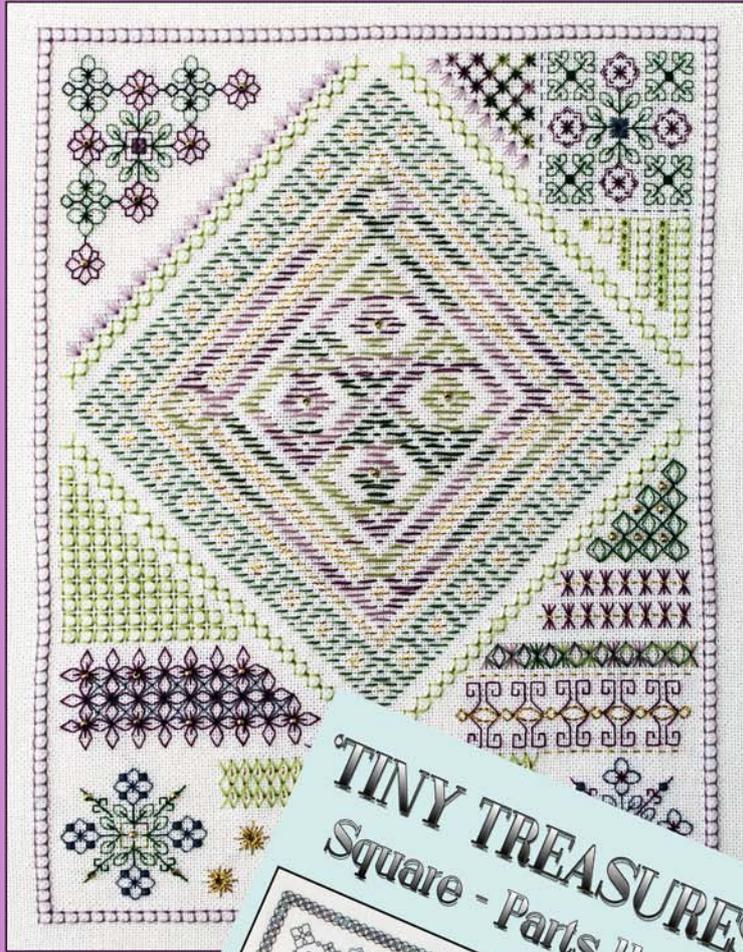




Blackwork Journey Blog

June 2019



TINY TREASURES
Square - Parts 11 - 12



Colour, Black & Gold
The final parts!



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May has been a very hectic month with talks and day schools all around the UK. Printing charts, sorting threads and packing kits takes hours, but the pleasure that I gain from meeting fellow needlewomen makes all the effort worthwhile. To see the delight when someone masters a stitch or explores a different technique never ceases to encourage me to explore and expand my own knowledge.

‘Calico Gardens’ – a new challenge

By special request I have been asked to teach Calico Gardens. This is something I haven’t done for over 30 years and I approached it from a very different angle from when I originally taught this technique.

Cutting out and applying leaves and flowers does not really appeal to me, but stitching in different threads on calico does. I had no samples, but lots of ideas so I set to work to create a minimum of 15 different pieces, all shapes and sizes. Having designed, stitched and packed twenty kits with different weights of calico, small and large eyed needles and twelve different threads I set off to teach in the Lake District which is one of the most idyllic parts of the North West of England.



Spring in the Lake District, a perfect place to teach!

What is Calico?



‘Calico’ comes from the word ‘Calicut’ which was a European name for the city of Kozhikode, in Kerala (South western India)

It is a plain weave fabric made from half processed and unbleached cotton. It comes in different weights - light, medium or heavy. To hand stitch comfortably a medium weight is better than the rather heavy coarse canvas.

Because it is half processed there are often flecks of cotton seeds in the fabric which add to the appearance of the fabric. It is usually cream or grey in colour and creases easily, but is a really good fabric to experiment

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with. The fabric is far less fine than muslin, but less coarse than canvas or denim.

Calico is versatile and cheap and is used by artists and designers alike, often for bags and furniture. It is also used for designers 'toiles', the mock-up of a garment before it's created with the final fabric. Because calico is sturdy and durable, it's often used for items such as aprons, curtains and furnishings, all items which experience considerable wear and tear, but need to be durable. A huge amount of calico is bleached and dyed annually.

To stitch calico I collected all the different types and thicknesses of cream, taupe, beige and light brown threads that I could possibly find, ranging from string to crochet cotton, embroidery floss and fine crewel wool. Calico for leaves and flowers was stiffened with glue, iron-on Vilene and a soft material interfacing.

Vilene Standard Interfacing is a crisp, stable interfacing especially suited to light/medium weight fabrics and small, detailed areas. It is ideal when you need 'just that bit of extra body'.

A washable firm wadding was used to cut out shapes, such as garden pots and arches rather than mount board and hessian was shredded to make trees and bushes.

It is a long time since I 'played' with fabric and threads and I found the experience challenging and very enjoyable.



The samples ranged from bags and cushions to pictures, scented sachets and jewellery.

I am thinking of adding some embroidery designs to the Blackwork Journey site later in the year containing a wide variety of embroidery stitches.

The designs will be worked on a variety of different, easily available fabrics – calico, cotton sateen or cotton twill, evenweave and Aida fabrics. The emphasis will be on the embroidery stitches to create the design.

The importance of knowing many different embroidery stitches and how they can be used to the best effect in a variety of threads and thicknesses determines whether a piece will succeed. They add extra interest and texture to embroidery and have been sadly overlooked for many years. Just by expanding a stitch repertoire with a few new stitches and variations opens up new areas to explore in so many different ways!



'Spiral' worked on calico with eight different textured stitches and a selection of different thickness of thread ranging from crochet cotton to embroidery floss.

The final part of 'Tiny Treasures – Square'

Another major project is coming to an end this month. The final part of the rectangular version was posted last month and already I am receiving photos of the finished pieces and some very proud and happy stitchers!

I am delighted to see how many of you have worked this project and all the different variations that are being posted on the Facebook groups for everyone to enjoy. To see how you have taken on the challenge of working with colour and making your own choices has been really interesting and posting photos on the Facebook site has helped other people who perhaps are not as confident or have never considered using a different colour scheme.



Tackling a large project is always daunting, but the end product is worth the effort and often a source of great satisfaction for the needlewoman. To look at a framed piece and say “I did that” is always rather special.

As the designer, I am always a little apprehensive about launching big projects, but the idea of spreading them over a number of months in small bite size pieces seems to be a very popular approach and one I will continue in the future. I will bring ‘Tiny Treasures’ out as an e-book later in the year as an extended version with different projects included and many of the wonderful photographs from readers.

‘Tiny Treasures’ by Angelica Sparolin MacKenzie

Angelica has stitched her ‘Tiny Treasures’ as a runner but could not decide whether to add a border to her work so she asked the Facebook group for their comments on whether to add a border or not?

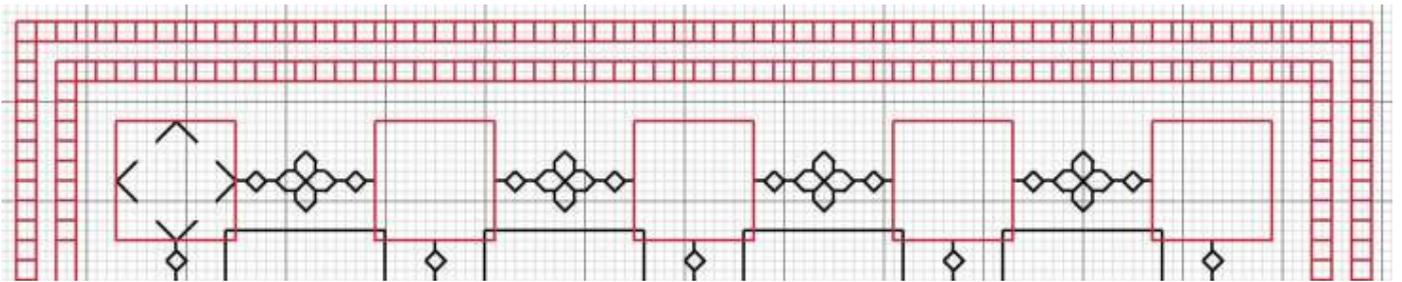


“I’m trying to decide if I should add the border to the Tiny Treasures rectangle. I used a pre-finished table runner from my stash knowing it was a little on the narrow side. If I add the border, will it look too close to the edge? I like it as is, but does it look unfinished without any border? Any thoughts would be greatly appreciated!”

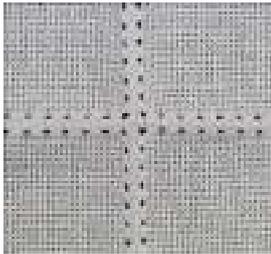
The Facebook groups give readers a chance to express their opinions and 28 readers commented on the piece.

The general opinion from readers was that it looked beautiful just as it was, but if Angelica still wished to add a border I suggested adding two bands of four-sided stitch in the same colour as the fabric, leaving two blocks between each row of pulled thread work.

By working in the same colour as the cloth it would give a defined, textured border, but would not be too dominant. I am looking forward to seeing what she decides to do.



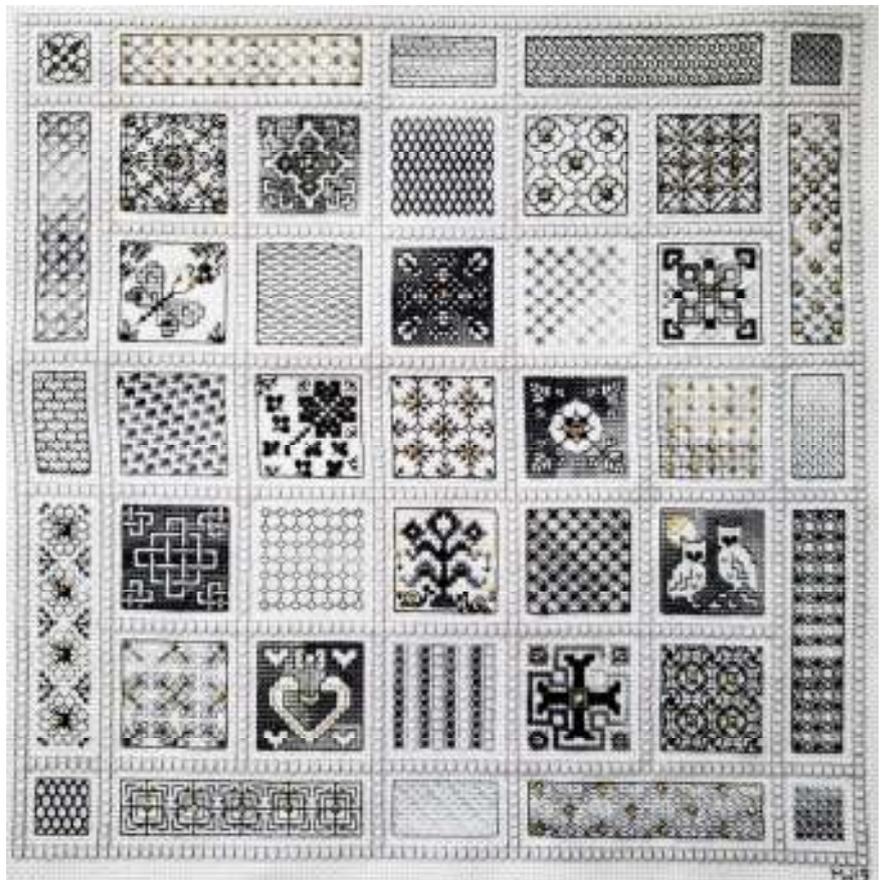
Four-sided stitch positioned on chart



Four-sided stitch worked on 25 count Lugana

Marie Hugery Williams has completed her EB0006 'Pandora's Box' using four-sided stitch on Aida fabric to create the borders between each square and to add a final border round the whole design.

Four-sided stitch is really versatile, is simple to work and can add just that final touch.



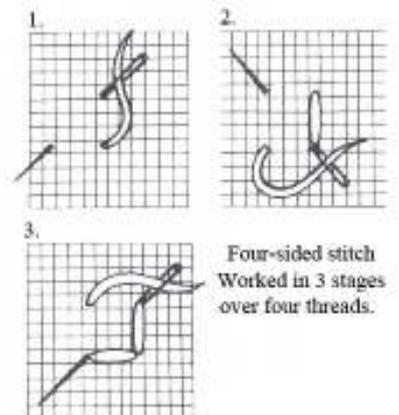
Four-sided stitch:

This consists of three straight stitches, to form the end, the middle and the top of the 'square'. Follow diagrams 1-3.

Row 1 Work from right to left over four threads. Always put the needle in at one corner and come out at the opposite one.

Row 2 Turn the work 180 degrees and work the second row. Pull tight to create the holes. If it is worked on Aida 'pull' the stitch gently! The rows of four-sided stitch are worked backwards and forwards until the space is filled.

Note: Some stitches share the same holes.



Summer Stitching – Two new sampler designs for June



CH0389 Kogin Blue and CH0390 Kogin Colour

Designing Samplers

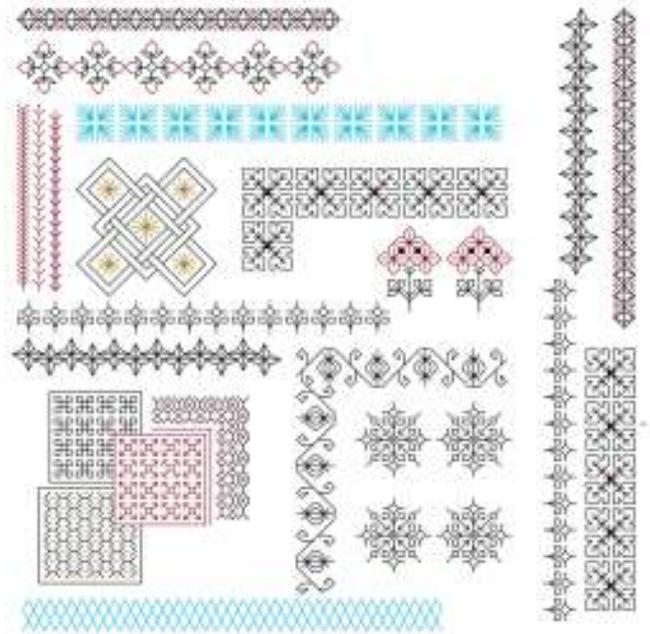
When I held a needlework course at home recently I was asked if I could design a sampler that combined pulled thread work, blackwork patterns and Japanese Kogin designs. This is where the idea for CH0389 Kogin Blue and CH0390 Kogin Colour emerged.

To combine all these different techniques was quite a challenge for me and to prove a point that designing samplers was not quite as easy as it looks'

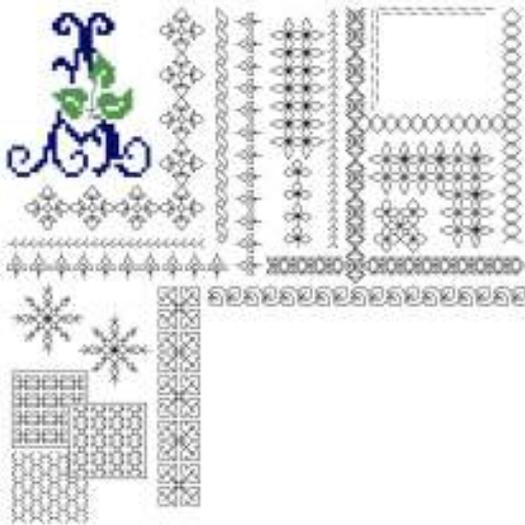
I gave the ladies the same pattern sheets and asked them to design their own samplers. They were given their initials from a Sajou alphabet in cross stitch on a piece of graph paper. The letters were A, J, M and T.

They also received two pattern sheets and glue sticks. Using the pattern sheets they were to cut out the different pattern elements and rearrange them using their initial as the focal point.





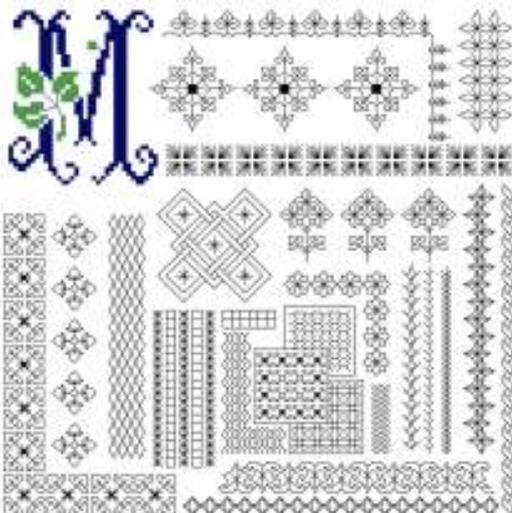
The pattern sheets contained borders, corners and blocks.



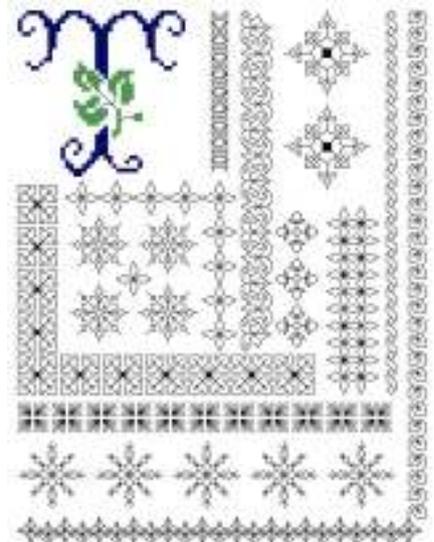
*A is for Anne –
design in progress*



J is for Janice



M is for Margaret



T is for Tanya

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I charted their chosen designs for them and they went on to stitch their own patterns. The interesting thing was how different the four designs were and how each lady had approached the challenge and later in the year I saw the finished embroidered samplers.

Here are Janice's and Margaret's samplers based on the charts they designed. They both went on to create their own designs with confidence.



J is for Janice



M is for Margaret



Well done ladies, it was a very productive weekend!

I have since held an 'Islamic Blackwork' weekend for the same ladies which was equally productive so watch this space – elephants and Islamic Chessboard and of course, samplers! I do like a challenge.

If you think you would like to try designing your own samplers just e-mail me on:

lizalmond@blackworkjourney.co.uk

If the response is favourable, I will design a pattern pack so you can create your own samplers.

Blackwork in paintings - Portrait of Anna Meyer

Finding blackwork in portraits is always exciting, but to see the development from a sketch to the final painting makes it especially interesting.

Hans Holbein (1497/1498–1543) created a blue pencil sketch of Anna Meyer who was the daughter of Jakob Meyer zum Hasen, a senior official and sometime mayor of Baseland one of his most important early patrons. This portrait is a preparatory drawing for the work known as the Darmstadt Madonna, which portrays Jakob Meyer with his family and the Madonna and Child. Meyer's first wife, Magdalena Baer (d. 1511) is also included.

Look carefully at the pencil drawing to see the bands of blackwork embroidery on her sleeves and cuffs.



Anna was probably between 13 and 15 at the time of this study. Holbein drew her seated, and with her loose hair signifying her virginity

Portrait of Anna Meyer

Date: circa 1525-1526

Medium: Black and coloured chalks, lead point and scored lines and the contours and face, background coloured light green

Dimensions: Height: 39.1 cm (15.3 inches); Width: 27.5 cm (10.8 inches)

Collection: Kunstmuseum Basel

In the final version of the Meyer Madonna she is kneeling and looks older, with most of her hair tucked into a chaplet, the headdress girls wore to church from their fifteenth year. The pink flowers in the chaplet may symbolise her betrothal.



Holbein has painted the blackwork bands clearly enough to interpret the design in a modern embroidery. It would have been worked in double running stitch, later referred to as 'Holbein' stitch which is not strictly accurate.

Portrait of Anna Meyer.

Detail of the Darmstadt Madonna by Hans Holbein the Younger. Anna Meyer wears her wedding dress with bands of blackwork embroidery and a wreath of rosemary.

Schlossmuseum, Darmstadt, Germany.

What is Holbein stitch?

Holbein stitch is a simple, reversible line embroidery stitch most commonly used in Blackwork embroidery and Assisi embroidery.



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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, 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 zigzag 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.

Note: Double running stitch should not really be referred to as Holbein stitch because the name 'Holbein' stitch was first used in the 1800's and the term was commonly used by The Royal School of Needlework in England.

Future projects – what do you think?

Now that 'Tiny Treasures' has come to an end I am thinking about a new rather more challenging project for later in the year. There are so many embroidery techniques, materials and stitches yet to explore and I am looking at a way of bringing lots of different techniques, stitches and ideas and presenting them together on one piece as a large hanging or possibly a throw in the same way that my grandmother created crazy patchwork quilts.

It would be colourful and exciting with each piece being no larger than 10 inches, all mounted on a background fabric or with sashing between each square. I want to include some canvas work with Bargello and needlepoint as well as crewel work, whitework and of course blackwork and Kogin embroidery. I might even include a Calico Garden and a piece of Islamic Blackwork.

There would be one new piece a month so you could try something new, experiment with the threads and materials you have in your stash and explore and expand your own knowledge. I will think it through in detail over the summer and work out what I want to include. I will keep you updated through the Facebook pages and through the Blog.

Happy stitching!

Liz

