



Blackwork Journey Blog

December 2021

HAPPY CHRISTMAS
FROM
BLACKWORK JOURNEY





December 2021 - a difficult year comes to an end and a new year beckons!

As this year closes and we anticipate Christmas and the New Year, no doubt we will all look back over the past two years with mixed emotions. For the first time in two and a half years, we will celebrate a proper family Christmas, as my son and his family from San Francisco will join my daughter and her family at their home in the Yorkshire Dales. After the non-event of Christmas 2020, I am excited and grateful that we can all come together as a family.

It brings into sharp contrast the families who have lost loved ones and are still facing the challenges of Covid19, the effects of war, disease and famine. Loneliness and mental health issues have grown significantly as a result of the isolation and it will be a long time before life feels 'normal' for many people, including the members of the Blackwork Journey community. I have been grateful for the love that members have shown each other and the support they have given to me and I wish you all a peaceful and joyous time wherever you may be in the world.

'Angel of the North'

At Christmas, angels are depicted on many greetings cards, but this is an angel with a difference and when I travelled north to teach recently I saw the 'Angel of the North' monument on the hillside in the distance standing guard over the landscape. I am not generally keen on contemporary sculpture, but it made an immediate impact perhaps because of the events of the last two years.

The 'Angel of the North' was created by the internationally renowned sculpture Antony Gormley and is located beside the A1 road in Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, England.

It was built on the site of a former colliery. It is 20m high with a 54m wingspan and its location means it is the UK's most viewed work of art, seen by an estimated 90,000 travellers every day.

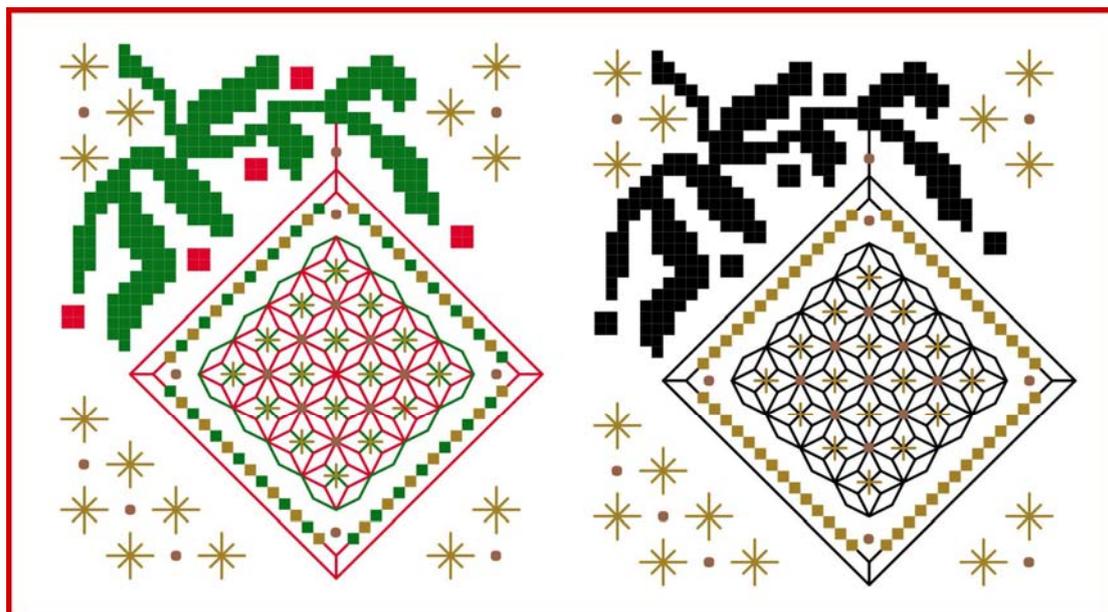


What does the 'Angel of the North' represent?

According to Antony Gormley, he chose an angel for the sculpture: to recognise the sacrifice of the miners who had worked beneath the site for two centuries and to represent the transition from an industrial to an information age and serve as a focus for our evolving hopes and fears.

Christmas Diamonds – a gift from Blackwork Journey!

Blackwork Diamonds sparkle with metallic thread and beads. They can be mounted in cards, used to create pin cushions and scented sachets, or used as decorations for the tree, with or without the leaves and branches. Two diamond patterns have been included one in blackwork and one in Christmas colours.



Christmas diamonds

Blackwork Journey Blog, December 2021

Fabric:

Zweigart 28 count evenweave or 14 count Aida, 6 x 6 inches

Threads:

DMC stranded floss (See Legend)
DMC Light Effects E3852 Dark gold one skein
Mill Hill glass beads MHG557 Dark gold
Tapestry needle No.24
Beading needle
Small embroidery ring

Legend:

■ [2] DMC-666 ANC-46 DLE- christmas red - br

■ [2] DMC-700 ANC-229 DLE- christmas green - br

Call Outs:

▲ [2] DLE-E3852 Dark Gold DMC Light Effects

Backstitch Lines:

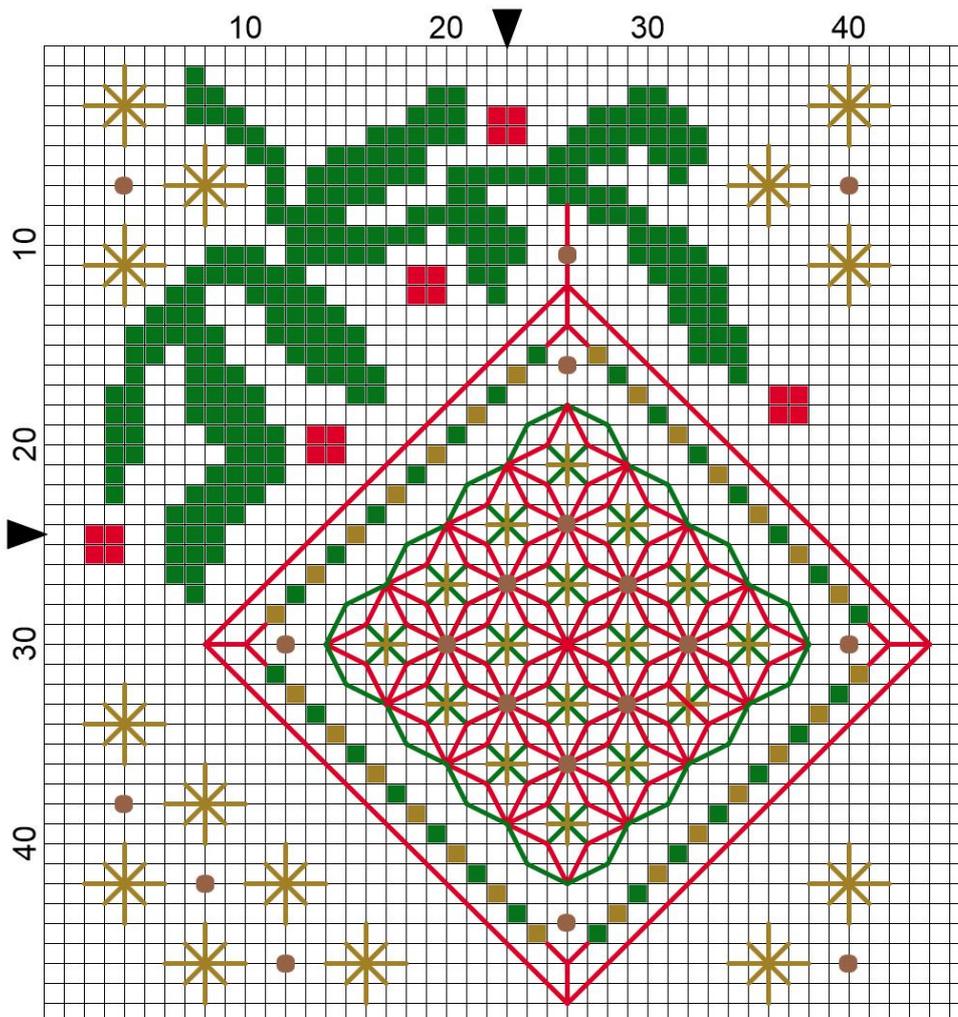
— DLE-E3852 Dark Gold

— DMC-666 christmas red - br

— DMC-700 christmas green - br

Beads:

● MHG-557 Mill Hill Glass Beads-Gold

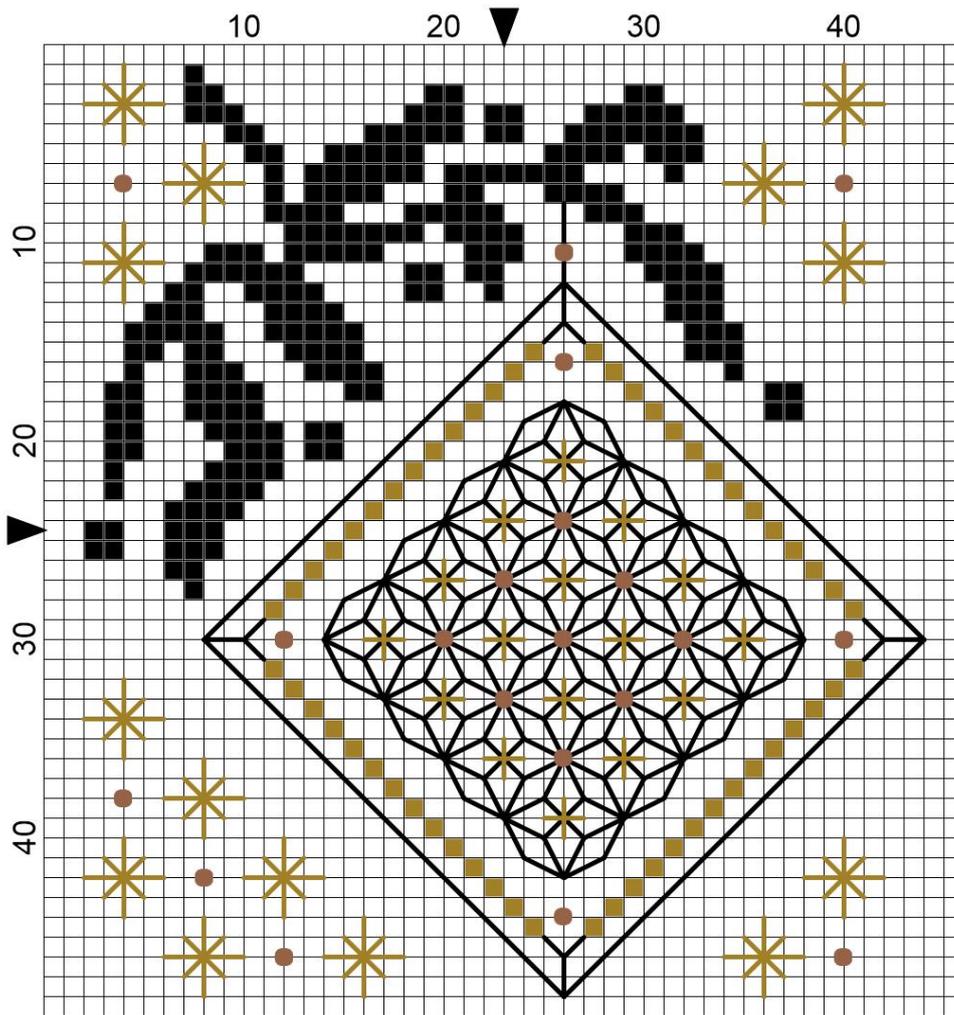


Stitches used:

Back stitch, one strand
Cross stitch, two strands

Key: Use DMC 310 Black for the blackwork diamond.

Christmas diamond in traditional colours



Method:

Fold the fabric into quarters to find the centre point. Work from the centre outwards.

1. Work the blackwork motif first and then the cross stitch back stitch border.
2. Work the cross stitch branch and leaves using two strands of floss for the cross stitch.
3. Work the gold stars.
4. Add the beads after the embroidery has been worked.
5. Place the finished embroidery face down on a soft towel and press lightly. Pull gently into shape.
6. Frame or mount in a card or make up into a scented sachet or decoration

Blackwork diamond – follow the instructions for Christmas Diamond

I hope you have as much enjoyment from stitching these designs as I have in creating them.

New charts and e-books for 2022

Now that we are looking forward to 2022, I have been considering which new e-books and charts I will add to the Blackwork Journey website next year. Two new Sashiko quilt projects have been completed and just need to be edited, but the biggest and most challenging project has been the large Islamic mosque design.

‘New Mosque’ was originally created as a personal challenge during lockdown, but so many people have asked if I can make it into a stitching project, so I will graph the design and its development over the next few months.

The project is a blackwork design and pulled thread work, couching, embroidery stitches and metallic threads have all be used. Whilst I had some initial thoughts about the design, it was changed as I stitched. Areas were added, removed or altered to achieve the effect I wanted.



'New Mosque' worked in Paint-Box threads, DMC stranded floss, Cotton P rle No 12, braids for couching, Rainbow Gallery Petite Treasure braids and Mill Hill glass beads



I wanted to use the finished design as a wall hanging and a teaching project, so I used Paint-Box threads in No 12 Cotton P rle and DMC stranded floss.

Paint-box Threads is a UK based company that specialises in beautiful, hand-dyed fabric and threads for the textile crafting market. They have been trading since 2015 and every thread and piece of fabric is dyed by founder Zoe Acketts, in her Herefordshire based studio.

These threads were a pleasure to work with and the range of colours including variegated threads was comprehensive but with all hand-dyed threads they need to be checked first to see that the colours were colourfast.

'New Mosque' is a compilation of buildings I have seen in different parts of the world from Uzbekistan to India, Turkey to Spain, but the blue colours come from the mosques in Tashkent, Bukhara and Istanbul. Iznik tiles from Turkey and the Sheik Zayid Mosque in Abu Dhabi all played their part in inspiring different sections of the design.



Kalyan Mosque in Bukhara, Uzbekistan



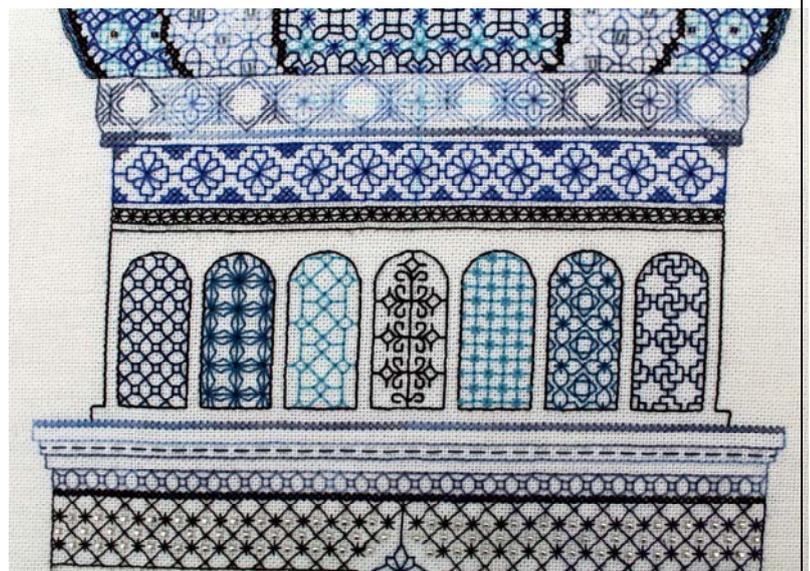
Bukhara is an ancient city in the central Asian country of Uzbekistan. It was a prominent stop on the Silk Road trade route between the East and the West, and a major medieval centre for Islamic theology and culture. It still contains hundreds of well-preserved mosques, madrassas, bazaars and caravanserais, dating largely from the 9th to the 17th centuries.

The turquoise Iznik tiles from the ablutions in the Sheik Zayid Mosque, Abu Dhabi were matched with the Paint-Box threads and used on some of the columns in the embroidery



Sultan Ahmed Mosque, Istanbul also known as the Blue Mosque

Inside the Blue Mosque there is a very high ceiling decorated with 20,000 blue tiles. These ancient tiles contain designs of flowers, trees, and other traditional decoration which I have incorporated in the design. This was a joy to create and I was pleased with the final piece!



To end 2021 I have added two new designs to the Blackwork Journey website:



CH0421 'Ogee Christmas'

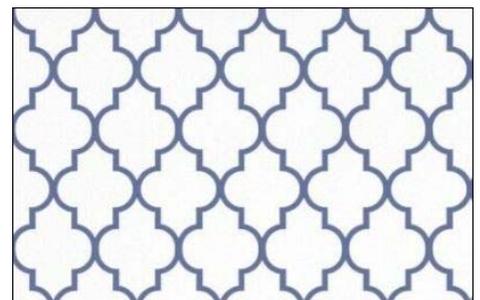
This design can be worked in colours of your choice or traditional black and gold

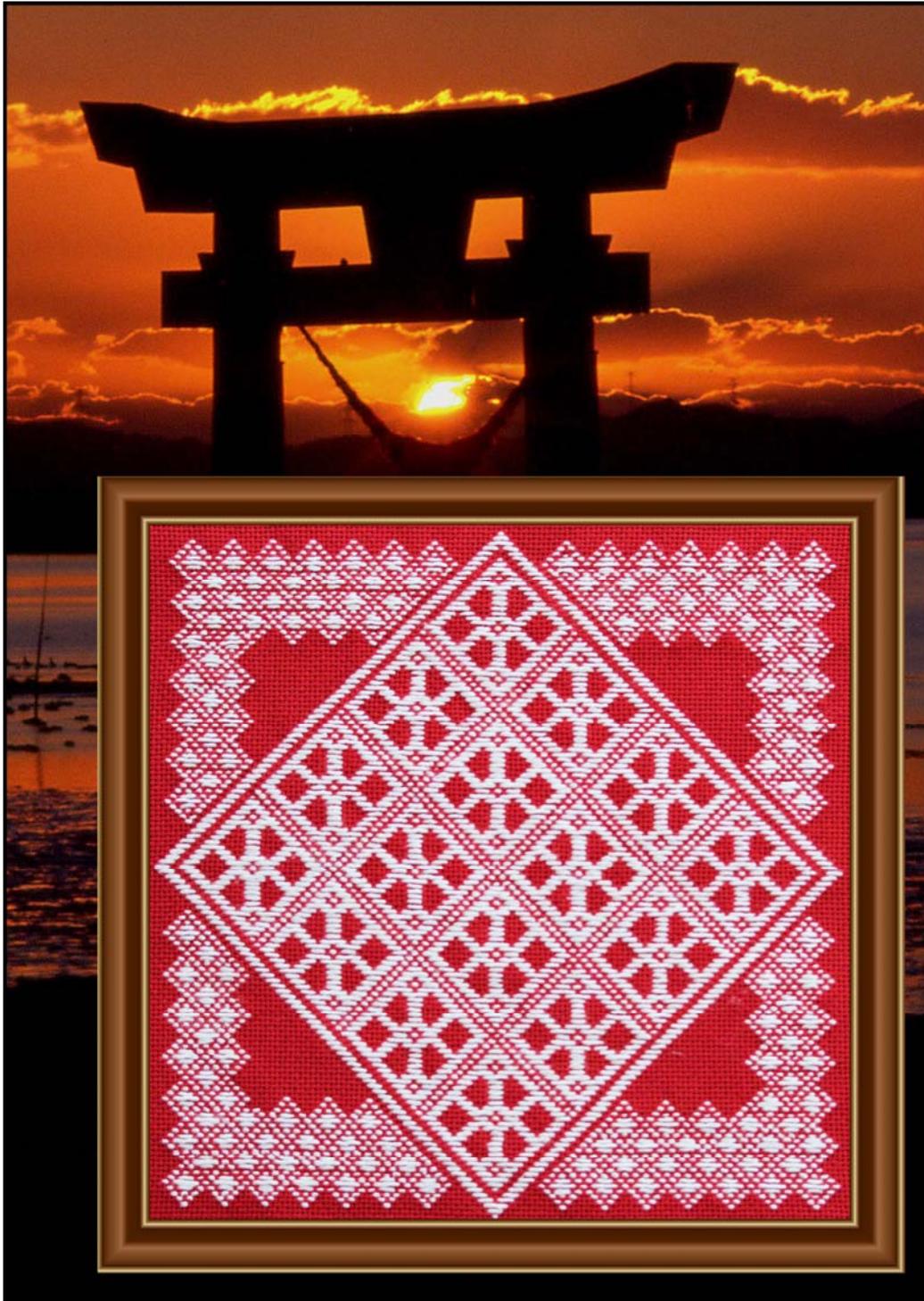
5.93 x 5.86 inches,
83 x 82 stitches

Worked on Zweigart 28
count evenweave, or 14
count Aida

*Work one motif or all four,
use different colours,
metallic threads and beads
to create your own design.*

'Ogee Christmas' is based on a distinctive pattern with two continuous S-shaped curves narrowing and widening. These two curves form a perfect oval before curving out gracefully. As merchants and travellers began travelling along the Silk Road, the design travelled with them on the many textiles they traded, appearing across the Middle East, down into Africa and eventually into Europe.





CH0422 'Neko No Ashi'

Create a small Japanese style Kogin sampler using two different patterns.

9.64 x 9.57 inches,
135 x 134 stitches

Different types of fabric can be used for this design and full instructions and sizes are included.

What is Kogin embroidery?

Kogin is a form of counted thread Japanese pattern darning where the patterns consist of horizontal running stitches worked in rows along the weft of the fabric across the full width of the pattern. The designs were usually geometric and often diamond shaped. It was worked in the hand without using a frame and with a number of stitches on the needle at any one time, making it faster to stitch. Working in the hand rather than on a frame requires a different approach and practice if you are to achieve the results which came so naturally to the local Japanese craftsmen. The traditional colour scheme was white on indigo dyed hemp. Many different colours are used in contemporary Kogin designs.

Introducing the RSN Stitch Bank

In Blackwork Journey and in the years that I have been teaching, I have always stressed to need to learn new stitches and add to our knowledge of stitches and their history which is why when I discovered the RSN Stitch Bank I was really excited.



RSN is the Royal School of Needlework which was founded in the UK in 1872. It is based in Hampton Court Palace which is a Grade I listed royal palace in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, 12 miles south west of central London on the River Thames. Building of the palace began in 1514. Its most famous occupant was the Tudor king Henry V111.

Henry VIII after Hans Holbein the Younger c. 1537–1562

The RSN teaches hand embroidery to the highest standard and is based at Hampton Court Palace where they hold courses and offer bespoke services to customers worldwide from members of the Royal family, places of worship, livery companies, leading fashion and interior design houses and private individuals. They also have a conservation studio preserving and repairing historical textiles.

One of their recent commissions was working on the wedding dress for the Duchess of Cambridge creating the bespoke lace on the wedding dress, veil and shoes.



Hampton Court Palace



**ADOPT A STITCH
TO PRESERVE IT
FOR THE FUTURE**



The RSN Stitch Bank aims to become the biggest repository of stitch in the world

This is how you can contribute



Why do we need the RSN Stitch Bank?

The idea of the RSN Stitch Bank is to digitally conserve and preserve every stitch in the world. It might seem odd to consider losing stitches, but textiles are as vulnerable as nature. Every year we lose historic textiles through wear, age and the more aggressive routes of war, neglect and destruction. We know that stitches from history have been lost because they fall out of use. Then, when an older embroidered piece is discovered, curators and museum staff cannot recognise the stitches. Textiles and the knowledge of stitches throughout the world continue to be threatened by wars and other disturbances, as well as changes in manufacturing processes. The time has come to compile a world directory of stitch – the RSN Stitch Bank.

This project goes to the heart of the Royal School of Needlework's core purpose. We were established in 1872 to keep the techniques of hand embroidery alive, and implicitly, all their stitches.

Who is it for?

The RSN Stitch Bank is available online to all stitchers, tutors, curators, historians, researchers and students. Stitchers will be able to find a new stitch to use in a project and learn how to make it using videos, written instructions, illustrations and photographs for each stitch.

Researchers, curators, historians and students can use the site to learn about the use, structure and history of each stitch in a range of embroidery techniques and to identify a stitch on a textile. RSN Tutors can use stitches from the RSN Stitch Bank as part of their teaching kits so that students working from home can check they are working the stitch correctly.

The project so far

The RSN Stitch Bank was launched on 24 September 2021 with the first 150 stitches to launch the RSN's 150th anniversary in 2022. This has been made possible thanks to our funders and many stitchers and supporters who have contributed.

The expansion of the project

Stitches are not just confined to one country, some stitches have been used around the world. Stitch has already been recognised as intangible cultural heritage in many countries by UNESCO so the RSN plans to raise further funds to work with curators, historians and stitchers across the world to add stitches and patterns to the RSN Stitch Bank to make it a truly international resource.

A CASE STUDY



The Syon Cope, image courtesy of the V&A

Underside couching was used specifically for works known today as *Opus Anglicanum* (English work) made for the church and royalty by embroiderers in the City of London. There remain some extant examples, as seen in a recent exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, but the technique of underside couching is now extremely rare - all the courses taught around the time of the exhibition were taught by RSN Tutors.

Underside couching went out of fashion because it was more expensive than ordinary couching, by virtue of taking longer to work and requiring more gold thread. This was traded for the quicker, cheaper but less 'sparkly' surface couching.

It is important that underside couching, and other stitches in danger of being forgotten, are saved for the future and made available to as many people as possible. That is the role of the RSN Stitch Bank.

Blackwork Journey Blog, December 2021

How you can help

You can adopt a stitch to help the work continue. Stitches can be adopted in your name, in memory or recognition of a loved one and can be adopted by Guilds, societies and groups. It costs between £135 and £228 for each stitch entry to be prepared. If you pay for a whole stitch (£135 and above) your name will be added to the Stitch record as its sponsor, but you can make a donation of any amount.

Just go to: royal-needlework.org.uk/rsnstitchbank to find out more and make a payment. On receipt of your payment, your stitch will then be allocated and an e-certificate of sponsorship will be sent along with more information about the RSN Stitch Bank. Your support will bring history to life.

See the RSN Stitch Bank for yourself at rsnstitchbank.org

'Poinsettia' card

Design area: 2.07 x 2.14inches, 29 x 30 stitches

Material:

Zweigart 14 count Aida, 6 x 6 inches

Threads: DMC stranded floss

Tapestry needle No.24

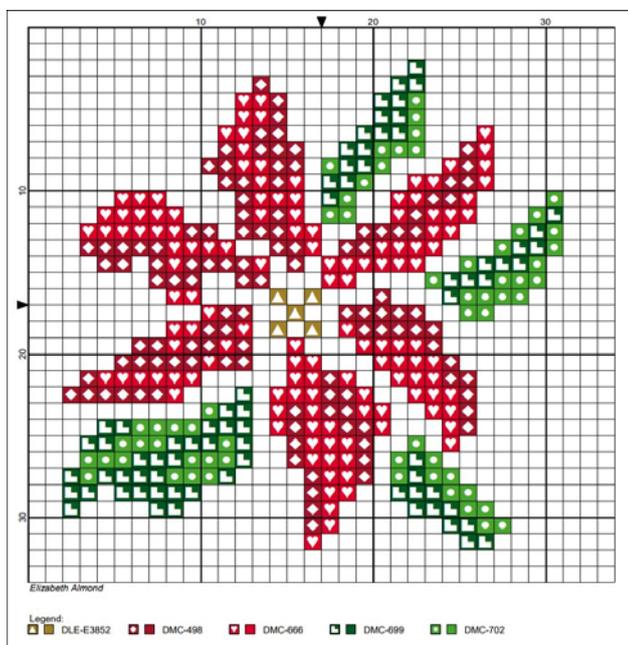
Stitches used: Cross Stitch, two strands

Method:

1. Start from the centre of the design working outwards using TWO strands of cotton for the cross stitch. Work each petal and leaf in turn.

2. Place the finished embroidery face down on a soft towel and press lightly.

If two pieces are stitched the pattern can also be used to make a scented sachet, tree decoration or pin cushion.



I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog. If you have any queries please contact:

lizalmond@blackworkjourney.co.uk

Happy stitching this Christmas and in the New Year!

Liz