



Blackwork Journey Blog

February 2023



Signs of Spring!



January has been a miserable month in England with constant rain and cold, not the crisp weather that makes you feel like tramping through the countryside, but there have been a few days when nature has sparkled, when the trees have been covered with hoar frost and the landscape has been magical.

This view was taken by my husband not far from where we live in Lancashire and whilst I was comfortable in my studio designing and stitching I was reminded when I looked out of the window that the bulbs are pushing through, small birds

were rooting through the leaves and the owl house is ready for its next residents! Spring is just around the corner and a long and difficult winter is coming to an end.

I use the winter months to design new charts, print out and prepare kits for the coming year. This year I have a number of talks and workshops across England so I have been cutting, printing and kitting for weeks. It gives me a chance to reflect on what I can offer and how I am going to work with both new and familiar groups in the coming months.

There is an appetite for new ideas, projects and techniques and a need to meet together and share quality embroidery time together after nearly three years of disruption. Many of the groups are welcoming new members and have worked hard to keep everyone together during the pandemic. This has not been easy, but they are now seeing the results of their efforts in the continued enthusiasm of their members. It is also good to see so many younger people participating.

My objective is to use embroidery stitches and traditional techniques with a modern slant. It should be enjoyable and relevant to the complex world we live in and have a purpose. For an embroidery to be left unfinished, hidden in a drawer and the embroiderer left frustrated is not the aim of any tutor.

I find that it helps to have actual samples of finished embroideries available so that classes can examine and handle them. Ideas for the future development of techniques, well printed charts and good fabric and threads put together in a kit make it easier for the tutor and the student. The days of going to the local needlework store to pick up threads and fabric are disappearing as most of the materials have to be bought via the internet which is not possible for many older members of groups. Whilst it takes time to prepare kits, at least I know that everyone will have the right materials for the day. Encouragement, enthusiasm and coffee all help to make a workshop a success!

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There is satisfaction in seeing packed charts and kits, but there is even more satisfaction in seeing what students produce during the workshops and after they have finished!



My sincere thanks go to the members of Preston Embroidery and Textile group and to Basingstoke Creative Stitchers and all the other readers who send in photographs of their finished work and work in progress.



Work in progress from workshops – Monogram Magic, whitework and Blackwork with a Twist.

New charts for February 2023

Two new charts have been added to Blackwork Journey this month. The first one is based on apples in the style of Japanese Kogin patterns. The apples can be worked individually for cards and gift tags or used to create a sampler.



CH0432 Applefest

What is the symbolic meaning of an apple?

It is a symbol of beauty, sweetness and the hope for prosperity and the hardiness of the fruit and its durability represents strength and growth.



Apples have a long and extensive history in Japan. It is thought that they originated in Central Asia and spread through Europe and later to the Americas. Throughout this time, apples were much smaller than they are nowadays and were mainly used for cooking, making drinks, and eating fresh.

The first apples in Japan were brought from China in the Heian Period (around 918). They were very small and often used at Buddhist temples as offerings. In 1871, the history of Japanese apples took a big step forward as 75 varieties were imported from the United States.

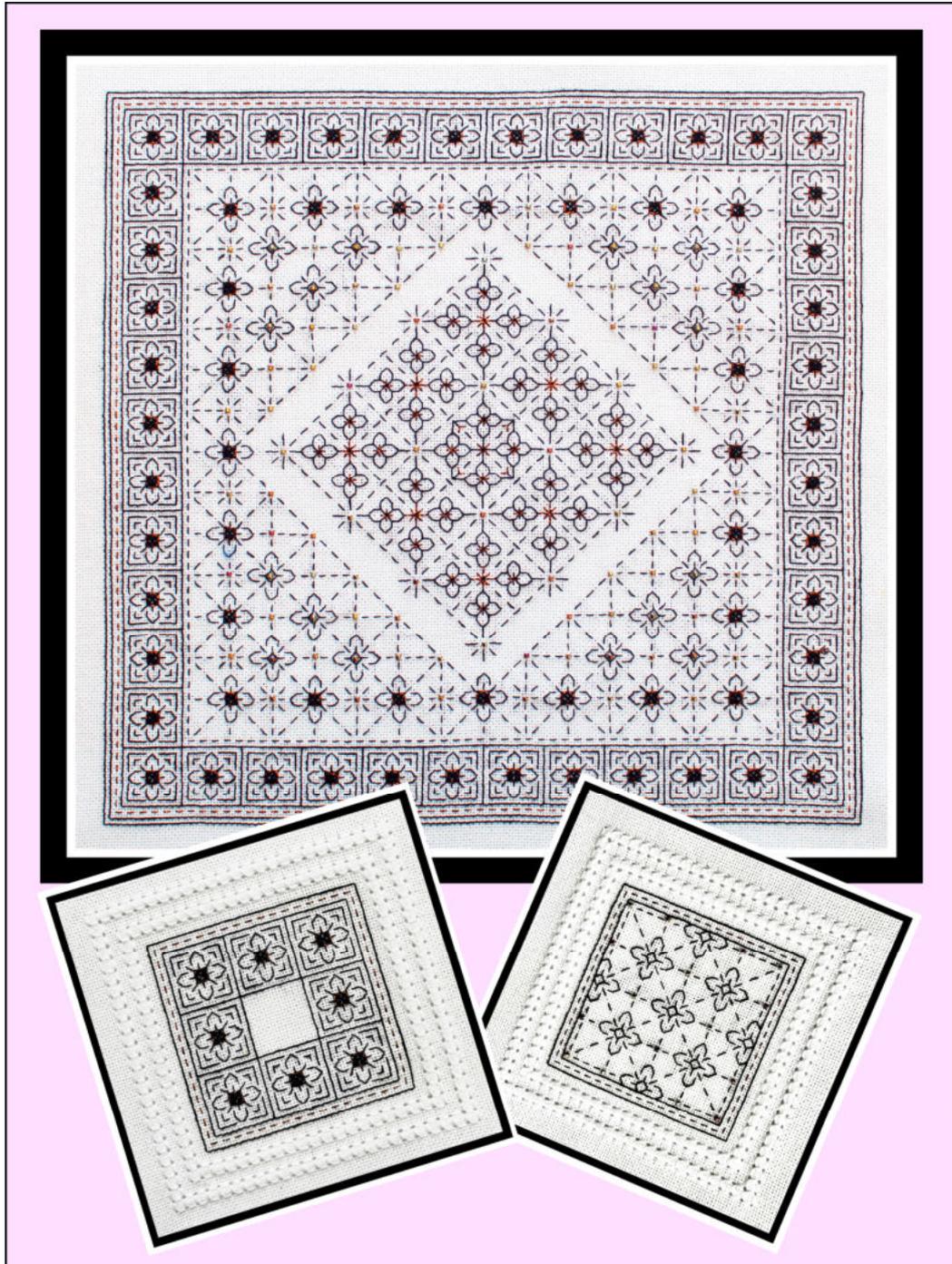
Design Area: 7.69 x 7.50

Stitches: 123 x 120

Fabric: Zweigart 16 count Aida, 11 x 11 inches. Aida: one stitch = 1 block with one row of blocks between each row. Zweigart 18 count Davosa evenweave and Zweigart 20 count Bellana are suitable fabrics but they are worked over ONE thread with one thread between each row.

The second design is a traditional blackwork sampler which can also be used to create needlework accessories.

CH0433 Careful Counting



Starting a blackwork design can be daunting, but it is just a case of careful counting. Only two stitches are used in the main design, cross stitch and back stitch. The design is suitable for Zweigart 28 count evenweave or Zweigart 14 count Aida.

Alternative colours can be used. Gold metallic threads and beads could be used in place of copper. DMC 310 black could be changed to garnet or royal blue. Choose a colour you enjoy working with!

Design Area: 9.14 x 9.14 inches

Stitches: 128 x 128

Fabric:

Zweigart 28 count evenweave, 12 x 12 inches or, Zweigart 14 count Aida 12 x 12 inches

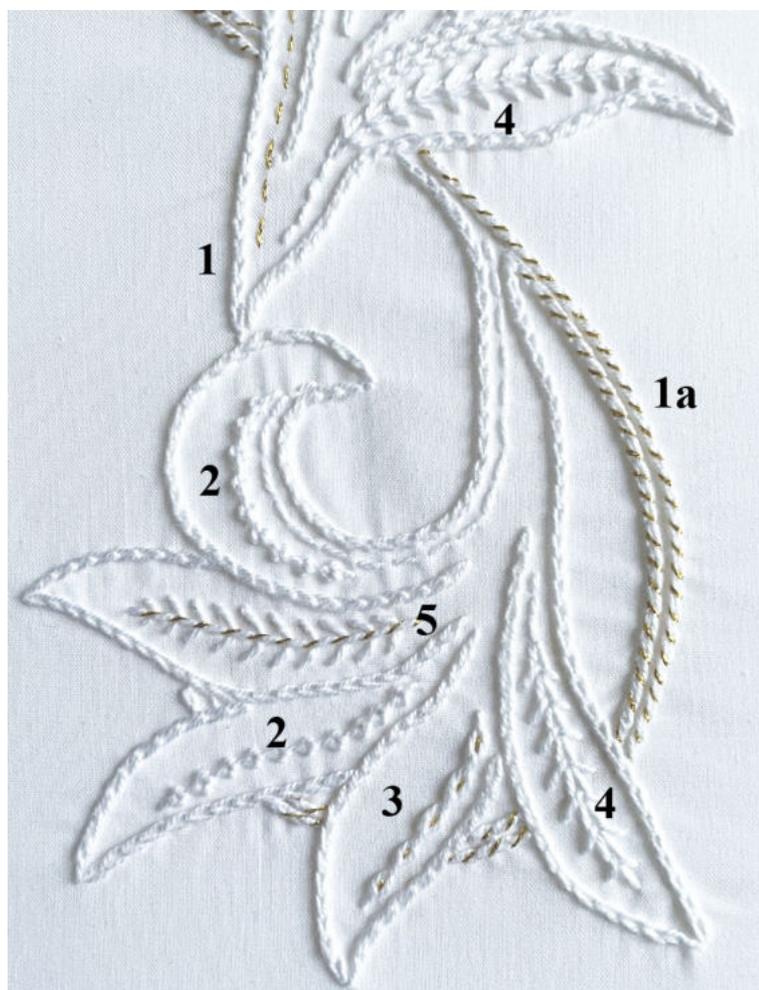
Evenweave - the stitches are worked over 2 threads. Aida - the stitches are worked over one block.

Accessories:

Extracts from the pattern have been used to create a set of needlework accessories, a pin cushion and scissor keeper. The pin cushion could also be adapted to make a needle case.

Textured stitches in freestyle embroidery

Needlework should be enjoyable and at times, challenging! Add originality and interest to your embroidery by adding some textured stitches to your repertoire. The same stitches appear again and again in modern embroidery, but experimenting with just a few new stitches opens up endless possibilities.



I have been using textured stitches to create both coloured and whitework designs. I posted an extract from a coloured design last month and from a whitework design on the Facebook groups recently and asked the readers if they could name the stitches. It was very interesting to see their responses.

This is an extract from the whitework design.

Five textured stitches have been used in this design plus running stitch and whipping in metallic thread:

1. Reverse chain stitch for the outline and reverse chain stitch - whipped (1a. stem).
2. Double knot stitch (Palestrina stitch)
3. Cable chain stitch
4. Wheatear stitch
5. Fly stitch whipped

Running stitch rows can be added to follow the shape of the leaves.

Two of my favourite textured stitches are Double knot stitch (Palestrina stitch) and Wheatear stitch, but there are other stitches for working outlines other than in stem stitch, back

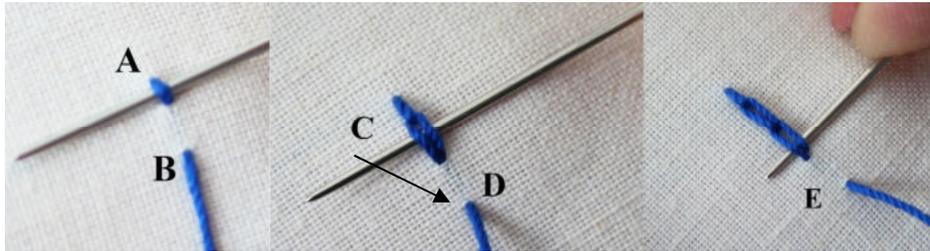
stitch and back stitch whipped or chain stitch.

Reverse chain stitch creates a broader and flatter outline stitch than chain stitch. Use four strands of floss or cotton P erle No.5 and a chenille needle (big eye, sharp point).

Reverse Chain Stitch

Reverse chain stitch is worked down the line towards you. Make a short straight stitch at A and bring the needle out a short distance away at B. Slide the needle under the straight stitch and into the material at the

place where the thread emerged. Bring the needle out again at C, pass the needle under the previous chain and back down at D (arrow). When sliding under the chain loops (E) the needle does not pierce the material. Pull gently!



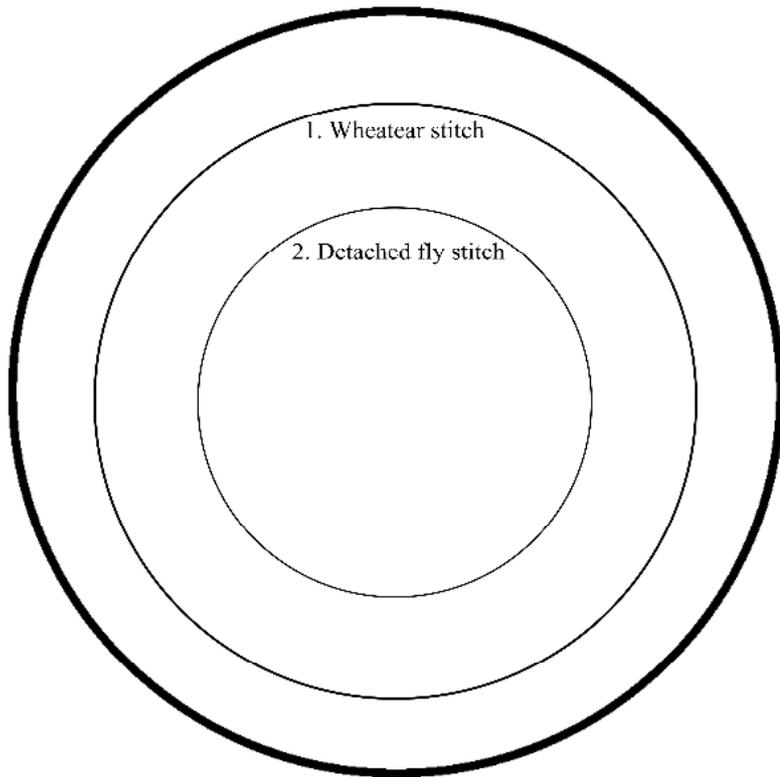
Reverse chain stitch can also be whipped to create a cord effect as shown on the stem (1a). Different threads can be used for the whipping. I used Rainbow Gallery Petite metallic in gold to add sparkle and interest.



Once you know how to work the stitches any outline design could be adapted to make new textured designs.



Change the colour and the effect is different again.



Create a textured design

Take the ideas from the previous designs work a new embroidery. I have added some suggestions.

You will need:

Fabric: White cotton or cream calico – two pieces, 8 x 8 inches

Threads: Selection of threads of your choice, stranded floss, matt crochet cottons, Cotton P rle No 5 & 8

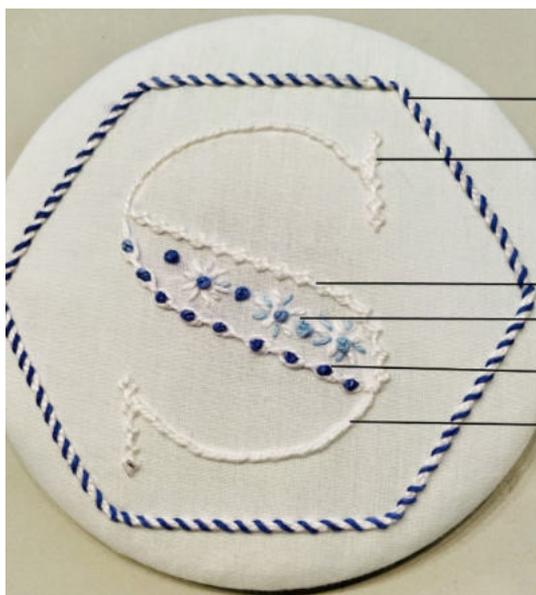
Needles: Chenille (large eye, sharp point) in different sizes. Small embroidery ring

Circle: Templates can be any size - glasses, a CD, card circle and plastic quilter's circles were used ranging from 4.50 inches diameter to 2.00 inches for the smallest design. Decide on the size of the circle first. If an initial is added the circle must be large enough to 'frame' the letter.

2 card circles or 2 old CDs or flexi frame. Use thin wadding to pad the card.

Method:

1. Cut two squares of fabric for each design, one for the backing and one for the embroidery. Start with a simple outline first and build up to more complex designs.
2. Choose the circle size and trace it onto the fabric using a water soluble pen or an HP pencil.
3. Work the embroidery in textured stitches – use 3 - 4 strands of floss. Consider adding an initial or changing the shape.



chain stitch whipped

double knot

double knot

lazy daisy, colonial knots

cable chain, colonial knots

back stitch whipped



Mounting the embroidery:

The card circles will be larger than the embroidered ring. The embroidery and backing is cut out at least one inch larger than the card circle. A fine wadding can be glued to each card circle. The fabric circles are drawn up over the card circles using a strong thread, a ribbon hanger is added and the two pieces are slip stitched together.

Recycle, reuse!



Many of the threads and fabrics already in your stash can be used for these designs.

Looking back – Mrs Grace Archibald Christie. (1872 -1953).

We have become so used today to buying modern craft books and magazines in full colour at a reasonable price that it is an education to look back to see what was available in the past. Reading about the different fabrics that are no longer available, researching the threads and working out how the stitches were worked from the drawings and the black and white photographs is an interesting exercise well illustrated in ‘Samplers and Stitches’ by Mrs Archibald Christie. (1872 -1953).

SAMPLERS AND STITCHES

A HANDBOOK OF THE EMBROIDERER'S ART

BY MRS ARCHIBALD CHRISTIE
WITH MANY DESIGNS AND OTHER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



LONDON

B. T. BATSFORD LTD 94 HIGH HOLBORN
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

Grace Christie, often known as Mrs. A.G.I. Christie, was an English writer and teacher on embroidery techniques and embroidery history. She is regarded as one of the most influential people in the early twentieth century with respect to the development of embroidery and embroidery studies in Britain and elsewhere.

Grace (as she preferred to be known) married Archibald Christie, who was working as a teacher at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, an institute that was founded in the late nineteenth century.

Archibald Christie went on to become the first professor of design at the Royal College of Art, London. Grace Christie also taught at the Royal College of Art and helped students to move away from the designs of the Arts and Crafts Movement towards a more technically aware form of embroidery. She encouraged her students to work on historical embroideries from all periods, not just the medieval forms. In 1914 she started a needlework magazine called the ‘Needle and Thread’, which was a mixture of ‘new’ designs and historical information about embroidery.

Many of her other books including ‘Embroidery’ can be found online.

<https://archive.org>

[https:// www.antiquepatternlibrary.org](https://www.antiquepatternlibrary.org)

If you place her work into the context of the era in which she lived. The 1920s, also known as the ‘Roaring Twenties’, was a decade of contrasts. The First World War had ended in victory, peace had returned and with it, prosperity. For some the war had proved to be very profitable. Manufacturers and suppliers of goods needed for the war effort had prospered throughout the war years and become very rich but depending on your income and social standing the role of the woman in the 1920’s was very different than it is in the 21st century.

[https:// www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-1920s-in-Britain/](https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-1920s-in-Britain/)

In the Preface to her work ‘Samplers and Stitches’ she writes:

There are many who would gladly recall, if they could, the past beauties of the delicate art of embroidery, but unfortunately the traditional receipts for the stitches and methods of work, which it used to be the practice to hand down from mother to daughter, are fast passing away. So it seems desirable, especially in times like the present, that these should be collected and placed on record, and in some measure be brought up to

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date. To attempt this is one of the objects of this book. Also it is hoped to add to the worker's knowledge of materials and technique, because this forms the proper basis of embroidery design.

The stitches and methods of work brought together here have been collected for the most part from actual embroideries. These have been classified and presented to the reader by means of working diagrams which often show several stages of each stitch, and a series of samplers illustrate some of the uses to which they can be applied when learnt. In the art of embroidery, the question of design is so interwoven with that of technique that pattern planning, if approached in the right way, grows almost unconsciously out of the study of stitches. It will be found upon experiment that many stitches can introduce new ideas for design.

The worker is urged, when thinking over a new piece of work, either simple or complex, to take some characteristic stitches and see what can be done with them, rather than to make a design with pencil and brush and then see what stitches can be adapted to working it out. The former method is fairly certain to result in a true embroidery design; the latter sometimes looks as if it had been stitched with difficulty, and would perhaps have been better if painted with the brush.

Although the study of old work forms the basis of the research which has made up the book, the illustration of ancient examples does not take much space in it, for it is hoped that the power obtained through a wide knowledge of technique should and will, naturally express the changes of fashion which time brings about.

The aim is a text book, not of ancient, but of modern embroidery and design.

GRACE CHRISTIE.
Ingleborough House,
East Runton, Norfolk.
October 7, 1920



Embroidery made by Grace Christie, dated 1914. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

Needlewomen like Grace Christie laid the foundations we build upon today and we owe them a debt of gratitude for their foresight and imagination.

I hope you have enjoyed reading the Blog. If you have any queries please contact me at:

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Happy stitching, *Liz*