



Blackwork Journey Blog

March 2020



'Itch to Stitch'
Explore embroidery stitches



Spring is coming?

I wonder which month you most look forward to?

In my case, it is March when the signs of spring start to emerge with crocuses and daffodils appearing and everyone starting to cheer up. In the UK, February was a complete wash-out as it rained constantly and large areas of the country were flooded. Coping with the constant rain and damp can make joints ache and the greyness of the sky becomes really depressing. However, stitching and creating beautiful things can very quickly help us forget the weather.

I take the opportunity to spend the winter designing new projects, not just for the site, but to stretch and challenge me. I am teaching many different groups in 2020 and 2021, some I have visited many times and are old friends, whilst others are new and I will be meeting for the first time. From lacemaking groups to quilter's and Embroiderer's Guilds, there are always new people to meet and work with and share my love of embroidery. I will take my new projects with me as examples of what people can do and I am always happy to work with groups as I have done in the past. Just e-mail me if you would like me to help.

'Stitching for Relaxation'



During the winter, I have been working on two projects and will present these over the next few months to encourage readers to use new embroidery stitches in a different way. One is designed for mindfulness where you stitch something simple and straightforward where your mind can wander, listen to music or just sit quietly and relax.

'Stitching for Relaxation' is based on 15 simple designs which are worked in sashiko stitch which is a form of running stitch. The whole piece is hand stitched, although a machine could be used to join the squares, but I know a lot of readers do not have sewing machines and prefer hand piecing.

The instructions are for a tablecloth or a lap quilt. The piece measures 42 x 42 inches and is worked in cotton.

Smaller projects for cushions and bags can be worked using the different blocks. Because the piece is worked mainly by hand I have used a 0.5 inch seam allowance rather than the usual 0.25 inch seam allowance. This gives a little leeway if the blocks are not cut out quite accurately, or if embroidery is to be worked over the seams.

If you are interested in trying this project, I have included a list of the materials and equipment that you would need.

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In 'Freebies' I will add a small cushion project first as a taster before I release the e-book later in the year.

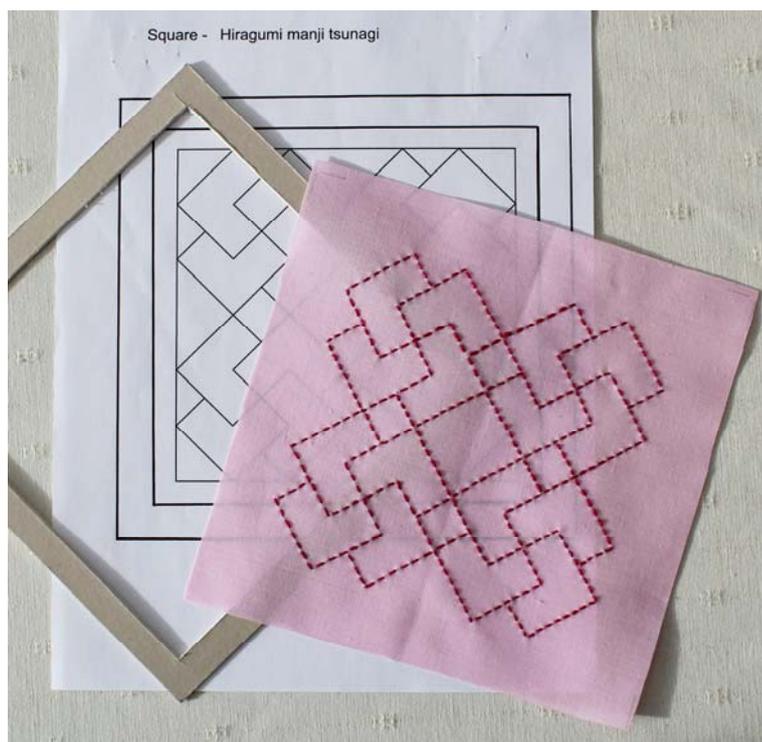
Material:

Cotton fabric for the top: 25 cotton squares 8 x 8 inches (finished square size 6 x 6 inches), two borders, one narrow and one wider.

Note: If you are an experienced quilter you may wish to use the usual ¼ inch seam allowance, in which case the fabric squares would be cut to 6½ x 6½ inches.

Backing fabric: 45 x 45 inches

Wadding (Batting) if the finished top is to be made into a quilt 45 x 45 inches



Note: 0.5 inch seam allowance is allowed on each side of the squares and the borders

Threads:

Sashiko thread, Coton à broder or, Coton Pêrle No 8 or No 5 (thicker) or DMC stranded floss (use 4 strands)

Sewing cotton for machining or hand stitching pieces together to tone with the fabric

Tacking thread

Sewing sharps. Alter the size of the needle to the thickness of the thread used.

Quilting pins

Thimble (optional)

Small embroidery ring (optional)

Scissors

Narrow border:

Cut four strips 3.5 inches wide x 36 inches
Finished size of border will be 2.5 inches wide 35 inches long

Wide border:

Cut four strips 5 inches wide x 45 inches long

Finished size of border will be 4 inches wide - 44 inches long

The finished size of the top is 42 x 42 inches

Template: Make a cardboard window template 7 x 7 inches square with a 6 inch aperture.

This includes the 0.5 inch seam allowance and makes placing the embroidery correctly in the square.

14 full size Japanese sashiko patterns and a border are included so that they can be traced onto the fabric easily using a water-soluble pen or an HB pencil.

'Itch to Stitch'

The second project I have been working on is designed to explore new stitches and use them in different ways. We tend to use just a few stitches on a regular basis and ignore the vast majority of embroidery stitches. I wanted to expand my own stitch knowledge and use the different stitches on both large and small projects. There are 49 different patterns using 100 different stitches.





An octagon quilt is also being stitched, but this will take some time.

Each square comes with photograph, instructions, stitch diagrams and pattern.

Any number of squares can be stitched in different arrangements but like all projects the planning is the most important stage. Thinking it through carefully first saves a lot of disappointment later in the day.

The project is very detailed and will be released as an e-book rather than in separate parts later in the year.

Blackwork, pulled thread work and embroidery projects for 2020

My first love, blackwork has not been forgotten over the winter months and I have been putting together a series of four embroideries combining sashiko and blackwork called Japanese Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. I enjoy the challenge of combining different techniques.

The first one of the series, Japanese Spring was presented last month in 'Projects' on the Blackwork Journey website.

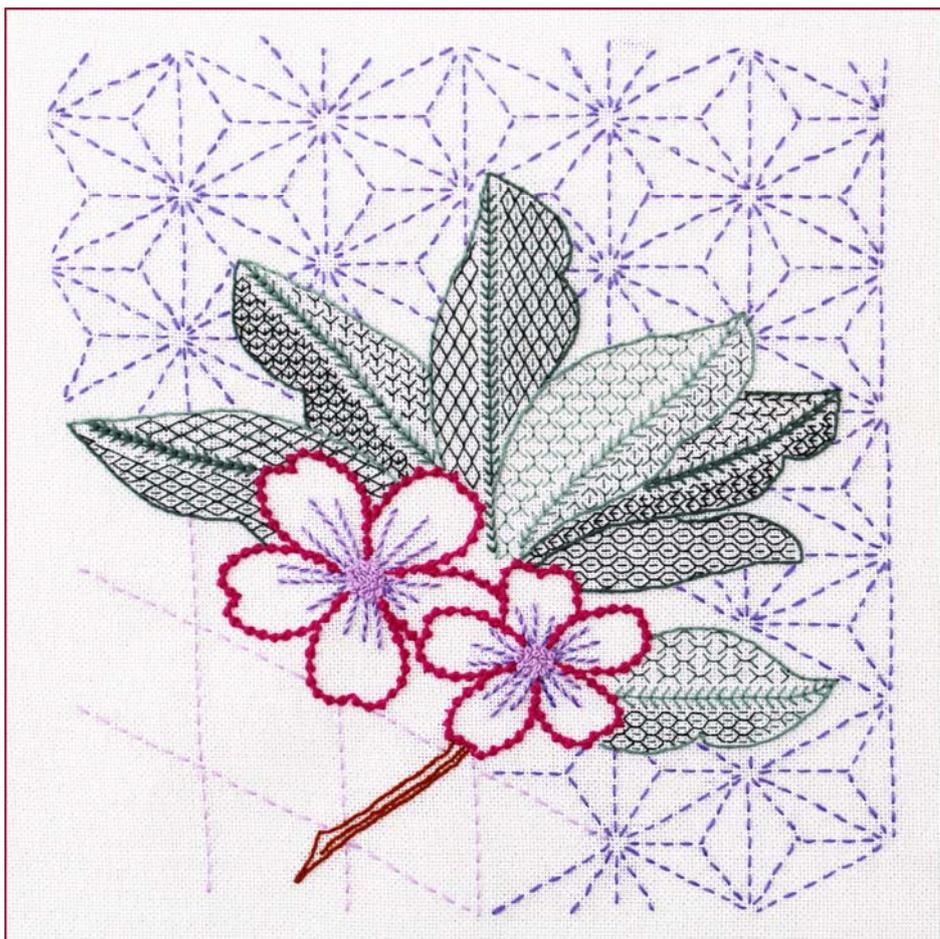
The design was worked on calico and used as a cushion and on a bag.



The sashiko pattern is Shippo tsunagi, also known as linked Seven Treasures and a full size design is included for use in other projects.



PR0057 Japanese Spring



The next one in the series is PR0058 Japanese Summer which is in 'Projects' this month

This design combines the techniques of blackwork and Japanese sashiko with textured embroidery stitches in a free style design worked on evenweave fabric.

Design Area: 8 inches wide x 9 inches high

Material: Zweigart, 28 count evenweave, 10 inches x 12 inches
This design is not suitable for Aida fabric.

The design is Asa-no-Ha or flax pattern which is used frequently in sashiko embroidery.

Future counted thread projects:

Also being worked are a new series of blackwork projects including an Islamic Chessboard and a large project in parts combining motifs, bites of blackwork and delicious colours. Despite the weather it has been a very productive winter and I hope you will enjoy all the different projects and feel encouraged to try them.

The Liver Bird – Liverpool's symbol

I have also designed and worked a project based on the Liver Bird which is the symbol of Liverpool in the UK and one of the last things that immigrants would have seen as they left the Port of Liverpool for America. I am researching the background and the story behind the statue and will add it to 'Inspirations' later in the year.

It is a large piece of free style blackwork worked on 28 count evenweave in shades of greens and teals.

The bird has always fascinated me. It is normally represented as a cormorant and appears as such on the city's coat of arms, in which it bears a branch of laver seaweed in its beak as a further pun on the name "Liverpool".

The two most famous stand on top of the clock towers of the Royal Liver Building at Liverpool's Pier Head, overlooking the River Mersey. Their names are Bertie and Bella. The male, Bertie looks over the city and the female, Bella looks to the sea.



The Liver Bird is a free style counted thread embroidery



Two Liver birds are mounted on the top Royal Liver Building

Hari Kuyo, The feast of broken needles by RicAmando



'For over four centuries, in Japan on February 8 we celebrate Hari Kuyo, a holiday dedicated to broken or old needles, to thank them for their service, and pray to see their sewing skills improve. But it's also a way to remove worries and sorrows, which according to tradition would move into needles during long sewing hours.

Needles are planted in tofu or pillows, and are often enriched with colored hoods, then taken to the temple where a series of ceremonies are performed to purify them.

Hari Kuyo is the last day of Japanese New Year's holidays, and no household chores are traditionally. Today the party is losing some centrality compared to a few dozen years ago: the main reason is that it is that there are less and less women who dedicate themselves to sewing, and consequently those involved in this tradition.'

Thank you for your article RicAmando. I have heard of the ceremony before and it is so good to hear that the tradition still continues. Needles play such an important part in our lives it is nice to know that they are still valued.

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Facebook groups:

Embroidery is not difficult it just requires a little patience. If you need help on your journey I am always available through the closed Facebook groups which I use for teaching. With over 9,000 members, the groups have really developed over the past few years.

It is a two way process as I learn as much from your contributions as you do from mine and it enables me to stay in contact with members who are not able to access groups because of where they live, illness, war zones and numerous other circumstances. Your photographs inspire other less confident members and many projects have gone on to win praise and prizes in major shows across the world. It does not matter if you are a beginner just finding your way or an experienced embroiderer, there is something here for everyone!

Facebook groups set up for projects:

The main site is:

Blackwork Journey - Elizabeth Almond Designs

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/blackworkjourneydesigns/>

Pandora's Box - Elizabeth Almond Designs

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/425352680984872/>

Box of Delights Stitch-A-Long. Designs by Elizabeth Almond

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/blackworkjourney/>

Sublime Stitches - Elizabeth Almond Designs

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



Readers Contributions

I decided to make the rest of this month's Blog about you, the readers and your wonderful work.

I gain enormous pleasure from looking at the photographs of your work in progress, seeing the finished projects and hearing your stories. I watch your enthusiasm and see your confidence grow. I see the work of groups in different parts of the world who are working on Blackwork Journey designs and enjoy working with the group leaders such as Maureen in Montreal who is working on PR0021 Flight with her ladies. I get regular updates on progress and am looking forward to seeing all the photographs in due course.

Best of Show Indiana State Fair
'Life is a tapestry woven by God'
Karen Ward

As I said earlier in the Blog, I am very happy to work with groups in the UK, different parts of the world through the internet, the Facebook groups or through a personal visit.



'Save the Stitches' was one of the first big projects on Blackwork Journey nine years ago and readers are still working the design and winning prizes at major shows!



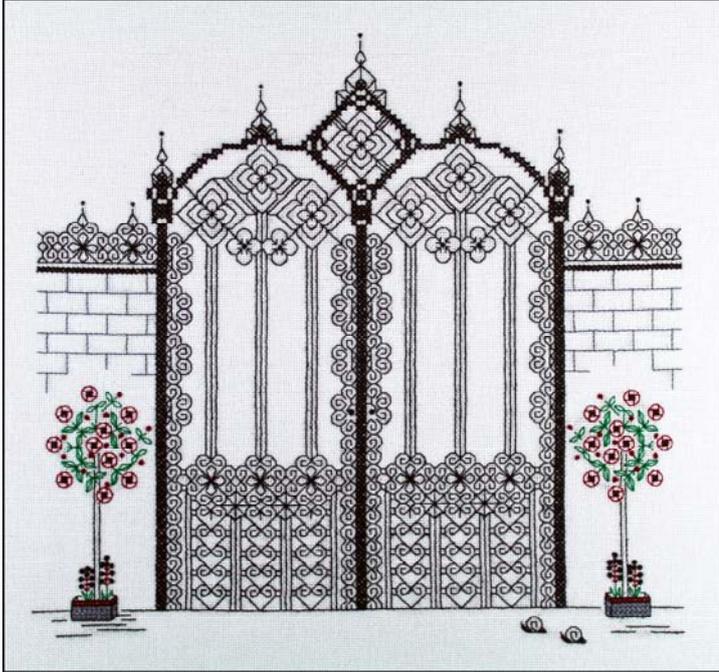
1. Jenny 2. Christelle 3. Zara 4. Liz 5. Nancy 6. Marie-Louise – talented ladies!

Blackwork comes in infinite varieties, colours and sizes

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The charts can be a trigger for readers to design their own projects and it is always interesting to see how they have been developed. Elizabeth was inspired by CH0342 Portail De Fleurs and this is her interpretation!

'Gate of Flowers' reminded me of a challenge given to a group I belonged to (Material Girls) which I thought you might be interested to see.



We were given a bag of "ingredients" and the theme of 'Gates'. The only rules we had was that we had to use a piece of all the ingredients in the bag. We could do anything with them, e.g. dye, cut up, etc. and add any other materials we wished.

As I have a thing about incorporating traditional embroidery into my modern pieces I immediately thought of a blackwork project on my 'to do list'. Looking through my back issues of Stitch Magazine I found it – and it was your beautiful Gate of Flowers design. You will see that I had to adapt it quite a bit to make it the size I wanted for my piece but I think you will recognise the design as being yours. I did make it clear at our "show and tell" of completed pieces where I got the inspiration for the gate from and that it was your design from Blackwork Journey.'

Elizabeth Roberts



I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog!

Happy stitching, *Liz*