



Blackwork Journey Blog

November 2016

New Ideas, challenges and projects!



November is proving to be an interesting and challenging month. Because of internet problems for two weeks in November I have decided to delay the start of next project 'Sublime Stitches' and the associated Facebook group until December 1st. Since it is a twelve month long project there will be ample time to decide whether you would like to take part and to collect the materials together. Christmas is always a busy period and it will give you time to read the 'Introduction' to the project and think about it over the festive season !

The next big project - 'Sublime Stitches'



'Sublime Stitches' is a large project and there will be two versions, one worked on **evenweave** and one worked on 14 count **Aida**. The evenweave sampler was worked on 25 count Lugana which is a really versatile fabric to work with and comes in a wide range of colours.

There are a number of different techniques included in the project, but because of the pulled thread stitches the **evenweave sampler cannot be worked on the Aida fabric**. However, the Aida sampler can be worked on evenweave.

There are 160 different patterns and motifs included and during the course of 2017 I will include different projects and mini-samplers developed from the main charts.

I would welcome your ideas as to how the different patterns could be used and adapted. Readers have been very creative with past projects such as 'Save the Stitches' and 'Box of Delights' and I have really appreciated seeing the different interpretations and ideas.

'Sublime Stitches' Evenweave

This will be backed and made into a wall hanging to use when teaching. The border is pulled thread work.



When you have collected your threads and fabric together, if possible share a picture of your chosen colour scheme with the Facebook group. This will help readers who are less confident in their colour choices and also introduce readers to new threads they may not have seen before.

This will be a closed Facebook group set up for 'Sublime Stitches' and all pictures and comments will be posted to that group.

The address for this group will be included in December's Blog and in the existing Facebook groups. Just type the <http://> address into your browser and it will take you to the page where you can ask to join the Facebook group.

'Sublime Stitches' Aida - the next free project starting in December 2016!

I have already been asked a number of questions about the project which I will try to answer:

Where did the idea of a sampler come from and what does it mean to you?

I have always been fascinated by samplers and their history and wanted to design a sampler for the 21st century that reflected my interests and the development of 'Blackwork Journey'. As a result, I have created 'Sublime Stitches' which is the fourth in the series of designs I have created. The story behind the patterns has been included where possible so that every pattern has a meaning, some personal, some historical.

Planning the project for two fabrics has taken a long time and a lot of stitching and altering to achieve the effects that I wanted. When tackling a project this size it is always helpful to print out the initial ideas, pin them up and keep looking at it and altering until the final piece is accurate. The embroidery is far more vibrant than the chart implies so changes were made during the course of the stitching and the charts changed to reflect this. At one point, five different charts were pinned up in the bedroom!



Planning stages!

Where will I find all the patterns for the project?

The two patterns will be posted in 'Freebies' every month on the Blackwork Journey website. There will be two versions, one for **evenweave** and one for **Aida**. Download whichever version you have decided to work. It is only essential that you download the chart. All the rest of the information can be stored on the computer. Join the pages together every month to complete the Master chart. There will be 12 pages posted over 12 months.

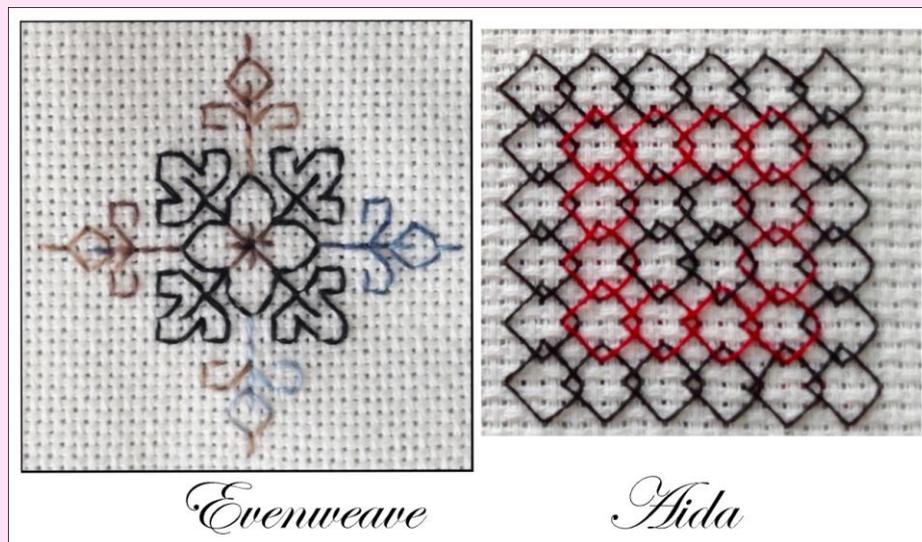
I am new to blackwork so can I do a project as large as this?

Yes, because every pattern will be accompanied by a picture, chart and clear instructions. The threads and number of strands will be clearly indicated. Help is always on hand if you have any questions through the Facebook group or by e-mail to me directly.

Which fabric should I choose?

If you are comfortable working with evenweave, then use a fabric that you enjoy working with. My evenweave sampler was worked on cream 25 count Lugana, a fabric which handles well and the holes are easy to see. As I stated earlier, the Aida chart can be worked on evenweave, but the evenweave chart cannot be worked on the Aida because of the pulled thread work stitches.

If you are not quite so confident, then the Aida version is the one you should consider. It is easy to count and different patterns have been added in place of the pulled thread work. The Aida sampler was worked on Zweigart 14 count white Aida. If you choose to use a 16 count Aida, bear in mind that there are some blocks have been split so you will need a sharp needle and good eyesight!



Choose a fabric you can see to work on easily!

Please check the fabric count. Not every fabric is the size it says it is, especially the cheaper fabrics. I have allowed enough fabric for mounting and framing. It is better to have a piece which is too big rather than one that is not large enough!

Can I use space dyed fabric?

I know these fabrics are very popular with readers. If you do use them, remember that there are 160+ patterns ranging from very complicated to simple and delicate. If the colour of the fabric is too strong it will detract from the embroidery. Hand dyed fabric and threads are seldom colourfast so beware if you need to wash your embroidery.

How many threads do I work over?

Evenweave is worked over 2 x 2 threads and Aida is worked over one block unless otherwise stated.

Page 1	Page 2	Page 3
Work across from 1 - 3		
Page 4	Page 5	Page 6
Work across from 4 - 6		
Page 7	Page 8	Page 9
Work across from 7 - 9		
Page 10	Page 11	Page 12
Work across from 10 - 12		

How will I know how much fabric to get?

In the 'Introduction' published in 'Freebies' in December, there will be a list of the materials and the exact size of the embroidery for the material selected. If you want to add a border, sufficient material has been allowed and border patterns will be included later in the year.

Page layout

Each month a new page will be added to 'Freebies'. Join each page together every month to create the Master Chart. There are twelve pages in the Master Chart

Preparing your fabric:

How do I start?

Because of the size of the project I have started in the **top left hand corner** and the design will work across as shown in the diagram. Where part patterns are started they will not be completed until the next page is added.

Join each page together every month to create the master chart.

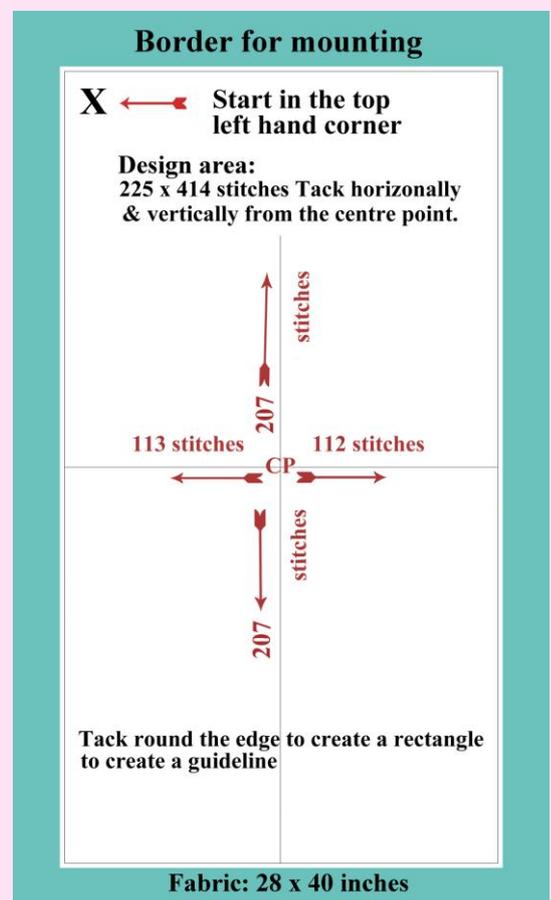
How do I find the right place to start?

Fold the fabric into quarters and find the centre point. Count stitches to the left and right following the diagram and tack in both directions. Use a pale tacking thread. Tack vertically and horizontally and then work a rectangular box of tacking. Your embroidery will fit inside this rectangle. Any border will be added afterwards and **outside** the tacked rectangle.

A little preparation and counting at this stage makes life easier once the patterns are added and you will know that you are starting in just the right spot!

What type of needle do I use?

Generally, when working on either fabric you will use a tapestry needle No 24. If the eye is too small for you to thread comfortably use a larger needle. These needles have a large eye and a blunt round point. Sizes 22, 24, 26 and 28. You will also need a pointed needle to split blocks on the Aida fabric and a beading needle.



Note: I use a No 11 Sharps needle rather than a beading needle. It is easier to thread and passes through the bead comfortably.



Do I need a frame?

This is a personal decision. I find working with a frame difficult so all my embroidery is worked in an 8 inch plastic flexi-frame which is removed at the end of each session. It does make the embroidery neater and more even if it is worked in a frame.

Pulled thread work stitches do distort the fabric, so the finished embroidery will need to be reshaped when it is completed.

White plastic flexi-hoop 8 inch diameter

Can I make changes to your design?

My design is there for you to enjoy, but it is also your embroidery so if you want make changes I am delighted, but I would love to see pictures of your interpretation. This is your heirloom for the future, so space will be provided for you to name and date your work.

What threads did you use for your samplers?

I used DMC Coloris threads and DMC 310 black for the evenweave sampler and Anchor 1206 variegated and DMC 310 black for the Aida sampler. The beads used were Mill Hill glass beads and the metallic threads were Rainbow Gallery Petite Treasure Braid PB01 or DMC Lights Effects E3852 Dark Gold and DMC Lights Effects E317 Titanium.

The colour scheme for the Aida version of 'Sublime Stitches' was more restrained, but worked well on the white Aida.

Colour is a very personal thing, but when choosing threads remember that blackwork is worked mainly in one strand of floss. If the thread is too pale it will not show up on the fabric.



DMC and Anchor threads were used for the Aida sampler

How long will the patterns remain in 'Freebies' ?

The patterns will remain online in the same way as all the previous patterns. I appreciate that we all have busy lives and do not always have time to stitch however much we may enjoy doing so, therefore the patterns can always be found in the 'Freebies' section of Blackwork Journey. Just click on the pattern and a downloadable pdf will appear.

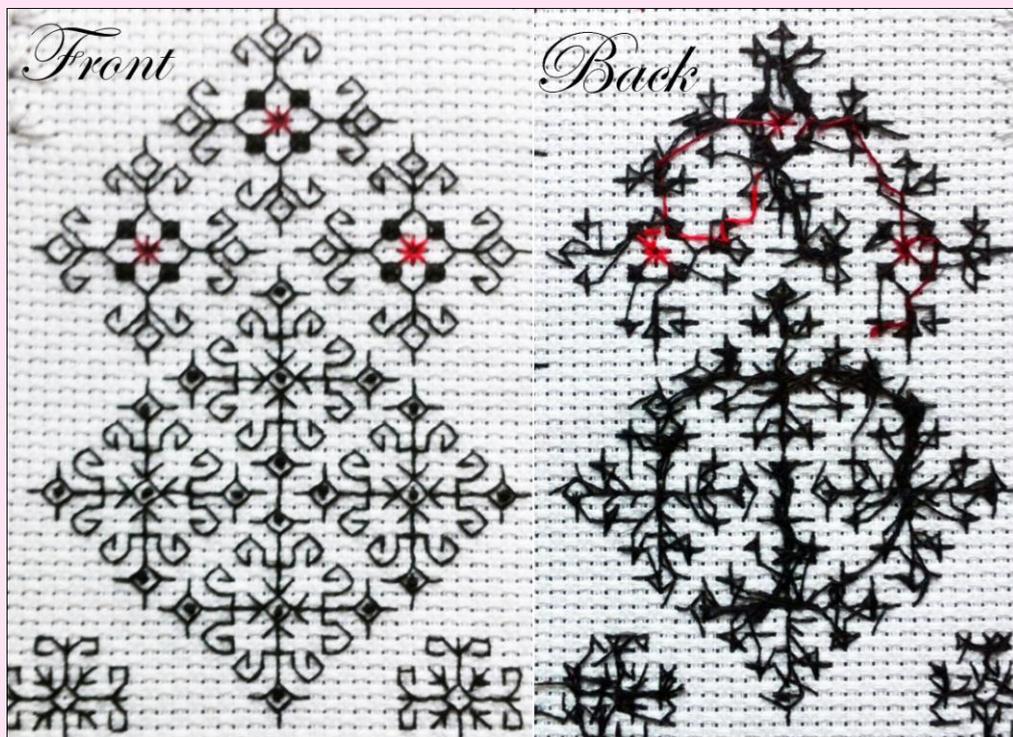
If you have any questions, however small please ask them and I will do my best to answer them. No question is too minor so if you are worried please e-mail me.

Embroidery backs, a lively discussion

Looking at the back of a piece of embroidery is a subject which always causes controversy and it raised its head last month in the Facebook group when a member posted a comment about 'Save the Stitches'. Because the back of the work was not identical to the front of the work she was informed that "This was not blackwork!" and she became very discouraged and put her piece of embroidery to one side. She asked the opinion of the group and within twenty four hours the website was buzzing with comments and support.

I do not design my blackwork to be identical on both sides, indeed it would be impossible to do so. In some patterns, the 'path' is clear and it is easy to see how the pattern develops and the steps taken to complete it, but in many patterns there is no logical order, it depends on how the individual sees or 'reads' the pattern.

Not everyone will work the same pattern in the same way and if it appears correctly on the front of the work then that is satisfactory for my designs.



Extract from 'Sublime Stitches' showing the front and the back!

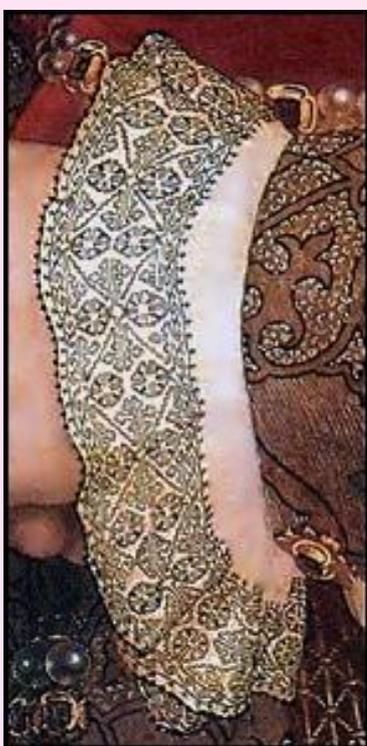
Many of the ladies posted backs of their work just to prove the point. The only time I would work a pattern in Holbein stitch is if the embroidery needed to be identical on the front and the back of say a cuff or a collar.

After much debate, the general opinion was that if the back of the work was reasonably tidy then it was acceptable. It was summed up very neatly by a member from South Africa who wrote "Asking a lady to reveal the back of her embroidery is like asking a lady to expose her panties!"

I would suggest that all the ends are stitched in and trimmed, so that they do not show through on the front of the work when it is framed. Finish each motif off and do not trail threads across large open spaces as again, they will show through on the front of the work. Unless your work is being entered in a competition where attention to detail is paramount, just relax and enjoy your embroidery. Remember it is your piece of work and you make the rules.

What is Holbein stitch?

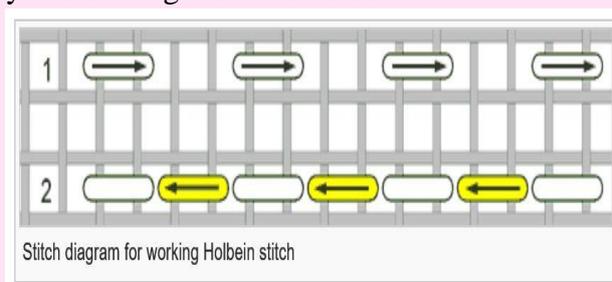
Holbein stitch is a simple, reversible line embroidery stitch most commonly used in blackwork embroidery and Assisi embroidery. The stitch is named after Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543), a 16th-century portrait painter, best known for his paintings of Henry VIII and his children, almost all of whom are depicted wearing clothing decorated with blackwork embroidery.



Although superficially similar to back stitch, the Holbein stitch produces a smoother line and a pattern that is identical on both sides of the fabric. It can be worked in straight lines, diagonally, or in a stepped fashion to make a zig-zag line and is well suited to creating outlines or intricate filling patterns.

Holbein stitch is also known as double running stitch, line stitch, Spanish stitch, Chiara stitch and two-sided line stitch.

Holbein stitch is usually worked on an evenweave fabric where the threads can be counted to ensure perfect regularity and is worked in two stages. Firstly, a row of evenly spaced running stitches is worked along the line to be covered. Then the return journey is completed, filling in the spaces between stitches made on the first journey and sharing the same holes:



*Blackwork embroidery in Holbein stitch.
Detail of portrait of Jane Seymour by
Hans Holbein the Younger 1537*

Holbein stitch

Does my blackwork have to be worked in Holbein stitch?

Historically blackwork is a counted thread technique generally using black thread usually stitched on even weave fabric. Both sides of the embroidery were to be seen so it was worked in a double running stitch (also known as Holbein stitch), making the front and back identical.

Unless the embroidery needs to be reversible and seen from both sides as in a cuff or collar, it is not necessary to use this stitch. The Blackwork Journey designs are worked in back stitch unless otherwise stated.

Examining portraits is a good method of obtaining accurate information about the fashion of the period and the National Portrait Gallery in London has an excellent collection of Tudor portraits. Since little clothing from the period has survived detailed paintings such as the one of Sir Henry Lee give an insight into the thinking of the day since the portraits are full of symbolism.

Portrait of Sir Henry Lee (1533 - 1611) National Portrait Gallery

This portrait depicts the courtier Sir Henry Lee (1533-1611), a favourite of Queen Elizabeth I. Within his long and prosperous lifetime he was both organiser and champion of the Accession Day tilts (chivalric events held in honour of the Queen).

The portrait is painted by Anthonis Mor (1516-75/6), one of the most important and accomplished artists working in Europe.



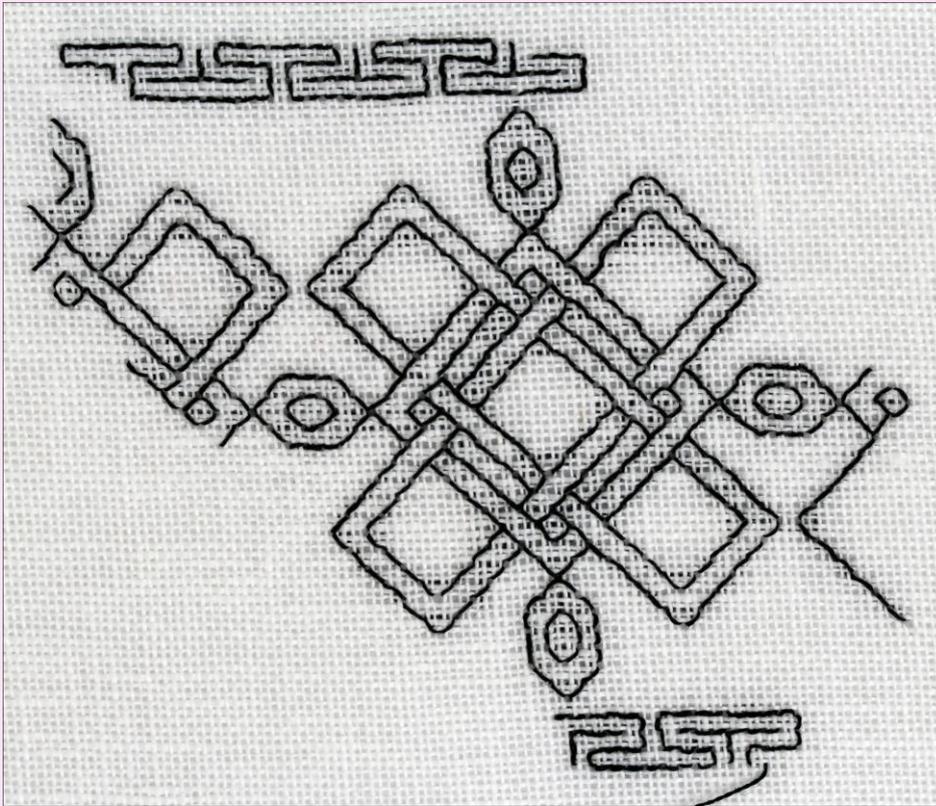
Sir Henry Lee (1533 -1611)



The armillary spheres were emblems used by Elizabeth I and were regarded as signs of heavenly wisdom and knowledge. The lover's knots are considered indicative of a romantic relationship. Both these symbols can be found on the sleeves of Sir Henry's costume.

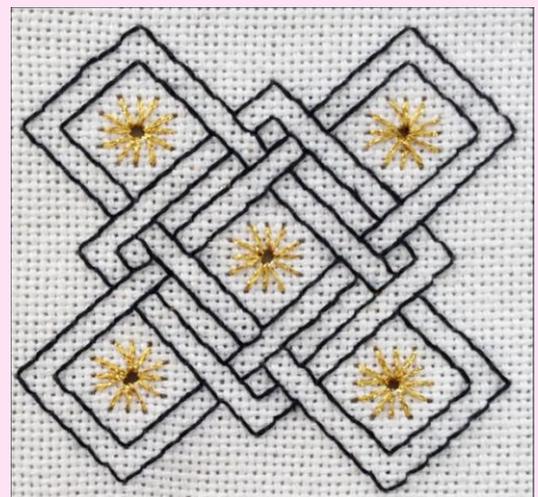
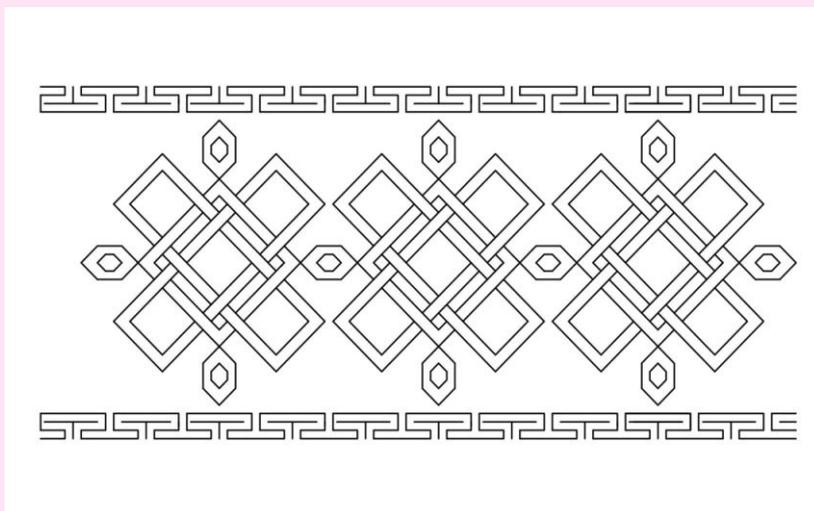
When the portrait of Sir Henry Lee was painted blackwork embroidery was at its height. The sleeves were probably worked in blackwork, certainly the motifs can be interpreted in that manner.

Designing some embroidery pieces for the TV series 'The White Princess' I examined many of the Tudor portraits in the National Portrait Gallery for inspiration. Sir Henry's sleeve became part of several of my designs!



Extract from the embroidery for 'The White Princess' using interlocking knots and the Greek key pattern worked on 32 count Cashel linen.

When the series was filmed the ladies of the court stitched their embroidery using hand beaten needles of the period.



Extract from 'Sublime Stitches' worked on 25 count cream Lugana

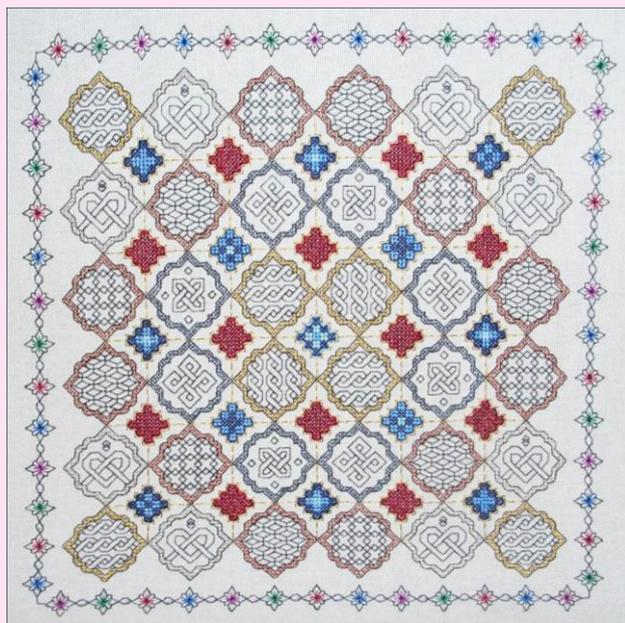
Talented Readers

Every month I receive photographs of work completed by readers throughout the world. Many of them enter their work into competitions and shows and many have received prizes for their work. As the designer, it gives me great pleasure to see finished projects and to know that people have enjoyed working them and are proud to show off their final efforts.

I am just as proud to receive photographs from readers new to blackwork who are just finding their feet. I have recently worked with a lovely lady who really thought that she could not work a particular pattern. I was delighted when I got an e-mail saying "I did it!!!" and then showed me her work the following week. Confidence grows with practise and nothing is impossible if you take time to really look at the pattern. If you are getting frustrated, put the work away for a few days and then come back to it. It is surprising how much easier it seems when you take a fresh look.



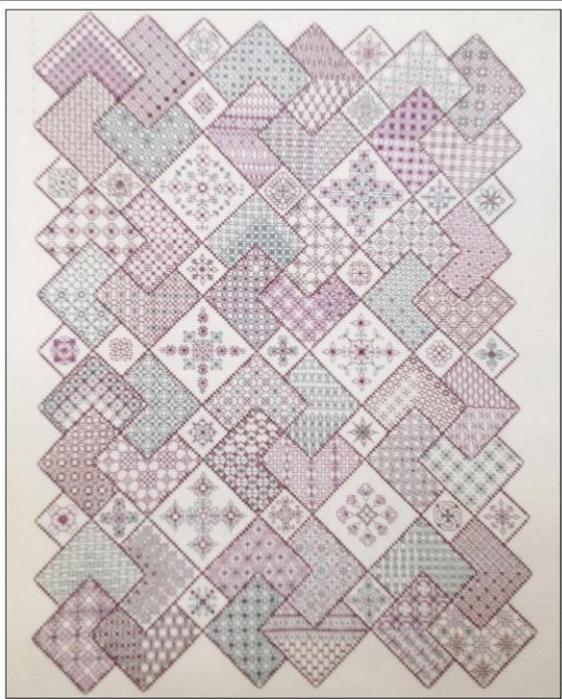
Kerry chose to make her 'Box of Delights' into a very attractive cushion making her embroidery both decorative and useful.



Charlie entered her version of 'Box of Delights' into the Craft Competition of the Women's Royal British Legion and was awarded 99%. She altered the design by adding in Celtic knots and crosses.

Nothing is impossible Estelle - as you have demonstrated!





'Save the Stitches' by Judy.

There have been so many different variations of the different projects and I would like to thank the readers who have sent in photographs of their work. Seeing work in progress is also helpful.

It is the journey that counts as well as the finished project so thank you Melissa Jane from New Zealand for sharing your progress. Well done!



Hobbies 'improve brain power in old age'

If you are feeling a little guilty about taking time out for your hobbies, I have it on good authority from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, who followed 256 people who were over 85 years old for four years. That those people who had taken part in arts were 73 per cent less likely to have suffered memory or thinking problems. Those who crafted were 45 per cent less likely to have mild cognitive impairment, while socialising lowered the risk by 55 per cent. Those who regularly used the internet or a computer reduced their risk of memory problems by 53 per cent.

I hope you have enjoyed November's Blog. Christmas and the new project is just round the corner. I will have some more exciting news to share with you next month.

Happy stitching!

Liz