

16<sup>th</sup> Century Fashion Dolls:  
Evolution from Fashion to Toy  
By: Lady Mairin O’Cadhla

As a child I have always wondered, where did toys come from? How did they get their start, what were they made of? Renewing my interest as an adult thus began my research into the world of historical toys and games, most specifically dolls. It became a little passion of mine and leads me into other related interests such as a chancellor minor for my local shire. I have made various replicas of 16th century fashion dolls. These were inspired and based upon the portrait of Arabella Stuart as a child, dated 1577 by an unknown artist. (Fig 2 on pg 4)

The listing of my materials I used for this project is mostly modern. I found that the intended use of the dolls would make the durability factor important and I adjusted my materials accordingly. Which lead me to use more modern materials compared to the materials I would have used, if there was no specific purpose intended for the dolls after completion. Items used were six; 11 inch Chic fashion vinyl dolls with original plastic shoes, period shoes didn’t work for their molded feet designed for a heeled shoe. Nail polish remover and acrylic paint was used to repaint the facial features to a more period appearance for each doll, which were to represent the six wives of Henry VIII. So their features were made to better portray depictions of each Queen found in Holbein paintings of the time. As a closer representation to period dolls I used six; 6 inch muslin wired framed stuffed dolls with bead eyes and for child’s toy representation I used a 20 inch vintage doll with vinyl face, hands, and feet for this project.

Other materials used were; stiffened felt, plastic boning, hot glue, cotton/polyester thread in various colors, metal needles, suede and chord trim, gold chord trim, cotton lace, faux pearl beaded strands, metal strait pins, faux pearl corsage pins, polyester blue green gold trim, brass jewelry chain, and brass fasteners beads and charms. For the clothing and gowns I used silk and polyester velvet, cotton and polyester brocade, poly cotton damask, thin suede material, 100% unbleached linen and 50/50 rayon cotton blended fabrics.

The materials used by Tudor and Elizabethan tailors for these dolls, would have started with items they had available to them in their respective careers. The original doll had a linen or silk stuffed body with wire frame inside the linen shell. The doll body was stuffed with saw dust, cloth or fiber wadding, or wool, which ever was most available and dependent on price in the region in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, dolls were also made out of other materials like metal, clay or wood in this period. (Arnold 107) Outer clothing of the doll was made of the finest fabrics and trims; silk, fine wool, brocades, and damasks. Tailoring of the clothing was made in the popular fashions of the time, then hand sewn onto these miniature dolls, some detail items were attached with hot wax. These dolls were shown by the tailor to their exclusive customers, as way to gain interests in their skills and as advertisement for their trade as a tailor. Thus began a new way of trade for foreign fashions to reach other lands, this was referenced in a letter to Helena von

Snakenborg, Marchioness of Northampton by her sister Mrs. Karin Bonde living in Safstaholm in April of 1604(Arnold 157).

These dolls being much more portable than full size garments, the figurines were later discarded, when different fashions became popular. Noted in the painting of Arabella Stuart, she is holding a fashion doll made in fashionable clothing from a few years earlier, than the fashions of 1577 the year the painting is dated (Arnold 157). With the reference of Arabella Stuart's painting of her as a child, we can conclude that the dolls were handed to children as playthings, when the doll was no longer a new fashion source. (Arnold 157) I focused on just the 16<sup>th</sup> century fashion dolls, their uses, and transition into a child's plaything. Though there is documentation that shows forms of doll like objects much farther back in history as early as Egyptian times.

My interpretation of 16<sup>th</sup> century fashion dolls were made as a fashion teaching aid and can be used for light play by older children. I believe a period doll would not stand up as well to light play or handling in a classroom environment. Period materials such as making the various types of fabrics and carving or sculpting doll bodies, is very time consuming and also expensive. I can buy a \$3 vinyl doll and get a more accurate representation of the human form to dress period clothing on, than what I can artistically sculpt out of clay or carve out of wood. The materials used for the replica dolls, have been taken into consideration for their durability and close representation to the fashions of the period.

Here is how I made my dolls from start to finish. Though the materials I used are not all period, the method I used to make the clothing and outfit the dolls is constructed the nearly same as making period clothing for a full-size person with some changes. Here are those steps:

Locate material suitable for clothing and accessories in the right proportions for the doll; these should be close to period types of fabrics you would use for your own garb. For this project, I used scrap fabrics from my own Tudor garb projects and made similar corresponding garb for these dolls. You want to look for similar materials listed above in smaller patterns to accommodate the dolls size, so the scale looks proportional to your doll. Cut out the patterns for the garb and hand sew all the pieces to construct the layers for the garments. You would need make the following layers for a Tudor period gown; a shift (chemise), kirtle (corset), farthingale (hoop skirt), over gown( outmost layer), then hat, jewelry and accessories. After garment is constructed, then sew it on the doll, the garments are not meant to be removable. Looking at the reference photo of a doll circa 1585, the doll is 15cm high and dressed in rich fabrics and trim fitting her size, there isn't evidence from the picture that the clothing is removable (Arnold, pgs 157-158). (Fig1. on pg 4) Next add trim to the outer garments and make the hat or headdress for the respected time period being represented by the doll. Continue to accessorize the doll with miniature jewelry, jeweled or beaded decoration for the hat, gown, girdle belt, and shoes.

(Note) One might have to modify the dolls looks, especially make-up to be more suitable for a period appearance. Some of the layers and styling of garments can be modified to better portray different types of garb. One could make the doll garb represent fashion from multiple foreign countries and so on. You would want to reference time period paintings or costume history sources, for more accurate depictions of the fashion you would want to represent in your doll.

For the garment patterns, I referenced the graphed patterns in *The Tudor Tailor* and found them to scale down nicely. One could use a printer's percentage setting to help achieve the proper scale, if one didn't want to draw the pattern out on paper. If you are going to modify the pattern it is best to draw it out on paper with your changes. *Lynn McMaster's website* also had a pattern for a linen bodied doll that I felt suited the look for the 6inch dolls. Plus her website has great reference materials of period dolls and her representations of 16<sup>th</sup> century reproduction dolls she made. I modified the pattern for the clothing from *The Tudor Tailor*, not using the same bodice methods suggested, the clothing is not meant to be removed and really didn't need the extra bulk of lining. I also scaled the patterns down to fit a 6, 11, and 20 inch doll.

The 11-inch dolls were dressed in shifts that had black work on the collar and cuffs. Additionally, these dolls had corsets and a modified farthingale to achieve the proper silhouette for early to later Tudor gowns. The 6-inch doll has no chemise but a little lace to represent a ruffle at the collar and sleeves to give an impression of a shift. The smaller the dolls, the more bulky layers become. I tried making a chemise for these dolls and it made them look out of proportion in their waists. The 20-inch doll has a full chemise and pantaloons underneath her dress with lace trim that matches the color of the outer dress. My findings turned out that if I gave her a hoop skirt and corset, when she sat down you could see up her dress. Since she is soft bodied and meant for children's play, I left the corset and farthingale out. Other construction issues were in making the dresses fit tightly, it was straining on my thread and had to rework some areas to makes sure it was going to fit. Going over my seams twice did help strengthen them and made the gowns fit correctly.

For appropriate hat patterns, I referenced the *Tudor Tailor* and *Holbein's Portrait Drawings* to look at different representations of French hoods and English gabled hoods. Since both styles of hats were used in the time period between 1500 and 1550's, I was able to scale patterns down to doll sizes. I made bases for the hats out of stiffened felt using some period hat patterns in the *Tudor Tailor*. I used *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd* to find further information on dolls of the time and their uses. For further accessory information, I referenced Norris's *Tudor Costume and Fashion* for details on hats, jewelry, shoes, under garments and styles of different gowns in the time period between 1500 and 1595.

IMAGES PENDING A HAND-DRAWN VERSION

Fig 1

Fig 2

Fig 1. A doll 15cm high, possibly a fashion doll, c.1585.Livrustkammaren, Stockholm. (Arnold 157)

Fig 2. Lady Arabella Stuart, aged twenty-three months, holding a doll which may have been made to convey fashion news and then handed down as a toy. Panel painting by an unknown artist, 1577 National trust, Hardwick Hall. (Arnold 158)



Fig 3. These are the 11-inch vinyl dolls that I modified into representations of 16<sup>th</sup> century fashion dolls. These dolls represent Henry VIII and his six wives. Can you figure out which Queen is which?



Fig 4. This 20-inch doll has a vinyl face, hands and feet. She is a soft bodied doll and is meant for gentle child's play, mainly to carry about. She is inspired by Katherine of Aragon.



Fig 5. These are the 6-inch muslin dolls; Henry VIII and his six wives.

(Note) The dolls hats and jewelry have been more elaborately decorated since these pictures were taken. This is meant to show you the basic finished look and can be made to be fancy or plain depending on what station of life you want your doll to represent historically. These pictures don't do them justice there is much detail needed to be seen in person. The replicas of 16<sup>th</sup> century dolls in figs 3, 4, and 5 won a blue ribbon and first place in the Toy Making Category at Ice Dragon 2010.

Sources:

Arnold, Janet, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*. W.S. Maney & Son LTD, Hudson Road, Leeds. 1988. ISBN 0-901-28620-6. pages 107,157-157

Hans, Holbein, *Holbein Portrait Drawings*. Dover Publications Inc. Mineola, New York. 1985. ISBN 0-486-24937-9. Pages 1,25,8,15-17,20-22,26,29,31,33,37,38,41

Lynn McMasters Webpage: <http://www.lynnmcmasters.com/>

Mikhaila, Nynia, and Malcolm-Davies, Jane, *The Tudor Tailor*, BT Batsford, Bramley Road, London W10 6SP. 2006. ISBN 0-713-48985-5. Pages 105-115

Norris, Herbert, *Tudor Costume and Fashion*. Dover Publications Inc. Mineola, New York. 1997. ISBN: 0-486-29845-0. Pages 267-270