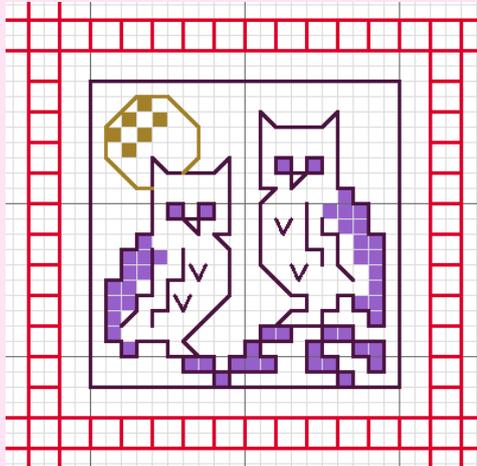


Blackwork Journey Blog, June 2016

I love this time of year in England, when the trees are covered with fresh green leaves, the flowers are blooming and the snow and rain are hopefully, behind us for a few months. I get the urge to garden and to step away from the computer and enjoy the fresh air. For the first time in ten years, a tawny owl and her mate nested in the owl box in our garden, so I have spent many hours just trying to get a glimpse of the occupants.



Owls from Block 1, Pandora's Box



Our tawny owl is about 14 - 18 inches tall. The last time we saw her she was being chased into the nest box by a pair of black crows!

The story behind Blackwork Journey

Last month, I spoke about the process of creating a design and since 'Pandora's Box' is coming to a conclusion this month, I want to continue this discussion by considering what my responsibilities as a designer are to the reader and to my family and myself.

When I retired from college as part time lecturer, I returned as a student to undertake a three year part time web design course and numerous courses on Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator with the rather nebulous idea that I wanted to create designs and perhaps start a web site. Since I barely knew how to switch on a computer this was rather ambitious thinking! Anyway, with great trepidation in November 2008 Blackwork Journey was born.

I loved blackwork and there were very few kits or embroideries available at the time. It has a long established history relating to the Tudor era and beyond, which inspired me and I knew could develop the technique along new paths and encourage other people to take a fresh look. I travelled round the UK giving talks and doing days schools on embroidery for many years and after discussing the idea with various groups I was working with, found a genuine enthusiasm for what I was trying to do.

However, like all new ventures the first year was terrifying. I had to learn not only to design the charts so that I could follow them, but put the information across to the readers so that they would be able to understand it. Graph paper and pencils were no longer sufficient, so I progressed to computer software. In fact, I now have four different software programmes on my computer, each one with its own advantages and disadvantages. Many hours are spent with sketchpad and pencil in the initial stages of a design before I approach the computer. Everything is noted down and tucked away sometimes for years! I run ideas past my

long suffering husband who checks all the charts and takes the photographs at every stage of a design's development.

Hours are spent working on the design and then stitching it, but it was not until I had a very serious accident three years ago that I realised just how much my needlework and Blackwork Journey meant to me. It is an essential part of my persona and has kept me going through some very dark days. This, in turn, has given me a greater understanding of the difficulties many people face in their everyday lives and how needlework has become a lifeline for so many readers.

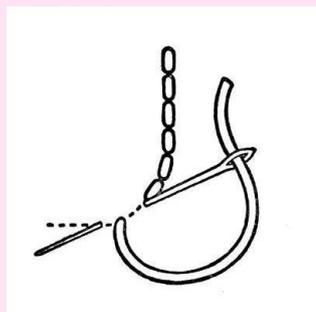
Being able to share each other's work and answer questions and interact directly with readers was why the Facebooks were formed. I was asked if a closed Facebook group could be formed for 'Save the Stitches' which I agreed to and later, when I could see the benefits of this type of group, I started two other groups for 'Box of Delights' and 'Pandora's Box'. It is not possible to interact directly with readers through the Blog, so this was a very good area for teaching. There are over 2,500 members in the groups and many friendships have been formed and support given. Being able to see each other's work in progress and the colours and fabrics that have been used for the different projects has been very exciting and informative for everyone, including myself.

So Blackwork Journey has developed from a very small site into quite a complicated one. Looking back through the early charts I can map my own progress and monitor how my thinking has changed over the years. This is how it should be, constantly changing and growing in confidence and content. New techniques are being explored and taken through to the readers and to the magazines and books that I work with and as a result, new people throughout the world from the USA and Canada through the UK, Russia and Japan are now participating and working on the different projects.

Embroidery is international and I would like to feel that Blackwork Journey had played a small part in raising the profile of Blackwork and bringing both enjoyment and satisfaction to people.

Take a Fresh Look!

Every month I am going to take a fresh look at the stitches we use daily in our embroidery. There are many different ways these stitches can be used to change the appearance of embroidery. The changes may be small, but they can make a real impact.



Back Stitch

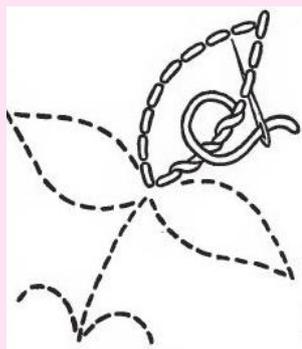
This is one of the most common stitches and can be used in different ways to fulfil an important role in defining and edging projects. Frequently associated with cross stitch, it is a line stitch.

Working from left to right, the needle is brought out just in front of the line to be

covered. The needle is then taken back to the point of last stitch. (See diagram)

Back stitches should be firm, neat and regular.

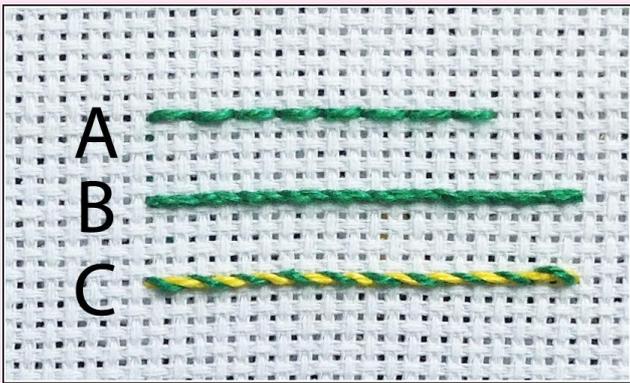
Diagram 1 Back stitch



Back Stitch Whipped

To make a corded effect back stitch the foundation row of back stitch and then pass the needle through and over each stitch. Pull gently to create a cord effect.

Using different thickness of thread will make the cord lighter or heavier. On 28 count, I usually back stitch in two strands of floss and whip with two strands if I



want medium weight line. Using one strand and whipping with one strand gives a lighter effect.

Diagram 2 Back stitch whipped

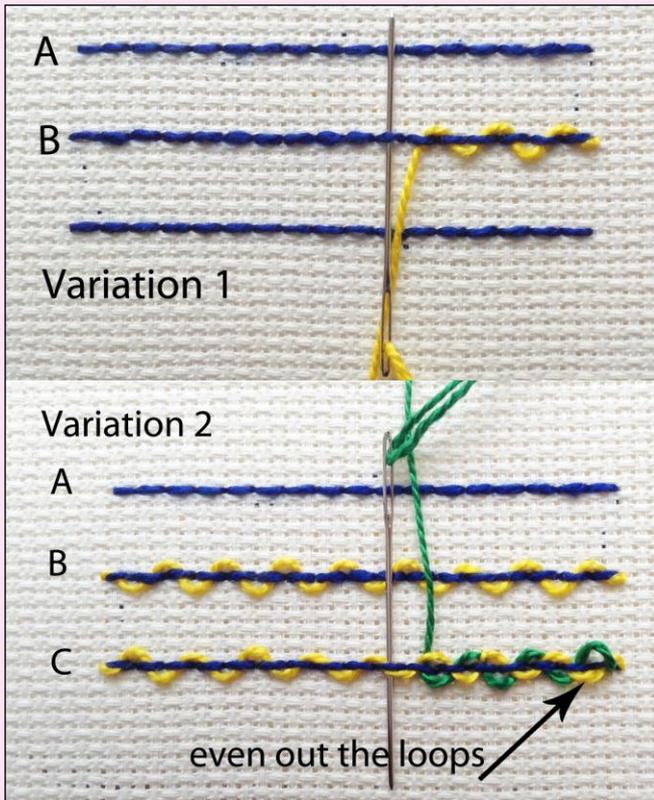
- A. Back stitch
- B. Back stitch whipped with the same colour
- C. Back stitch whipped with a different colour



Note; Once you start whipping with a different colour do not stop until you have reached the end. Always whip in the same direction or the 'twist' will be wrong.

Examples of back stitch used in quilting, for lettering, embroidery and counted thread work.

The stitch needs to be a size you can work with comfortably. There is no virtue in a stitch so small that it cannot be seen. If you are going to thread the needle underneath the stitches, then the stitches need to be large enough to take the thread and needle comfortably.



Back stitched threaded

This can be worked as two different variations and if different threads are used it makes very attractive fillings. The weight of the threads is carried on the top of the fabric making it a useful stitch on heavy fabric which is difficult to stitch through.

Variation 1

A. Work the foundation row of back stitch first, then as shown at B, using the first coloured thread, weave under each stitch in turn pulling the thread gently to make a row of loops.

Variation 2

Work rows A and B, then using a third colour weave under each stitch between the yellow loops. Even the loops out and finish the threads off at the back neatly as shown at C.

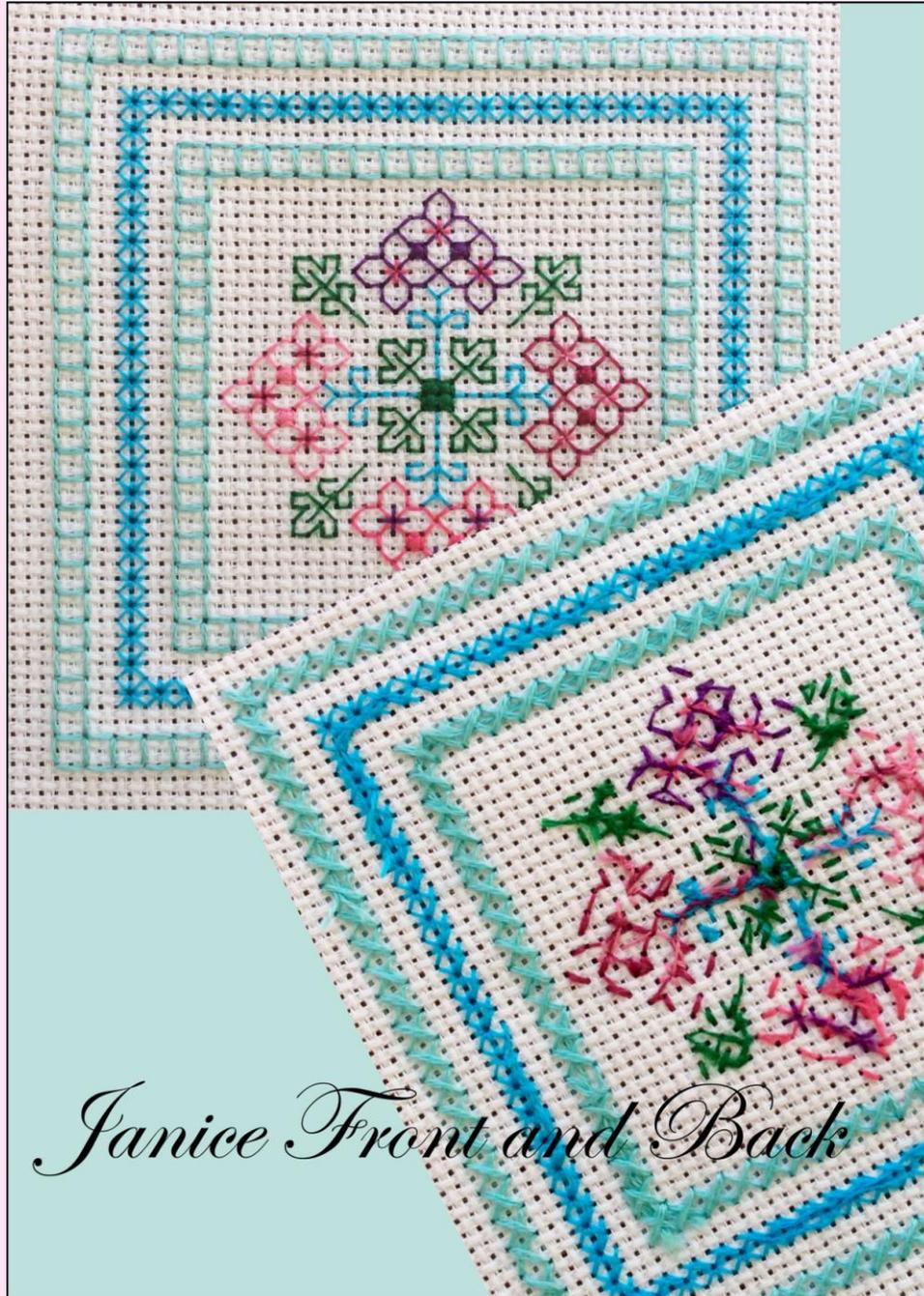
Using variegated threads in these type of stitches can be really effective and DMC have just bought out a new range of 24 variegated threads which I just could not resist.



Should the back of the work be as neat as the front?

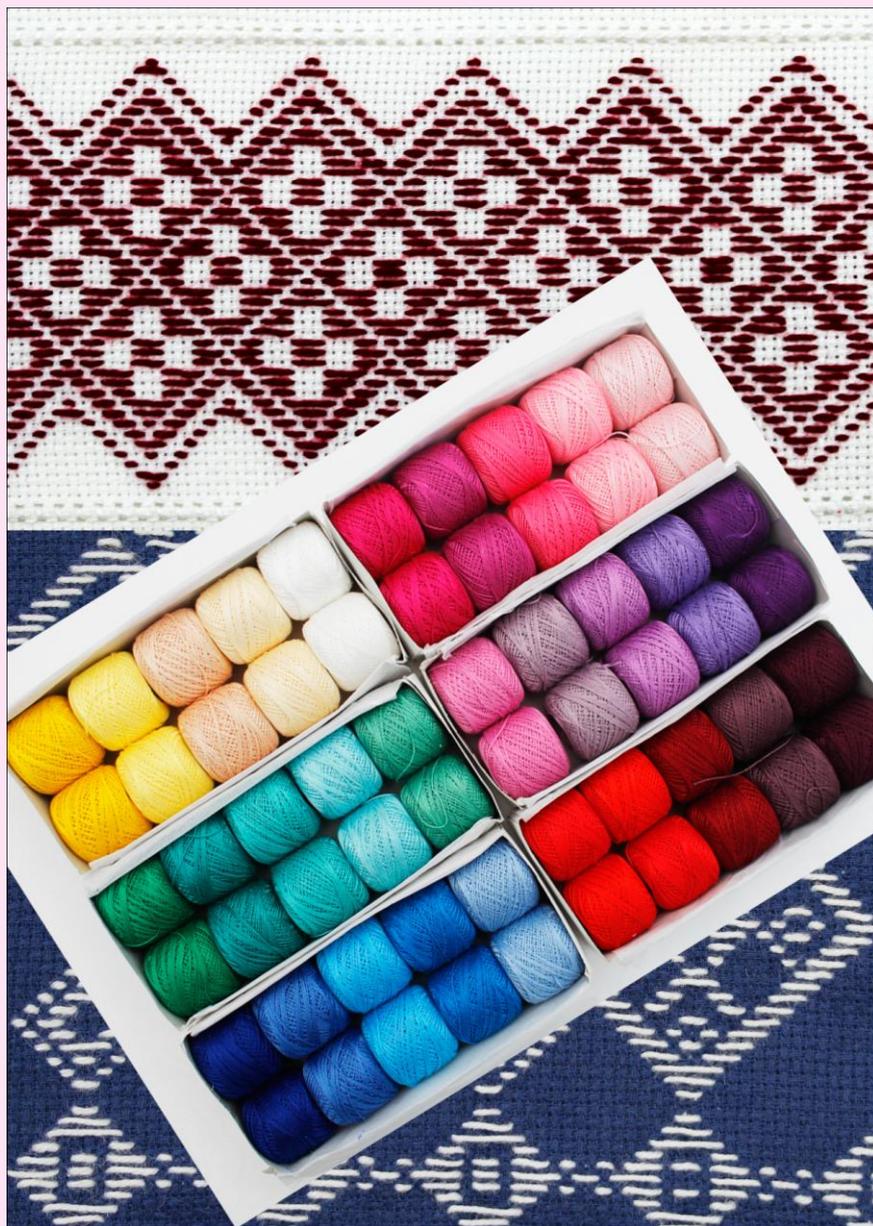
When I teach blackwork classes, I always stress the need to keep the back of the work neat with all the ends sewn in and trimmed. It is not because I am being fussy, but if the ends are left, especially if the threads are dark coloured, it will be found that if the fabric is framed, the ends will show through the fabric onto the front of the work.

One of my students took this very seriously and sent me pictures of her finished embroidery, both front and back! Well done and thank you Janice, it made me smile!



Janice Front and Back

Sewing the ends in!



Kogin continued - a winning combination - Aida 16 count and Cotton Cotton Pérle No.8

I have continued to develop my interest in Japanese pattern darning. It is not easy to find the correct fabric and threads in the UK so I have been looking at alternatives which are readily available and found that I6 count Aida or 32 count evenweave work very well together.

However, try different combinations until you find a balance that is right for you.

Actual Japanese Kogin work is quite heavy because of the thick cotton threads that are used. My designs are more delicate using finer threads and less dense stitching.

If the technique is to be used on clothing, bags or household linen such as towels, suggest you adjust the weight of the thread accordingly.

Impaired eyesight

I receive regular e-mails about eyesight problems and the difficulties of continuing to sew when someone's eyesight is impaired. There are some immediate points to consider here: lights and lenses, size of needles etc which are detailed in a number of PDF's in the 'Techniques' section of Blackwork Journey and which may be helpful, but there are a number of fabrics available to assist the embroiderer.

Chris experimented with a new Zweigart fabric recently called Turkestan. It has one of the largest open weaves I have seen other than 11 count Aida and comes in four colours - **white, cream, yellow and red**

Stitch	1,45
Count	3,5

Stitches/Threads/cm	2,45 Stitch
Material composition	100% Cotton
Width:	140 cm



Zweigart Turkestan

Suitable for use with thick threads and wool Turkestan is an alternative to 11 count Aida

Japanese Festival of Broken Needles (Hari- Kuyō)

During the course of the year, I break or bend a number of needles whilst stitching, so I was fascinated to hear about an annual festival celebrated in Japan. Somehow, it seemed very appropriate, especially since we take the tools of our trade so much for granted!

Whilst in Japan last year, I visited a Japanese needlewoman and she told me about the Buddhist and Shinto 'Festival of Broken Needles' which is held each year on February 8th in the Kanto region and December 8 in the Kyoto and Kansai regions. It is a memorial for all the needles broken in their service during the past year and an opportunity to pray for improved skills. A little extra research from Wikipedia filled in more details.

"Hari" means "needle" and the suffix "-kuyou" means "memorial", derived from a Sanskrit word *pūjā* or *pūjanā*, meaning "to bring offerings".

Hari-Kuyō began four hundred years ago as a way for housekeepers and professional needle workers to acknowledge their work over the past years and respect their tools.

Apart from humans, and animals, plants and items are considered to have souls. This festival acknowledged the good given to people by their tools. Needlewomen went to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples to thank their broken needles for their help and service. This conforms with the philosophy of "not wasting" or "paying honour to the small things" which I thought was an interesting concept.



A ceremony at the Awashima Shrine

Blackwork Journey Blog, June 2016

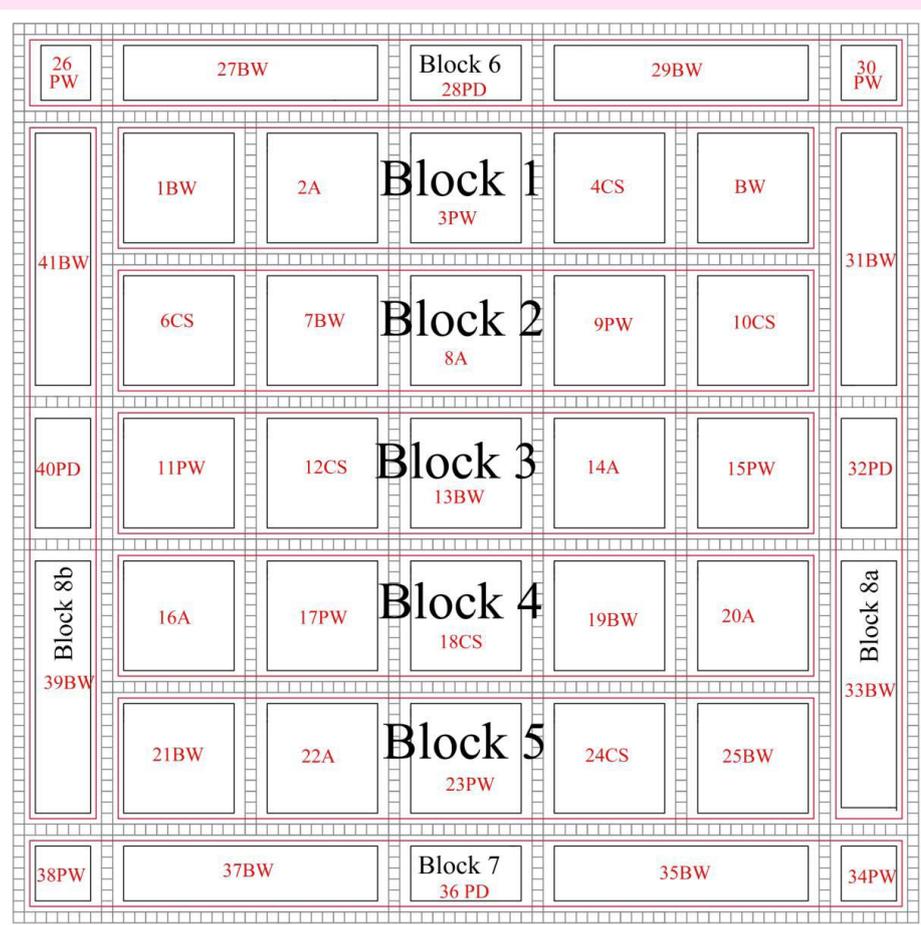
Today, needlewomen gather at shrines and temples, bringing their broken needles and pins. Rather like a funeral, the implements are laid to rest in tofu or konnyaku (soft jelly cakes) in a spirit of tenderness and gratitude.

A small three-step altar is set up and hung with a sacred rope and strips of cut white paper which indicate a sanctified area. On the top step are offerings of fruit and sweet cakes. On the middle step is a cake of tofu and on the bottom step are various sewing accessories.

On this day, the seamstresses take a holiday and bring their old needles to the temple to stick them in a piece of tofu or konnyaku. Threads of the five Buddhist colors were used with the needles.

The conclusion of Pandora's Box

The final two parts 8a and 8b have been added to Freebies which completes both versions of the pattern. Follow the instructions for the final two blocks carefully, ensuring that they are placed in the correct position. However, check the master chart first.



Block 8a is on the right hand side and Block 8b on the left hand side of the master chart.

In the evenweave design Blocks 8a and 8B both have two areas of blackwork and one area of pattern darning each.

Stitches Used:

Back stitch, one strand

Cross stitch, two strands

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Detached Eyelet, Cotton P rle or two strands of floss

Anchor 1325 Iris - variegated, three skeins

Anchor 1325 - is represented by DMC-333 Lavender on the chart.

DMC Cotton P rle No.12, white, one ball

DMC Cotton P rle No.12 - is represented by DMC-666 Christmas red on the chart.

Do not add the beads until after the embroidery has been completed.

Block 8a Evenweave

Pattern 31 Blackwork

Pattern 32 Pattern Darning

Pattern 33 Blackwork

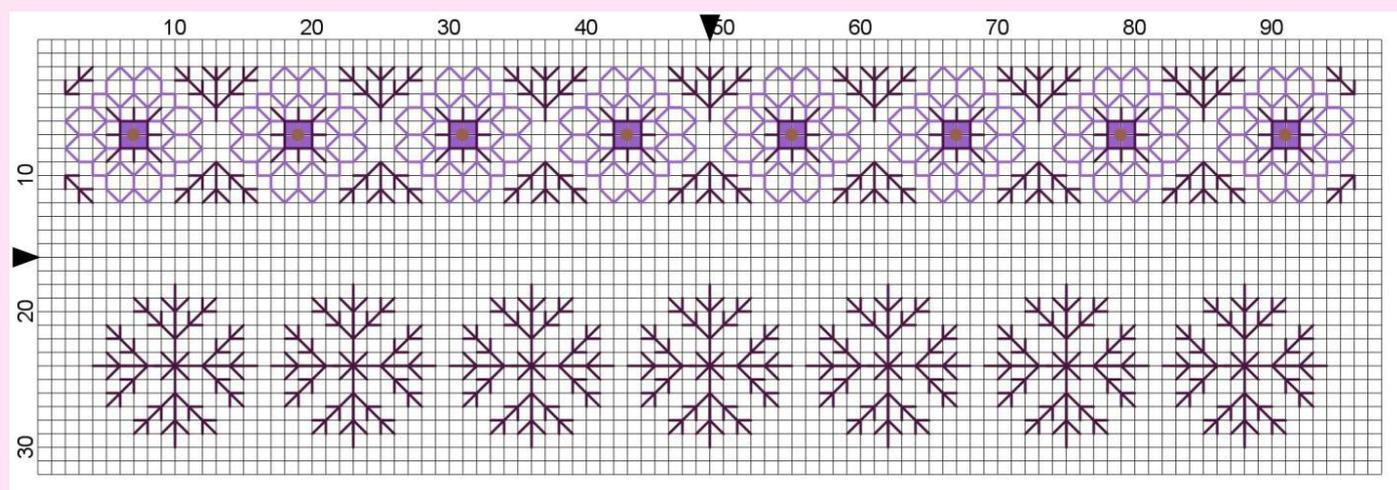
Block 8b Patterns 39 – 41

Pattern 39 Blackwork

Pattern 40 Pattern darning Zig Zag

Pattern 41 Blackwork

Two extra border patterns have been included. These can be used for edging table linen or towels or used as a pretty addition to an item of clothing or even another bookmark.



Blocks 8a and 8b Aida

Six blackwork patterns have been used to create the final two blocks. Locate them on the master chart and work as usual for blackwork filler patterns

Block 8a Aida

Pattern 31 Blackwork

Pattern 32 Blackwork

Pattern 33 Blackwork

Block 8b Aida

Pattern 39 Blackwork

Pattern 40 Blackwork

Pattern 41 Blackwork

This completes the embroidery in Pandora's Box. To finish the project:

Add the beads.

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Place the finished embroidery face down on a soft towel and press lightly.
The embroidery is now ready for framing and for you to enjoy.

Thank you for taking part in my adventure. I have received some wonderful photographs of the work in progress from readers right round the world and next month, I will include some of the finished designs.

If you have not started any of the projects yet, they are available in 'Freebies' in Blackwork Journey and are also available as E-books. 'Pandora's Box' will be published as an extended E-book later in the year.

Future Project for November 2016

I have been working on some ideas for the next major project and it is almost ready for charting and stitching. Blackwork Journey has been a source of inspiration but creating new ideas is another challenge and takes time to research and prepare.

The project will be different from anything that has been worked previously. It will be worked over a number of months as this is less daunting. It will include some embroidery stitches to expand your stitch knowledge and develop some of the techniques you have already become familiar with. I will tell you more about it over the next few months.

Plans for 2016/2017

We have two journeys planned for this year, one to Nice, France and to Southern India later in the year and hopefully a pleasant English summer ahead. Time to smell the roses and enjoy my grandchildren. James will be two in June. As many of you may remember he was born very early and his first year was very difficult. I am pleased to say he is now walking, talking and singing all the time.

My two older grandchildren are growing fast. They both love swimming and sport and it is wonderful to see them develop into lovely individuals and I look forward to spending time with them over the summer.

I have needlework friends from Canada coming to stay in September and we will have the pleasure of introducing them to the delights of the north west of England, the heart of the Industrial Revolution and the great cities of Manchester and Liverpool.

In May 2017 I will be going to Newfoundland to the National Conference of the Embroiderers' Guild of Canada as a tutor and I already have a full program of teaching in the diary for the end of this year and 2017. Along with designs to do for some magazines and books I think this year is going to be very busy.

I hope you will take time out to enjoy the summer months with lazy days and lots of needlework.

*Happy stitching,
Liz*

James

