

There's More Than One Method to Elizabethan Clothing

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A lot of times in historical sewing circles we get caught up in finding “the right way” to make a gown, doublet, or piece of clothing. It comes from a good place. We love historical clothing. We love recreating patterns, researching stitching techniques, and doing everything we can to make sure our piece is **right**. But many times that love and our very best intentions can lead us to place where we start to believe clothing was nearly always made the same way. “Gowns always laced up the back or fastened with hooks and eyes in the front”, “All jackets have 5 gores”, “Elizabethans only used two part sleeves”, “All embroidery was vine work and flowers”. You come across these ideas all the time. And in a way they are right. There are a lot of two part sleeves in Elizabethan Fashion and vine and flower designs were extremely popular in Elizabethan and early Stuart embroidery. But in the end they are not fully correct. Clothing was not only made one way. Gowns and kirtles closed several different ways including (but not limited to) lacing up the back, lacing up the sides, fastening up the front with hooks and eyes, buttons, and frogs.



A blackwork jacket in the Manchester Art Gallery

An excellent example is the embroidered jackets of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Many of the jackets you see in portraiture and museums are embroidered in polychrome silks in flower and vine patterns. However, that is not the only way they were made. One example of a jacket created using different methods is [the gorgeous jacket at the Manchester Art Gallery](#). It is embroidered in a flower and chevron design rather than intertwining vines. It's also a monochrome embroidery, embroidered in black silk, with the larger flowers filled with diaper patterns. Jackets also varied with respect to the number of gores, stitches used, and whether the closed with ties, hooks and eyes, or other methods.

There is a wide and rich variety to the way fashion was made during the Elizabethan period. Some methods were more popular than others but that did not mean they were the only methods

used at all. When you are working on clothing projects take some time to enjoy and experiment with the wide variety of clothing styles and sewing methods used throughout your period of study. I think you will be pleasantly surprised by the wide variety available to you.