

# Late 16th C Embroidered Jacket (Incomplete)

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## 1 Item

An in-process embroidered jacket inspired by extant English jackets, c 1600 CE.



Figure 1: Jacket panel in progress. 01/26/2025

## 2 Context

Single and multicolored jackets with silk or wool embroidery on undyed linen are relatively common surviving garments from 16th and early 17th c England, held in multiple museum collections in the UK. Likely the most famous of these is the Layton jacket (fig 2), named after Margaret Layton, its wearer in a 1620 portrait by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger. Made from relatively accessible materials, the primary cost of jackets such as these is time (one reproduction of a simple monochrome jacket required over 1900 hours of embroidery alone (Mellin (2008))), making them the purview of women who had either the leisure time



Figure 2: Left: Layton jacket; polychrome silk and gilt thread on linen with silk lining. Jacket worn by Margaret Layton in portrait by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, also shown. Unknown (c 1610-1650), Gheeraerts (c 1620) Right: Portrait of Elizabeth Vernon, Countess of Southampton, in an embroidered jacket, pair of bodies, and petticoat. Unknown (c 1600)

to spend on embroidery or the wealth to pay for professional embroiderers. Only a few of the garment references surveyed in *The Typical Tudor* (8 of over 57,000) clearly alluded to embroidery (Malcolm-Davies & Mikhaila (2022)), again heavily implying that these heavily embroidered jackets belonged to wealthy merchant or noble women. However, portraits of women wearing these garments tend to be informal or even intimate, such as the Elizabeth Vernon portrait (fig 2), indicating the jacket's relative informality for at least the noble women who wore them.

Whether the wearers embroidered these jackets themselves or commissioned professional embroiderers is an open question; embroidery was a highly prized skill for noble women at the time, and many of the jackets use a relatively simple set of stitches, with irregularities and missed motifs, that point to an amateur creator (Kratts (2013)). Others both display a high level of uniformity and skill and are incredibly similar to each other (see a jacket held in the Costume Museum of Bath and the Burrell Jacket in Glasgow), indicating a possible professional workshop (Kratts (2013), Arnold (1985)).

Either class of designer could pull from texts such as *A Schole-House for the Needle* (Shoreleyker (1632)), a 1632 book of embroidery and lace patterns, for inspiration. I've drawn heavily on the Maidstone jacket (fig 3), along with other extant jackets and coifs for motifs.



Figure 3: Right: Maidstone Jacket; monochrome red silk on linen. Held at the Maidstone Museum in Kent, UK. Left: Barberry jacket; monochrome wool on linen. Unknown (1610-1620 CE)

### 3 Materials

Silk thread on linen.

In a survey of 23 extant embroidered jackets (Kratts (2013)), nine are monochrome; two embroidered with red thread and the remainder in black. Two of these black jackets are embroidered with wool thread (see fig 3); the remaining, including all the red jackets, are embroidered with silk thread. All polychrome jackets use silk and metallic thread. Extant shirts with counted pink and blue silk embroidery (Arnold (2008)) combined with the variation in color of the extant monochrome jackets encouraged me to use the coral silk thread available in my stash.

Among both the monochrome and polychrome jackets, only two of the 23 are embroidered on silk; the remainder are on undyed linen (Kratts (2013)). The heavy cream I chose has an appropriate weight for a jacket and a similar scale to an early 17th c embroidery I was able to view at the Detroit Institute of Arts (see fig 4).

Six of the 23 surveyed waistcoats are lined, three with silk or silk shag (Kratts (2013)); given the delicacy of the embroidery and the relative simplicity of my design, I have chosen to eventually line it with linen. I haven't yet chosen whether it will be fastened with ribbon ties, hooks and eyes, or pins, all of which appear in the historical record.



Figure 4: Embroidery sampler; silk on linen. Unknown (c 1625 - 1650)

## 4 Method

I've begun with a self-drafted pattern based on The Tudor Tailor's waistcoat pattern (Mikhaila & Malcolm-Davies (2006)) and Patterns of Fashion 4's interpretation of the Layton and Burrell embroidered jackets (Arnold (1985)). I used a draping method, starting with a previous fitted kirtle pattern; at the time, a jacket like this would likely have been patterned by a professional tailor using personal tapes and a layout manual, as described in The Modern Maker Vols 1 and 2 (Gnagy (2014) and Gnagy (2018)).

The next step is to design the embroidery and transfer it to the body fabric. In period, the design would have been done on a heavy paper or parchment pattern and transferred via pricking and pouncing; ie, holes would be pricked in the pattern outlining the embroidery design. This pattern is then laid over the ground fabric and a bag of fine charcoal dusted (pounced) over it to transfer the pattern (Arnold (1985)). The dots are finally connected with an ink pen; these ink lines are often visible in areas of the final piece (see fig 5). I've chosen to draw my design on the original fabric pattern using a gel pen, then trace it onto the ground linen with a lightbox for reasons of speed and ease, though I have used ink on the ground fabric to maintain the look of a pricked and pounced embroidery. I recommend a micron pen for this step; I found that fine point sharpie bleeds, and water soluble inks are a risk for future wear. I will be trying the period method as a part of this project in the future.



Figure 5: Left: closeup view of forehead cloth with decayed silk thread, revealing inked design below. Silk and silver gilt thread on linen. Unknown (c 1600 - 1615). Right: prepared pattern pieces with silk thread.

After transfer, the textile is mounted into a slate frame and stitching begins. Period practice would have been to mount the entire length of cloth onto a frame (Arnold (1985)) to preserve fabric, but due to the size of my slate frame I have chosen to rough cut each pattern piece and embroider them separately. An interesting detail is the order in which the gussets were embroidered: on the Maidstone and Layton jackets, among others, they seem to have been embroidered after the gussets were sewn in (Arnold (1985), Kratts (2013)). In other jackets, the gussets were embroidered, then inserted. I've chosen to insert the gussets, then embroider them.

My stitches are a combination of backstitch, occasional double running stitch, and running stitch fill. All were used on the extant monochrome jackets, though stem stitch is more commonly used as the outline stitch (Mellin (2008), Kratts (2013)). Many of the extant jackets also have messy backs, knots, and traveling threads; I have chosen to follow that example (see fig 6).

## 5 Future Steps

After the embroidery is complete, I plan to handsew the jacket using waxed linen thread. The seams and outer edges will be outlined, though whether with blanket stitch, a fingerloop braid, or some other method is still undecided. These treatments also vary on the extant pieces (Kratts (2013)). The lining will be slip stitched in, as seen on the Burrell jacket (Arnold (1985), fig 7). I have many hours of embroidery ahead of me, and I look forward to presenting the completed piece in future.



Figure 6: Vine Bodice; wool on linen. Full jacket and detail of underside. Unknown (c 1580 - 1620)



Figure 7: Burrell Jacket; polychrome silk and silver gilt thread on linen. Unknown (c 1615 - 1618)

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