



Blackwork Journey Blog

February 2026





Spring is coming in the UK!

After a very wet and cold Winter the first bunches of daffodils are in the shops, the bulbs are pushing up through the soil and I can look forward hoping that the worst of the winter is coming to an end. Daffodils make me smile and feel happy whether they are in a vase in the kitchen or blooming in the garden. I look forward to warm Spring days when I can sit outside and stitch! The light will be better and the colours clearer, but we still need to not only consider how we stitch, but how we sit and what we can use to make life easier and more comfortable.



lower back region is properly supported.

Following on from last month, in Part 2, I want to explore posture, lights, lenses and magnifying aids.

Comfortable Seating

Comfortable seating and the correct sitting position are as important as the equipment you use. Long periods of sitting in an unsuitable chair, with poor general posture, often results in neck and shoulder pain. The most suitable chair for long term use should be well padded with soft arm rests and provide good lumbar support so that the

The cushion of the chair needs to be wider than your hips and deep enough to support the front part of your thighs. If the chair is too big your back will not be fully supported. The height of the chair should allow both feet to be placed flat on the floor.

Relax and try not to cross your legs! Make sure you have all your materials and equipment near to hand, so you don't have to stretch out for them.

Lenses and Lighting

Once you are sitting comfortably, let's consider your eyesight and lighting. Eyesight is the most fundamental issue to address, so start by asking yourself when you last had your eyesight checked? If you cannot see to thread a needle or stitch without discomfort, then the time may have come to consider glasses and the many items of equipment on the market which could make a real difference. I have a pair of glasses made specifically for embroidery which means I do not need to use a special lens very often.

Obviously, you need the best possible lighting. If you are working in daylight, try to sit near a window with the natural light on your work. Never work in your own shadow, either when using natural light or a lamp.

Lighting has changed significantly since I researched this aspect 15 years ago, but I have found the ones with a daylight simulation bulb especially helpful and are particularly suitable for organising thread colours

as well as reducing eyestrain and glare. These bulbs can be obtained from most good craft stores or via the Internet. Since I have developed a serious eyesight problem, I am more conscious than ever of the importance of the correct equipment.

Needlework quilting and crafting lamps are designed to provide the optimal lighting for all your crafting needs. Whether you're working on embroidery, cross-stitch, quilting, crochet or knitting, good lighting enhances the workspace, ensuring you can see every detail clearly and comfortably. Decide what type of light you need and ask yourself several questions first e.g. Does it need to be portable? Where will it stand? Does it need to attach to a table or be free standing? Do you need a magnifying lens combined with a lamp? Can different accessories be attached to it?

There are many different types and combinations of good quality lights that are worth researching prior to purchase.

Types of light:

Examples include;

Floor lamps

Table lamps

Portable lamps

Magnifying lamps

Stitching stands

Easel and studio lamps

LED magnifiers

The web site <http://daylightcompany.com> illustrates a wide variety of products, although other manufacturers sites are available.

The following are a few of the devices I have used.

A magnifying lamp. This combines a light and lens together in the same unit. There is a whole range available on the market and whether it is a floor stand or a desk lamp, the combination of light and suitable lenses can make sewing far less stressful.

For example, the “StitchSmart 2 Magnifier & Chartholder” (Right) from the Daylight Company provides a light, magnifier and chartholder.



“StitchSmart 2 Magnifier & Chartholder

The magnifier/lamp with its 9 cm (3.5 inch) glass lens and ultra-bright LEDs provides exceptional clarity for intricate tasks and accurate colour matching, whilst the chartholder keeps the patterns at eye level.

Portable lighting. If you work in more than one place, consider portable lighting which can be set up when and where you need it.

For example, the “Twist 2 Go” light (Below) provides a portable, rechargeable and compact design wherever you are working.



“Twist 2 Go” magnifying light/lens

Head and neck magnifying lights are also portable and flexible. For example, the “Lightcraft Pro LED Magnifier Glasses” (Right) with 4 precision ground lenses with magnifications of between 1.5 and 5.0 and an adjustable LED spotlight and rechargeable battery.



Magnifying glasses and neck light

There are lights and lenses that can fit on your head, but I find these can sometimes be difficult to work with. A neck light can be useful.

My personal preference is for a desktop combination of light and magnifier (Below), although floor models are also available and may suit your situation better. There are different levels of magnification and some of the lenses also incorporate a small area of much higher magnification, which is useful for threading needles or examining stitches in detail.



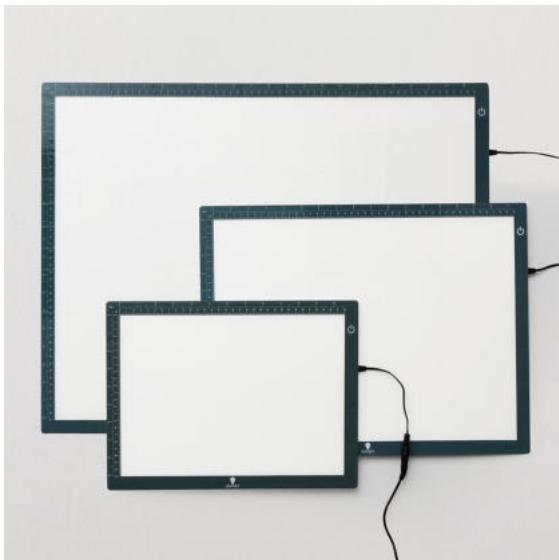
Determine what strength of lens is needed and in what combination. If the natural light where you usually work is particularly good, simple lenses without lights are available which can be clipped to a table or an embroidery frame. These can be more useful and often more flexible than a light which must be connected to an electricity supply.

Just a word of caution, remember to cover your magnifying lens when you have finished working, especially if it is near a window and strong sunlight as an uncovered lens with the sun reflecting through the glass can start a fire.

A desktop light and magnifier with an embroidered cover for the lens.

Lightbox.

I often draw and trace patterns and the lighting tools I find very useful for this purpose are my wafer-thin A2, A3 and A4 lightboxes from the “Daylight Company”.



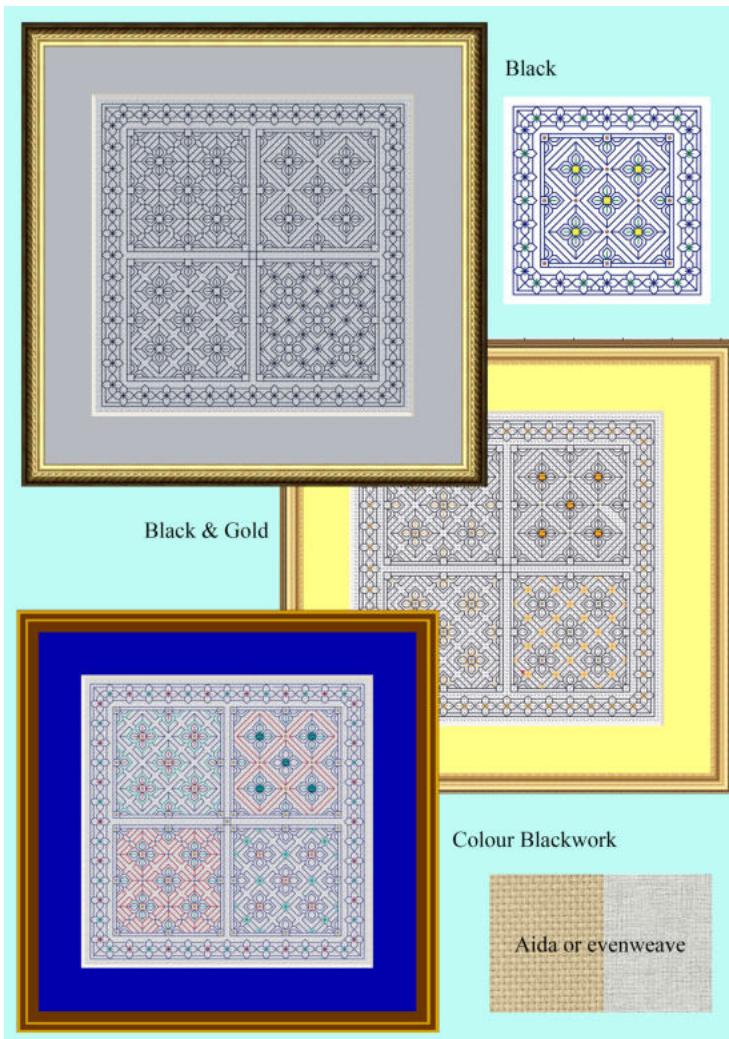
They are portable and provide an even spread of light from edge to edge and are powered via an AC adaptor, which results in very little heat being emitted from the screens.

Handy hint: You can also use the magnifying feature on your smart phone or I-pad for enlarging patterns and examining your embroidery in detail if necessary.

I hope you find this information helpful. If you have any other hints, please e-mail me to let me know.

New designs for February 2026

Two new patterns have been added this month, CH0447 Exploring Blackwork and PR0086 Shunkoju Sashiko. One is a blackwork pattern and the other is a free style counted thread design.



CH0447 Exploring Blackwork

There are three different variations of this design. One is a traditional blackwork design, one is in colour and the other uses metallic threads.

Each pattern is built round a single motif to show how patterns change by adding and removing stitches.

The charts included are based on a simple motif worked on Zweigart 14 count Aida or 28 count evenweave. If Aida is used, count the blocks. One block = one stitch. Evenweave one stitch = two threads. Aida makes a perfect choice if you are new to this counted thread technique.

Design Area for charts 1 - 3: 6.00 x 6.00 inches Stitches: 84 x 84

Fabric: Zweigart 14 count Aida or Zweigart 28 count evenweave, 9 x 9 inches.

Threads: DMC or Anchor stranded floss.

Blackwork embroidery tends to fall into two principal areas:

1. Block designs where geometric patterns form the shapes.
2. Freestyle 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 creates the balance within the design. The closer the stitches, the heavier the design becomes.

Blackwork embroidery worked on 28 count evenweave in black and copper.

Using metallic threads and beads adds texture and sparkle, but metallic threads are not always easy to stitch. Use short lengths and a needle with a larger eye than usual to create a bigger hole for the thread to pass through.



I particularly like “Rainbow Gallery Petite Treasure” braid as it does not fray and is easy to work. I use PB01 Bright Gold and PB21 Copper. Bronze and Copper give a warmer appearance than gold metallic thread. Mill Hill glass beads: MHG557 Gold, MHG228 Bronze or MHG330 Copper complete the embroidery.

PR0086 Shunkoju Sashiko



This pattern developed from an idea for a quilted table centre which I worked in Sashiko running stitch and embroidery stitches on a medium weight white cotton. This is a freestyle design where the pattern was drawn onto the fabric with an HB pencil.

A fine wadding, cotton backing and bias binding edging completed the mat. Once I had worked the design I was pleased with the result and used it to create a more complex counted thread work design.

PR0086 Shunkoju Sashiko combines the techniques of blackwork and Shippō tsunagi, a Japanese Sashiko pattern with textured embroidery stitches in a free style flower design worked on evenweave fabric in a circle or square.



*PR0086 Shunkoju Sashiko can be found in “Projects” on the Blackwork Journey website.
(Shunkoju is a Japanese peony)*

Design area: Embroidery 8 x 8 inches designed to fit a 10 x 10 inch frame.

Fabric: Zweigart 28 count evenweave or Zweigart 25 count Lugana, 12 x 12 inches. This design is not suitable for Aida fabric.

Two patterns are included, one square and one circular. If they were enlarged using a photocopier you could also create your own Japanese style table centre.

Make do and mend, recycle and reuse!



As you know, we often accumulate pieces of fabric and threads left over from other projects, but rather than throw them away, see if they can be put to practical use as I have recently done with a piece of furnishing fabric, a Japanese crane design, a square of black cotton and a scrap of Japanese fabric to create a small panel which I then embellished with sequins and silver beads.

The techniques involved were very simple. On the black square I drew an outline of a plum blossom (ume) which I stitched with two lines of Sashiko running stitch and the veins embroidered with fly stitch in a variegated crochet cotton. I cut a small circle, and needle turned the edges in before applying it to the centre.

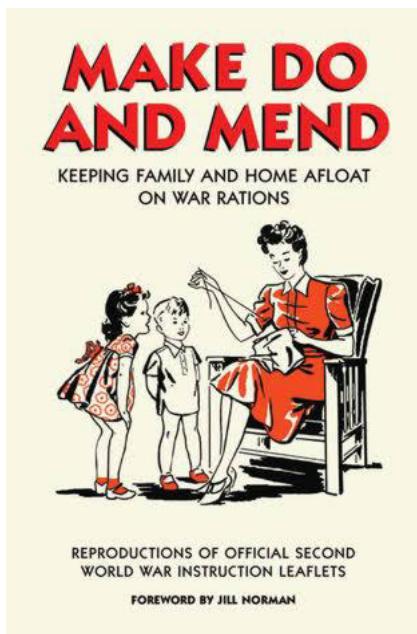


Sequins and beads were added as a final touch for texture and interest. Using what I already had meant the project cost nothing but time!

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The ethos of “Make do and mend” as we know from history is nothing new, but it has gained new emphasis in recent years with the influence of cheap fast fashion leading to a huge surge in the number of items being sent to landfill. Alongside this constant buying of cheap fashion, a counter movement is emerging whereby people struggling with the increased cost of living are turning to online platforms such as Vinted and E-bay to turn their surplus items into cash. Repair cafes are emerging in some towns and villages where items can be repaired and reused rather than being discarded and alongside this movement old skills are being rediscovered from furniture restoration to the often-forgotten skills of dressmaking, knitting, crochet and embroidery.

In the UK “Make do and mend” often reminds some people of the war years from June 1941 to 1949 when buying new clothes in the UK was rationed. In 1943 the government’s Ministry of Information created a newsreel trailer to push the campaign urging people to repair, reuse and remodel their existing clothes. Pamphlets were issued with tips on how to keep the family and home afloat on war rations.



At that time people had no choice because of the lack of new materials, but the idea of repairing rather than discarding was a philosophy that my grandparents and later my parents lived with for most of their lives. I vividly remember my granny in her nineties sitting in a rocking chair making rag rugs and crocheting blankets with recycled wool from old jumpers. Wool socks were darned over a wooden mushroom time and again and my father mended all our shoes with metal segs which sparked on the pavements as we walked to school.



As a teenager and college student I could not afford to buy much that was new, so I made my own and I learned embroidery from a book on a train travelling to and from college. I remember making all my daughter's dresses and crocheting cardigans which seemed to last forever.

In a sense make do and mend has come full circle. To see modern teenagers personalising their clothes to make them “different” or discovering “new skills” is a joy and to be applauded. Beautifully illustrated craft books are widely available nowadays at reasonable prices and old skills are being updated via the media including TV programmes such as “The Repair Shop” and “Sewing Street” in the UK.

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YouTube which is the world's largest online video-sharing platform also allows users to watch, upload, share, comment, and subscribe to content and can be a good starting point for someone who has an interest in learning a new technique.

Websites such as my own "Blackwork Journey", Mary Corbet's "Needle n' Thread" and The Royal School of Needlework's "Stitch Bank" all help to promote new ideas.

Having an idea and taking it forward using what you have in your stash can be very satisfying. All it takes is patience and time!

Certain countries still practice this as an art form as well as reusing old textiles. In India I saw many examples of Kantha (also spelled *Katha*), a popular and traditional form of Indian embroidery from the West Bengal region of India and Bangladesh.

Kantha involves a simple running stitch used to create intricate patterns and motifs, often depicting nature, folklore, and daily life. Traditionally, rural women used old saris and dhotis, layering them and stitching them together with colourful threads drawn from the garment borders to create new items like quilts, blankets, and shawls.



A village woman in Bangladesh stitching a Nakshi Kantha.

There are many interesting videos on YouTube to explore. Kantha could also be considered as mindful or slow stitching. Keep an open mind and consider whether you would like to create your own piece using recycled textiles.

An interesting article by the BBC which can be viewed on-line:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/culture/article/20221020-the-stories-hidden-in-the-ancient-indian-craft-of-kantha>

Sarah's Hand Embroidery – an interesting website!

<https://www.embroidery.rocksea.org/hand-embroidery/kantha-work/outlines/>

I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog.
If you have any queries, please e-mail me at:

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Happy stitching,
Liz