



Blackwork Journey Blog

April 2017

**'New Stitches'
work in progress!**



MALTESE LACE



Lace making in Malta.

When I was a little girl living in Malta, I remember watching a lady making lace on the doorstep of her home and one of the reasons I wanted to visit Malta was to find out whether the tradition of lace making still continued.

Malta has always been associated with lace making or 'Bizzilla'. This craft flourished in Malta and the tradition dates back to the time of the Knights of St John from 1530-1798. Back then, the bobbin lace produced was used to accessorise the clothing of noblemen. Due to its popularity during this time, the Maltese grew increasingly skilled and specialised in the art of lace making. This was encouraged by the Church, as it was also used to embellish the clothing of the clergy. Lace making, along with other textile crafts such as weaving, eventually became the main source of income of many rural families in Malta and Gozo.

Bobbin lace is made with various threads, each fastened to an elongated spool or bobbin. 'Ghazel' is the Maltese term used to describe the technique. A pattern is initially drawn on parchment paper. Holes are then pricked to show where the pins should be placed. These pins serve to maintain the linen threads stable whilst the lace is made. The parchment is placed on a cushion throughout the whole process.

Queen Victoria greatly admired Maltese lace and it figured amongst the objects sent from Malta to the 'Exhibition of Industries' held in London during 1881. There is a statue of Queen Victoria in Republic Square, Valetta with a Maltese lace shawl over her lap.

The commercial potential of Maltese bobbin lace led British missionaries to copy and introduce local patterns in China and India. Initial patterns were copied in silk. Later copied patterns introduced linen and cotton threads.

As with the tradition of Madeira embroidery, lace making almost faced an extinction during the economic depression in the 19th century. The tradition was saved by a handful of individuals who supported it. The first person was Lady Hamilton Chichester who sent lace makers to Malta from Genoa to teach locals how to produce Italian bobbin lace. In the meantime, Dun Guzeppa, a designer in Gozo promoted the production of lace in Gozo, which subsequently developed its own distinct style.

Like the embroidery I saw in Madeira, the art of lace-making spread from mother to daughter, neighbours and friends. Before long, lace-making proved its worth as the product was sold to the island's upper class community and abroad. The income generated raised the general standard of living for some Gozitan families, many of whom came from an agricultural background.

When I was in Madeira last year, I found that the modern embroidery varied considerably from the older designs and I wanted to find out whether this applied to modern lace making in Malta.

I found some very old Maltese lace in a museum in Valetta and took a number of photographs of the display. The white silk and linen threads were fine and the patterns intricate. I wanted to know if standard lace was still on sale, so I investigated several shops in Gozo and Valetta that specialised in Maltese lace.

Most of the modern lace was worked in a much coarser brown linen thread and the patterns were simpler, usually edgings and borders on plain linen. Whilst they were attractive, they were designed for the mass market and took far less time to manufacture.

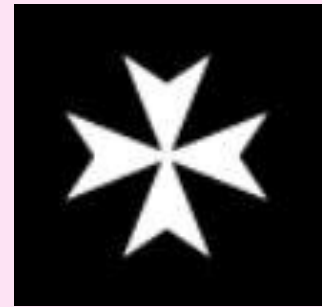


**Antique lace
Malta**

Lace from the 'Malta at War' Museum, Vittoriosa, Malta



I explained what I was interested in to one particular shopkeeper and she carefully bought out a box from under the counter with some of her treasured lace collection. All the pieces were wrapped in tissue paper and she explained that no-one asks to see the traditional work anymore, so she was delighted that I wanted to look. I was particularly interested to see the Maltese cross on a black lace shawl.

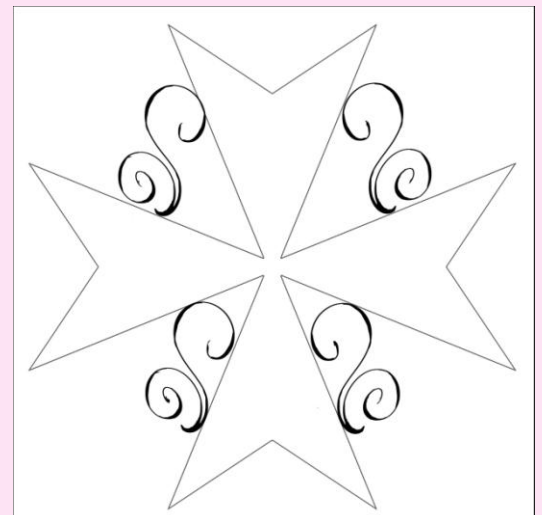


The **Maltese cross** is the cross symbol associated with the Order of St. John since 1567, with the traditional Knights Hospitaller and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and by extension, with the island of Malta. The cross is a white eight-pointed cross having the form of four "V"-shaped elements, each joining the others at its vertex, leaving the other two tips spread outward symmetrically.



Examples of the cross can be found in the highly ornate St. John's Co-Cathedral which was commissioned in 1572 by Jean de la Cassière, Grand Master of the Order of St. John. The cross also appears in silver filigree jewelry for which the island is famous.

Future goldwork design for Blackwork Journey?





St John's Cathedral in Valletta, Malta - Ornate goldwork full of symbolism covered the walls, ceilings and floors.



'Sublime Stitches' Part 4 Evenweave and Aida

Following on from Parts 1 - 3, the full width of the design has now been embroidered and it is time to move on to Part 4 which sits underneath Part 1 on the chart. Finish off any parts outstanding from Part 1 before moving on to the next section.



Many readers have already completed the first three parts and have posted pictures of their work in the Facebook group:

Sublime Stitches - Elizabeth Almond Designs

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1695785137378480/#>

This is a closed group, so only the people within the group can see the information. If you do want to join the Facebook groups, please click on the button on the home page of Blackwork Journey.

Sampler 4 from 'Sublime Stitches' based on Part 4



I had great fun creating this sampler! The colours were subtle, but very effective and they blended well together. There are 18 different patterns within the design and some pulled thread work has been included along with the instructions and photographs of each specialist stitch used. **This design can be found in 'Charts' in Blackwork Journey. CH0353 Sampler 4.**

The threads used were DMC Coloris 4504, one skein
DMC 310 Black, one skein
DMC 3803 Mauve, one skein
DMC 3781 Mocha brown dark, one skein
DMC 3032 Mocha brown medium, one skein
DMC Light Effects E3852 Dark gold, one skein
DMC Cotton P rle No.12, white, one ball or DMC white floss, one skein.(Use two strands for pulled thread work).



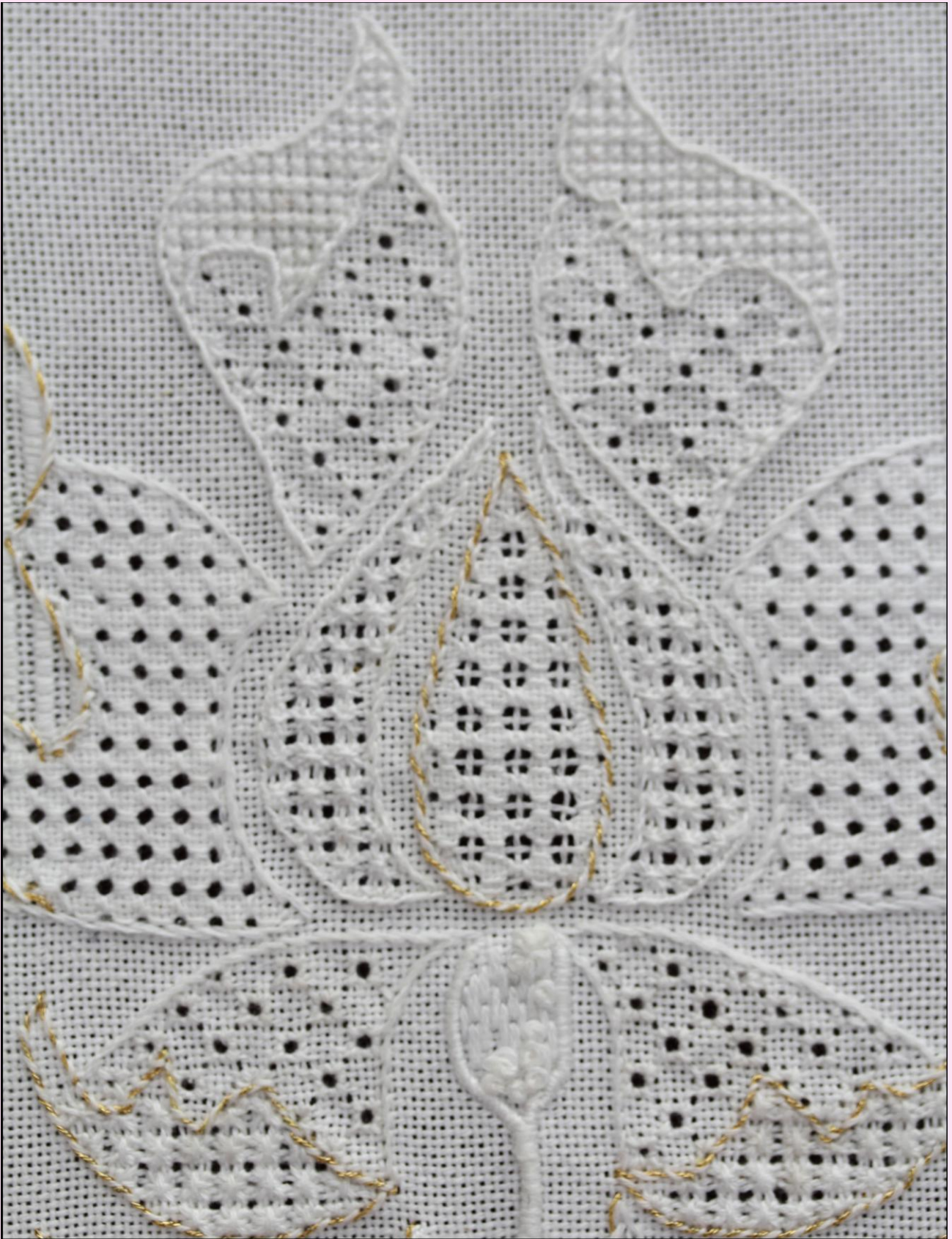
New Whitework and Pulled Thread design. PR0039 - White Iris

*'Iris' - Faith, Wisdom, Valour,
Promise, Hope, Friendship -
Pulled thread work design*

As a contrast to working in coloured threads, I enjoy creating white pulled thread work designs. This is a pulled thread sampler worked on evenweave fabric with a free style outline.

White Iris contains a variety of embroidery stitches for the outlines and seven pulled thread stitches worked in Cotton P rle No.12 or 2 strands of floss.

The design was worked on white Zweigart 28 count evenweave.



Stitch detail from PR0039 Whitework Iris - Gold thread is used to emphasise part of the outline!

Wedding Fever

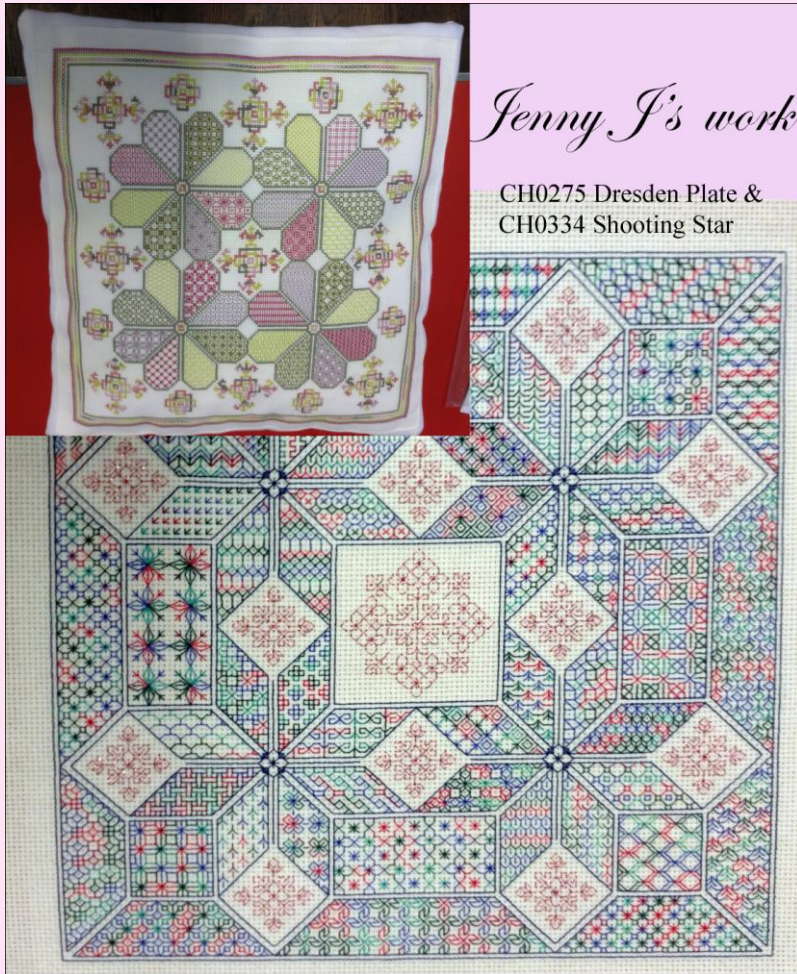
Spring weddings are always fun, but finding a suitable gift can be difficult, so making your own special heirloom for the day may be the answer.

Whilst teaching at a day school last year, Alison approached me saying she wanted to make something special for her daughter's wedding in Spring 2017. We considered a number of ideas and she decided to stitch a ring pillow in whitework on mountmellick fabric which is a heavy sateen fabric using white threads of different thicknesses. (See below)

I think you will agree that her daughter has a gift to be proud of from a very special mum!



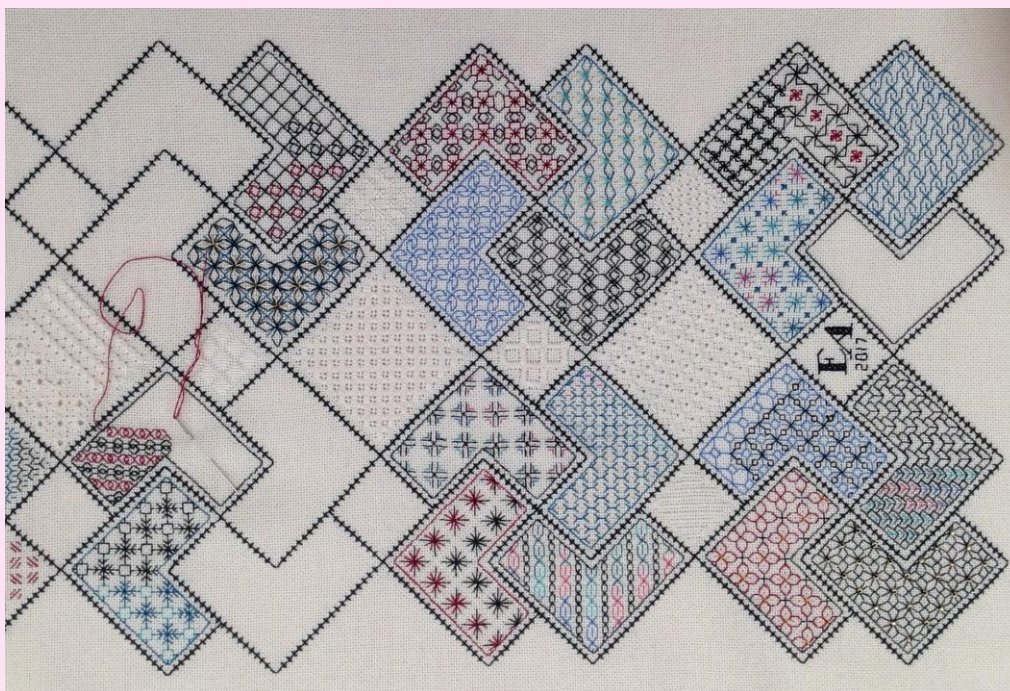
Alison's ring pillow
PR0036 'Projects'



Pauline and Jenny

Meeting readers in person, especially when they are from overseas is one of the most satisfying aspects of Blackwork Journey. This month I was privileged to meet Pauline from Victoria in Canada. She was visiting her brother in the UK and asked if we could meet. We spent a lovely day together going through my studio and unpacking all the boxes and hopefully, she went home with lots of new ideas for the future.

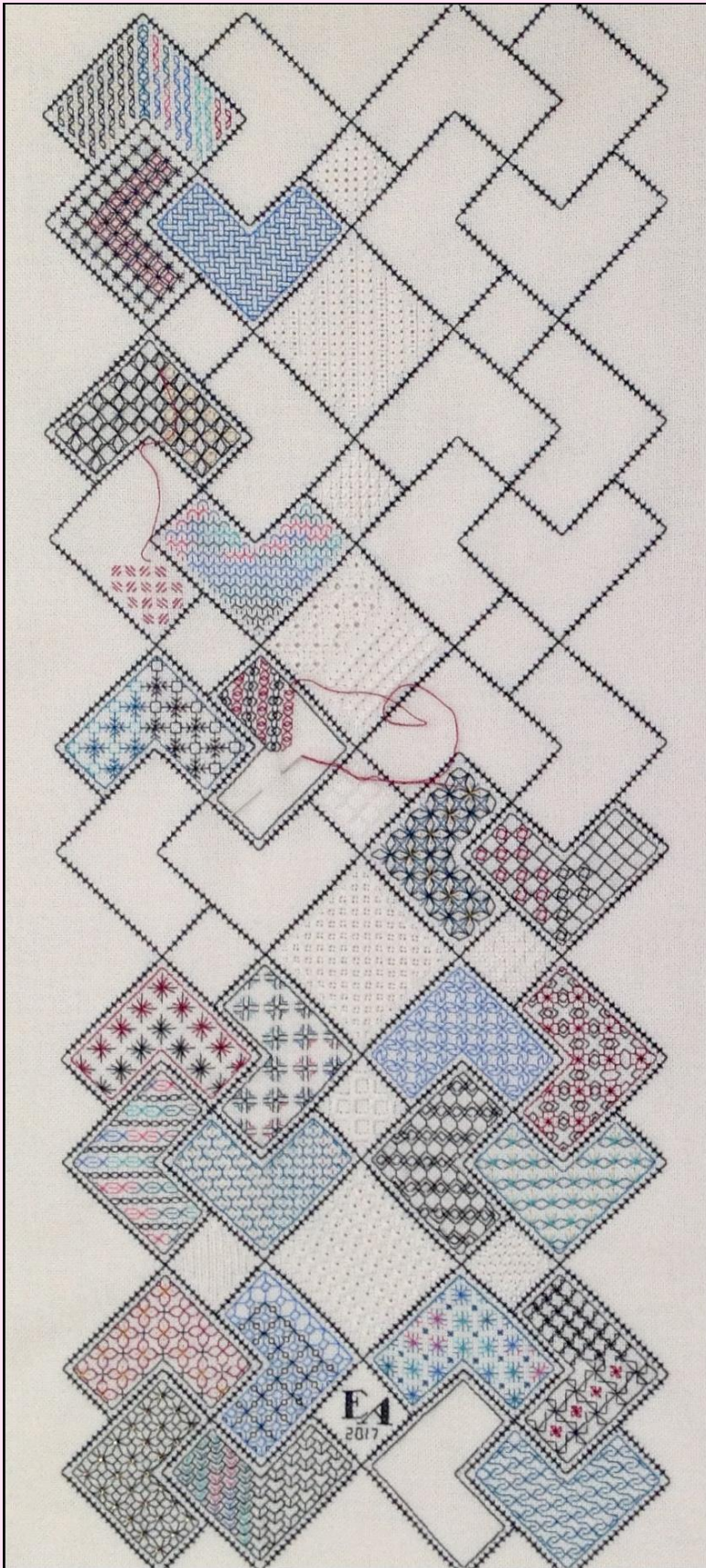
Jenny from the Midlands also contacted me and asked if she could take part in a day school I was teaching in Solihull for the Embroiderers Guild. The group agreed and we had a really enjoyable work day. Jenny bought some embroideries she had completed and some photographs of a large cross stitch completed by her husband and yes, we do have men in Blackwork Journey as well as needlewomen!



'New Stitches' - work in progress

After receiving many requests for a smaller version of 'Save the Stitches' I am working through a new project called 'New Stitches'. It has 55 different pattern blocks and will have a border which is optional.

There will be three different versions of the design to provide different options:



- the design shown with colour and pulled thread work
- black and gold
- white on a coloured background.

The pulled thread work cannot be worked easily on Aida fabric, so other blackwork motifs can be substituted. I am using black DMC Cotton Perle No.12 to create the cross stitch frame on this example and using a selection of DMC threads to fill the blocks. The pulled thread work is stitched in DMC Cotton Perle No.12.



I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog. It gives me great pleasure to show you some of the work that has been created by the readers and to show you my work in progress.

Confidence grows the more stitching you do and the better the results. I have been stitching for over 40 years and to be given a new piece of material and threads still gives me the same excitement as it did all those years ago.

Happy stitching!

Liz