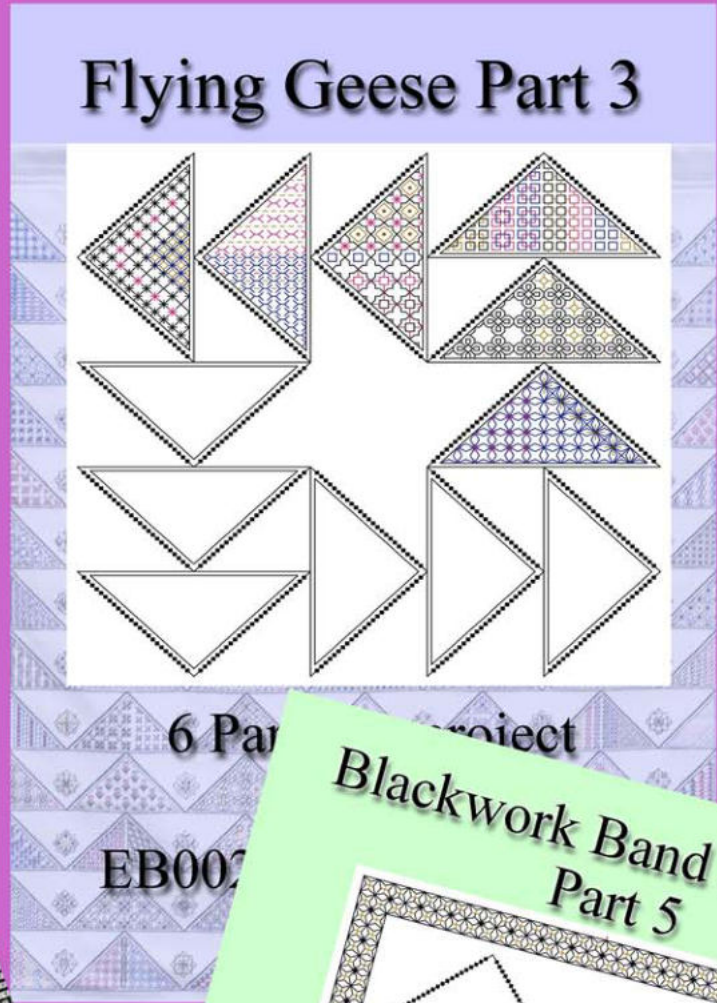
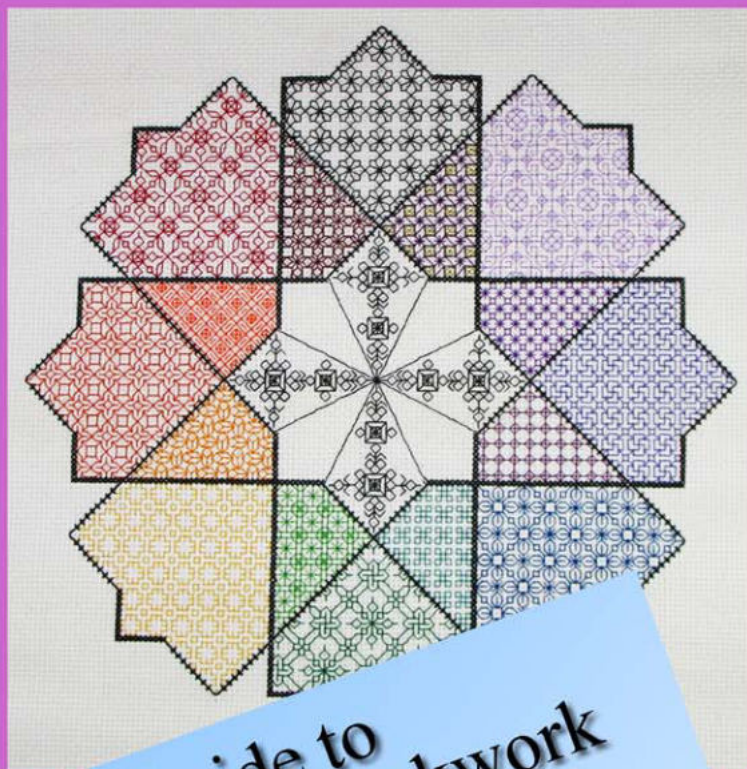




Blackwork Journey Blog

May 2024



**Mini Guide to
Blackwork**
Liz Almond



**Blackwork Band S
Part 5**



Blackwork Journey S

Busy, busy, busy!



Talks, day schools, volunteering with a charity and church, preparing embroideries for an exhibition, travelling and teaching have dominated my last few months, so to take a day out and share it with friends who stitch is a rare treat.

I had underestimated how important talking and sharing interests has been and I needed to touch base on a personal level and recharge my own batteries. Working in isolation is not ideal, so it can be helpful to have a like minded friends to bounce ideas off, ask for opinions and provide alternative views.

The importance of sharing ideas and a support network was recently reinforced within my own local embroidery group where members held an event to enable members to not only meet socially, but interact with each other to explore new techniques and show pieces they were working on to some of the newer members who were less experienced.

The social aspects of any club are, of course, important and with the support of our excellent committee, our members are currently working on a large exhibition at Astley Hall in Lancashire, UK this month. If you live within reach, please come and visit our exhibition and

enjoy the varied work on view. The exhibition is open until the 19th May 2024.

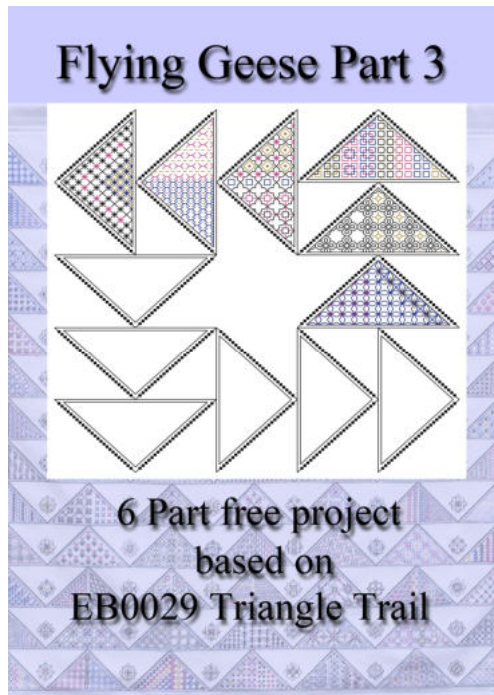
New additions to the Facebook group and 'Freebies' on the Blackwork Journey website.



As many of my readers know, I have two free blackwork projects online now. In the Facebook group 'Box of Delights' I am running a Blackwork Band Sampler SAL over 14 weeks with a section uploaded every Saturday. Readers are encouraged to share their work in progress, and I look forward to seeing many more photographs in the next few weeks as people collect their threads and fabrics together.

Box of Delights Stitch-A-Long. Designs by Elizabeth Almond
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/blackworkjourney/>

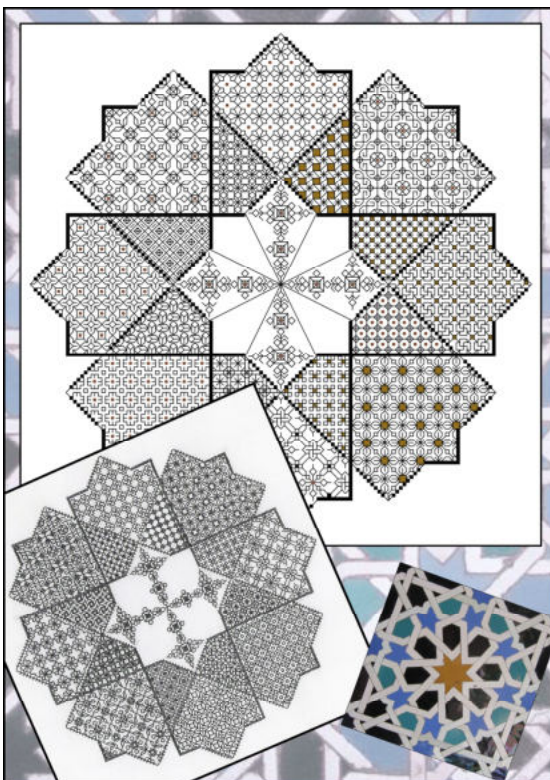
In 'Freebies' on the website I have another free project based on EB0029 Triangle Trail called 'Flying Geese'. Part 3 has been uploaded this month.



EB0029 Triangle Trail embroidery

Both projects are designed for readers to explore the beauty of blackwork on a smaller scale with lots of variety. Different patterns are developed within each triangle, so it is possible to see how patterns can be developed and altered by adding or removing stitches.

Member's work

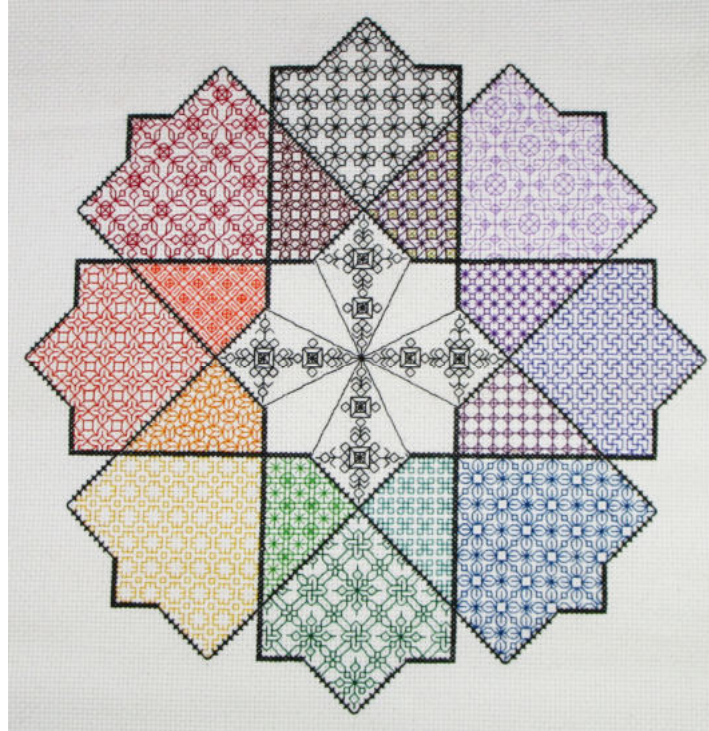


I always enjoy receiving pictures of completed projects and Susan Platt has sent me her version of CH0070 'Star Challenge'. This is a very early Blackwork Journey Islamic design which was worked on 14 count Aida for a wooden footstool which I bought. Whilst my design was worked in black and gold, Susan has chosen to work her design in different colours.

I think you will agree that her embroidery is excellent and very attractive.

Thank you Susan, for sharing it with us and well done!!

If other members have finished Blackwork Journey designs, they would like to share please e-mail me a picture.



Susan's delightful embroidery of CH0070 'Star Challenge'.

Mini Guide to Blackwork Liz Almond - Blackwork Journey

I know that many readers are interested in the history of blackwork embroidery and how it can be implemented today, so I have created a 'Mini Guide to Blackwork' which I have added at the end of this month's Blog for you to read.

If you are new to the technique of Blackwork it will help you understand how it has developed and will give you information on how work a modern piece of blackwork embroidery.

I hope you will find this helpful.

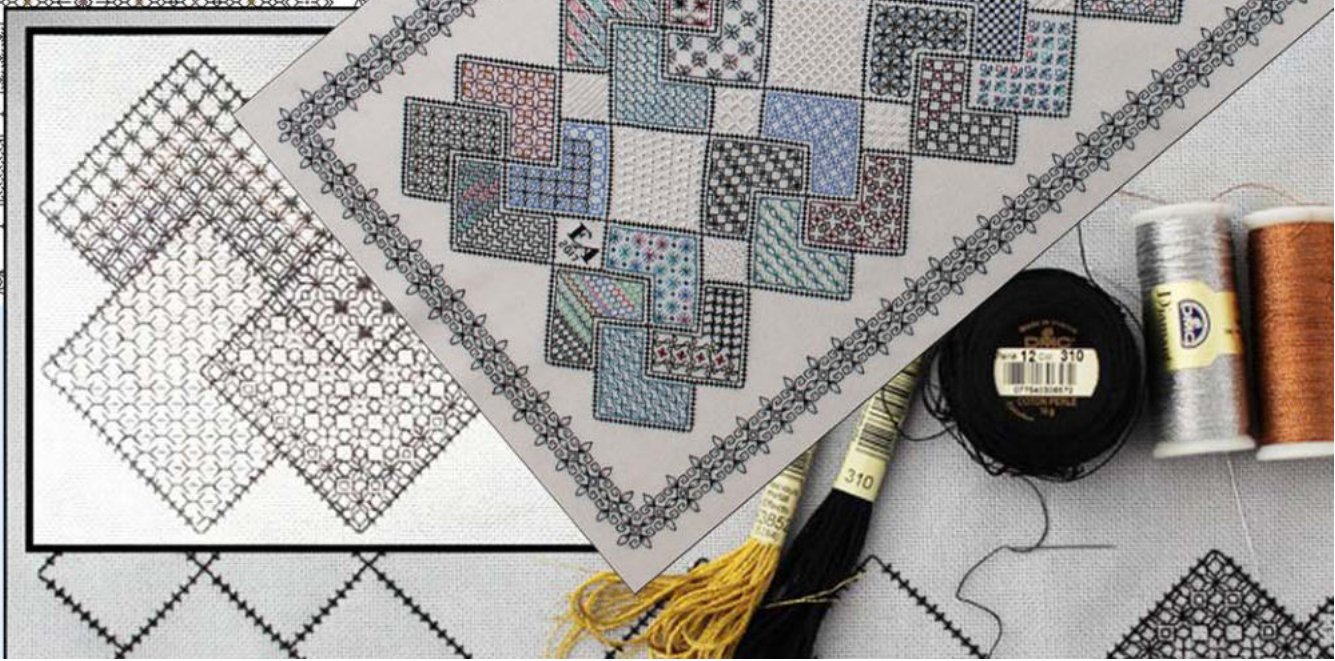
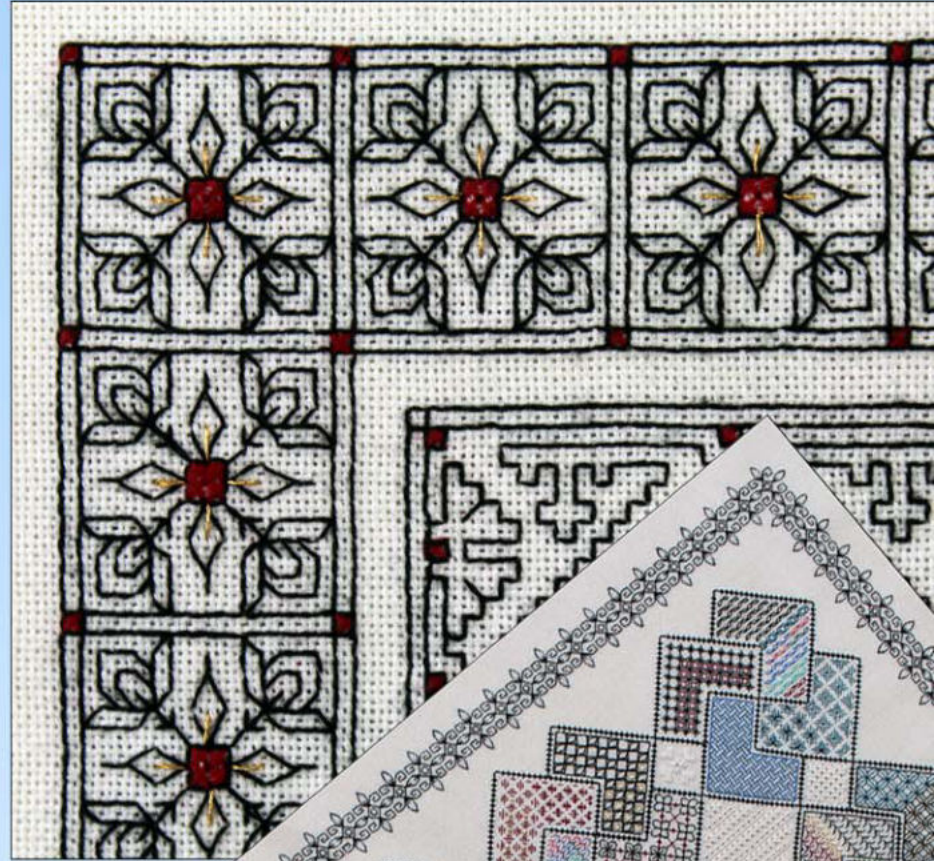
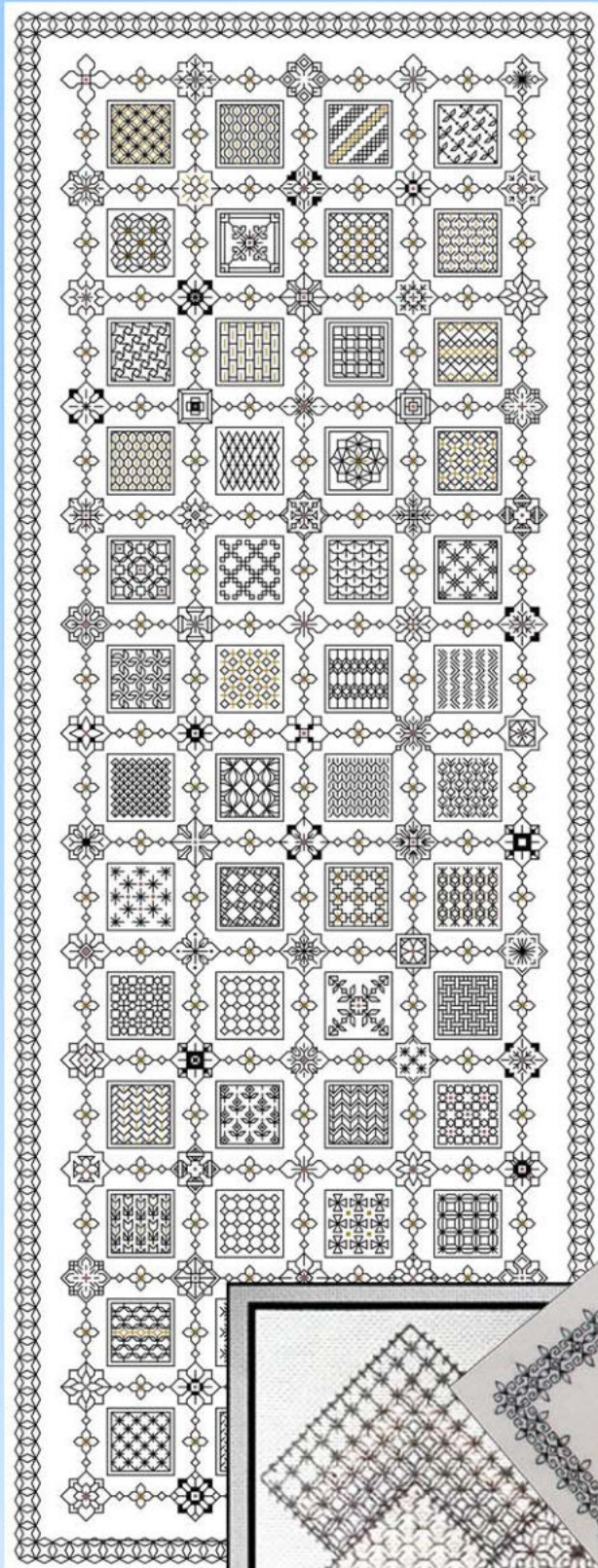
I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog. If you have any queries, please contact:
lizalmond@blackworkjourney.co.uk

Happy stitching,

Liz

Mini Guide to Blackwork

Liz Almond



Mini Guide to Blackwork Liz Almond - Blackwork Journey

Blackwork is a counted thread embroidery technique in which repetitive often geometric patterns are used to fill design areas. It has been popular since 1400 and was mentioned in Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." It contains Arabic and Spanish elements and was influenced by Catherine of Aragon who married Henry VIII of England and is sometimes referred to as 'Spanish work'. It was stitched in silk thread on white or off-white linen and was used for shirts, cuffs, ruffs and sleeves. Some metallic and coloured threads were used and this is reflected in modern blackwork which often uses a variety of colours and threads ranging from metallic threads to pearl cottons and beads for texture and interest.



*Henry VIII (1491 -1547) Elizabeth I (1533 -1603)
Blackwork embroidery is displayed in both portraits*

By the end of the 16th century, blackwork was being used to decorate linen coifs (a close-fitting head covering) and other garments, some of which include gold and silver thread and spangles, as well as black thread. Elizabethan embroidery designs were often free style embroidery, rather than counted thread. Motifs were normally outlined in black and either filled with blackwork patterns, or embellished with stitches, especially seeding to give a more realistic effect. Flowers, animals and insects featured widely and this style continued largely unchanged into the Jacobean era. In the second half of the 17th century counted thread blackwork was being worked on samplers, but by the 18th century its popularity had declined.

The counted thread version of the technique was revived in the 20th century when blackwork patterns started to become readily available.

Blackwork embroidery designs tend to fall into two main 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 create the balance within the design. The closer the stitches, the heavier the design becomes. This is reflected throughout both versions of 'Triangle Trail'.

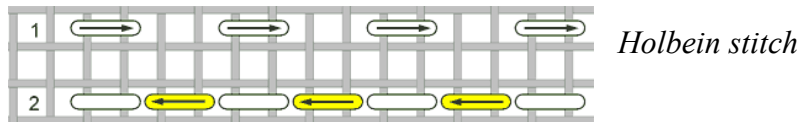
Holbein Stitch, named after Hans Holbein the Younger

Traditionally blackwork was worked in Holbein stitch which a simple, reversible line embroidery stitch is also found Assisi embroidery. Although superficially similar to back Stitch, Holbein stitch produces a smoother line and a pattern that is identical on both sides of the fabric. Holbein stitch is usually worked on an even-weave fabric where the threads can be counted to ensure perfect regularity and is worked in two stages.

1. A row of evenly spaced running stitches is worked along the line to be covered.

2. The return journey is completed, filling in the spaces between stitches made on the first journey and sharing the same holes.

If the embroidery is not to be viewed on both sides back stitch can be used for the filler patterns.



Materials

Historically blackwork is worked on a linen or cotton fabric. Counted thread blackwork embroidery can be worked on a number of different fabrics, but the most commonly used fabrics are 28 count evenweave i.e. 28 holes to the inch.

Whilst Aida blockweave 14 or 16 count is often easier to count blocks may have to be split if there are part stitches in the design. The more holes per inch the smaller the design will be. Zweigart 25 count Lugana is a suitable alternative fabric if the 28 count evenweave is too fine to work on easily.

However, as a general rule, use a fabric where it is easy to see the holes, along with a needle large enough to thread and threads which reflect the weight of the fabric. If working on a white fabric is difficult, antique white, ecru or cream can make suitable alternatives. Modern blackwork may be worked on pastel or space dyed fabrics using variegated or hand dyed threads although these may not be colourfast.

Threads

Six stranded DMC, Anchor or Madeira floss are the most common choices, using one or more strands as required.

Threads can range from fine sewing cotton, Danish flower threads, P erle No 5 or 8 or Cotton   broder No 16.

By experimenting with different threads and combinations it is possible to see which thread is most suitable. Different colour threads can be used in place of black, such as garnet, emerald green, royal blue and dark brown. Lay one strand of floss across the fabric. If it does not make an impact use a darker colour.

Needles

Stitches are worked over an exact number of threads, usually two threads over two (evenweave), or one block (Aida) without piercing the fabric. Tapestry needles with blunt points sizes 24 and 26 are particularly suitable.

If working a freestyle outline, it may be necessary to pierce the fabric threads, in which case a sharp pointed crewel needle size 22 is needed if the shape is to be followed accurately.

Whilst not essential, a small frame or ring will help to maintain the correct fabric tension and create neater stitches.

Stitches

The basic stitches for counted thread blackwork:

Arrowhead, Back, Blanket, Block Trellis (Pattern), Bricked wave (Pattern), Buttonhole, Chain, Chevron, Couching, Double running Herringbone, Holbein, Outline, Running Seeding and many more.....

Stitches for outlining free style shapes:

Back stitch

Back stitch whipped

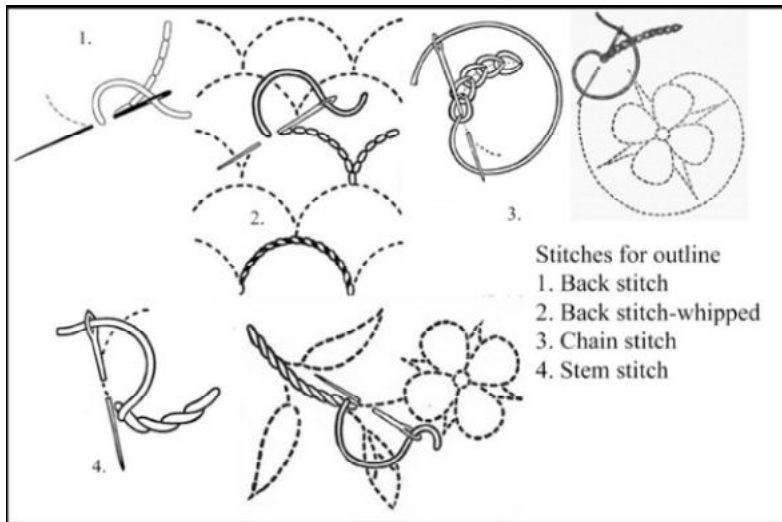
Chain stitch

Stem stitch, Stem stitch whipped

Couching, using one or more threads

Instructions for all these stitches can be found in the Royal School of Needlework Stitch Bank:

<https://rsnstitchbank.org/technique/blackwork>



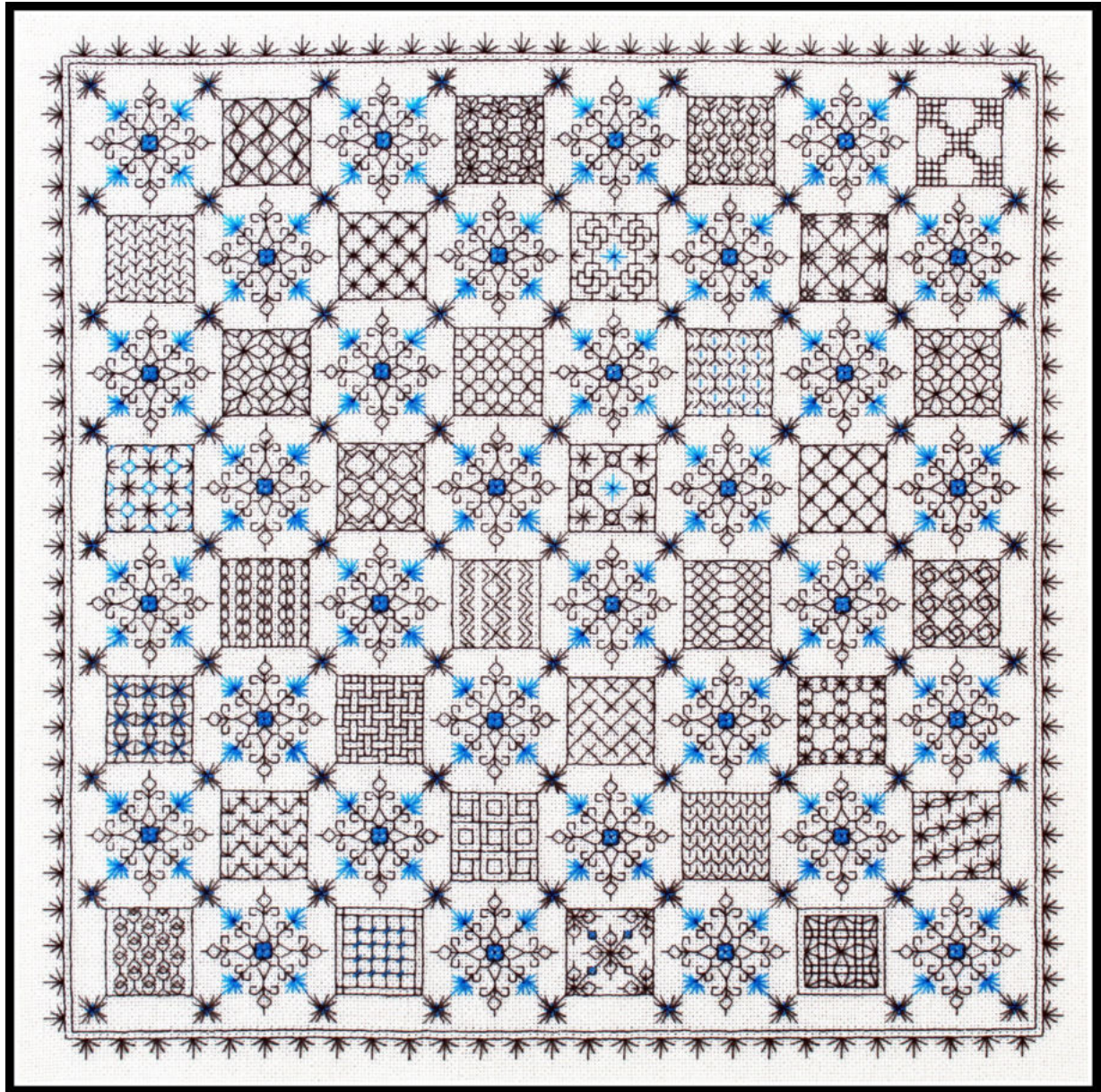
Stitching Methods:
Counted thread design:



CH00435 Elizabethan Blackwork worked on Zweigart 28 count evenweave

1. Fold the fabric into quarters to find the centre of the fabric. On a large project mark the centre of the fabric with a line of tacking stitches in a pale thread to place the pattern accurately on the fabric.

2. Start from the centre of the design working outwards using the required number of threads and the tapestry needle. One strand is usually used for the filler or diaper patterns and two strands for the cross stitch.
3. Study the pattern carefully and count the threads. Once the pattern begins to develop it is simple to spot and correct mistakes. Most of the patterns are geometric and regular.
4. Use short lengths of metallic thread as it generally frays easily. Rainbow Gallery Petite Treasure Braid is easy to use and does not fray. DMC Light Effects metallic thread, Madeira and Kreinik are also suitable.
5. Add beads or any other embellishments after the main embroidery has been completed.
6. Check carefully that all ends have been stitched in and trimmed.
7. Place the finished work face down on a soft towel and press lightly from the back.



CH0399 Which Stitch worked on Zweigart 28 count evenweave

Small 'bites' of blackwork are included with many different patterns to tempt, but not over face the embroiderer!



CH0374 Stitch Royal worked on Zweigart 14 count Aida. This design can also be worked on evenweave fabric.

Freestyle Blackwork

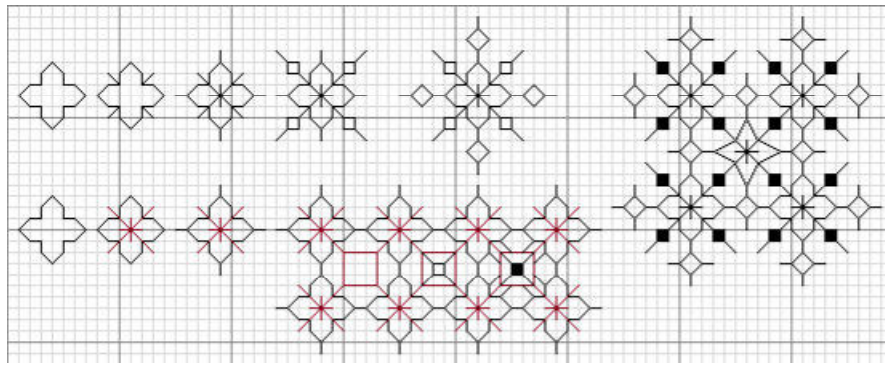


CH0436 Blackwork Hibiscus worked on Zweigart 28 count evenweave

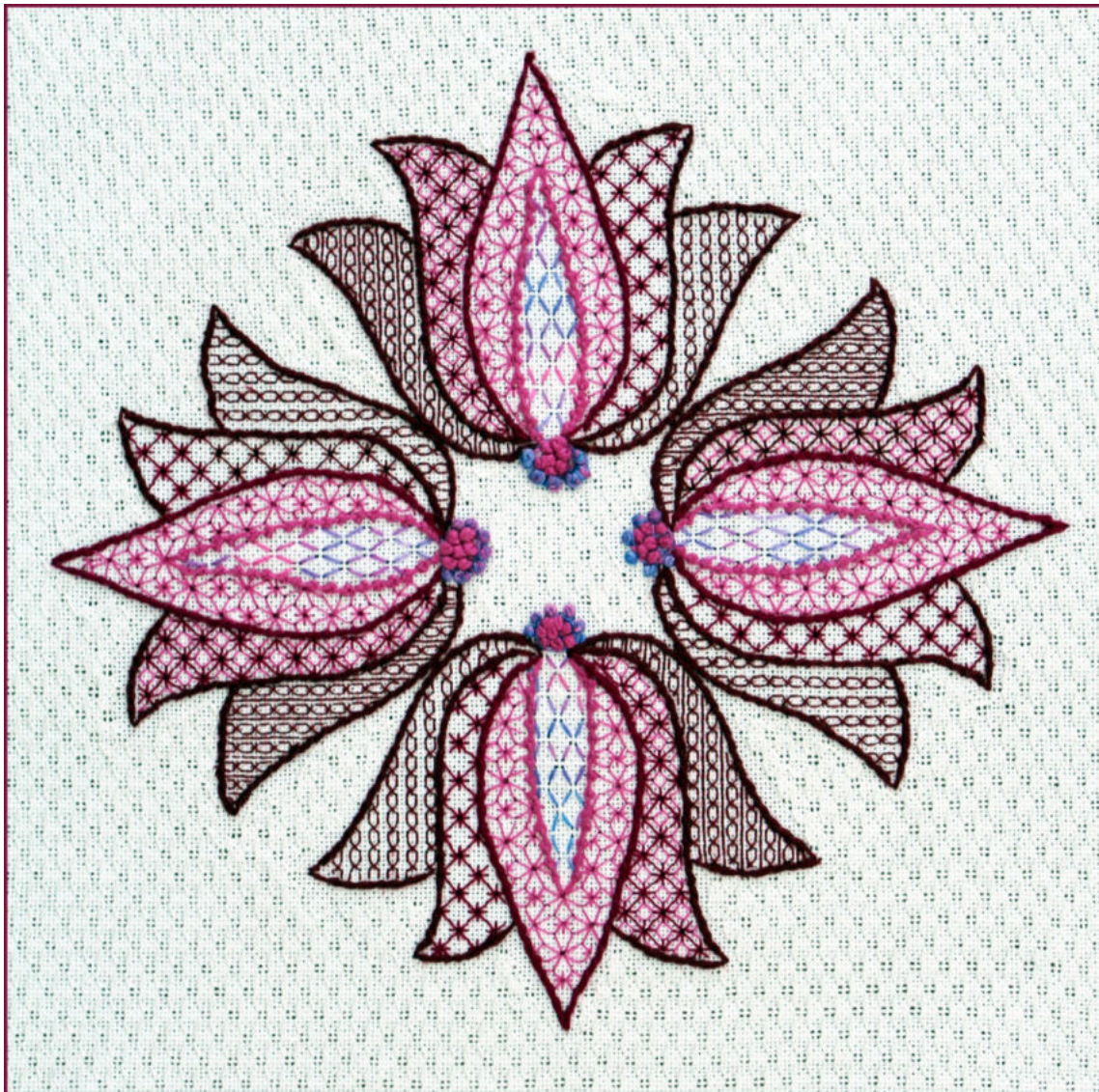
1. Fold the fabric into quarters to find the centre of the fabric. Place the design under the fabric and pin.
2. Trace the design outline on the fabric lightly using an HB pencil, or a water soluble pen. Use a light box, tape to a window or use an i-pad to help trace the design onto the fabric!
3. Work the outline using either stem stitch, back stitch, back stitch whipped, chain stitch or couching. This defines the areas to be filled. Experiment with the different outlines stitches. Each one creates a different depth and type of outlining. Adjust the number and type of threads to create the desired outcome.
4. Stitch from the centre of each shape to be filled, outwards working towards the edges filling in additional stitches as required
5. Add beads or any other embellishments after the main embroidery has been completed.
6. Check carefully that all ends have been stitched in and trimmed. Dark threads will show through the fabric if they are not trimmed off.
7. Place the finished work face down on a soft towel and press lightly from the back.

Building blackwork patterns

Blackwork patterns are easy to create by adding or removing stitches. Follow the example below to see how a pattern can be built up from just a few stitches to a complex design.



Start with a small pattern. As you gain confidence seeing the patterns becomes easier!
Blackwork can also be combined with different embroidery techniques such as pulled thread work.



PR0055 Angkor Lily- Freestyle blackwork and pulled thread stitches combined

I hope you have enjoyed this brief Mini Guide to Blackwork.

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