

The Skeleton Baste

To start off with this module, are two small items that I overlooked which should have been in the previous section. We will then go through a quick checklist to make sure you have done the essential alterations to your pattern, and then begin with cutting out the fabric, doing the iron work, and completing a skeleton baste. The skeleton baste gives us one last chance to catch any larger errors before we start construction, where things can't be undone in some cases.

Waxing and Pressing your Thread

I've had many looks of surprise when I explain to people that I both wax and press my thread. Although it takes a few minutes, it is very much worth the effort.

To begin, thread your needle with about 18 to 24 inches of thread. I like to prepare 10 - 12 needles at once, to save time. Then, for each, place it on top of a cake of beeswax, and pressing your thumb down on top of the thread, draw the thread across the beeswax two or three times.

Next, fold a sheet of paper in half, and lay the thread inside. Place your hot iron on top of the paper, and draw the thread through by holding the needle end.

When this is done, be sure to move the iron away from the paper. You will find that the thread has more body to it, and is stiffer. This will help prevent knots, make the thread stronger, and give a nicer finish on top stitching. Do give this a try if you haven't already!

Skirt Fullness

As you are trying on your full completed muslin, check out the back of the skirt. Does it hang straight down, or does it spread

apart at the back vent? Also, take a look at the hips. Does the fabric seem a little tight here, giving a pulled or strained look? If any of these cases is true, you will need to add some fullness to the skirts, and perhaps some fishes (darts).

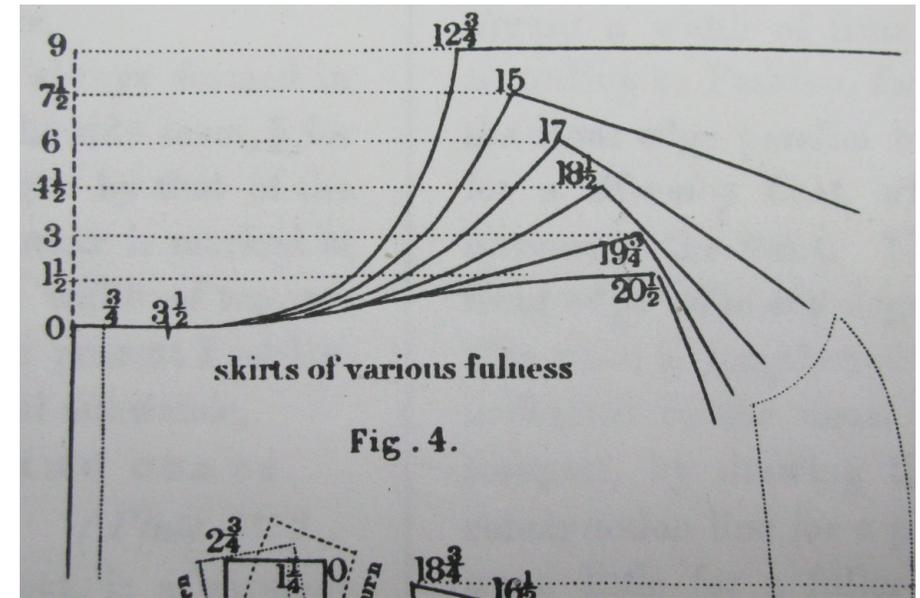


Fig. 4.

To create more fullness, instead of rising three graduated inches from point 0 in the skirt draft, rise up $4\frac{1}{2}$ to even 6 graduated inches, and also give more spring to the back seam, as shown. You can give up to 45 degrees of spring, instead of the standard 30, if desired.

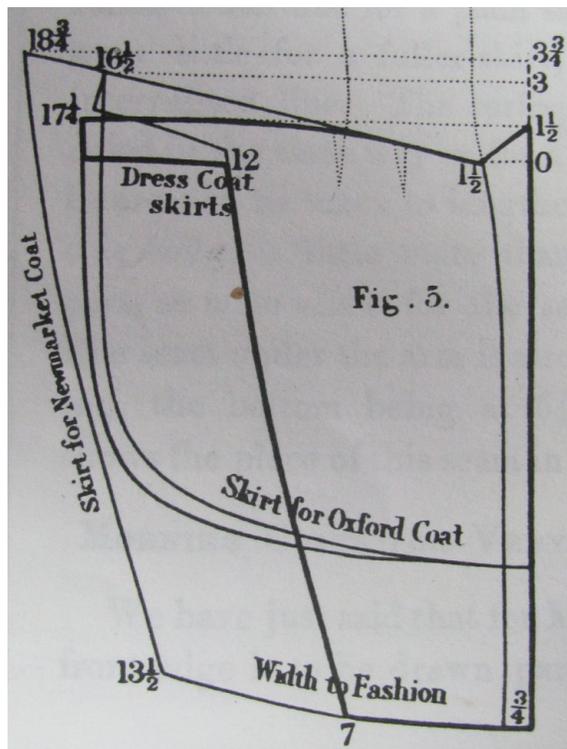
This will give the coat plenty of room in the seat area, and the skirt will drape nicely.

Darts in the Skirt

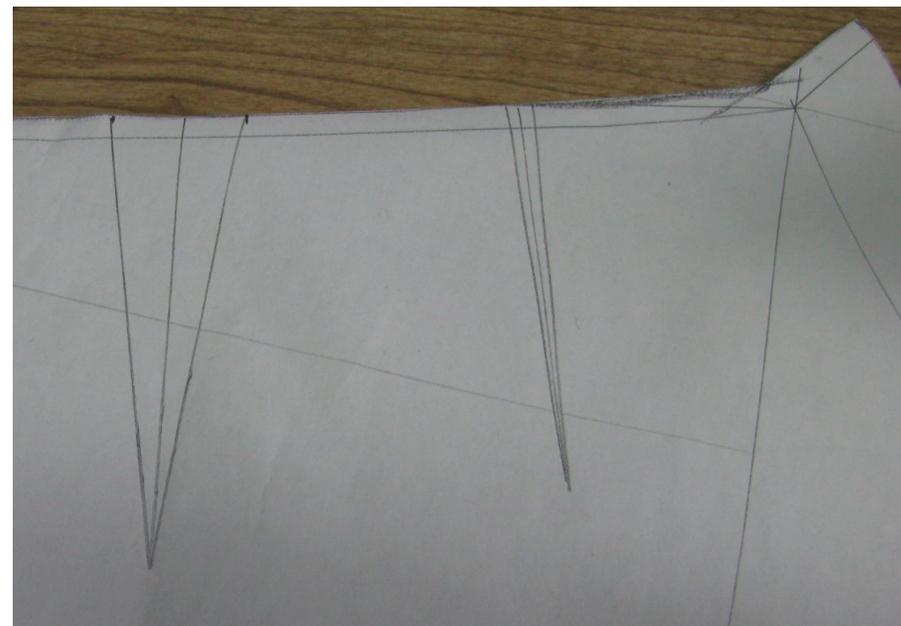
If you are adding spring to the skirts, as above, it is also advisable to add in one or two small darts, depending on how much fullness you need. The main dart needs to lay directly underneath the where the side seam will be. To figure this out, lay the side piece of your pattern onto the skirt pattern, 'right sides' touching.

Mark the point where the seam allowance of the side seam begins.

Then measure out to the left half inch. From the midpoint of those two points, on the skirt waist line, draw a line, at right angles to the waistline, about 3 to 4 inches long, and connect the three points, creating the main dart.



If you wish to have a second dart, it needs to be centered under the side piece, i.e. between the first dart, and the inlay of the skirt where it springs up. Make this dart a half inch wide as well, and about half an inch shorter than the first dart.



These darts should be the same width, just use the photo as a layout guide, the widths are wrong there.

After these are drawn on your pattern, they are cut out directly on the lines you just drew, which will be the seam line of the dart.



The Lapel Dart

The lapel dart is very important for the correct fit of a coat based on Devere's patterns. While it will give some additional degree of fullness to the front of the coat, it's main function is to help straighten the shoulder point. The concept of a crooked shoulder will be discussed later on in this module.

The lapel dart will move the shoulder point forward, as well as remove some of the extra ease that will appear in the front chest area of the coat when buttoned. If you've made a coat with Devere's drafts before, and haven't put in the lapel dart, you'll be familiar with this problem.

While I drafted my dart directly on the cloth, you should draw the dart on your paper pattern.

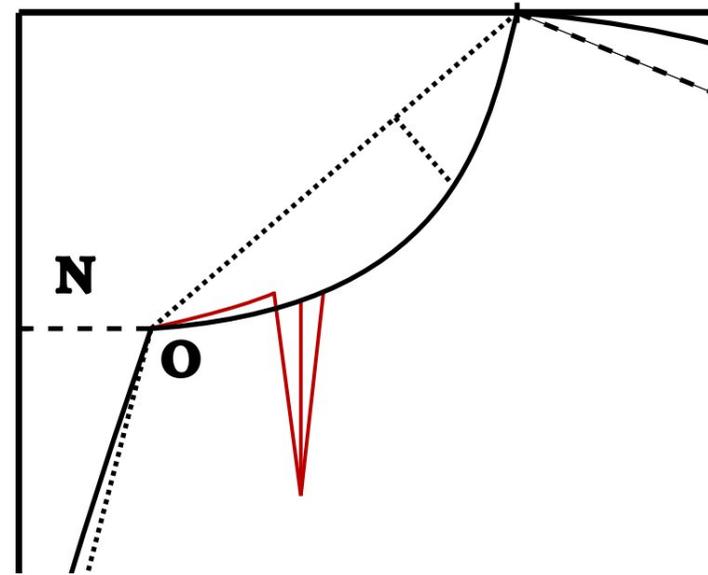
First, about 2 inches from the neck point, draw a line parallel with the construction lines. This line should be about three inches long.

At the top, on the neck line, measure over 1/4 inch from the line in both directions. Then connect each point to form a sharp triangle - the lapel dart.

Because the sides of the dart are of unequal length, you may want to raise the lower side by about 1/8 to 1/4 inch to match. If you forget to do this, you'll still have an opportunity to correct it with inlays, as I've done.

The dimensions given are a rough guide. You may find you need to adjust it slightly during the fitting, but this is a good place to start from.

Cut the dart out of the paper pattern directly on the lines. The lines you drew were the seam lines.



Checklist before Cutting

- 1) Make sure you have lowered the waist seam of the pattern, as was the style in the 1860s. When you do that, the fabric then comes over the hips, so make sure there is a bit of spring added to the pattern at the side seams of the forepart and side piece.
- 3) Ensure that the center front seam of the forepart and lapel of meets up and touch, without excessive tightness. If necessary, add to the front as previously discussed. At the chest there should be a little bit of ease to leave room for the quilting.
- 4) Finally, make sure the front of the waist doesn't dip down too much, and that the fronts of the coat do not fall away. If they do, raise up the front of the waist slightly (you can just use pins to test), and if that fixes the problem, you may leave it for now.

Pattern Layout

First, be sure you have drawn grain lines on all of your pattern pieces. If you have a nap on the fabric, you'll have to lay out each piece in the same direction, with the nap heading down. If there is no discernible nap, the pieces can be laid either direction, as long as the grain line on the pattern pieces line up with the fabric.

Try to fit pieces as close together as possible, but leave room for the inlays as described below. I find it easiest to lay out one piece, draw the inlays, then do the next piece, and so on. In the diagram, you can see a period fabric layout. They're good to get some ideas, but don't feel you have to follow them directly.

Be sure to leave plenty of leftover fabric for the sleeves, facings, collar, and other odd ends.

Remember, as you are striking the pattern, to use a sharp piece of chalk. I find I have to sharpen it between each piece, sometimes more often.



Inlays

As you layout each piece, it is important to add inlays, for fitting purposes. If you made a mistake in your drafting that you somehow missed, these inlays may save you from having to cut new pieces, or even saving your entire coat from ruin.

Add inlays to each piece as follows. As you are learning to do this, measure out each inlay carefully. With experience, you'll eventually be able to do this freehand, and anticipate how much inlay to add based on the figure you are fitting.

Forepart

At the side and bottom, leave 1" inlays. At the center front, leave 2 inches. This is very important, and if you forget, the coat will not button. At the neck and shoulder, leave ½ inch, and at the armscye, start at half an inch, tapering to nothing about halfway down the front of the scye.

Also, if your pattern has darts, chalk those, and then close the bottom of the dart by drawing a line as if the dart were not there. The edges of the dart represent the seams, not the cutting point.

Also, as you are laying out the forepart, transfer the chest line to the fabric. This will be helpful in aligning the front later on.

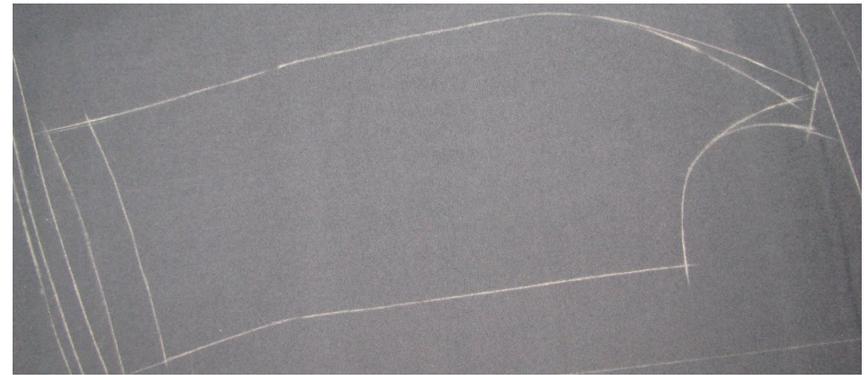


Lapel

For the lapel, I've actually removed all seam allowances. This works out well, because while the forepart is longer than the lapel, the curvature will be shrunk away, leaving the pieces of equal length. I would add a 1" inlay to the bottom, and half an inch to the center front and top, just to have some extra room.

Side Piece

At the bottom, leave a 1" inlay. At the top, leave a small inlay, ½



inch at the widest point, tapering down, as shown.

Diagram showing use of inlays

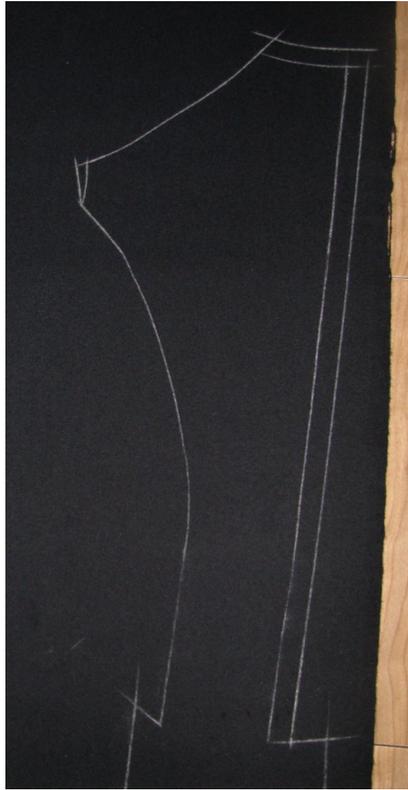
Dark Blue indicates the actual pattern as originally drafted.

Light Blue indicates the seam allowances.

Red indicates the inlays.



Back Section



Leave a 1/2" inlay at the top of the neck, as well as down the center back, as shown. At the top of the plait areas, add a 1 inch inlay, extending the height. This is in case you need to raise the back button points up. And finally, at the bottom, leave a 1/2" inlay, to allow for any stretching of the back of the skirt that may occur during making up.

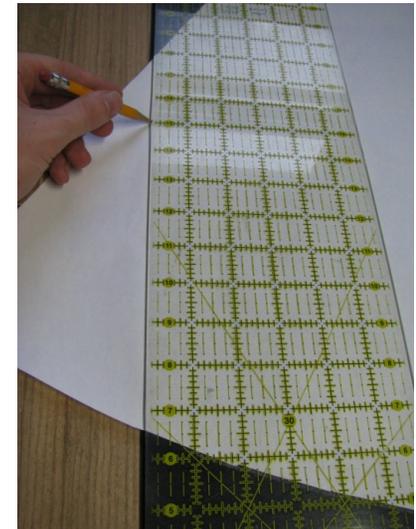
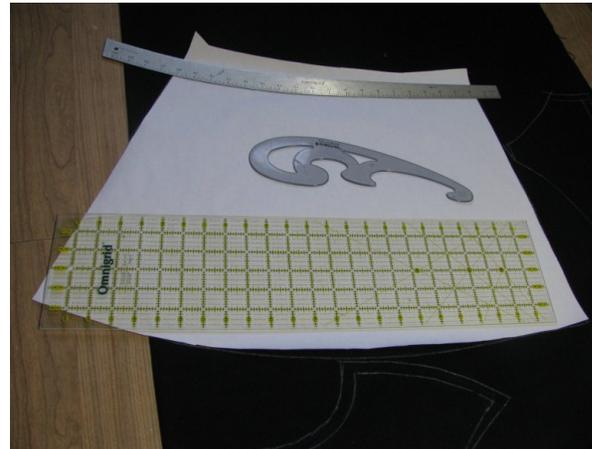
When you're laying out the back section, make sure the pattern is on the grainline. The center back should be on a slight diagonal when lined up properly.



The Skirt

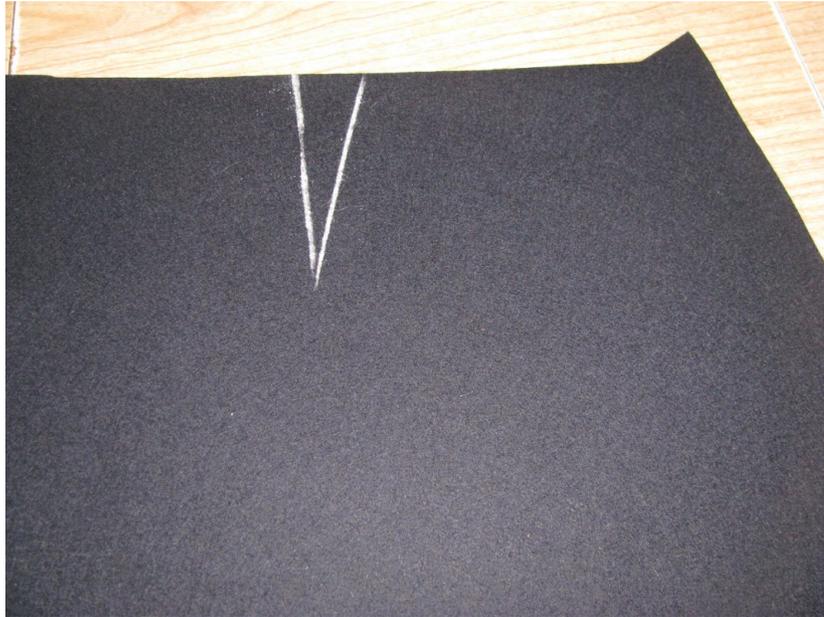
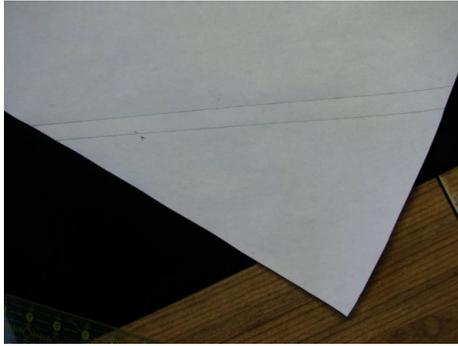
If you are adding any darts to the skirt, add 1 1/2" inlay to the front of the skirt. The skirt needs to be able to fold over itself in the front to form the facing, and you need room to do that.

There is a special period technique for laying out the skirt pattern, that helps to save fabric. In the majority of cases, the skirt is too wide to fit on the fabric. Don't turn it sideways or unfold the fabric! Instead, lay the pattern out, with the front of the pattern against the edge of the selvage. The back of the skirt should be hanging off the edge of the skirt. Take a ruler, place it on the edge of the fabric, on top of the pattern, and draw a line on the pattern, indicating the edge of the fabric.



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Now, add twice the seam allowance to this small triangle, which would be a ½ inch in our case (we're using ¼" seam allowances, remember). Then cut out this small piece of the pattern, and place it elsewhere on the fabric where it will fit. Snug it up into those little spaces you have still. The longest edge, which has the seam allowance, should be on the grain line.



As you are chalking out the skirt, mark the darts, and then mark the tops, as if you had not cut out any darts in the pattern. This is important as you will NOT cut out the darts. They are just seam lines. Very important.

Cutting

This can be a nerve-wracking step for some people, especially if you are using expensive fabric like Hainsworth. It's potentially

Module Seven — The Skeleton Baste

hundreds of dollars down the drain if you make a major mistake. I remember reading about a tailor cutting an overcoat with fabric that was about \$800 dollars a yard. He was very nervous as well!

But, if you are careful, and check everything twice, you should be okay.

To cut, make sure the shears are held completely straight, not slanting to the left or right. This will help make sure both pieces are cut equally. Cut inside the lines, as the chalk line adds some width to each piece. Make sure you are cutting the inlays with the pieces! After a piece is cut, carefully move the pieces aside, keeping them together as one. This is necessary for the next step. It's also a good idea to mark an X on the wrong side of each piece, especially if the right and wrong sides are similar in texture.

Tacking

Now, you must mark the inlays more permanently with thread, using tailor tacks. You learned the stitch in the previous module. Do the stitches, cut the threads, separate the pieces slightly, and then cut the stitches in between. Make sure to mark any darts, as well as the chest line on the front of the coat, as well.

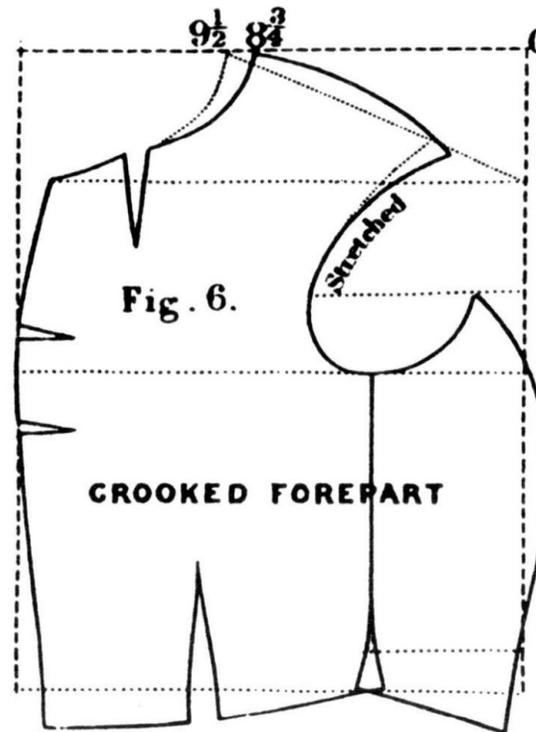
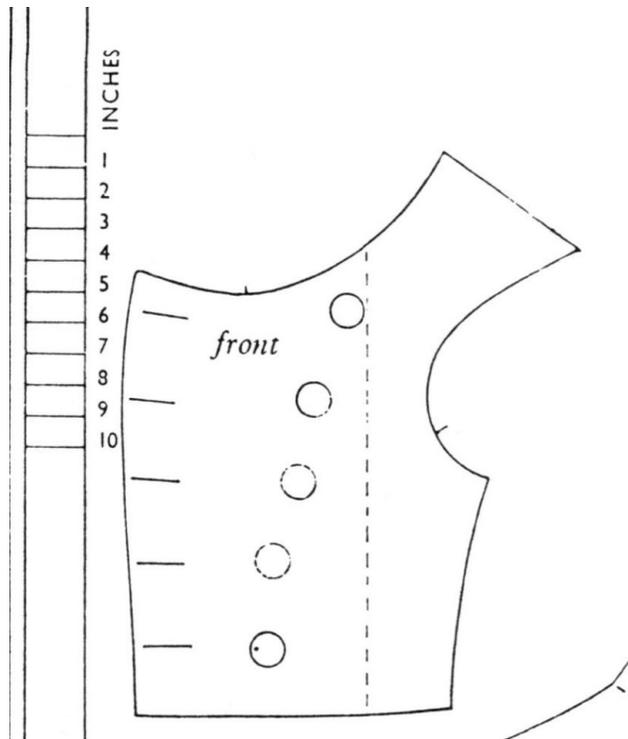
Keep the pieces together, still, for we have some ironwork to do.



The Crooked Cut

Devere's system of drafting gives us what is called a 'crooked' style of coat. What this means is that the distance of the neckpoint from the front of scye is greater than say, a coat cut from today's patterns. See the accompanying images on the next page for a visual description. Notice how the first draft, from the 1840s, is extremely crooked in the shoulder. Next, we see Devere's draft, which still has the crooked shoulder, but not as severe. Finally, there is a draft from Rundschau, 1959, a German cutting magazine still published, showing the straight cut shoulder, used to this day.

The benefit of the crooked cut is that when properly worked up



with the iron, you will get a closer fitting armsye, and more fullness in the chest. This gives us the period 'pigeon-breasted' look that is so often missing from reenactor's impressions. Compare your store-bought patterns, if you have them, to your draft from Devere's, and see if the shoulder is similarly crooked.

Because the shoulder is so crooked, it must actually be straightened with the iron, which in turn will give us the shape and fit we are looking for.

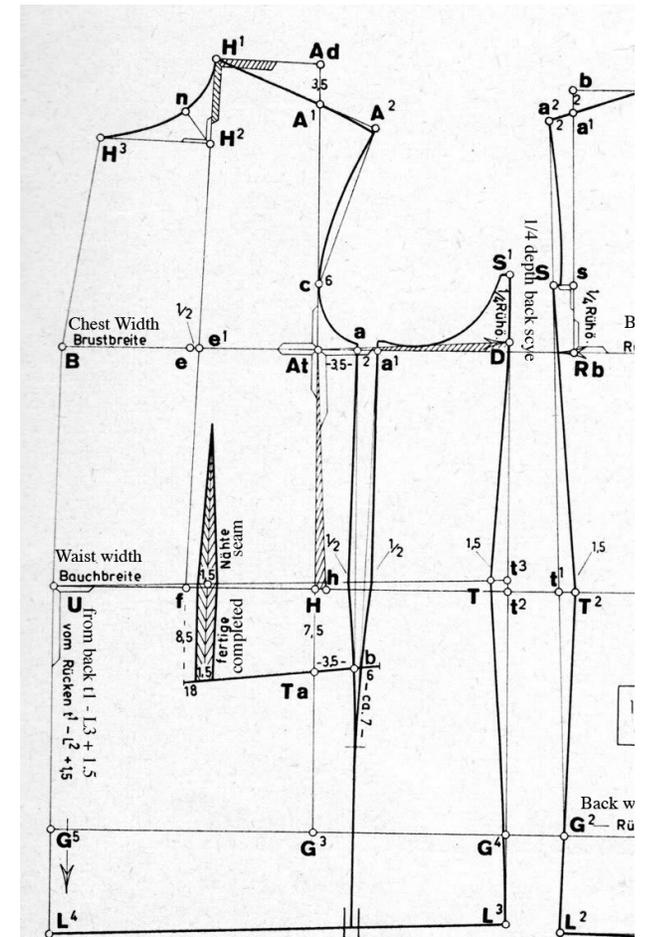
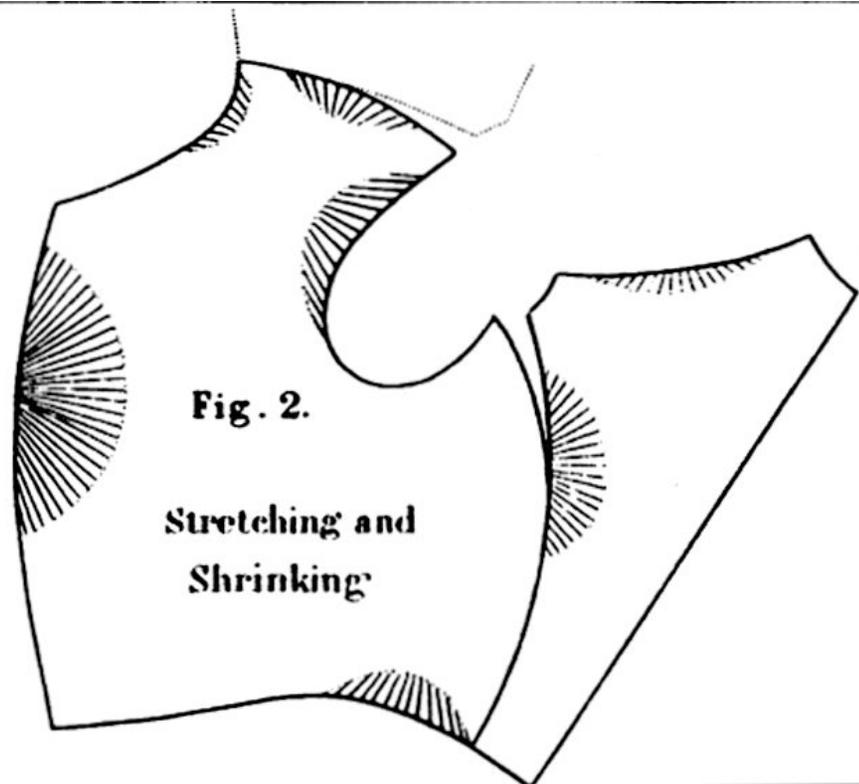


Abb. 47: Seitenabnäher, Tailenabnäher, Taschenlage und untere Kante

Ironwork



Ironwork seems very intimidating to most people, as very few tailors, save the bespoke tailors on Savile Row, and some others, still practice it. And the style of ironwork done in the period is almost unheard of. I know it was one aspect of tailoring that took me years to figure out. I didn't have anyone to just show me though, and had to learn it through books and lots of practice.

If you skip the ironwork, you'll end up with long vertical folds near the shoulder and front of scye, and the chest will not be full enough to contain the padding we will be inserting. The front of the coat will drape open, a problem often seen.

The following text comes from *Practical Tailoring, The Art and Craft Simply Explained for the Student and Apprentice*, by J. E.

Liberty. He gives the clearest instructions for ironwork I have found yet.

Shrinking to Shape.

The material should be laid on the board and a little water applied with the fingers of the left hand, the part to be shrunk being nearest the worker. Place the iron first at the back of the material at a part where the shaping will begin, and working it from right to left and towards the front, work round the part being shrunk with the fingers of the left hand while the iron is moving. It will be seen that the shrunk section probably has one or two small pleats formed by trying to shrink too much at once, and these should be smoothed out by putting a little water on the creases and passing the iron over them. It should not be necessary to go over the shrunk part more than twice to obtain the shape required, as too much shape will not hold in the cloth, and should be taken out of the seams in the cutting of the garment.

Stretching.

In stretching the process is similar to that used in shrinking, except that the material is worked out instead of in. It should be remembered that in shrinking into shape, the material will, after a time, return to its normal shape, but with stretching, it seldom, if ever, does; also that to obtain length by stretching naturally reduces the width, and this must be allowed for in cutting.

The Forepart

We will begin our ironwork by taking up the forepart, and stretching the front of the armseye. The total amount of stretching should be about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. Hold the fabric at the shoulder point, and put pressure down with the iron, stretching as you go. Both layers of fabric should be stretched at the same time, to ensure they are stretched equally.



Next, stretch the shoulder seam, about a quarter inch total. This is one of those steps not explained in any book, but learned only through practice and critical thinking. If you measure the distance from the edge of the shoulder seam, and compare that to the edge of the back shoulder seam, you will see they are equal. If you add a seam allowance to that, there is no problem getting them to line up. This is what the majority of produced patterns do. Remember, we did not add a seam allowance, so instead, measure the distance of both seams, $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the edge. You'll find that the back seam is $\frac{1}{2}$ " to $\frac{3}{4}$ " longer. By stretching the front shoulder seam, and

shrinking the back shoulder seam, this distance is reduced, and the seams line up much closer.

Now, stretch the hollow point of the neck seam only, about a $\frac{1}{4}$ " as well. This gives a little more shape to the shoulder area, and helps the neck hug the body more closely.

Stretch the side seam as well, about $\frac{1}{4}$ ". This is not shown by Devere, but is necessary to get the seam to line up with the side piece.

The center front needs to be shrunk now. If you notice a lot of frock coat reproductions, there seems to be a lot of fullness at the center front, right in the middle of the chest. The



fullness actually needs to be moved to the breast area, to give that pigeon breasted look so common throughout the period.

Place the foreparts with the center front facing you on the ironing table. Pinch up a small amount on the front, as if you were putting in a dart. A half inch at a time is good. Gently work the iron over the fullness, gradually pushing it towards the middle of the chest, away from the edge. Continue with this process until the front edge is almost entirely straight. The very top may still be slightly curved, but that is permissible, as it will help the lapel roll back on itself towards the chest.

Notice how the fullness is visibly in the center of the forepart now.

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This will also leave room for the padding later on. The shoulder area should have a lot of shape to it as well.



Side

The goal of the ironwork on the side piece, is mainly to impart more shape into the coat. In this step you are basically folding the fabric over, and stretching the seams, while shrinking the middle. It will take some practice, but you will get it. Try not to crease the middle of the piece as you're doing the ironwork, as it's hard to get rid of. I speak from experience on that one . . .



Module Seven — The Skeleton Baste

The following is a description from *The Art of Garment Making*, by Phillip Dellafera.

Fold the sidebodies as indicated, then proceed by shrinking away all the 'loose' material that will show itself at the waist. This work must be done carefully, until a nice hollow is formed at the waist; it will then be seen that the outer edges will have become slightly stretched. This is exactly what is required, and it will be found that a well-defined waist is obtained by adopting this method.

Sometimes this effect is obtained by slightly stretching the seams in a downward direction only. This, of course, will certainly help to get the desired shape; but the best plan is to shrink the centre of the side body, which will automatically give the extra length to the seams.

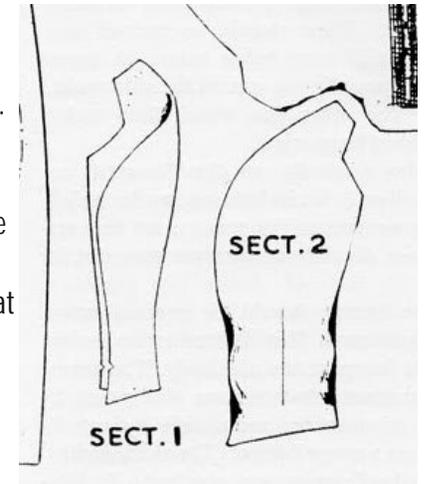
Also, stretch the bottom of the side piece slightly, again about $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

Back

The back requires some shrinking, but we will be waiting until certain construction steps before we perform that work.

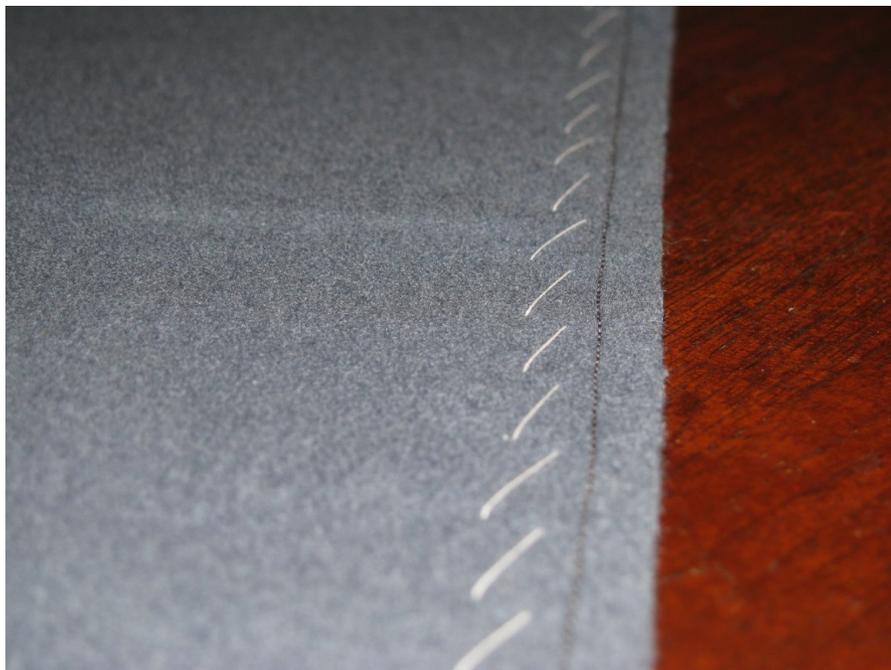
Piecing the Skirt

Now we will actually commence construction, starting with the skirt. Find the small triangular pieces you cut. Also be sure you have separated the two skirt pieces by cutting carefully on the fold line. Next, figure out which side is longest on the triangular piece, and line it up, right sides together, to the skirt piece. It may take some fiddling to figure out which piece goes where, but I assure you, they will line up, providing you added double the seam allowance when cutting.



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After they are lined up, baste together carefully, making sure there is no fullness on either side. Then, sew, using a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance, with either a backstitch, or machine stitch. If using the sewing machine, I recommend about 12 stitches per inch. Remember that machines of the period could not so backwards, so no back-tacking! Instead, leave about 4 inches of extra thread at the ends, pull the threads to one side, and tie in a secure knot. Remove the basting stitches.

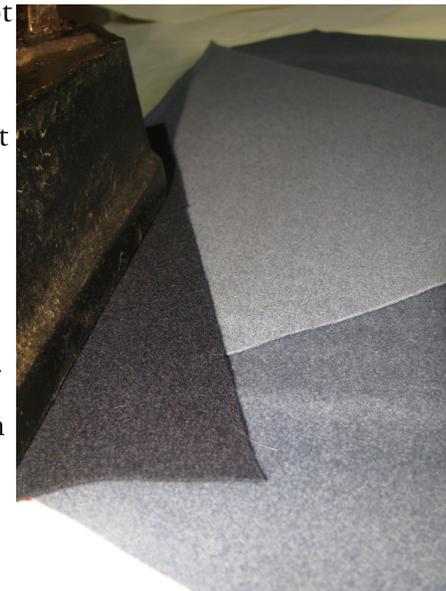


Module Seven — The Skeleton Baste

Now, press the seam, using the following technique. After pressing, snip off the little triangular pieces that form at either end of the seam allowance.

Pressing Technique and Opening Seams.

The first rule of pressing is to not move the iron up and down the seam, as this has a tendency to stretch the seam and throw it out of shape. Begin by laying the pieces, still right sides together, on the ironing board. Go over with a hot iron, with a little steam, and press the seam. Use a press cloth made from a scrap of leftover wool to prevent shine on the fabric. Flip both pieces over, and repeat this process. What this is doing is setting the stitches, which will give us a tighter press of the seam.



Next, open up the seam from the wrong side, and press the seam open. Take your time, and do just a small section at a time. Hold the iron for a few moments, remove, then press with a heavy goose iron, or clapper, to really set the seam. We're trying to avoid that rolled look to the seams that one so often finds, especially in coats made of heavy fabric.

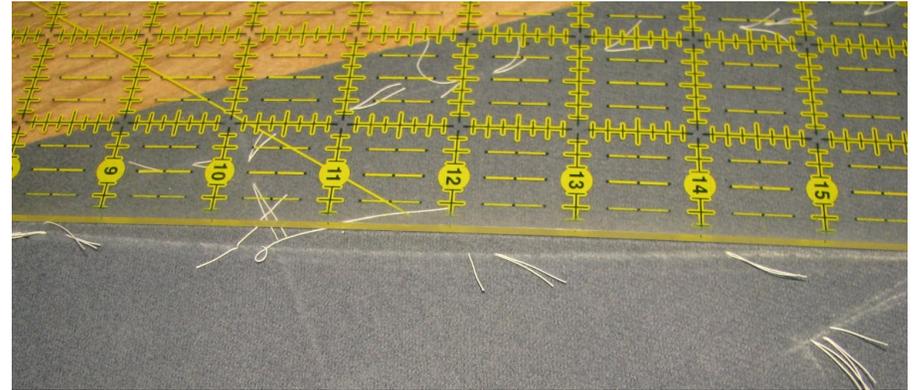
Turn the fabric over to the right side. Using a scrap of fabric as a press cloth, go over the seam again, with the steam iron, then the clapper or goose iron. When using the clapper, you may want to put the fabric seam on a hard surface such as a piece of wood. Make sure to use a press cloth whenever pressing the right sides of fabric, to prevent shine and imprinting the shape of the iron.

If you have the problem of the seam allowances showing through to the right side, press the seams with a piece of cardstock underneath each of the seam allowances.



Remarking the Roll Line

It's likely that while shrinking the front edge of the forepart, that the roll line was nudged out of shape. At this point, take a straight edge and remark the roll line, then replace the marking tacks with new ones.



Darts

On the wrong sides, on both the skirts (if used) and forepart, mark the darts in chalk, carefully tracing the thread tacks you put in.



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Next, baste the darts, starting with a couple of stitches in place to hold, then using the basting stitch. Make sure the stitching aligns with the chalk lines on both sides of the dart as you sew.



The Skeleton Baste



Module Seven — The Skeleton Baste

At this point, you will baste together all pieces of the garment by hand, to test for fit one last time. Normally, in a skeleton baste, the tailor would baste in the padding, linings, and collar as well. Since you have yet to learn how to construct these pieces, we will forgo them for now. On your next project, you may put them in.

This is done just the same way as for the full muslin, except do not clip any seams. Treat the marking threads as the edge of the cloth, the inlays are there in case you need room.

After sewing the front lapel on, sew a length of stay tape to the front of the forepart to prevent the shrunk edge from stretching back out.



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Do the same with around the armholes when completed, as well as the neck, from lapel from lapel. The last thing you want is for all the careful cutting and shaping you performed to be ruined when trying on the coat.



Module Seven — The Skeleton Baste

When you are basting together the center back seam, sew from the top to 1/4" inch past the bottom of the inlays at the waist seam. Then you can get a good idea if the opening is at the correct height or not. Press each seam as you go, but only lightly. And when sewing each seam, stop when you hit the marking threads. You don't want to include the inlays in the seam, as they are not technically part of the coat at this point.

First Fitting

Congratulations, you've made it to your first fitting intact! The main things to check for at this fitting are the same as at the beginning of this module. If you need to make adjustments, do so now by marking the amount you need to take in or out with chalk (just draw a line), and then removing the basting stitches, and rebasting. Remember, you need to leave room for the padding and lining, so don't fit the front too tightly. Be mainly concerned that the back hugs the back closely, that there are no unsightly creases or folds, and that all seam lines are in their proper place.

The main things to look for are that the various seams are in the correct locations. Check in particular the placement of the back pleats and vent, that they are all aligned and at the correct height.

The waist seam should be about one inch below the natural waist, rising on the sides over the hips, falling back to the same level in the back.

The center front should meet in the front without any pulling, and should hug the front of the chest closely, thanks to the lapel dart.

And of course any misfitting pieces should be corrected.

There are endless issues that can occur, but rather than listing them all, I will correct each person's work individually.

Please post photos of this stage, for critique and helpful hints. Following are a few photos of the completed process.



Front view. The distortions at the front are due to the pins holding the coat closed.



Note how the skirt drapes nicely in this photo. There are no drags across the hips, and the pleats hang nicely in back.



I still need to shorten the back slightly, to get rid of the wrinkles on the side-bodies and lower back. The ripples across the upper back are due to the stitching, I'm pretty sure, but I'll investigate it just the same.



The fabric comes right up to the bottom of the arm. Slight amount of extra fabric in the front of the armhole will be carefully trimmed off. Notice how the coat does not move even when the arm is raised.