



Blackwork Journey Blog

March 2023



Brenda's Quilt

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Looking forward!

Shaking off the last remnants of Winter and looking forward to Spring is always a special time. I look forward to seeing the snowdrops in the garden, the first buds on the lime tree and watch to see if the owls return to their nesting box after the Winter. We can hear them hooting in the trees around and there is a brand new nest box with a “To let” sign waiting for them in the garden!

It is also a busy time for teaching, but a recent request for 58 kits for one day school did rather take me aback. It involved a considerable amount of printing, cutting, winding threads and packing, but how exciting to know that so many people want to participate. All the groups are so enthusiastic after the Covid pandemic and are enjoying meeting up after the isolation of the past two years. Many of the groups are also welcoming new members of all ages, which is encouraging for the future of embroidery in the UK. However, not everyone is able to meet in person and the Facebook groups have been expanding rapidly that enable me to touch base with so many members worldwide.

This has been especially valuable after the recent earthquake in Turkey and Syria which caused such devastation. A close friend of mine who helps to administer the Facebook groups, lives in Turkey and it was a relief to know that she and her family are safe and well.

However, not all the members of the Blackwork Journey family have been so lucky and our love, prayers and support go out to all of those affected in both countries. I know that embroidery has been a great comfort to our members who live under difficult conditions and the additional problems are unimaginable. You are in all our thoughts!



Brenda's quilt

Recycle – reuse a Suffolk puff quilt!



E-Bay can produce some surprising bargains as Brenda, a member of our local “Knit and Natter” group found out recently when she bid £25 for a Suffolk puff patchwork piece, thinking that she could take the puffs apart and use them in card making.

What Brenda did not realise was that it was an almost complete quilt made of fabric mainly from the 1970's!

How many Suffolk puffs in Doreen's Quilt?

Doreen's quilt consisted of 208 squares each made of 16 Suffolk puffs, in total 3,328 puffs.

A few of the puffs were missing and there is some repair work to be done if it is to be reused as a quilt but, after some deliberation, Doreen decided that she was not going to use it for cards, but instead use some of the puffs to create an embroidery and repair the rest of the quilt!



What is a Suffolk puff?

A Suffolk puff is a circle of fabric gathered round the edges to make a smaller circle of double thickness. It is usually made from scraps of fabric and stitched together to form quilts or even toys. I remember making dolls with Suffolk puff bodies when my daughter was young and later for Christmas decorations. The patches are sometimes called “yo yos”.

To make a Suffolk puff you will need scraps of lightweight dressmaking material or patchwork fabric in contrasting or toning colours. A card for a template, water soluble pen or HB pencil, scissors, thread and needle.

A template for a 16.5cm diameter circle will make a 7.5 cm finished puff. Depending on how many you wish to make, use strong card or template plastic to make a durable template. Trace around the shape onto the wrong side of the fabric, using a water soluble pen.

If the centre of the circle is going to be seen, turn under a small 1/2cm hem onto each circle and press lightly.

Use a strong thread work a running stitch round the hem, pull up the circle and tie it off tightly. Sew the ends in. Flatten the puffs and sew them together.



Buttons and beads can be added to the centre, or two puffs of different sizes could be stitched together to make a double puff.

Use a quilting needle and quilting weight thread to sew the puffs together.

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Place two puffs right sides together (the right is the side with the opening), sewing as close to the edge as you can stitch a few anchor stitches.

Use a slip stitch to stitch a short length to join the puffs. Finish by stitching a few more anchor stitches on your final stitch. The puffs are anchored at four points.

What was really interesting was to see the different fabrics that had been used in the quilt. Rayon, cotton, synthetics even velvet had been included. The cotton prints were from the late 1960's and early 1970's "a real trip down memory lane" and some the ladies remembered wearing these prints. It was a period of great change in society and this was reflected in the fashions, fabrics and colours of the period. From Mods to miniskirts, synthetic crimplene and nylon to denim!

<https://www.thepeoplehistory.com/70sclothes.html/>

Suffolk puffs for modern embroidery

Looking at Brenda's quilt triggered an idea. I frequently work with calico when teaching "Calico Garden" workshops. Could I incorporate Suffolk puffs in calico into the day school?



Embroider the design first in textured stitches!

One way would be to;

1. Draw design onto the calico and embroider using a selection of cream and brown threads in different thicknesses and types. Add the beads, wash and press.
2. Make the Suffolk puffs and gather up circles to make flower petals. Stitch the calico puffs and petals in place. Add colonial knots and beads to the centre of the puffs and petals to add texture and interest.
3. Tiny wooden bees, insects and flowers can be stitched onto the finished rustic design.
4. Cut a card circle and pad with wadding. Draw the embroidery over the circle and tie tightly.

5. Cut a second card circle, pad, and cover and draw the backing fabric up. Add a hanger and slip stitch the two pieces together.



At the end of this Blog is a project to explore with a Stitch Dictionary – “**Creating texture in embroidery**”.

Trace off the design onto cotton or calico and use the Stitch Dictionary to find suitable stitches. Look through the threads in your stash and create your own unique design.

Please post photographs of your finished work on the Blackwork Journey Facebook group:

Blackwork Journey - Elizabeth Almond Designs

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/blackworkjourneydesigns/>

Celebrate the coming of spring with seasonal flowers



Tulips, Pansies, Peonies, Snowdrops, Bluebells, Alliums, Lilac, Iris, Freesias, Daffodils and Hyacinths can all be found in the UK in the Spring, but for me the first snowdrops peeping through indicate that winter is finally over.

However, I have discovered that the grey squirrels like eating spring bulbs, so to find a crocus or a snowdrop that they have missed is rare!

PR0049 Snowdrops – blackwork, pulled thread and freestyle embroidery

“These chill snowdrops, fresh from wintry bowers, Are the forerunners of a world of flowers.....~”

Ruth Stout,



Embroider freestyle snowdrops to herald the coming of Spring in two different techniques. Both designs are traced onto the fabric using a water-soluble pen or an HB pencil.

PR0049 Snowdrops

PR0049 is a counted thread design worked on Zweigart 28 count evenweave using DMC stranded floss for outlines and blackwork counted filler patterns with some pulled thread stitches. Pulled thread work is worked on evenweave fabric. No threads are removed, but the threads are pulled together to create the stitches. The threads need to be strong enough to withstand the 'pull'.

Two sizes have been included:

Small design: 4.50 x 5 inches Material: 8 x 9 inches

Large design: 6.50 x 7 inches Material: 10 x 12 inches

PR0051 Mountmellick Snowdrop

Full size design: 6.50 x 7 inches **Material:** 10 x 12 inches

Exploring whitework embroidery requires a different approach, but it is satisfying and challenging.

History

Irish Mountmellick embroidery was developed around 1825 by Johanna Carter, who taught it to a group of women and girls. It uses matt white cotton threads on white cotton sateen fabric with a slight sheen. There are no open spaces, eyelets, drawn or pulled areas in this style of embroidery, but dense areas of embroidery created by a wide variety of threads and stitches.

The plants featured in the design, were those that were found around the town of Mountmellick and included blackberries, oak, fern, dog roses and shamrocks. This style of embroidery is textured and tactile which contrasts with many of the other whitework techniques, such as Ayrshire work, which is densely embroidered on very fine fabric.

Mountmellick Work "Embroidery Book"
Mary Thomas 1936



Traditional Mountmellick embroidery used a matt cotton thread. The aim was to have as much contrast between the thread and the fabric as possible. If the fabric is matt use a thread with sheen, such as Cotton P rle. If the fabric has sheen uses a matt thread.

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The thread needs to have some weight and dimension to it, so floss is not the ideal choice. White Mountmellick threads: No.1 (the finest) No.2 fine (4 ply), No.3 medium (6 ply), and No.4 thick (7 ply). Do not divide the thread. Use it as it comes from the skein or cone.

Cotton á broder, candlewicking cottons and cotton floche and Cotton P rle No's 5 and 8 may be used as alternatives, but they are not traditional Mountmellick threads. Twisted, mercerised threads do not create an authentic appearance. I suggest you experiment with different threads to find one you like working with.

PR0039 Whitework Iris

The iris takes its name from the Greek word for a rainbow. It stands proudly amongst the bright greens of a spring garden, a true representative of hope for the New Year.

This is a pulled thread sampler worked on evenweave fabric with a free style outline.

Pulled thread embroidery is a counted embroidery technique, worked on a loosely woven evenweave fabric. Stitches are worked around groups of threads in the fabric and pulled, using the tension of the stitches to form gaps, creating lacy, open fillings, bands, border and hems. It is usually worked in white thread on white fabric, but can also be worked with coloured threads.

Design Area: 6 inches wide x 9 inches high

Material: Zweigart, 28 count evenweave, 10 inches x 12 inches

Threads: DMC stranded cotton, White, one skein – use the number of strands recommended for each stitch. Cotton P rle No.12 – white, one ball, used for all pulled thread stitches or, two strands of floss DMC Diamant Gold, one reel, or DMC Light Effects E3852 Gold, one skein Tapestry needle No.24 Crewel needle No.22 Embroidery ring or frame, small HB pencil or water-soluble pen.



CH0354 Blackwork Iris

This is a traditional freestyle blackwork design where the outlines are worked first and the filler patterns added.

Design Area: 6 inches wide x 9 inches high

Material: Zweigart, 28 count evenweave, 10 inches x 12 inches

Blackwork embroidery designs tend to fall into two main areas i.e. Block designs where geometric patterns form the shapes or, free style designs in which geometric patterns fill a drawn outline.

The filling stitches or diaper patterns have three elements within them, namely light, medium and dark which create the balance within the design. The closer the stitches, the heavier the design becomes. Heavy patterns

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should not be placed together in a blackwork design as it can unbalance the design. This design can be worked as a blackwork embroidery in DMC 310 black and greys with silver metallic thread or in colour.

Recycle patchwork

Take two unused pieces of patchwork, a little imagination and create a Japanese style sashiko cushion!

Front:

Draw the design onto the fabric using a blue water-soluble pen and a white pencil crayon.

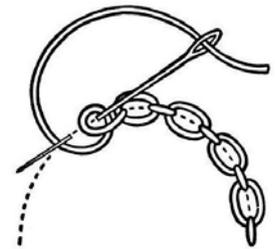
Threads: Matt crochet cotton, white and red.
Rainbow Lace 1 ply 100% Mercerized Cotton



The outline was worked in cable chain stitch and emphasised by rows of white sashiko running stitch

Stitches used:

Sashiko running stitch
Cable chain stitch



*Cable chain
stitch*

Cable chain stitch consists of alternate straight stitches and loops so that the finished stitch looks like a length of metal chain. Mary Corbet has an excellent video on cable chain stitch if you wish to follow her lesson at www.needlenthread.com https://youtu.be/4v_r-beCyEM

Cushion back

Alternating red and white bands of sashiko running stitch in a flower design were worked on the back of the cushion.

If sashiko thread is not available matt crochet cotton is one of the threads that can be used as an alternative.



Clover sashiko needles and palm thimble

Working on denim fabric

I recently embroidered the back of a denim jacket using the variegated Rainbow Lace 1 ply 100% Mercerized Cotton and was pleased with the result.

The denim was stiff so a sashiko needle and Japanese thimble were used to make it easier to push the needle through the fabric. Sashiko needles are longer and thicker than the needles normally used, and most have large eyes for threading thick cotton sashiko threads. A number of stitches are on the needle at any one time which makes the stitching faster and straighter.

Stitches used on jacket:

Yoke: Shippo-tsunagi variation – interlocking circles

Phoenix:

Back stitch, back stitch whipped

Chain stitch, Cable chain stitch

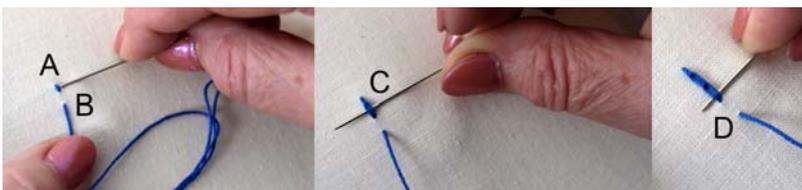
Colonial knots

Reverse chain stitch

Reverse chain stitch whipped

Sashiko running stitch

Reverse chain stitch



Reverse chain stitch is worked down the line towards you.

Make a short straight stitch at A and bring the needle out a short distance away at B.

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Slide the needle under the straight stitch and into the material at the place where the thread emerged. Bring the needle out again at D, pass the needle under the previous chain and back down at D. When sliding under the chain loops the needle does not pierce the material. Pull gently!



Stitches used on jacket



I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog and that you find new information and ideas to explore.

If you have any queries please contact:
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Creating texture in embroidery

Very simple line designs can be interpreted in many different embroidery styles, stitches and threads.

In the flower design the darker flower is the starting point: centre, lines, dots and petals. Using the Stitch Dictionary select TWO different stitches for each element. Then, select the thread suitable for each stitch

Centre: is it to be textured or smooth? Select two different stitches

Stitches: a. b.

Thread:

Lines and Dots:

Stitches: a. b.

Thread:

Petals: - depends on how the centre, lines and dots have been worked.

Stitches: a. b.

Thread:

Once you have worked out what to do with the flowers consider the leaves and stem.

Stem: - textured or smooth?

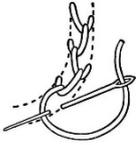
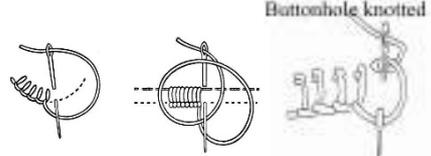
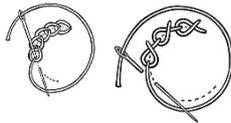
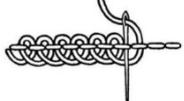
Stitches: a. b.

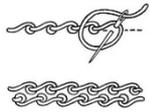
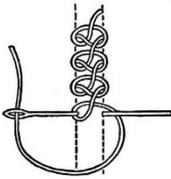
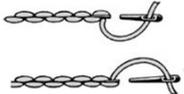
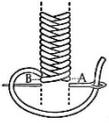
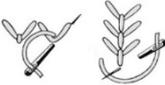
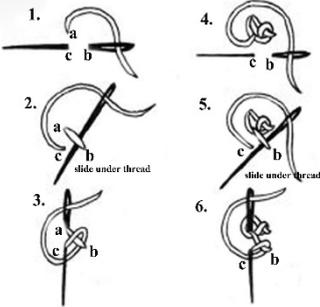
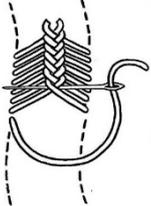
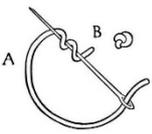
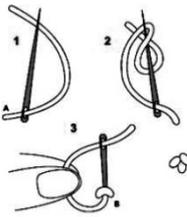
Thread:

Leaves: There must be sufficient contrast in texture/colour/stitches between the flower and the leaves. Make the wrong decision here and the balance of the embroidery can be wrong.

Stitches: a. b.

Thread:

Outline stitches – some ideas:		
Back stitch Double back stitch Threaded back Whipped back 	Single feather stitch 	Buttonhole stitch Buttonhole knotted 
Cable stitch Knotted cable stitch 	Chain stitch Knotted chain 	Coral stitch 
Couching 	Cross stitch 	Dot stitch 
Trailing stitch 	Pekinese stitch 	Running stitch Whipped running stitch 

<p>Scroll stitch</p> 	<p>Split stitch</p> 	<p>Double knot stitch</p> 
<p>Stem stitch</p>  <p>Whipped stem stitch</p> 	<p>Wheatear – which category? You choose</p> 	
Band stitches:		
<p>Chain – zig zag</p> 	<p>Braid stitch</p> 	<p>Cable stitch</p> 
<p>Fishbone</p> 	<p>Fly</p> 	<p>Herringbone</p> 
<p>Loop</p> 	<p>Mountmellick</p> 	<p>Vandyke</p> 
Knots:		
<p>French knot</p> 	<p>Colonial</p> 	<p>Bullion</p> 
Leaves:		
<p>Buttonhole leaf</p> 	<p>Fishbone</p> 	<p>Open fishbone</p> 
<p>Whipped back stitch</p> 	<p>Long and short</p> 	<p>Satin</p> 

There are many more stitches that can be used but this will give you a base to start from. Now move on to the other designs and follow the same exercise.