

## 16<sup>th</sup> Century Woman's Brimless Hat

***An upper-class lady's hat in the style of England and France, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century***

### ***Period Materials and Methods***

16<sup>th</sup> century adult women in France and England wore a variety of hats. The brimless hat was a style found in the portraits of upper-class and noble women in England and France in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 16th century.

So few extant hats remain from this period that it's difficult to know exactly how they made their hats. However, an important find from Little Sampford Church in Essex, England revealed a 14<sup>th</sup> century hat that used felted wool for its shape and was covered in silk. The blue felted wool was molded to form a seamless crown and brim.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that the felted wool technique, which was a common hat-making method, was used to create the 16<sup>th</sup> century brimless hats as well.

### ***Period Portraits***

The portrait below left of Mary Queen of Scots was painted when Mary was 9 and living in France. Note that the arc of her brimless hat is shaped so the front is taller than the sides and back. Not all of the brimless hats had this feature – many were equally sized all around – but several of them had this shape. Note also the trim and jewellery. On the right is a crayon drawing of French princess Marguerite de Valois from a few years later showing the equally sized version of the brimless hat.



*1551, Mary Queen of Scots*



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<sup>1</sup> The hat is in the care of the Textile Conservation Center at the University of Southampton in England.

In the portrait on the right, Queen Elizabeth, who often adopted the styles of the French nobility (and the Spanish and the Italian too!), is wearing a similarly-shaped brimless hat in 1565, 14 years after Mary's portrait was painted. This was a popular and enduring style.



*Unknown English lady, 1560*

The hat appears less frequently as the century goes on, replaced by a shape that I believe evolved from the brimless hat and possibly the French Hood. The difference between this hat in the portrait on the left and the brimless hat is that it has a distinct upper billiment around the crown of the hat, and the lower billiment lies flatter on the head than does the standing side of the brimless hat. These are the features that appear to derive from the French Hood.



*Elizabeth I: Portrait with verses, 1561*

### ***My Method and Choices***

I must confess that I did not try to use period methods to construct the base. I chose to use plastic needlepoint canvas instead, since I lack period hat-making supplies and also prefer to make my hats as strong as possible. (I have a bad habit of stuffing them inside crowded hatboxes.)

I fitted a paper pattern to my head, then cut and shaped the canvas sides and crown until I was satisfied with the shape. I included the slight point because I like the look and wanted to draw attention to the front beading pattern and pendant. I then attached the pieces and cut out the lining and fabric.



The lining is a blue synthetic fabric, although they would probably have used linen or silk. (I prefer natural fabrics for authenticity and comfort, but had the lining on hand.) The fabric covering is a blue silk. Regarding my color choice, there is a persistent myth that the Elizabethan upper class and nobility did not wear blue. That would be news to the Earl of Cumberland, whose 1590 portrait by Hilliard is on the left.

I used a silk dupioni so you can see surface slubs close-up, and in period they were more likely to use a perfectly smooth silk satin. There is some evidence that slubbed silk may have been used in garments by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but probably not in noble garments. However, the slubbing on my silk is subtle so I went with it. I also used glass pearls for

the beading pattern. The smaller pearls are pre-strung. The Elizabethans used pearls for decoration and strung pearls into necklaces, but I cannot prove that they used pre-strung pearls for trimming like I did.

My blue and gold trim is commercially made, but they might have twisted a similar one out of blue cord and silver-gilt cord, which was called "Venice gold" or "gold cable." Since glass pearls were often referred to as "Venetian pearls," I'm wondering what the Elizabethans *really* thought about Venice!

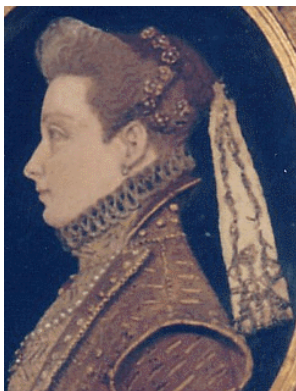
To the right is a crayon drawing in the style of Francois Clouet. This drawing of Marguerite de Valois, dated around 1570, shows a pendant on the bottom of the hat's edge. The pendant on my hat is a similar style to the enameled piece shown on the left. It was one of the more than 200 pieces of jewelry discovered in the Cheapside Hoard, which are



dated to the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. My pendant has tiny "diamond" fragments on it. I'll take this opportunity to dispel a myth about period gems that keeps cropping up, that "*they didn't facet their gemstones.*" Of course they did. They just didn't facet it to the degree we do now.



In 1475, Louis de Berquen, of Bruges, Flanders, used a polishing wheel (a scaife) to cut the Sancy Diamond in a rose cut shape for Charles Le Temeraire, Duke of Burgundy. Here is a picture of the 55-carat Sancy Diamond, which today resides in the Louvre. Dated 1475, it hardly supports the idea of "no faceting." Although my diamond fragments are not in the same league as the Sancy, Renaissance jewelers used the same cut to facet diamond fragments like the ones you see here.



There are a few portraits showing the brimless hats with attached veils. I like the look, so adopted it from a 1575-1580 portrait of a lady with an attached and patterned veil.

## References

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