

Flat Caps and Tall Hats

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http://www.vertetsable.com/demos_elizabethanhats.htm

Once upon a time, a really long time ago, I joined a historical re-enactment society. I constructed a huge number of really bad hats back then but I loved hats so I kept at it. Then, one day, while I was wearing one of my latest tall hat creations (something closer to accurate but still not quite there), a well-meaning but rather tactless long time player bluntly informed me that my hat was so incredibly incorrect that he could not contain himself and had to say something. In public. In a really loud, incredulous voice. In front of a huge number of people.

Right then and there I made a two-fold vow. First, I would never, *ever*, under any circumstances accost someone like that in public. No matter what. Second, I would never make or wear another hat again.

I'm proud to say that, to my knowledge, I've not broken the first part of that vow. But I broke the second part of the vow about a year later when I made my first flat cap.

Let's start with an easy one -

Flat caps, in period, were called *bonnets*, which is a gender loaded word for us modern folk. Even a gentleman who will wear pumpkin pants ("*they're called SLOPS!*"), will refuse to wear a bonnet. So let's call it a flat cap and avoid any possible problems.

Flat caps are easy. There is a lovely example of a bonnet... whoops!... flat cap in Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion* (pg. 31), made from wool felt, pink silk taffeta lining, and fuzzy wool pile. Also on that page is a picture of Charles IX of France wearing a bonnet... excuse me... flat cap.

According to Arnold's pattern the brim consisted of doughnut shaped pieces (one each of lining, felt interlining, and tufted wool outer shell). The felt would've been much stiffer than what is commercially available to us - something along the lines of what could be hand-made using felting techniques discussed elsewhere in this site. The actual thickness, according to Arnold, of the brim was just a little over an inch.

Only fragments of the crown of this particular cap remained but Arnold assumes that they were simply larger circles. Additionally, there was another thick piece of felt stitched to the inside to keep the crown perfectly flat on top.

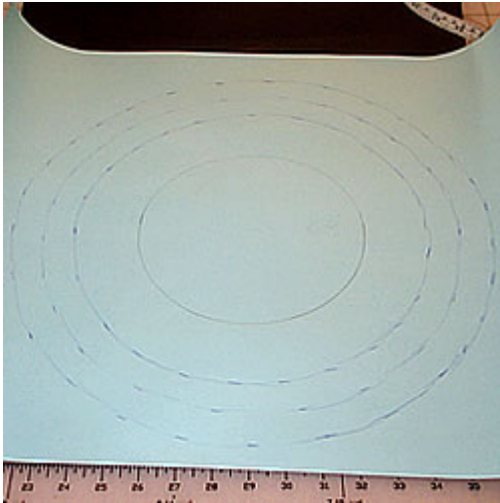
To make your own flat cap you will need to measure around your or the cap recipient's head for circumference. Measure at the point where the hat will be worn. Once you have the circumference of your head, measure out a perfect circle, using your measurement. If you have a compass, this will be far easier. In order to figure out how wide to make the arms of the compass to give you the proper sized circle, you need to use the following equation:

Diameter=Circumference divided by 3.14. Half of the Diameter is the Radius of the circle. The Radius is how much width needs to be between the arms of the compass

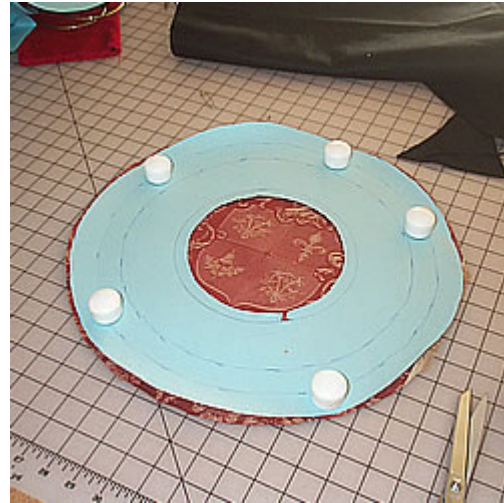
So if your head is 24", divide 24 by 3.14 which gives you 7.64 (drop all numbers after). This is your circle Diameter. Divide this by 2 to find your circle radius - the measurement from the center of the circle to the side of the circle. In this example, it is 3.82 inches or roughly a little more than 3 3/4 inches. Centimeters expresses this better but math gives me a headache so

just getting this much is more than enough. Take your compass and widen the arms until the width between measures just a bit more than 3 3/4 inches. Draw your circle. If you do not like tight hats, add a bit more to this measurement.

After you've got this first circle on paper, go ahead and draw out your brim circle. In Arnold, the cap has a brim width 3", including the seam allowance so that's what I've done here as well. In figuring how large your crown should be, add the width of the crown to the brim, bringing the crown piece out 6" from the first circle.



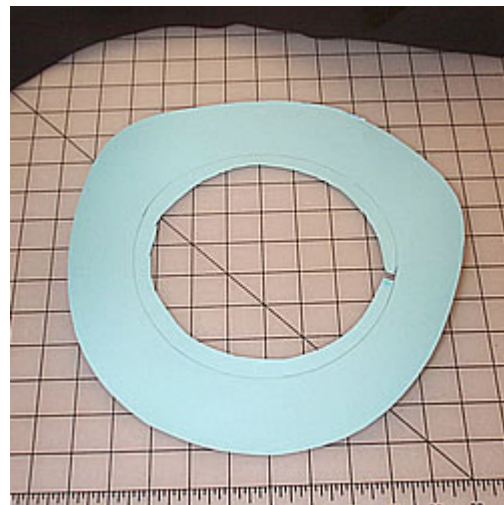
1. The central circle represents the circumference of the head. The second circle represents the brim. The third circle is a reference and the fourth represents the crown piece.



2. Cut around the outer most circle and cut the head hole of your pattern. I then cut out the pieces of my crown. In this case, a piece of felt, a linen lining and the outer fabric. Notice the position of the pattern over the pattern in the brocade.



3. Here are all the pieces of the crown cut out and sandwiched together. At this



4. Carefully cut the excess amount that represented the crown away from the

point stay stitch all around the outside edge to make the layers stay put and behave.

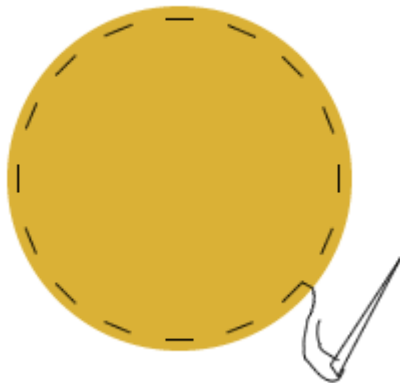


brim and head hole. This gives the pattern for the brim. Notice that there is added seam allowance for inside the head hole.



5. An extra layer of buckram has been added between the felt and the lining. Notice that the right side of the lining and the right side of the outer layer are put together. This prepares for the next step.

6. All layers of the brim are stitched together along the OUTSIDE of the brim. DO NOT stitch the head hole together. Once the edge is stitched, clip away the felt interlining and buckram. Using the head hole, turn the brim so that the right sides are on the outside. Press. If you are wanting to add wire, now is the time to do it. Otherwise, simply top stitch the brim edge down and then stay stitch the head hole down as well.



7. Take some strong thread and do a long running stitch around the edge of the crown. Gather this into fairly nice



8. You are now ready to stitch the brim to the crown. After this, you can apply bias binding to the edge to finish it off.

cartridge like pleats until the opening is the same as the opening of your brim.



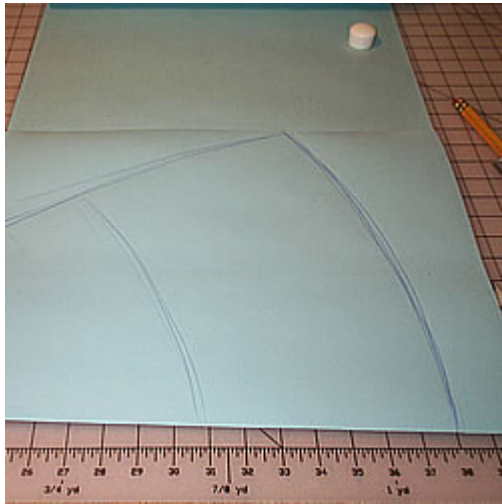
Viola! A flat cap. Simple, yes? This one is now ready for a hat band and a feather.

And now for the more difficult one -

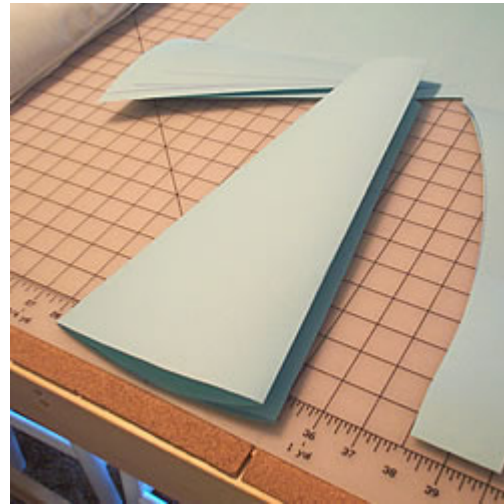
This one takes a bit of planning and the construction phase takes a bit longer. I can put a flat cap together in about an hour or so. This tall hat will take me almost four or five hours. But that's ok. The results are well worth the effort.

There are several examples of tall hats in Janet Arnold's *Patterns of Fashion*. All of them start with a felt base although one has a wire frame, Arnold states that this is an early restorative attempt and that the rest of the hats she viewed did not have wire support. And really, with the thicknesses of felt used and the introduction of pasteboard and glue, wire is really unnecessary.

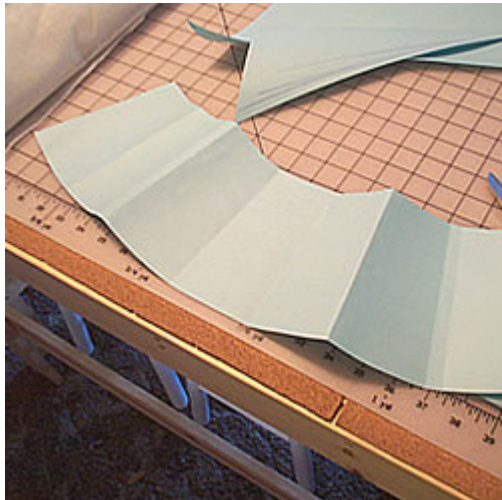
In order to construct a tall hat, you must begin from the inside and start with the crown. To give myself a nice stiff base, I used two layers of wool felt and two to three layers of buckram along with the linen lining and the wool outer shell.



1. Fold a big piece of paper in half. Make sure that it's a large fold because once you're done, you'll cut this out and wrap it around your head to determine fit. Draw a gentle curve shape as above. This is your crown. Don't get excited about the curve. It needs to gently taper, otherwise, you'll get a pointy hat shape.



2. Once you've got the curve cut, fold the paper again in half and true up the lines so that the curve is not wobbly. True up the side seam to match the fold. This is important so that the crown doesn't look lopsided when done.

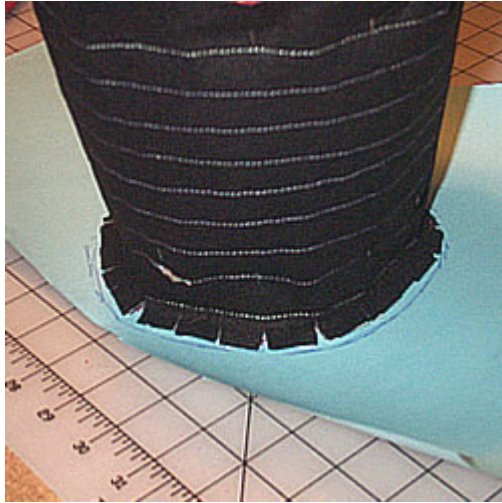


3. This is the trued up crown pattern. Following one of the extant hats in Arnold's book, this crown is 6" in height.

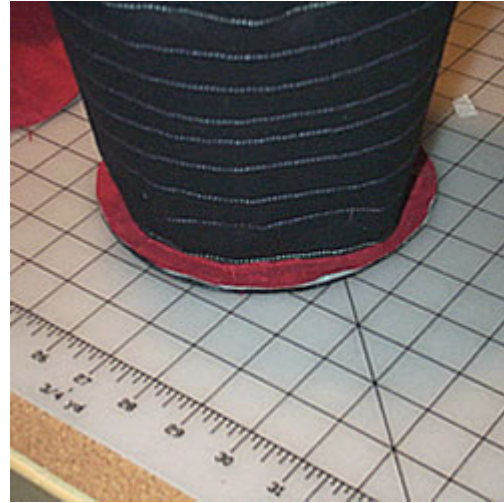


4. I sandwiched two layers of wool felt and two layers of buckram together and then quilted them to form the crown support, sewing the side seam in after and clipping away the excess bulk. A steam iron helps iron out any small wayward wrinkles. At this point the lining can be pinned in.

Please note that you do not have to follow my method for creating a hat foundation. Using felt, making your own felt foundation, using pasteboard and glue, all are period methods. So is mine and I find it faster and less messy but if it doesn't work for you, by all means, try something else!



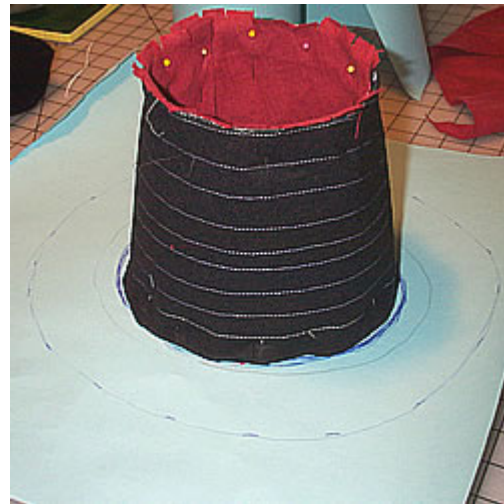
5. Clipping the top of the crown to just above the seam allowance, place the crown top down on a piece of paper and trace out the top of the crown.



6. The top of the crown, using the two layers of wool felt and two layers of buckram with the lining, are cut out and checked for fit before sewing together.



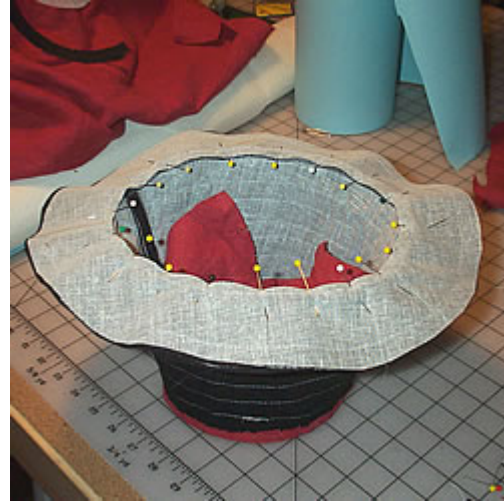
7. The top of the crown, with the felt and buckram clipped to remove bulk. The lining is then glued to the felt surface.



8. Using the crown, trace out the brim pattern. Using the hat in Arnold as a referent, the brim is made 2" in width with seam allowance.



9. If you want a slightly better fit, before cutting the pattern for the brim, make the head circle slightly oval. Historically, it could go either way. Once the brim pieces (two layers of felt, two layers of buckram) are cut out, they are attached to the crown.



10. Notice that the lining is held out of the way for this part and that the brim is as yet unlined. Once the brim is attached to the crown, if wire for the brim is to be used, it should be attached to the brim at this point.



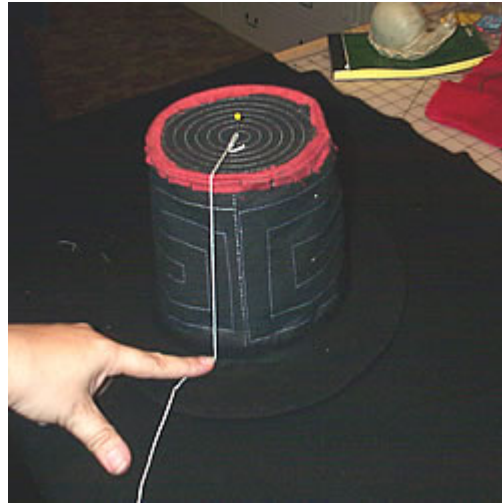
11. Now the lining is pulled out and tacked to the brim of the hat.



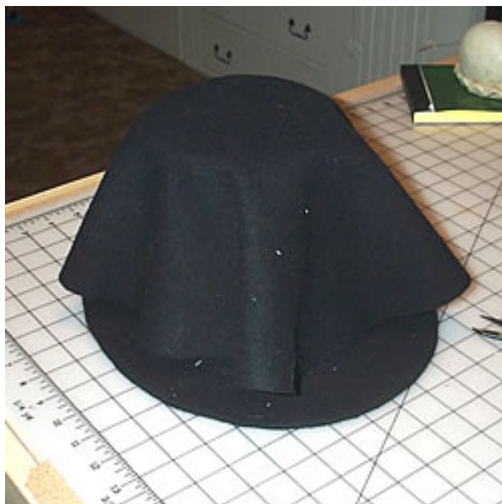
12. The wool cover for the brim is cut and added to the hat. Glue or tacking stitches can be used. I use a flexible permanent glue that works well with fabric.



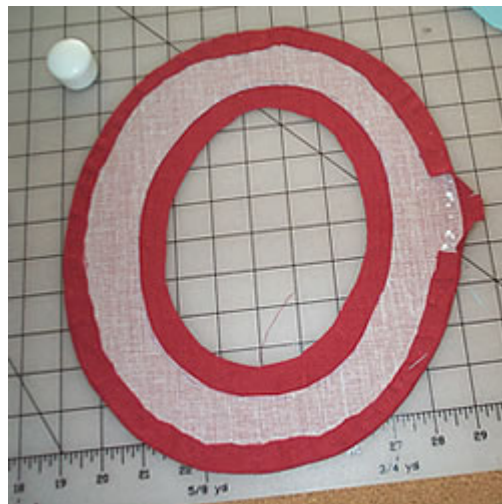
13. The wool cover of the brim is wrapped over the edge of the brim and glued to the underside of the brim in preparation for the brim lining.



14. In order to figure out how big to cut the circle of wool for the crown cover, take a piece of string and pin it to the center of the crown. Stretch it down to where you want the cover to end. Place a knot or take a marker and mark this point. Remove the pin and string, attach the pin to the fabric and use the string to draw a circle in the top fabric.



15. The piece of wool, just prior to pleating. Once to this point, a running stitch line is made at the edge, as for the flat cap crown above. Don't attach the crown cover however.



16. The brim lining is cut and interlined with a piece of buckram. The edge of the lining is glued around the edge of the buckram and the inner head hole is left free.



17. The buckram reinforced brim lining is then glued to the brim of the hat in preparation for top stitching. The lining can be turned under and tacked down on the inside, making it so that there are no raw edges whatsoever.



18. The hat just prior to finish pleating. At this point a second row of stitches will be used to put the pleats in order and an equal distance from one another.



It is vitally important that you keep your work area clean and free of foreign objects.

So there you have it! Go forth and make hats! As this is my first demo in several months, if you have any questions or if I haven't explained something completely, please don't hesitate to contact me!

Happy costuming!