



Blackwork Journey Blog

November 2024



Explore the beauty of
Whitework Embroidery



Bolton Castle near Leyburn in the heart of the Yorkshire dales

At the heart of Wensleydale lies the small market town of Leyburn, the gateway to the Yorkshire dales with its mix of quaint shops and cafes. The town is surrounded by some of Yorkshire's most picturesque countryside and is a wonderful place to visit which I did twice recently to meet members of the Richmond and Leyburn Creative Stitchers. The journey from our home in Lancashire took us through some winding and narrow lanes, past streams and waterfalls and fields full of sheep grazing peacefully in fields - a joy to behold!

Blackwork Journey Blog, November 2024

The first journey to Leyburn was to give a talk on "Whitework for Today" and the second visit was to do a whitework workshop with 22 very keen embroiderers. I always enjoy whitework workshops because many people have never really looked at the technique in detail which is very relevant to modern life.

Whilst whitework is found in almost every country in the world and is worked on a wide range of fabrics from shadow work on delicate Indian muslin and Scottish Ayrshire embroidery, to Pina (pineapple cloth), Heavy cottons, linen and cotton twills are used for Irish Mountmellick embroidery. Candlewicking was worked on calico and is still popular today. In fact, there is a whitework technique to suit every taste and ability.

Questions to ask

If you want to explore modern whitework embroidery there are a number of points to consider before you start: -

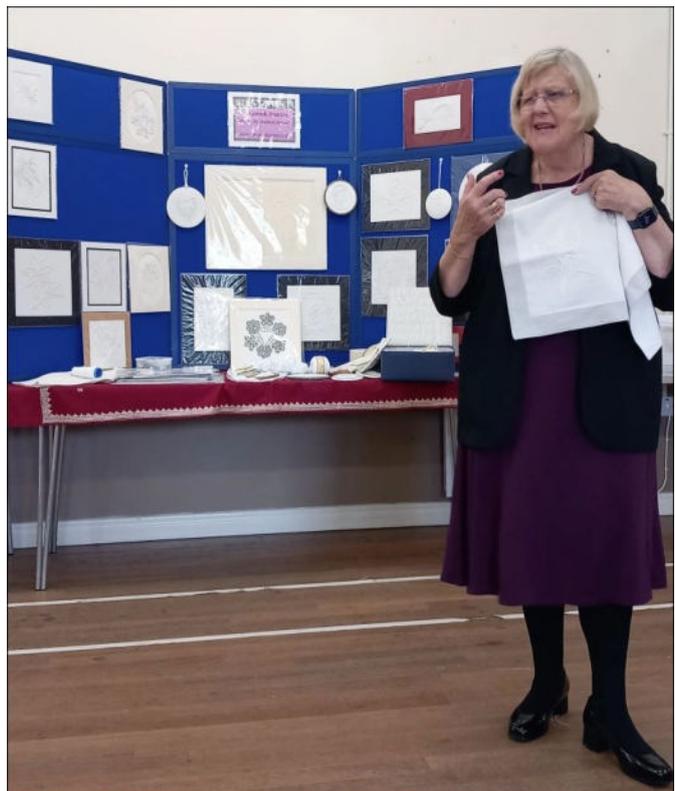
1. What style of whitework do you want to explore or is it a specific technique?
2. Do you want a practical piece of work that can be used or a delicate piece to be framed or exhibited?
3. How good is your eyesight? Can you see to work white embroidery on white fabric? If glare is a factor, consider using antique or similar white fabric.
4. Would cream threads on cream fabric be a suitable alternative and would it be just as effective?
5. Can you purchase suitable threads and fabric for your chosen project, or can you substitute other fabrics to achieve the desired effect?
6. Are you prepared to learn some new stitches and expand your stitch repertoire?
Looking at the stitches listed below in "Types of Whitework" many of them are used in different forms of whitework.
7. Be prepared to experiment with threads and fabric. Changing the thickness of the threads changes the final appearance of the design. You will be surprised just how different and satisfying it can be!
8. Explore your stash of threads and fabric before you go and buy new ones. Which ones do you really like working with? Explore matt crochet cotton, floche, pastel floss and delicate pastel shades to work with the white threads.
9. Lay the white threads out in daylight and look carefully at the "white". The threads can vary from bright white, white, blue-white, yellow white to grey-white, so choose carefully.
10. Can you see to thread the needle? If necessary, use a needle with a larger eye. Thicker threads require different types of needles.
11. If the fabric is delicate, work it in a frame or ring with the fabric under tension.
12. Practice new stitches on your doodle cloth before starting on the embroidered piece. This can save hours of frustration and unpicking!

Good preparation is the key to all embroidery projects. If you can answer some or all these questions before you start can save a lot of frustration. Use the internet to explore the different types of whitework and see what resources are available to help with the stitches.

The Royal School of Needlework Stitch Bank is one of the most comprehensive resources.

<https://rsnstitchbank.org>





Members of the Richmond and Leyburn Creative Stitchers who attended the workshop. It was a successful day which I really enjoyed. Thank you, ladies!

Blackwork Journey Blog, November 2024

I have listed some of the most well-known types of whitework and their characteristics. Many of the stitches used are common to more than one technique. The threads chosen and the ground fabric will determine how the finished work appears and if you want to choose a whitework project there are many designs on my Blackwork Journey website covering a wide range of techniques.

A brief summary of some of the different types of whitework, fabric, threads and stitches:

Texture in whitework is achieved through a wide variety of methods: by raising stitches through padding or the use of needlelace; by creating holes in the fabric by the use of eyelets, cutwork, or drawn thread work; by manipulating the ground fabric through pulled thread work; by stitching into net; or by the use of thread with a contrasting finish to the fabric.

Some whitework techniques use just one or two of these methods, e.g. Mountmellick uses a matt thread on a glazed fabric and also pads some stitches; other techniques use several methods, e.g. Ayrshire uses padded stitches, needlelace, cutwork, drawn work and pulled work. In Blackwork Journey there are a number of charts with pulled thread work, candlewicking and Mountmellick on white fabric and well as many free style whitework designs to explore.

Related techniques: Drawn Thread, Cutwork, Hardanger, Pulled Thread, Ayrshire, Mountmellick, Needlelace

Ayrshire Embroidery

Fabric: Delicate embroidery on fine cotton muslin (lawn), linen or cotton cambric (not easily available).

Threads: Fine white sewing cotton DMC Broder Machine cotton 50, Broder Special No 30, stranded cotton, linen, lace making threads.

Needles: Crewel needle or sharp sizes 10 -12

Stitches: Blanket, Chain, Cloth, Eyelets, Herringbone, Laddering, Overcast, Outline, Satin, Stem, Straight, Trailing

Broderie Anglaise – simple cutwork with pierced and cur eyelets and blanket stitch edging.

Fabric: Fine linen, lawn, cotton poplin

Threads: Soft cotton, Stranded cotton. Choose the weight of the thread to match the fabric. Floche – 5 ply thread Size 16.

Needles: Crewel needle and sharps. Stiletto to pierce eyelets.

Stitches: Blanket, Eyelets, Overcast, Running, Satin. Stem.

Candlewicking

Fabric: Unbleached calico, medium weight cotton fabric, cotton canvas – lightweight.

Threads: DMC soft cotton threads, matt crochet cotton

Stitches: Back, Blanket, Cable, Colonial knots, Coral, Couching, Detached chain. Feather, Fishbone, Fly, French knot, Herringbone, Outline, Running, Satin, Split, Stem, Straight, Trellis.

Needle: Chenille or crewel – various sizes

Carrickmacross – embroidery on net and fine muslin with cutwork and embroidered bars resembling applique "lace".

Fabric: Fine muslin, cotton net.

Threads: Cotton thread Size 50 and 30. Cotton crochet No.60

Needles: fine sharp, crewel Size 10-12, tapestry needle.

Stitches: Cobweb, couching, single dot stitch, darn.

Cutwork

Found in many countries and variations with a long history. Renaissance, Richelieu and Reticella are three of the most well-known variations.

Fabric: Close woven linen or cotton.

Threads: Matt threads – Danish flower thread, floche, stranded cotton. Modern cutwork uses silk and cotton Perle.

Needles: sharps, crewel and tapestry.

Stitches: Blanket, Overcast, Running, Eyelets, Laddering, Bars, Couronnes (rings worked round a cylinder and blanket stitched).

Hedebo Embroidery - Danish cutwork similar to Ayrshire embroidery.

Linen or cotton fabric with linen threads. Cotton threads are not used.

Needle: sharp or crewel. Tapestry needle for fillings.

Stitches: Beading, Bullion, Couranne, Eyelet, French knot, Hedebo Point, Running, Satin.



Blackwork Journey Inspirations Madeira Embroidery

Madeira Embroidery – delicate embroidery on fine fabric.

Detailed PDF on the Blackwork Journey website in '[Inspirations](#)' [Madeira Embroidery](#).



Cutwork on translucent linen and organdie.

Threads: Floche No.16, Broder Special. Needles: Size 7 between – short needle, sharp point, round eye.

Worked in the hand, not in a hoop.

Stitches: Blanket, Back, Eyelet, Granitos, Long and short, Outline, Pin, Satin, Seed, Shadow work, Stem.



Blackwork Journey Techniques

TQ0013

Mountmellick Embroidery – floral, heavy, matt Irish whitework on thick, matt satin jean fabric.

Detailed PDF on the Blackwork Journey website in "[Techniques](#)" [TQ0013 Introduction to Mountmellick](#)

Introduction to Mountmellick

Fabric: 100% medium to heavy weight cotton with a sheen. Cotton sateen. Always pre-wash.

Threads: Matt Mountmellick cotton Sizes 2, 3 and 4. Matt, mercerised knitting and crochet cottons. Knitted fringes may be added.

Needles: Crewel or chenille needles, sharp points, large eyes. Work in a frame.

Stitches: Back, Blanket – many variations. Braid, Brick, Bullion, Cable, Cable chain, Cable plait, Chain, Coral, Cording, Couching – Bokhara and Roumanian, Cretan, Detached chain, Feather – single, double, closed, Fern, Fishbone, French knot, Fly, Gordian knot, Herringbone, Honeycomb, Knitted fringe, Loop, Mountmellick,

Blackwork Journey Blog, November 2024

Outline, Overcast, Palastrina, point de reprise, Portuguese knotted stem, Running, Satin, Scroll, Seed, Spider web, Split, Stem, Thorn, Trailing, Trellis, Van Dyke, Wave, Wheatear.

Shadow work embroidery – translucent fabric showing the stitches worked from the back and showing on the front. From Iran and India where it is known as Chikan embroidery worked on fine muslin.

Fabric: fine linen, organdie, voile, organza, batiste, chiffon, fine silk.

Threads: One strand of floss or silk, fine perle, broder special, floche.

Needle: Fine tapestry needles No 24 or 26 or fine sharp or crewel, both have advantages and disadvantages.

Stitches: Double back, Herringbone. Work in a frame or ring.

Tambour embroidery or Ari work is worked with a tambour hook similar to a crochet hook on a special frame called a tambour "drum". The stitch is a continuous chain stitch.

Fabric: Cotton voile, cotton, silk, cotton and silk net.

Threads: High twist Size 30 or 50 cotton sewing thread, linen lace thread.

Needles: Tambour hook with hooks of various sizes.

This is a selection of the whitework charts available on the website:



CH0437 Whitework Hibiscus - free style embroidery worked on cotton twill



PR0025 Winterland_ - free style and pulled thread work embroidery worked on Zweigart 28 count evenweave.

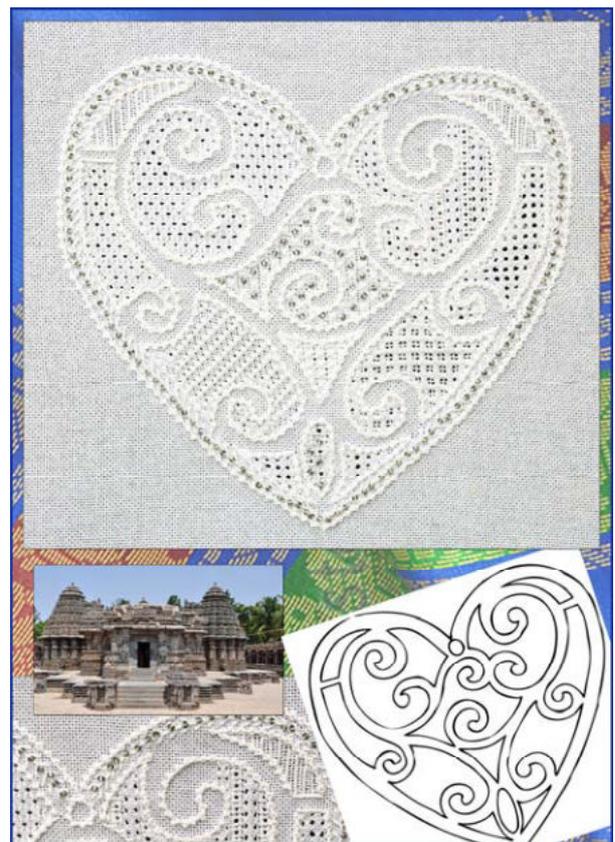


PR0036 Whitework
Ring Pillows



PR0051 Mountmellick Snowdrop

PR0036 Whitework Ring Pillows and PR0051 Mountmellick Snowdrop are free style embroidery designs worked on white cotton using a variety of white, matt threads.



PR0039 Whitework Iris and PR0037 Love India are both free style counted thread pulled work designs worked on Zweigart 28 count evenweave in Cotton P rle No. 12 and DMC stranded floss.

Embroidery is about exploring patterns, stitches, fabric and shapes and enjoyment!

The paisley design is a case in point.

What is a paisley pattern?

The Oxford Dictionary defines the paisley pattern as “A distinctive intricate pattern of curved feather-shaped figures based on an Indian pine-cone design.” It dates from Kashmir 2,000 years ago and is as popular across the world today as it was then. From Scotland and the town of Paisley to the heart of India paisley patterns are used in textiles, shawls and high fashion today. I grew up in the 60's and paisley was worn by the pop icons of the time from the Beatles to David Bowie.

I drew a basic paisley pattern, traced the design onto the fabric and then thought about what threads and stitches I wanted to use. Whilst I considered working it as a whitework design I had a skein of Anchor variegated thread in blues and green and decided to incorporate it in the design along with matt crochet threads and cotton P erle No.8. My aim was to produce a small highly textured design using a variety of stitches and threads.

Stitches used:

Back stitch, bullion stitch, chain stitch, cable chain stitch, double knot stitch, fly stitch, lazy daisy stitch and wheatear stitch.

Many of the stitches are textured and work well with the thicker threads. The beads were used to add extra texture and interest and were added after the embroidery was completed.



Playing with paisley!



Shawl Fragment (India), 19th century: Shawl fragment with a narrow border has a pale green ground covered with paisley motifs, flower clusters and large leaves in shades of red, purple, pink, orange, green, and light blue



Work from Readers

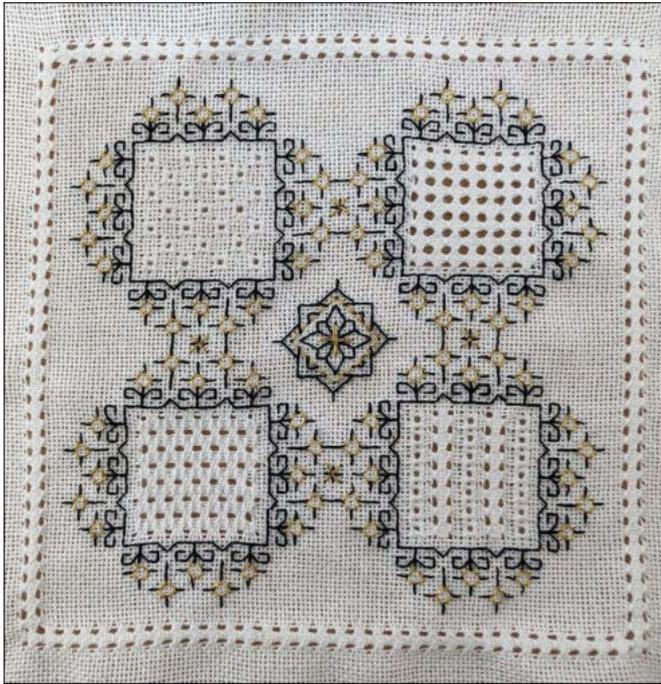
Aisha has completed the Flying Geese project which was in six parts in 'Freebies' on the Blackwork Journey website.

Rather than frame her work she has fringed the edge making a very attractive and interesting edge.

Well done Aisha!

Blackwork Journey Blog, November 2024

I recently worked in the Isle of Man with the "Manx Embroiderers and Stitchers" giving a talk on blackwork and a workshop on pulled thread and blackwork and I was delighted to receive some photographs of work that the members had finished after the class.



Pulled thread work design by Helen

Pulled thread design on Aida and Evenweave by Jean



I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog.

If you have any queries, please contact me at:
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Happy stitching,

Liz