THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

TRU VUE

Pilgrim Trust

Conserving and Displaying a Rare Silk Costume

How have we been able to display this early 17th-century costume?

Because of the fragile nature of silk and the early date of the costume, it is extremely rare to find a complete surviving outfit from this era. It is over 400 years old after all!

It is so exceptional that it is included in Janet Arnold's ground-breaking 1970s text on historical costume, *Patterns of Fashion*. It was also exhibited and researched at the V&A from the 1950s to the 1990s.

Conserving the Doublet

The costume was re-discovered in 2019. The doublet was in a state of partial conservation. The trunkhose had fared much better and needed little work.

With the help of a generous grant from the Pilgrim Trust, Tuula Pardoe of the Scottish Conservation Studio was engaged to restore the doublet so that it could be displayed again. In the course of her treatment, Tuula removed 763 pins from the previous work on the doublet!

Left sleeve of the doublet

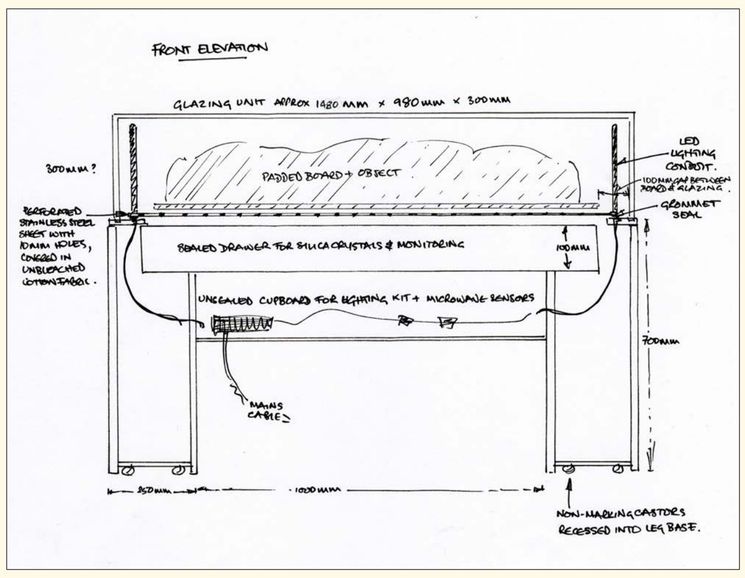
Today, the doublet is partly covered in a specially dyed fine net to preserve the very fragile silk. It must remain on a flat surface, as dressing it onto a mannequin would put too much stress on the delicate fibres. It looks splendid and should survive for several more centuries!

Emma Ronald, our castle manager and independent textile conservator, made a soft internal shape for the trunkhose, and a rigid support board matching the one Tuula made for the doublet.

Displaying the Costume

With the costume now ready for exhibition, we realised we would have to display it in optimum environmental conditions protected from:

- **harmful UV light and pollutants**
- **fluctuations in relative humidity and temperature**
- **hungry pests** – or not at all. This would involve housing it in very expensive, bespoke display cases.



Fortunately, a grant from Tru Vue Acrylics and the Institute of Conservation (ICON) enabled us to commission the two identical display cases in which the costume is exhibited today.