to make or wear a cartwheel farthingale. (Someone else tested the process for me.) It would be exceedingly easy to slide past the issue by breezily mentioning that such things did exist, with a comment on how they were probably made, and then to go rapidly on to another subject. Nor would I be alone in this evasion. It seems to be standard practice, even in some of the serious theatrical textbooks. However, one doesn't spoil the soup for want of a pinch of pepper and I can't see any justification for curtailing the collection for want of a little practical imagination.

Most sources of information regarding the cartwheel farthingale seem to believe that the garment consisted of a petticote which was shaped by a series of hoops of roughly the same size, looking rather like a cylindrical box in which the wearer stood. [*Figure 8:61*] I am a good deal less than convinced of the accuracy of this interpretation. In the first place such a garment would be hideously difficult to manage, and next to impossible to sit down in. My own belief is that the cartwheel farthingale was, in fact, an angular variant of a bum-roll, [*Figure 8:62*] which interpretation is bourne out in at least some of the sources from the period in which it was popular. [*Plates F–2, F–3*] What is less certain is whether this framework was

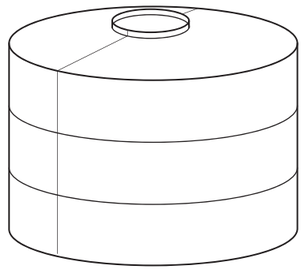


Figure 8:61- Standard interpretation of the Cartwheel farthingale.

worn alone, or whether it was in fact supported by a conventional bum-roll which was worn beneath it.

Typically when a cartwheel farthingale is needed, the most immediate solution is to find a rigid hoop of some material (or to make one), cover it tightly with a solid piece of firm cloth — like a drumhead, cut a hole in the middle with a slit to form a plaquet, add a waistband and finish off the raw edges. (Or simply make up a harness out of straps of webbing from waist to hoop.) This will work. I have seen a farthingale made with a hoop of rattan salvaged from a King chair, which was made pretty much in this manner and it worked quite adequately. Florist supply shops carry heavy wire hoops up to three feet across which would also work. However, maneuvering a solid hoop in a crowded backstage area, although possible, would be hazardous. Another consideration is that one's stage business might very well have to be drastically reduced. (Sitting down in a hoop which keeps you a constant distance from the back of your chair will affect your balance, and comfort as well.)

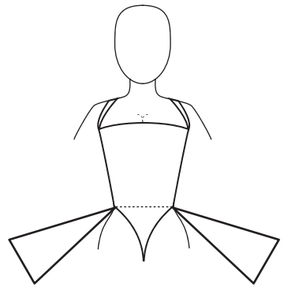


Figure 8:62 - Cross-section of the cartwheel farthingale as a form of angular bum roll.

Now, doubtless the ladies of the 16th century who wore the cartwheel farthingale were accustomed to its benefits and its limitations. Therefore, a highly-placed, fashionable Elizabethan lady would have known exactly how to move in her cartwheel, and what she could or could not do in it. It seems reasonable to suppose that it was primarily a court garment, designed for business which was generally conducted standing, and was, for the most part, worn only by those with the highest pretensions to fashion. Even by these it was probably only worn intermittently. The bum-roll produced nearly the same line and was probably easier to manage due to its generally smaller scale and more stable behavior. This being the case, it is unlikely that a lady, all dressed in her high court best, would have attempted an action which she knew to have been outside her capability. We, however, are not Elizabethans, and the style of a modern actress is not to stand in the middle of a stage and declaim. Nor would an audience be overly tolerant of an actress — however beautifully costumed — who chose to do so. Although it is generally well known that the women of the Elizabethan era led fairly active lives, it is less clear as to how they dressed for each activity. Nor can we be certain of how clothing was expected to move.

There are perhaps three main reasons why so few people — of my acquaintance anyway — have undertaken the cartwheel farthingale. The first is a profound lack of aesthetic sympathy with the style. There is no method of design or construction which can do anything about this. A second stumbling block is produced by the aforementioned inherent clumsiness of the garment itself. It is one thing to have a three yard hoop following you about at instep level where it is pretty much out of the way, and quite another to have the same hoop riding up at hip level and getting between you and, literally, everything around. There is very little which can be done about this either. At any rate, in a hoop which is made of flexible materials such as wire hooping, it is at least possible to sit down on a chair with the hoop bending to permit the wearer to slide back onto the cushions rather than getting between her and the chair back and keeping her from doing any more than perching on the edge. The third major deterrent is a lack of confidence over being able to keep the hoop from sagging down "like a Chinese lampshade" in the words of one colleague. Well, I don't know about lampshades — of any nationality or ethnic persuasion — but a certain degree of sag is bound to be inevitable. It is quite impossible to take on the law of gravity *and* the weight of Elizabethan skirts and bring them both

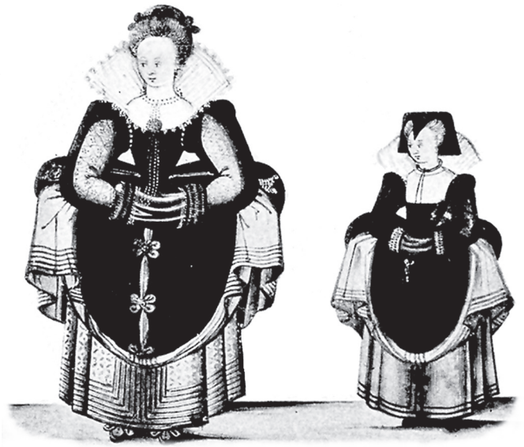


*Plate F – 2: **Damoiselles Françaises,** French School. These ladies have each drawn up the skirts of their overgowns and their outermost petticotes and bundled them onto the tops of their farthingales to keep them out of the dirt. As can be seen, the "tabletop" of the farthingale is broader than the width of the next inner petticote — worn under the farthingale. This seems pretty strong indication that the cartwheel farthingale was, essentially an angular variant of bum roll.*

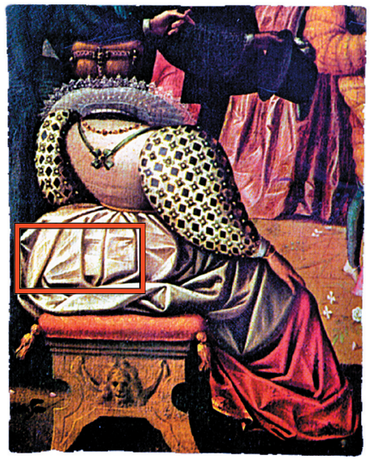


*Plate F – 3,: **Ball at the Court of Henry III** (detail), French school, c. 1581-82. By the undistorted flowing over the knees and shins of the seated lady's skirt, it can readily be seen that there are no hoops supporting the lower section of her skirts. By the folds of the fabric in the area indicated by the rectangle, it appears, that her cartwheel is most probably composed of two hoops a few inches apart, as in the process developed here.*

*Plate F – 4: **The Sailing Wagon on the Beach** (detail), Claes Jansz Vischer. Early 17th c. A rare profile view of the cartwheel farthingale.*

to an unconditional surrender. Nor did persons in the 16th century, as may be seen in the accompanying illustration [*Plate F–4*] (a rarity in that it not only shows a person in profile but displays an uncharacteristically good understanding of the principles of perspective drawing). This illustration also shows that the cartwheel was not in universal usage; note the seated woman in the right hand side of the picture who appears to be wearing no more than a small bum-roll to support her skirts (probably a woman of the middle classes).

One major problem with the cartwheel is that we have only a very shaky notion of what it really looked like. The reason for this is that the perspective of most of our artistic sources is dubious. Also, the cartwheel appears to have been worn for a really very short period of time. It appeared late in Queen Elizabeth's reign, and did not survive it.

At present, although some still contend that the farthingale was round and that the wearer stood in its center, the more usual view (during the 1970s and '80s) is that it was, in fact, oval or at least flattened somewhat, and that the wearer was slightly closer to the front edge (compare with Plate F–4). Nearly all modern sources state that the farthingale was tilted upwards at the back. This is at least somewhat indicated. On the other hand, not all contemporary sources agree. This is, again, one of those details which may be incorrect due to faulty perception. It is quite likely that the back of a farthingale was higher than the front, but this seems more probably to result from a natural compensation for the front of the wheel being pressed down by the busk or the wearer's hands. As to whether it was round or oval, I would hate to have to say. If the hoops were flexible, and it is quite likely that the most high-end cartwheels were also made from whalebone, the wheel may have been any form of ellipse or compound curve. After all, if I can develop an oval hoop with flexible boning, so could they. They weren't stupid by any means, or unimaginative. If the hoops were rigid, it may have been either round or oval. What seems most likely to me is that each tailor or dressmaker's cartwheel farthingale was a unique product put together by someone who was making it up as they went along.

In fact, we are in a most unenviable position in regards to this garment. On the one hand, we are almost completely without knowledge of how it was originally constructed, and ignorant of the unofficial rules and regulations of its use. The fact that it existed side-by-side with other devices for supporting the skirt would tend to indicate that there were social as well as economic circumstances wherein to wear a cartwheel would *not* have been appropriate usage. On the other hand, the modern audience has enough sophistication to know that such a garment existed, and has the corresponding expectation of, at least occasionally, seeing it. At the same time, the modern spectator has very definite standards of what constitutes good acting and will expect, indeed, will demand, that the performance will conform with these criteria of "spontaneous" and "naturalistic" movement. A modern company has the job of trying to satisfy both expectations. The easiest and most common option so far appears to be to utilize the bum-roll to the maximum extent and, in effect, ignore the existence of the cartwheel.

I cannot say that I blame them. After all, a cartwheel looks as though it could be a chancy thing, uncompromising in behavior and difficult to maneuver. It also seems to be potentially hazardous to the wearer in crowded quarters, and certainly to bric-a-brac on stage. Nor could the contraption's — possibly quite authentic — bobbing and wobbling be trusted not to render scenes of the highest tragedy laughable to the modern viewer. (Shakespearean and other Jacobean outbreaks of suicide, murder and general mayhem are not supposed to look like farce.) What is probably most called for is a good compromise.

And, although I am not altogether certain I have come up with the best one either, I *have* evolved a method which ought to work at least as well as any other, and it does have the virtue of requiring no materials which have not already been called for in the corset, bum-roll, and Spanish farthingale. It is easy to construct and at least marginally more manageable for the wearer. Whether it is the answer to the whole question is still in the balance. The test model turned out fairly well, though it *does* wobble. I suppose if one wanted to go to the trouble, one could wear a bum-roll under the cartwheel, which would slow it down considerably. It seems like an awful lot of bother, however.

This version is made of standard hooping of the same type as that called for in the Spanish farthingale. This is intended to make the device a little less troublesome in close quarters. With a farthingale made of rigid wire, in order to navigate a narrow space, it would be necessary to tilt the hoop to get through. If there is a narrow space and a turn, the going may be difficult to impossible while the costume is being worn. (Without damage to something, that is.) With a flexible hooping cartwheel, the hoop can be crushed into a narrower form which will spring back to the original size when released. The hooping farthingale wobbles a good deal, but I am not altogether certain that, with the costume over it to slow it down, it would show significantly more movement than a rigid hoop (with or without a supporting bum-roll).

Whether one chooses to use the circular or the oval hoop is largely a matter of preference or conviction. In any case, it will probably be more attractive for the wearer to emerge from it slightly closer to the front edge rather than at dead center, even though this may make the balance a bit trickier.

The first step in drafting a pattern for the cartwheel farthingale is to find the size and general shape of your waist. To do this, put on your corset, measure your waist circumference, and then measure the width of your waist from side to side and from front to back. If you have made your corset with the lengthened waist and tabs, you may find your waist to be nearly circular. If your corset has the standard higher waist, it will probably be to some degree wider than it is deep. Take a sheet of graph paper, and, choosing an intersection for your center-point, measure out from this point one-half of each total distance along the proper center line (front, side, back and side), [*Figure 8:63*] marking each line at the desired point. (It is simpler to do than to describe). Now, we are going to start improvising. Let's face it, this does not have to be all that precise. If the difference between width and depth is an inch or less, wing it. Draw a circle with a diameter of the larger dimension and plan to ease the excess into a waistband. If the difference is more than an inch or so, take a compass, set the pin at your central intersection and adjust the marking element to be even with the front (and back) measurement on the [vertical] center line. [*Figure 8:64*] Now, setting the pin at the center of one side, turn the marking element towards the center intersection and make a small mark on the [horizontal] center line. Repeat from the other side mark. [*Figure 8:65*] Using these two new marks as radius points, draw two half circles intersecting the original side marks at the centers of their curves as shown. [*Figure 8:66*] Draw connecting lines between the ends of the two half circles. [*Figure 8:67*] If you measure the total circumference of the figure drawn (to do this you may either physically measure the circumference or you may apply πD to the waist depth measurement and add the distance of the gap between each of the half-circles in Figure 8:66. You will probably find it to be a bit larger than your waist measurement. If this really bothers you, you may play around with flattening out the curve until it fits. Otherwise, you may simply resign yourself to having to ease in the excess.

Having produced a shape for the waist hole, it will now be necessary to produce a shape for the hoop and position the waist hole in it. If you are planning to make your hoop circular and to emerge from the center of it, you've only to draw a circle of the proper size,

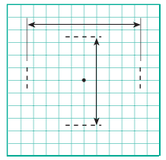


Figure 8:63 - Mark the width and depth of your waist.

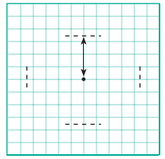


Figure 8:64 - Find radius of the waist depth.

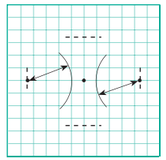


Figure 8:65 - Draw an arc with the radius equal to that of waist depth from the horizontal centerpoint of each side of the waist's width.

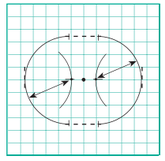


Figure 8:66 - Using the marks just made as radius points, draw half circles extending from the front to the back of the waist depth, and touching each side point.

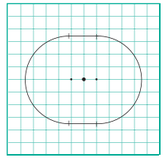


Figure 8:67 - Connect gaps in center front and back.

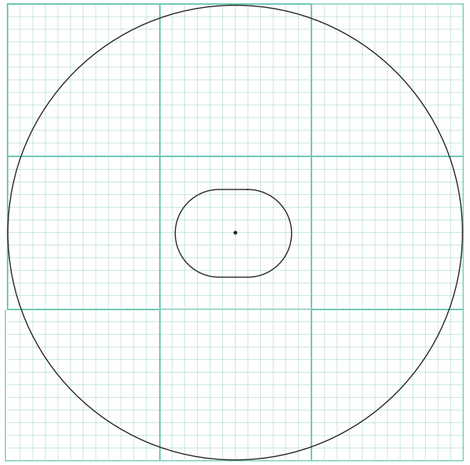


Figure 8:68 - Waist at center of circular hoop.

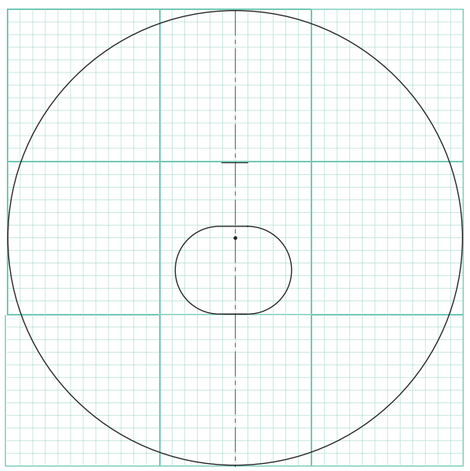


Figure 8:69 - Waist closer to front of circular hoop. Waist shape is set ⅓ of the diameter back from front edge of hoop.

using your center intersection as radius point. [*Figure 8:68*] If you plan to use a circular hoop and position your waist hole closer to the front edge, a good starting point would be to divide your intended diameter into thirds vertically and place your waist hole one third from the front edge. [*Figure 8:69*] You can play around with this on graph paper until you have something that satisfies you. While one can make a cartwheel of almost any size, generally speaking, a hoop with a diameter of one yard is probably, for the average wearer, about as large as can be readily managed. Be careful not to make it too small, however, or it will just make you look fat. This is supposed to be an exaggerated style. In most of its representations the skirt appears to be about as wide as it is long. Timidity will just be self-defeating.

To make a flattened hoop, with its greatest projection at the sides and back and its smallest at the front, is not very much more difficult to draw. First one decides how far one wishes the sides to project. A good general distance for that would probably be around 12–18 inches. We will use 12″ in this example. Extend the horizontal center line of your waist hole beyond the side point(s) to the desired distance. [*Figure 8:70*] Now divide your waist's centerline into thirds, marking

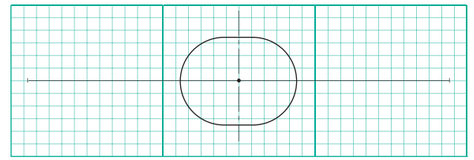


Figure 8:70 - Extend horizontal waist centerline. Mark intended edges of hoop.

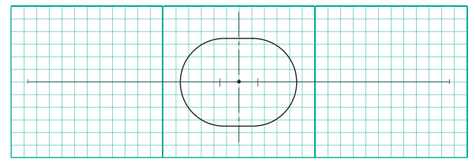


Figure 8:71 - Divide waist hole centerline into thirds.

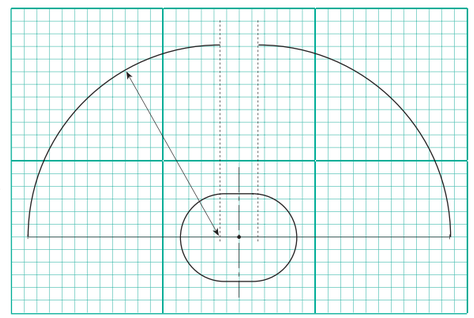


Figure 8:72 - Draw ¼ circles from intended edge of hoop to back line using marks just made as radius points.

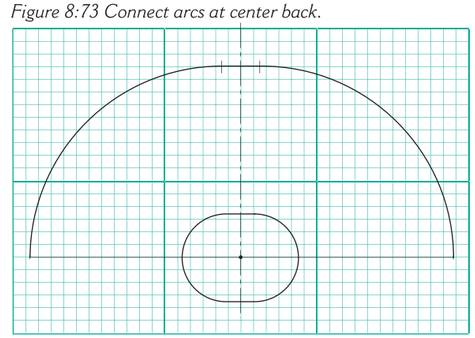
the divisions. [*Figure 8:71*] Using each of these marks as radius points, draw two quarter circles which reach from your extended side points to positions parallel along a vertical axis to each radius point toward the back. [*Figure 8:72*] Connect these two back points as shown. [*Figure 8:73*] You have drafted out the back half of your hoop.

To draft the front half of the hoop, you place the pin of your compass on the side point of the waist hole and adjust it until the drawing element meets the end of the quarter circle already drawn from the extended side point. Using the two side waist points as radius points, draw two quarter-circles tangent to those already drawn, which extend from the extended side points to positions which are parallel along a vertical axis to the side waist (radius) points toward the front. [*Figure 8:74*] Connect these two lines as shown. [*Figure 8:75*] You have finished drafting out the shape of your hoops. You can adjust this to some other shape if you prefer; it's only a guide.

To convert a flat drawing into a wearable device requires a certain degree of planning. The first step is to determine the full circumference of the figure drawn. If you have used the circular hoop, you have an easy task. Our old friend πD will take care of the business in no time. If you have drafted out an oval hoop as described in the paragraphs above, your task is slightly more complex. Your pattern has two straight portions, one at center front which is equal in length to the horizontal centerline of the waist hole and one at center back which is roughly one-third this length. Record these lengths for reference. At each side of your oval you have a compound curve composed of two quarter circles with different radii. The easiest way of determining their measurement is to forget about their being compound curves and to work with them in two portions.

Therefore, you will be dealing with two quarter-circles with radii equal to the extended side line from side waist point to extended side point, and two quarter-circles with radii equal to the same *plus* one-third the length of the horizontal centerline of the waist hole. In the figure drawn as an example the horizontal centerline of the waist is nine inches and the side extension is 12 inches. Therefore the radius of the first two quarter circles is 12 inches and the radius of the second two circles is 12 inches plus ⅓ of 9″ (3″), or, 15″. To find the circumference of two quarter circles, i.e., one half circle, you

Figure 8:73 Connect arcs at center back.



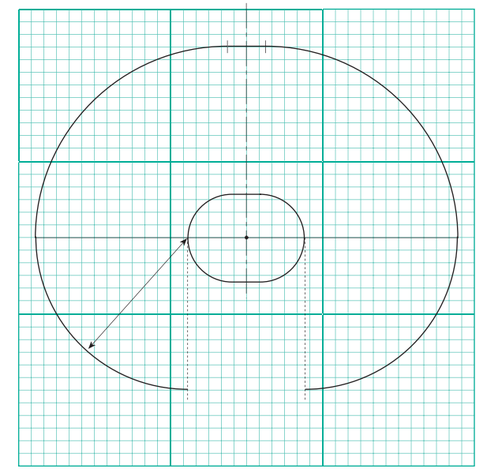


Figure 8:74 - Draw ¼ circles from intended edges of hoop to front line using edges of waist hole as radius points.

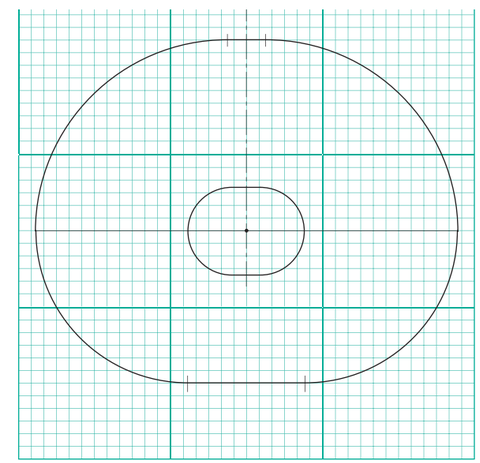


Figure 8:75 - Connect arcs at center front to finish drafting shape. If shape displeases you, modify to suit.

multiply the radius by pi (πr). To determine the circumference of the figure as drawn, you proceed like this: find circumference of the two smaller quarter circles (3.14 x 12″= 37.68″) find circumference of the larger two quarter circles (3.14 x 15″ = 47.10″). Add both circumferences together along with the straight section which is equal to the horizontal centerline of

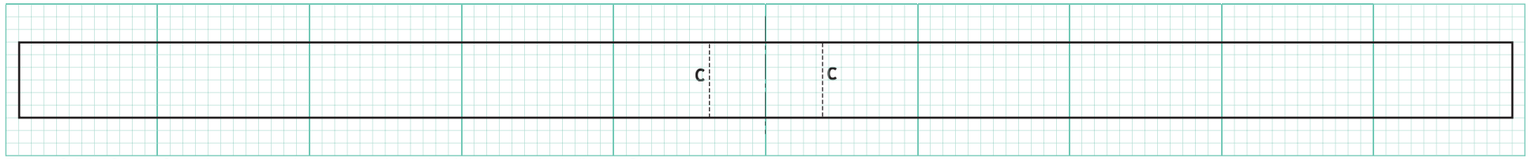


Figure 8:76 - Strip of graph paper with center and side back lines marked. (Lines C)

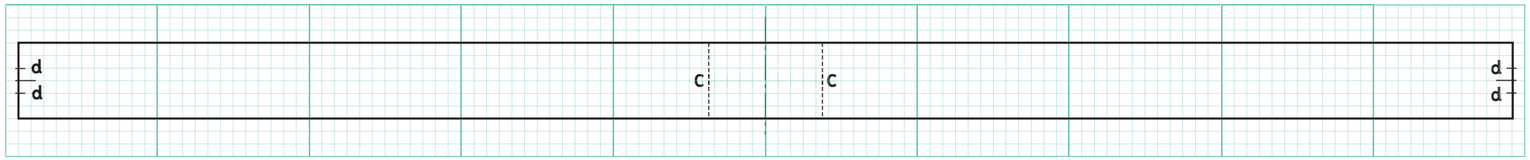


Figure 8:77 - Lengthwise centers, and points 1″ on each side from them have been added (points d).

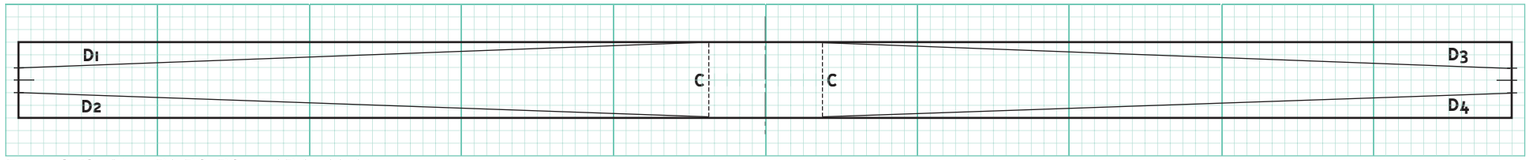


Figure 8:78 - Lines Dl, D2, D3, and D4 added.

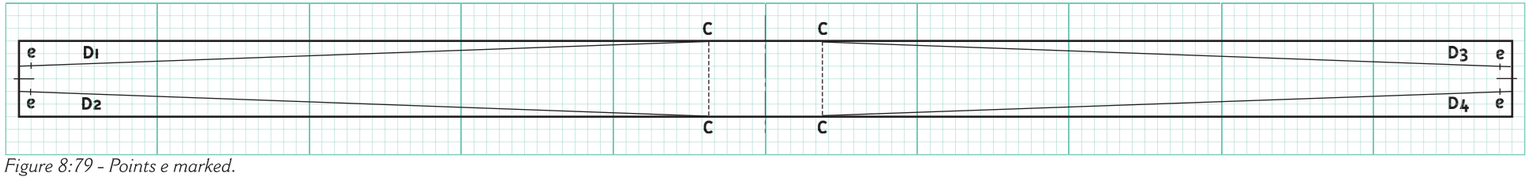


Figure 8:79 - Points e marked.

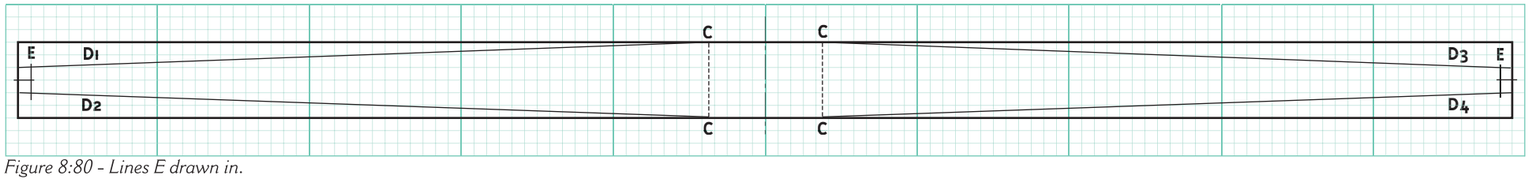


Figure 8:80 - Lines E drawn in.

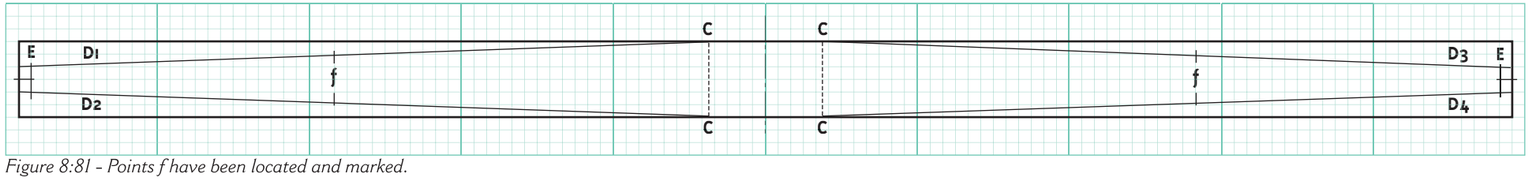


Figure 8:81 - Points f have been located and marked.

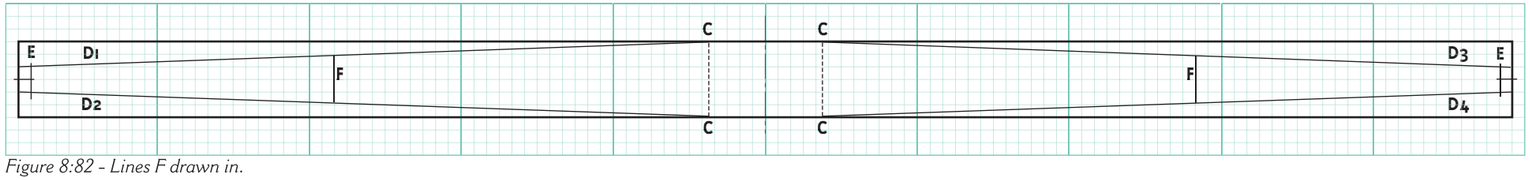


Figure 8:82 - Lines F drawn in.

the waist hole (9″) and the smaller straight section which is one third of this distance (3″). Therefore 37.68″+ 47.10″+ 9″+ 3″= 96.78″, or three yards and approximately ¾″. We will round this up to 97″ and add an additional inch for seam allowances.

The form of cartwheel which I have devised is essentially a hollow, angular bum-roll. It has a top surface, a bottom surface, and an outside surface which extends between the two. The outside surface contains the boning and hooping for the garment. Hoops at its top and bottom edges are self-explanatory. There are also small bones, positioned vertically between the hoops and are intended to hold them apart and to keep the garment from collapsing on itself under the weight of the costume. This center section is tapered in width from about 6 inches at center back to about 2 inches at center front. The reason for this is that if the hoops are held at a fixed distance (6 inches) from each other all the way around, when one sits down one will acquire a 6″ high ridge lying across one's lap. This is unlikely to be either in period or understood by the audience. A 2″ ridge, particularly considering that the sides and back of the hoop will be a good deal higher, may not seem quite as disconcerting. This design is of theatrical application, and is not authentically period. Should a disrobing scene be required, I should advise that you do more extensive research and use something else.

Okay. This outside surface, obviously, is equal in length to the circumference of the top and bottom, and at its widest point (center back) is about 6 inches across. So take your graph paper and, using the sample pattern above, draw a rectangle roughly 98 inches long and 6 inches wide. Now mark the center back. Divide the waist hole's horizontal centerline measurement (9 inches) in half (4½ inches). Measure 4½ inches out in each direction from the center back line and mark as shown. [*Figure 8:76*] These are lines **C**. Find the horizontal center point of each end of the strip. Measure one inch on each side of this center point on each end, and mark (points **d**). [*Figure 8:77*] Now draw a line through each point **d** to the nearest end of a line **C**, as shown. (Lines **D1**, **D2**, **D3**, **D4**) [*Figure 8:78*] Now, as with the Spanish farthingale, cut a strip of your graph paper to use as a measuring tape. Subtract the horizontal centerline measurement of the waist hole (9 inches) from the total length (98″) and divide the difference in half. 98″- 9″= 89″÷ 2 = 44.5″. Mark a section of your measuring strip for this distance (approximately). Line one end up with the **C** end of a line **D**. Measure 44.5″ along the line from it toward point **d** and mark (points **e**). Repeat from each **C** point. [*Figure 8:79*] Connect these newly marked points at each end of the figure as shown. (Lines **E**) [*Figure 8:80*] Now you need to find your side points. Add the length of the straight section in the center back of the hoop (3″) to the circumference of the larger quarter circles (47.10″).

Subtract the horizontal centerline of the waist hole (9″) from the total and divide the difference in half. 3″ + 47.10″ = 50.10″ - 9″ = 41.10″ ÷ 2 = 20.55″.

Mark 20.55″ on your measuring strip. Now, measuring from your **C** points, measure 20.55″ along each line in the direction of the nearest point **e**. [*Figure 8:81*] Mark these four side points (points **f**). Connect these points as shown. (Lines **F**) [*Figure 8:82*]

Before starting construction, a simple way of avoiding a good deal of tiresome detail when you come to making a plaquet for the wheel is to measure your vertical centerline, from center front to center back, add a couple of inches, and cut two pieces of your material at this length. Any medium-weight firmly-woven material 45 inches wide will do. This is assuming that 45 inches is wider than your total horizontal centerline (plus a couple of inches). If you are working in a small enough scale for 36 inches to cover the distance (as in the sample), go ahead and use it. Take these two pieces of material and baste their selvage edges together. [*Figure 8:83*] Fold the result in half with the seams in the middle. Press with seams open. [*Figure 8:84*] Now, using your seams as the vertical centerline, draft out your pattern on the cloth. Later, when you have cut out your pattern, you will need to permanently stitch the back seam and part of the front seam, but will be able to unstitch the basted portion of the front seam and use whatever treatment to the waist opening (snaps, hooks, buttons, zipper, ties) you wish without having to finish off a raw edge.

In any event, when the yardage is spread out on the table or floor, you find the vertical centerline and mark it. Then you find your horizontal centerline and mark that, and continue to re-draft the waist hole and wheel at full size on the top layer of the fabric. [*Figure 8:85*] Use the same tape measure/compass dodge as used in the Spanish farthingale to draft the quarter-circles.

When you have drawn out your hoop, add a seam allowance in the waist hole and around the outside edges of your panel [*Figure 8:86*] and cut out both layers. Re-sew the back seam of both layers. On the upper layer, install whatever plaquet finishing (if any) that you choose to whatever depth you need on the front seam. Re-sew the end of the seam where it will meet the hoop section. [*Figure 8:87*] On the lower layer, re-sew the end of the seam where it meets the hoop section, remove the basting and stitch down the edges so they won't get in your way. (Or stitch it to the underside of the top section when you line the two layers up together, after you have joined them and finished the waist edge treatment.) [*Figure 8:88*] Line up the two layers so that the waist holes match. If you are going to attach a waistband, line them up with wrong sides together, baste or pin together, and add waistband, matching center front, back and side points, easing in any excess between these points. I'm not going to go into detailed instructions for adding a waistband. If you are the average seamstress this collection is intended for, you already know this. If you are not, any basic sewing text will be only too willing to tell you. If you do not choose to add a waistband, line the two layers up with right sides together and seam them together. [*Figure 8:89*] Trim seam allowance to ¼″ or so, clip curves [*Figure 8:90*], turn and press. Top stitch a second seam ½″ from the first as shown, forming a casing. [*Figure 8:91*] You may run a drawstring through this casing to assure a snug fit. You may wish to mark and add grommets or eyelets matching those in your corset tabs at this point. Or, you can sew ties to the wheel to tie to the corset grommets. [*Figures 8:92, 8:93*] Now take the graph you charted out for the side section and chart it out on cloth. Since this is a long narrow shape, you may piece your fabric by sewing bits together, rather than trying to find one long narrow strip. Your basic shape on paper was about three yards by six inches. For your actual garment you will want to use a piece at least a couple of inches wider and longer since you will be adding seam allowances. In fact, you will want two pieces for you will be cutting two side sections. One piece of material about 16–18″ wide and about 98″ long, folded lengthwise, will do fine. (You don't really need to be told, that, if you are piecing this, all the raw edges should be to the same side?)

When you have charted out your side piece on cloth, add seam allowances on all sides and cut out both pieces. [*Figure 8:94*] Now mark the center back, lines **C**, and side points, on *both* pieces. (They will already be on one piece; you need to transfer the marks to the other.)

Taking one side piece, draw another vertical line about 7–7½″ from each side line toward the front ends of the piece.

Now draw 2–3 vertical lines between the side line and the line at the edge of the center back section. Space them

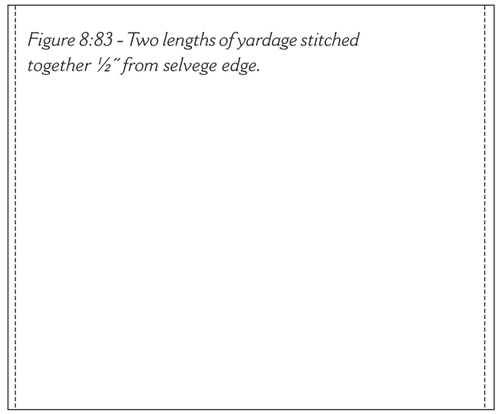


Figure 8:83 - Two lengths of yardage stitched together ½″ from selvege edge.

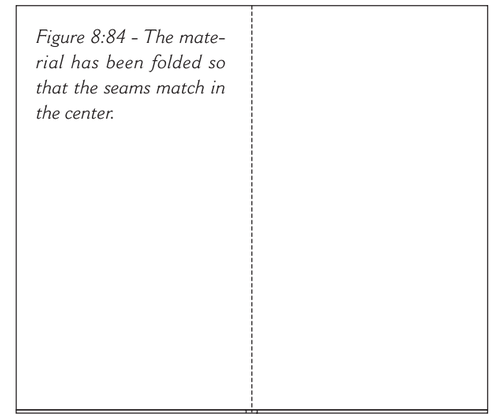


Figure 8:84 - The material has been folded so that the seams match in the center.

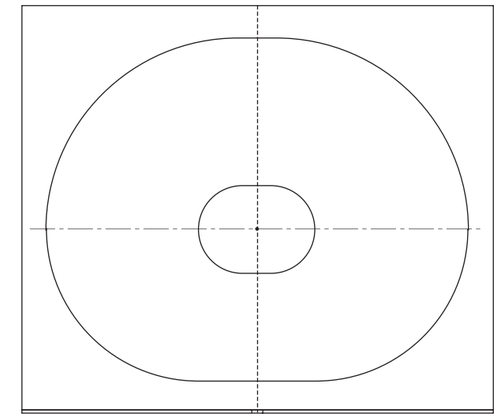
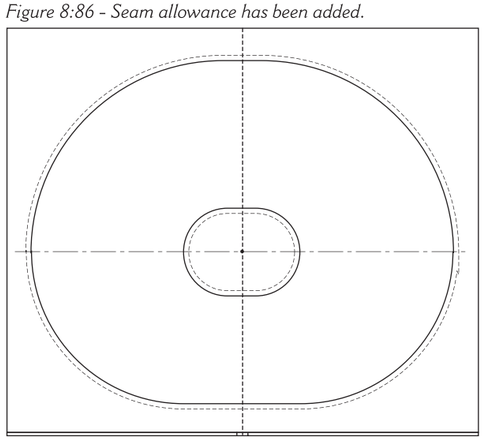


Figure 8:85 - The wheel top (and bottom) has been drafted onto the piece, using the seam as vertical centerline.

Figure 8:86 - Seam allowance has been added.



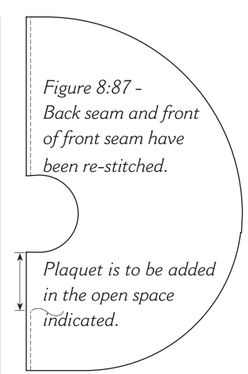


Figure 8:87 - Back seam and front of front seam have been re-stitched.

Plaquet is to be added in the open space indicated.

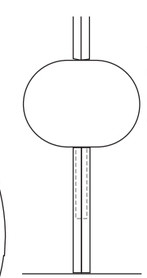


Figure 8:88 - Stitch down the raw edge of the opening on the bottom piece.

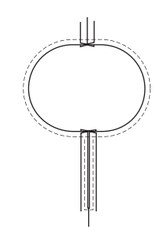


Figure 8:89 - Stitch right sides together.

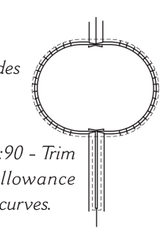


Figure 8:90 - Trim seam allowance and clip curves.

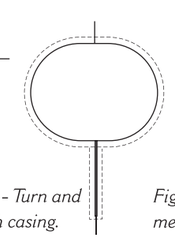


Figure 8:91 - Turn and press. Stitch casing.

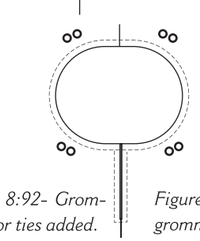


Figure 8:92- Grommets for ties added.

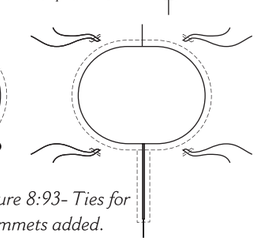


Figure 8:93- Ties for grommets added.

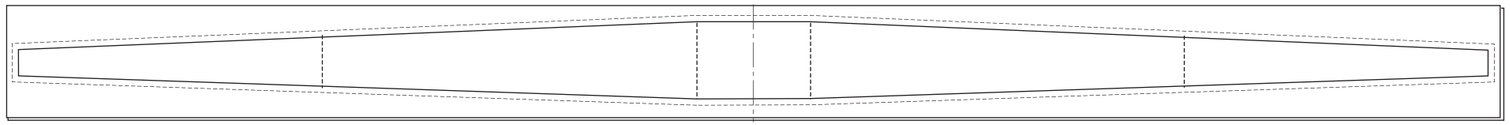


Figure 8:94 - Side piece drafted out on folded strip of material. Seam allowance has been added.

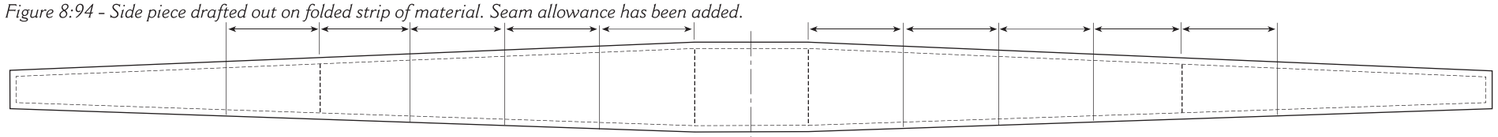


Figure 8:95 - Positions for bones marked on outer piece.

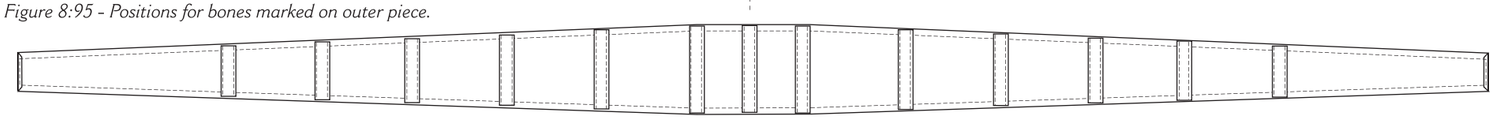


Figure 8:96 - Casings for bones sewn in place. Seam allowance at ends stitched down.

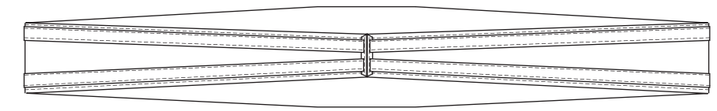


Figure 8:97 - Ends of inner piece sewn together. Casings for long bones sewn in place. (Stitching which would be visible on outside of piece has been omitted for clarity.)

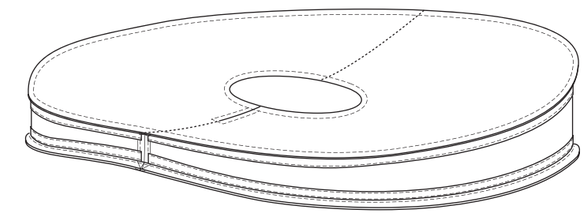


Figure 8:98 - Top and bottom sewn to inner side piece.

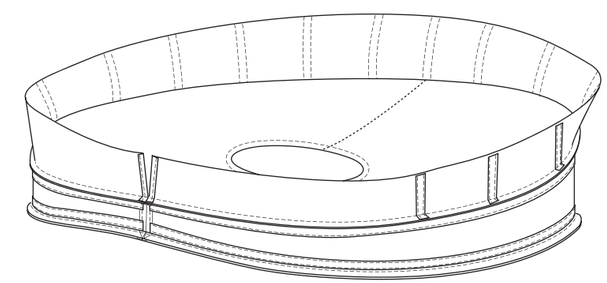


Figure 8:99 - Outer side piece sewn to top and inner side piece.

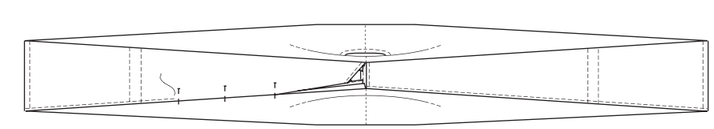


Figure 8:100 - Insert bones in outer side piece, fold all seam allowances inside, pin outer side piece to bottom and inner side pieces. Top-stitch in place.

as evenly as you can manage, but do not fret about the odd half-inch or so. [*Figure 8:95*] Cut bones to match each vertical line (minus about ½–1 inch for seam allowances). Mark which bone is which. Sew casings at each line, edge to edge of the material. Do not insert bones yet. For these bones, by the way, you can use just about anything but the lightest weight featherboning. Finish off the raw edges at the ends of your strip, at seam lines. [*Figure 8:96*]

Now, take the other side piece. Sew the ends together at the seam line. Using at least 1 inch wide twill tape, or other material, sew a ¾″ wide casing, lengthwise, about ¾″ from each edge of the piece with ends at this center front seam, as shown. [Figure 8:97] Now, taking this side piece, match its edges to the edges of the top and bottom sections of the wheel, as shown. [*Figure 8:98*] Sew together on both edges. You have attached the inner side piece to the top and bottom pieces. The casings and all raw seam edges should be on the outside.

Pin the other side piece — the outer side piece — to this inner side piece along their top edges with the right sides of the outside piece and the top panel together. Match all markings. Seam together. [*Figure 8:99*] Trim seam allowance to ¼″ if wished, turn and press. Press the lower seam allowances of both pieces inside along seam lines.

Insert bones into the casings of the outer/side piece. Turn seam allowances of both side pieces and the bottom piece in and, matching all markings, pin the lower edge of the side to the lower edge of the wheel with all the raw edges together between them. [*Figure 8:100*] Using a zipper foot, top stitch these pieces together. You may top stitch along the other edge, too, if you wish. (Be careful not to break a needle on the bones.)

The center front seam of your outer side piece should still be open, with the raw edges turned in. The ends of the casings for the two hoops, which are on the inner side piece, ought to be just inside this open seam. Feed your hooping into its casings through this opening. Overlap the ends of the hoops as in the Spanish farthingale. Do not forget to cover all four ends of your hooping in adhesive tape to avoid having it eat through its casing. Whipstitch the ends of the casings together if you wish. Whipstitch the center front seam of the outer side piece together.

This will produce a garment which will be usable under most circumstances. However, there is that bugaboo, the disrobing scene, or the scene in *deshabllé*. At this point one tends to panic and escape into bum-rolls (which were worn concurrently, after all). I do not blame you. For it's pretty obvious that the actual cartwheel farthingale, whatever it *did* look like, probably did *not* look exactly like what we have produced. At this point, I turn into a totally unprincipled coward and abandon you to your reference books and your own devices. We all have our limits.

If you do choose to use a rigid hoop, such as a florist's hoop, you can probably bend it into an oval, if wished. Or use it as is since those are made of fairly heavy wire. If, that is, you can find a florist supply who will sell you one. In Los Angeles, at least, this is one trade which is notorious for selling only within the trade. (MOSKETTELL'S — now called MICHAEL'S — used to be the only company which I am pretty sure will sell to the public.)

As to the aforementioned hoop-in-a-drumhead, I don't know about you, but I would probably reconsider. Particularly since there is considerably less than conclusive evidence to support the notion that the farthingale was actually made in this manner. According to the plates, it seems more likely to have been constructed on the "one or two rigid hoops in a harness" principal, or even something not too dissimilar to the design which I have evolved.

Part III

Which Consists Mainly of Observation

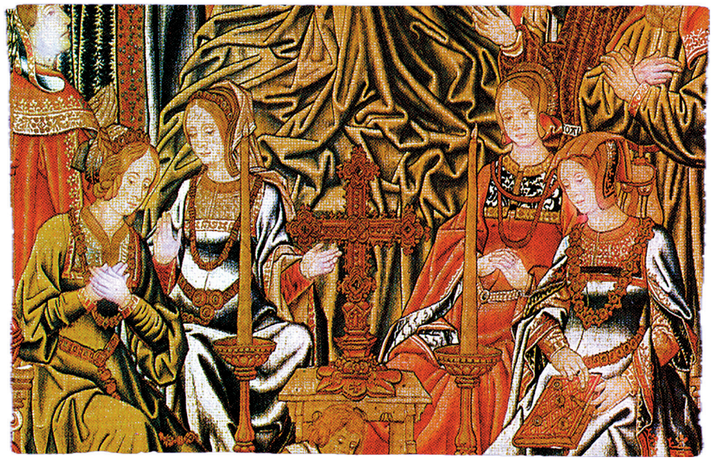


Plate G – 1: ***The Communion of Herkenbald,*** *(detail) designed by Jan von Roone, C. 1513. The corset had not yet come into use throughout all of Europe. These ladies' gowns had not yet been made rigid by "busks."*

Plate G – 2: ***English Citizen's Wife****, Hans Holbein, c. 1540. The middle and lower classes were slow to adopt the rigid busk. By this date court ladies had been wearing the stiffened bodice for some time.*

ALTHOUGH I DO NOT intend to go very heavily into the question of producing the outer costume of the Tudor era (there being no dearth of excellent information on the subject in books that are already available), I do have a few observations regarding particular cases which the reader may find helpful. These are the cases relating to the very early and transitional costume at the beginning of the era, some notes on Germanic costume, the question of the arched neckline, and a few further observations in regards to the problems inherent in trying to produce a direct copy from a known source.

A close look at the examples of early Tudor era costume [*Plates B–7, G–1, and G–2*] will reveal, by the shading of the bodices, that the absolutely flat front had not yet become universal. This shading is particularly noticeable in the examples taken from tapestries. As may be seen, one of the commoner forms of gown was indeed the flat-fronted stiffened bodice that we have learned to recognize. The other predominant style was that of the earlier, unstiffened gown with the bodice and skirt usually cut in one. The neckline, in this earlier style did not coincide with the apex of the bosom, being made high enough to follow the contours of the body to the upper chest area, or filled in with a partlet or undergown. The bodice, where stiffened and cut separately, was still somewhat high-waisted, as in the late medieval period. Clearly this form of gown requires a different handling than that of the later, more corseted era.

It can be easily seen that the clothing of this era did not rely on an artificial body shape, and whatever distortion may be present, is very minor. I would be willing to hazard a guess that the stabilization used in this period was on the order of the heavy duty interlining, or the underbodice stiffened with paste variety. These garments are mentioned in nearly all costume histories, but very little speculation seems to have been expended on them. The material was probably a good deal more firmly woven than modern buckram. It has generally been credited with having been made of linen and stiffened with what may have been a gesso, or a glue sizing (which must have smelled delightful — I *don't* think! Ugh!) Whether it would have lost some of its stiff scratchiness when damp, I do not know. Some modern buckrams go limp when wet, but that is quite beside the point. The seams and lacing edges were probably still reinforced with whalebone. I suggest, that in attempting this style, that you start out as though you were intending to make the standard Renfaire corset pattern, fit it completely to the torso, and bone only the seams and lacing edges. You may want to experiment with canvas, and *possibly* gesso. It may keep the garment from breathing. It is recommended that you not attempt to use modern buckram. Persons who have tried have ended up very much the worse off for it. Unless you really know what you are doing, and are extremely careful, the buckram may draw blood before it's done. Literally.

There may also be problems with skin sensitivity as well. It will help to keep in mind that the visual sources which you will be working from may be highly idealized. Still, they are representative of the type of form which results from a very close fitting underbodice worn over a shift with strips of whalebone reinforcing the lacing edges to keep them from crumpling up. Featherboning would probably be an adequate substitute. Remember that neither separate-cup bras, nor bust darts were in use in the 16th century.

When working out your pattern for this early period, I would highly recommend Mary G. Houston's Medieval Costume in England and France or Elizabeth Birbari's Dress in Italian Painting, 1460 – 1500. There are undoubtedly other good sources as well.

In any case, expect to be adding a center front seam. Take in any extra fullness from this center front or the side seams. Do not use darts. Make the underbodice waist length all round, do not lengthen the front. Do not expect the bosom to be as well shaped or supported as in modern foundation garments. The purpose of the underbodice was to hold everything in place by being snug enough to keep the bosom from undue wobble.

As time progresses, the wearer may expect a certain amount of settling to take place. During the subject period,

among the upper classes this would have been to some degree offset by the fact that people seem to have changed their clothing, or at least their linen, at frequent intervals throughout the day.

Throughout the whole of the Renaissance, fine bleached linen was a conspicuous status symbol. This appears to have held true in most of the European countries. When you stop to think of it, it naturally follows that the most reliable method of being sure that one is always seen with one's linen at its best, is to change it whenever it has been sweated through. Frequent changes also assured that one's outer clothing was kept in good condition, since if you changed as soon as your shift was sweaty, your outer gown did not have a chance to become stained. Since the shift is the bottom layer, in order to change one's linen, it is necessary to strip down to the buff. It is reasonable to suppose that before donning a fresh shift, it would be usual to rub down with a moist towel and dry off. Then to redress from the skin out, as in "changing" for dinner, for visiting, for afternoon, etc. Except under unusual circumstances, it would have been the height of eccentricity for a member of the elite to have stayed in the same clothing all day. The only obvious exception to this generality being the conditions inherent in traveling. On a journey of any appreciable length, one could not well afford the time to stop and change one's linen three or four times a day. Which probably contributed as much to the physical discomfort, psychological distress and euphemistic "dirtiness" traditionally associated with lengthy journeys as did unsprung carriages and unpaved roads.

This custom also throws a bit of welcome light upon a point which is otherwise somewhat bemusing. I refer to the well-documented fact that most Renaissance *ensémbles* were largely held together with *pins*. Until I made this connection, the concept of pinning one's clothing together was frankly appalling. After all, my outlook was that of a 20th century participant of S.C.A. events and attendee of public festivals. In either of these environments, once you are clothed, you stay that way until the event is over for the day, when you can (finally!) take off your costume and wash. The thought of going around all day in a get-up which was held together by pins made my skin crawl. I am no fonder of the idea of having parts of my costume come adrift than the next person, let alone voluntarily taking the risk of getting stabbed. But if there was no such thing as a zipper, if velcro was a figment of the imagination, if hooks and eyes were hand made, exorbitantly expensive and difficult to come by, and buttons, visible lacings or ties stylistically undesirable, given the choice of being sewn into my clothing or being pinned together for a period of maybe three hours of ladylike activity, yes, I think I could manage it. Particularly if, at the end of this period, I would be required to (quickly!) strip down and completely redress in a fresh outfit for the next few hours or so, after which I would probably be required to change my clothing yet again. One can face the notion of having one's clothing pinned together when one is well aware that one is not going to be in it for any appreciable length of time. Pinning would also facilitate quick changes. Presumably, when more strenuous activity was known to be expected of one, such as riding or dancing, one wore clothing which was fastened more securely.

It would also seem reasonable to suppose that one would attempt to take advantage of these changing periods to answer the calls of nature. Speaking as a costumed attendee of a considerable number of public festivals, I can state without reservation that farthingales and porta-pottys are not a match made in heaven. Nor do straight-fronted corsets make the process any simpler. The sanitary arrangements of Renaissance buildings were probably not overly capacious either, and it would make perfect sense to try to wait for the time that one would be taking all of the artificial superstructure off. It is amusing to think that the much observed custom of teenaged girls trooping off to the ladies' room *en massé* may have so venerable an origin.

BEFORE CONTINUING, I am going to temporarily adjourn and trot out another hobby horse for a brief foray. The notion that everyone in Europe went around thoroughly filthy and reeking to high heaven until the 19th century seems to be grounded in the fairly well substantiated information that bathing was rare. I am of the opinion that the blank statement of this particular fact is misleading. Yes, bathing *was* rare. *Washing*, however is another matter.

Social status entails more than fine food and clothing. It also implies a certain level of personal cleanliness. To be sure, bathing — in the modern sense of sitting in a tub of warm water — *would* have been infrequent. It takes a great deal of work to prepare that tub of warm water for sitting in. First, the water must be drawn from the well, spring, or river, then carried to where your heat source is and warmed over the open fire. Meanwhile, the tub had to be carried to the bather's room, or wherever the bathing area may have been located. (Braudel contends that bathing areas were usually basements, which were easier to deliver the water to, but harder to drain it off from.) The tub would then need to be set up in front of the hearth, the fire attended to, the water carried to it in cans or buckets, the tub filled, soap and towels set out where they could be reached, hot and cold water mixed to a suitable temperature, and the water strewn with medical or fragrant herbs. And, once the bath was over, the tub would have to be emptied, the water carried away, the tub carried away and scrubbed, and the room mopped and dried and generally set to rights.

This is a great deal of nuisance to be gone through for the sake of a bath. It entails a tremendous amount of time and trouble for someone. Nor is this someone likely to be the same someone as the person who is actually getting the bath. People who indulged in "frequent" bathing were people who could afford plenty of servants.

Insofar as how frequent *was* "frequent," Queen Elizabeth I, a person noted for personal fastidiousness, is reported to have bathed just about every month, as a general rule, and up to twice as often in hot weather. From this information, persons who are not in the habit of looking at things in context have concluded, with mid-20th century smugness, that she must have been a very dirty woman. They have not considered, or do not realize, that in addition to her monthly, or semi-monthly immersions, Good Queen Bess was probably also rubbing herself down with a warm damp towel and changing her linen two to four times a day.

Most Renaissance nobles were not so particular. They also had a number of daily rubdowns, but they did not bathe as frequently. They probably did not feel that it was necessary, and upon the whole, this feeling was very likely justified. Although modern deodorants and antiperspirants were unknown, the general level of personal hygiene among the upper classes of the Tudor period may have compared more favorably with our own than did that of our own great-grandparents with their bath every Saturday night, whether it was needed or not.

Indeed, when comparing the Elizabethans to ourselves, although a slightly higher level of human odor would have been unavoidable, in a healthy upper class individual it would probably have been far from overwhelming. It may have been within the range that the perfumes and pomanders in general usage could have masked without in themselves becoming unpleasantly obtrusive. One bit of substantiating evidence for this theory may be found in the examination of the formulas of the "sweet waters" i.e., perfumes, of the period. Those of the Elizabethan era are comparable to cologne, or cologne concentrate for the most part. Those of the Georgians — a more elegant but less cleanly age — were, in the words of my informant, "enough to gag a maggot."

Another point to remember is that one may bathe in other manners than that of sitting in a tub of warm water. The ancient Greeks "bathed" by rubbing themselves with oil and then scraping it off with specialized tools. Some of the perfumed unguents of the Renaissance may have been intended for this purpose.

The lower classes, on the other hand, were another matter. People who work at the direction of someone else cannot stop to change their linen whenever it suits them. Even a person who only does his or her own work, rather than someone else's, has generally not got time to stop and change their clothing in the middle of a working day. Consequently, there was a great gulf in hygiene between the rich and the poor. The poor could not afford to pay servants to prepare baths for them, nor could they well afford the time to prepare their own. Their masters did not pay them to bathe, after all. Whatever time they had which was not spent seeing to their employers' needs was spent seeing to the needs of their own families. Nor would it have occurred to them that bathing was even a desirable thing for them to do. No example of regular bathing was set before them. Bathing was that *outré* pastime which their boss did every six weeks or so, not an habitual

detail of personal maintenance which one might apply to oneself. The church's fulminating over the goings-on in the public bathhouses (which enjoyed pretty much the same reputation that they do today, for very much the same reasons) would have further tended to have put "respectable" people off.

The lower classes also did not have as many clothes to change into, or an army of laundry maids to keep them washed. Therefore, servants, the "respectable" poor, would be in the same clothing from morning to night, possibly for days on end. In humbler households, they could be expected to sleep in their linen as well. In later eras, it became customary for house and parlor maids to change from simple print "morning" uniforms into their formal black "afternoon" uniforms. The heavy work which got one sweaty was done in the morning. The family's guests were most likely to visit in the afternoon and evening. Sedentary work, such as mending, was done in the afternoon.

The poor, to put it harshly, were greasy and they stank. They were also usually illiterate, ignorant, superstitious, uncultured, and often lacking in self-discipline. And they firmly resisted efforts on anyone's part to encourage them to be less so. There was nothing remotely romantic about the "great unwashed." When seen in context, the utter lack of sympathy or concern among the wealthy and powerful on behalf of those less fortunate, is less an unfailing indication of cold-hearted callousness than might otherwise be assumed. To each class the other must have seemed almost another species, and one to be regarded with the gravest of suspicions to boot. Indeed, considering the overwhelming differences between the conditions, habits, priorities and values (and, let us not forget, speech) of the two, the 18th century — callous as it was — is to be commended on the zealousness of its reformers.

In the meantime, the rich did not want the poor any nearer than was avoidable. Those who worked in particularly smelly areas, kitchens, sculleries, stables, farmyards, etc., were generally not welcomed, or even permitted, into the presence of their employers. In the few occasions when they found themselves in such presence, or were actively brought before their masters, they were likely to be very ill at ease. It is not conducive to anyone's sense of well-being to be made conscious of the fact that the people upon whom their livelihood depends consider them to be little better than another smelly animal, and to be all too aware that there is justification for this view. When employers wanted speak to their cooks, they went to consult them in the kitchen. Or sent the steward to do so. Servants of a higher sort were permitted into the house to clean it, but were expected to efface themselves when the guests returned. Personal attendants and servants in the highest offices, like the steward, were required to maintain a level of personal cleanliness sufficient to make their presence tolerable to their employers. At the highest range of the social scale, royalty was served by ladies and gentlemen in waiting, who were themselves nobles, and maintained themselves accordingly. The nobility and gentry were served in this capacity in their own homes by their poorer relations.

The middle classes were in a peculiar position. They were well enough off to have ideas well above their station. But had not the resources to put them into effect. In a world of abundant cheap labor, servants and apprentices can be acquired to handle the daily drudgery, and the middle classes' standard of living was at least high enough to assure that they could have their linen washed regularly. But the fact that they still had work of their own meant that they could not stop to change as frequently as they might feel the wish to. Persons in the equivalent of white-collar positions no doubt had a status edge over, say, a master craftsman. But it was likely to be a less than conclusive one.

As in the rivalry between noble and merchant, the one who dealt with the muck was more likely to have control over his own income. A gentleman's secretary might not run about and get his clothing sweaty, but he had to be at his employer's beck and call, and had probably less chance of advancement through his own industry. Where a tradesman could possibly become wealthy through his own efforts, the secretary was dependent upon his master's good will and influence. On the other hand, the good will and influence of a highly placed employer could take one very far indeed.

In any case, the middle classes, with the best will in the world, were not able to dress in the manner of the nobly born. A servant must dress in sturdy, securely-fastened garb. A noble, with the luxury of a great deal of idleness, may be quite content to go through life in clothing which is semi-securely held together with a handful of hand made, and fairly expensive, pins. A person with duties to perform as well as pretensions to support could do neither. Middle class dress, therefore occupied an uneasily shifting middle ground between the two. More fashionable, and better made than most laborers' dress, it was yet simpler, more securely fastened and more durable than that of the truly wealthy. Much ingenuity has been exercised by the middle class in devising less visible, more efficient fastenings, as well as other gadgets which would enable their clothing to more closely resemble that of their betters. Nor has this habit stopped at their clothing. It does not astonish us to discover that the bulk of those innovative spirits who have gifted mankind with the greatest number of labor–saving, as well as profit–making inventions, have, in quite disproportionate numbers, sprung from the middle classes. It is also somewhat disconcerting to realize that one of the greatest implements in the equalization of mankind (insofar as it *can* be equalized) was nothing more exotic than soap. That cleanliness might be next to godliness seems a sanctimonious fallacy, even if it was a major church figure who originally declared it (John Wesley in fact), but this detracts little from the impact of the sentiment's more secular application, the middle class's traditional motto; "clean *and decent*".

Leaving this subject, let's move on to another, more immediately relevant to our own purposes. Earlier in this collection, I made the statement that in attempting to reproduce archaic clothing styles, we are forced to work largely from hearsay evidence. Very few garments survive from this period, and even those that do, do not give us a clear view of what people looked like in them. Nor, if I may be allowed to state the obvious, was photography in use at that time. All that we have to base our visual research on are artist's renderings, which are entirely subject to the skill, the intentions, and the pretensions of the artist in question, and subject to the graphic/artistic conventions of the day. The painters of the Renaissance had no great commitment to the photo-realist school of painting. However, the advances in technique, and the fact that the stylizations of the period were so strikingly different from those of the "International Gothic" which had preceded them tends to cloud our perception that the works of this period were also highly stylized. One of the chief difficulties to be met in this area can be summed up in one name; Hans Holbein (The Younger).

*Plate G – 3: **Anne of Cleeves**, Hans Holbein, c. 1530. The torso has clearly been narrowed in order to present a strong graphic statement. This may be good art, but it's bad proportions.*

Since Holbein — in addition to being a genius, or at least a very great master — was a very successful painter, he was widely imitated by a host of lesser artists, whose work acquires, due to stylistic resemblance to his, a high degree of credibility, by association. The fact that he painted faces and textures in so convincingly "realistic" a manner, lulls the spectator into believing that the art of the period was generally reliable in depicting such information as that we seek. Unfortunately, the depth of conviction contained in Holbein's work overshadows the fact that he also practiced a certain amount of artistic shorthand. A second look at many of Holbein's portraits will reveal that he has frequently narrowed the upper arm and ribcage so that the subject stands in strong graphic contrast to the flat color of the background. [*Plate G–3*] He has not, however, narrowed the shoulders. This technique, as one might expect, is even more noticeable in Holbein's sketches, since these were essentially head studies, with the body only roughed in with a few lines, for general orientation and rough costume details. [*Plate G–4*] Generally speaking, if one were to draw an imaginary horizontal line, just below the shoulders of one of his sketches, it becomes obvious that the drawing is

done in two different scales. It should also not be forgotten that this was early in the period. One of Holbein's famous compatriots (well, sort of), only slightly senior, Lucas Cranach the Elder, was still profitably engaged in glorifying the Gothic ideal of feminine beauty with neither embarrassment nor apology. Holbein may not have utterly rejected elements of this common background. The work of the third major Germanic artist of this transitional period, Albrecht Dürer, also shows clear development from gothic to classical styles.

*Plate G – 4: **Mary Souch**, Hans Holbein, c. 1541. The head and shoulders of Holbein's sketch appear to be at a completely different scale from the torso and arms, which appear to have been merely roughed in.*

What this may indicate, is that in the same way in which the Medieval painters called attention to the more important figures in their religious or secular paintings by drawing them at a larger scale than their surroundings, the typical Renaissance painter of a half-length portrait called attention to what he considered the most expressive elements of his work, the subject's head and hands, by drawing them in careful detail, and filling in the torso and arms more or less as an afterthought, often in slightly smaller scale. These features apparently were considered of use only to display the artist's skill, and the subject's wealth and taste in dress. Keep in mind also that such sketches as G–4 are also are not the finished artwork, but only head studies in preparation for larger works, or sketches for the artist's recreation. Under such circumstances, he would not have been paying the same attention to scale as in the final commissioned portrait. Later, in France this trick becomes even more noticeable since the French painters, rather than exaggerating shoulder breadth were typicaly more inclined to exaggerate their slope. In the work of a few, Corneille de Lyon, for instance, this combination of graphic tricks becomes so extreme as to be grotesque. [*Plate G–5*]

*Plate G – 5: **Gabrielle de Rouchechovart**, attributed to Cornelle de Lyon, c. 1560–65. The graphic shifts in scale are so blatant as to be grotesque. It is paintings like this which had 19th century novelists claiming that the French court demanded ladies-in-waiting to maintain 13 inch waists.*

Occasionally an artist will be seen to work in more than one style of draftsmanship. And sometimes an artist invented his own. Dürer in particular seems to have become caught up in his own art theory, wherein one attempted to produce an ideal form by creating an image from a series of set proportions. [*Plate G–6*] This despite the fact that (or possibly because) Dürer seems not to have ever made a formal study of anatomy.

And, finally, there were the Mannerists. The Mannerists, from our point of view are the bane of the whole later half of the 16th century. I have not gone hunting to find just where the Mannerists got their start, but they seem to have been an international phenomenon. I'm sure that any number of other observers have attempted to explain the Mannerists. I am rather fond of the following version from Geoffrey Squire;

"The extraordinary fashions of the second half of the 16th century seem explicable only after reference to developments made in painting and architecture during the preceding twenty-five years. Then younger artists had started reaction in two ways against that ideal perfection set by the great Italians of the quattro-cento. Either, by conscious over-refinement, they produced effects of the most extreme artificial elegance — or, by reversal, saw great beauty in ugliness."

Well, *gee*, I can certainly understand *that!* Sounds just like the art of typography since the mid-1980s. But then *I've* had all the advantages of living next door to scruffy old east Hollywood since the Nixon administration. I think I'm going to start envisioning those Elizabethan dandies with their peascod doublets and their melon hose (and don't forget the padded codpieces) and the earrings and those pointy little beards, and, for that matter, their ladies, too, with their split ruffs and cartwheel farthingales, and just mentally carry this look to the logical extreme and start adding a few tattoos and chains and multicolored mohocks. Which all may go some way towards relieving my feelings of frustration, but it doesn't make our job any easier.

As the period progressed and the Mannerist influence became stronger throughout Europe, their graphic tricks became more ubiquitous. The accompanying painting of an unknown lady by an unknown painter is English in origin [*Plate G–7*] and dates from a period some fifteen years later than that of the de Lyon painting above. At first glance it is an attractive work. But upon closer inspection it becomes painfully obvious that none of its elements bears any clear relationship to any other.

As with the majority of English paintings, the shoulder breadth has been exaggerated. The length of the hands is incompatible with the length of the arms. The breadth of shoulder, is incompatible with the length of the torso or the width of the ribcage. The head, not in scale with anything else, floats weightlessly above a ruff, which in turn hovers above an embroidered partlet, without direct contact occurring between any of them. The individual details of the *ensémble* are rendered meticulously, and may be of great value in research, but the painting as a whole is of no real assistance in determining proportions. (Although I daresay if you simply exagger-

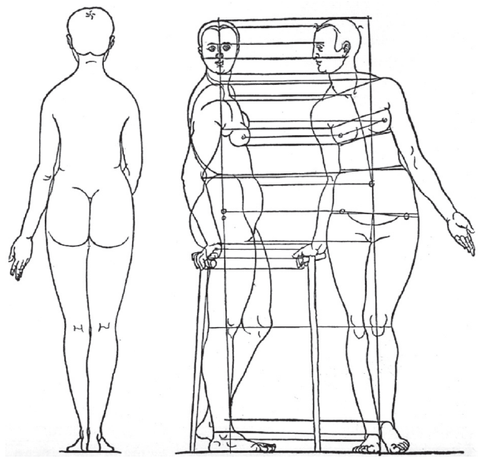


Plate G – 6: Illustration from Four Books on Human Proportions, Albrecht Dürer c. 1528 (posthumous). Proportions of the normal female, 7½ heads in height.

*Plate G – 7: **Unknown Young Lady**, unknown, c. 1575–80. An attractive picture drawn in the strangest jumble of porportions.*

*Plate G – 8: **Mary Fitton**, unknown, c. 1600. Mannerism in full bloom, Weightless, insubstantial, bizarre and rather disturbing.*

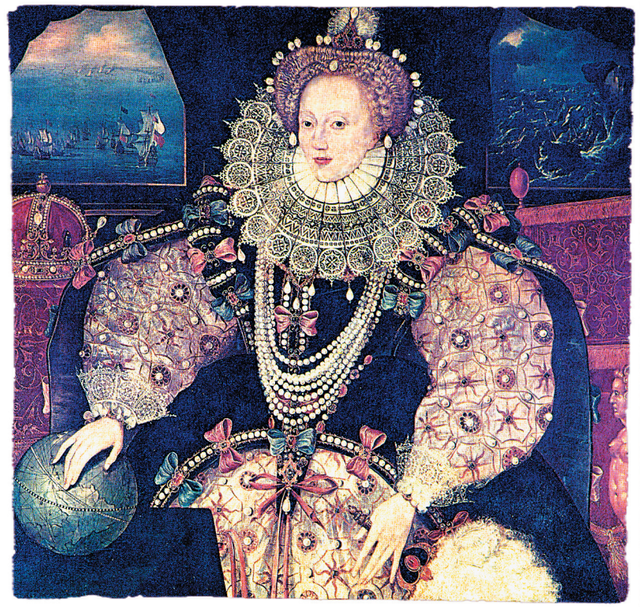


Plate G – 9: ***Elizabeth I*** *(the "Armada" Portrait), unknown, c. 1588. Note brocade pattern.*

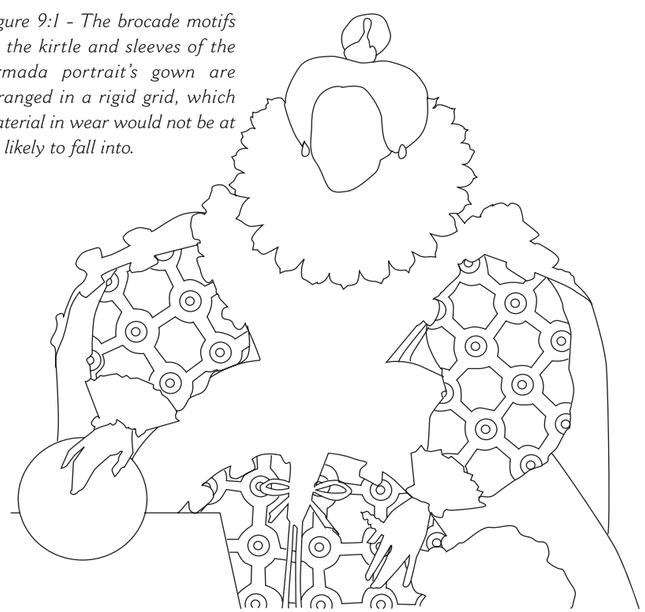


Figure 9:1 - The brocade motifs on the kirtle and sleeves of the Armada portrait's gown are arranged in a rigid grid, which material in wear would not be at all likely to fall into.

ated everything, you would be pretty safe.) For that matter, would you really expect to get a clear idea of proportions from modern fashion designers' sketches?

In the next example, dated yet another twenty years later, the fragmentation of the subject, noted in the last example, has evolved into "Mannerism" in full bloom. [*Plate G–8*] Indeed, the fundamental practice of the Mannerist painters seems to have been to break the subject up into as many different elements as possible, exaggerate them all and then paint them individually, superimposing them upon each other in a sort of collage, rather than actually joining them together. The result is bizarre, and often rather disturbing. The end product is a self-contained muddle of images which, despite its bulkiness, has become as weightless and insubstantial as anything ever produced by the Gothic painters of a century before. Nor is the total at all representative of the sum of its parts. An actual *person* in that outfit would not look like that.

Even the individual parts are not necessarily depicted realistically. In the "Armada" portrait of Queen Elizabeth, for example, The embroidered or woven motifs in the fabric used for the kirtle and sleeves are displayed in an absolutely regular grid, despite the fact that real fabric, in wear, would not necessarily fall into an orientation which would give it quite this appearance. [*Plate G–9, Figure 9:1*]

In paintings produced for purposes other than portraits (historical, mythical or religious subjects), particularly those done in the classical manner, the proportions, although reflective of classical ideals, are less likely to be subjected to peculiar graphic shorthand, perhaps because these were undertaken in the light of major artistic "statements", or were commissioned as political propaganda, rather than attempts to cash in on a popular trend to keep the pot boiling. [*Plate G–10*] Full-length portraits, barring those of the unremittingly Mannerist school, appear to be more reliable as indications of what was worn, and how, than are most half-lengths. These are far from infallible, but are less subject to gratuitous allegorical drapery than are most classical allusions. [*Plate G–11*] As a general rule, Mannerism appears to be at its most virulent in portraits of court dress. Unfortunately, while the Mannerist movement appears to have been (mercifully) short-lived, its heyday cuts a swath through the period in which we are most interested.

By contrast, Spanish painters of this era seem at first glance to have been refreshingly straightforward. Even upon close examination, they rarely exhibit irrational flights of fancy or indulge in overmuch fashionable artistic shorthand. As Spain lost its grip on world leadership, Spanish *fashion* became somewhat grotesque, but it is nearly always depicted in a believable manner. (Earlier Spanish painters are neither better nor worse than anyone else's.) Dutch painters also tend to have a good eye for detail, and are very useful for their "great" periods. Realism had become fairly well established as a desirable quality in art by the 1620s by which time a large enough pool of upper-middle class potential purchasers of *génre* paintings existed to make their production economically feasible. This happy conclusion has proved invaluable to the writers of costume books. Indeed, the chief problem in researching the Tudor era is that, not only is it too remote to have provided us any extensive body of examples of garments worn to study, but that the whole period was plagued with an unsettled (not to say downright perverse!) notion of what constituted a desirable artistic statement. It both began and ended amid a welter of willful artistic distortions.

Another comparatively minor, but plaguing question which has occasionally come up when designing costumes for the earlier Tudor eras

Plate G – 10: ***Queen Elizabeth with Juno, Minerva and Venus****, Hans Eworth, c. 1569. A straightforward piece of political propaganda which nevertheless, in the figure of the Queen, is both moderate and credible, insofar as physical proportions are concerned.*

concerns the allegedly arched neckline. This feature is persistent in the depiction of Tudor dress. The earlier the era one is researching, the greater its frequency of appearance. Although I do not totally disbelieve the hypothesis that this may be an accurate representation of a style, I am rather more inclined towards the theory that the illustrations exaggerate and slightly misrepresent the feature. A close look at most of the examples shown will reveal that if one continues the line of the neckline "arch," the extended ends will almost invariably pass immediately under the arms. [*Plates G–4, G–5, G–7*] Or, to put it more plainly, the configuration will be exactly similar to the line of the top edge of the standard strapless (or leather) corset described in chapter six. The rise in the front of these corsets is not particularly evident in wear. But if one takes a good look at the diagram of its general shape [*Figures 6:26 and*

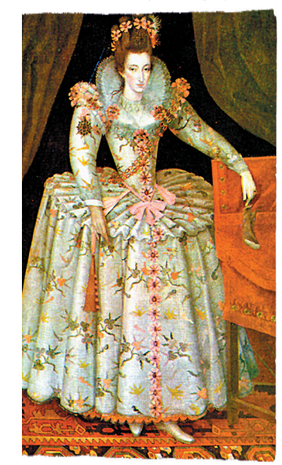


Plate G – 11: ***Anne Vavasour****, unknown, c. 1600-1605. Even during the height of mannerism, a full-length portrait tended to be more credibly proportioned than a half-length.*

Plate G – 12: ***Isabella of Portugal****, Titan, c. 1526. The neckline of this gown rises impossibly high, given the basic facts of human anatomy. It seems probable that there is some painterly distortion in evidence.*

Plate G – 13: ***St. Elizabeth of Hungary****, Florentine School, 17th C. In this later example, the probable configuration of the effects of a high neckline are dealt with in a far more realistic manner. The figure's stance demonstrates that the belly-first posture of the Renaissance was a long time a'dying.*

6:41], it will be obvious that the corset is lower at the sides, under the armpit, than it is at center front, even when the depth of the waist point is left out of the calculation. The angle from which the majority of Tudor portraits are drawn is one which will display both the center front and the side front of the bodice. Therefore, much as the Pre-Raphaelites determinedly painted distant objects in their local colors, the Tudor painter may well have shown this curve in the interests of verisimilitude, since he *knows* that it is there, even though it is not an outstandingly obvious feature of a three-dimensional model. Tudor painting, although it did incorporate some shading, was, upon the whole, rather flattened in perspective.

Obviously, when a painter has also narrowed the ribcage and upper arm in order to make a stronger graphic statement in the juxtaposition of subject and background, this curve will appear even more pronounced. The image has been compressed horizontally, but not vertically.

Occasional vertical compression may have taken place in some paintings, however, such as when the square-cut neckline of a gown appears to rise nearly to the level of the collarbone, without any indication of curving over the apex of the bosom to reach the upper chest. [*Plate G–12*] I am, at this time, unable to account for this configuration other than to suppose that some degree of deliberate distortion has been applied. It is just possible that since the ideal bosom of the period was small and high, the painter may have been attempting to minimize it. But it seems more likely that the

Plate G – 14: ***Portrait of the Princess Elizabeth****, unknown, c. 1547. The line of the corset is visible in the bodice of the dress. As may be seen, the corset ends low on the torso. (Compare with Plate B-8.) In this example the neckline of the gown really does run across the top of the chest. This configuration is not to be found in the portraits of grown women of the period.*

actual subject may have presented an appearance more like that of this second (later) example. [*Plate G–13*]

One other related case comes easily to mind, however. This is the portrait of the young Princess Elizabeth. [*Plate G–14*] In this painting, the bodice very obviously *does* rise up over the whole bosom area to an uncharacteristically high position at the upper chest. The line of the corset, with its flat front section is plainly visible. The front of the bodice rises above this rather angular foundation, and the neckline edge passes across the top of the bosom rather than around its apex. However, what most observers fail to take into account is the fact that this is not the portrait of a grown woman. This is the portrait of a fourteen-year-old girl, and not of an early developing girl, either. The subject had, at this period, probably little or no bosom to require lift or support. Therefore, there was no necessity to set the neckline at the level of its still mostly nonexistent apex. A careful look at the shape of the corsetry reveals that the foundation stops relatively low on the torso, i.e., just as high as it can go and still be in direct contact with the body. If the front of the corset were to rise any higher, it would begin to stand away from the body in a ridge. The deceptive apparent maturity of the figure is largely due to the elongation of the torso and the exaggeration of the shoulder width. Which are both highly misleading.

The squared-off flatness of the front of this gown is uncharacteristic this early in the Tudor period. The more usual configuration, seems to have been a smoothly curved plane from one side to the other. It is highly probable that this gown was indeed worn over a separate corset of slightly different design, rather than being a stiffened outer gown worn over an undergown of basically the same shape. It is uncertain whether this was becoming common practice in court circles at this time, whether it was characteristic of corsetry for adolescents at this stage of development, or whether it was an isolated instance. There is always the possibility that this may have been a particular case adapted to only this particular wearer's age or stage of development. It seems also possible that the corset worn under this gown may have been an early example of that which utilized the separate stomacher. The flatness of the center front would tend to support this theory.

This particular type of flat front was to become far more characteristic of the later Tudor eras as the separate stomacher came into general usage. It can be seen, that in portraits where a separate stomacher is featured, there is generally no reference to an arched neckline. This may have been because the painter, knowing that the stomacher was *not* cut lower at the sides to pass under the arms, did not feel any obligation to depict it doing so. For whatever reason, as the period progressed, painters came more and more to depict the neckline edge with a confident, horizontal line.

Another feature about which you may find yourself having to make an arbitrary decision is the partlet. There seems to be some question as to whether this was actually stitched to the shift, was in fact *part* of the shift, or was a separate accessory which was worn *over* the shift, or as seems to be the case in some French portraits, overlapping the top of the gown. Where shown in this last manner, it generally appears to have been made of some rather fine white or "natural" color fabric, often carefully decorated in some form of needlework, and fastened under the arms. Whether this was generally the case in countries other than France, I hesitate to guess. In this form it appears to be closely related to the dark yoke with the standing collar which was highly popular in England during the reign of Mary Tudor. [*Plate G–15*]

Another trouble spot wherein no consensus appears to have been reached

Plate G–15; ***Portait of a Lady,*** *Hans Holbein, The short, dark over-yoke was the commonest method used for producing a high-necked outfit up through the reign of Mary Tudor. During the reign of Elizabeth I it fell out of favor and was replaced by the doublet bodice. The overyoke sometimes seems to have been made to fit exactly into the neck opening rather than to overlap.*

has to do with that section of the bodice which passes over the shoulder. As depicted in some sketches, it may very well not have been a part of the bodice at all. Some examples depict this strip of material tapering from its widest visible point at the top of the shoulder to virtually nothing at the corner of the neckline, which is positioned nearly under the arm. In some examples, this strip appears to be inset into the bodice front. [*Plate G–16*] In others it appears to be missing entirely, the edge of the sleeve cap forming the neckline edge by itself. [*Plate G–17*] In still other examples, it appears to have consisted of a separate piece of material which has been stitched along the front edge

Plate G – 16: ***Lady Henegham,*** *Hans Holbein, c. 1526. The shoulderpiece of the gown appears to continue as an apliquéd, or inset, piece of trimming in the bodice of the gown.*

Plate G – 17: ***Jane Seymour,*** *Hans Holbein, c. 1536. There appears to be no shoulderpiece, the sleeve cap provides the neck edge.*

Plate G – 18: ***Lady Vaux,*** *Hans Holbein, c. 1540. A shoulderpiece continues over the bodice of the gown, but in this example it seems to be set slighly outside of the actual neckline edge and may be only decorative.*

of the sleeve, extended and *appliquéed* over the bodice front as a decorative element. [*Plate G–18*] It is possible that this strip concealed these bodices' fastenings. You will have to decide how you are going to handle this feature on a case-by-case basis. Do not overlook the possible significance of the date of each example, if available. Unfortunately, the fact that many of the sources for confusion over this feature come in the form of rough preliminary sketches does not assist the decision-making process.

As a further, and very general note; costume, during most periods, seems to have been composed of three basic layers. the first, would be the shirt or shift, traditionally worn next to the skin. It was usually made of linen, and consequently was referred to as one's "linen." Second, there would be the undergown or other inner garment. These varied considerably over the centuries, sometimes almost completely concealed, sometimes quite elaborate and very much in evidence. Toward the later part of the Tudor era, in addition to the equivalents of the decorative kirtle and undersleeves which had always been worn at this level, this layer also gradually came to be the one at which all of the outer costume's foundations resided. The third layer was composed of the outer gown, headress and embellishments. A fourth layer of overgown, cloak, or other such garment would be added in the event of seasonal necessity or formalized function. Once you have figured out the number of layers in the original, you may decide to fake some of them for ease in quick changes. (When you are cutting corners it can be important to know just what corner it is that you are cutting.) When encountering a non-structural feature, such as a sleeve, You may find it necessary to experiment.

GERMANIC COSTUME in the early 16th century operates on slightly different principles from that of the countries within the Spanish sphere of influence (England, France, Italy and the Netherlands). Germanic taste appears to have long been based upon a lingering preference for the gothic ideal, modified by elements imported from the styles of 15th and 16th century Italy. Gradually, the more massively "classical" forms crept into favor, and have remained so up to the present century.

In point of fact, "Germanic costume" is an over-generalization. At this period there was no more German unity than Italian, merely a clutter of small kingdoms, principalities, electorships and duchys known collectively as the "German States" (much like the city-states of Italy), each of these having their own court and their own variants of fashion. Certain elements do seem to be fairly widespread, however. Northern women, for example, appear to have been considerably later to adopt the whale-boned body than those in the more western kingdoms of Europe, and were very late in adopting the straight busk. For most of the 16th century they seem to have utilized the waist-length, paste or otherwise stiffened, underbodice common to the earlier, "transitional" era.

Once the Reformation was well underway, the greatest opportunity for the widest degree of cultural exchange (apart from the German artists' obstinate penchant for studying in Italy) was effectively foreclosed upon. This semi-isolation may have been at least partially responsible for the distinctive "oddity" about the dress of the Germans as compared to that of the more southern and western Europeans. Improved conditions of travel and trade lessened this divergence by the Baroque era, but that was some time after the period in which we are interested.

Of the artists with which we are most likely to be familiar, Albrecht Dürer's models seem to have worn the widest variety of different styles; a number of these were Venitian, but Dürer retained a fondness for sketching the styles of his native Nüremburg. [*Plate G–19, G–20*] One of the salient features of this particular style seems to have been the inset panel of pleated fabric which occupies the center front of the gown, from below the bosom to the hem of the garment. Since these gowns are almost invariably depicted as having been close-fitting to the waist, these pleats would have necessarily been stiched down until that point, and then allowed to fall free in the skirt. It seems probable to me that this was a thrifty measure allowing the gown to be worn throughout a woman's pregnancies, by the simple measure of unstiching the pleats. If this was in fact the case, (as one must admit seems likely) then it seems possible, although far from certain, that this particular style was one worn primarily by married women, or women who had once been married (younger, still marriageable widows). Unmarried girls may have worn other styles, and indeed there are several distinctive styles of dress depicted in Dürer's drawings.

In England this recurring physical condition seems only to have been clearly indicated in Holbein's working drawings of Sir Thomas More's family, most particularly in this working drawing of Cecily Heron in preparation for his group portrait of the family [*Plate G–21, G–22*]. As may be seen, two other ladies of Sir Thomas's family, wear open fronted gowns much in the same style. The likelihood of this having been Tudor maternity wear is very high. As all three of the ladies depicted are young married women reported to have borne children in the same year, this seems a very safe assumption to make.

The English approach to this condition appears to involve adoption of an older-fashioned form of gown, recognizable from earlier decades. Both the gown and the undergown appear to be interlined, but not boned (except, as usual, at seams and lacing edges). The bosom is at a fairly natural level,

Plate G – 19: ***Nuremburg Lady in Ball Dress,*** *Albrecht Dürer, 16th c. The "Nuremburg" gown.*

Plate G – 20: ***Declaration of Love,*** *Albrecht Dürer, 16th c. Another example of the Nuremburg gown, lacking the hanging sleeves.*

Plate G – 21: ***Cecily Heron,*** *Hans Holbein, c. 1528. Tudor maternity wear. It can be seen that the actual front of the gown is seamed to the side front starting from the neckline corner. By the angle of the seam, it is obvious that the gown could have been drawn closed during the earlier stages of pregnancy. By the lowness of the bosom it is likely that the gown never was intended to be worn over a corset, although this is not conclusive reasoning, since the gown's neckline would be at least somewhat higher when drawn closed. The undergown seems to be much in the same form as that worn outside court circles. Compare with G–2.*

Plate G – 22: ***The Family of Sir Thomas More,*** *Hans Holbein, c. 1527. Mrs. Heron (Sir Thomas's youngest daughter)may be seen, seated third from the right. The ladies seated in right foreground and standing at far left are also wearing what I identify as Tudor maternity gowns.*

i.e., noticably lower than is usually depicted in court dress at this date. This overgown opens down center front and is held in position by adjustable ties. The skirt does not appear to be split all the way down the center front, but only at the upper portion. The undergown may very well have been made with the bodice and skirt cut in one piece, very much in the manner of the gowns in Plate G–1. It seems likely that this undergown was made to fasten at the back or side, since no center opening is visible, but, since the neck opening was large, it may have been intended to pull on over the head.

Some of the Germanic gowns depicted by Dürer appear to have been fairly similar to those worn in northern Europe for most of the century previous. [*Plate G–23, G–24*] These gowns were long. They were cut with the bodice and skirt in one piece, and were shaped to be rather narrow through the body, widening from the side seams into very full skirts. The waist appears to have been slightly raised, and armholes also were cut high and small in the Gothic manner. As in the Nüremburg gown, no very sophisticated method of fitting the bodice over the bosom seems to have been attempted. Rather, the neckline opened into a wide V– neck from a point immediately below the breasts, and was kept from falling off the shoulders by a horizontal strap or tie which passed across the upper chest. The neckline may also have been V–necked in back as well, although probably shallower in cut. These gowns also probably laced down the back. Earlier forms of this gown, higher-necked and without the matrons' pleated front panel, had often laced in front. The close similarity between this gown and the gowns of a century earlier suggest that some variant of this form of gown may have been the traditional dress of unmarried women.

The sleeves of both of these gowns seem generally to have been straight, but not so narrow as those worn during the Gothic period. Occasionally a sleeve would be left open down the back seam so that the shift might be pulled through in the Italian manner. Or sleeves could be slashed at shoulder and elbow, have fairly deep cuffs, or false hanging sleeves were worn. These last may have been detachable, but the use of sleeves made in a contrasting fabric seems not to have been as common in Nüremburg as in some other parts of Europe. The shift is virtually always visible in the neckline of the gown, which would probably also have been worn over a petticoat, (or petticoats). Occasionally an undergown is visible as well. I am rather inclined to doubt that the actual gowns fit their wearers as smoothly as the sketches claim without some form of stabilization, although what could be regarded as corsetry was clearly not in use. Without some assistance I suspect that the material would have rucked and pulled and fallen into horizontal creases. My guess is that the bodice would have had a sturdy interlining and some boning reinforcing the seams and lacings. That the ladies depicted are women of the bourgeoise would tend to explain the practical wearability and sobriety of the styles. A possible layout of the pattern pieces for the simplified Nüremburg gown is shown below; [*Figure 9:2*] this diagram is given as a suggestion, it has not actually been subjected to testing.

Lucas Cranach the Elder is the third major artist associated with 16th century Germanic styles. He is usually not as highly thought of today as are Holbein and Dürer. In comparison with them he seems to have displayed little interest in adopting the stylistic advances of the times, perversely clinging to the style favored in his youth throughout his long career. Although Cranach, like every other major painter of the period, may very well have spent some time in Italy (anyone who was anyone, or wished to become so, seems to have gone to Italy in the 16th century), he appears to have rejected most of classicism's elements and continued to work in what is a recognizably gothic style even as that style was actively passing out of favor among his fellow artists.

It was not, however, passing out of favor among art *patrons*. Not in courts through central Europe. Cranach was an exceedingly popular, "fashionable" — and prolific — painter who, over a lengthy career served, among other things, as Court Painter to the Elector of Saxony, and has populated the walls of art museums the world around with a veritable bevy of slim (but round-bellied) sinuous, blonde or red-headed beauties whose narrow shoulders slope in a manner unknown to modern man or woman, and who regard the world through sly, sidelong glances with mocking, secretive, or insincere smiles. [*Plates G–25, G–26*] Cranach, unlike Dürer, seems to have been less interested in producing an "idealized" image than a deliberately sexy one. (The Vargas' girls of the 16th century?) These ladies are all interchangeable. What is more, at least half of them appear to be gowned in variants of the same red velvet gown with gold brocade trim. (And most of the rest are nudes.)

The almost overwhelming sameness of the dress in Cranach's portraits of women, particularly young women, seems, to us, to be both mildly startling for the work of a man who is accounted a major painter, and destructive of the credibility of this claim. It is, however, fairly positive evidence — considering his undoubted popularity — of what the people of the place and time wanted to think they looked like. It is next to impossible to believe that Cranach ever

Plate G – 23: ***Lady and Lansquinet,*** *Albrecht Dürer, 16th c. The simple German gown depicted here seems little changed from those worn a century earlier.*

Plate G – 24: ***(Rt) The Magdalen,*** *Roger van der Weyden, mid 15th c. A germanic gown not greatly dissimilar to G–20. The neck is higher, the attached sleeves are of a simpler cut and it lacks the pleated front panel.*

produced a close likeness — even if a glamorized one — of any of his subjects. But, beyond question, he depicted a highly distinctive form of dress.

In fact, Cranach also shows us several variant forms of dress, which blend nicely with the clothing shown in the work of painters more well thought of today. [*Plates G–27, G–28*]

For much of the period of my involvement in amateur costuming circles the problem of the construction of a typical Cranach gown was one which was grappled with intermittently. The descriptions to be found in many costume books, particularly those of the "simple costuming for the small stage" ilk, were often far less than helpful.

Unfortunately, our first consideration when addressing the challenge of "doing a Cranach" was the inescapable realization that Cranach was not, by modern standards, a "realistic" painter. There is no Holbeinesque virtuosity in displaying the behavior of fabric. The images are extremely "flat" with very little modeling. The subjects are obviously "posed", stiff and so formalized as to offer an interpreter very little assistance. What is more, he seems often to have outlined parts of his subject's garments with thin dark lines rather than to have made any clear attempt to show depth, or the relationship between garments insofar as to make it evident wherein which piece overlays which other. A considerable degree of guesswork was necessary.

Some of the questions which haunted us were; Are the lacings decorative or functional? Whether the white panel backing these decorative(?) lacings was, or was not, the shift. And, if so, how was the decorated band covering the bosom attached to the rest of the bodice? We sometimes also questioned whether the model was even wearing a shift. After all, if the white panel is the shift, how is that heavy, cartridge-pleated skirt attached to the rest of the gown, and what is it attached to in the front? If that is the shift, the bodice must be open several inches in center front.

As to whether the white panel that backs the lacings is intended to represent the shift or not, I am glad to be able to say that I believe Plates G–29 and G–30 finally make it clear that the bodice of the typical Cranach gown laced over a separate stomacher. The upper portion of the stomacher was lavishly decorated. The lower portion, where the lacings could be expected to always be in contact was generally left plain. It can be seen that in this particular case, the stomacher, although probably firmly interlined, does not appear to be stiffened. It is likely that this is also typical.

It is also interesting to note that the white portion of the sleeves, rather than being formed by pulling a shift through openings in an oversleeve — in the Italian manner — is actually part of the sleeve itself, and therefore may be made of some richer material, such as silk, rather than the thin gauzy linen one might have otherwise expected. It is not certain whether the lack of a shift, as shown here, is typical with gowns of this style, or if it was omitted for this particular painting. That the shift is missing would tend to indicate that the wearing of a shift may have been considered optional. In any event, to omit the shift, although possibly considered fairly racy, (the painting, after all, is obviously intended to titillate) was not, evidently, regarded as unthinkable.

The question of whether or not a shift was *typically* worn, is one which is not easily answered. In many of the paintings a shift is scarcely, but ultimately, discernible. Since extremely sheer linen appears to have been a ideal to be striven for, in some cases the garment is more an inference than a certainty. It can sometimes only be detected by the slightly paler, or yellower skin tone of the subjects chest area than the face. (You vant transparent lingerié? Ja, ja, Lukie vill paint you in transparent lingerié…) In other paintings it seems very likely that there really is no shift in evidence. It is possible that this is a factor which may have depended upon the context of the particular painting. ("Young ladies", etc., wear shifts. Gold-digging, ill-matched lovers and females toting knives, swords and severed human heads do not.) Where a shift is clearly visible, the fullness is often gathered into what is probably a neckband which is hidden under the virtually universal jeweled collar. This collar is a separate item, worn even by Cranach's nudes — along with golden mesh, or other richly decorated, cauls or snoods, and lavishly plumed hats!

As to the construction of the skirt, or, to be precise, the overskirt; If the paintings are to be believed, this was nearly always very full, cartridge-pleated, (like an Elizabethan ruff) and typically made of velvet trimmed with brocade. We may also assume that it would have been exceedingly heavy.

In fact, I suspect that it would have been far too heavy to have simply been sewn onto the edge of a bodice and let the rips fall where they may. It is my contention that this overskirt was

Plate G – 25 (above): ***Princesses of Saxony,*** (detail) *Lucas Cranach c. 1535.*

Plate G – 26 (above Rt): ***St. Mary Magdalene,*** (detail) *Lucas Cranach c. 1525. Both paintings show typical Cranach cuties, all virtually inter-changable.*

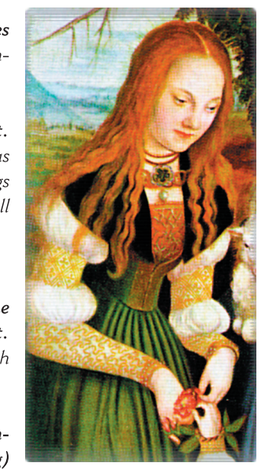
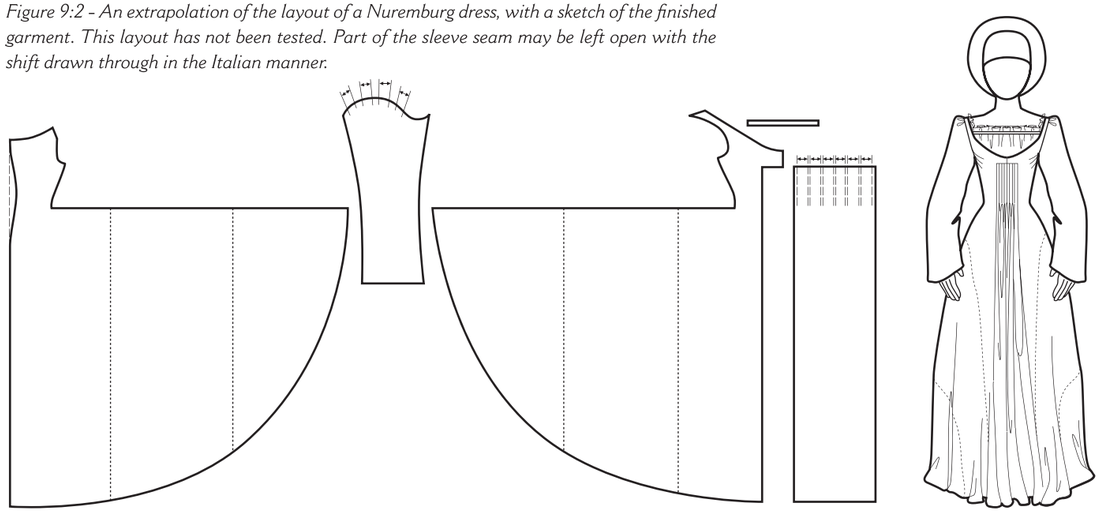


Plate G – 27 (Rt): ***St. Catherine Alterpiece, (right wing) St. Dorothy*** (detail) *Lucas Cranach c. 1506.*

Plate G – 28 (far Rt): ***St. Catherine Alterpiece, (right wing) St. Kunigunde*** *(detail) Lucas Cranach c. 1506. Both of the gowns shown here are variations of a form of overgown found, in essence, in the work of most Germanic artists of this period. Compare with Dürer Plate G-23 and Holbein Plates G-3, G-33, G-34. If one can ignore the varying sleeve forms, it becomes clear that these gowns all bear a family resemblence.*

Figure 9:2 - An extrapolation of the layout of a Nuremburg dress, with a sketch of the finished garment. This layout has not been tested. Part of the sleeve seam may be left open with the shift drawn through in the Italian manner.



attached to a waistband, or belly-band, which would have been snugly fitted and sturdy enough to have supported it. In Plate 29, where the stomacher is shown detached from the upper portion of the bodice and folded down, the lower ends of the stomacher are still attached to the bodice and held in place. We cannot actually see the model's waist, and the portion of her torso which is concealed by the folded-down stomacher is just about the right height to be covering a waistband to support that heavy skirt.

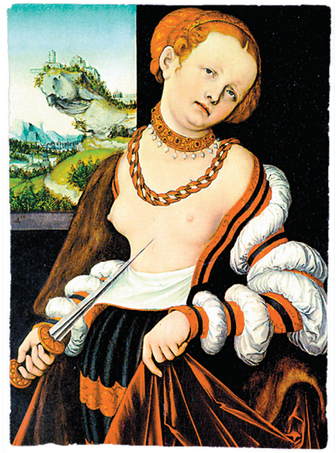
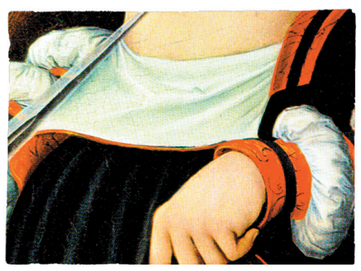


Plate G – 29 (above): ***Lucretia,*** *Lucas Cranach. One can finally see how the bodice and stomacher of these gowns typically related to each other.*

Plate G – 30 (below): ***Lucretia,*** (detail) *Lucas Cranach . One can see that the stomacher is not stiffened and that the decorative upper portion is attached to a plain, foundation piece. which in normal wear would be laced across.*



I readily concede that this interpretation is far from the only one. But a skirt of such fullness is going to be in need of support, and a waistband would be the sort most easily contrived. Still, if one wishes to be clever, I am sure that some other explanation could also be devised.

For example; a skirt of this fullness is going to be made up of several panels of material. The front central 2–3 of these could be attached to the bottom edge of the stomacher while the remainder are fastened to the edge of the bodice. This front portion of the skirt is stitched to the rest from the hem to within a few inches of the waist and the openings finished with a plaquet on either one or both sides. Where there is an opening, the stomacher attaches to the bodice with hooks or pins and the fit is adjusted with the lacing. Through the plaquet(s) one may access a purse or pocket in the petticote, as was typically done in women's dress until the late 18th or early 19th century (women's dress being unaccountably reluctant to adopt pockets). I will admit that I am more inclined to believe that the skirt was attached to a waistband and worn with interchangeable bodices and stomachers. The sleeves may also have been interchangeable.

Holbein's portrait of Anne of Cleeves displays a related form of construction, utilizing an open bodice that laces beneath the bosom over a closely fitting undergown. [*Plate G–3*] In this example, however, the skirt is less full, the waist is slightly higher,

Plate G – 31: ***Queen Anne of Cleeves,*** *unknown, 16th c. The partlet, undergown, jewelry and headdress are the same as those shown in the Holbein portrait, only the overgown is different. Compare with Plate G-3.*

and the skirt, which is split, definitely appears to have been attached to the actual bodice, so that the whole overgown may be put on, rather like a coat. The skirt overlaps in front, and a narrow belt is worn over all. It would appear that Flemish modes showed influence from both the eastern, Germanic states, as well as that of Spain, being within the Spanish sphere of influence.

Another interesting observation is that both of the two other most frequently encountered portraits of Queen Anne, one a watercolor miniature also done by Holbein, the other a half-length by an anonymous painter [*Plate G–31*], show an apparently identical bodice, paired with the same headress, undergown, and jewelery that are shown in the large Holbein portrait. The Holbein miniature, which at first glance appears to depict the same ensémble as the half-length, in fact, shows neither sleeves nor skirt. If — as seems to be at least a tenable hypothesis — Anne owned more than one gown with bodices of very similar construction, it is quite possible that the gown shown in the miniature may well be yet another one altogether. Which would account for the fact that the gown shown in the miniature is a clear raspberry pink, while that of the larger portrait is — even allowing for layers and layers of yellowing varnish — almost certainly either rose or russet.

Plate G – 32: ***Christina of Milan,*** *Hans Holbein, 1538. The young, widowed sister of the King of Sweden was one of the candidates for Henry of England's fourth wife. Here she wears an outer robe much like those commonly shown worn by older men and scholars.*

Another generalization which seems to hold for Germanic and Scandinavian fashions is that — possibly due to the climate — overgarments are very much more in evidence in portraits than are generally to be found in portraits from more temperate zones. There are numerous examples of little capes and tippits, jackets, and even a definite fashion for dressing in the full-length, fur-lined robe or gown which in England had for many years, been almost exclusively shown worn by men, usually by elderly men and scholars, at that. [*Plate G–32*] For our purposes, since this form of outer robe *is* so universally worn, even if by men, it should be easy enough to find sources of its probable cut and construction among the other books currently available to costumers.

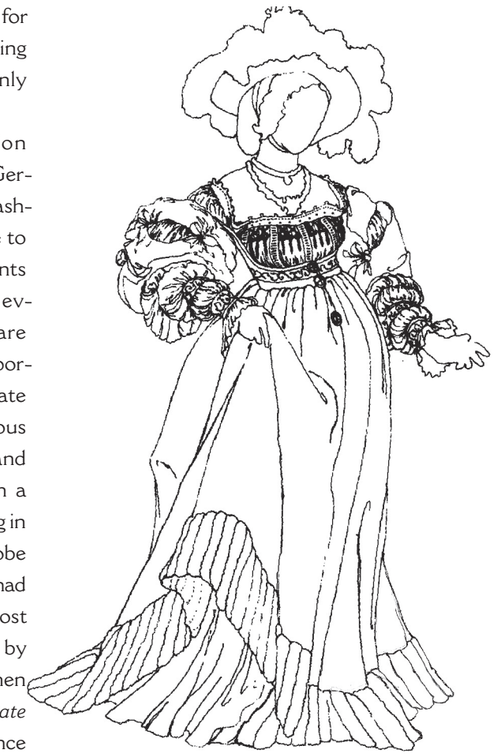


Figure 9:3 - A direct tracing of Holbein's Lady of Basle.

WHEN TRYING TO COPY a specific painting or other work of art, there are a number of considerations to remember. One is to make up your mind as to just how accurate you want your copy to be. If you are only trying to make a close enough copy for it to be recognizable to an audience, you don't have an outstandingly demanding task, and can pretty well work from any source. If, however, you are attempting to make a conscientiously accurate, line-for-line reproduction of an historical garment, you will find that you have bitten off a sizable mouthful.

Your first mission is to make sure you know just what you are trying to copy. Janet Arnold includes a very enlightening passage in her HANDBOOK OF COSTUME in which she examines the variations between four different representations of the same gown, the gown depicted in Holbein's half-length portrait of Queen Jane Seymour. [*Plate G–17*] Two of

Plate G – 33: ***Basle Woman's Apparel****, Hans Holbein, c. 1523.*

Plate G–34 ***Dorothea Kannengiesser, Wife of Jakob Kannengiesser, Mayor of Basle,****, Hans Holbein, c. 1523 The deail of the Lady of Basle's elaborate shift may be copied from the example in this (earlier) portrait.*

these paintings were actually painted by Holbein himself, at two different points in time. One was done contemporaneously with these by a lesser, unidentified artist — possibly one of Holbein's students. The fourth was done by yet another unidentified artist, probably a generation later. All four paintings depict the same subject in the same gown. Each painting is quite different. Each of the four undergowns and undersleeves are of a different design and material. The jewelry also varies. Even the fit of the overgown varies. This information is of considerable interest and points out a number of ways of looking at costume in paintings, all of which is highly applicable and of excellent value. Unfortunately, for most people, the chance of being able to go and study actual existing artworks is slight. That level of research is all very well if one moves in the rarified atmosphere of the professional studio costumer, or the world of private, or public research grants, and nothing that you need to ex-amine is more than a few hundred miles away. But if you are approaching the business from a more typical amateur's standpoint, with access to perhaps five or six costume books of your own, and whatever is available in the school or public library, it may seem a bit excessive.

Finding a good reproduction is particularly important if what you are trying to work from is not a photographic reproduction, but an artist's representation of one. Artist's interpretations can be unintentionally misleading, even when produced with the highest of motives (as is usually the case).

The following section will examine this in greater depth.

Holbein's drawing of a woman of the city of Basle [*Plate G–33*] is one which has often been redrawn by the illustrators of costume books. The results vary considerably. [*Plates G–35, G–36, G–37, G–38, G–39 and G–40*] I have added to this particular collection a direct pen-and-ink tracing of the original, All of these are immediately recognizable. Only one — and my tracing — duplicate all the details of Holbein's original illustration.

Taken individually, the first, by Braun & Schneider, [*Plate G–35*] is arguably the earliest version which is readily available to the modern copyist, having been produced for an artist's source book at some point in the 19th century. Although it retains the somewhat massive scale of the original, it looses most of the detail which indicated the construction of the garments. There is, in this version, nothing to show that the outer gown was secured at the corners of the neckline to the shift beneath by pins — as may be concluded from the original from the way the material behaves. Also, while the scale is still massive, the proportions have undergone a subtle change. The lady is longer-waisted, her head and neck are smaller, and she is fuller bosomed, with broader hips and a larger behind. Holbein's lady is sturdily built, but she is not particularly fat. Her massiveness is chiefly due to her voluminous clothing. Holbein has given us a depiction of a heavily-clothed woman who is solidly enough built to carry it off. Braun & Schneider's lady is a fine-boned creature who could stand to go to Weight Watchers. Her clothing, while full, does not account for her general massiveness. She is also more upright of carriage.

Now examine the clothing, and compare again. Holbein's lady [*Plate G–33*] wears a lavishly trimmed and very voluminous shift. The trimming of this shift is quite unexpectedly complex. There is, first, a neckband with some sort of a worked edge, and extraordinarily full sleeves. The sleeves are gathered into three visible puffs in the lower arm area and at least one large one at upper arm, glimpsed through the slashings of the oversleeves. There is a wide band separating the two lowest sleeve puffs, and another separates the lowest from a frill at the wrist. These bands are well embroidered. There may be additional bands between the other sleeve puffs as well, but these are not visible. The front section of the shift, covering the bosom, appears to be constructed of vertical bands separated by fuller sections which have been gathered up as in preparation for smocking. Over these gathered areas are segments of what may be a knotted fringe. This fringe appears to be anchored to the neckband by foundation knots which space themselves along the center of the band. It is possible that the lines which I have taken for this fringe, are, in fact, smocking, but that would not account for either the dangles or foundation knots. (A search through the rest of Holbein's work uncovered a contemporary portrait of the Mayor of Basle's wife who appears to be wearing a shift decorated in very much the same manner. [*Plate G–34*] It is also possible that the detail of the shift in Plate G–33 was roughed in from memory by the artist with this slightly earlier portrait in mind.) We may postulate that if the back of the overgown is as low-cut as the front, that the back of the shift may be similarly decorated. Over this shift, the lady wears a full, heavy petticote. Her outer gown is cut low under the bosom, leaving narrow "straps" which pass over the shoulders. A pair of full, slashed oversleeves is fastened to this shoulder piece. Probably by pins. The gown is slightly high-waisted, snugly-fitting, but not artificially stiffened around the ribcage — it is probably interlined with some firm fabric — and has a very heavy, fur-lined and edged skirt, pleated and attached to the overbodice. Both bodice and skirt are split down center front and fastened by three large buttons which are most probably buttons-and-loops.

When the overgown was first put on, the shoulder area of the bodice was pinned to the neckband of the shift for stability. Since then, the weight of the sleeves has pulled the shoulders of the gown off the lady's own shoulders, causing the sleeves to be carried near the tops of her upper arms. The stress of the weight of the sleeves has pulled the neckband of the shift into a nearly straight horizontal orientation across the top of her bosom, and slightly down at the corners where the gown and oversleeves appear to be attached. The portion of the neckband which passes over the shoulders has also been displaced, resulting in what first appears to be a squared-off neckline. By the tortured look of the neckband, it seems likely that this was not the intended design. Since the side portion of the gown which is visible shows no attempt to sag, it may be assumed that the back of the bodice is no lower cut than the front. Since the distortion of what we can see of the back of the shift's neckband appears to be no less than what we can see at the front, we may (provisionally) suppose that the gown's back neckline is at least cut low enough to leave the shoulder areas sufficiently without support to be unable to add significant resistance to the weight of the sleeves' attempt to pull them from the wearer's shoulders. Since the shoulders of the shift have not altogether followed the shoulders of the gown down the lady's arms, we might further suppose that either the shift, or the gown may be somewhat higher-cut in back than in front, or that the gown is pinned to the shift closer to the center back of the garment.

Braun & Schneider's lady [*Plate G–35*] wears a bodice which is long enough to extend to her natural waist, and tries to spread out over the top of her hips. The abrupt bulge at the join of her skirt and bodice is greater than can be accounted for by pleating heavy material onto a waistband, indicating that the waist of her bodice is at least slightly compressed. The weight of the material of which her skirt is made, is not so great as that worn by Holbein's lady. It certainly does not suggest that the skirt is fur-lined. Nor is it clear from the way the edging of the bottom of the skirt is drawn whether the decoration at the edge of the skirt is intended as a fur edging, or as a not particularly full flounce. The bodice is now a full bodice, rather than an overbodice worn over a shift. Its construction is peculiar. It appears to be a solid, square-necked bodice with vertical cut-outs of varying lengths which are square at the top and slanted at the bottom. This gown evidently opens in the back, for the center front appears to have no separation, although decorative buttons are still in place. The oversleeves now defy gravity, evidently floating unsupported at the lady's upper arms, since they are no longer anchored to the bodice at any point. The top edge of the shift so closely follows the line of the bodice's edge as to be quite unconvincing as an indication of a separate garment, leaving us to hypothesize a pair of conventional set-in sleeves, and smocked insets to the bodice's cut-outs.

Plate G – 35: As drawn by Braun & Schneider, 19th c.

The next version, by one Frederick Hottenroth, is also from the 19th century. [*Plate G–36*] The work is German in origin, and while a French translation seems to have been made in 1896, no English-language edition exists, making the work of limited use to most Americans. Which is a pity, for Hottenroth managed to get it right. Hottenroth, was another producer of artist's source books, and is known to have brought out at least two works, which by some perverse accident or design, both seem to have the same title. The larger contains drawings of many common items as well as costume drawings. The smaller book is more exclusively devoted to costume research. This particular drawing is only to be found in the smaller volume. A vastly higher than random number of Hottenroth's sketches, both costume sketches and extrapolated construction diagrams (about one in six) are also to be found in Carl Köhler's History of Costume, originally printed in the 1870s, and familiar to us from Dover's reprint of an updated edition of 1933. The sketch of the lady of Basle is not among them however. These overlapping examples place some question on who was actually the original source.

The major differences between Hottenroth's lady and Holbein's are that the latter's waist is slightly shorter, and her bosom somewhat flattened. The drawing is slightly simplified to present a cleaner outline. He has drawn the figure 6½ heads tall, as opposed to Holbein's 7, and Braun & Schneider's 7½. Not all of Hottenroth's drawings are so reliable, but his average is no poorer than that of most artists who have undertaken to redraw their sources.

With the next example, by Iris Brooke, we enter the field of 20th century interpretations. [*Plate G–37*] Made in the early 1930s, it demonstrates the soft, unconstructed approach popular in the contemporary fashion of the day. Brooke has drawn the figure some 8 heads tall, upsetting the proportions rather badly. The gown no longer slips from the shoulders, pulling the shift's neckline out of alignment. It is no longer evident that there is a separate gown and shift at all. The neckline is now a wide and low square. The vertical inset bands of the shift now appear to be merely folds and the smocking represented by no more than a few tight rows just below the neckband. The shift, in general, seems to be fuller and more blowzy than Holbein's. The oversleeves are reduced in volume and have been lifted primly to the top of the shoulders and set in place.

Plate G – 36: As drawn by Frederick Hottenroth, 19th c.

The lower sleeves on the other hand are more voluminous, and the wristband looser. The overall appearance is less that of an overgown and shift, than that of a loose, full peasant blouse worn with a full skirt with wide waistband, or, alternately, a full, flowing one-piece gown with a belt or sash. The skirt and waistband are no longer split down center front and held together with buttons, and the edging which was once made of fur, could easily be mistaken for a pleated flounce. The costume's weight has been totally absorbed by the wearer.

The fourth version, by Douglas Gorseline, [*Plate G–38*] is obviously a product from post-WWII. Mr. Gorseline apparently couldn't bring himself to draw so pretty an *ensémble* worn by a fat lady. The lady of Basle is now quite slender and back to being 7 heads tall. The whole costume now reflects the "New Look's" crisp, highly constructed lines characteristic of the Eisenhower era. The figure, is much longer-waisted than the original, and has an hourglass configuration. The skirt is back to being split and fur-lined, but it is a good deal fuller than it started out and springs from the tight waistband in a modishly bouffant manner. (Dior would approve.) Gorseline has managed to pretty thoroughly muddle the bodice, however. In the first place, he has provided the lady with a partlet, which neither Holbein nor his original model had considered necessary. She is also no longer obliged to display herself in her shift. The bodice of the gown is now prim, well-fitting, and inset, not with smocked material, as is Braun & Schneider's, but with some patterned material which may be brocade, and appears to be cut into long strips which may well continue to her waist inside the waistband. This waistband is much in the manner of a cummerbund, decorated, as is the skirt, with what are either large buttons, or small pom-poms. The bodice's square neckline is decorated with point lace. This lady's bodice is also no longer in any danger of slipping off her shoulders. The sleeves have also undergone transformation. The lower sleeve, rather than being a soft shift loosely gathered into bands, now resembles a pair of the puffed, slashed or paned undersleeves such as are to be found in many Italian or French paintings of the later Tudor or Stuart periods, which usually look as though they might be made of ribbons. The bit of shift which had been visible at the shoulder of Holbein's lady, is now indistinguishable from the padded shoulder roll to be found in most early Elizabethan portraits. The over-sleeves have been less tampered with. To be sure, they are a little less full, no longer held together by bows, and securely anchored beneath the shoulder roll. The lady is, all in all, an eminently proper specimen now, even to the point of the genteelly lifted pinkie as she shows off her petticoat. In fact she is now irreparably prissy.

Plate G – 37: As drawn by Iris Brooke, c. 1933.

Erhard Klepper, in the early 1960s, also undertook to redraw the lady of Basle. [*Plate G–39*] The lady is again 7 heads tall, and of the properly stalwart build. The silhouette in fact, is fairly accurate. But the shading is clumsy, making details difficult to see. (The buttons on the overgown, for example, are not even visible.) In common with Brooke, Klepper *appears* to be under the impression that the lady's outfit consists of a shift and skirt with a wide waistband, rather than a low-cut overgown worn over a shift and petticoat. But, due to the shading, this is left uncertain. At least Klepper seems to have the oversleeves properly attached to the neckband at the "corners" of the neckline.

Doreen Yarwood, in the mid-'70s produced the most recent example in this collection. [*Plate G–40*] The lady of Basle is again 7 heads tall, but the silhouette is a little unclear due to the grouping of the figures. The lady's skirt is again split, or possibly opens with a plaquet at center front. It is correctly fur-trimmed and lined and held together with large buttons. Its fullness is not exaggerated, but the waistband is narrower than typical. The proportions

and orientations of the upper and lower sleeves is generally correct, although the upper sleeves are again defying gravity and floating at mid-arm without visible support. The bodice is completely confusing. There are virtually no seam lines visible, making its construction a matter of complete speculation. Nor do there seem to be any side panels to the outer bodice, making its existence as an actual bodice questionable. While the shift's presence is obvious, its design is not. It seems to be the standard smocked shift of no particular design or cut. Over this shift, the lady may as well be wearing a harness or atypical sort of suspenders consisting of a squareish neckpiece and five vertical straps hanging down in front, and presumably in back as well. The neckpiece and front straps may be stitched to the front of the shift although the shoulder pieces do not seem to be attached, so presumably only the front of the harness is so stabilized. Certainly there is very little ground for being able to speculate any definite construction of the gown from the sketch as it is given.

Plate G – 38: As drawn by Douglas Gorsline, c. 1951–2.

Certain factors are constant. The skirt in all seven versions is longer than floor length, and trails behind the wearer in a slight train. Her net caul and plumed hat are always in evidence, and she invariably wears at least one of her two necklaces. While I will concede that this is a very complex outfit, to compare the versions makes a very useful demonstration of the differences between interpretations, as well as displaying just how much clarity might be lost, dependant upon the period in which the interpretation is made, the skills and understanding of the artist, and the method of reproduction used. The reader will have noticed, for example, that despite the fact that all four of the 20th century artists have almost certainly worked from a photographic copy of the original drawing, they have been unanimous in depicting the *ensémble* as a bodice and skirt with waistband, rather than as an overgown worn over the shift and petticoat. The cumulative perpetuation of error in five out of six examples ought to be both illuminating, and humbling.

Of course, to an audience which is passingly familiar with the source drawing, a costume made up in accordance with any of these examples will be capable of provoking the response of; "Oh! I know that costume! I've seen it in a book! That's the lady of Basle." But in five out of six cases, you simply will not be presenting a truthful representation of 16th century Swiss costume as presented by Holbein. And what your audience will probably be recognizing are the headress and oversleeves.

There are a few fundamental bits of research methodology which it might be reasonable to go through. All of which may be quite helpful. None of them are overly time or labor consuming.

It is always a good idea, if you have the luxury of choice, to be able to take into account the coloring and body build of the person who will be wearing the costume before deciding upon just which source you are going to make a copy of. But this is a best-case scenario which can probably not be counted upon. Obviously one has a running start if one is working from either a painting or an artist's rendering of a painting which is well-known. If you are working from a drawing of something more obscure, tracking down the source will be a little more complex. Check your source. The text notes regarding the illustration may indicate what the drawing is taken from. Or may at least give you an artist's name to look up. A drawing labeled "after Corot" or "from Rubens" will give you more specific direction than one which is merely called out as "French, early 17th c." If the source gives you no direction at all, you may want to check through some other books of art or costume history in hopes of finding it again, with better identification. If you cannot find exactly the same outfit, try to find something as similar as possible. Then examine both and determine wherein they differ. If the differences are fairly minor, i.e., color, details of jewelry or headress, you will be fairly safe in using this secondary source. Once you have managed to find a probable source for your target drawing, write down its title and the artist's name, and try to find as good a copy as possible. In difficult cases, and if you have fairly unlimited time, you could write or e-mail the publisher of whichever book you found the drawing in, requesting information about the drawing's source. This might not help. But then again it might. Clearly identify just which illustration you want the information about, and if you are using snail mail, be sure to include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you ever hope to get a reply. Unlimited time is definitely an advantage in this particular case, since the periodic rounds of mergers and aquisitions which afflict the publishing business can make the process of discovering just who currently owns the rights to an older or out-of-print book can be an extended one indeed.

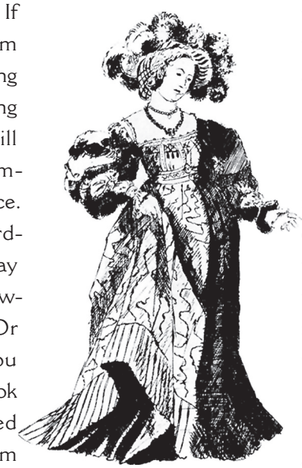


Plate G – 39: As drawn by Erhard Klepper, c. 1961.

The first step, when one has chosen the outfit one wants to copy, is to find the best reproduction of it that one can. It is very difficult to get a clear look at something which has been reproduced at the size of 2″ by 2½″. It also helps to be able to find the painting reproduced in color, if only because most black and white prints have rarely been converted from color with a mind towards making the grayscale version read clearly. Most metropolitan libraries have quite respectable fine arts sections. Try to get to the main branch (or one known to have a good arts collection) and check for books on that particular artist's work or books on that particular museum's collection. Your original reference book ought to have a listing of the sources of its plates, to provide this information if it isn't already stated in the caption. Many libraries have a collection of prints as well as books. You might want to check for a copy of the work there as well. College libraries also are often quite good in this regard. (You might check the Art Department's office as well, or at least ask someone there for information.)

Plate G – 40: As drawn by Doreen Yarwood, c. 1975.

Once you have your drawing and your painting, compare them. Has the contemporary artist lost details of construction? Has he added ones which were not in the original? You may find it helpful to make a tracing of each to spot the differences. (I speak from experience. The scope and detail of the decoration of the lady of Basle's shift were not plain to me until they were materializing at the end of my pencil.) Try to see through the artistic distortions, if any, of both sources. (This won't be easy.) Then try to figure out the probable number of layers, the number and type of garments which went into each layer, and the probable shape and seaming of these garments. If you are not a moderately experienced seamstress or tailor, try to have someone who is look it over and explain to you what is making the material behave as it is. Start with the assumption that the artist has tried to depict the correct fall and drape of the fabric. This may be a false assumption, but you have to start somewhere.

Although it deals with a much earlier period, Dorothy Hartley's Medieval Costume and Life (if you can find it!) offers valuable insight on the way material behaves, and is one of the solidest demonstrations extant of the art of "creatively viewing" one's source, in her case, that of manuscript illuminations.

A final consideration — if you think that it is worth the trouble — you might check whether the painting which you are working from has ever been restored, and if so, when. Many of the 18th and 19th century "restorers" had little compunction about making the subject more "attractive" to their own eyes than the original artist had ever intended. Modern x-rays have upon occasion discovered that an original painting may have been quite other than had been traditionally believed. (The painting refered to as *The Night Watch*, which upon cleaning turned out to have been painted in broad daylight is a classic example of mistaken interpretation — even though x-rays had nothing to do with it.)

This step is probably going a bit too far. It is not a likely thing to have happen in your research, after all, and even if it did, there wouldn't be much of anything that you could do about it, other than to reflect that there is no reason for you to expect that your copy will end up looking *exactly* like the original, either.

Which is a reflection that applies to all paintings, whether they have been tampered with or not. Paintings are not photographs. Nor do artists invariably set out to depict the literal truth. We have no certainty of what the artist believed he saw when he recorded his version of the image on wood, or paper, or canvas. And, if we do not know precisely what it was he "saw," we certainly do not know what it was that he was actually looking at. An image, when all is said and done, is produced primarily for purposes of display. And such purposes are seldom best served by the delineation with the strictest degree of accuracy. Even when what is on display is no more than an assertion of the subject's wealth and the painter's virtuosity, an artist has a difficult time resisting the urge to simplify or to improve upon nature. Usually with the active cooperation of the sitter. Even after photography had become common, photographs of important people were often retouched for publicity purposes, as was known to have been done to stars' photographs in Hollywood. [*Plates B–14, C–1*] Fortunately, or unfortunately, our eyes are overly facile in editing out many incongruities and leaving us with what seems to be a coherent view consistent within its own form of plausibility. Ideally, the conscientious copyist should at least try to be aware of the distortions or technical shortcomings of his or her source before safely ignoring them. But this is not always feasible.

The end result, however, is certain. People, even in the most carefully reproduced costumes, simply will not look like they have just stepped down from picture frames. Even the appearance of those people whose physical type closely resembles that of the original model will not completely match that of the painted image. And the eye's facility in editing out incongruities between similar forms, will usually work in the costumers' favor. Your intentions, at any rate, will be evident.

That which is truly essential is the audience's basic recognition of the subject. If your project or your principles require the most convincing similarity, you will need to shade your manner to do justice to both your audience's experience and its objectivity.

THE FOLLOWING IS A grumbling compilation of the obstacle course which the novice costumer finds him or herself running as s/he wanders ever more deeply into the field of historical costuming. Amid the pitfalls and pratfalls there are some very fine works available. There are also quite a few others which are excellent sources for some things, but should be followed with caution. Having managed to bark my shins on most of them, I append this chapter as a partial guide to what "they" don't tell you in a conventional bibliography. (Don't worry, there's one of those too. In which you will find any work mentioned or alluded to in the following.)

The novice costumer soon discovers that most works on costuming fall, more or less neatly, into one of two schools. These are: the academic, and the theatrical. In the first you will find general fashion history and special interest research works. In the second you will find your basic theater crafts collections of practical instructions in various stages of complexity of aim or method. Both schools have inherent limitations. The first, particularly in its more popular form, has a rather distressing tendency to fall into ancestor-baiting. Also, some of the finer examples from this school are difficult to obtain, being out-of-print and/or difficult to use when found, having been written primarily by and — apparently — for academic historians, rather than for costumers.

The theatrically-oriented works sometimes make an even less satisfactory showing. The tragic flaw here being a tendency to fall into excessive generalization. In attempting to use these books as guidelines, the reader is frequently frustrated by a lack of detail and occasionally nonplussed by the disconcerting discovery that s/he and the author are essentially working at cross-purposes. One is particularly prone to encounter this when working with books from the "simple-costuming-for-the-small-stage" field.

This field cannot be categorically deplored. When "simple-costuming" books reach their intended audience they fulfill a definite purpose. Which is, to get a motley crew of amateurs into a consistent enough semblance of proper dress for the ensemble to attain some degree of visual coherence with the minimum outlay of time and effort.

These books can be an invaluable help to Mrs. X, who suddenly finds herself called upon to produce a third-grade sized George or Martha Washington, a pilgrim, a Wise Man (or a radish or the nation of Bulgaria), at the drop of a pageant. They are equally valuable to the tiny amateur theater group possessed of small ambition and audience, miniscule budget and one hapless volunteer wardrobe person who hadn't realized what s/he was getting into. Such books soothe the distraught and console the timid. But it cannot be overlooked that they frequently serve chiefly to provide people who have no lasting interest in costume with costumes that no one will much care about. And if you have reached the stage of wanting to make sure that your Tudor costume has proper foundations, it is unlikely that such books are going to be able to suit *your* purposes.

It does not really matter if little Madison and Zachary's pageant is poorly costumed. Their audience does not come to see the costuming. It is also of no particular n ote if a theatrical project of the "Hey! Our church needs a fund-raising. Let's put on a show!" variety, has costumes which disintegrate by the end of the performance. In neither case are these particular costumes likely to be needed again. (Although the kiddies' costumes may be pressed into service again at Halloween.) It is a seldom-acknowledged fact that, in amateur theatricals, costume is often, and properly, a very minor consideration.

Once it has been decided that costume *is* really important, however, there is usually very little safe middle ground. Sooner or later, any group which has the ambition of engaging in frequent theatrical projects is going to begin to consider the advisability of building up some form of wardrobe stock. At this point, the methods of construction recommended by a fair sampling of the "simple-costuming-for-the-simple-minded" collections begin to show their limitations. It is all very well to dress a growing child in a costume largely composed of cardboard and cheesecloth for

a school or church pageant, which will take, maybe, an hour or an afternoon. But dress anyone, growing or not, in the same for three full performances this year, and then attempt to use the same costume in a production next year, and you will have problems. Most school pageants are basically unstaged productions, calling for little more than the physical presence of the participants. Reciting or singing in themselves place no demands upon the costume. In a full dramatic production, however, an actor is (ideally) required to *act*. This will make demands, not only upon the actor, but upon his costume. The cheesecloth and cardboard school of construction is not always equal to the strain of moving, gesturing, or sitting.

Which is not to say that all stage costuming books, even within the "simple-costuming" range are of uniformly inferior quality. There are some very fine works in this field, and others may well have useful information on specific details, even if the costumes as a whole are less satisfactory. But these books often are operating under sets of assumptions which may be very much in conflict with *your* intentions.

In the first place, most make the assumption that these costumes are unlikely to be used again. So, many of the methods and processes are not concerned with durability. Nor can one count upon finding absolute period accuracy. Their intention is only to assist their readers in producing *simple* and *economical* costumes with enough resemblance to the intended period to be able to suggest the historical era to untrained observers. That is all. Any further emphasis, will usually be directed at making the outfit attractive, rather than accurate, The reader ought not to depend upon being able to duplicate the dress of a desired period from books in the "simple-costuming" range.

Repeat; the aim of most of these guides is merely to *suggest*. The fact that, in some cases, it *is* very nearly possible to duplicate the intended effect must not be allowed to cloud the aspiring costumer's perception. This piece of serendipity may only be accomplished where the aim is within the reach. In some periods, people wore simple dress. It is not reasonable to demand that the same methods of simple costuming should also be adequate to reproduce the costume of such periods wherein the common dress was *not* simple.

Another assumption of theatrical costuming guidebooks is that the costumes produced are going to be displayed upon a stage. And that, therefore, they are not going to be viewed at close range. Under such circumstances, many shortcuts in the interest of speed and economy may be expected to pass unremarked. A camera, however, will "see" details, and eventually display them at closer range than would ever be possible for human observers in a theater audience. Natural light, if available, will also tend to show up inaccuracies. Note; there are cameras, and there are cameras. Film, given optimum conditions, will record everything in fine detail in a form which is accessible to the human eye, without modification. Videotape, converts everything into a series of tiny squares called pixels, which will eventually be displayed on a monitor which may or may not degrade the quality of the resolution of the image. In general, a taped image, will display in a softer focus than a filmed one, making theatrical solutions more feasible. (It is to be expected that after the impending transition to HDTV standards this may no longer be the case.) A costume which is to be worn in a public festival will be seen at close range, by daylight, from all angles simultaneously, and virtually no short-cuts will go unnoticed. In costumes designed for this purpose, recommendations which might be useful for stage costuming should receive very careful consideration before adoption.

Another limitation, shared by nearly all costume books, of either school, is the attempt to cover, in the space of one volume, every major form of human dress which has ever been worn, from ancient Sumeria to a week ago Tuesday. It is not possible to do this and do justice to all. Consequentially, there is very little satisfactory material to be found in these sources on such technically demanding subjects as period foundations from the 16th to 19th centuries.

Furthermore, while the little that there is may be adequate as a supplementary text accompanying a series of planned class lectures or demonstrations, it is usually not so as a guide for the unassisted novice. In the general run of such things, a theatrical textbook will give a very brief rundown of the general shape of the silhouette of the period, how many garments a person of said period would usually be wearing, and what these garments were. It will then give general information on colors and materials, headgear, jewelery, and other accessories, and possibly a few details on cut and fit. All of this very useful, if a little patchy. The book will then proceed to do the same for persons of different social classes, or the opposite sex. There will usually be at least a few illustrations, which may be of variable quality. These illustrations are more likely to be drawings from photographs of art works rather than reproductions of the photographs. Which makes them subject to the talents and interpretations of the artist responsible. There may be diagrams of various garments. There generally are no actual measurements given, nor any information on what size person a garment made from these diagrams will fit. Sometimes at the back of the book there will be a section on construction details. This section will rarely include graphic aids, and will occaionally refer to commercial patterns which may no longer be commercially available. After hitting the high points of the period, the book will probably refer you to other sources for further research. Usually this leads one back to those works written for the academic historian.

Within thie academic school of costume history, there are also two basic approaches. These are the popular history and the scholar's reference book. The popular history is usually issued in coffee-table format. These boast large color plates, paired with a relatively scanty text. These also generally attempt to cover everything from ancient Egypt, if not Sumeria, onwards, and frequently are an interpretation of fashion according to the author's pet hobby-horse of psych-, soci- or other favorite "ology." They can be fascinating reading. The theories themselves often show considerable thought and insight within the periods to which they are unquestionably relevant. And the attempts sometimes made to force a theory into compliance with all periods, relevant or not, are sometimes highly entertaining. Such books have become extremely popular since the early 1960s, but I have no ready theory as to why this should be so. I merely am grateful to the fact.

The authors of such books rarely go into very much depth on any one period, however, and are – even more than the compilers of the comprehensive reference books – inclined to pass along questionable information. Since these books have often evidently been geared to the holiday gift market, consideration for their works' entertainment value may be no small part of the authors' intentions. If a few anecdotes of an apocryphal nature find their way into the mix, it is not likely to adversely affect sales. Consequently, cartoons, satirical statements, old-wives' tales and moralists' ravings are represented as if they were the strict, literal truth. The resulting hodge-podge may even manage to enhance the work's salability. But it lessens the credibility of the whole. Occasionally, even the author seems to be plagued by doubts, which may show in his or her faintly patronizing quest for quaintness and an accompanying feeling that anything quite so unheard of cannot possibly be true. It is also obvious that none of these books, howsoever thought-provoking, enjoyable or perceptive they may be, were written either by nor for anyone who ever intended to wear the clothing described therein.

The scholar's reference work is a slightly different proposition. One is less likely to be *obviously* lumbered with an author's personal axes for grinding, but biases *will* slip in. Nor are even those researchers responsible for the most reliably seeming dryness immune to attacks of gullibility. The most pedantic may be capable of failing to recognize satire, or of passing on established misinformation as truth. Moreover, scholars, not being the humblest of mankind, are anything but capable of resisting the urge to "interpret" the data, frequently without benefit of experience. Sometimes too subtly for the casual reader to detect.

These works also tend to be heavily illustrated. Rarely, however, are the big, lush color plates of the popular history resorted to. In this part of the field, quantity frequently substitutes for quality. Many of these books are illustrated by a host of smallish, black-and-white halftones of variable legibility. In others, the text is enriched by artists' renderings. Which, as pointed out earlier, are completely dependent upon the skills and understanding of the artist, as well as the method of reproduction. Representative of these two extremes are Milla Davenport's The Book of Costume, with its copious reproductions of valuable material printed at so small a size and in so muddy a quality as to be next to unreadable, and Iris Brooke's English Costume series, which is

essentially a series of picture books with a scanty commentary by the late James Laver, a former curator of the V & A. Ms. Brooke, an artist as well as a theatrical costumer, made a valiant effort to depict persons of all ages and walks of life in this series. Her drawings, sweetly posed, and tidily rendered, are quite charming, recalling the works of Kate Greenaway and Walter Crane. Which makes it all the more a pity that the figures so drawn look as though they would be more at home on an early 20th century greeting card.

Ms. Brooke is not alone in the field of artist-rendered interpretations, nor is Davenport alone in the field of bad reproduction. Nor are either of their books unusable, if it comes to that. For example, Ms. Brooke's book on simple stage costuming is excellent.

Other well-known works which are dependent upon artist's interpretations are: R. Turner Wilcox's series of The Mode in (Whatever) books, and Doreen Yarwood's earlier mentioned European Costume — 4,000 Years of Fashion. Both of these unintentionally demonstrate that a book depending upon artists' renderings, is at the mercy not only of the artist's interpretations and skills, but by the method of reproduction as well. The sheer volume of work which a heavily illustrated work will place upon an artist will alone assure that some percentage of the total will go to press misleadingly, or unclearly drawn. And will remain that way, due to either the artist's exhaustion or the impending deadline. (This book is probably not an exception.) In addition, an artist will naturally be too familiar with the way s/he draws his/er subjects to necessarily be *aware* of when the subject of a drawing is presented unclearly. When you add to this the technical difficulties of representing the several different garments and materials of which an *ensemblé* consists, using only black and white line art, and trying to get the result to "read" without being "scratchy," it stands to reason that something may get lost in the translation.

But the biggest problem applying to artists' renderings is the fact that most artists *will* try to make their subjects appear "attractive," or "realistic" in the light of contemporary taste. And such lights are occasionally very dim. I have seen 17th century Spanish gowns drawn as if they were worn by proper Victorian ladies, over wasp-waisted corsets and tea-cozy dome crinolines, and labeled 1610 with a (presumably) clear conscience. Or, for that matter, Italianate gowns drawn as though worn over 20th century separate-cup bras.

The reference book which is intended for a specific, rather than a general market, and consequently concerned with only one period and nationality, or with the history of special-purpose clothing, are another matter as well. Such books may be extremely dry reading, but they usually have the virtue of being grounded in painstakingly careful research. It is in these books that one may be most likely to encounter information regarding actual surviving garments and contemporary writings, as well as attempts to reproduce such garments for accuracy's sake. Not all of these are concerned with such practical considerations of reproduction, however.

Among the books of this category may be found sober discussions of clothing in social or economic historical contexts which say little or nothing about construction, usually concentrating on sumptuary laws or the dates of the introduction of specific fabrics or methods of textile production. (Which may still be helpful in pinpointing the accuracy of given details of a projected costume.)

However, there are a few source books which do take a practical view. These are obviously designed to be used by theater crafts people, or by artists and illustrators involved in depicting period dress. Herbert Norris is distinguished in this field by his unfinished History of Western Costume, which was intended to span, in its six volumes, the period from ancient Greece through the 19th century. We are unfortunate in that Mr. Norris's death in the 1940s deprived us of the fourth and fifth volumes of this work, as well as much of the intended text, and, evidently, all of the illustrations intended for volume six, which was eventually finished and illustrated posthumously by another author. The existing volumes left to us are a very careful, detailed work in the manner of the great Victorian source books, of which it may arguably be considered the final representative. Mr. Norris provides designs for household implements, furnishings, and carriages, as well as clothing and accessories. However, I will have to point out that although the first volume contains diagrams with clearly marked measurements, and photographs of actors wearing the costumes made from these diagrams, the later volumes do not. Norris's drawings seem often to be an attempt to capture those details which might have otherwise been lost during the conversion of a photographed painting into a halftone. If this was indeed his intention, he seems generally to have been successful. But he was also frequently subject to "attractive" renderings, and made some lapses in judgement when interpreting his sources. The basis for Norris's work was his collected production notes from his many years in the British theater, giving it a rare capability for translating a flat design into a reproducible garment. However, this work has been long out of print, and the first two volumes are virtually unavailable in this country. The third volume, however, has been recently reissued as a trade paperback by Dover.

Very similar to Norris in intention, (and, more to the point, also recently reissued by Dover) is Medieval Costume in England and France by Ms. Mary G. Houston. This, in addition to Ms. Houston's books on earlier periods, is very fine indeed, with clear text, well-done drawings and readable diagrams which are based upon actual experimentation. (Although they do not provide measurements.) These books constitute a sound, basic analysis of the garments worn up to the beginning of the 16th century. But this series stops short exactly at the beginning of the era which introduced the corset and farthingale.

Another fine book on early European costume which was actually intended as a source for people involved in public festivals is Medieval Costume and Life, by Dorothy Hartly. This work also shows plates of actors costumed according to the diagrams given, as well as much useful information regarding medieval artifacts, and an excellent analysis of extrapolating clothing construction from a careful study of one's source materials, in Ms. Hartley's case, that of manuscript illumination. Unfortunately, like that of Norris, Ms. Hartly's work has been long out of print, and is almost impossible to locate. It also seems to be, of all the works alluded to in this chapter, the one most consistently hit by library vandals. There seem to be few intact copies.

Yet another book which offers diagrams and plates of reconstructed costumes, is the 1930s Dover reissue of A History of Costume by the previously referred to 19th century researcher, Carl Köhler. Unfortunately, while the reissue does contain photographic plates of costumes made from included diagrams, the costumes so reproduced show a depressing tendency to too closely resemble the fit and silhouette of the period in which the reissue was produced. Nor were period foundations taken into account in these reconstructions. Nevertheless, many of the original diagrams are extremely well thought out.

In recent years there has been a return to reference works which are based upon reconstruction of the clothing to be found in paintings. These may be works that — after all the Egypt-to-WWII extravaganzas most typically encountered — might seem to be very limited range, but within these limits, they can be definitive pieces of practical scholarship. Among these works are such stellar examples as Elizabeth Birbari's Dress in Italian Painting – 1460 – 1500. Unfortunately, such books are not all that easily located.

Even more painstaking are the books which entirely forego theory in favor of pure research. These books often do not examine paintings so much as surviving garments. This, they do carefully enough to make the production of a line-by-line copy possible for a really experienced and top-notch seamstress. Notable among these researchers are such persons as Janet Arnold, Nancy Bradfield, Norah Waugh and most recently, Jean Hunnisett. Several of the Cunninghams' books very nearly fall into this category. Obviously, these researchers are constrained to comparatively recent periods by a lack of a significant number of surviving examples from very much more than two centuries or so distant. Most of such works are most informative regarding the styles of the 18th century and later.

But this only scratches the surface of the riches that the novice costumer may expect to discover awaiting him or her.

I can promise all this and more.

In particular:

S/he will — not more than twenty times in an given day — grow to finding him or herself making poignant inquiry as to what was done in some former lifetime which could have brought one to one's present pass. In traversing this quagmire, the novice is also assured of finding ample opportunity for frustration and, occasionally, acute embarrassment. I also promise that s/he will become all

too familiar with the incestuous tendencies of the writers of costume books, and their habit of repeating everything they have ever been told. While it stands to reason that the later books will quote the earlier ones, the end result can blur into a Greek chorus all seeming to recite the same words with the same voice. And none of it may be of the slightest use in answering the specific question which said novice is trying to ask.

The novice costumer will also need to learn to make allowances for his or her own room for expansion. While all costumers tend to have pet reference works to which they find themselves resorting at the first swelling of each creative bud, s/he will discover that satisfactory information becomes less easy to find the longer you stay in the game. A book which may have seemed to be wonderfully comprehensive in one's first year of costuming, may, by one's fifth or sixth year have grown to be maddeningly inadequate. Which is the chief symptom by which one may recognize that s/he has been infected by an ancient and honorable condition known as "divine discontent."

Which is, I suppose, about as good a justification for writing new costume books as any I've ever encountered.

Such as this one.

Cheers.

Part IV

Which Consists Mainly of Lists

all-in-one: A mid-20th century foundation garment combining a long line bra and a pantie girdle in one piece. Usually made in elastic step-in style but occasionally with a zipper down the back.

apex (of the bosom)**:** This is amply explained in the text. (Pg. 29)

appliquéed: Applied. Most usually refers to decoration which has been stitched to the surface.

arc: A regularly curved line. A segment from the circumference of a circle.

bandeau: A narrow brassiere, worn to support the breasts. The earliest style of this garment did not have separate cups.

barktan: A tooling leather which is tanned by a vegetable process. It is a dense-textured leather with a hard surface and a fleshy pink/tan color.

baste: To stitch in place temporarily, using large stitches which are later removed.

beau ideal: The culturally sanctioned ideal of beauty [of a given period].

bias: The direction which travels diagonally across the threads running lengthwise in a piece of material. Fabric is least stable along its bias, stretching and distorting with very little effort.

bodice: The portion of a gown or ensemble which is worn over the torso from shoulders to waist. May be loose or fitted, part of the gown or separate, reinforced with boning or not.

bodice point: The point at the center front of the waist of a pointed bodice.

boned: Reinforced with bones. Used to describe anything from some featherbones reinforcing the seams to fully-boned stays.

bouffant: Puffed out. Usually made to appear light and airy and usually requiring some form of support. Most usually applies to skirts, sleeves, or coiffure.

"bow-window" effect: Bulging out in a smooth curved line like a bow-window.

brocade: A luxury fabric woven on a jacquard loom with an all-over pattern on a flat background, usually of satin or flat twill weave.

buckram: A coarse open weave, usually of cotton or linen stiffened with a glue sizing. Some of the modern types are of synthetic fibers stiffened with plastic. Used for craft projects, etc.

bum roll: A stuffed roll which is worn around the hips to extend and support the skirt.

bursar: A treasurer or business officer.

busks: The heavy, supporting piece which runs down the center front of a corset. Needed to maintain the line and to keep the front from sagging or curling up.

busk lace: A cord designed to hold the busk in place and keep it from working its way out of its casing. It passes through eyelets in the corset and occasionally through holes drilled in the busk itself.

bustle: A cushion, sometimes a braided wire form, worn at the back of the waist and used as a support for a decoratively looped up overskirt.

bust point: Apex of the bosom.

caricature: An exaggerated depiction of a subject wherein the subject is still recognizable. Commonly a cartoon drawing.

cartridge pleated: Small, round, close-set pleats packed together like bullets on a military cartridge belt.

cartwheel farthingale: A farthingale made with large hoops at the top, like a wheel; also referred to as a "drum" farthingale.

casing: A tube or channel in a garment made to hold bones, hoops, or busks, or through which a drawstring is threaded.

caul: A type of cap used to cover the hair. In the Renaissance period this was often made of network.

chemise: A loose undergarment made of some light, soft fabric. It is worn under all other clothing. Also called a shift.

corselet: A tight, reinforced bodice worn as an overgarment over a shift or shirt. Usually used in peasant costume.

corset: A garment designed to impose a fashionable shape upon the human body. It is close-fitting, reinforced, and usually worn as an undergarment.

couturiér: A dress designer. Usually used to refer to the male of the species.

crinoline: Originally a stiff reinforcing braid woven of horsehair. Later used to refer to the steel "cage" hoopskirt of the mid-19th century. This was shaped rather like the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

cuirass bodice: A close-fitting bodice bearing an imaginary resemblance to a piece of body armor. Popular during the 1880s.

darts: Pointed tucks taken in a garment in order to make it fit closer to the body.

déshabillé: "Undress" i.e. not completely clothed or with clothing in disarray.

doublet: The ancestor of the jacket. A close-fitting bodice, usually fastening down the front. Generally a male garment. Originally the padding worn under body armor.

edge roller: A leatherworking tool used to smooth the edges of a piece of leather into a rounded shape (in cross-section).

edge skiver: A leatherworking tool designed to shave off the corners (in cross-section) of a cut edge of a piece of leather.

eyelet : 1. A fairly crisp fabric (pink or otherwise), usually cotton, having a design of little holes cut in it which have all been finished off like tiny buttonholes. Usually white or insipid pastels. Also referred to as a *borderié anglaise*. 2. A short metal tube which is inserted into a hole in a garment and fixed in place by crimping the ends with an instrument that looks rather like a pair of pliers. Primarily used to reinforce lacing holes.

farthingale: A hoopskirt. Used to refer to both the bell shaped and cartwheel varieties.

featherboning: Very lightweight boning material. Nowadays usually made of plastic.

featherbones: Bones made of featherboning.

fíchu: A small scarf, usually triangular and often made of muslin, worn around the neck or crossed over the bosom.

fin-de-sieclé: Literally "end of century", generally refers to the 1890s.

florist's hoop: A rigid hoop made of heavy wire soldered into shape. Used as a base for floral arrangements.

flounce: See ruffle.

foundation garment: An undergarment worn to stabilize motion, to smooth or reshape the figure, to serve as a support for outer garments, or all three.

French skiver: A leatherworking tool designed to shave the excess from a piece of leather in strips.

fully-boned: Reinforced so completely that all the area of the garment is solidly supported with bones.

gesso: A heavy glue sizing used to stiffen fabric. Of a thin plaster consistency. Still used nowadays to prepare artists' canvases.

grommet: A large heavy two-piece eyelet which is hammered into place like a rivet.

gusset: A piece of material, usually triangular in shape, added to a garment to enable it to fit over the body where more fullness is needed.

half-boned: Reinforced with bones at intervals until roughly half of the garment's area is backed with boning.

hooped: Having a shape which is produced by being supported by hoops.

hooping: A specific type of wire material which is designed for making hoops. Described in text.

horizontal folds: Folds lying across the body due to stress at the sides.

inset bands: Smooth bands sewn into a garment between other sections which are smocked or gathered.

JP: Junior petite. A size range designed for the youthful adult figure which is shorter than average.

jumper: A sleeveless overdress designed to be worn over a blouse or shirt. (Note: this is an American term. It does not mean a jumper according to British usage, which in America is referred to as a sweater.)

kirtle: Skirt. Usually used to refer to a decorative petticote.

latigo: A chrome-tanned leather with a fairly firm texture and a slightly waxy feel. It can be decoratively stamped, but not tooled.

mannerist bodice: The very elongated bodice depicted in mannerist paintings. It seems to have been an artistic convention having little to do with reality.

merry widow: A mid-20th century foundation garment covering the torso from bosom to hip joint. It is usually made of something frivolous like satin or lace, is usually strapless, and has garter tabs.

mordant: A substance which is added to the mixture in dyeing, to fix the color.

muslin: A practice run of a garment made of muslin or some scrap fabric. Used for testing a new pattern.

organdy: A very crisp, lightweight, transparent fabric popular in weddings. Most commonly made of nylon or some other synthetic fiber.

oversleeves: Decorative sleeves made to wear over a shift or another pair of inner sleeves.

paneing: Decorated by being cut into, or made out of, strips or "panes".

paniéred: A form of skirt decoration produced by looping or gathering up the skirt and supporting it on some sort of framework.

parti-colored: Divided into variegated colors. Also called motley.

partlet: A garment for the neck and shoulders. Usually for women.

parvenu: Nouveau riche, an upstart.

"peach-basket": The effect wherein the bosom rises up in two soft mounds above a snug-fitting, staight-fronted bodice without overhanging the edge.

peasecod: The oddly-shaped doublet worn by men in the Elizabethan era. It was padded and wired in a manner believed to resemble a pea pod.

pelon: Once a brand name, but rapidly becoming a generic term for all non-woven interlining materials.

petticoat: A skirt intended to be worn under another skirt. Also referred to as a petticote (old spelling).

petticote: See petticoat.

phygian cap: A type of cap attributed to the ancient Greeks of the more "democratic" states. Worn as a symbol of republican sentiment during the French revolution.

plastron: A solid front section to a corset. May be separate from the rest.

plaquet: The fold sewn to the inner side of an opening in a garment to which the fasteners are sewn. (aka placket.)

pomander: Small apple-shaped ball of filigree which held a perfumed core. Could also be a hollowed-out orange containing perfume. Used to ward off disease and bad smells.

pouter pigeon: A breed of pigeon with a habit of puffing out its crop until it looks as if its chest has been inflated.

puff: A bit of an inner garment, usually the shift, which has been pulled through an opening in the covering garment as a decorative feature.

retroed: To have engaged in a "retro" movement, i.e. a movement which attempts to revive and reinterpret aesthetic elements of an outmoded style. From "retrograde".

ribbands: Ribbons (old spelling).

Rococo: The design style which followed the Baroque, and lasted most of the 18th century. Sweetly pretty and highly ornate, less formal than Baroque.

rucking: Ruck = to fold, crease or wrinkle.

ruff: A stiffly starched ruffled collar encircling the neck.

ruffle: A strip of cloth fulled, pleated or gathered onto a straight edge as a frill.

S-bend: The distinctive posture of the Gibson girl, head and shoulders back, bosom forward, hips and seat back. Produced by the straight-fronted corset worn during the period.

sans-cullotte: A commoner, literally a person without breeches (an upper-class garment). Used to refer to the *hoi polloi* of the French revolution.

seam allowance: An extra one-half to five-eighths of an inch of fabric beyond the stitching line to give the stitching something to hold onto.

selvage edges: The webbed edge of a woven piece of fabric which keeps it from unravelling.

separate cup bra: The modern 20th century brassiere with a separate cup for each breast.

short-bodied stays: Stays which end at or above the waist.

sinecure: An office requiring little or no work, yielding profitable returns.

sizing: A gelatinous glue used to stiffen fabric.

skive: A process of thinning down a piece of leather by shaving away the excess with special tools.

skife: A leatherworking tool designed to shave down leather where it is too thick.

slashed sleeve: A sleeve which has been cut so that the inner garment may be pulled through the holes for decoration.

sleeve cap: The part of a sleeve which goes over the top of the shoulder.

smocking: A decorative method of gathering in extra fullness, wherein the fabric is drawn up in small regular gathers for some inches of length, and then held in place by decorative stitching on the surface, made in geometric patterns.

snood: A type of caul.

split ruff: A ruff which has been split so that it stands up around the back of the neck, while the throat and bosom may be displayed in front.

spoon busk: Late 19th century busk which curved in at the waist, and out at the bosom and abdomen.

standing collar: Any one of many styles of collar which stands up around the neck rather than folding down about the shoulders.

stay: A corset bone.

stays: A corset.

stomacher: A separate plastron. Usually highly decorated.

stress point: The place at which a garment is pulled in more than one direction.

Stuart cap: Late 16th century headdress associated with Mary, Queen of Scots, distinguished by dipping to a point above the middle of the forehead.

taffeta: A rich, thin, crisp material. Usually of plain weave and shiny surface.

tea-cozy: An insulating sack made to fit over a teapot and help keep the tea warm. Referred to due to its traditional dome shape.

tippits: 1. A scarf for covering the neck and shoulders, having ends hanging down the front. 2. The long pendant part of a hood or sleeve, etc.

tub-thumping: Ranting and preaching, or other variants of flag-waving in aid of whatever hobbyhorse you happen to be riding at the moment.

underbodice: A close-fitting bodice worn under another, sometimes decorative.

undergown: Like an underbodice, but having its own attached skirt.

unguent: An ointment or salve.

waist cinch: A wide, tight belt worn about the waist. May either buckle or lace.

waist tabs: Petal-like extensions of a bodice extending from the waist. Used to lessen the pressure of the boned edge of a corset or bodice in the waist area.

waiver theater: A small theater for which various theatrical unions have "waived" some of their usual conditions for production and participation of union personnel. Usually pertains to houses having fewer than 100 seats. Also referred to as a waiver house.

whipstitch: To sew or gather using an overcast stitch.

yoke: A separately cut part of a garment intended to support a pleated or gathered part. Usually at hip or shoulder.

zipper foot: A special attachment to a sewing machine enabling one to stitch along the very edge of the fabric or the crease of a fold, or the edge of a solid object. Designed for insetting zippers.

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Elizabethan Costume for the Years 1550–1580 (Other Times Publications, Revised 2nd Edition, 1983)

Yarwood, Doreen
European Costume (Larousse & Co., Inc., 1975)

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Plate G–37: Iris Brooke; *English Costume in the Age of Elizabeth*, Adam and Charles Black, 1933.

Plate G–38: Douglas Gorsline; *What People Wore*, Bonanza Books, copyright Douglas Gorsline 1951, 52.

Plate G–39: Erhard Klepper; James Laver's *Costume Through the Ages*, Simon & Schuster, N.Y. 1961.

Plate G–40: Doreen Yarwood; *European Costume*, Larousse and Co., Inc., 1975.

The front and back cover photographs were taken at the Southern California Renaissance Pleasure Faire by the author.

Sources for Materials

THROUGHOUT THIS COLLECTION THERE have been many references to materials which are necessary for the production of the foundations herein described. I append the beginnings of a list of sources for boning, hooping and other materials which are of use to the amateur costumer. Attempting to keep current on these maters tends to be impossible. But this is my most recent information regarding these resources. I am deeply indebted to the members of the International Costumers' Guild whose publications have been the source for the following;

Alter Years:
http://www.alteryears.com

This company also operated a brick-and-morter store until recently, when development forced it out. But there is also a catalogue. (Catalogue $5/4th class, $8/priority) In addition to patterns for costumes of various periods (and skill levels) they have a complete supply of hooping, boning and other necessaries. Alter Years is also an official resource of the Renaissance Pleasure Faire.®

Mail Order:

Amazon Vinegar and Pickling Works Drygoods:
221 E. 11th St
Davenport, IA 52803
http://amazondrygoods.com

Not a subsidy of the more well known amazon.com books, music and everything else company. This is a reenactors source, most commonly used by Civil War reenactment groups. Their web site reflects this in its primary focus on Victoriana. Their main catalogue is of "Authentic Patterns from the Past." While these are primarily 19th century reproductions, they carry patterns from at least one company which specializes in Medieval and Renaissance costumes. This main catalogue is $4.00. Their 2nd catalogue is of their Dry goods, yardage and findings, and includes books and ready-made costume items. This catalogue is $2.00. They also have a complete supply of hooping, boning and other necessaries.

As a further note; while I hesitate to make reference to commercial patterns (given the certainty and speed with which they inevitably disappear from the market) in addition to the redoubtable Folkwear© collection, at the time of this writing, someone in a decision-making position at Simplicity appears to have noted that while many branches of the home sewing market are fading even as we speak, one branch which is not going anywhere is the one composed of persons who are in need of actual *costumes*. To this end, the once anemic "costume" section of the Simplicity catalogue has grown to some 90 pages of historical and special-purpose clothing covering a wide range of periods and clearly intended for school theater, community theater, historical reenactment and public festival, as well as traditional Halloween costumes. While some of these are "freely adapted", others are very well designed and presented, and, although it would be rather too much to expect them to be shaped like actual Tudor corsets (although one pattern for mid-19th century corsetry *is* provided), a bodice pattern made from the technique featured in this collection can readily be used with the skirt and sleeve treatments of Simplicity's designs.

Many of these patterns may be viewed on Simplicity's web site (http://www.simplicity.com). The reader is cautioned that it is a good idea to make the additional effort to actually consult the printed Catalogue as well, since not all of the patterns shown in the printed catalogue are featured on the site.

It must be mentioned that the catalogues of the Buttrick and McCall companies may also repay investigation, and that costumers in need of 20th century designs might be well recommended to examine Vogue's Vintage collection.

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NOTES

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has been set digitally
in Monotype's Cantoria family,
using Adobe InDesign software.
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Jonathan Barnbrook's
Mason Serif (Regular, Alternate and
Super) from Emigré Fonts,
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Additional symbols and characters
from Zusana Licko's
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Emigré have also been used.
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Macromedia FreeHand.
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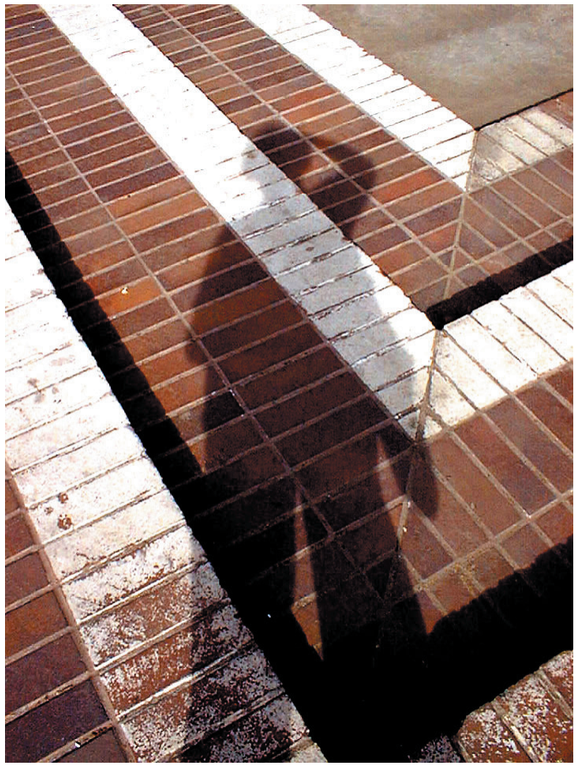
and Aridi Computer Graphics
was also used in
its production.



A Native of Los Angeles, the author holds a Bachelor's degree in Theater Arts from the California State College system, and is currently employed by the City of Los Angeles in the capacity of a Graphics Designer. She has been involved in amateur costuming organizations for several years and is a current member of the Costumers' Guild West chapter of the International Costumers' Guild.