



Blackwork Journey Blog

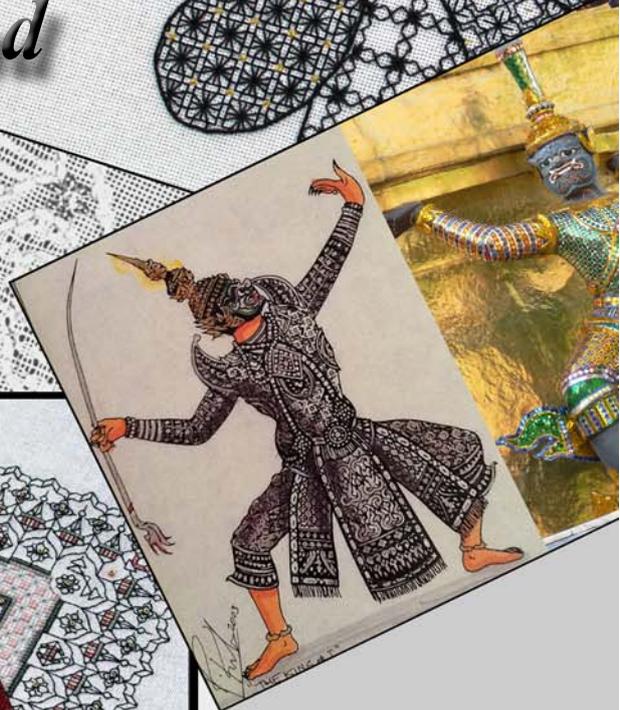
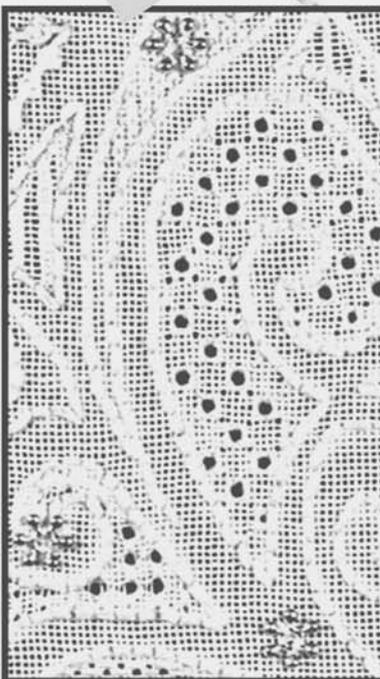
February 2015

Creating a working environment.

Opus Anglicanum

Two new designs for 2015!

Inspiration from Thailand



Craft holidays in Spain

Craft Holidays in Spain 2015

If you are looking for an interesting holiday in 2015 why not consider a fun-filled week of textiles and sun at fabulous studios based in the Murcia region of Spain.

Liz Almond - 'Blackwork embroidery inspired in its birthplace of Spain' Blackwork, - 10th - 16th May 2015



From Catherine of Aragon and Islamic influences through to 21st century design, enjoy the opportunity to explore the beauty of 'Blackwork' and develop new techniques and your existing skills during a week of exciting stitching with a friendly and experienced teacher.

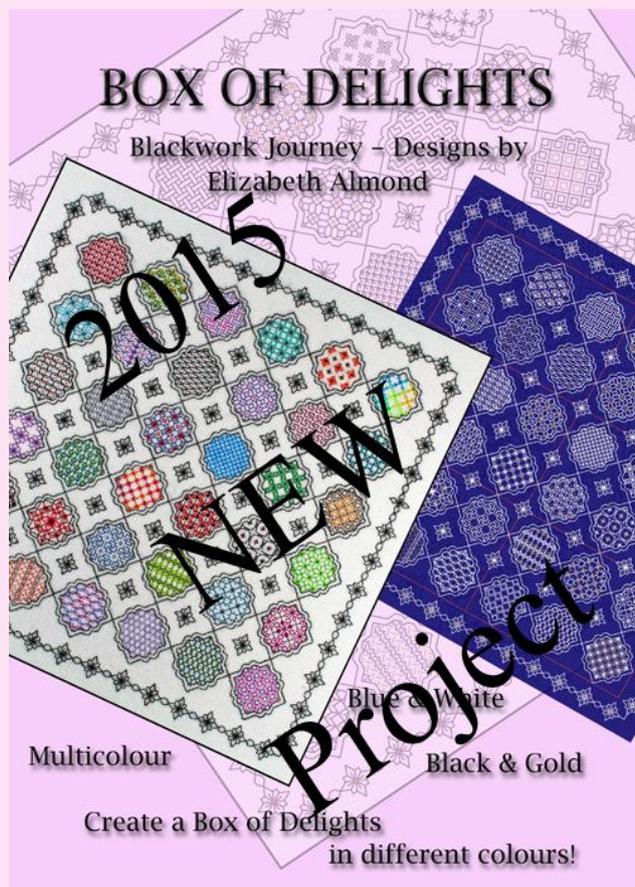
E-mail: info@castanearcraftcourses.com or visit www.castanearcraftcourses.com for further information

New free project – Box of Delights!

Starts in March in the 'Freebies' section

Enjoy a non-fattening

'Treat' for all Chocoholics!



Future Blackwork Project?

I was recently given a wonderful card from the Stratford Festival of Canada. The costumes were designed by Roger Kirk for the 2003 production of *The King and I*. The character of Simon of Legree was played by Eric S. Robertson and this set me thinking. Whilst his costume would make an interesting embroidery, it reminded me of the Statue Guards of the Emerald Buddha, I saw whilst on holiday in Bangkok at the Wat Prakeo Temple.

There are a number of these ornate figures inlaid with glittering stones on a gilded background. Fierce and intimidating, these guardians form a backdrop to a spectacular stupa or temple which houses a small Buddha carved in jade who sits on a throne, worshipped by the faithful and admired by the tourists.



Contrast the costume of Simon of Legree with the Statue Guard of the Emerald Buddha

The Far East has always been a source of inspiration to me, so with this in mind I have been sketching various designs for a future projects based on the two images above.

Working a large piece gives more freedom and room to experiment and than a small piece and I would like to incorporate couching, cords, chains, beads and tassels into the embroidery to create a really textured piece, so I will see what develops over the coming months and share my progress with you.



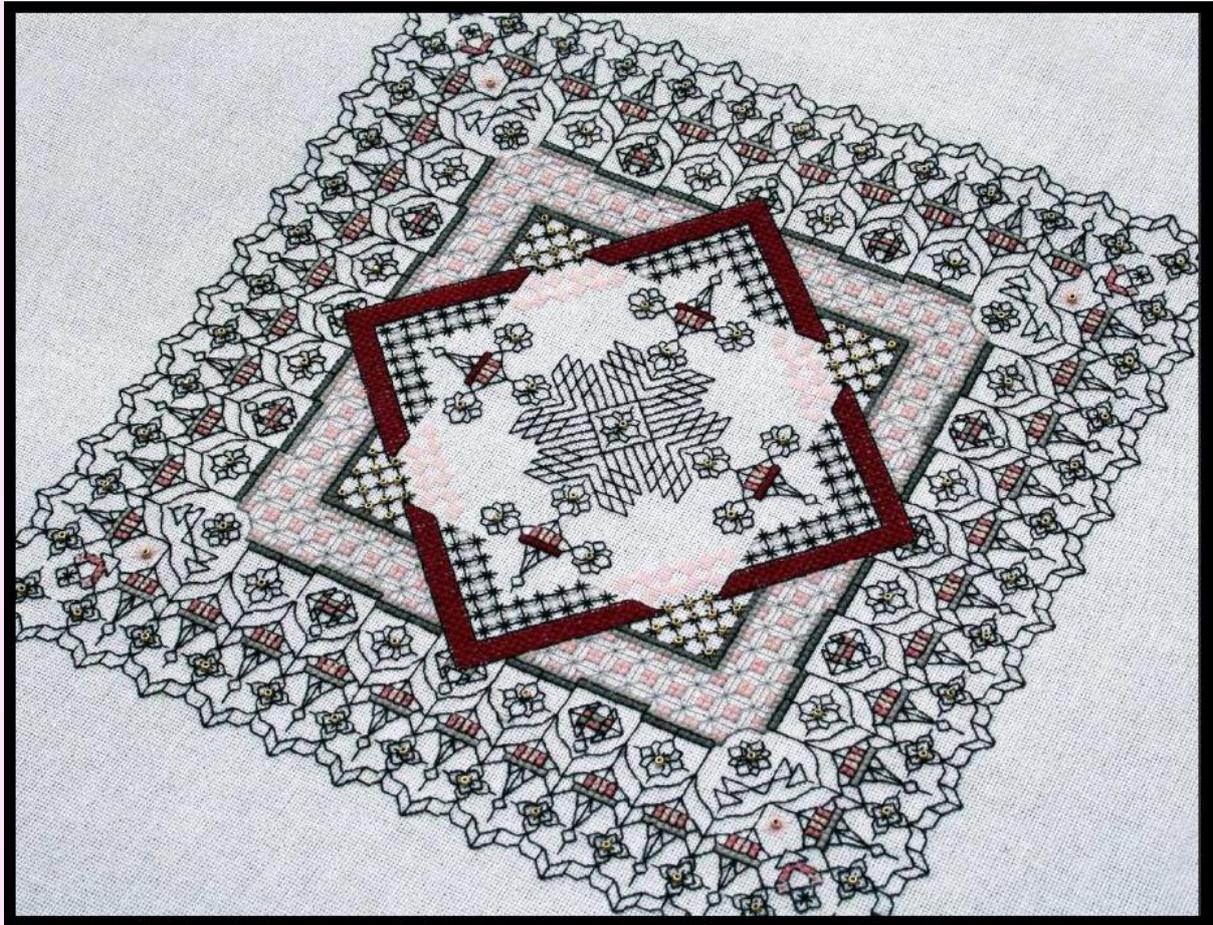
Wat Prakeo Temple, Bangkok, Thailand.

The scale of the building within the temple complex is hard to comprehend and the decoration is overwhelming, but the potential for the embroiderer is everywhere.

One design which developed from my visit to Thailand was CH0220 Red Thai Mandala which was based on Wat Ratchanda in Bangkok.

CH0220 Red Thai Mandala





CH0220 Red Thai Mandala was published in 'The Gift of Stitching'

The metal roof and pinnacles of Wat Ratchanada, Bangkok was the inspiration for Red Thai Mandala.



Many of my charts have developed from places I have visited and i am always looking for inspiration!

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Creating a practical working environment.

I spend many hours sitting at my computer designing charts for Blackwork Journey or stitching examples to display at day schools, talks and residential courses and having a good working environment is important.

I am fortunate as there an old stone building in our garden that

was once the laundry for a big house that stood on the site of our house. It was damp and cold, but just the right size for a workroom, so after much consideration I spent the end of 2014 having it converted into a modern studio.

The entire building was stripped back to just the thick stone walls and then gradually rebuilt and heavily insulated. New lighting, heating and ventilation were installed along with extensive storage facilities for my materials, threads and books, including the large roof space which was also insulated and provided with lighting and easy access steps.

Storage was not quite as easy as it may sound! Like all needlewomen I have a large store of fabric, threads and books which never seem to diminish. I needed everything to be easily available and equally easy to store away when I had finished working.

My main working surface is under the two large front windows with a bank of lights above which can be adjusted as required. A raised bar with six electrical sockets, TV, stereo and telephone points runs the whole length of the working surface, which means I don't have to hunt for sockets on the floor under the table.



The concrete floor was covered with an easy care wood laminate and one of my Christmas presents was a long handled brush and dustpan!



Numerous 64 litre transparent plastic boxes hold most of my materials and threads, but arranging the silks was solved by the addition of a DMC display rack. My library was arranged on adjustable metal shelving.

So finally, after 20+ years I have the workroom of my dreams which I hope to put to good use over the coming years.

Blackwork Journey has taken six years to develop, so I have named the new studio 'Journey's End'. Somehow, it feels very appropriate!

Whitework project ‘Winterland’

A whitework embroidery has been added to the Project section this month. ‘Winterland’ is a whitework and pulled thread embroidery design.



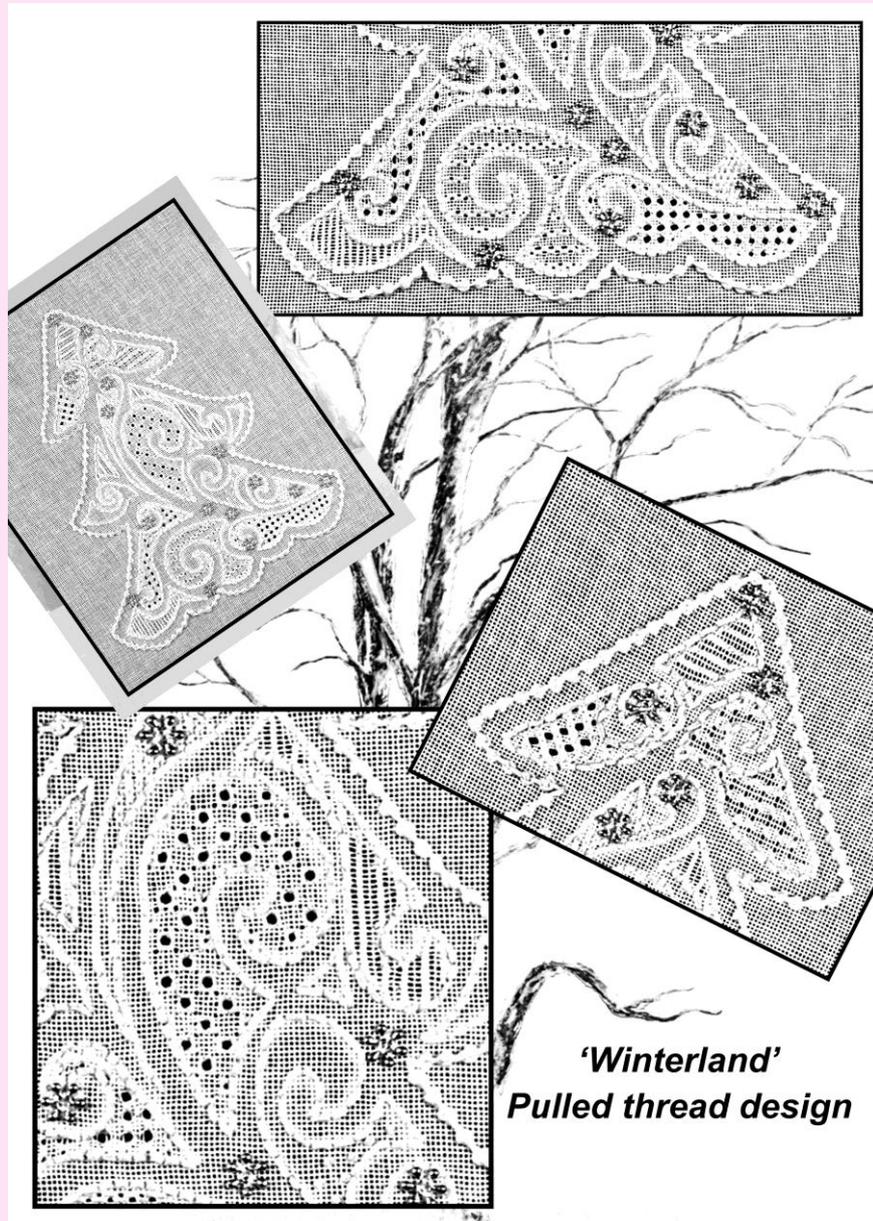
*PR00
‘Winterland’*

Pulled thread work is a counted embroidery technique, worked on a loosely woven evenweave fabric. Stitches are worked around groups of threads in the fabric and pulled, using the tension of the stitches to form gaps, creating lacy, open fillings, bands, border and hems. It is usually worked in white thread on white fabric, but can also be worked with coloured threads.

‘Winterland’ is worked on 28 count evenweave fabric in a variety of threads. It combines pulled thread stitches and traditional embroidery stitches. Sequins and beads provide added sparkle and double knotted stitch add texture.

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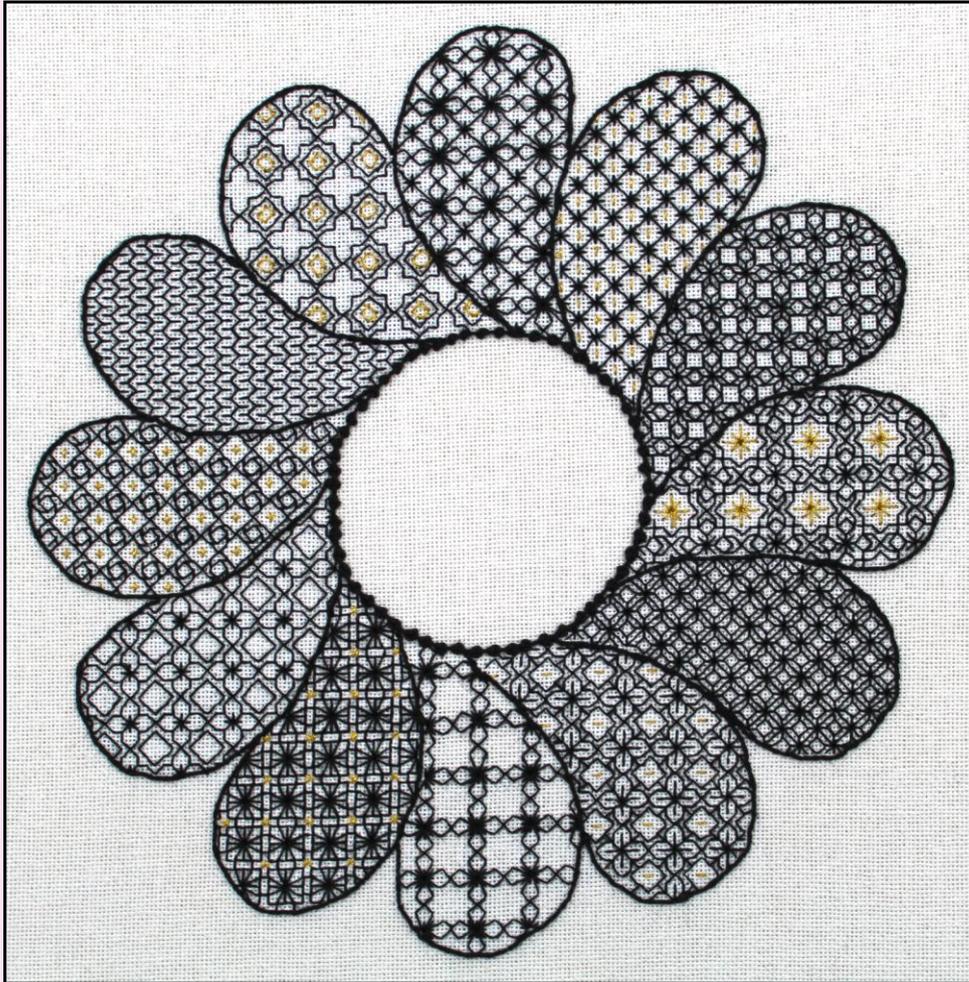
As an introduction to pulled work, it has been fun to create and would make a suitable project for a beginner new to the subject.



Working freestyle

Working freestyle designs is very straightforward once the design has been drawn onto the fabric because the areas to be filled have been clearly defined. Once the outlines have been stitched the internal fillers or diaper patterns can be added easily.

This method enables curves to be clearly and simply stitched without the rather jagged edges that come from counting the stitches and enables much different style of designs to be explored. For example, domes on mosques with their rounded profiles are very difficult to stitch, but using a crewel needle and following the exact line of the drawing the rounded profile is easily achieved.



CH0332 Feathers

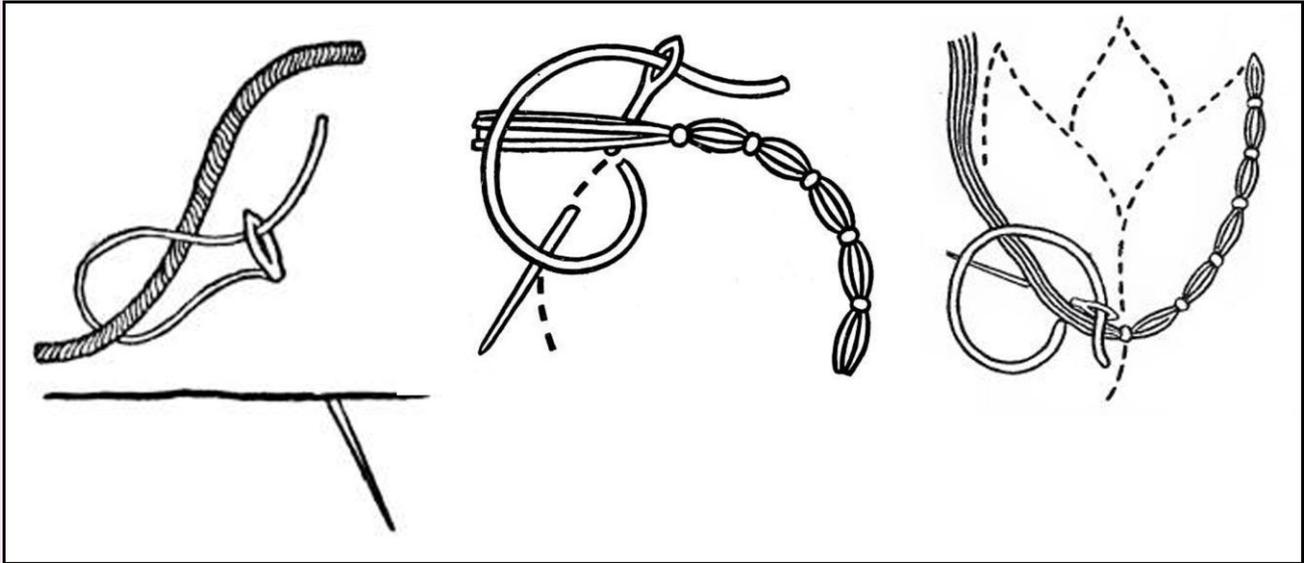
Couching outlines on fabric

Another method of achieving a rounded outline is by couching a thread or cord over the drawn line. Since there are many different types of cords and threads available this enables threads, which may not otherwise be suitable, to be used for a design. This technique has a long and distinguished history especially in England and I find the idea of using traditional techniques in a modern design very appealing.

What is couching?

Tying down of one or more threads upon the material by means of another is called couching. As some threads are too coarse, delicate or brittle to pass through the material the couching thread must be strong enough to accomplish the task, but not bold enough to destroy the appearance of the finished work.

Look in a haberdashery department or local craft store to see what cords are available and consider whether they could be used. Also consider whether the embroidery has to be washed and how it will be mounted. This will help to determine whether the cord is suitable or not.



Couching diagrams

A little embroidery history - Opus Anglicanum

This is a very ancient technique dating back to the Middle Ages when the medieval workers used all kinds of silk and gold thread for couching.

Known as ‘Opus Anglicanum’ or English work, this fine needlework was used for ecclesiastical or secular use on clothing, hangings or other textiles often using gold or silver threads on rich velvet or linen. Such English embroidery was in great demand across Europe, from the late 12th to the mid 14th centuries and was a luxury product. Couching with silk and gold and silver-gilt threads, pearls and jewels are all mentioned in inventory descriptions.

Some of the work was carried out in nunneries, but much of the production was carried out in workshops centred in London. Practically all the surviving examples of ‘Opus Anglicanum’ were worked by professional embroiderers, both men and women, in workshops generally run by men. The names of some of these embroiderers, both male and female, are recorded in contemporary documents.

‘Opus Anglicanum’ was as important as painting and the work of goldsmiths at the time. For further information of this subject, take a look at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London website and go to ‘Collections’:

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/o/opus-anglicanum/>



***Embroidered
bookbinding***

The earliest example of an embroidered book in existence is, I believe, the manuscript English Psalter written in the thirteenth century, which afterwards belonged to Anne, daughter of Sir Simon de Felbrigg, K. G., standard-bearer to Richard 11. Anne de Felbrigg was a nun in the convent of Minoreesses at Bruisyard in Suffolk, during the latter half of the fourteenth century and it is quite likely that she worked the cover—such work having probably been largely done in monasteries and convents during the Middle Ages.

Image published 1899. Embroidery is a Victorian "restoration" of 16th century original

The ground is worked with fine gold threads 'couched' in a zigzag pattern, the rest of the work being very finely executed in split-stitch by the use of continuous lines - each successive stitch beginning a little within that immediately preceding it - the effect in some places being that of a very fine chain-stitch. The lines of this work do not in any way follow the meshes of the linen or canvas, as is mostly the case with book-work upon such material, but they curve freely according to the lines and folds of the design."



Butler Bowden Cope

English: Cope, 1330-1350, V&A Museum no. T.36-1955

Techniques - Silk velvet, embroidered with silver and silver-gilt thread and coloured silks

Place -England (embroidering), Italy (velvet, probably weaving)

Dimensions - Width 165.5 cm (along top), Circumference 341 cm

A little research into this area of embroidery history is worthwhile.

We often take the materials we use for granted. Needles can be bought from a craft shop or even a supermarket. Threads come in skeins or on a reel and materials are bought by the yard or the metre or in a packet from a store.

This was not always the case and a further look into the tools of our trade will ensure that we never take them for granted again, but perhaps are more appreciative of the men and women from the past who produced such fantastic work and laid the embroidery foundations for the future!

Happy stitching!

Liz