

Gloves and Muffs and Masks, Oh My!  
By Baronne Belphoebe de Givet

William Harrison, in his *Description of England in Shakespeare's Youth* published in 1575, records that "Women's Buskes, Mufs, Fanns, Perewigs, and Bodkins, were first devised and used in Italy by Curtezans, and from thence brought into France and there received the best sort of gallant ornaments, & from thence came into England about the time of the Massacar in Paris". The later is a reference to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, which took place on August 24, 1572 during the Wars of Religion under the reign of Charles IX.



Figure No. 1

**MUFFS:** In addition to Harrison's description, Cesare Vecellio, in the second edition of his fashion book *Habiti antichi, et moderni di tutto il Mondu*, published in 1598, shows a woodcut entitled "Winter Costume of Venetian noblewomen and wealthy ladies." On a closer inspection, the lady appears to be carrying a large muff (Figure 1). We can even see the little tufts of fur coming out of the borders, as well as what appear to be large buttons. It is difficult to tell from a woodcut what shape this accessory would have had, but it appears to me that it looks more envelope-shaped



Figure No. 2

than tubular. My theory is that an envelope-shape would have made sense for large muffs, as a tube would have been much less practical to carry around. Just look at the size of the muff worn by the lady featured in an embroidered valance, c. 1588-90, which is currently in the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum (Figure 3). I believe that a large, semi-soft envelope-shaped affair might have been easier to slip on those sleeves and carry around than an unwieldy large tube.

There is, however, plenty of pictorial evidence showing tubular muffs, one such can be found on a miniature in the margin of a poem written by Georges de la Motte, a Huguenot refugee, and presented to the Queen in 1586, which exists in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (MS Fr. e.I, f.13v) (Figure 2). This illuminated miniature shows Queen Elizabeth, wearing a silvery white cloak, or possibly a shoulder rail, over a black gown, a black muff embroidered with gold thread hangs from a ribbon. Also of note is the portrait of a lady said to be Eleanor Verney, Mrs William Palmer, Queen Elizabeth's god-daughter, attributed to Sir William Segar, c. 1590. This is part of the Collection at Parham Park, a detail of which you will see below in Figure 4. In that regard, those tubular muffs seem to be narrower than the large, envelope-type ones.



Figure No. 3

According to Andre Blum, in his volume *The Last Valois*, it is reported that King Henri III of France was fond of "perfumes and cosmetics, ear-rings, velvet or satin muffs lined with fur – in fact, a whole range of modes formerly reserved for the use of women." Another reference to Parisian fashion for wearing muffs appears in Janet Arnold's *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd (QEWU)*: "Amyas Paulet was also instructed to get Elizabeth [Queen] a muff or 'countenance (so they call it here)' in Paris in 1579. He sent one, 'the best I can find at this time thinking it better to send this as it is when there is some cold stirring, than to wait for a better till the cold be clean gone. I



Figure No.4

have caused this countenance to be furred as well as it can be done in this town, but have not perfumed it because I do not know what Perfume will be the most agreeable to her Majesty.”

Other terms for describing a muff would have been "snuffkyn," "skimskyn," or "countenance."

MASKS: Phillip Stubbes, a puritan social reformer, published a book in 1583 called *Anatomie of Abuses*. In this book he denounced, among other things, the fashions worn by men and women at the time. This is what he has to say in regards

to masks: “When they use to ride abroad, they have visors made of Velvet . . . wherewith they cover all their faces, having holes made in them against their eyes, Whereout they look So that if a man that knew not their guise before, should chauce to meete one of them he would think he met a Monster or a Devil: for face he can see none, but two broade holes against her eyes, with glasses in them.”

Randle Holme, another scholar, noted that, “A mask . . . This is a thing that in former times Gentlewomen used to put over their Faces when they travel to keep them from Sun burning. It covered only the Brow Eyes and Nose, through the holes they saw their way; the rest of the face was covered with a Chin-cloth. Of these masks they used them either square with a flat and even top, or else the top cut with an half round; they were generally made of black velvet. The second form of Mask is the Visard Mask, which covers the whole face, having holes for the eyes, a case for the nose, and a slit for the mouth, and to speak through; this kind of Mask is taken off and put in a moment of time, being only held in the Teeth by means of a round bead fastned on the inside over against the mouth.”



Plate 43 French School c. 1580

Figure No. 5

But these are not the only references to the fashion of wearing masks. Emmanuel Van Meteren, a merchant of Antwerp, settled in London and lived there throughout Elizabeth’s reign, serving as Dutch consul in England from 1583 to 1612. He noted in 1575 that “Ladies of distinction have lately learned to cover their faces with silken masks or vizards and feathers.” Apparently the Queen’s [Elizabeth] masks might be lined with perfumed leather. A warrant dated April 19, 1602 states: “Item to Raffe Abnett . . . for one dozine of sweet skynnes to lyne maskes.”



Figure No. 7

Peter Erondell’s book of French/English dialogue, “*The French Garden: For English Ladyes, and Gentlewomen to walke in . . . Being an instruction for the attaining of the French Tongue,*” published in 1605, describes a Lady Ri-Mellaine getting dressed in the morning, assisted by Prudence, the chambermaid, and Jolye, the waiting gentlewoman. Said account describes that “*The final touches are given by neckwear, purse, clean hadkerchiev, gloves (it is too warm for a muff), mask, fan, ‘Chayne of pearls’, and girdle with these times in a case hanging from it: scissors, pincers, pen-knife, a knife to close letters, bodkin, ear-picker, and seal.*” The book was dedicated to Lady Elizabeth Barkley, the only child of Gorge Carey, Baron Hundson and godchild of Queen Elizabeth. Muriel St. Claire Byrne suggests that the

character of Lady Ri-Mellaine is based on that of Lady Elizabeth Barkley.

It appears that while wearing these particular masks was certainly a fashion statement, their main purpose was to protect the skin against the effects of the elements outdoors, as opposed to masks worn in masque balls and other social occasions. Although no extant examples of 16<sup>th</sup> Century masks exist today, some images survive, as well as a miniature 17<sup>th</sup> Century mask belonging to a doll called Lady Clapman. This doll currently belongs to the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.



Figure No. 7

The first image is a print of the French School, circa 1580, entitled “*A Horseman with his Wife in the Saddle behind him,*” which currently resides in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris*. This engraving shows a masked woman in an enormous ruff, a black hood, and a bell-shaped skirt with a farthingale. (Figure No. 5)

Another example is a print from the ‘*Omnium Poene Gentium Habitus*’ by Abraham de Bruyn, published in 1581: “*in this fashion noble women either ride or walk up and down.*” The image depicts a lady wearing a mask with holes cut for the eyes. (Figure No. 6)

However, the closest thing to an extant example of this type of artifact is the miniature mask featured in the wardrobe of Lady Clapman, a 17<sup>th</sup> Century doll that has been preserved with her entire wardrobe. Although the doll and the wardrobe were constructed out of period, this little mask corresponds to 16<sup>th</sup> Century descriptions, down to the button in the mouth for the wearer to bite and keep the mask in place. If one compares the little toy mask with the aforementioned prints, there is no doubt that we are talking about the same type of mask. This may mean that the fashion of wearing masks could have survived all the way to the 1600’s with very little change to their design. This mask is made out of cardboard, covered in hand-sewn silk, lined in vellum, and has a wooden bead located at the mouth. (Figures No. 7 and 8).



Figure No. 8

**GLOVES:** The topic of gloves requires a class on of its own. Because of that, I will only do a brief overview of the use of gloves in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Gloves in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were much more than just an accessory to fashionable dress. The wearing or carrying of gloves by either sex was a conspicuous mark of rank and ostentation. They were worn in the hat or belt, as well as carried in the hand. Gloves were popular as gifts and were often given by a young gallant to his favorite mistress. In combat, a glove was thrown down as a gage, or challenge.



Figure No. 9

At the end of the sixteenth century, it was possible to purchase leather, fabric and knitted gloves, as well as mittens, although their production and distribution were handled by different crafts and trades. The traditional skins used in gloving were taken from deer, lambs and sheep. Kidskins, already dressed and ready for the glovemakers’ shears, were one of the products that France exported. The fashionable members of English society for example, admired French kid gloves because of the quality of the leather and the elasticity of the glove, which was important in ensuring a good fit before glove calibers were invented in the nineteenth century, were far superior to the English varieties.

The cut of the modern glove, as opposed to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century glove is quite different. For one thing, the *forchettes* (the gussets between the fingers) in a period glove are one “V” shaped piece as opposed to two pieces put together as in modern gloves. The thumb is also cut differently, wider and more centered at the bottom, and the resulting effect is that of a thumb “in repose.” (Figure 9). Very late court gloves sport unnaturally elongated fingers as well, as one can see from the extant pair at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which dates from 1590-1610. These gloves are white leather with gauntlet tapestry woven in silk and gold; 33 warp threads per in (13 cm.), and it was probably designed by the Sheldon Tapestry Workshops. (Figure 10).



Figure 11

The cuffs of gloves also varied in length and shape. From about 1558 to 1580, shorter gloves and gloves with piccadils were most commonly worn. This worked well with the larger wrist-ruffs that were fashionable at the time. The pair of gloves worn by the Earl of Norfolk, as portrayed in a painting of 1568, depicts a very short pair of gloves, unadorned by fancy cuffs or piccadils. (Figure No. 11).



Figure No. 10

It was not until the later part of the sixteenth century, when ruffs became smaller and when the turned over lace cuff that the piccadils evolved into large tabs, which allowed for fancy decoration and eventually became the cavalier style so popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

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List of New Year's Gifts to Queen Elizabeth I: <http://www.larsdatter.com/gifts/index.htm>

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[Kate's Corner](http://www.employees.org/~cathy/) Mistress Kate Maunsel's excellent webpage. <http://www.employees.org/~cathy/>

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