

“Flanders” Gown

For an Englishwoman in c. 1600’s London



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This Item is...

A gown in the style sometimes called a 'Flanders' gown, worn by women of the middling and gentle sort in the latter part of the 17th century. It was inspired primarily by the gowns worn by three of the women in Lucas de Heere's work, *Three London Citizens and a Farmer*, from 'Description of England, Scotland, and Ireland'.

The gown is executed in dark gray double cloth wool with silk velvet trim. It is interlined with heavyweight undyed linen, padded with wool melton, and lined with handkerchief weight undyed linen. All stitches are hand sewn using relatively heavyweight silk thread. The pattern was drafted based on the proportions for a straight front doublet as they appear in the tailors' manuals of Alcega, Freyle, and Burguen and analyzed by Matthew Gnagy in *The Modern Maker, Volume 2*.¹

¹ Gnagy, Matthew. *The Modern Maker, Vol. 2*



Figure 1: *Three London Citizens and a Farmer*, from 'Description of England, Scotland, and Ireland' by Lucas de Heere, c 1570

Garment Inspiration & Historical Exemplars

My initial inspiration for this garment was 3 of the 4 women in Lucas de Heere's illustration of *Three London Citizens and a Farmer*, which I first spotted while browsing *The Typical Tudor*². In designing the gown for this ensemble I chose to take elements from all three of the Citizens - from the woman on the far left, the gray fabric with black velvet trim and collar lining, along with the shorter puff-top sleeves. The woman in the middle inspired the waist silhouette and a manner for adding a belt, while the woman on the right inspired adding contrasting color sleeves.

Based on the exemplar image, I determined I would likely be making:

- A gray gown with black silk velvet guards,
- With a pointed waist and split-front shaped skirt,
- With short sleeves to the elbows and a generous sleeve head/puff at the shoulder,
- With a lined collar and front opening which were intended to be seen when worn and the front opening fastened midway down the body, and
- With a collar that could be worn sitting low around the neck with the sides hanging open.

A single image, of course, is only one artist's interpretation of a specific point in time, so I sought other examples of the design details for these garments.

First, **color and material**. For this I need look no further than *The Typical Tudor*, where Malcom-Davies and Mikhaila dedicate a full chapter to the fabric content and colors used in-period according to their analysis of wills and other documents.³ Given the structure and style of the garment, I chose to look for a cloth to approximate period broadcloth, "a high-quality woolen cloth... was used overwhelmingly for gowns for the middling sort".

For the guards and lining, "some pretty furniture of velvet or fur" were used by many, according to William Harrison in 1587. ⁴ Velvet was restricted by the acts of apparel as the main fabric in

² *The Typical Tudor*, p 122

³ *The Typical Tudor*, p 27

⁴ Harrison, William. *The Description of England*, p 148

outermost garments, but was permitted for trimmings on less expensive fabrics and for accessories.⁵

For color, I turn again to the work of Malcom-Davies and Mikhaila. Of the 48,736 garments in the documents analyzed, 9,728 or 7% of them included information as to their color. 32% were black, with 7% of those being descriptions of their lining or trim. Meanwhile, 3% of the color-described garments were grey, of which 21% were gowns and frocks.⁶

Armed with these details I was quite confident in the historical accuracy of building my gown out of gray broadcloth with black velvet guards, or at least a modern textile that closely resembled those fabrics.

Next, the **silhouette**: a fitted doublet style bodice with a point at the center front waist and split front, shaped skirt. For this, I find it most useful to consult two types of evidence: published tailor's manuals (thankfully Spain insisted their master tailors publish books of their patterns which have survived to this day) and contemporary images.

Alcega, Freyle, and Burguen all include some version of a straight front doublet cut for a woman in their pattern manuals as well as patterns for generous skirts with shaped back hems - all of which leaves me quite confident in the basic styling and choice of a shaped skirt. For additional details, I looked to other images and illustrations. *A Fête at Bermondsey* by Marcus Geerarts the Elder has examples of several different styles of dress represented, including a woman in a gown with a silhouette quite similar to that in the inspiration image: a split front skirt, low front point gown with the collar folded back.

Another example of this style can be seen in the image of gentlewoman Dorothy Kaye, pictured in a velvet guarded high-body gown in *The Woodsome Panels* held by the Tolson Museum in Huddersfield, UK.⁷



Marcus Geerarts the Elder, *A Fête at Bermondsey* (detail). C 1571. Private Collection, UK

⁵ *The Typical Tudor*, p 32

⁶ *The Typical Tudor*, p 40

⁷ *The Typical Tudor*, p 7

So far my examples all tend to be of fairly high-born sorts, but I'm aiming for a person more in the middle of the pack - not so high as to be fancy, nor so low as to parade about in her petticoat with a partlet and apron like the 'country woman' in De Heere's illustration. For some insight into the less hoity toity, I look to many of the figures included in *The Cryes of the City of London* which dates to circa 1600.



Figure 6: The Cryes of the City of London, Marcellus Laroon.
Courtesy the London Sound Survey

Three in particular seem useful to my needs. The first and third wear similar tight-fitting doublets, while the second wears a gown that opens a bit lower than the one in De Heere's illustration. Their sleeves all show some evidence of fullness - the first and second have shoulder wings while the third does not.



So the silhouette is solid, and along the way I've found additional evidence for the open-front, lined collar. Further evidence as to the closure of the garments comes from a different series of drawings by de Heere⁸. In one, an upper class woman of 'Seine' wears a garment with a similar silhouette to that of the gown I am creating. As she is from the Continent I hesitate to take too many details from that particular drawing, but the row of hooks and eyes on the center front of her dress leaves me confident in using the same closure method for my garment.

Meanwhile, two pages from the same source depict Englishwomen of differing classes in England: two higher status ladies in blue and green gowns over decorated kirtles, and two women with a more toned-down aesthetic in what may be an sketch for the inspiration image of this project. The middling, merchant sort are wearing less fashionable, simpler clothing that will last and look correct for a far longer period of time than the wealthy sort.

⁸ De Heere, Lucas. *Théâtre De Tous Les Peuples...*



De Here, Lucas. "Damoiselle et Senateur de Sene" (detail). Used with permission from Ghent University Library



De Here, Lucas. "Dame et Damoiselle Angloses" (detail). Used with permission from Ghent University Library



De Here, Lucas. "Un bourgeoise et une merchant Angl" (details). Used with permission from Ghent University Library





Finally, the **sleeves**. Multiple exemplars so far have shown evidence of a puffed sleeve head that ends just above the elbow, but to add an additional datapoint one need only look to an additional figure from *A Fête at Bermondsey*. The woman wears a red gown, and you can see the shape of the folded down collar trimmed in black fabric, possibly velvet. Also, the sleeves are clearly visible (and from the back!) - full at the top, possibly tightening a bit but not to the point of being skintight, and clearly ending above her elbow.

Marcus Geerarts the Elder, *A Fête at Bermondsey* (detail). C 1571. Private Collection, UK

Design Decisions, Patterns, & Historical Accuracy

This garment is designed and constructed with a strong leaning to historical accuracy. As mentioned previously, the patterns were drafted to the wearer's proportions using the Bara method. I leveraged patterns developed by Alcega, Freyle, and Burguen. As Matthew Gnagy explains in the introduction to *The Modern Maker, Volume 2*, "Burguen's manual of 1618 holds within it a page that gives a precise description of the proportional concept. He describes two versions of the bara. There is a standard bara ... he also describes the proportional bara which is meant for measuring and making clothing."⁹ Thus I am quite confident that my patterns are entirely accurate to the period as a tailor might have customized to me.

In the History section I laid out the evidence for outer fabric type and color. *The Typical Tudor* lists further evidence of materials used in garments: interlinings might have been of heavyweight linen termed 'canvas', 'sackcloth', or 'harden' while linings of holland and silk were also recorded.¹⁰ I've chosen to use a mid-weight double faced 100% wool for its stiffness and body in a dark blue-gray shade, and trimmed the gown in black silk velvet. These are both reasonable mundane fabric options to stand for what was used in-period.

The gown was fully hand-sewn, using tailoring techniques passed down from historical tailors and in some cases still in use today. My primary introduction to these techniques was by Matthew Gnagy in an in-person workshop¹¹, bolstered by further study with him in later years and additional information from the examples in *Patterns of Fashion, The Tudor Tailor*, and others.

Though my hooks and eyes are commercially produced, hooks and eyes like them have been used since well before the 1600's to close garments.

Overall, this garment is authentic in look and feel, with material that are exceptionally close to period, accurate design and construction, with a special effort made to achieve total period effect.

⁹ *The Modern Maker, Volume 2* page 11

¹⁰ *The Typical Tudor*, p 29

¹¹ Conversations with Matthew Gnagy, in-person and online

Materials

For the Gown:

- Wool 'broadcloth' in dark gray, ~4 yards (very approximate yardage)¹²
- Silk velvet in black, ~1 1/2 yards¹³
- Heavyweight 'Warsa' linen canvas in 'oatmeal', 7.5 oz¹⁴
- Heavyweight 'Pluto' linen canvas in 'gray', 8.5 oz¹⁵. Used for center front doublet stiffening
- Heavyweight wool melton, ~1 yd¹⁶. Used for padding and skirt stiffening
- Mid-weight wool melton, ~1/2 yd¹⁷. Used for lighter stiffening on CF of skirt.
- Silk taffeta in green¹⁸ and dark blue¹⁹, ~1 yard. Used for hem facings and sleeve linings.
- Black hooks & eyes²⁰
- Black Silk thread in TEX-46 and TEX-112²¹

Additional Tools:

- Hand sewing needles
- Tailor's open-top thimble
- Scissors and embroidery snips
- Tailor's chalk
- Pattern paper, pencils, rulers and right angles for drafting
- Bara tapes
- Cotton basting thread
- Sewing pins
- Steam iron (modern stand-in for a period cast-iron tool and a brazier)
- Beeswax

¹² Source: Mood Fabrics, NYC and online

¹³ Source: Mood Fabrics, NYC and online

¹⁴ Source: Gray Lines Linen, NYC and online

¹⁵ Source: Gray Lines Linen, NYC and online

¹⁶ Source: AK Fabrics, NYC

¹⁷ Source: AK Fabrics, NYC

¹⁸ Source: Fabric Place Basement, VA

¹⁹ Source: Silk Baron, CA and online

²⁰ Source: Stash

²¹ Source: Sil Threads Inc, NYC

Construction Techniques

For a step-by-step construction guide, see Appendix A.

I began by drafting a pattern based on the straight-front doublet in *The Modern Maker Volume 2* and others. I used marked Bara tapes in making the draft, specifically ones sized to my body while wearing the completed kirtle. I constructed a toile based on the pattern to check for fit, made minimal adjustments to the pattern, and then proceeded with my actual garment.

I cut out all necessary pieces in top fabric, interlining, padding, lining, and facings, making adjustments to each piece as necessary to allow for my planned tailoring. Additional facings and trim were cut and prepared as-needed during the construction process.



Back canvas panels with trimmed padding ready for pad stitching



Dramatic curve in pad-stitched front canvas



Prepared front canvas ready for flatlining

I pad-stitched the front and back padding to the canvas interlining, using patterns of stitches that introduce tension and shape the layers of linen and wool. This added structure and body to the previously flat pieces of linen, such that when held up to the body they wrapped around as one might expect them to do in the finished garment.

Next I flat lined the top fabric to the interlining, stretching it slightly as I did so. After trimming away the excess interlining and stretching certain areas as indicated in the patterns with a hot iron and lots of steam, it was time to begin the initial assembly of the doublet bodice.

I first attached the neck piece, then joined the center back and side seams, all using strong thread in a backstitch. After sewing each seam, I used a much finer thread to run a line of pick stitches worked on the outside of the garment, catching the seam allowance in place and adding additional strength and stability along each seam.



Assembled bodice, with bottom hem folded up and lining partially sewn into place

While the shoulders were still open, I folded up and basted the bottom edge of the doublet bodice with fine thread, then pick stitched along the edge to catch the seam allowances and stabilize the edge. I lightly basted the linings into place and finished them in areas where it would not cause problems for later construction.

Then I closed the shoulders, using the same stitch technique as for the other main body seams: backstitch, then pickstitch.

It was time to address the skirts. First I joined the piecing to the main skirt pieces, still using my thick and thin threads but this time using a running backstitch along the main seams and pressing the seam allowance to one side, with pick stitches only on the side with the seam allowance. I then sewed up the long seams in the skirt, again using a backstitch and pressing open the seams before running a line of pick stitches down each side of the seam.

I finished the center front using my typical pattern for reinforcing skirt hems: folding the raw edge of the skirt over a piece of heavy wool facing, then using a piece of bias-cut silk with one edge folded down to cover the raw edge, felled into place. The unfolded edge of my bias facing is wrapped around the stiffening strip and whipped into place with small, careful stitches as it does show.



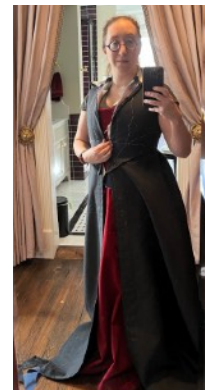
Cartridge-pleated skirt ready for sewing

I folded down the top of the back panel of the skirt to give me a cleanly finished edge, wrapping it over a strip of wool melton I'd prepared by steaming it into a curve and felling it together. This section could then be gathered to the bottom back edge of the doublet in cartridge pleats using whip stitches in strong thread.

I laid the front of the skirt horizontally inside the doublet point, folding it inside the seam allowance of the center front which I folded and pressed into place. Taking care not to pierce the top fabric, I secured the front skirt panels to the interlining with a backstitch, then felled the doublet's bottom edge to the skirt front panels. Finally I turned the bottom edge of the lining under and felled it into place.

With the skirt in place, I could close the center front openings and add eyelets, checking for fit. I then laid in the velvet facings, felling them down at the edges. Next came the collar lining, which I pinned into place before felling down all around the edges. This was also when I closed the armholes, snipping, turning, stitching, pick stitching, and pressing before turning the linings in to finish the opening.

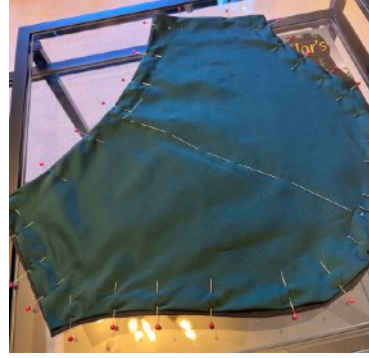
My next step was to sew the sleeves. I lay the linings on top of the top fabric and basted, then felled them into place taking care to create two mirrored sides rather than two identical pieces. After pressing, I whip



Fit check



Basted sleeve ready to be felled



With lining pinned into place



Finished sleeve pinned in place
and ready to be sewn

stitched the opening shut. The final sleeve step was to pin the finished sleeves to the gown and whip stitch them into place.

Finally, it was time to finish the gown. I leveled the skirts on top of the kirtle I'd wear beneath, trimming them with a roughly 1/2 inch seam allowance. I then lay additional steam-curved strips of wool melton to act as a stiffener along my edge, turning the seam allowance over the bottom. A strip of bias-cut silk with one long edge folded under was felled down to cover the raw edge, then wrapped around the top of the melton to hide it and secure it with small whip stitches.

The only task remaining was the trim. I cut strips of velvet on the straight grain, laid them in place, and felled them down, mitering corners where possible. This completed the gown.

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Appendix: Making a Gown from Start to Finish

These steps were primarily drawn from The Modern Maker, Volume 1 with modifications to allow for the different manipulations required for a woman's doublet and to attach a skirt. The doublet being constructed is listed in The Modern Maker, Volume 2 as a 'straight-front' doublet, meaning that the front closure lies straight across the fabric rather than being curved, but they can be generally used for female-bodied doublets in-period.

Cut Pattern Pieces

1. Cut out all pieces pieces in top fabric.
2. Cut canvas & interlining for back pieces.
3. Cut front interlining, adding an extra 1/2" to all edges.
4. Cut two strips ~2" wide and the length of your bodice front. These will be pad stitched to the center front edge of your bodice to reinforce the closure edge.
5. Cut front padding from wool melton, using the patterns outlined for the doublet bodice you are using. In this case I used the pattern from p 129 & 130 of The Modern Maker Volume 2 and cut two layers before grading one significantly.
6. For the back lining, create a new pattern or modify your traced pattern to drop the back waist 3/8" and cut.
7. For the front lining, create a new pattern or modify the pattern as you trace it onto the fabric, dropping the waist 3/8" and adjusting the armhole by taking a small pinch of fabric from it. This pinch has the affect of raising the bottom of the armhole ~3/8" while blending the addition out in the front and back, and opening the underarm ~1/2 at the bottom of the armhole. See The Modern Maker Vol 1, p 43 for details.
8. Cut collar lining by lining up collar pattern pieces in a row, touching the next one, and chalking around them leaving 1/4" additional seam allowance along the top and bottom edges.

Building the Canvas & Flatlining

1. Trim/Grade top layer of padding as indicated in the Modern Maker Vol 2 patterns.
2. Padstitch the layers of padding to the canvas, both front and back, following the stitching patterns indicated in The Modern Maker Volume 1 and leaving room for the seam allowance to be folded back - don't forget that there is additional seam allowance included on these pieces!. Properly executed, this will result in a canvas that has 3-d shape and curves around the body all on its own.
3. Padstitch front support strips to the CF edges of the canvas, leaving room for the seam allowance to wrap around.
4. Baste all bodice top fabric pieces to their interlining. Moving forward, treat as one layer.
5. Referencing the diagram in The Modern Maker vol 2, stretch the prepared canvas and bodice pieces using a hot iron and lots of steam. Be careful not to flatten your padstitching while you work!

Assembling the Doublet Body - Part 1

1. Attach the front collar pieces to the necklines with a backstitch. Clip the seam, press it open, and pick stitch from the right side to hold the seam allowance in place and stiffen the seam edge.
2. Close the center back seam with a backstitch in strong thread. Clip where necessary, press open, and pick stitch from the right side.
3. Close the side back seams, again backstitching with a strong thread, clipping, pressing, and pick stitching from the right side.
4. Turn up the bottom edge of the doublet, using a herringbone stitch to tack it into place.
5. If you will be using a different fabric for the CF lining facing, this is the time to add it, leaving the bottom free to make adding the skirt simpler.

6. Baste the back and front lining pieces into place. Lap the folded edge of the front lining pieces over the flat edge of the back lining and fell or pick stitch into place. Do the same for the center back seam. Leave the seams relatively open at the shoulders.
7. Close the shoulders with a backstitch in strong thread. Clip, press open, and pickstich them to secure the seam allowance. Close the lining over each shoulder seam.
8. Optional: Add strip of bias-cut canvas to the collar, if it needs the additional structure. Note that I omitted this in my doublet body.

Assembling the Skirt

1. Join any piercings as needed, pressing the allowance to one side and pick stitching it in place.
2. Join the side seams of the skirt with a running backstitch. You may choose to leave a gap open for the pocket at this stage, or close it and open the seam later. Press the seams open and pick stitch from the right side to secure the seam allowance. Leave an amount at least equal to the distance between the waistline and the center front point of the bodice open.
3. Cut a strip of straight grain wool to act as wadding for your pleats. Use steam to shape it into a curve, then trim it to the width of your back pleats.
4. Fold the top edge of the back panel down over the wadding strip, then fold the raw edge under. This adds additional padding to your pleats and secures the back edge from fraying. The top of the wadding strip should be at the same height as the opening left at the top of your skirts.
5. Fold the center front edges of the skirt back and press.
6. Sandwich a straight strip of padding inside the folded center front edge and baste the folded edge down.
7. Add the facing strips. Cut the strips, then fold one edge in and press. Position, pin, and baste with the folded edge on the inside of the seam nearest the skirt opening. Fell this seam into place.

8. Fold the free edge of the facing strip around the padding strip. Using fine thread and small, careful stitches, whip the facing strip, skirt edge, and padding together. These stitches will show on the front of the skirt unless covered by trim.

Attaching the Skirt to the Bodice

1. Use your favorite method for cartridge pleating to gather the back skirt panel to the back bodice. I chose to use the magic pin method, dividing both my bodice and my skirt panel in half, pinning them at the middle, then pinning the divisions in half, and so on until it was pleated to my satisfaction. I fastened them to the bodice with whip stitches using a strong silk thread.
2. Lay the front skirt panels inside the front panels, taking care that the skirt is encased in the turn back at the center front. These are basted and then backstitched into place, taking care to stitch to the interlining and not the lining.
3. Working from the outside, fell the bodice to the loose skirt on the front panels
4. Working from the inside, fell the lining to the bodice & skirt at the bottom of the bodice, all the way around. The skirt is now attached to the bodice.

Assembling the Doublet Body - Part 2

1. If center front facings have not yet been added, add them now. In my doublet I waited until this point to ensure I knew how far down to take the facings without adding additional bulk to the front of the bodice.
2. Fell collar lining into collar on all edges using small, neat stitches.
3. Turn armscye edges in, clipping as necessary, and sew. Pickstitch each seam open, then close the lining and fell into place.
4. Add hooks and eyes or other closure to the doublet center front opening.

Assembling and Attaching the Sleeves

1. Baste the sleeve linings to the sleeves, taking care to build a left and right sleeve rather than two lefts or two rights.
2. Fell the lining to the sleeves, leaving a slight overlap of top fabric wider than the lining all round. Pickstitch at the sleeve opening and side seams if you feel so inclined.
3. Close the sleeve seams using a whip stitch with strong thread.
4. Gather the sleeve to the sleeve head, using your preferred method to handle any fullness in the top of the sleeve. Secure with a whipstitch using strong thread.

Finishing the Skirt Hem

1. Test your gown skirt length by wearing it over whatever garments it will be regularly layered with. Mark the edge, fold it back to test, and when you are confident in the length trim it down, leaving ~1/2" of seam allowance on the bottom.
2. Cut strips of stiffening/padding long enough for the circumference of your skirt. You will likely need several lengths. Use your iron and steam to shape these into a curve.
3. Lay your strips of padding on the bottom edge of the skirt with the wider edge of the curve pointed to the bottom. Wrap the skirt seam allowance over the padding edge and pin in place. Once fully pinned, baste.
4. Cut bias strips of skirt facing fabric wider than your skirt stiffener and press one long edge under, similar to the treatment for the center front facing. Lay the strips onto the skirt hem, covering the basted raw edge of the top fabric, and secure first with pins and then with basting stitches.
5. Fell the skirt facing to the skirt, taking care not to sew through to the outside of the skirt.
6. Wrap the free edge of the skirt facing around the skirt stiffener and tuck it into place. Pin, baste, and whipstitch into place. The final stitches should be in very fine thread using small stitches - these will show unless covered by trim.

7. Add any desired trim or embellishments. Your garment is complete!