

What the Tudor Women Really Wore

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Research and hand drawn sketches created by Kimiko Small, March-April 2006, except where noted. This was originally developed for Margo Anderson's Historical Costume Patterns, and has been modified and updated for use in the Collegium Caidis class on April 10, 2010.

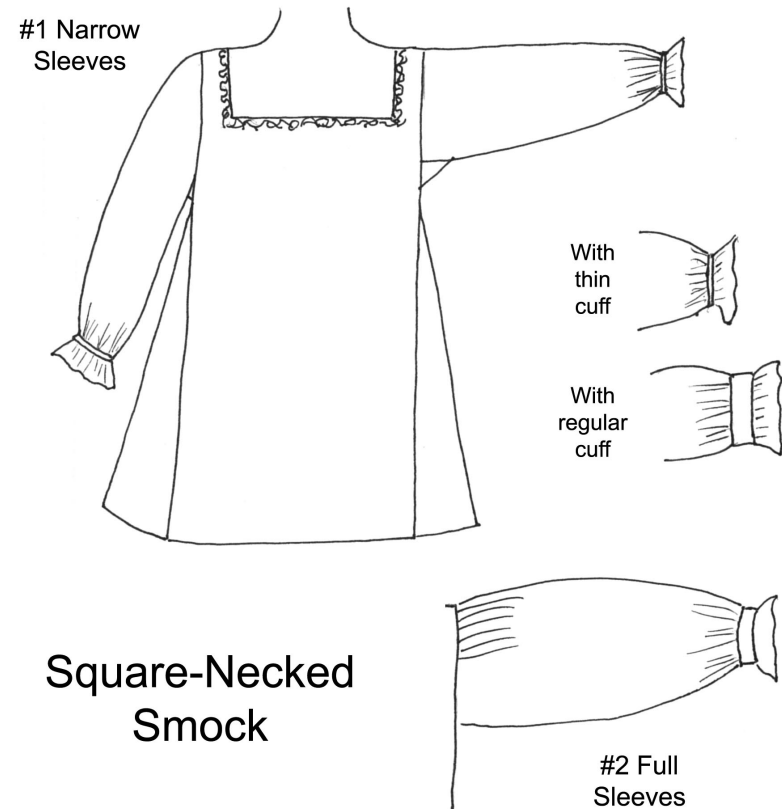
The Smock

#1 is a basic square necked smock with regular/narrow sleeves. A gusset is given under the arm. A regular cuff or a thin cuff is appropriate. A wide ruffle that drapes over the hand is often seen, and is usually worked in Blackwork embroidery as seen in various paintings.

#2 shows the very full sleeves, and is based on an Italian smock in the book *Moda a Firenze 1540-1580* by Roberta Orsi Landini and Bruna Niccoli, © 2005, Pgs. 124-125. As noted in the drawing #2, the upper half of the sleeve at the body is gathered, while the lower part of the sleeve at the body is not gathered, making up for a lack in underarm gusset. The sleeves should be full if it is intended on pulling them out from the bottom of the fore-sleeve of the kirtle, as is seen in Mary Guildford's portrait.

High-necked Smock.

The high-necked smock or shirt appears in a few images of the time, often seen under the Medici collared partlet. They look similar to a man's shirt, with the full body gathered into a shirt collar. There might be a small frill or ruffle attached to the top of the collar.



What the Tudor Women Really Wore

Partlets

Partlets are an accessory that is added on top of the smock, worn over the chest in the manner of a dickey.

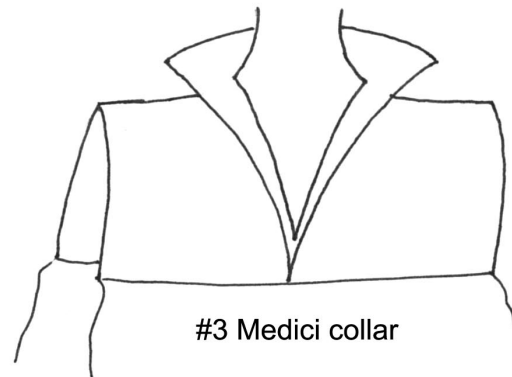
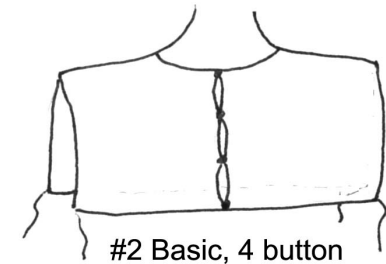
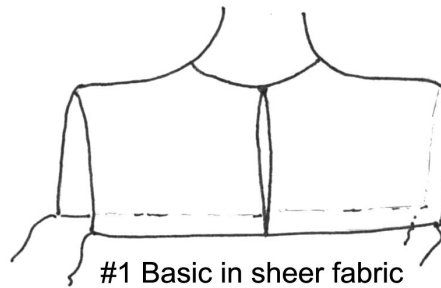
Lighter partlets are worn with the edges usually underneath the kirtle edge, allowing the jewels of the kirtle to show.

Partlet #1 was taken from the More family sketch, and appears to be of a sheer material. A small button or a pin closes the front at the throat. This is the simplest form of a partlet, and is recommended in any lightweight material, especially to protect the skin from the summer sun.

Partlet #2 is from the same sketch, but shows multiple buttons or closures down the front.

Heavier partlets, sometimes with the standup collar, often cover the top of the kirtle or even the gown, and appear almost seamlessly with the top of the gown's bodice, which is why some researchers thought the bodice had changed shape and had a collar. But if you look closely at the images, you can see the edge of the partlet.

Partlet #3 is called a Medici collar according to Cunnington (64), but I think that is a modern term. This style was seen in the mid 1530s and on into the 1560s, as Queen Mary Tudor was seen in several paintings wearing this style at that time. Lady Lee in the 1530s is seen wearing it, as well as the lady whose possible namesake it was from, Catherine de Medici in a painting by Francois Clouet, c.1530-35. This partlet is usually made from matching fabric to the gown, or black velvet. It looks lovely when the lining (usually white) is decorated with embroidery, or with hanging beads from the collar. The collar of this partlet should be pad stitched with an interlining of canvas in order to hold its shape. Because of the layers, this partlet style is recommended for wearing during the colder months to keep the upper body warm.



Partlets

What the Tudor Women Really Wore

The Petticoat

The petticoat is an optional garment, which isn't required for the Henrician look, but can be worn in the colder months to provide additional warmth. If a petticoat was worn, it was the first to be put on (after the smock), followed by the kirtle (Malcolm-Davies, 20) It can also be padded with cotton wadding to provide a stiffer look to the skirts of the kirtle and gown, which is what may have been going on before the farthingale was adopted. If an optional farthingale is worn for late Tudor (1545 and later), the petticoat would be worn under the farthingale to cover the legs and keep them warm.

Mikhaila provides a pattern for the petticoat, with a minimal bodice attached in order to hold up the skirts, yet minimize the bulk around the bodice area. The bodice would not be padded or stiffened, and lining it is optional. If the skirts are quilted with cotton wadding or flannel, the edges are bound instead of turned under. Again the front of the skirt is slit for ease in dressing, but this slit will be hidden behind the kirtle skirt front. The bodice is closed by either hook and eye, or by lacing.

The Farthingale

The farthingale really wasn't used in England during most of this time frame. It was used in France and especially Spain, so it can be worn if desired. The shape would be about the same as later Alcega farthingale, but as there are no tailor's books or surviving farthingales for our time frame, it would be conjecture. When the farthingale does appear with the stiffened skirt (mid 1540s into 1550s), the other main garments remain in use, they ended up becoming exaggerated in the size of the sleeve, especially the fore-sleeve with its faked puffs. The skirts also became larger and longer in length to accommodate the farthingale underneath.



What the Tudor Women Really Wore

The Kirtle

Kirtle Front

When dealing with the bodice, “(i)t is important not to cut the bodies too long in the sides; the waistline of the bodies should sit just below the bottom of the ribcage. This may feel quite short, but it is necessary to prevent the bottom edge of the bodies from digging into the flesh around the waist.” (Malcolm-Davies, 105)

Corsets are not generally believed to have been in use during this time frame. The kirtle was probably the garment that was stiffened, if any stiffening is required. Canvas or buckram is pad-stitched or sewn in channels to either the lining or muslin underlining for stiffening in the front only. For more support, plastic boning, plastic cable ties, or even hemp cording can be used to provide additional soft support. The look is not as stiff, rigid or conical as in later Elizabethan fashions.

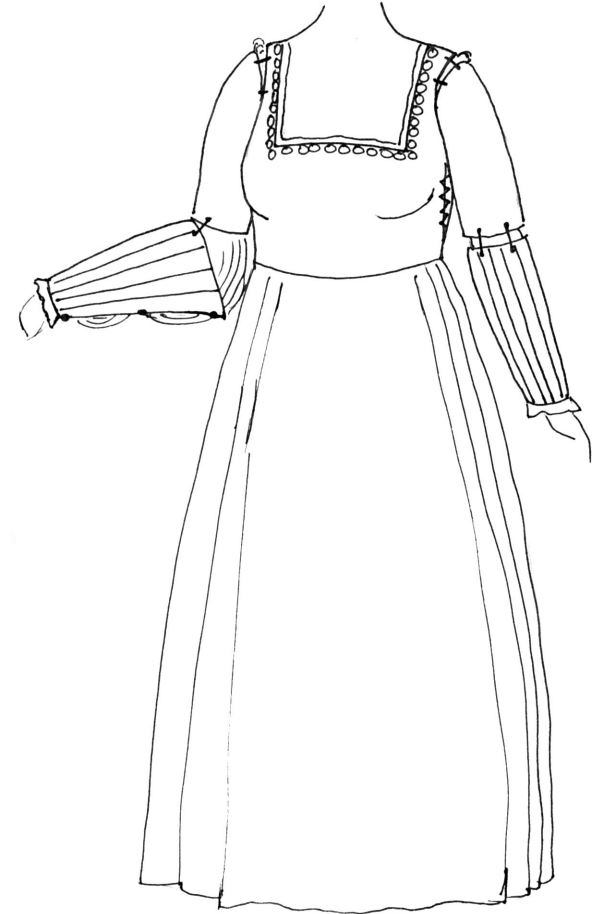
Mikhaila suggests the following two features to achieve the appropriate look seen in the images of the time.

“First, boning must not rise over the bust (as in the extant pairs of bodies) in order to retain the softness which is evident in the portraits. Secondly, the fastening for the stiffened layer must be at the back or sides, and, for the fuller figure, be laced from top to bottom. This draws the bust down and avoids cleavage.” (Malcolm-Davies, 24)

The bodice neckline is arched in the center, and designed to show the top edge of the smock worn underneath to show off any embroidery on the smock. This also protects the kirtle from the body oils and dirt.

The waist of the bodice is at the natural waistline, or a touch higher, and does not go to a waist point in front until the 1540s.. The skirt is full, flat in front with pleats along the side front going into the back, and is sewn directly to the bodice during this time. The skirts should be lined or flatlined for a better drape. The skirt length was usually floor length in front for gentry and higher. Some effigies and images show the front length to be longer than floor length. A train in the back is optional.

The kirtle would be decorated around the square neckline with jewels. Other forms of decoration are possible, including slash & puff along the bodice and sleeves, if following early 16th c. French images. Most images hide the kirtle with the gown, so it is unclear what other forms of decoration might have happened.



What the Tudor Women Really Wore

Kirtle Back

View #1 is the kirtle shape that matches the gown back shown in *an unknown English lady*, by Hans Holbein, c.1528-35 sketch. This shows a side back lacing arrangement.

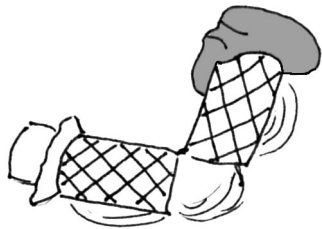
View #2 is from a view of a peasant woman working in the fields as illustrated by Jean Poyet in *the Hours of Henry VIII*, c. 1500.

View #3 is suggested from a Flemish tapestry *The Journey and Temptations of the Prodigal Son*, c. 1517-30. This is an alternate view for those gowns that may have a round back, not the V-shaped one.

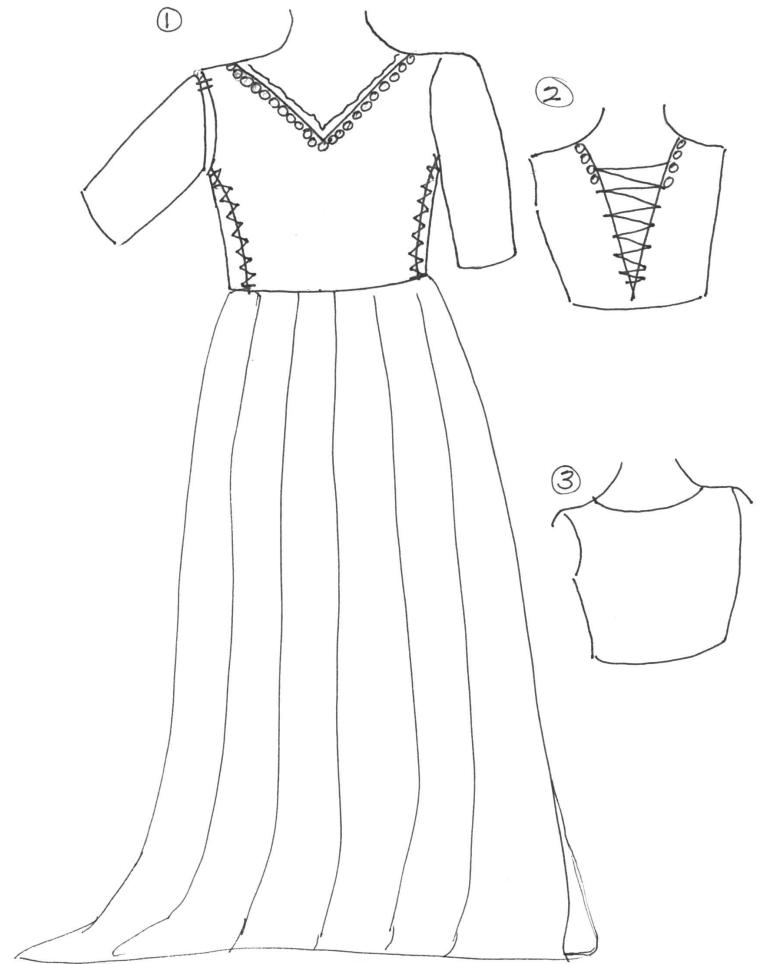
I provide these alternate views because it is very uncertain what the back shapes of the Tudor kirtles would be. They should be similar to the shape of the backs of the gowns.

Kirtle Fore-sleeves

The kirtle upper sleeve can be pinned on, tied on as seen above, or sewn onto the bodice. Tied on sleeves are seen in early 16th century images from France, and offer greater options in fashion, as sleeves can be changed as desired. Sewn on upper sleeves are also seen in lower class images from Flanders, with the fore-sleeves pinned onto the upper sleeves. I was unsure if the early 16th century images from France would apply in England, so I was happy to find a drawing from Cranmer's Great Bible of 1540, which the sketch to the left is taken, of a sitting



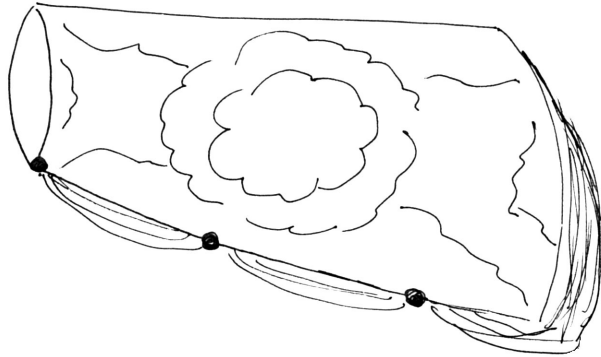
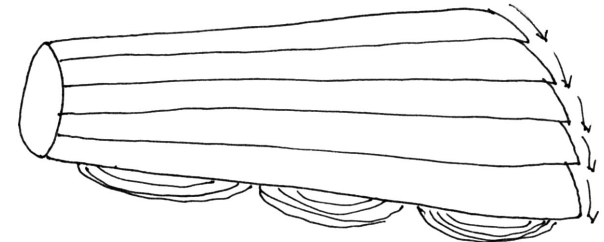
woman with her gown sleeves up showing the kirtle sleeves is attached to a matching upper sleeve. It was unclear how the upper sleeve is attached to the bodice, as the gown sleeve blocked that view. Decoration styles can be seen in various images.



What the Tudor Women Really Wore

Decorative fore-sleeve are seen under the gown, if a turn-back gown sleeve is used. The fore-sleeve were open below, and had puffs of the chemise (real or possibly faked) showing between the closures. The closures could be ties, hook and eyes, decorative ouches (like modern buttons), or pieces of jewelry, depending on station and wealth of the wearer.

The first sketch (right) of the fore-sleeves is a pleated fore sleeve, as seen worn in the *Portrait of Mary Guildford* by Holbein (1528), and in one of the *Portrait of Jane Seymore* images, made by the Holbein workshop (1537). The knife pleats are loose in the Guilford image with the bottom pleat partially undone. This may have meant the pleats were set with pins, and one pin happened to be missing. The lower puffs of the sleeve do appear to be puffs of the smock, as the fore-sleeves appear to be just a little wider than the arm (which would require the full smock sleeves). There are no obvious closures between the puffs in the Mary Guildford portrait, so it may be hook and eyes, or pins closing them. The Jane Seymore image shows jeweled clasps.



The second fore-sleeves sketch (left) is taken from the original *Portrait of Jane Seymour* by Hans Holbein, 1537. This one would be used for patterned fabrics, such as brocade and damask, as it is a flat sleeve. These fore-sleeves would match the front or forepart of the kirtle skirt. The puffs are softer, and may have been faked as the fore-sleeves is much wider near the elbow than the actual arm width.

There are other styles of foresleeves that were worn, as seen in various images but is not sketched here.

The Forepart

The forepart is a decorative fabric seen under the split front gown skirt. It is usually the kirtle front, but can optionally be made as a separate garment, which allows for a greater variety of looks. If done that way, it should be lined in drill or light canvas. It can be attached to the front of the kirtle with pins, ties, or modernly large ‘poppers’.

What the Tudor Women Really Wore



The Gown

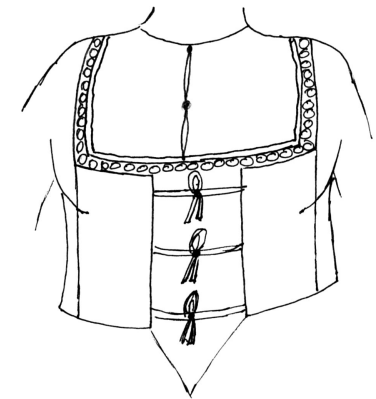
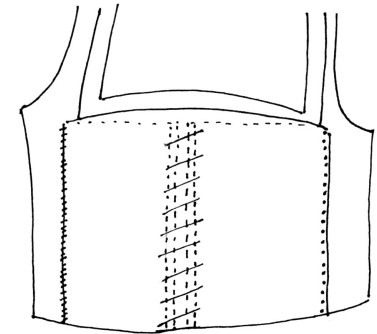
The gown is the outermost garment for a woman. It is of two types, one with a short slit down the front of the skirt for ease in dressing, and one with an inverted V-shaped opening down the front of the skirt, showing off the decorative front of the kirtle.

Gown Front

The opening of the gown's bodice is in the center front, hidden by a stomacher that is probably pinned into place on both sides. A miniature of Mrs. Pemberton shows possible pins closing on the right side with the left side hidden, while Jane Seymour's shows pins on the left side, with her right side hidden.

A key element of the gown bodice is that it should be setback from the kirtle bodice about an inch or so all around the neckline, in order to show off the jewels or beadwork at the edge of the kirtle.

As is seen in this x-ray style sketch (right), the bodice part under the stomacher is called a 'forebody', and is where the gown is laced together. The forebody is just slightly arched across the top, and matches the shape of the stomacher piece across the bottom.



Alternative methods of gown closures included tying the front shut, as seen in the sketch (right) of the More family by Holbein. Even the stomacher can be left off, which is why I think the stomacher was pinned into place. This was done when a lady was pregnant, as is seen in some of the ladies in the More sketch, who appear very pregnant. A placket of velvet or decorative material can even be inserted and pinned into place behind the lacings or ties. Both Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour were seen by others using both methods to extend the width of the gown during their pregnancies (Malcolm-Davies, 25).

The gown hem may have guards, welts or both added. Piping, if any, should be added along the neckline, the armholes, the

What the Tudor Women Really Wore

bottom edges of the turn-back sleeves, and optionally along the split-front opening. Piping should be added to the top of the stomacher, to match the rest of the neck edge.



Gown Back

The back of the gown is based on the unusual V pieces seen in Holbein's sketch and Bruegel's paintings. I have added in the drawing (left) that shows this view from the drawing *an unknown English lady*, by Hans Holbein, c.1528-35.

The skirt length of the gown is usually floor length in front. A 'French gown' has a train in the back, while the 'round gown' is floor length all around. The skirts are sewn directly to the bodice of the gown. While walking, a train can be held over one arm, or pinned up in place in the back, showing the decorative fabric of the kirtle underneath.

Alternate Gown Style

An alternate gown version (right) with a shortened gown over a long kirtle with a back train has been seen in a couple of effigy images, paintings and illuminations. Not all images show a split front gown. The effigy also showed the kirtle longer than floor length, pooling around the feet. The gown length was somewhere between calf and ankle length. One image shows a short train on the gown as well.

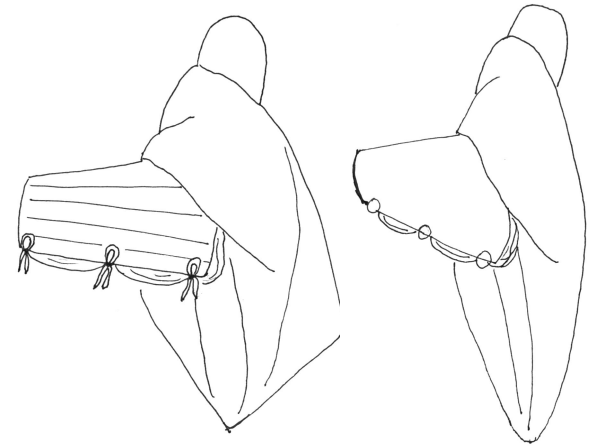
There are other possible fashion styles, but the images that show them are very few, and may not be historically accurate. More information is needed on them.



What the Tudor Women Really Wore

Gown Sleeves

There are several different versions of gown sleeves seen in the various images of the time. Early in the century the sleeve is not depicted turned back. Later on, the sleeve is turned back, getting higher on the arm as the decades progress. Turned-back sleeves can be a square shape, as seen with Mary Guildford, or a curved sleeve, as seen with Jane Seymour. With either turn-back sleeve, the decorative kirtle fore-sleeves can be viewed. This allows a view of the lining of the gown, which can be fur, velvet, satin, brocade, cloth of gold, damask, or even decorated, such as Jane Seymour's beadwork.



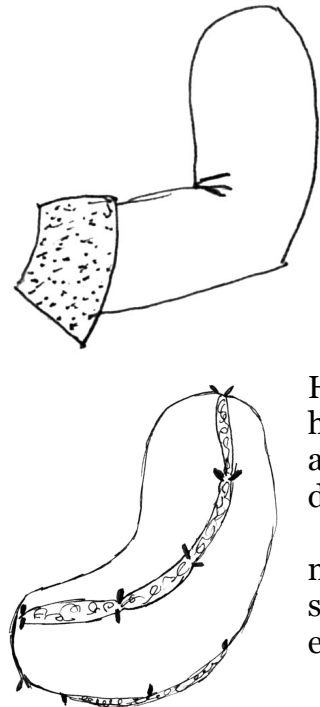
Alternate Gown Sleeves

The first alternate sleeve is a regular to semi-tight fitting sleeve, usually ending in a cuff of fur. This sketch was modeled from a brass rubbing of William Molyneux and his two wives, 1548 (Davenport, 435)

The next two sleeves are actually similar in patterning, as they are both full sleeves. Their differences lie in where the slashing details are made.

The first full sleeve sketch (right) is from the *Portrait of Margaret Wyatt, Lady Lee*, copy after Holbein. While the painting is dated c.1540, it is believed to have come from the Holbein workshop based on a sketch by Holbein. Lady Lee died about March 10, 1536/37, so her dress style predates her death. The gown is in a dark reddish/brown patterned fabric. The sleeves are slashed in a spiral pattern with dark matching solid fabric coming through the slashes. Metal aglets decoratively catch the openings on the sleeve at intervals along the slashes.

The second full sleeve sketch (left) is from the *Portrait of Elizabeth Seymour-Cromwell*, called by most sources as *Portrait of Catherine Howard*, by Hans Holbein, c.1539 – 1541. This gown is in black satin, with slashings along the upper and lower seam lines of the full sleeve. Poufs of black velvet embroidered with gold come through, also embellished with aglets along in intervals.



What the Tudor Women Really Wore

Because there is a class on Headwear, I won't get into details on the following.

English Gable Hood

The English Gable hood is what makes an English woman of this time look English, and not French, nor Flemish, nor German. While many say the French hood is more flattering to the face than the English hood, nothing says "I am English" or reflects the Tudor look more than wearing this hood.



Fig. 405. Anne Boleyn, Queen of England, 1532

French Hood

While the English gable hood gives the best impression of English costume, the French hood was and is a very popular hood to wear, especially since it is more flattering, and easier to create.

French hoods, and the English variant (right), during this time were flatter to the head than is usually worn by modern re-enactors, who tend to stand the back of the hood higher than it really should be. This can be seen in the few side shots, such as worn by Queen Mary Tudor on a coin.

Coif or Biggin

The coif or biggin can be worn underneath either the English gable, or under the French hood, to protect the hoods from hair oils. It is unclear what the proper shape should be, as I've only found one image of a coif from the end of the 15th century.



FIG. 379. QUEEN KATHERINE, 1520



FIG. 380. QUEEN JANE, 1536



What the Tudor Women Really Wore

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