

Your SCA Name: **Melissa of Bright Hills**_____

Entry name: Early English Gabled

Bonnet/Hood

Date Range: Circa 1500

Area: Fiber/Early Tudor Henry VII



Building a English Gabled bonnet from the reign of Henry VII. I built the hood out of separate components, and then assembled them with pins. This will allow me to reuse the various components when I made other styles of English bonnets from the era.

What They Did / Used

'Sipers' Linen Pasteboard

'Wyire' (copper?), covered by silk ribbon

Black Silk Velvet Bonnet

Silk Black Velvet or Satin Frontlet

Gold & Precious Jewels on Silk Taffeta

What I Did / Used

Homemade Linen Pasteboard

Millinery wire & cotton flannel

Black Poly Velvet lined in Black Poly Taffeta

Black Poly Velvet Frontlet, lined in tawny taffeta

Faux pearl, gold DMC, beads & buttons

What you changed and why: For budgetary reasons, I did not use silk velvet, silk, satin, or precious jewels. I tried my best to only use items I already had in my fabric and craft storage with just a few exceptions. I attempted to make my own linen buckram, but used an acceptable modern glue substitution already in my kitchen pantry.

What went wrong / What I learned: My finished product was slightly too wide, but pulling the twill tape tighter in the back of the paste corrected the issue. The black velvet frontlet and gold taffeta frontlet could have both been made longer. I also have a lot to learn about embroidery, embroidery stitches, and period techniques. One excellent decision was keeping the components separate: the paste, frontlet, and bonnet are all interchangeable elements that can be reused with different bonnet styles.

Circa 1500 English Gabled Bonnet

Summary



Figure 1: Elizabeth of York, Unknown Artist. Circa late 16th century, based on a work circa 1500. Oil on Panel. National Portrait Gallery. London. U.K.

I chose to reproduce an early English gabled bonnet, similar to the one Elizabeth of York wears in Figure 1, because I have never seen one recreated. Today, we would refer to the style as a Gabled Hood. All the primary sources referred used the term 'bonnet,' so that is the term used in this paper. Early gabled bonnets extend well-beyond the chin and appear to have many options for styling the back.



I recreated the gabled bonnet with a homemade linen buckram paste, a black velvet bonnet that hangs down the back, and a black velvet frontlet lined in contrasting tawny silk taffeta. These three components make a complete gabled bonnet. However, I chose to risk the fine for violating sumptuary laws, and added an embellished gold silk frontlet and a decorative edge worthy of Tudor Royalty.

Why An Early Gabled Bonnet?

The reign of Henry VIII is full of drama, and Tudor enthusiasts are spoiled for choice when it comes to books and period dramas about the famous king and his six wives. His father, Henry VII, gets remarkably less attention, and his wife led a quiet life. In televised dramas or plays about the War of the Roses, the plot ends once Henry Tudor wins the battle of Bosworth. Beyond a reputation for being a miserly king with a domineering mother, a lot less is generally known about his reign. The fashions of the era also get overlooked: as England transitions from the late Gothic medieval era to the Renaissance, the clothing is a delightful jumble of new and old. Why did English ladies move away from the colorful and large butterfly hennins of Richard III's reign, to a black boxy bonnet that was only popular in England? Such an odd accessory begs further study, and I generally find that I understand fashions better once I make and wear them.

Anatomy of an Early Gabled Bonnet

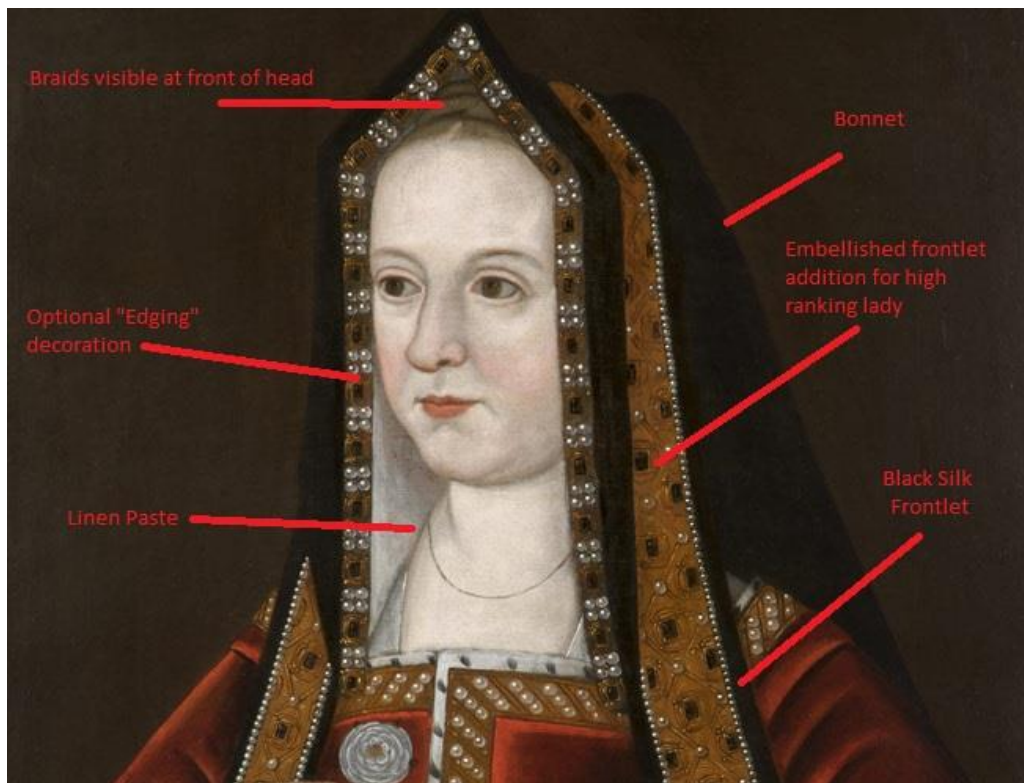


Figure 2 Elizabeth of York (1466-1503), Queen Consort of Henry VII. Circa 16th century. Oil on panel. National Trust, Nostell Priory. West Yorkshire, England. Added notations about gabled bonnet components added by author.

I consulted the Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York and an article about the Dress in the Household Papers of Lady Margaret Beaufort. The words 'bonnet' and 'frontlet' appear consistently. William Stafford receives payment in 1502 for going "from Richemount to London to maistres Lokke for bonnettes for the Quene."¹ The fine silk cloth to make the bonnets and frontlets was purchased from a vendor known as the 'silk woman.'

The bonnets mentioned at court are almost exclusively black, generally made of velvet, occasionally satin. Sumptuary laws enacted under Edward IV stated that "the wives, and daughters unmarried, of persons having possessions of the yearly value of 10. and upwards, were permitted to use and wear frontlettes of black velvet, or of any other cloth of silk of the colour of black."² To the modern eye, black may seem like a somber color, but it was the height of luxury: quality black dye was extremely expensive.

While most frontlets were black, the author of *The Queen's Servants* does mention that they could be lined in a contrasting color: generally crimson, tawny, or white. In addition to velvet and satin, sarcenet, a kind of thin silk taffeta that was used for linings, was also common. Queen Elizabeth's Privy Purse, Henry VII Privy Purse, and the Privy Purse of Princess Mary all mention extravagant gold frontlet purchases which may be what the embellished frontlet overlay is in Queen Elizabeth of York's portrait. One amusing entry showed that Princess Mary lost a gold frontlet in a wager to Lady Margaret, the King's mother. The woman making a wager with her granddaughter for a costly gold accessory conjures a rather playful image that is at odds with her strict rules at court, the severe widow's garb, and her vow of chastity.

¹ "Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York : Wardrobe Accounts of Edward the Fourth. With a Memoir of Elizabeth of York, and Notes : Nicolas, Nicholas Harris, Sir, 1799-1848 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming," Internet Archive (London : W. Pickering, January 1, 1970), <https://archive.org/details/privypurseexpens00nicouoft>, Page 14.

² Ibid, page 192.



Figure 3 Katherine Yelverton, bronze effigy, circa 1510, St. Mary's Church, Rougham, Norfolk.

Notably absent from the Privy Purse records were any references to 'edges' or 'borders' as they pertained to bonnets. However, the publication I was consulting only have one year of her accounts. Caroline Johnson states that the Great Wardrobe mentions a 16 shilling "paste with an edge."³ 16 shillings is significantly more expensive than a regular paste, which only cost a few pence. I only managed to find one additional visual record of an edge: the 1510 effigy of Katherine Yelverton. Katherine's effigy confirms that edges were not restricted to members of the royal family. The sheer number of plain bonnets implies that an edge might have been an addition for dressier occasions.

In the sections discussing silk for bonnets, both Lady Margaret and Elizabeth's Privy Purse discuss purchasing black velvet to make a tippet. As my version of the gabled bonnet does not include a tippet, I save the discussion of this style for the end of the paper which will briefly review alternative English bonnet styles of the era.

Reconstructing the Gabled Bonnet



The Mock Up:

Using the pattern shapes from *The Queen's Servants*, I made a mock up with cardboard, tape, and twine. I originally drafted a very long bonnet similar to Elizabeth of York's, but learned I have a short torso. I shortened the pattern to stop the bonnet above my bust line. At its original length, my bosom kept knocking it off my head.

³ Caroline Johnson and Jane Malcolm-Davies, *The Queen's Servants: Gentlewomen's Dress at the Accession of Henry VIII; a Tudor Tailor Case Study* (Fat Goose Pr., 2011). Page 21.



Making the Linen Buckram

I wanted to try making my own linen buckram after watching a YouTube video from Burnley & Trowbridge. My research suggested that Gum Arabic or animal glue would be a period glue option. A Google search suggested xanthan gum was a good modern substitute to Gum Arabic. I already had some on hand (key ingredient in making sugar free ice cream).



I added ½ tsp of xanthan gum powder to 8 tbsp hot water. I made another batch later in the project, and had better success by immediately mixing the solution after every tablespoon of water to avoid the clumpy bits. The glue sat for 20 minutes and allow the gum powder to fully congeal.



Before making this panel of linen into buckram, I transferred the pattern shapes onto the fabric using a pencil and marker. I used a sponge brush to saturate the fabric. It will dry faster in the sun, but the shower works just as well if one resides in a high-rise building.

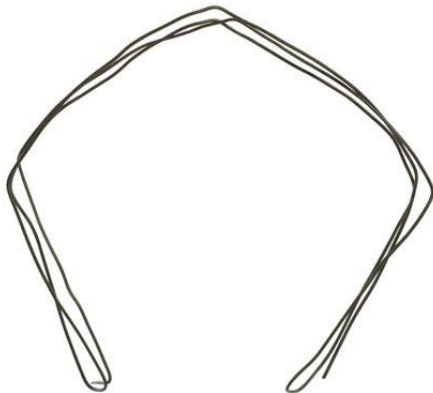


Once dry, the buckram was stiff like paper. Helpful tip: don't iron the buckram after it dries. It lost some of its crispness, despite not using any steam. My thanks to my cat, Lord Dare, for the shameless photobomb.

Making the Paste



Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe book mentions purchasing pastes. The cost was minimal: a batch of seven for 4 pence, and "may have been made of buckram, linen, or canvas."⁴ To make my paste, I cut out the buckram pattern piece without any seam allowances. It is possible that with a coarse enough linen and multiple coats of glue, the linen base could form the paste without needing any additional support.



Because my linen was densely woven, the glue did not as easily saturate the buckram. It would not support the weight of the headdress, so I added millinery wire. The Museum of London has a metal frame from a gabled bonnet in its collection. It's short, and most likely from Henry VIII's era, but it shows that wire could plausibly been used on the linen pastes of earlier bonnets.

Figure 4 Gabled "Diamond" Headdress Frame, copper alloy, circa Late 15th to early 16th century. Museum of London: Medieval London: Daily Life and the Thames: Fashion. London, U.K.

Covering the Paste

⁴ *Ibid.*



The next step is not period correct, but became necessary when I used millinery wire to stiffen the bonnet frame. Using hat making techniques that go back to the Victorian time frame (if not before), a layer of cotton or wool flannel is sewn on to pad the frame. This hides the wires and provides a smooth surface for the fashion fabric. My local thrift store had an old flannel sheet that worked perfectly. A third and final layer of white linen completed the paste. Herbert Norris in *Tudor Costume and Fashion* suggests that the Tudors would have left the wires plain or covered them with a ribbon.⁵ They could have been sewn into the paste, or pinned in place.

Making the Edge



I used one long strip of linen buckram, and created the angled shape of the bonnet by creating diagonal stitching. I thought this would be a quick step, but creating the perfect angle was rather difficult. The three corners were each stitched and re-stitched multiple times before I was satisfied with the result.

⁵ Herbert Norris, "Henry VIII, Section IV Hairdressing," in *Tudor Costume and Fashion* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), p. 336.



I constructed the edge of the bonnet using the same techniques as the paste. However, I noticed the points of the wires supports in the paste were poking through all three layers. When adding wires to each of the edge angles, I made sure to round the edges with needle nose pliers and avoided the same issue.



I decided to make some black buckram. The edge on Elizabeth's bonnet seems to be backed with black fabric. It could be velvet or satin, but I thought linen would make decorating the edge easier. When I finished applying the final linen layer to my paste, I was very disappointed with wrinkles/floppy top covering (the white flannel middle layer had been much more attractive).



Remembering how I struggled to use a single long strip of linen and form the angles with diagonal seams, I took a shortcut and cut two pieces by tracing the edge. Such wanton waste of fabric is not period: fabric was expensive, labor was cheap. The buckram yielded a crisp finish. I left the back of the edging uncovered, so I could bejewel my edge and cover the threads when finished.



The 'jewels' were made of gold bugle beads, craft store jewelry beads, and buttons. I chose to cut off the button shanks and use a glue gun to attach the buttons so they would lay flat. While I would have preferred a method where I could have sewn on the 'jewels,' the buttons were what I had on hand. If I had sewn the buttons on with the shank, they would stand too far away from the edge and flop around. I did sew on the gold bugle beads.



I thought using a glue gun would make the edge decorating a fast project, but attaching the bugle beads turned it into a multi-day project. I'm glad I took the time, because I think the bugle beads give the square appearance of the jewels that decorate Elizabeth of York's Edge.



Once the decorations were complete, I pinned the backing on to the edge and hand stitched it in place.



A curved millinery neededle made quick work of attaching the edge to the paste.



Knowing that this area of the paste would be covered by the frontlet, I made no attempt hide the black stitches. I also purposefully used very large stitches: the edge can be easily removed if I ever want to wear a more plain version of the gabled bonnet.



Making the Velvet Bonnet

Herbert Norris and Sarah Thursfield, author of *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant*, argue that that the Gabled bonnet is constructed from one piece of fabric, slit in order to create a front and back, similar to this French Hood in an illumination from the late 15th century.

Figure 5 Detail of *Lestrif de Fortune et Vertu*, Miniature by Martin le France, dedicated to Philip the Good. Circa last quarter of the 15th century, Netherlands. Royal 16 F IV f.3. British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts. London, U.K.



While some bonnets may have been constructed in one piece, the fact that Tudor sources repeatedly mention the bonnet and frontlet as separate components leads me to believe the two were separate pieces. I couldn't find any images of early gabled bonnets from the back, but Elizabeth of York's portrait seems to show her bonnet neatly folded inward, and flowing straight down the back. I decided to try a semi-circular shape based off of Herbert Norris⁶ and Sarah Thursfield's⁷ books.

I draped a measuring tape over my bonnet while wearing it to figure out roughly how long the veil should be. I then cut a rectangle of velvet the length of my measurement (roughly 27 inches). I folded the piece in half with the nap to the middle, pinned a 27 inch piece of twine to the corner, and then moved it in an arc and traced the line with tailor's chalk. The result was an almost perfect semicircle. I sandwiched the velvet with polyester taffeta, folded in the seams, and then hand stitched them together. I would have loved to use silk, but I only had the poly on hand. Once I pinned it to the paste, I was amazed that I didn't need to arrange the bonnet: It naturally folds inward due to the shape of the paste.

⁶ Herbert Norris and Richard Martin, "The Reign of Henry VII: Headdresses," in *Tudor Costume and Fashion* (Dover Publications, Inc., 1997), p 105.

⁷ Sarah Thursfield, "Women's Cloth Head-Dresses and Hoods," in *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant: Making Common Garments, 1200-1500* (Costume & Fashion Press, 2001), p. 204.



Making the Frontlet

I cut out a strip of fabric the width of my velvet, and then sewed in a tawny colored silk taffeta lining. This would be similar to Tudor sarcenet. I made it using the same sewing technique as the bonnet.

Making the 'Gold' Frontlet



I'm not quite sure what possessed me to attempt the decorative gold frontlet in Elizabeth of York's portrait. I have no experience embroidering, and did not have time to research late Gothic/early Tudor techniques. I grabbed a piece of silk and dove into the deep end of the pool.



I used pencil to trace off the embroidery pattern. I couched on gold DMC floss. I don't have the proper words for describing my dislike of polyester gold floss. After several days of broken, knotted, shedding threads, the gold outline was complete. I then used a chain stitch to fill in and outline the design.



If the edge took days, the gold frontlet took about a week to complete. I glue on more buttons and then sewed on pearls. In an ideal world, I would have made one more pass with the pearls, but time was short and I was happy with the result.



Sewing the backing onto the embellished frontlet covered up all manner of newbie embroidery sins. I did not have a thread that matched the color of my silk, so I used some white silk thread I found in one of my sewing drawers.

Styling the Hair



Figure 5 *Troy*, by John Lydgate, circa 1457-1460**, Detail of a miniature of Troilus taking leave of Cressida, with Trojans at the gate behind. English origin. Royal 18 D II. Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts, British Library, London, U.K.

The detail of a 16th century manuscript shows the hairstyle worn beneath a gabled bonnet. The hair was generally worn in a crown of braids at the front of the head, wrapped with a ribbon. *The Tudor Tailor* book is an excellent resource for learning how to create this style.

What women wore underneath the bonnet is a bit of a mystery. It seems difficult to believe that hair was left bare underneath the bonnet: women tended to protect their hair, and the oils of the hair would dirty the paste. However, the inexpensive linen paste that the hair would be touching could easily be replaced. Queen Elizabeth's Privy Purse doesn't mention coifs, but it does mention kerchiefs, so it is possible one of these was worn over the hair, behind the braids.

Finished Bonnet



All the components are pinned onto the paste using fine flat head silk pins.

Alternative English Bonnets

I am very pleased that I left the bonnet, gold frontlet, and frontlet separate. The paste and frontlet can be worn with different English Bonnet styles. For a future project, I hope to make more interchangeable early Tudor bonnet components.



Black velvet tippetts were repeatedly mentioned in the royal family's wardrobe accounts. The author of the *Queen's Servants* believes tippetts refer to these pointed caps. The brass depicts frontlets worn on top of the tippetts.

Figure 6 Daughters of Thomas and Emme Pounder, unknown Flemish artist, circa 16th century, Pounder brass memorial, St. Mary's Church, Ipswich, U.K.



Alternative Gabled Bonnet style: a gabled paste, worn over a tippet bonnet. An additional piece of fabric is draped over bonnet. *The Queen's Servants* suggest that the additional fabric is a sheer for this style. No color is specified, but it is most likely white or black, and made from a fine, sheer linen.

Figure 7 Anne Serche, detail, memorial brass, unknown artist, circa 1502. Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Northleach, Gloucestershire, U.K. veil over pointy bonnet and paste



A round bonnet with frontlet. The back of the bonnet has a round structured or gathered cap protruding in the back, before loosely draping in a manner similar to the gabled bonnet.

Figure 8 Mirabel Sulyard, detail of memorial brass, Unknown Artist, circa 1493, All Saints Church, High Lever, Essex, U.K.



A gabled bonnet, worn with a round bonnet. Also, note the shortened length of the frontlet. The image is circa 1516, which is well into Henry VIII's reign. It's possible the frontlet was worn shorter by this point, but it also possible that frontlets varied in length.

Figure 9 Dame Anne Palgrave, funeral memorial, unknown artist, circa 1516. St. Peter Church, North Barningham, U.K.

Lessons Learned

1. There were many lessons learned while making the linen buckram. A coarser linen canvas would most likely make a stiffer buckram. Multiple layers of glue can be applied to further stiffen the buckram, possibly making the millinery wire step unnecessary.
2. When adding wire to the paste, always be sure to curve the ends of the millinery wire with needle nose pliers. I left three wires in the paste with unfinished edges, and they poked through the fabric of the finished product. This may seem very obvious, but I have always used millinery wire in one large circuit around the edges with overlapped ends whipped together. There were never any sharp ends to worry about.
3. I took care to use fine stitches and ensure the flannel covering of the paste was taut. I also learned that I should have used linen buckram to cover the cotton flannel, because no matter how much I pinned, and how much I tried to pull the linen covering taut, the finished paste was slightly floppy. My experiment with the edge shows that using buckram would have yielded a crisp and fitted final layer.

4. Despite using a tape measure to estimate the length of my frontlet, the black velvet frontlet was shorter than I would have liked. I cut a strip of velvet the width of the 45-inch fabric to economize on fabric usage. I think an extra 4-5 inches would have draped more gracefully. I plan to make another frontlet, perhaps black satin lined in crimson and make it longer.
5. The gold frontlet length was also a learning experience. I very carefully measured the finished black frontlet to ensure I had half-inch black velvet borders around the finished gold frontlet. I cut the gold frontlet piece to the correct size, but because I did not stretch my fabric while I embroidered it, the fabric shrank. Lesson learned: get out my large cross stitch frame, and pull the fabric taut for future embroidery projects.
6. This probably brings me to my biggest lesson learned: I need to learn more about embroidery techniques. In my enthusiasm for reproducing this bonnet on a three-week timetable, I didn't have time to learn how to embroider, or research proper period techniques. While I am very proud of my gold frontlet, an experienced embroiderer might not be impressed. I especially want to learn more about gold work and bullion threads, rather than the dreaded gold DMC floss.
7. My final lesson was the importance of properly adjusting and styling the finished bonnet. Wearing my hair in coiled braids gave the bonnet more style and additional height. I also needed to adjust the twill tapes so the bonnet fit more snugly around my temples. I also gently bent the wires of the paste outward, to make the edge fall properly.

Bibliography

Bradfield, Nancy, and Nancy Bradfield. "Henry VII (1485-1509); Women's Fashions." Essay. In *Historical Costumes of England 1066-1968*, 69–73. Costume & Fashion Press, 1997.

Dreher, Denise. *From the Neck up: An Illustrated Guide to Hatmaking*. Madhatter Press, 1981.

"English, French, and Burgundian Women's Bonnets in the 15th Century." GBACG Finery, February 3, 2021. <https://gbacg.org/finery/2014/english-french-and-burgundian-womens-bonnets-in-the-15th-century/>.

Johnson, Caroline, and Jane Malcolm-Davies. *The Queen's Servants: Gentlewomen's Dress at the Accession of Henry VIII; a Tudor Tailor Case Study*. Fat Goose Pr., 2011.

Kammel, Frank Matthias, Johannes Pietsch, and Thessy Schoenholzer Nichols. "It Does Not Need To Be Hard To Hold." Essay. In *Structuring Fashion: Foundation Garments through History*, 29–37. Hirmer Publishers, 2020.

Lynn, Eleri. *Tudor Fashion Dress at Court 1485-1603*. Yale University Press, 2017.

Mikhaila, Ninya, and Jane Malcolm-Davies. *The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing 16th-Century Dress*. Costume and Fashion Press, 2008.

Netherton, Robin, Gale R. Owen-Crocker, and Susan Powell. "Textiles and Dress in the Household Papers of Lady Margaret Beaufort (1443-1509), Mother of King Henry VII." Essay. In *Medieval Clothing and Textiles 11*, 139–58. Boydell & Brewer, 2015.

Norris, Herbert, and Richard Martin. "The Reign of Henry VII: Headdresses." Essay. In *Tudor Costume and Fashion*, 97–112. Dover Publications, Inc., 1997.

"Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York : Wardrobe Accounts of Edward the Fourth. with a Memoir of Elizabeth of York, and Notes : Nicolas, Nicholas Harris, Sir, 1799-1848 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming." Internet Archive. London : W. Pickering, January 1, 1970. <https://archive.org/details/privypurseexpens00nicouoft>.

Thursfield, Sarah. "Women's Cloth Head-Dresses and Hoods." Essay. In *The Medieval Tailor's Assistant: Making Common Garments, 1200-1500*, 200–204. Costume & Fashion Press, 2001.

Trowbridge, Angela. "Historic Fashion Tutorial Series: Making Buckram." YouTube. YouTube, September 19, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbdSvjZn5kU>.

"Tudor Gabled Hoods: A Closer Look." YouTube. YouTube, January 26, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppBXVvp1AkQ>.

Weir, Alison. *Elizabeth of York: A Tudor Queen and Her World*. Ballantine Books, 2013.

Thank you for reading all the way to the end! As a reward for getting this far, here is a cat, in a hat.

