



Blackwork Journey Blog

2010



the album
26.10.09

Cheryl Cole 3 words

December 2010

This month has been interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, my computer died and had to be scrapped, which meant that although I back up my work at regular intervals, all the software programmes were lost and many have to be reloaded and advice sought on reactivating products, registration numbers etc. Any reader who has been in that position will understand the frustration this has caused, but it made me realise just how dependent we have all become on technology. The days of using graph paper and pencil to design charts have long gone, but for a few days I returned to tradition and used a pencil which I found quite satisfying, if a little slow.

Secondly, I have been exploring textile and embroidery resources on the internet and have found some interesting sites. For example, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London has an outstanding collection which can be viewed in detail on-line at:
www.vam.ac.uk

The screenshot shows the V&A Search Collections website. At the top, it displays the V&A logo and search statistics: "Search 1,127,714 objects and 395,014 images from the V&A's collections". The search term "embroidery" is entered in the search bar. The results are displayed in a grid format, showing various embroidery items with their titles, creators, and dates. A sidebar on the left provides filters for Category, Collection, Material, Name, Place, Style, Subject, and Technique. The main content area shows a grid of 16 items, each with a thumbnail image, a title, a creator/artist, a date, and options to view details or add to a download list.

Category	Collection	Material	Name	Place	Style	Subject	Technique
Clothing (279)	Textiles and Fashion Collection (2261)	Linen (336)	Gordon, Evelline (220)	England (446)	Ottoman (255)	Flowers (194)	Embroidered (210)
Embroidery (1084)		Silk (379)		Great Britain (281)			Embroidering (541)
Fashion (387)		Silk thread (409)		London (293)			Embroidery (211)
Textiles (976)				Turkey (257)			Weaving (454)

Item	Title	Creator/Artist	Date
Panel	Frances Mary Temple...	Unknown	1892
Dress	Unknown	Unknown	1925
Pillow case	Unknown	Unknown	17th century (made)
Cover	Unknown	Unknown	1600-1700
Dress	Courreges, Andre	Unknown	1967
Evening dress	Owen Hyde Clark	Unknown	1955
Cover	Unknown	Unknown	1600-1699
Orphrey (cushion...)	Unknown	Unknown	1329-1354
Panel	Unknown	Unknown	1560-1570
Panel from a bur...	Unknown	Unknown	1320-1340
Trimming	Houldsworth & Co...	Unknown	1853
Settee seat cov...	Unknown	Unknown	1726-1740

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

Just type the word "embroidery" into their search box to bring a treasure trove of needlework onto your own computer.

By clicking on the individual pictures, a larger image appears and details of the embroidery can be viewed.

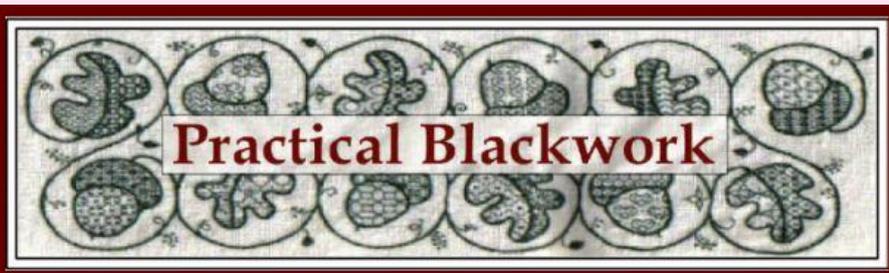
Many museums and art galleries around the world have collections which can be visited in a similar manner. The more I investigated, the more sites I discovered, many with links to yet more sites!

There are archives of historical textile books freely available, which can be downloaded or read over the internet. One of the most interesting sites is:

www.antiquepatternlibrary.org

Embroidery sites are plentiful, but two are especially appropriate:

Liadain, the designer, is collating different sources of blackwork embroidery and has an excellent portrait gallery and provides a lot of useful information. She is a self confessed blackwork addict and her enthusiasm shines through.



"Blackwork is black, except when it isn't. Blackwork is reversible, except when it isn't. Blackwork is a counted thread technique, except when it isn't..."
Lady Roxanne's "Blackwork Article"

HOME

PRACTICAL BLACKWORK

DESIGNS

GALLERY

LINKS

MORE LINKS

USEFUL BOOKS and BIBLIOS

BEAUTIFUL THINGS

FREE STUFF

DESIGNERS and SHOPS

Detail, Jane Bostocke sampler, English, 16th cent



Victoria and Albert Museum, London

What does THAT mean? The simplest definition of "blackwork" is monochrome embroidery on linen, but's it is more than that - there are many traditional monochrome-on-linen embroideries that are most certainly NOT blackwork. And so, rather than trying to define with rules, we define with STYLE - whether counted, scrollwork, or strapwork, in any color, "blackwork" has a look all its own.

The roots of blackwork embroidery seem to be in the Middle East - some of the earliest recognizable finds are pieces from 14th-15th century Coptic tombs (see the photo - in the baggage of Crusaders or pilgrims? along the trade routes? - and made its way to every western country, but seemed to find its most welcoming home in the fertile soil of England...

sampler detail, egyptian, 15th century

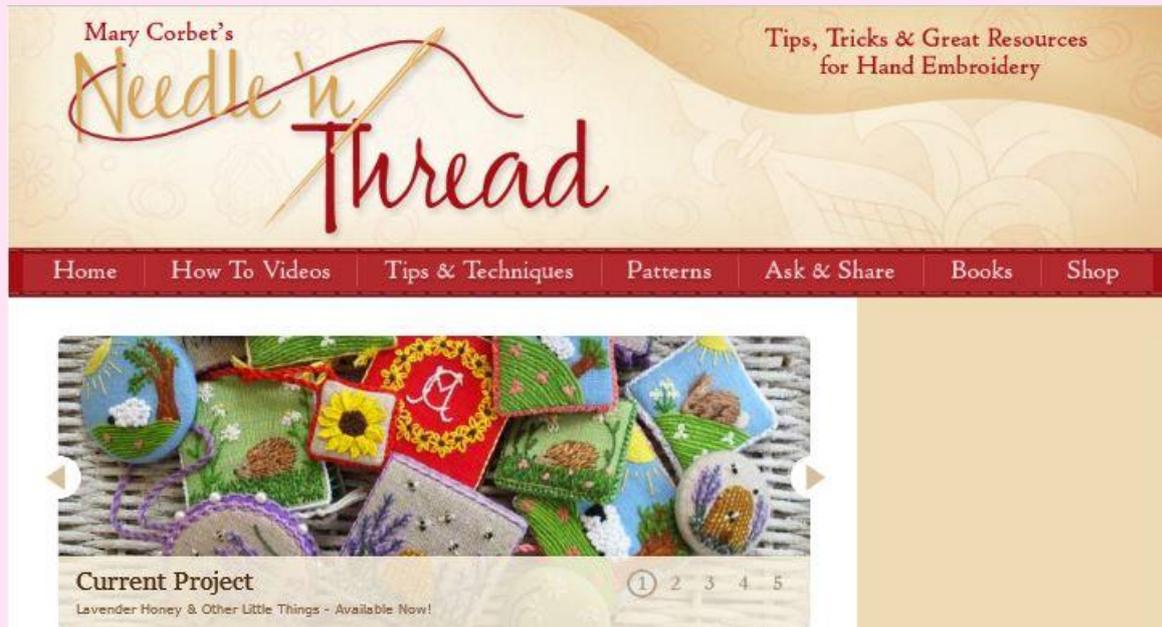


Victoria and Albert Museum, London

www.practicalblackwork.com

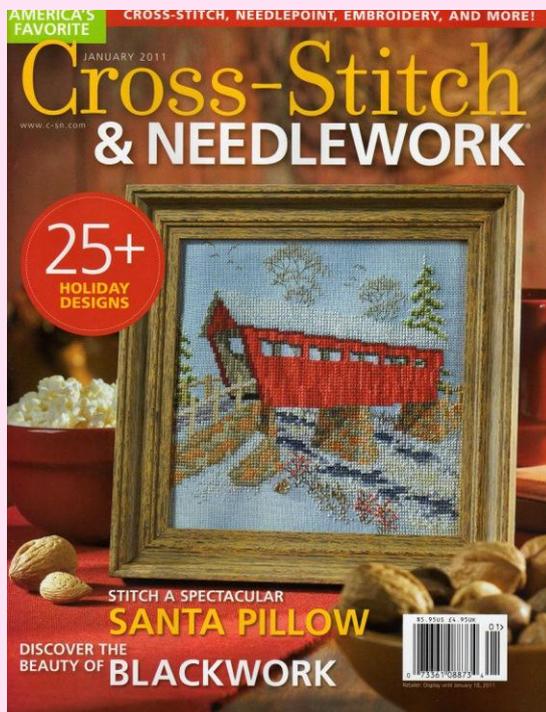
Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

Mary Corbet's 'Needle 'N Thread' site has excellent stitch videos, beautiful designs and information about many aspects of embroidery.



www.NeedleNThread.com

I hope you enjoy looking through these sites and find them as useful as I have!



The current issue of Cross-Stitch and Needlework

Have a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year!

Liz

November 2010

Preparations are well under way for Christmas. The charts are online and the embroideries were stitched well in advance. Working for magazines has been a real challenge. Their contents are planned months in advance, so I was designing Christmas cards for "The World of Cross Stitch" in May and Valentine's Day designs for three magazine in 2011 were dispatched in June and July and I am currently working on another Mandela for "The Gift of Stitching" for April next year.



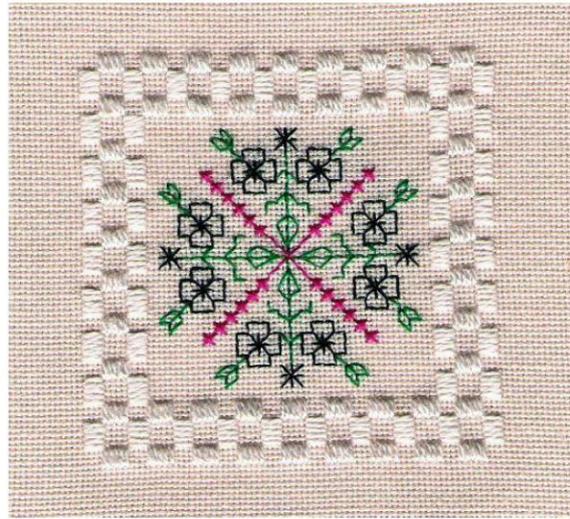
A visit to Thailand was a great source of inspiration for the coming year and a great escape from the British winter!

When I see an article or a chart in print it gives me a real buzz, as have the many friendships that I have made from this web site. Creating and maintaining a site, keeping it fresh and varied is quite a challenge. If you have suggestions as to the type of charts you would like to see, please let me know.

Working with people is an essential way of spreading information about embroidery and encouraging people to try new ideas. Blackwork is a very simple technique, but its history and practicality make it an ideal technique for today's hectic life.

Combining Techniques

These two samples show how techniques can be combined. The centres are worked in cross stitch and blackwork, whilst the borders are worked in uncut kloster blocks.



Have the confidence to look at different ideas and include them in your own work. There is great satisfaction in creating something that is unique to you and so many ways you can use what you make.



CH0169 Love Heart

Keep stitching,

Liz

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

October 2010

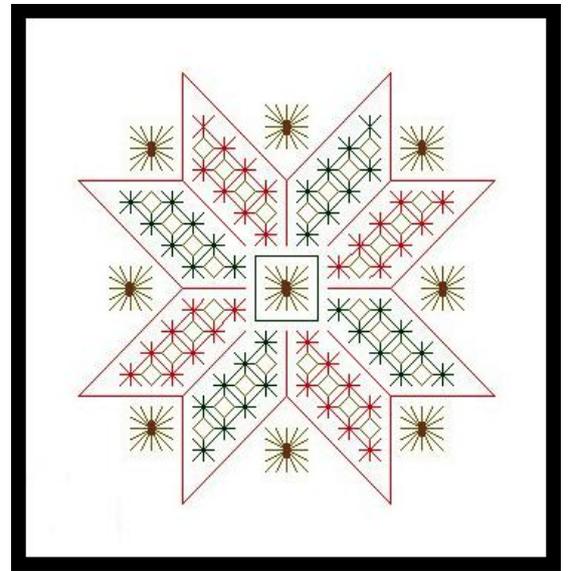
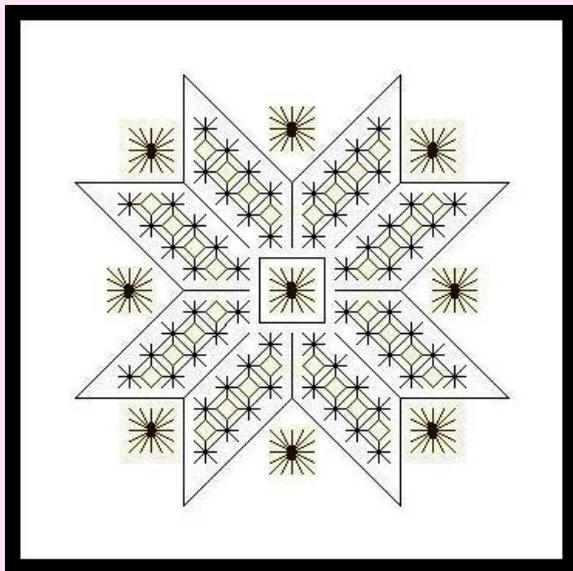
October has been a very thought provoking month for me.

I travelled with my husband to Holland, Belgium, Germany and Poland following the path of the RAF's Bomber Command from World War 2, visiting dams, cemeteries and prisoner of war camps. Reading the inscriptions on the tombstones of the many victims, I was struck by the ages - young men in their early youth and compared them with similar inscriptions from the war cemeteries near the River Kwai in Thailand, which I saw earlier in the year.

Returning home and playing with my two young grandchildren was therefore a pleasure not to be enjoyed lightly. That we are free to follow our lives and interests, raise families and grow old in peace is something we take for granted as a right. However, in many parts of the world these freedoms still do not exist, which is why coming together through our hobbies via the internet is such a joy. It is a privilege to share my love of needlework with other people and to receive a positive response in return.

Developing Blackwork Journey has been a considerable undertaking and I have enjoyed almost every minute of it. This month, I have added to the Freestyle charts and Sonata in "What's New" was stitched on my 2,000 mile coach journey across Europe. It is my bird of freedom in memory of that journey.

Also, with Christmas not far away I have added two Christmas stars in Freebies. By changing the colour, it is possible to change the whole effect of the chart and as you know, blackwork is especially suited to changing colours.



Choosing colours to work with is very personal and I identify with some colours more easily than others.

By looking at the spectrum or a colour wheel, it is easy to decide which colours appeal and to work out which colour schemes will work for you. The warmth of reds and oranges through

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

to the cooler blue tones work comfortably with black and white, but if the colour is too pale and a single strand of cotton is being used, it may not create sufficient impact.



Colours across the spectrum span warmth to cold!

Variiegated threads produced by such manufactures as Anchor and DMC make a wonderful addition to the embroiderer's palette. There are many other manufacturers of variiegated threads in a range of thicknesses. Explore these within your needlework to open up a whole new world.



Anchor variegated threads

Happy stitching,

Liz

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

September 2010

Autumn has arrived early and the leaves are just beginning to turn brown. We had a hosepipe ban imposed in July, here in North West England and I think it has rained almost every day since so the reservoirs are recovering and the ban has been lifted. However, it is still raining! When the weather is bad there is no excuse for not stitching. The lawns and the weeding can wait!

After three days attending a course run by the Royal School of Needlework, I started a new project on faces in blackwork using the transfer methods I mentioned in August. Cheryl Cole's new record album cover provided the inspiration and I have included two photographs below to show 'the work in progress'. I started with the eyes and the mouth, thinking that if they were right, then the rest would follow. I am using Anchor 403 Cotton A Broder as the thickest thread, Anchor stranded 403 in one and two strands, black sewing thread and Pearsall's Gossamer Silk, which is like sewing with a hair. It focused my thoughts on exactly where the shadows fall on the face and where the depth of stitches should be most concentrated.





Work in progress

The outline is traced onto tissue paper and then the tracing is stitched to the fabric with pastel tacking thread. When the tissue is torn away the stitched outline is left on the fabric ready for the embroidery.

Always use pale tacking thread so that no residue is left in the fabric when the threads are removed!



Start with the eyes. Once they are stitched correctly move round the shaded areas changing the depth and texture of the stitches. Once the face has been completed milliner's net will be stitched over the face, the basket weave of the hat stitched and an artificial rose sewn down.

Work in progress!

I have also included some Christmas designs this month. I like to plan my stitching in advance so that everything is not left to the last minute and I can take some stitching with me when I go on holiday just in case I have five spare minutes. I hope you find something that appeals to you this month.

Happy stitching, *Liz*

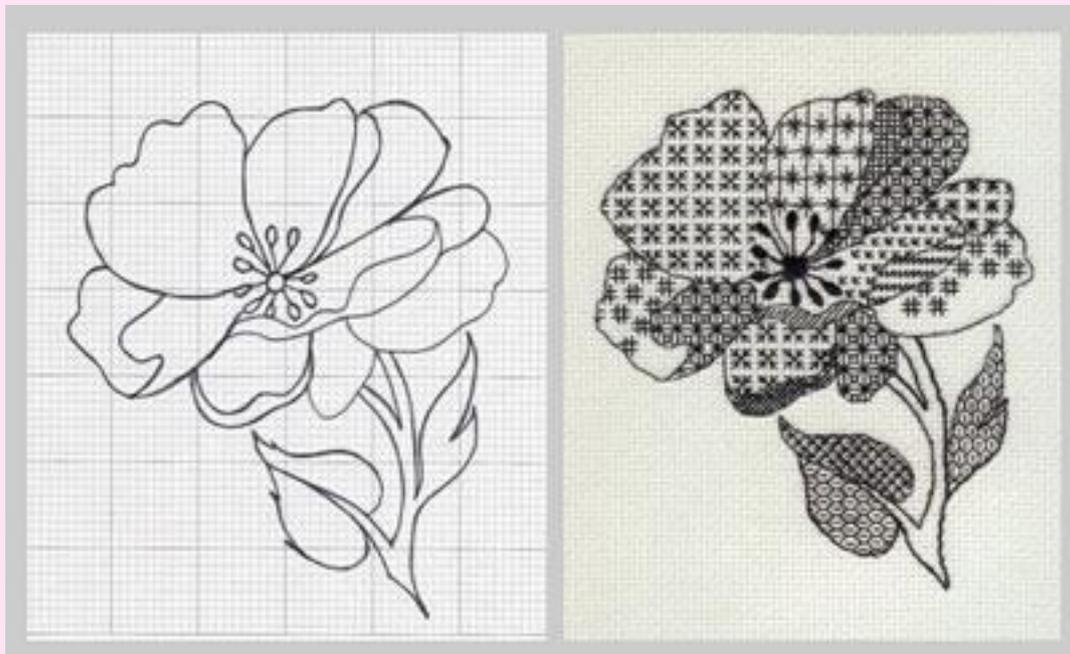
August 2010

Much of this month has been spent looking back over the site to see how it is developing and to determine its future direction.

Freestyle blackwork

To date, the charts have been planned as graphs and laid out so that the embroiderer can follow the chart to achieve the desired effect, but there is another way of creating blackwork designs and this month I have introduced three new patterns where the outlines are traced onto the fabric and then the spaces are filled with patterns.

Rounded edges, circles and domes are much easier to create if the outline can be drawn first. This is a very fluid way of producing blackwork and gives the embroiderer more choice as to where to place the stitches.



CH0172 Wild Rose – freestyle blackwork!

Method:

Before tracing the pattern onto your selected fabric, **READ THE INSTRUCTIONS** on the pen or pencil, **BEFORE** transferring your design onto material.

Use one of the methods below:-

Iron-On Pattern Pencil Silver Marking pencil for use on darker fabrics.

Water Erasable Pencil (Check the blue colour does remove completely by checking on a sample of the fabric **BEFORE** drawing on the main fabric) Suitable for use on light fabric. Usually blue!

Mark and Erase Pen – ink at one end and eraser at the other. (With Self Erase pens the lines can disappear before you have finished your embroidery!)

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

Dressmaker's carbon paper – comes in a variety of colours.

HB pencil, with a sharp point.

There are other methods, i.e. prick and pounce or tracing the design onto tracing paper and using pale blue thread to tack the outline onto the fabric. However, unless the design is very detailed a simple line drawing will suffice.

I use an HB pencil for preference, drawing as lightly as necessary to see the design. It can smudge, but I have seldom had a problem using this method.

A light box will help if the outline is difficult to see but you don't have a light box tape the material and pattern to a window using masking tape! Even the television screen can become a light box. Once the pattern is on the material then the outlines can be stitched in stem stitch or back stitch and the fillers added.

This is the way I transfer my designs. It works for me but the needlewoman may prefer another method.

Colour scheme - maroon

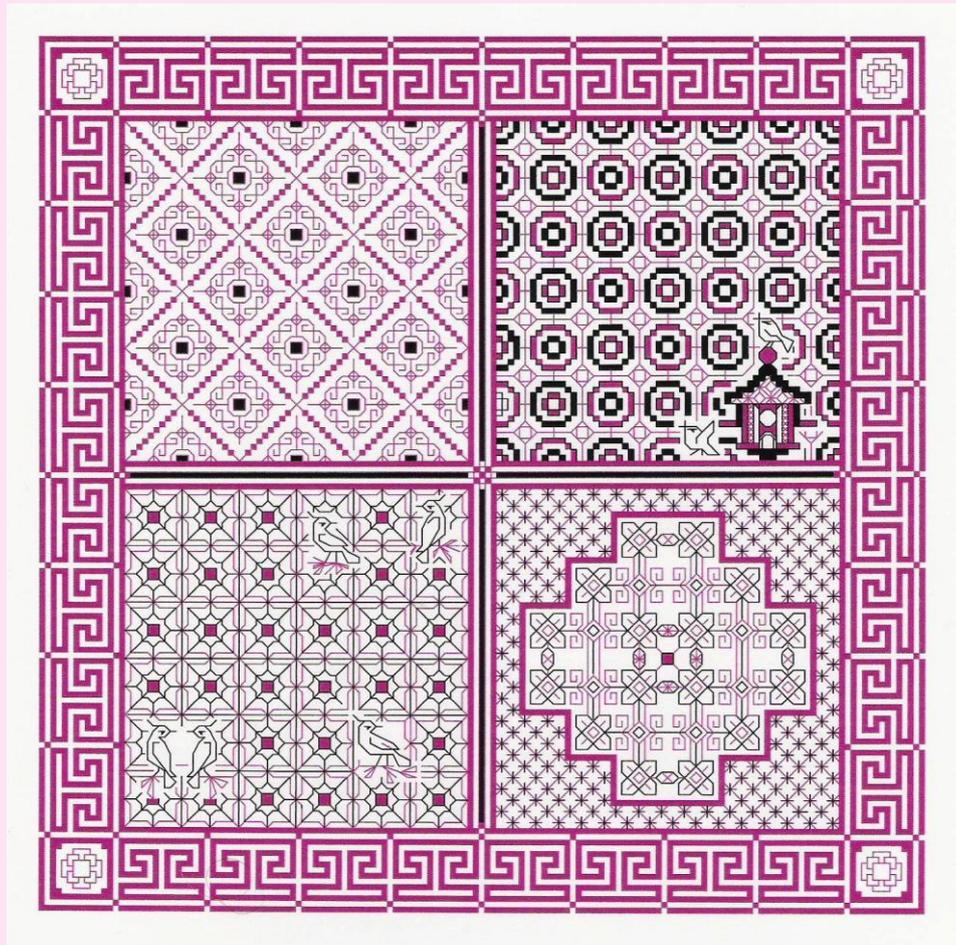
The colour theme for August is maroon. Maroon is a dark red colour. The word maroon comes from the French word marron which means "chestnut". The first recorded use of maroon as a colour name in English was in 1789.



A scrapbook, pin cushion, design for a box top and a handbag mirror compete with two dolphins, embroidered on a placemat show how maroon can be used.

The warmth and depth of maroon makes it an ideal substitute for black and it has been used throughout history as an alternative.

A number of my charts use maroon as the main colour i.e. CH0023 Maze Magic, CH0029 Serene, CH0030 Thyme Boxes, CH0078 Chengdu, CH0105 Combination Magic and CH0168 Startime Sampler.



CH0078 Chengdu

I have also used maroon to create a number of small items suitable for gifts. The scrapbook has a piece of maroon embroidery mounted on the front cover protected by a piece of clear plastic.

Now is the time to think about working your Christmas gifts. I hope this has given you some ideas.

Happy stitching! *Liz*

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

July 2010

I cannot believe that yet another month has passed and we are now into summer. As I type this, three black and red woodpeckers are pecking at the nut feeder in my garden and two ring doves are cooing in the trees.

I made a resolution at the beginning of the year that I would finish all the projects that have been outstanding for months and mount all the embroideries that have been completed and left in a pile. I have started to frame some of the work, but I have also been looking at other ways in which embroidery can be used. There is only so much space on my walls and not everyone appreciates embroidery as a gift, so over the next few months I am going to present some different ways of using blackwork.

I hope this will give you some ideas for your work. Many of the patterns in "What's New" and "Charts" can be used to create different embroidery ideas. By using a little imagination you can easily move away from the traditional use of embroidery.

If you are creating more than one item, consider using a colour theme.

Black and white colour scheme

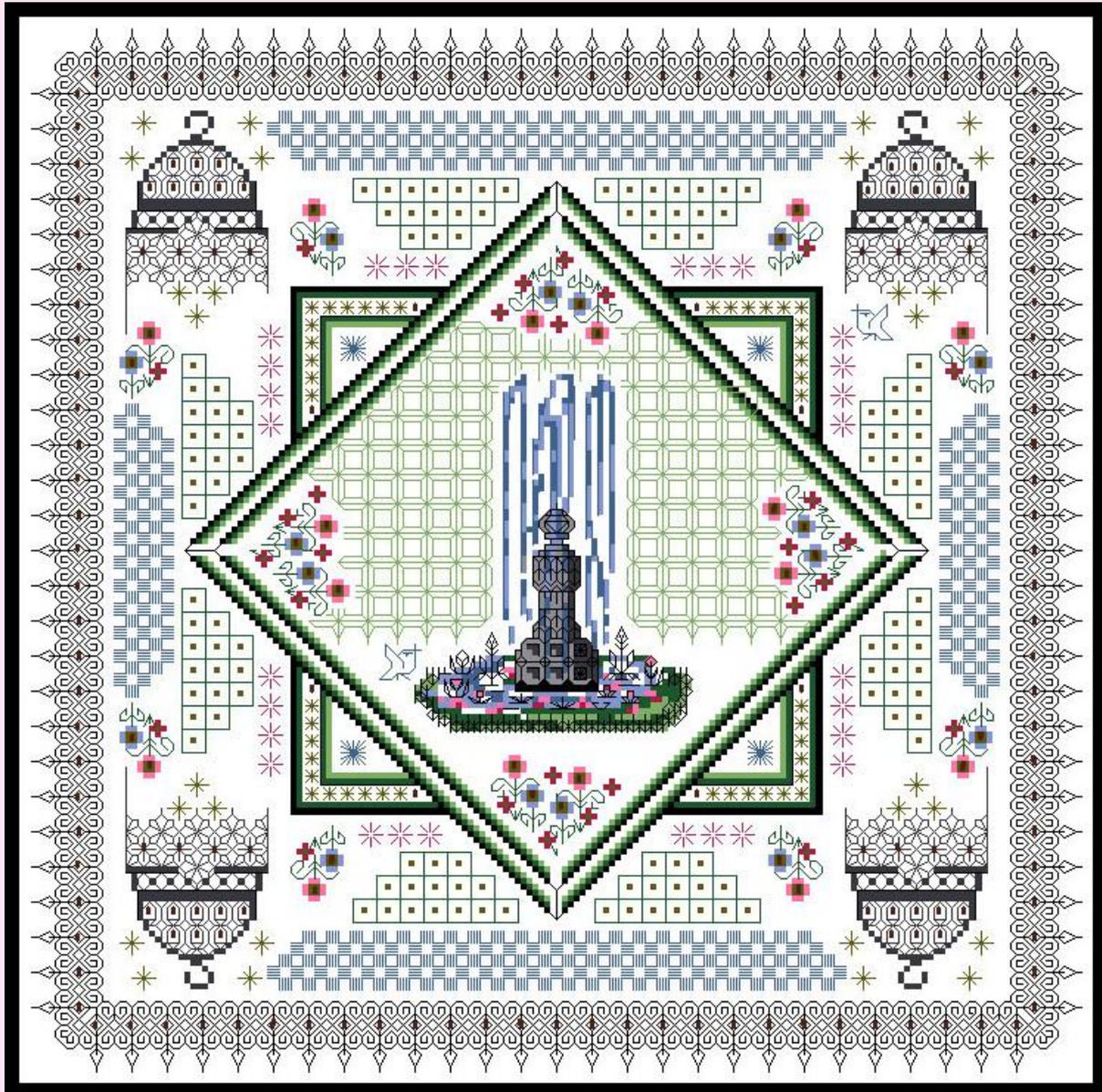


Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

The theme for July uses black and white designs for a new office. A blackwork border stitched on a black place mat, an embroidered ruler and scissor keeper go hand-in-glove with a pencil pot, coaster and heart design picture in a square black wooden frame - all designed to make working both practical and a pleasure.

Fountain Mandala

The 'Gift of Stitching' magazine June 2010 edition has featured my article and design which will continue into July. They have also kitted the design 'Fountain Mandala'. To connect to the 'Gift of Stitching' click on the "Links" page.



Fountain Mandala Gift of Stitching June 2010

Happy stitching,

Liz

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

June 2010

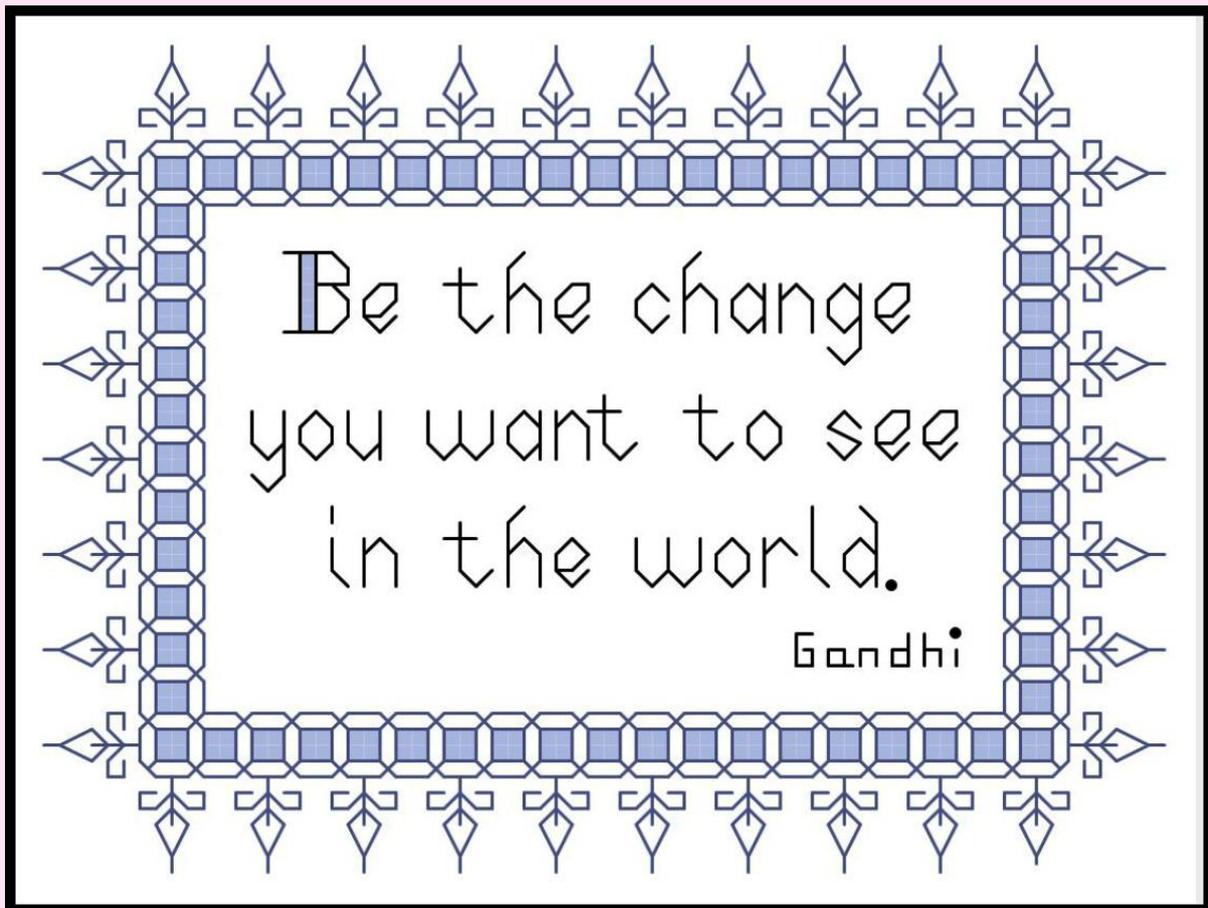
This has been a very uncertain month, not only in the United Kingdom with the major political changes, but also in Thailand where there has been so much conflict and given this upheaval in the world, it is especially important that we find some inner peace and space to dream and follow our own thoughts and hobbies.

I was sent a card recently, the words of which were so simple, but true!

Happiness is a butterfly,
which when pursued
is always just beyond your grasp,
but which, if you sit down quietly,
may alight upon you.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

I have also found a simple quotation from the writings of Buddha, which I have adopted as my goal in life and designed a small sampler around these words, which you will find in this month's "What's New" section.



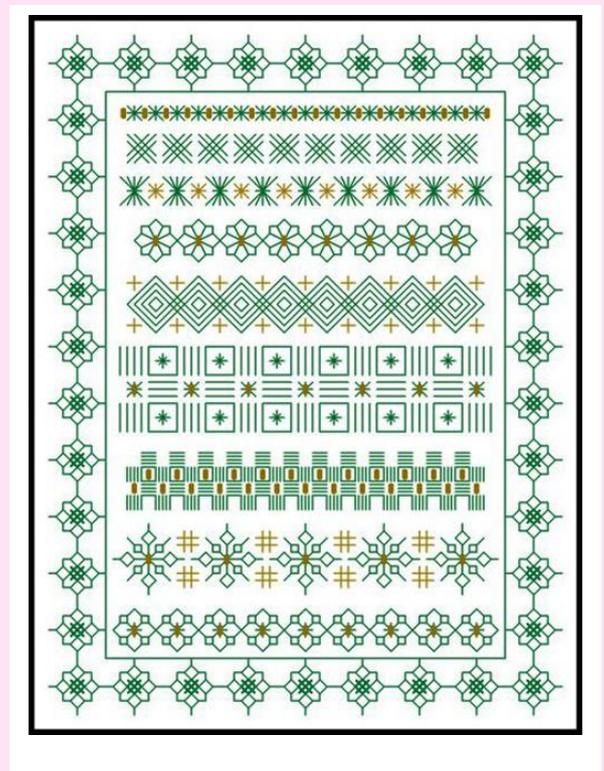
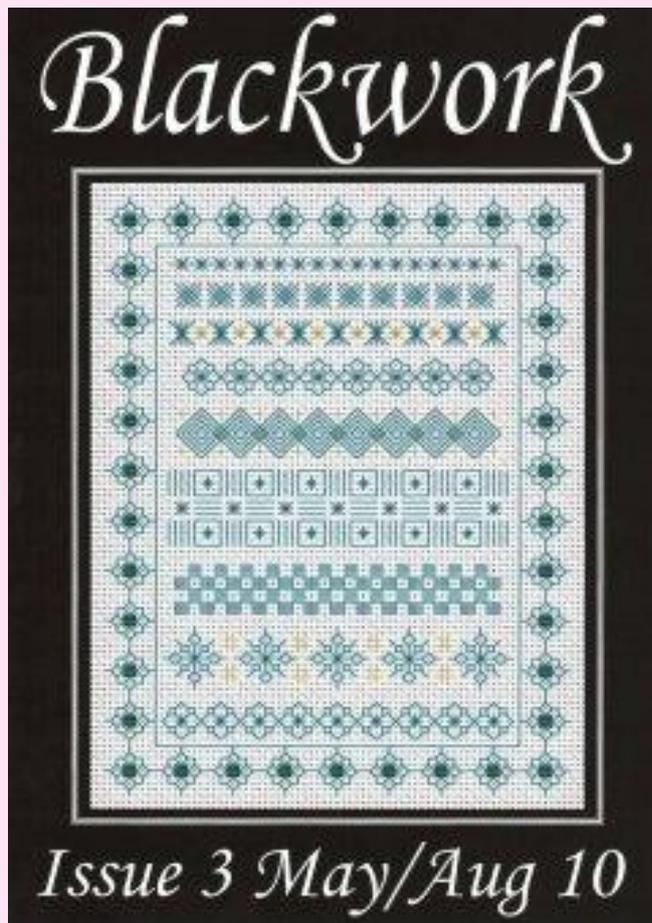
"Be the change you want to see in the World"

Blackwork Guild Magazine

The third copy of the Blackwork Guild magazine was released this month. It is full of interesting information and designs and I have included the link:

www.theblackworkguild.com

If you want to investigate this internet magazine further!



CH0163 Exploration

Enjoy the change in the weather, take time out to look around you and have a peaceful month

Happy stitching,

Liz

May 2010

How can I stitch into old age?

I have worked as an embroidery teacher, lecturer and designer for many years and I am very mindful of the problems that aging brings and the frustrations when you really want to do something but don't know how to achieve the results any more. There are ways of achieving your aims and equipment is available at minimum expense.

The first thing you have to do is have a good hard look at yourself. Which bits ache? Which don't function as they used to do 30 years ago? What state is your eyesight in? How do you sit and where and when do you work? Is there a reason why you have developed one specific problem more than others and what medical advice have you been given?

Once you are armed with, in my case a long list resulting from a serious back injury, arthritis and deteriorating eyesight set about tackling each one in turn. Having worked with older people for many years during the course of my teaching career, the same list seems to be common, so here goes:

Eyesight

Most people have deteriorating eyesight and they need to be realistic about what projects they work on. If you are working in the daytime face the light. Don't work in your own shadow. Use a daylight simulation bulb in a good magnifying light so that your stitches are enlarged and lit at the same time. I stitch all my designs using a good light and especially if you are working on fine material it helps to take the strain off. There are magnifying glasses that will fit over your own glasses and even a headset with built in magnifying lenses as used by model makers. Talk to your optician!!



Magnifying lens/light and daylight simulation bulb

Posture

Watch the way you sit! Don't slump in a comfy chair. Sit in one which gives your back support. This in turn takes the strain off your shoulders. If you are comfortable you will stitch better, the results will be neater and the tension more even. Don't sit in the same position too long. Move and stretch at least every 15 minutes. Rotate your shoulders and move your neck. Do some finger stretching exercises and rub the joints – gently!!!!!!!!!!!! Bring your

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

needlework up to you rather than your head down to your needlework. Like sitting over a computer for a long spell – needlework can damage your health. If it hurts - stop!

Use a frame which goes between your legs or under your bottom to free up your hands and avoid stretching over a slate frame or gripping a ring frame which can be impossible for swollen joints. It looks bit unusual but it really helps.



Materials, needles and threads.

There is no reason why you cannot stitch until you are ninety if you take stock of the materials, threads and needles you are using. **USE NEEDLES YOU CAN SEE TO THREAD!** There is no point struggling with a small needle if you cannot see the eye.

Change the fabric to suit the thread. Move to a smaller count of material e.g. Aida 11 threads to the inch, lower count evenweave with fewer stitches to the inch. There is no reason why designs cannot be stitched on tapestry canvas, either single thread or double count or locker stitch canvas and still produce a beautiful result.

Change to wools or increase the number of embroidery strands you use to increase the thickness of the threads you are handling. Arthritis limits grip and control. Larger needles, threads, courser materials and a frame give you back some control. If your hand shakes as in Parkinson's disease, a felt covered house brick laid along the arm helps to limit the shaking and gives more control back to the hand. You look a bit odd when you get a brick out of your sewing bag but it really can help.

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

I have taught students from 16 – 90 and most people have problems of one kind or another. I hope this helps you to think positively about your problems and remember that nothing is impossible!



Portable work base with fanny frame and magnifying light



The World of Cross Stitch April 2010 Issue 164 38 designs by Liz Almond

Happy stitching,

Liz

March/April 2010

The blog this month is a combined one - three weeks in Thailand rather changed the schedule, but gave me masses of inspiration.

It is a very beautiful country, not just the people, but the architecture and countryside generally. To watch cranes dancing in the paddy fields was magical. There are so many colours everywhere and after such a miserable winter in the UK it was a joy to feel warm. Everyone smiles more when they are warm, especially me! Even the gold statues on the temples displayed teeth and tusks!



Thai women and children!

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

From the temple dancer and the boatwoman in the floating market to the tribeswomen of the north, politeness and charm were a memorable part of the experience. The young woman from the long necked hill tribe of Northern Thailand wore her necklet with pride. Extra rings are added annually. It is seldom removed and was very heavy. Buddhism and its gentle rituals were evident in all aspects of daily life as was the calm and sincerity that prevailed. It all made a lasting impression on me and I hope to reflect this later in Blackwork Journey.

Thailand is noted for its handicrafts - wood carving, lacquer work, umbrellas, textiles, jade, jewels, silk and silver. There is no end to the variety of handmade items available, many of which are produced to a very high standard and tempting to the tourist. Being able to watch these crafts being created was a privilege and an insight into a world which is fast disappearing under modern influences.

I hope you enjoy sharing some of these images.

Happy stitching, *Liz*

February 2010

January in the UK has been very snowy and unpleasant so to see the bulbs beginning to peep through the soil is a very welcome sight and an indication that spring is not too far away. The one bonus about having to stay indoors for long periods is that I have been busy designing some new projects for my site and for various publications. I will also be adding new pages to Inspirations over the next few months. Visits to Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Andalucía provided some interesting ideas and Thailand is beckoning...

On a serious note! All the images and embroidery designs on this site are copyrighted by the designer, Elizabeth Almond, and may not be used in any form without permission. People who purchase my charts have permission to make a working copy of the chart for their personal use. As you can imagine it takes time to create designs and it is annoying to find that they have been copied elsewhere or misused.

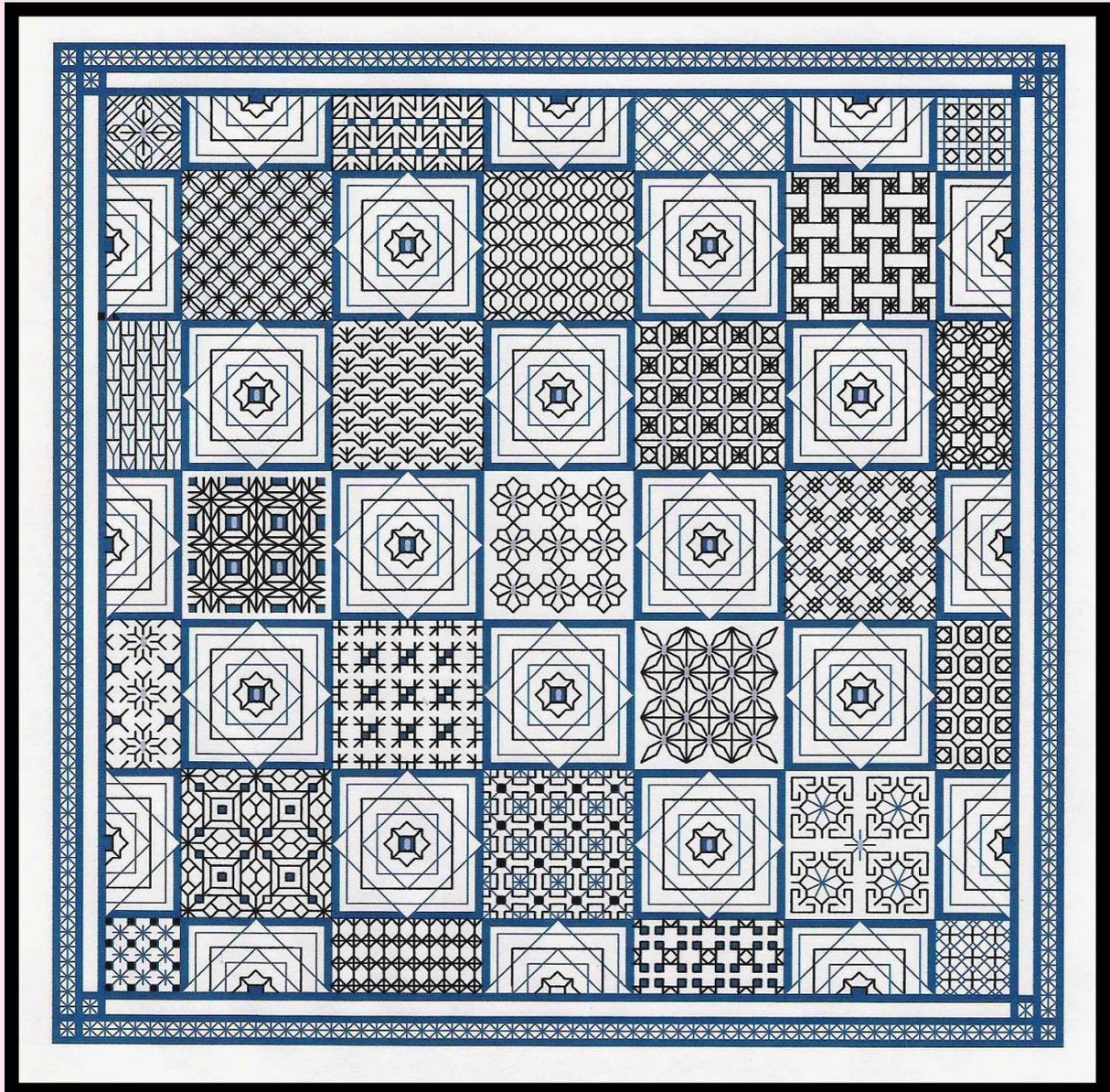
It is great fun to see something you have created in print and "Tabatha's Sampler" is at the newsagents now in the January/February 2010 issue of "Just Cross Stitch". which is an American publication. They have introduced a digital version of the magazine for the first time and (for now) that digital downloadable issue is available FREE!

<http://justcrossstitch.epubxpress.com>

Please keep sending your photographs of your finished work for Gallery, sort out your silks, decide what your Spring projects are going to be and start stitching!

"Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes, and the grass grows by itself."

Buddhist proverb



January/February 2010 "Just Cross Stitch"

January 2010

Happy New Year!

I hope 2010 brings peace, health and happiness to a very unsettled world.

The decorations have been put away for another year. The turkey and the trimmings are just a distant memory and it is time to take a positive look at all those New Year resolutions.

My resolution is to try and finish all those unfinished projects, create some new designs and take Blackwork Journey a step further! This year, I would like to introduce some specialist stitches into a number of the blackwork designs and broaden the horizons by integrating it with other techniques, such as hardanger and pulled work. I have been experimenting with this idea for some time and the results should begin to appear on this site over the next few

Blackwork Journey Blog - 2010

months. I will explain how these stitches are worked, so that hopefully everyone can understand them. 'Inspirations' will also have some new pages reflecting the countries I was fortunate enough to visit in 2009. Watch this space!

Needlework is constantly evolving and I think it is important to try new ideas. It is very easy to get stuck in a rut, but making the effort to reach out for new techniques, materials, threads, colours and patterns away from one's 'comfort zone' can be very rewarding.

For me, one of the saddest sights is a car boot or jumble sale where someone's hand embroidery, piece of crochet, or lace is dumped in a pile, dirty and neglected. I think of the hours someone has lovingly spent stitching their project for it to have such a sad fate. Remember, whatever you create, whether it is embroidery or quilting, is special to you and you should be proud of it! Name and date it so that in a hundred years time someone will look at it and wonder about the person who created it. The heirlooms of the future start with you!

'All there is'

Make the most of yourself,
for that is all there is of you.

By Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882), USA

Happy stitching,

Liz