



Blackwork Journey Blog

June 2021



Blackwork Journey Islamic Tiles

E-Book 20



Stitched by
Vicky Brown



June – a taste of summer to come!

After a wet and cold April and a miserable May, the prospect of sunshine and warmer days beckons. Summer clothes are retrieved from the back of the wardrobe, sandals and summer shoes make their appearance, but there is still a chill in the evening. I bought a denim blouse/waistcoat to slip over a top when the evenings got chilly recently, but decided it looked rather plain so I decided to decorate the back and the front with some interlocking Celtic designs.

The Celtic triquetra or trefoil knot has three interconnected ovals - one pointing upward, the other two pointing down, to the left and right, making an eternal knot that cannot be untied. This design can be found in many countries and religions. I used the idea of the eternal knot to decorate the front with a single triquetra and the back with four eternal knots at the nape of the neck.



What Is Denim?

We take denim for granted, but what actually is it?

Denim is a strong cotton fabric made using a twill weave, which creates a subtle diagonal ribbing pattern.

It was first produced in France in the 17th century. The cotton twill fabric is warp-facing, meaning that the weft threads go under two or more warp threads. The warp yarns are more prominent on the right side - these diagonal parallel lines make denim fabric different from other sturdy woven cotton fabrics like canvas or cotton duck.

Many manufacturers produce denim fabric made from a mix of cotton fibres, polyester and elastane to create stretch denim or increase its durability.

Denim is usually coloured with indigo dye, resulting in its characteristic blue-cotton colour.

After denim is coloured, manufacturers can wash, rinse, or distress the fabric to produce a wide array of denim, from dark-wash to light. They also use a different dyeing process to create black or white cotton denim.



The interwoven pattern on the back of the waistcoat is a traditional quilting design.

The stitch used was running stitch in 6 strands of DMC navy floss, rather like Japanese Sashiko stitching. I used a sashiko needle. It is longer than crewel needle, has a large eye for threading thick cotton sashiko threads and is very sharp, ideal for piercing thicker fabrics such as denim. Several stitches are on the needle at any one time making the stitching faster and straighter.

**New charts and an e-book for June:
CH0413 Sashiko Sakura**

I like a challenge and when I found a canvas bag in my local “Hobbycraft” store I thought it was the perfect base for a new sashiko design and for a cushion to go with my calico quilt.

Sashiko literally means "little stabs" or "little pierce" and is a form of decorative functional embroidery from Japan that started out of practical need during the Edo era (1615-1868). Traditionally, it was used to reinforce, or repair worn areas of material or tears with patches, making it stronger and warmer. Nowadays, this running stitch technique is used for purely decorative purposes in quilting and embroidery.

The geometric patterns in straight or curved lines are easily recognised. The white cotton thread on the traditional indigo blue cloth gives sashiko its distinctive appearance, though decorative items sometimes use red thread. It is more well-known than Japanese kogin embroidery which also uses running stitch.



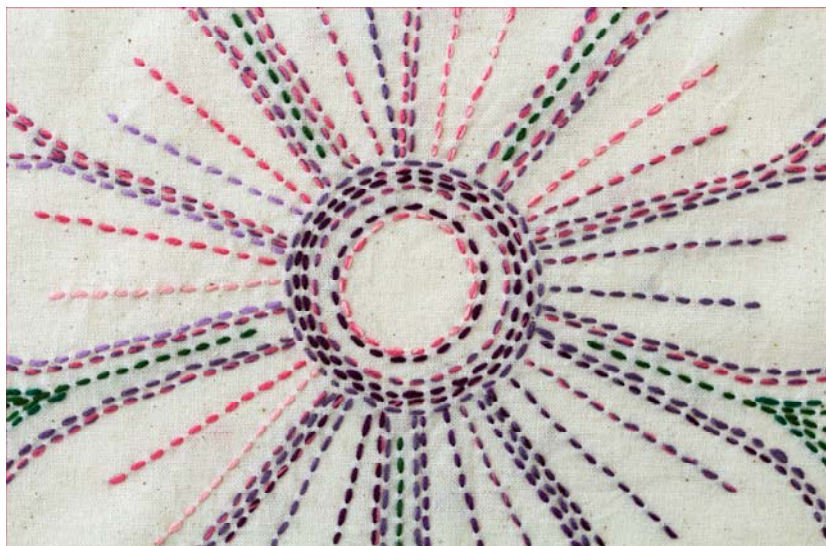
The work for cherry blossom in Japanese is Sakura. This pretty flower lasts just a few days, but it inspires festivals and tourists worldwide.

On Japan's southern, subtropical islands of Okinawa, cherry blossoms open as early as January, while on the northern island of Hokkaido, they bloom as late as May.

In most major cities in between, including Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, the cherry blossom season typically takes place in early April.

The cherry blossom festival called Hanami is practiced to celebrate the beauty of the pink flowering trees. The festival brings crowds of tourists all gathered in parks across the country to celebrate the beauty of the cherry blossom tree.





Mixing threads to make different colour combinations.

We tend to forget how easy it is to make different colour combinations with the threads that we already have.

Take one strand of one, one strand of another and you have a third colour which makes blending easy. Take a very basic stitch like running stitch, mix and match the threads and you can come with some very pretty colour combinations.

Another great way to blend colours is to use one strand of variegated floss and one strand of regular floss in the same colour family in the same needle. It creates a more subtle colour change.

The second new design added this month is EB0020 Islamic Tiles

I really enjoy putting an E-book together because it enables me to take a basic idea and expand it in ways that cannot be done within the scope of a normal chart pattern. E-books are very useful for readers new to embroidery because they are more detailed and contain extra information and photographs of all the stages.

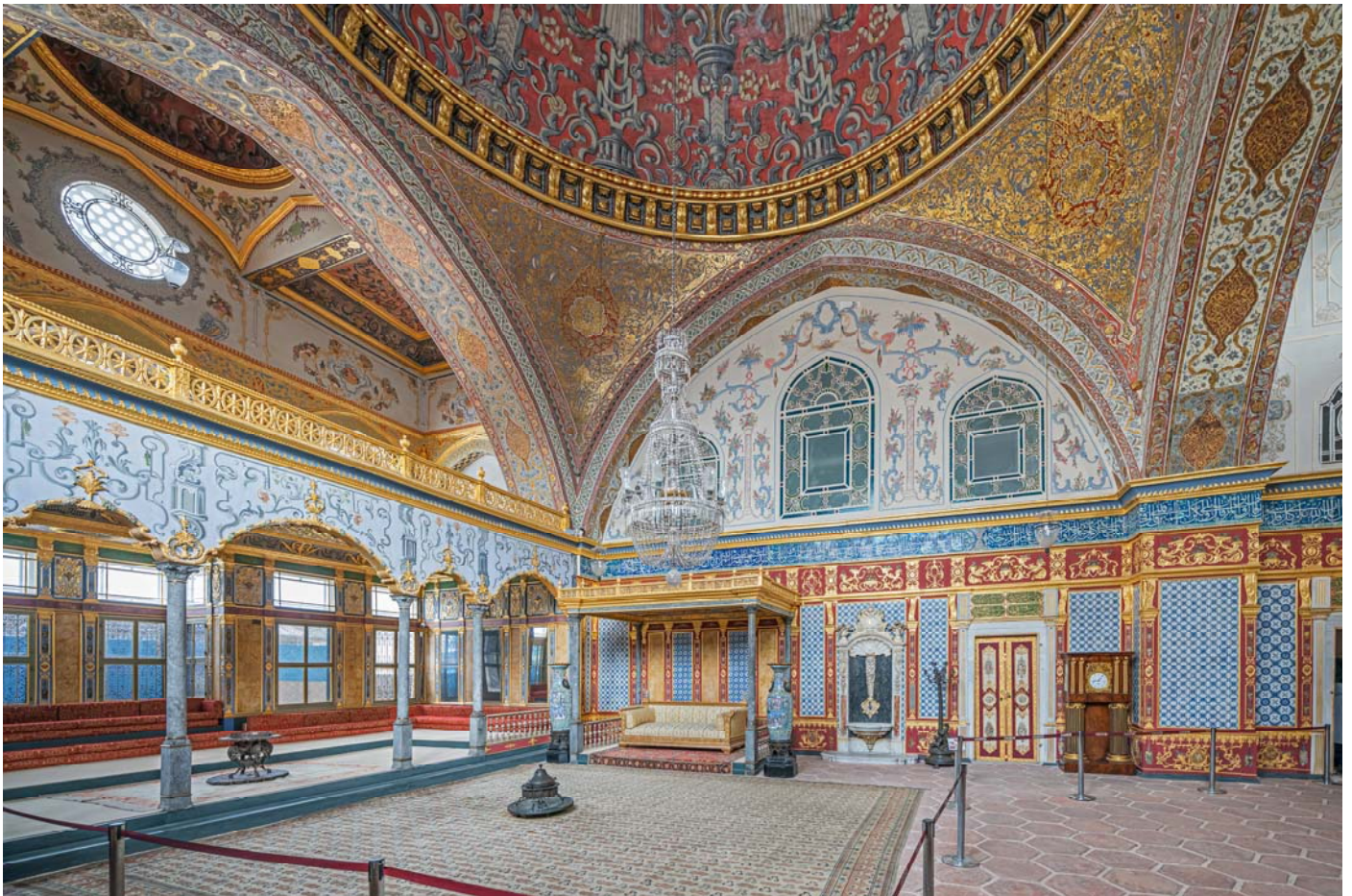
Behind every embroidery there is research and a story. Having travelled in Islamic countries I have become aware of the wealth of techniques, pattern and use of colour. These designs have been developed from observing the work of the inspirational craftsmen and women and their heritage. It is an honour to follow in their footsteps.



The principal Islamic architectural types for large or public buildings are the Mosque, the Tomb, the Palace and the Fort. The geometric designs in Islamic art are often built on combinations of repeated squares and circles, which may be overlapped and interlaced, as can arabesques (with which they are often combined) to form intricate and complex patterns, including a wide variety of tessellations.

The tile design is based on repeated squares and tessellations inspired by the Topkapi Palace in Turkey and several different colour combinations have been included.

The design has been used to make a cushion or table entre using the techniques of blackwork and pulled thread work. Specialist stitches add texture and interest.



The Imperial Hall, Tokpaki Palace, Istanbul – the inspiration behind the designs!

The Imperial Hall or Hall of Diversions, is a domed hall in the Harem, believed to have been built in the late 16th century. It has the largest dome in the palace. The hall served as the official reception hall of the Sultan as well as for the entertainment of the Harem. Here the Sultan received his confidants, guests, his mother, his first wife (Haseki), consorts and his children. Entertainments, paying of homage during religious festivals and wedding ceremonies took place here in the presence of the members of the dynasty.



Front and back of the cushion



Finishing off using four-sided stitch and beads!

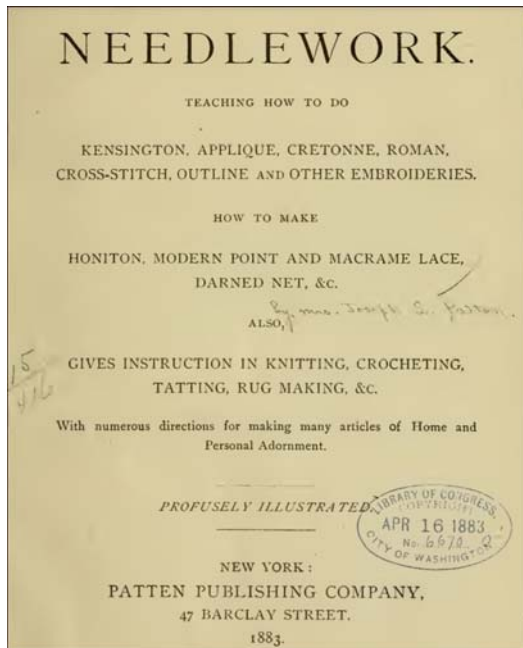
If you are new to embroidery, I hope you will enjoy reading this e-book. There are four different projects which can be worked at a level to suit your requirements and some ideas as to how the patterns can be used. Basic information about which fabric to choose, hints on creative embroidery and instructions for making up the design are also included.

The book cover for 'Blackwork Journey Islamic Tiles E-Book 20' has a purple background. In the top left corner, there is a small illustration of a mosque with a crescent moon and a minaret. The title 'Blackwork Journey Islamic Tiles' is written in a large, bold, black font, with 'E-Book 20' in a smaller font below it. The central part of the cover features a collage of embroidered tile patterns. There are several square tiles with intricate geometric designs in various colors (red, blue, white, and black). One tile is mounted on a white pillow, another on a dark brown pillow, and others are shown in different frames (blue, gold, and white). A small bouquet of white snowdrops is placed in the bottom right corner of the collage.

Looking back over old publications:

There are many sources of old publications to explore on the internet where documents can be downloaded and stored on the computer to read at leisure. These make interesting reading and illustrate how women were viewed at the time and their role within the family and society.

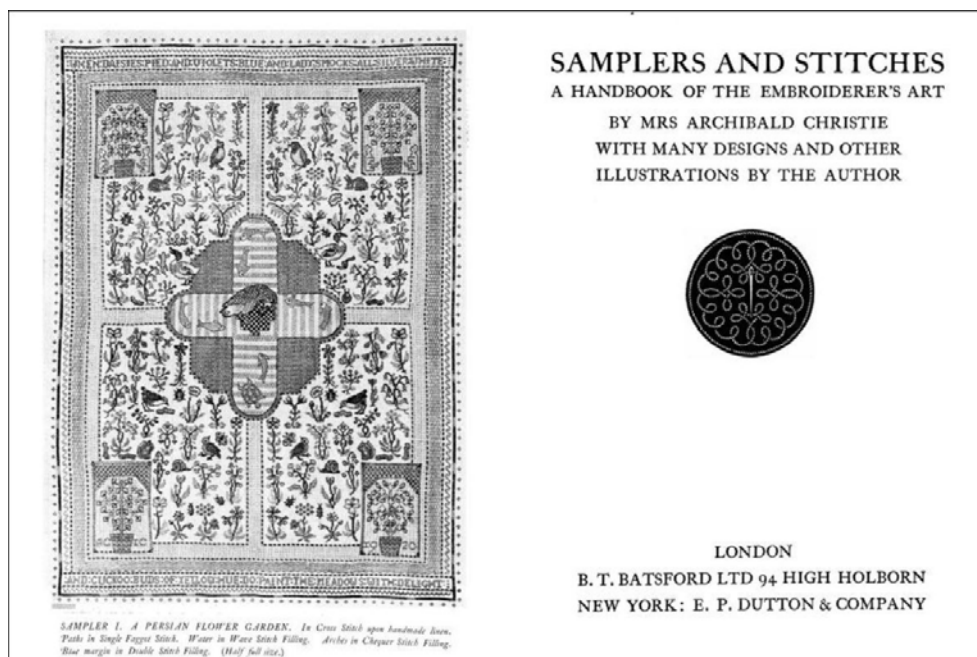
I own a number of these very old publications and it gives me pleasure to thumb through them occasionally, look at the illustrations and think about the people who used them and their lives. This is an extract from:



The 1883 Manual of Needlework by Mrs J. L. Patten 1883

“There cannot be too much said in favor of this branch of female education. Needlework is most essentially feminine and the great importance of early training, in the art of plain needlework cannot be underestimated. No young girl should be allowed to reach womanhood without at least mastering the needle sufficiently to keep in order her own wardrobe, thus training her hands to activity and making preparation for future home usefulness.

Fancy or decorative needlework is at present engrossing the female mind to a considerable degree and supposing the first rudiments to have already been taught, the object of this little book is to teach the use of the needle in the various kinds of work, the necessities of housekeeping and requirements of tasteful home decoration may demand”.



One of my favourite and most useful books that I refer to on a regular basis is: **Samplers and stitches; a handbook of the embroiderer's art by Mrs Archibald Christie**

Published in 1921 in London by B.T.Batsford

A PDF copy for download is held in archive.org

<https://archive.org/details/cu31924014066249>

This site is also a source for many embroidery books

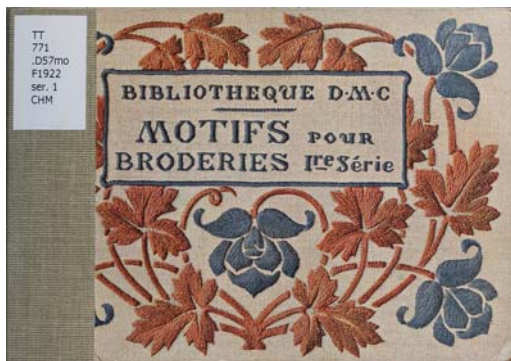
<https://openlibrary.org/>

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Another website I find really useful is

<https://www.antiquepatternlibrary.org/html/warm/catalog.htm>

There are many different techniques and resources to explore and the pdf's can be downloaded to your computer for future reference. Some of the most useful are by:



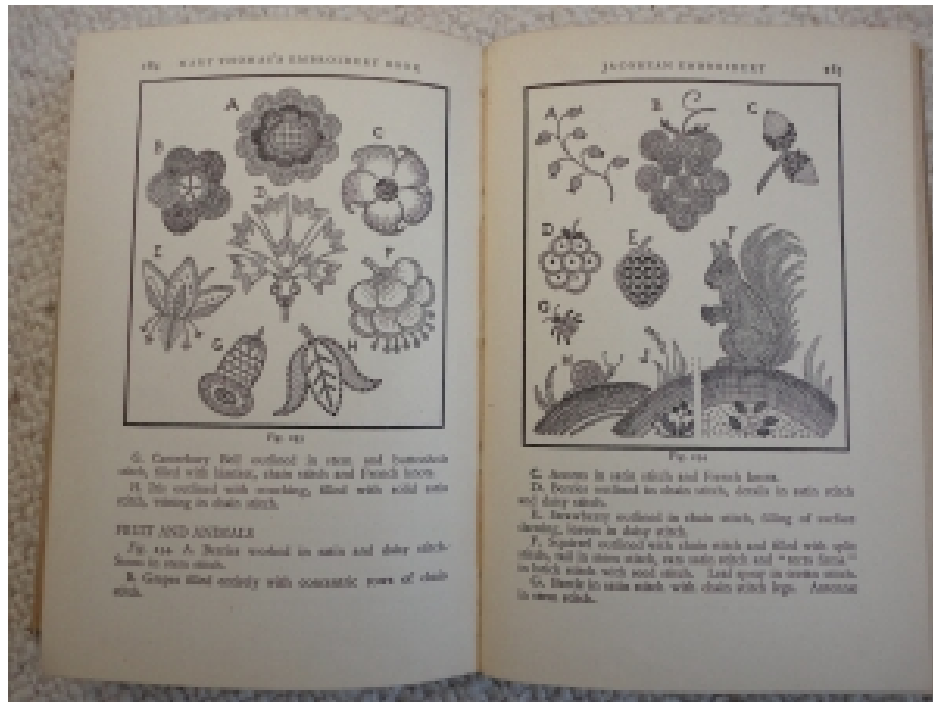
Thérèse de Dillmont (1846 - 1890). She was an Austrian needleworker and writer. Dillmont's book 'Encyclopedia of Needlework' (1886) has been translated into 17 languages. She owned a string of shops in European capitals and she was "one of the most important pioneers in the international and multicultural enterprise of hobby needlework in the late nineteenth century".

This website has many of her publications for you to explore and possibly use in your own embroidery.

When we consider how the quality of printing embroidery books has improved over the years and how attitudes to needlework have changed it is very interesting to step back and see what embroiderers of the past used to learn their crafts and how the subject was regarded and how the old books can be presented in a modern format.

One lady whose work I admire greatly is **Mary Thomas (1889-1948)**

I have two of her books printed in 1934. Her work is relevant to the modern embroiderer and some of her books have been reprinted and make a useful addition to my library.



Pages from Mary Thomas's Embroidery Book (1936).

Mary Thomas was an English writer about embroidery, who published mainly in the 1930's and early 1940's. She was born in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (England). She went to New York in 1911 with the aim of becoming a fashion journalist. During the First World War (1914-1918) she served with the Women's Nursing Corps in France.

During this period she married W. A. Thomas and after the war they started a school in Nantes, France, but the school failed. Shortly afterwards they seem to have divorced. They had two children.

In 1922, Mary Thomas joined *The Gentlewoman Magazine* and went on to become the editor of 'The Needlewoman' a popular English needlework magazine. In 1934 it was taken over by J&P Coats Ltd (Paisley, Scotland) and in the same year Coats signed an agreement with Leach's Publications Ltd., selling the magazine. Leach's went on to merge *The Needlewoman* with its own *The Needlecraft Practical Journal*

Mary Thomas appears to have resigned at this point and then started to write books about embroidery and decorative needlework in general. Her publications include:

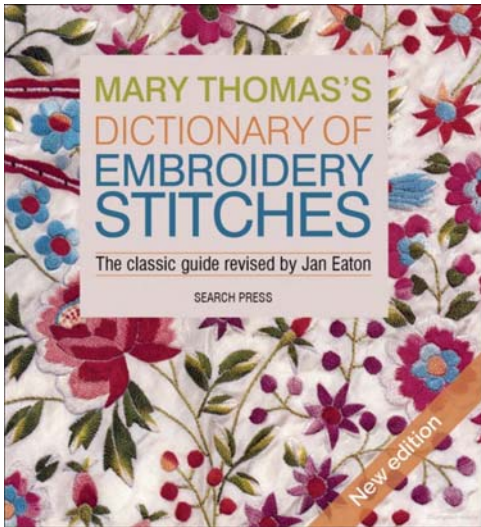
[Mary Thomas's Dictionary of Embroidery Stitches \(1934\), London: Hodder and Stroughton.](#)

[Mary Thomas's Book of Knitting Patterns \(1934\), London: Hodder and Stroughton.](#)

[Mary Thomas's Embroidery Book \(1936\), London: Hodder and Stroughton.](#)

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Mary Thomas's Knitting Book (1938), London: Hodder and Stroughton.
Teach Yourself Embroidery (1939), London: Hodder and Stroughton.



Modern publications are well illustrated, bright and informative and reasonably priced. Some of the older books have been reprinted in a modern format and in 1998, [Mary Thomas's 'Book on Embroidery'](#) was revised and updated by Jan Eaton.

It pictures and describes over 400 embroidery stitches arranged by usage, ranging from basic outline and border stitches to more complex detached-filling and pulled-fabric stitches. This is an outstanding reference book that will enable all needle-workers to master the art of embroidery.



Continuing the theme of antique items:

Do you remember any of your older relatives having an embroidered dressing table set?

I remember as a little girl watching my granny sitting at her dressing table and brushing her long hair with an embroidered brush and looking in the embroidered mirror before putting her hair up in a bun and skewering it with a large, very sharp hair pin.

I was reminded of this when Maureen, one of my readers, contacted me to ask if I could help her. She wanted to use a blackwork pattern, **CH0289 Florette** as a base for the design, but wasn't certain how to adapt the design to fit her dressing table set.

A number of e-mails went backwards and forwards as the designs progressed.

The embroidery was worked on linen using one strand of floss. The linen was quite fine and frayed when the final shapes were cut, but Maureen managed to mount the four pieces very successfully without having to use an iron-on stabiliser which we did consider.





Work in progress on the four pieces for the brushes and the mirror.



The finished result!

Maureen, I think this is a lovely piece of work and I hope you enjoy your set for many years to come!

I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog.

If you have any queries please contact: lizalmond@blackworkjourney.co.uk

Happy stitching!

Liz