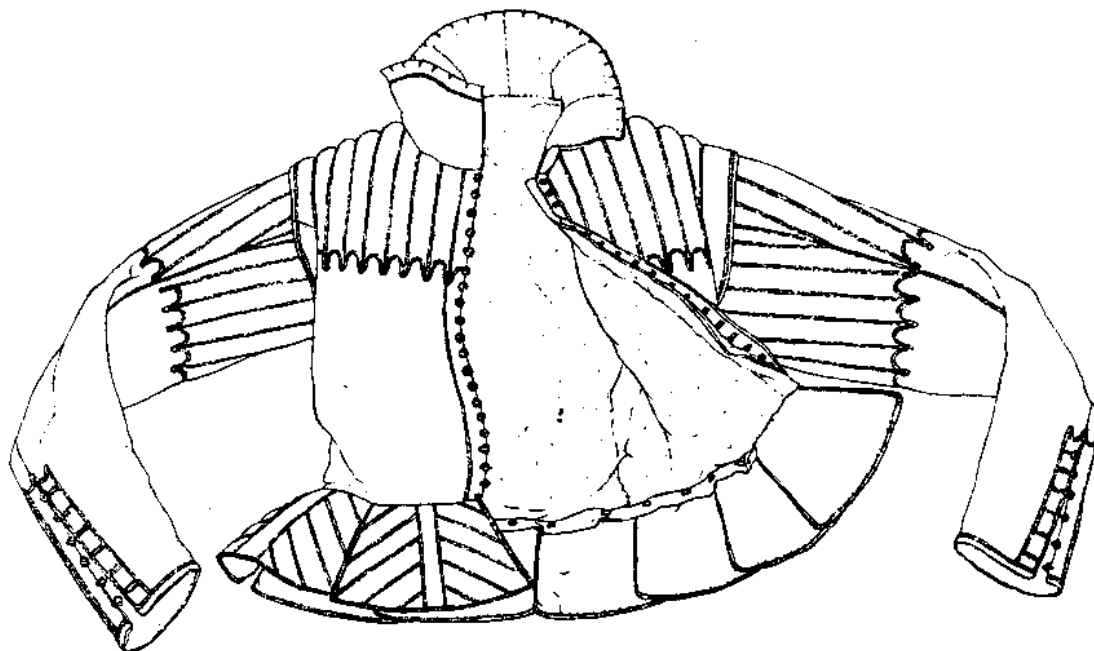


## Chapter 3— Buffe Coates and Clothynge

In this chapter, I will discuss the construction techniques of the sort of leather clothing that can be worn by a person of reasonable firmness in public. Attention is drawn to the *Flaying Act* of 1803, solely for reasons of the name and as it is only mentioned in the introductory paragraph, you are past it now.



Leather fencing doublet c. 1610 (Arnold, *Two Fencing Doublets*)

### Buff leather fencing doublets<sup>1</sup>

Apparently a civilian garment, a number of padded leather doublets survive from the period 1600 to 1615. One in the Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, another at the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh and one in a private collection are so similar, it has been suggested that they were some kind of uniform. While they differ in cut, and some are sleeveless, all have the same method of manufacture.

Made of thin buff-tanned leather, possibly doeskin, they are heavily padded across the chest, back, top of the sleeves and on the tabs. The body of the doublet is interlined with linen. Loosely spun cotton thread padding is packed between the two layers and secured with rows of stitching. A loose linen lining has been stitched inside each doublet, with a thin layer of cotton wool wadding held in place again with stitching. The cotton wool helps to keep the lower portion of the doublet in shape. Very little cotton wadding is used in places where the leather is heavily padded. Sleeves, where present, were interlined with linen and padded the same way as the body and lined with white linen. The padded lining hung clear of the buttonholes on the left front to hold the front smooth when buttoned up.

# c.1610 PADDED LEATHER DOUBLET

ROYAL SCOTTISH MUSEUM ACC. NO. 1977.237

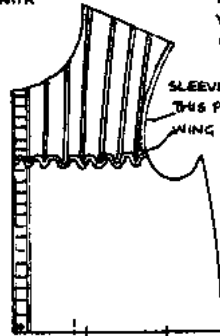
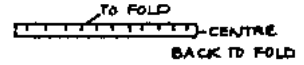
THE BODY OF THE DOUBLET IS MADE OF CREAM COLOURED LEATHER WITH A SMOOTH FINISH, INTERLINED WITH FAIRLY HEAVY WEIGHT YELLOW LINEN, THE COTTON PADDING IS PACKED TIGHTLY BETWEEN THE LAYERS OF LEATHER AND LINEN, HELD IN POSITION WITH ROWS OF STITCHING. A LOOSE Lining OF WHITE LINEN IS THEN STITCHED

INSIDE THE DOUBLET. A THIN LAYER OF COTTON WOOL WADDING IS CAUGHT TO THE INSIDE OF IT. THE STITCHES HOLDING IT IN POSITION CAN JUST BE SEEN ON THE RIGHT SIDE.

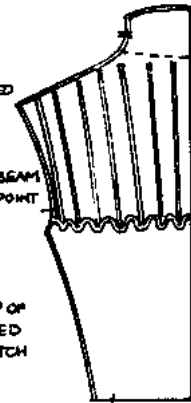
THE LINING IS COVERED WITH A STRIP OF GREEN SILK 25MM (1") WIDE ON BOTH FRONTS, BENEATH THE BUTTONS AND BUTTONHOLES. A LOOSE FLY FRONT IS MADE ON THE LEFT SIDE BENEATH THE BUTTONHOLES. THE PADDED LINEN IS FOLDED BACK AND FINISHED TO HANG SEPARATELY FROM THE BUTTONHOLES. THIS PADDING REACHES TO THE CENTRE FRONT AND HELPS TO HOLD IT IN GOOD SHAPE.



A STRIP OF LEATHER IS FOLDED IN HALF AND SMALL CUTS 16MM (5/8") DEEP MADE ON THE EDGE TO FORM THE PICKADIL, OR TABBED BORDER, FOR THE COLLAR, THE FOLDED EDGE OF THE GREEN SILK LINING IS SHIPPED AT THE SAME TIME.



THE COLLAR IS INTERLINED WITH YELLOW LINEN, POSSIBLY STIFFENED WITH GUM, THEN LINED WITH GREEN SILK.



THE COLLAR IS LINED ABOVE THE DOTTED LINE WITH GREEN SILK.

THE WORKED EYELET HOLES AT C.F. WAIST AND AT THE TOP OF THE TWO FRONT TABS ARE WORKED IN BLUSH GREEN SILK TO MATCH THE BUTTONHOLES.

LACING STRIP TO THIS POINT

THE LACING STRIP TO SUPPORT THE BRIGEECHES IS OPEN HERE



THE 19 BUTTONS FASTENING THE CENTRE FRONT ARE 8MM (5/16") IN DIAMETER. WOODEN BASIS WORKED OVER WITH GREEN, PADDED TO YELLOW, SILK AND SILVER-GILT THREAD. THE BUTTONS ON BOTH FRONT AND SLEEVES ARE SEWN ON VERY TIGHTLY WITH GREEN SILK. THE SHANKS ARE QUITE SHORT. THE BUTTONHOLES ARE 16MM (5/8") LONG, SEWN IN FINE, DEEP BLUSH GREEN SILK. THE OUTER END OF EACH BUTTONHOLE IS ROUND, THE OTHER END IS CONCEALED BENEATH THE BRAID.

THE BRAID AT THE CENTRE FRONT AND COVERING ALL THE LINES OF STITCHING FOR THE PADDING IS 3MM (1/8") WIDE. IT IS MADE OF BRIGHT GREEN SILK, NOW FADED TO YELLOW, AND SILVER-GILT THREAD WITH A YELLOW SILK CORE.

THE SECOND BUTTON UP FROM THE WRIST IS MISSING ON THE LEFT SLEEVE AND THE FOURTH BUTTON UP FROM THE WRIST ON THE RIGHT SLEEVE. ON THE LEFT SLEEVE THE TOP BUTTON IS MADE WITH A DIFFERENT SHADE OF GREEN SILK.

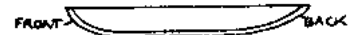
THE SKIRTS ARE SEWN TO THE DOUBLET FIRST, THEN THE STRIP FOR SUPPORTING THE BRIGEECHES, THEN THE LINING OVER IT.



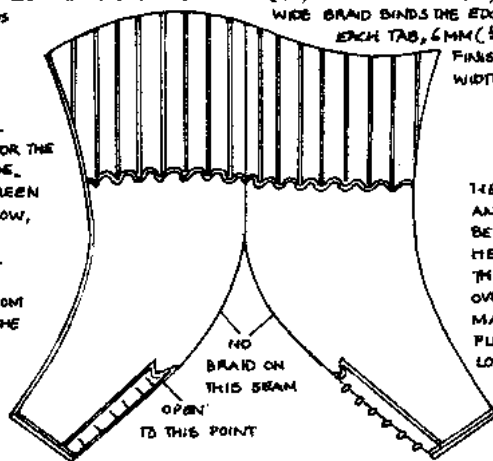
THE DOUBLET SKIRTS, OR WAIST TABS, ARE PADDED IN THE SAME WAY AS THE CHEST AND SLEEVES. THEY ARE LINED WITH GREEN SILK WHICH HAS ROTTED. A THIN LAYER OF COTTON WADDING IS LAID OVER THE YELLOW LINEN INTERLINING BENEATH. IT SEEMS TO BE STUCK TO THE LINEN WITH SOME KIND OF GUM IN PLACES. THE TABS OVERLAP EACH OTHER BY 13MM (1/2") AT THE TOP, 13MM (1/2")

WIDE BRAID BINDS THE EDGE OF EACH TAB, 6MM (1/4") FINISHED WIDTH.

C.B. THE LACING STRIP IS VERY STIFF, PROBABLY A LAYER OF CANVAS INSIDE THE WHITE LINEN LINING. THE EYELET HOLES ARE WORKED IN WHITE LINEN.



THE SHOULDER WING IS VERY STIFF AND IS PROBABLY INTERLINED WITH LINEN. IT IS LINED WITH DARK GREEN SILK AND 3MM (1/8") WIDE BRAID IS SEWN ROUND THE EDGE.



THE SLEEVE IS INTERLINED WITH WHITE LINEN AND THE COTTON PADDING IS PACKED TIGHTLY BETWEEN THE LEATHER AND INTERLINING, HELD IN POSITION WITH ROWS OF STITCHES. THE STRAIGHT LINES OF BRAID ARE MOUNTED OVER THE LINES OF STITCHING, STILETTO HOLES MADE IN THE LEATHER, AND THE ENDS PUSHED THROUGH TO THE WRONG SIDE. THE LONG STRIP OF BRAID AT THE BOTTOM IS PUT ON LAST, ARRANGED IN A SERIES OF CURVES. THE SLEEVE IS LINED WITH WHITE LINEN, COVERED FOR A SHORT DISTANCE AT THE WRISTS WITH GREEN SILK.

BUTTONHOLES ON LEFT SLEEVE ARE WORKED IN SILK MATCHING THOSE ON THE FRONT. ON RIGHT SLEEVE THE SILK IS NOW YELLOWISH GREEN.

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The collar of each doublet was stiffened with an interlining of linen or hemp/ramie pad-stitched<sup>2</sup> through to the leather. Again this was lined with white linen. A 13mm wide pickadil<sup>3</sup> was stitched to the top of the collar, which was then lined with silk. The tabs are made the same way as the body, with rolled cotton candlewick firmly packed between the linen and leather for padding, and silk lining stitched over a thin layer of cotton wool.

A waistband or lacing strip of coarsely woven hemp or linen canvas covered with the same linen as used for the body lining was attached. Eyelet holes worked with linen thread are provided for tying the points that held up the pants in the age before Viagra™. Eyelet holes below the centre front of the waistband allow for a point to tie the two edges firmly together.

The Nürnberg doublet has twenty eyelet holes and nineteen buttons and buttonholes. The buttons are made of green silk and metal thread<sup>4</sup> worked over wooden bases. The silver thread is tied in a knot in the centre, forming something not dissimilar in appearance to a contemporary nipple button. Each button is 9mm diameter and 4mm in height. The buttonholes are worked in silk. The sleeves were open to the wrist with six buttons and buttonholes. Braid, 3mm wide, covers all the lines of stitching securing the padding. The leather was pierced with a stiletto and the ends of the braid were pushed inside. Decoration of lightly padded areas was done with silver thread.

While occasionally reported as arming doublets, they are too stiff to permit movement under armour and lack points for attachment of armour plates. A number of contemporary woodcuts show fencers wearing similar garments, right down to a similar stitching pattern on the back.

Patterns for the Edinburgh doublet is given above, the Nürnberg doublet is similar, but for a more full figure. If you plan to make one yourself, and lets face it, who wouldn't, chamois leather is probably the best modern material for the outside. From the photos in the article, I think the cotton wool is similar to hospital grade cotton wool batting available from pharmacists, although others disagree.

## Buff coats



**Detail, Portrait of Nathaniel Feinnes. The left sleeve ends at the elbow to accommodate an elbow gauntlet. (Blackmore pl 2)**



**An unknown officer by Dobson. (Blackmore, pl 3)**

The buff coat appears to be a military branch in the evolution of a civilian protective garment. The most likely immediate predecessor was the buff doublet of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the descendants being the buff doeskin frock coat or dress doeskin waistcoat of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

Buff coats were probably used far less in the seventeenth century than in many reenactment groups of the twentieth century, probably because they are a showy cliché. Having made that sweeping statement, I will now demolish it by pointing out Edmund Gayton, writing his *Pleasant Notes on Don Quixote* in 1654 equated wearers of “*bufe*” with “*souldiers*”.

Extant buff coats are sleeved, double sleeved or sleeveless. The lengths of the body and of the tabs vary, some have collars, others merely lace to the neck. An example from the Museum of the City of London appears to have fabric oversleeves. The coat in the *Treasures of the Tower of London* mentioned above weighs 4.54kg.

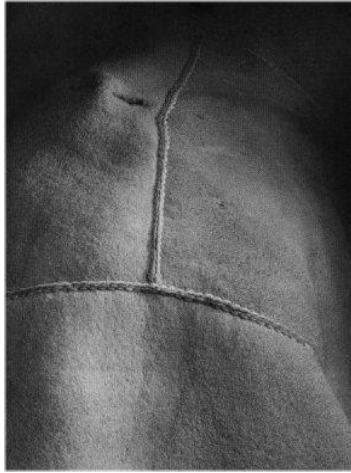
A significant restriction on the use of buff coats was the price. John Tubervill, writing to his father-in-law John Willoughby in 1640, laments “... they [buff coats] are exceedingly dear, not a good one to be gotten for under ten pounds, a very poor one for five or six pounds...”<sup>6</sup>. By way of comparison, the helmet of an ordinary cavalry trooper cost seven shillings and a breast and back cost about thirteen shillings at the same time<sup>7</sup>.

Buff coats were used as status symbols as well as for protection, “‘Trained band buff’ was a simple infantry version of the buff coat, usually with cloth sleeves. These are recorded as being popular with London soldiers...”<sup>8</sup> – the statute did not require them, but at six to ten pounds a throw, it would have been an ostentatious display of personal wealth. Some of the coats attributed to the London trained bands feature tasteful embellishment with silver wire. Waterer asserts that buff coats were “frequently worn with a gorget or cuirass... and nearly always some form of casque [helmet].”<sup>9</sup> He does not qualify or source this statement, but it does comply with the requirements of the legislation that stipulates “gorget, breast, back...”<sup>10</sup> To demonstrate that some of these people had a reasonable disposable income and were willing to blow it on items of fashion, we turn to a rant of Stubbes, (the Haaande of his day)

“Every Merchant his Daughter and Cottager his Daughter goes about in silken petticoats and taffeta kirtles, or ... cloaks [that] cost upwards of 20 pounds apiece...”<sup>11</sup>



**Painting of a Lady and an Officer. Note the similarity to the buff coat in the Museum of London, pictured on the following page.**



**Close-up of the stitching on a buff coat from Littlecote House. Royal Armouries III 1942. (Blackmore, fig 17)**

### ***Linings***

The vast majority of extant buff coats are lined<sup>12</sup> with wool, linen, silk or a combination of them. Those without linings frequently show evidence of linings being attached at some stage. Experimentally, the lining improves the wearing qualities of the garment, usually worn over a linen shirt. The lining also enables the coat to be put on and taken off more easily.



**Buff coat in the collection of Royal Armouries, Leeds, 1620-1650.**



**Buff coat with silver catches in front and silver wire braid on the sleeves, 1620-1630.**

**Museum of London**

## Gloves

By the fifteenth century, glove construction was a complex arrangement of webs, gores and inset pieces. A yet to be published 15<sup>th</sup> century workman's glove is in the Museum of London collection. It has no surviving thumb piece, but the hole for the thumb is an inverted teardrop shape with a triangular piece running up the thumb to provide the necessary space for movement.<sup>13</sup>



Glove, 1630-40 (Cumming)

Mid-brown suede leather decorated with applied bands of pale-blue satin ribbon overlaid with gold and silver gilt thread and trimmed with silver gilt lace and spangles and a silver gilt fringe.



17<sup>th</sup> Century Buff leather gloves

Total length 18 inches; the gauntlets fasten with four buttons. From *Royal and Historic Gloves and Shoes* by W.B. Redfern, Methuen, London 1904



Men's gloves, 1660-1680 (Cumming)

At the bottom is a cinnamon-coloured doeskin glove with looped decoration consisting of ribbons of green, blue, cream and silver tinsel. The glove in the centre is made from soft white leather, possibly doeskin, with green stitching outlining the fingers and thumb. At top left the glove is of white leather with an applied decoration of silver, white and orange ribbons, the wrist edged with silver gilt lace.



Gloves, c. 1650, Handkerchief, c. 1600 Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Many of the simpler gauntlet gloves from the late 1620s up to the 1640s survive in museum collections. They were often made in one piece, without the join between hand and cuff. The decoration is usually discreet, with a simple band of embroidery around the outer edge of the gauntlet, narrow outline motifs, or relatively plain bands of decoration. Fringed tops were a usual feature of these styles.<sup>14</sup>

On the more complex gloves of this period, the seam at the wrist (joining the leather glove to its embroidered silk gauntlet cuff) was often disguised by a band of ruched silk ribbon edged with metallic lace and spangles. The embroidery was usually carried out by professionals and the work is extremely skilled. There is some evidence cuffs were reused on different pairs of gloves after the originals wore out. The deliberately attenuated fingers were a fashion feature of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century when long, thin hands were admired. Queen Elizabeth I who was particularly proud of her narrow hands may have popularised this fashion.<sup>15</sup>

Around the mid seventeenth century a lighter style of glove came into fashion. The elaborate embroidery of earlier decades gave way to ribbon trimming, either applied in bands or given a three-dimensional effect with rosettes and loops.<sup>16</sup>

Armoured gloves are first mentioned in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, hand protection prior to this mainly being an extension of the hauberk sleeve. A French ordinance of 1296 specified a particular type of sheepskin for the glove and mentions a type of armouring similar to that in a coat of plates. Buff leather was in use by 1330 for gauntlets - both the straps to which the lames were attached and the glove stitched inside. A number of gauntlets with leather scales on the cuff are extant from the 17<sup>th</sup> century; one glove with buff leather scales in the Ashmolean Museum claimed to be 17<sup>th</sup> century might be earlier.



A seventeenth century woodcut<sup>17</sup> shows an archer (possibly Charles I) with archery gloves and bracer. The seams on the string fingers go to the middle of the back of the hand in a “vee” from between the fingers. The front seam probably ran across the base of the fingers. It is likely to have been thicker leather sewn in for those particular fingers. Rumour has it that there is an unpublished glove in the MoL showing these characteristics.

**Leather glove c. 1600-1625 with attached gauntlet of white satin embroidered with coloured silks, metal thread and seed pearls. The embroidery incorporates floral motifs and the phoenix rising from the flames. Trimmed with deep fringe of metal thread.**

**The Worshipful Company of Glovers' London, Historical Glove Collection, Accession number 23342**

### **Points**

Leather points were produced by the guild of Leathersellers. The guild of Pointmakers worked exclusively in silk or velvet. From the ordinance of 17 March 1327<sup>18</sup>, it seems that the best leather for making the laces and straps for armour was that of the roe deer, or “Roo”. It also appears that there was a thriving industry in dressing sheepskin to resemble “roo”, which “... would not last for two days if it was wetted”. According to the ordinance, it was all the fault of foreigners, who also “... haunted the brew-houses by night and seduced the apprentices and servants”. Another ordinance was enacted in 1467 covering much the same

points, although it doesn't mention if the foreigners were still at it with the apprentices and servants.

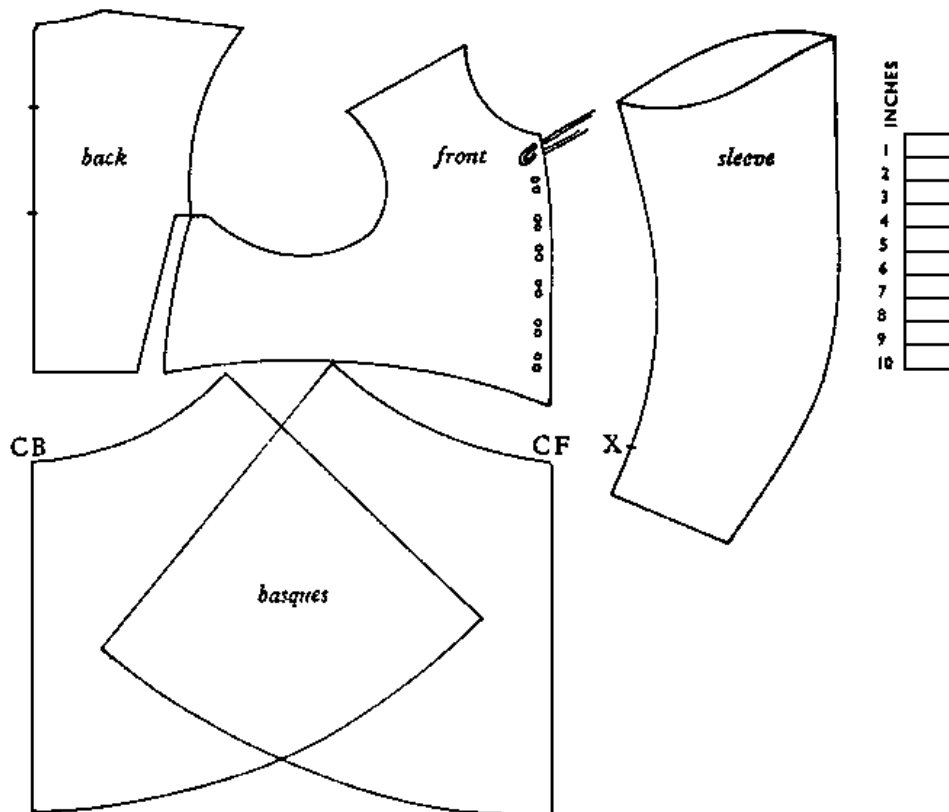
Arming points of varying width in tawed deerskin were usually tipped with ornamental tags called aglets. These were usually soft bronze but were sometimes made of precious metals. The tools used for making points were "hamour, file, shere and knyfe".

### Construction - Buff coats

Having measured your victim, transfer the pattern to paper or fabric and check the fit. When right, lay the pattern pieces on the leather, paying particular attention to which parts of the hide are used for different parts of the coat. The collar and underarms require more flexible or thinner sections than other parts.

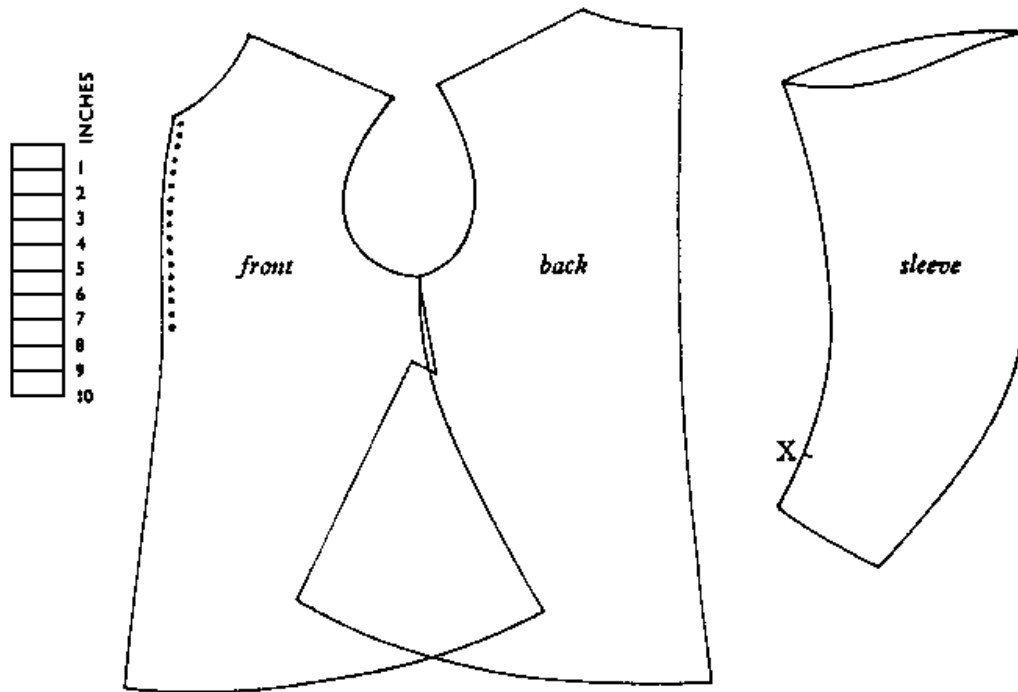
The panels are joined with butt stitching, which ensures that no ridges occur along the seams. The lining and fasteners are now attached. Fastening can be by lacing, rolled leather buttons or hooks and eyes, in many cases, the buttons or laces are for decorative effect only, the real fastening is done with hooks and eyes. A buff coat for an average height, average build person will need about 27 square feet of leather and about 45 meters of waxed thread.

Waugh gives two buff coat patterns<sup>19</sup>, taken from coats in the *Kostümausstellung*, which are reproduced below. The simpler coat appears similar in cut to one in the Tower Armouries (catalogue no. coat III.1445).



Buff Coat, c.1635. The sleeves are open to "X", and are bordered with silver lace. (Waugh, p25)





Buff Coat c. 1640. Sleeve seams are open to “X”, and are bordered with silver lace. (Waugh, p26)



A Pattern taken from a buff-coat at Littlecoate House. (Blackmore, figure 21)

### Construction - Gloves

Like the shoe chapter before it, this part is about the reconstruction of an item, not of a technique. Parts of the description below are modern or simplified versions of sketchily documented processes.

Stitching should be done using a small, wickedly sharp, diamond section awl and needle (glover’s needles leave triangular shaped holes which don’t show up in glove leather pre-1800, so probably weren’t used).

Gloves require a number of pieces, one for each the front and back, gussets for the sides of the fingers and thumb and thumb pieces. The most difficult part of making gloves is getting the correct pattern and the right amount of stretch in the leather before cutting the pieces. The cuff is trapezoidal, the short base the circumference of the glove with any seam allowance, the long base 50-150mm more, and the height 100-200mm. According to Waterer,<sup>20</sup> a rectangular piece of leather roughly the size of the finished pattern was cut first, stretched and finally cut to finished size. Chamois is a good cheap way to practice – if it works, you have a pair of buff tanned gloves.

Different stitches are used, depending on the weight of the leather. For stitching heavy leather a glover's stitch was used. Glover's stitch is based on of a regular running stitch. Start the same way as a running stitch, after making one stitch, run the needle and thread back through your original hole (you have now backtracked creating a stitch on both sides), you then go through the second hole, creating a second, longer stitch on top of your original stitch. Continue in this way ending up with a seam that alternates double stitches on either side of the project. A small whipstitch was used on lighter leathers.

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### Notes for Chapter 3

- 1 The main source for this type of garment and for the patterns is Arnold, *Two Fencing Doublets*.
- 2 Like a big tack-stitch. Ask Glenda.
- 3 A tabbed border — fold a piece of light leather and cut notches at regular intervals
- 4 Silver-gilt strip wound around a yellow silk core – Arnold, *Two Fencing Doublets*, p112
- 5 Waterer, J., *Leather and the Warrior*, p80
- 6 Beaby, p46
- 7 Norman and Wilson, p40
- 8 Green, D., *A Modest Achievement*, published in *The Routier*, Vol 15, No. 1, p 25
- 9 Waterer, J., *Leather and the Warrior*, p78
- 10 Directions for Musters, 1638
- 11 Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, 1583
- 12 Beaby, p45
- 13 Correspondence with Nikola Burdon, Assistant Curator, Early London History and Collections, Museum of London, 29 October, 1 November 1999
- 14 Cumming
- 15 Glovers'—6.html
- 16 Glovers'—8.html
- 17 Gervase Markham's *The Art of Archerie*, 1634, frontispiece
- 18 cited in Waterer, *Leather in Life, Art and Industry*, p90
- 19 Waugh, p25, 26
- 20 Waterer, J., *Leather in Life, Art and Industry*, p198-9