

Fall A.S. XXXV (2000)

Filum Aureum

Newsletter of the Needleworkers Guild

in the Kingdom of the West (SCA)

Sabrina de la Bere
P.O. Box 1809
El Granada, CA 94018

Guild calendar & projects

A note from Sabrina

Without the Guild members who share their skills, we would be very much less than we are. Therefore, we express our heartfelt thanks to those who teach. Their Royal Majesties Jade and Siobhan, during the reign recently ended, instituted a new award to recognize this very thing. The **Western Lily** is "more than a Rose Leaf, less than a Laurel," and is given for excellent skills in the arts and sciences **including** involvement in teaching. Congratulations to our Guild Patron, **Isela di Bari**, one of the first to receive this at Purgatorio.

Another new award, the **Order of the Queen's Treasure Chest**, is given to people who contribute items to this Chest for Her Majesty to give away (*see p.8*). Guild members Jania of Call Duck Manor, Judith of Stormholde, Christian de Holacombe, Willow McKay, Rosalie Ashleigh, Sarah of Foxhaven, Octavia Jenon de Treues, and Eliska z Jihlava have been so honored. Congratulations, all!

The Guild also received the personal thanks of Duchess Siobhan of Cloverdale for all the support our guild has given her thru two reigns. She is especially pleased with the quality of our workmanship! —

CROWN REPORT

Mentors' Corner: We had several mentors present after Saturday morning court to encourage, advise, admire, and help with your questions. We plan to make this a regular thing at Crown events! The mentors will also accept samples of needlework to be evaluated during the day for categories in the **Apprenticeship Program**.

Thanks to Iulitta Rowan, we now have a **Guild sunshade!** It's a tall white "Conestoga wagon" shape, eventually to have a canvas cover. We'll hang Guild banners on it (gold needle on green circle).

It was good too to see everyone at the Saturday afternoon Guild meeting. Thanks also to Mistress **Anne of Bradford** who came all the way down from Oertha to talk about **Table Carpets!**



FALL COLLEGIUM

Classes of interest include:

SATURDAY

Underside Couching with Metal Thread
INTERMEDIATE (2 class periods)

Letitia de Scotia, OL

Make a Sweet Bag (BEGINNING)
Sabrina de la Bere

Egyptian "Blackwork" Embroidery
Tangwystyl verch Morgant Glasvryn, OL

Stumpwork (INTERMEDIATE)
Mairghread nighean Eanruig

Laid and Couched Work (BEGINNING)
Kareina Talvi Tytär, OL

Documentation Made Easy (BEGINNING)
Christian de Holacombe

Competition Judging (ALL WELCOME)
with several experienced judges

SUNDAY

Introduction to Canvaswork
BEGINNING (2 class periods)
Iulitta Rowan

Remembrance of Things Past
(PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION)
Tangwystyl verch Morgant Glasvryn, OL

TWELFTH NIGHT

Don't throw it away!

The Needleworkers Guild will hold a **Silent Auction at Twelfth Night 2001** to raise money for the newsletter. We welcome anything needle-related. So far we have received stretcher bars, needlework kits, a review on medieval Swiss embroidery, embroidered napkins, and a basket of needlework supplies. But we need lots more to reach our goal! Any fabric? Scissors? Needles? Books? Call **Isela** (831)385-3040 or e-mail <dcobb@mail.meyernet.com>.

FROM THE CHRONICLER A grand experiment

This year has been a "grand experiment" with our printed newsletter. The new format is getting rave reviews!

But if this "grand experiment" is going to continue, we need to begin asking people for contributions specifically for this purpose. We are asking everyone who gets this newsletter to please donate **\$5 per year** to the West Kingdom Needleworkers Guild to cover the cost.

Our Chronicler is, and will continue to be, a volunteer. But we've expanded the number of pages, added photos, and we've gone from using someone's office copier for free to now having to pay for copying. The current Guild budget will just cover postage, but not copying. It costs about a dollar to create, copy, and mail one copy of the newsletter to you. But we also don't want *anyone* to miss out on our newsletter if they're still interested.

Please send your donations to the Guild Minister, **Sabrina de la Bere**, at the address below. You **DO NOT** have to send in a donation to keep getting the newsletter! Additional gifts to help subsidize the newsletter for those who can't pay are more than welcome and will be gratefully acknowledged! Thank you all. —

Royal Rose Project

SIGN UP NOW! We only have a few pouches left. Sixteen pouches, one for each kingdom, will feature the Queen's Royal Rose embroidered in the appropriate colors of that kingdom. Choose your favorite needlework technique and sign up! The guild will provide the fabric, thread (DMC), and instructions. Call **Isela** at **(831) 385-3040**. Completion date is scheduled for July 1, 2001 — in time to be presented to Her Majesty to take with her to Pennsic. —

The Needleworkers Guild of the Kingdom of the West

All are welcome to join us in making and enjoying historical needlework, furthering our knowledge, and developing our skills. We meet Saturday afternoon at every Crown Tourney and Coronation, and we look forward to seeing you and your needlework!

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Of stitches and styles

*One of the most frequently asked questions in the Guild is, "What stitches are period?" This article, the fourth in a series of six, will look at another category of the Apprenticeship Program, **Surface Embroidery**.*

— by Christian de Holacombe

I asked a friend recently to help me figure out a good definition of surface embroidery. My starting idea was, "any embroidery stitch done on the surface of fabric." My friend raised an eyebrow in her inimitable fashion, looked at me a moment, and gently commented, "Aren't they all?"

All right then, let's look for a better definition. When we talk about 'surface embroidery,' we are generally **not** talking about anything where you count threads. And we're probably **not** talking about quilting, drawn thread, gold work, or lace or openwork stitches.

WHAT DOES THAT LEAVE US?

To me, "surface embroidery" tends to mean all the basic embroidery stitches I learned when I first started embroidering almost 40 years ago: running stitch, back stitch, stem or outline stitch, satin stitch (which I'm still not very good at), button-hole stitch, chain stitch, herringbone stitch and maybe a few others such as "Lazy Daisy" (detached chain stitches).

These stitches are a major part of a particular **style** of embroidery; one that was so popular that it pretty much defined the word "embroidery" in the 1950s, '60s, and early '70s in this country. I affectionately call it the "Pillowcase Style" after one of its favorite projects.

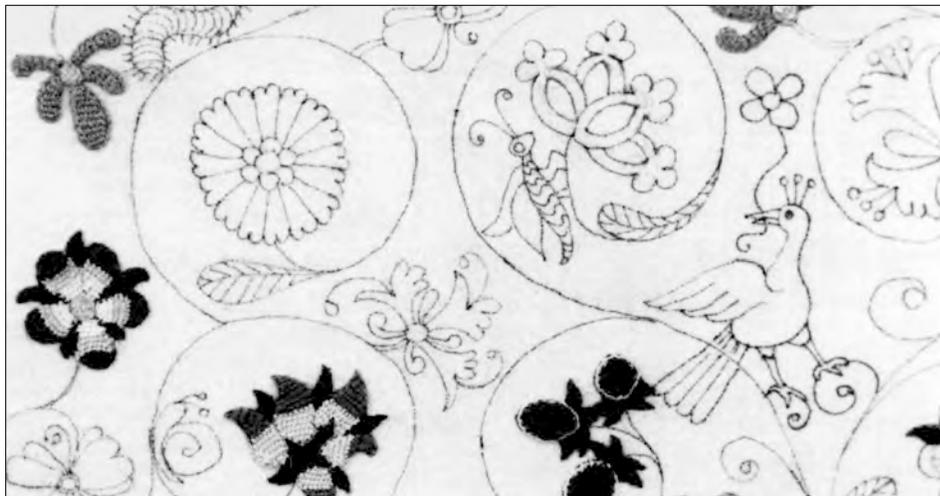
"PILLOWCASE" STYLE

But a **style** of embroidery is made up of much more than stitches. What **materials** are used? In the Pillowcase Style, generally cotton 6-strand embroidery floss in a wide range of mostly pastel colors. Fabrics range from light to medium-weight cottons, or sometimes tabby-woven "homespun" for a rustic look.

What **motifs** are used? Mostly small scattered flowers, bouquets, ladies with long skirts, small cute animals, mushrooms(!), trees, leaves, houses, and motifs.

How are the stitches used? Generally stem stitch or chain stitch is used for outlines, satin stitch for small solid areas, and French knots for flower centers.

And what are the **objects and uses** to which this embroidery is applied? Most commonly, small domestic objects: hand towels, dresser scarves, pillowcases,



potholders, cushions, tea-cozies, and children's clothes.

The Pillowcase style is, of course, *not* in use before 1600; but I thought it might serve as a familiar example. As you can see, there are many other factors that have a lot to do with establishing the style or "look" of an embroidery, besides simply what stitches are used.

The same applies to period styles of embroidery. Which means that "**Which stitches are period?**" is really not **quite** the right question, and an answer to it is half an answer at best.

MEDIEVAL & RENAISSANCE

Medieval and Renaissance embroidery, then, is much more a matter of **styles** than of stitches. The best way to get a "feel" for some historical styles of surface embroidery is to look, look, look — in museums if possible, or in big fat picture books that show embroidery in detail. When you see several pieces in a style you'd like to try, analyze them, and see how each one uses stitches, materials, motifs, and techniques to make finished products in a particular style. Then go and do thou likewise!

Some style examples

I'll give a few samples of such styles here. Each one could certainly generate an article, or even a book, so I'll just briefly give the highlights, and I'll try to point you towards some good resources to start with.

COPTIC CHAIN STITCH

Chain stitches worked as lines, and spirally as fillings, to produce a solidly embroidered surface. Found in Egypt and possibly other Mediterranean countries, before AD 1000.

Materials: 1- or 2-ply wool (one strand of modern 2-ply tapestry or sock-darning wool) in a variety of bright and dark colors (including Tyrian purple) on tabby woven linen ground. **Motifs:** borders of simple geometric shapes, stylized animals, plants, Greek and Roman mythical figures, angels and saints. See contemporary tapestry-woven pieces for ideas. **Uses:** Square and circular decorative patches and linear bands, appliquéd onto clothing. (See books for details.) **Where to look:** Books on "Coptic" textiles in the library. Unfortunately any one book is likely to have only two or three examples, but look also at the tapestry-woven pieces for motif ideas.

ELIZABETHAN SURFACE EMBROIDERY

Popular in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, this style is worked in a variety of stitches, including stem or outline stitch, chain stitch, satin stitch, plaited braid stitch, trellis stitch, couching, "spiderweb" wheels, and detached buttonhole stitch. Often decorated with metal spangles. Our cover and the illustration at the head of this article are of a coif that Guild member Francesca von Hesse has designed, marked, and is just beginning to stitch.

The main stems of the design are frequently in metallic gold thread in plaited

Styles, continued on p.4

Below: an example of Coptic chain-stitch embroidery from about the 9th century.



Styles, continued from p.3

braid stitch, which produces a raised line with a criss-cross appearance. This stitch is a bit tricky to learn; try it first on scrap canvas in shoelace-sized cording so you can see what you're doing.

Otherwise, lines of the design are usually in stem or chain stitch, and solid parts in detached buttonhole stitch and the other stitches mentioned above.

Materials: Silk thread on linen, in a limited and somewhat subdued color range: red, pink, dull gold color, white, a medium and light blue tending slightly towards teal, and medium and dark shades of a slightly yellowish green (not the 20th-century forest green, which is more bluish). The metal spangles used are flat 1/8 inch disks of gold-colored metal with a single hole in the center. **Motifs:** Flowers of all kinds, fruits, leaves, insects, caterpillars, snails, birds, occasionally deer and other animals, most often in a network of characteristic coiling stems. **Uses:** Cushion covers, coifs, women's jackets (especially after 1600), men's nightcaps, and sometimes embroidered smocks, chemises and shirts. **Where to look:** Books are fairly easy to find, but be sure to look at the **real thing** in books and museums to see the colors and the style of the curling-vine motif.



BAYEUX TAPESTRY

This famous work, made in the late 1060s to celebrate the Norman conquest of England, is worked in a very distinctive style, possibly of Norse origin. Solid areas of color are in a special type of laid and couched work; occasionally a tiny area will be simply filled with straight stitches. Thin lines are sometimes a single couched thread, more often a version of stem or out-line stitch where the stitches barely overlap, looking like backstitch.

Materials: Wool thread on linen. Colors used are a reddish yellow, a dull gold, terracotta red, blue-green, sage green, a striking olive green, and a bluish black. Interestingly, there were other colors available at this time that were **not** used. **Motifs:** People, animals, ships, buildings etc. in lively narrative scenes. **Uses:** Decorative wall hangings seem to be the only documented uses of this style. A very few similar fragments are found in Scandinavia, and the motifs of the Bayeux tapestry are quite similar to those in the "tapestry" found in the Oseberg ship burial. It seems likely that there were other wall-hangings in this technique that have not survived. **Where to look:** This one's easy: several whole books have been published on the Bayeux tapestry.



"UNCOUNTED" BLACKWORK

We often think of blackwork as a counted-thread technique, but there were also "surface" styles of blackwork that were *not* counted. Some pieces have only simple outlines in stem stitch; others use a wider stitch repertory, including chain stitch, buttonhole stitch, satin stitch, braid stitch, and "speckling" (tiny detached single stitches in random directions) are among the stitches used. Many of the pieces with speckling use it for naturalistic shading of motifs. **Materials:** Silk floss on linen, in black or red (a single color per project) or occasionally pink, lavender or some other color. **Motifs:** Similar to those in the style

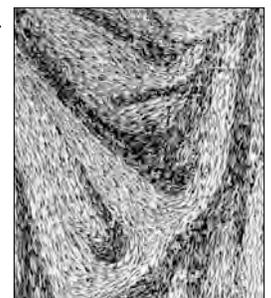


we've called Elizabethan surface embroidery: scrolling vines, birds and animals, embroidered lattice patterns with a flower or fruit in each compartment. **Uses:** Ornamented smocks, chemises and shirts, cushion covers, coifs, jackets, men's nightcaps. **Where to look:** Blackwork books will sometimes feature this style, though they often fail to point out that it's different from the counted style.



SILK SPLIT STITCH

This style can stand alone, or it can be combined with gold-thread underside couching to form the style called *Opus Anglicanum*. England was famous for its high-quality work in split stitch in the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries and exported it all over Europe. The stitch is very closely packed to fill areas with a smooth, satin-like texture, and it often follows the contours of the motif, for instance to show the drape of fabrics in clothing. Hair is worked in parallel wavy lines in several shades of color; cheeks are often worked as circular spirals to produce a puffed effect.



(**Styles**, continued on p.8)

Elizabethan sweet bag

— by Madilayn de Mer
Barony of River Haven, Lochac



One of the most common pieces we have from Elizabethan times is the purse. Usually purses, or “sweet bags” as they are called, were small, less than six inches square. They were used to put herbs in and placed in closets with linens and clothes, or they were worn. Similar small purses were used for money, hankies, etc., and often had a small pincushion attached.

Many purses had drawstrings and a profusion of tassels – bottom, sides, top and drawstrings. The embroidery ranges from simple blackwork to the more complex embroidered designs with many different stitches, featuring both flora and fauna.

Patterns were often taken from herbals and bestiaries, as well as pattern books of the time. A popular pattern book of the time was Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblems*, published in 1586.

The animal motifs included both real and fantastic beasts. For some reason, insects were very popular. Often the elements of the design had symbolic meanings (lovers' knots, gillyflowers, etc.)

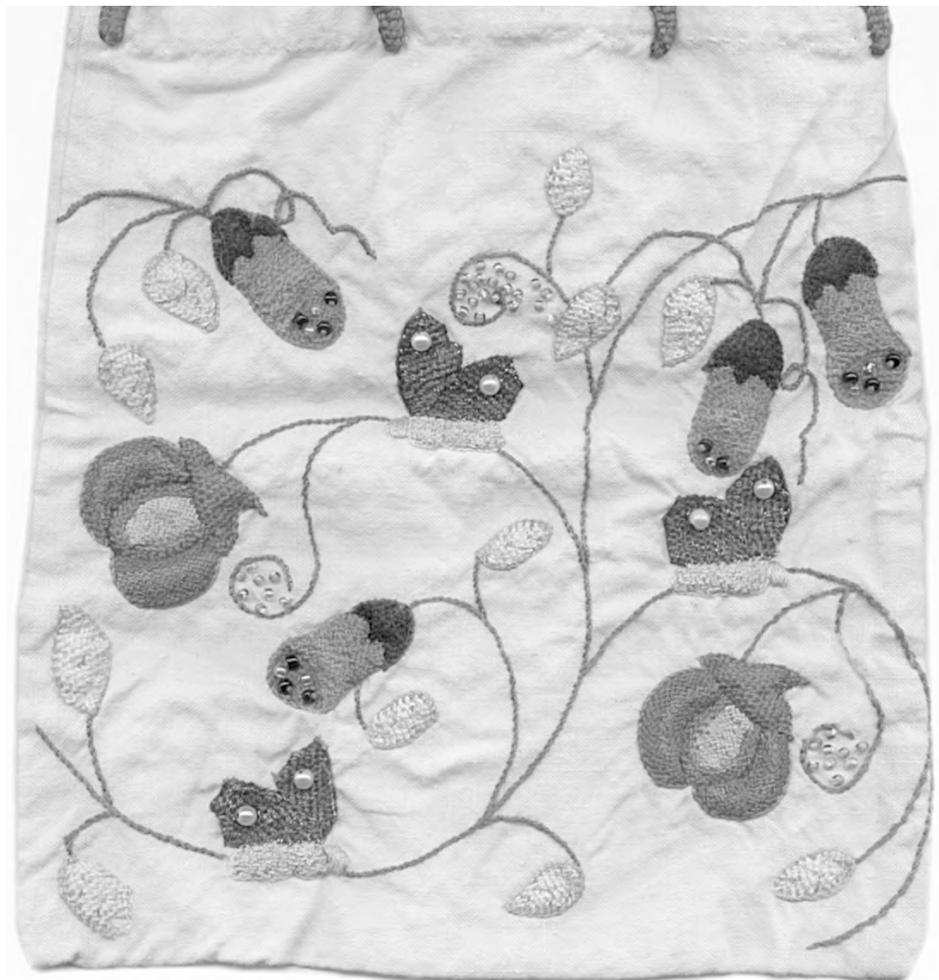
In this embroidery style, scale did not seem to matter, with a caterpillar being the same size as an elephant. Purses were very simple in style, but complex in form – and in embroidery!

The colours used were very bright, with sequins, beads, pearls, and metal thread embellishing the embroidery itself. Sometimes these pouches featured appliquéd “slips” with the designs on them.

ABOUT THIS PIECE

This piece was entered in the May 1999 Coronet competition for “Embroidered Pouches” of the Worshipful Company of Broderers of Lochac.

It is an embroidered drawstring bag using a design taken from “Exploring Elizabethan Embroidery” by Dorothy Clarke, and is one of her “project pieces”. I chose to do this rather than my own design, as this is the first piece in this particular style I have done, and was not very confident of my ability to get the correct “feel” in the design. From my researches since, I feel that this particular design is rather more Jacobean than Elizabethan, as there is a lot of “space”: the Elizabethan pieces seemed to be very busy. I think that the authors of the book decided to please modern taste, which does not run to the busy designs beloved by Elizabethan embroiderers.



The design is on a piece of fabric I picked up as a “linen remnant”, however I do not think it is – it seems to have more cotton in it. I have used 2 strands of DMC floss throughout, and for the metallic thread, 1 strand of Madeira metallic thread mixed with the 2 strands of floss. The beads are Milhill glass beads and pearl beads.

The stitches used are chain stitch, stem stitch, detached buttonhole stitch and lattice stitch. All of these stitches were used in the Jane Bostocke sampler.

I am aware that in period, these purses usually were embroidered on both sides, and would be lined. However as this pouch will be used primarily in our displays, where only one side will be seen, I have only done that side. I have not lined it so that you can better examine both sides of the embroidery, and also because it will not actually be used as a purse or pouch. There are no tassels on the pouch in the photo because I didn't have any when I made it up. I do, however, intend to add tassels to the bottom of the pouch, and also to the drawstring ends.

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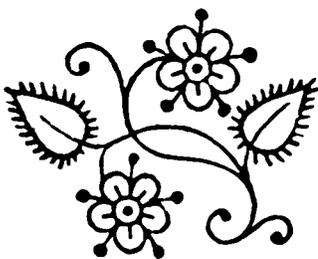
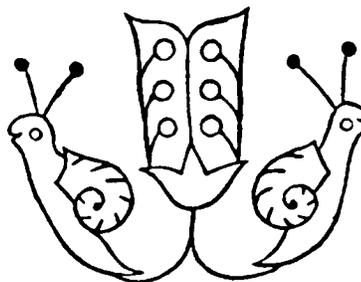
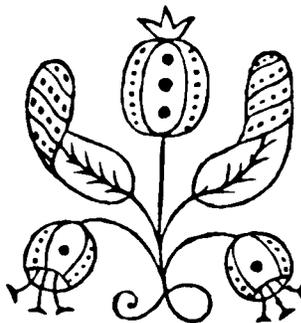
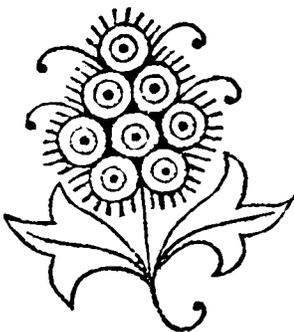
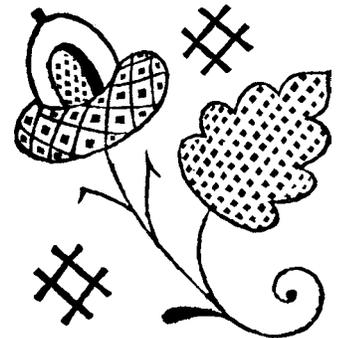
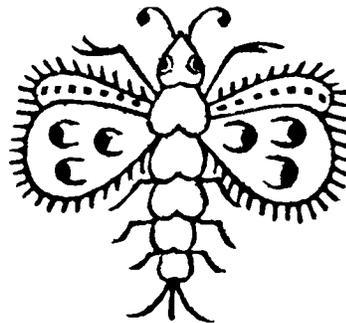
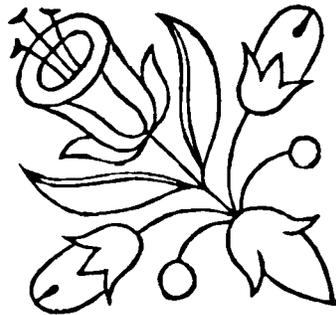
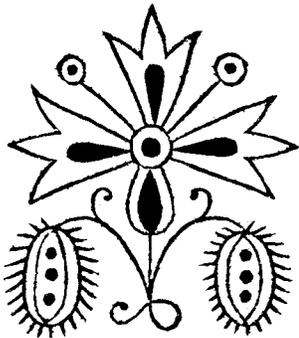
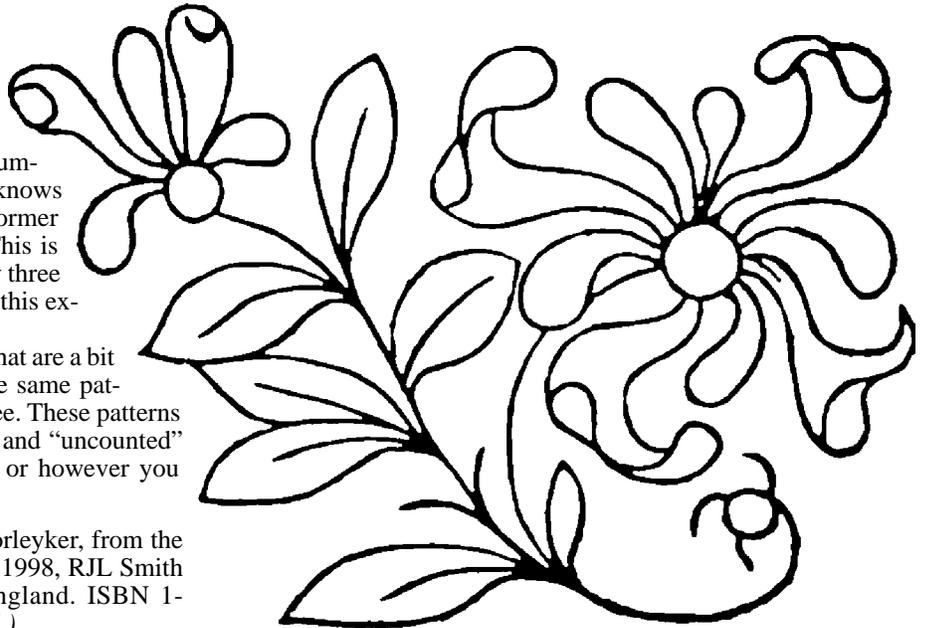
A Schole-house for the Needle

— by Christian de Holacombe

This issue's pattern page is a collection of Elizabethan motifs from the new (1988) reprint edition of *A Schole-House for the Needle*, first published by Richard Shorleyker in 1632. John and Elizabeth Mason picked up a copy at a rummage sale in Shropshire in the 1940s; no one knows anything else about its origin, and clearly the former owners didn't know what a treasure they had. This is the most complete copy known; it is missing only three pages. The owners have worked hard to produce this excellent facsimile reprint.

I tried to pick patterns from the new edition that are a bit different — **not** (except for the twin snails!) the same patterns from the same two pages that you always see. These patterns can be enlarged and used for simple stem stitch and "uncounted" blackwork, for Elizabethan surface embroidery or however you like.

A Schole-house for the Needle, by Richard Shorleyker, from the private collection of John and Elizabeth Mason. 1998, RJI Smith & Associates, Much Wenlock, Shropshire, England. ISBN 1-872665-72-1. (*I bought my copy at Lacis for \$45.*)



A warm beginning

Thank you all for the very warm welcome and support I received at the June Crown meeting for my stepping up as your Guild Minister. I have derived much enjoyment from being a member of the Guild and hope that I can continue to nurture an atmosphere where needlework is fun and fascinating for all of you.

Isela has done a wonderful job as Guild Minister for the last seven years. The Guild has grown and prospered under her leadership and enthusiasm for the needlearts. We are fortunate in that she has agreed to continue her efforts on behalf of the Guild in the position of Guild Patron.

There are lots of exciting happenings which I am pleased to share with you. First, there is our website which is growing under the willing and capable fingers of Anahita Gauri al-shazhiyya. Next, there is a

wonderful abundance of classes for the rest of the year with Fall Collegium and October Crown. Then there is the wonderful response to the Rose Pouch project which is well underway to meeting its goal. Iulitta Rowan has supplied us with a lovely pavilion of our very own, and she is making banners to indicate gathering places for needleworkers to meet.

In addition, I would like to encourage members to make their own personal belt or sleeve badge to show their participation in the Guild. Lastly, I want to thank Christian de Holacombe for putting together another wonderful newsletter.

Unfortunately, as usual, the Guild is short on funds, what with supporting the quarterly newsletter (*see p.2*) and our special projects. We charge no membership dues. Our only source of funds are dona-

tions, kit fees, and the semi-annual Silent Auction. We hope you will support the Guild in any way you can.

In the next few weeks you will be receiving a questionnaire about what changes, if any, you would like to see the Guild make over the next couple years. Your response is very important. I want to see the Guild meet the needs and interests of its members. The questionnaire is a key tool to developing that program.

I look forward to meeting all of the Guild's members over the next few months. Please do not hesitate to talk to me at events, email, or call.

I remain yours
in service,

Sabrina de la Bere

IN STITCHES . . . NEWS AND NOTES OF GUILD MEMBERS

A big THANK YOU to all of our needleworkers who brought their hand-stitched works for display at **June Crown**. What an inspiration these pieces were! Needlework techniques ranged from Bayeux tapestry stitch and reticella work to Elizabethan metal threadwork and exquisite brick stitch. Thanks to Aldith Angharad St. George, Francesca von Hesse, Sabrina de la Bere, Catherine Lorraine of Stonegate Manor, Christall Madeleine Moore, Elizabeth of the Blue Rose, Aja du Jardin, Anahita Gauri bint Karimal hakin al-Fassi, Astrithr Kjartansdottir, Anne Cathryn of Wicken Bonhunt, Ellen of the Western Winds, Elspeth Semstress of Dunkeld, Lynet of Heartsrest, Brid Hecgwiht, and Ilijana Krakowska. And a BIG thank-you to Rowan Oldway and Dietrich von den Weinbergen for their calligraphy. If we missed anyone, yell at Isela!

GUILD BANNERS

Thank you, Iulitta Rowan of Arran, for the new Guild Banners you created. She started the ball rolling with the first 3 which display the guild badge. The goal is to have a banner displayed at each guildmember's pavilion as a personal greeting inviting other needleworkers to introduce themselves and become acquainted. Iulitta is looking for people to help her with these banners. For more info, please call Iulitta at (916) 929-0189.

APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Congratulations to the following Guild Members who have achieved new levels in the Guild's Apprenticeship Program!



Above: Drawn by Guild member Willow McKay, a simplified version of "Band With The Holy Family" (detail), Switzerland or South Germany, 1591. Constance, Rosgartenmuseum (No.2).

AnneCathryn of Wicken Bonhunt completed the Apprentice Level with Counted Thread. **Lynet of Heartsrest** finished the Journeyman Level with Counted Thread and only needs one more

piece to complete the Needlemaster level. **Sabrina de la Bere** became the guild's latest Needlemaster by completing the both the 3rd and 4th levels, in Surface Embroidery and Whitework. *—S*

Guild Mentors

These people are here to help you with your needlework questions!

Catherine Lorraine	Sunnyvale	408-732-8581	lifitz@ncal.verio.com
Aldith St. George	El Cerrito	510-215-5879	hirschv@mindspring.com
Francesca von Hesse	Oakland	510-444-6244	moody@aimnet.com
Letitia de Scotia	Pinole	510-741-9885	vfrazier@pacbell.net
Kaitlin MacPherson	Sacramento	916-331-8066	
Mairghread nighean Eanruig	Colusa	530-458-4144	ettrick@mako.com
Rosalie Ashleigh	Marysville	530-742-6643	
Tashi of Falcons Claw	Modesto	209-824-0931	
Jania of Call Duck Manor	Palo Alto	650-493-7756.....	74007.1015@compuserve.com
Kareina Talvi Tytär	Mtn View	650-625-0545	kareina@alaska.net
Caiterina nic Sheamus	Vacaville	707-451-1091	cyndiflane@aol.com
Jenna Whitehart	S.Luis Obispo	805-934-9252	originalzaena@yahoo.com
Sabrina Goldbender	Santa Cruz	831-429-9020	gamealot@cruzio.com
Sabella Loreena of Wyndyfell ...	Oertha	907-262-3766	
Anne of Bradford	Oertha	907-338-4692	quidnon@micronet.net
Annora de Montfort	Oertha	907-344-5753	shadowood@sprynet.com
Iulitta Rowan of Arran	Sacramento	916-929-0189	croninkr@cwo.com

LOCHAC LIAISONS (Worshipful Company of Broderers)

Bess Haddon of York, Guildmaster	srandles@adfa.edu.au
Keridwen the Mouse, Guild Patron	jheron@comtech.com.au

DEPUTY MINISTER

Christian de Holacombe	Davis	530-758-5407	claning@igc.org
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GUILD MINISTER

Sabrina de la Bere	El Granada	650-712-8405	rlberry@sprynet.com
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GUILD PATRON

Isela di Bari	Monterey	831-385-3040	dcobb@mail.meyernet.com
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THIS ISSUE'S COVER & PAGE 3 (DETAIL): *Coif "in process"* by Francesca von Hesse (Erin Moody). LINE DRAWINGS ON PAGES 2, 6, AND 8 are from **Schole-house of the Needle** (see p.6). —✂

Styles, continued from p.4

Some split-stitch pieces also use stem, chain, and knot stitches. **Materials:** Silk floss on linen or silk background. **Motifs:** Geometric, scroll, and vine borders; saints, angels and Biblical characters and scenes; flowers, leaves and animals. **Uses:** Ornamental bands for necklines and cuffs; purses; church hangings and vestments. **Where to look:** Embroidery books show examples, though usually not close enough to see the stitching. Go to museums — and take a magnifying glass!

OTHERS

I haven't even mentioned **bead embroidery**, and there are also some interesting period techniques for attaching **jewels** to fabric. Many Tudor and Elizabethan gowns are decorated with elaborate patterns of **couched lacing cord** and braid. **Knotting**, the predecessor of tatting, produced lengths of cord with simple or elaborate

patterns of knots, and these cords were also couched down onto fabric to make elaborate cushion covers and the like. I've seen a few fascinating 16th-century pictures worked in **laid silk** — long vertical stitches running from edge to edge of the pattern areas. I had no idea till I saw them that this was anything other than a modern technique.

And these are only a few of the surface techniques of our period that you can explore.

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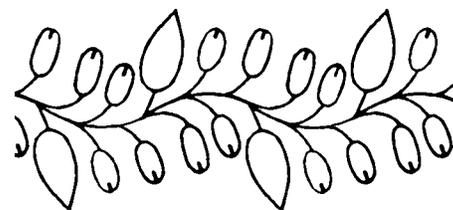
QUEEN'S TREASURE CHEST

Pincushions welcome!

The Gift Chest especially needs **bookmarks, fan pouches, and small embroidered pieces** that can be made into sachets or pincushions. It doesn't just need one or two things: it needs 5, 10, 15 or more of each item, so that Royalty can not only give them to other Royalty, but can also use these items as a little "thank you" present when someone hosts them overnight, makes them new garb, or does them a favor.

SUGGESTIONS: (1) If you're part of a local group of needleworkers, get together and do several of the same simple item, decorated in different ways. (2) Get **Guild kits** at any Crown event for good "starter" projects — then work them and give them back! (3) Contact Christian de Holacombe if you have **ideas for kits** or would like to **help produce them**.

The original Guild "learning kits" for a cross-stitched pouch, Elizabethan sweet bag, and fan pouch have been produced and sold by the Guild for almost two years, together with Isela's new bookmark kit. We'll be producing more kits — stay tuned! —✂



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