



Blackwork Journey Blog

June 2013

Curves & Stitches

New designs

Hand care!

Victorian style



Web sites



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June 2013

Well another month gone and I am still in a wheelchair. It makes me realise just how difficult life can be working at a lower level than usual. Nothing is the right height, negotiating doors is difficult and you feel every little bump especially over the flagstones. Even accessing my needlework threads and materials is a logistics exercise, since everything is either upstairs or outside in my studio!

However, thanks to a very good assistant, my husband, I have been able to carry out nearly all of my talks and day schools which were booked a year ago. I think most embroiderers value the time they spend with other like minded people and I have found it most encouraging and beneficial as I plough the long road to recovery.



One of my Whitework workshops in progress at Bickerton Embroiderers Guild, England

Newsletters – Nordic Needle

Regular newsletters help to unite people from isolated communities and different countries and one of the most enjoyable and informative is published weekly by 'Nordic Needle'. It

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contains a number of interesting articles about techniques, individuals and recipes which are often very different from anything we have in England.

If you are interested in following this, the website is: www.nordicneedle.com

The screenshot shows the Nordic Needle website's newsletter sign-up page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with categories like 'NEW', 'BOOKS & PATTERNS', 'KITS', 'STITCHING ACCESSORIES', 'FINISHING ACCESSORIES', 'LAMPS', and 'SALE'. Below this is a search bar and a shipping notice: '\$4.99 SHIPPING Every Day'. The main content area is titled 'Current Newsletter 5/20/13' and 'You are here » E-mail Newsletters'. It features a list of featured items with 'View' buttons: 'Roz's Features', 'Debi's Sales', 'Stash Articles', and 'Sue's Sales'. A sign-up form follows, with fields for 'Your Name', 'Your E-mail Address', and 'Verify Your E-mail Address'. Below the form is a checkbox for 'Weekly Sales, Articles, and New Product Features Newsletter' with a descriptive paragraph. Further down is a section for 'Technique-Specific Specials' with checkboxes for 'Canvaswork', 'Cross Stitch', 'Embroidery & Other Techniques' (listing various techniques like Brazilian, Blackwork, etc.), and 'Whitework' (listing Hardanger, pulled thread, etc.).

Nordic Needle web page

Hand care for embroiderers

Following on from last month's Blog about laundering embroidery, I have since found some historical information about hand care for embroiderers written by Eliza Mary Ann Savage 1836 - 1885

"Before leaving the subject of tools it may be well to give a hint or two as to the hands, the most important implements of all. It is essential, in all kinds of embroidery, that the hands be clean, soft and dry. The slightest roughness of the skin will catch and "tease" floss silk; therefore, if the finger be rough from plain sewing, it should be well rubbed with pumice-stone. A little silver shield is sometimes worn on the forefinger of the left hand to protect it. In winter the hands should be washed with oatmeal and most carefully dried. Do not grudge five minutes or more drying your hands well; use a soft old towel and do not give over rubbing and drying till the towel glides quite smoothly over the skin. The only reason why

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people have rough hands in winter is that they do not dry them thoroughly after washing. In summer if your hands are inclined to be damp, and you are doing delicate work, wash them frequently in warm water. Take persons, before you set to work: they catch and pull your materials, and bracelets fatigue the wrists more than you are aware of. Rings too, impede the circulation and cause weariness in the fingers. Take off all rings, bracelets, and the innumerable chains, chatelaines, and other bibelots, that lades are so fond of hanging from their

Unless your dress be perfectly fresh and clean, it is well, while you are embroidering, to wear a large linen apron with a bib to it. A pair of linen cuffs should be drawn over your sleeves... Thus attired, your aspect will be far from romantic; but you will be amply repaid for the little sacrifice of personal vanity that you may make by the appearance of your work when finished. Even the coarsest and dingiest materials, the darkest crewels on the roughest towelling, show the difference between careful and slovenly treatment, and are the better for dainty niceness of manipulation"

"Art Needlework for Decorative Embroidery" 1879

Eliza Mary Ann Savage 1836 - 1885

Another book available from www.archive.org has some wonderful recipes to improve the skin and hands and makes interesting reading about an era long gone.

"The Toilette of health, beauty, and fashion "...



including the comforts of dress, and the decoration of the neck ... with directions for the use of most safe and salutary cosmetics ... and a variety of select recipes for the dressing room of both sexes.

Published 1832 by Wittenoom and Cremer in London

*CH0298 Henna Hand and
CH0301 Trust*

TO IMPROVE THE SKIN

"Take two ounces of Venice soap and dissolve it in two ounces of lemon juice. Add one ounce of the oil of bitter almonds, and a like quantity of the oil of tartar. Mix the whole and stir it well till it has acquired the consistency of soap and use it for the hands.

The paste of sweet almonds, which contains oil fit for keeping the skin soft and elastic, and removing indurations, may be beneficially applied to the hands and arms.....

An excellent paste for the hands is made from horse-chestnuts and this is not attended with any inconvenience. It is prepared as follows:-Dry some horse-chestnuts and peel them - pound them in a covered mortar, and sift the powder through a fine sieve. Put a suitable quantity of this powder into water, and it will become white, saponaceous, and as soft as milk. Frequent use of this is highly salutary, and contributes greatly to the lustre and whiteness of the skin, to whatever part of the body it may be applied...."

Mrs Beeton in her book "The Cottage Cook Book" 1900, recommends the following for chapped hands:

"After washing the hands, and before drying them, pour over the backs of them some glycerine and water (equal proportions), smear it over them, and then quickly dip it into water and dry the hands gently, so as not entirely to wipe off the glycerine."

When you apply your hand cream nowadays, it is worth considering the effort that was once required to produce what is now so freely available!

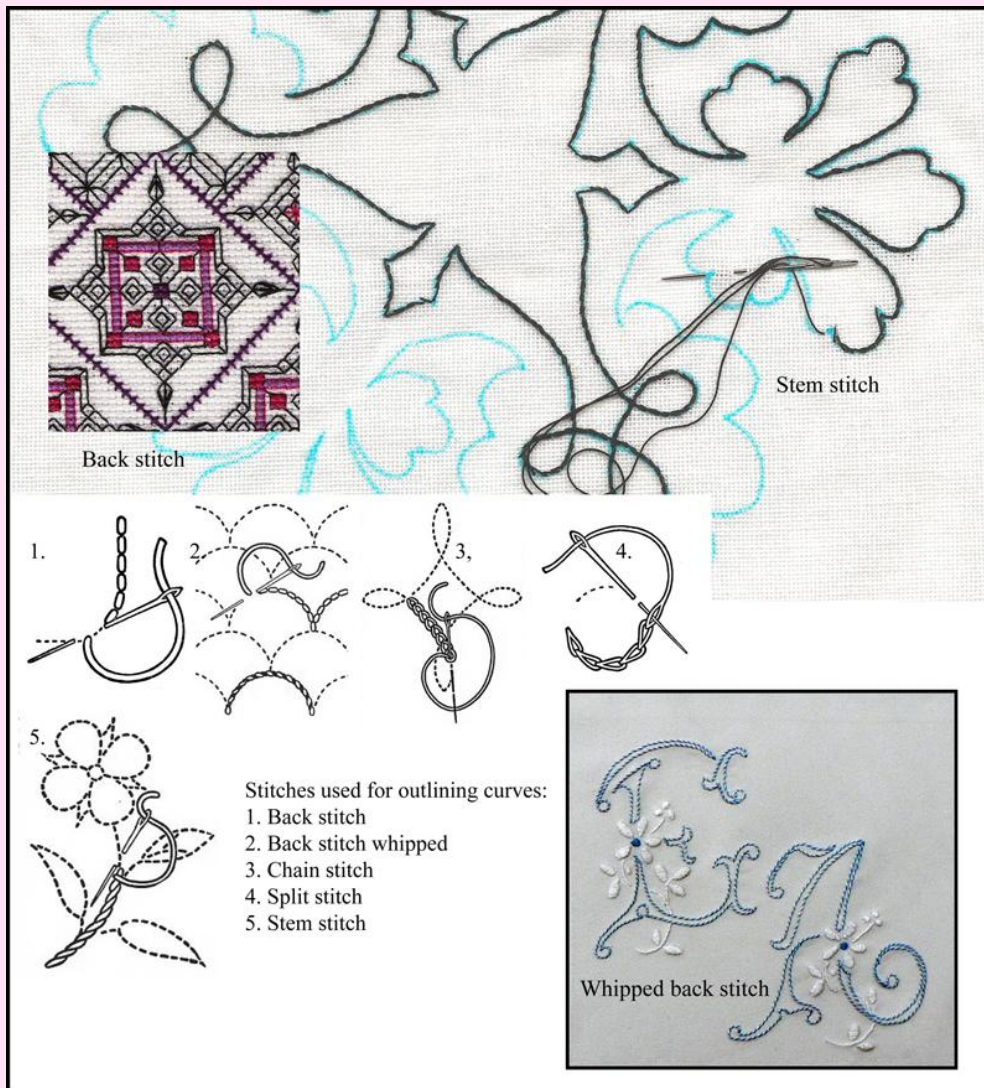
Horse-chestnuts and hands!

Stitching curves

Stitching outlines, especially curves in counted thread techniques is always difficult. The outline must be smooth and follow the shape closely which may mean splitting threads or aida blocks with a sharp needle to be accurate. Trace the drawing using either a water soluble pen or an HB pencil and then decide which stitch is going to be used to outline the design.

There are five stitches that I use regularly. They are:

1. Back stitch
2. Back stitch, whipped
3. Chain stitch
4. Split stitch
5. Stem stitch



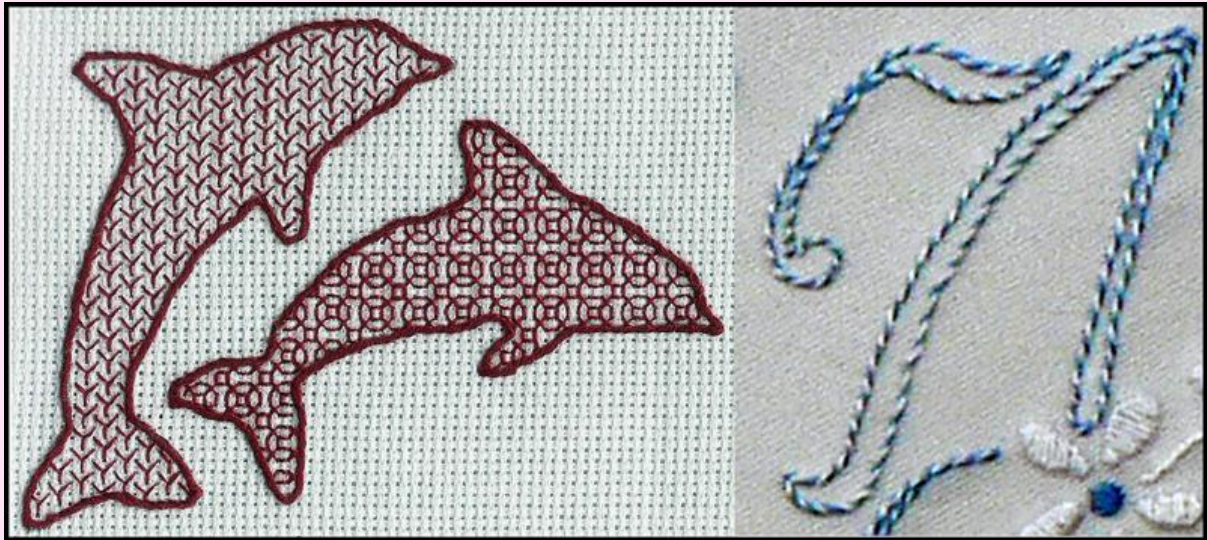
Stitches used for curves in embroidery

Of these stitches, I find back stitch, back stitch whipped and stem stitch to be the most useful for outlining designs in counted thread techniques.

Back stitch

Back stitch grows quickly and follows the line with ease. By making the stitches slightly larger than normal and using the heel of the needle it is possible to "whip" the back stitch creating a neat, corded edge.

It can be whipped with itself or another colour, but the whipping must always continue in the same direction once it has been started to maintain the correct 'twist'!



Plain and coloured whipping

Chain stitch

Chain stitch using two strands of DMC stranded cotton creates a flat outline, but it may be too broad if the outline is very complicated. It is very versatile and makes an excellent filling stitch when using thicker threads. There are many variations of chain stitch combining other stitches, but as an outlining stitch for curves it can be useful.

Stem stitch

Stem stitch is one of the most popular outlining stitches. Stem stitch worked in two strands of stranded cotton will follow a curve accurately, but the stitches need to be small if they are to lie on the fabric smoothly. If a thicker stem stitch is required for a design, increase the angle and decrease the length of the stitch. Again, it can be used as a filling stitch and is frequently used in whitework embroidery for stems and leaves.

Split stitch

Split stitch actually divides the thread and whilst it creates an accurate outline, I prefer not to split my threads. It is used very satisfactorily when creating an edge which will be worked over with other stitches such as satin stitch and is then preferable to back stitch. Back stitch works from the front of the material to the back. Split stitch works from the back of the material to the front creating a smoother, flatter line.

I hope you find these comments helpful. There are many web sites with excellent stitching tutorials, but experiment with any or all of the above, using different threads and thicknesses to determine which one is the most successful for you!

Happy stitching!

Liz