



Fall

A.S. XXXX (2005)

Filum Aureum

Newsletter of the Needleworkers Guild
A period
work basket

in the Kingdom of the West (SCA)

Aelia Apollonia, c/o Krista Barber
750 Bair Island Road #106
Redwood City, CA 94063

Guild calendar & projects

COLLEGIUM OCCIDENTALIS

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15 • CONCORD

There are lots of great classes in the Needlework and Clothing tracks! Please remember to bring an **embroidery hoop & scissors** to any class where you will be stitching! There will also be an artisan's display, a feast in the evening and feast entertainment. Sabrina de le Bere is organizing our display and we look forward to a fabulous exhibit of handmade treasures. Please contact her for more information. If you would like to volunteer to help with the artisan's display or sit at teachers' point (and meet our wonderful volunteers) or serve the feast, please jump in and contact the autocrat. It's a great way to meet new people and to get involved.

— 9:00-10:30AM —

TAMBOUR EMBROIDERY

Celyn of Stow-on-the-Wold

Tambour embroidery is a technique of Eastern origin that has been used on textiles for over a thousand years. With a finished result that is very similar to the chainstitch, tambour is worked with a hook rather than a needle. This is a hands-on class, which will teach the basic technique.

Bring: a small embroidery hoop, small crochet hook (size 8-10) or tambour needle, medium hoop, and crochet floss (not embroidery floss). The instructor will have tulle available as a practice fabric, as well as a small number of kits to borrow.

PERIOD PLEATING TECHNIQUES

Roseline d'Anjou

Learn about the various pleating techniques used to gather fabric for skirts and sleeves.

WHITE WORK PART 2 OF 4

Caiterina nic Seamus

Learn several white work techniques and practice on a prepared frame.

LIMIT: 4 NO FEE IF YOU BORROW A FRAME; PURCHASE OF FRAME OPTIONAL.

— 10:45AM-12:00 —

BLACKWORK EMBROIDERY

Katheryn de Langelei

Learn the techniques of Blackwork embroidery which was so popular in Elizabethan

England. The bulk of the class will be devoted to the teaching and practicing of stitches. A kit and handout will be provided to students. **Bring:** 5" embroidery hoop, embroidery scissors.

LIMIT: 6 FEE: NONE

MAKING PERIOD BUTTONHOLES

Sabrina de le Bere

We will make buttonholes, lacing holes and discuss welted buttonholes. We will discuss not only the techniques, but where and when what types of buttonholes were used. **Bring:** small scissors/embroidery scissors.

LIMIT: 10 FEE: \$2

— 1:00-2:15PM —

LAIWORK AND COUCHING WITH WOOL ON LINEN

Ceinwen ferch Belyn

Laidwork and couching are two of the stitches you learn as we explore these and the rest of the techniques presented in the Bayeux Tapestry. **Bring:** 5" embroidery hoop and scissors. Some loaner hoops will be available.

LIMIT: 6 FEE: \$5

COMING IN THE WINTER ISSUE OF FILUM AUREUM:

The Bayeux Tapestry 

— 2:30-3:45PM —

14TH-15TH CENTURY GERMAN EMBROIDERY

Felicia Margerye Amondesham

This style of embroidery is both easy and relatively quick. You will be using brick stitch to create very colorful or subtle motifs and geometric patterns.

LIMIT: 6 FEE: \$5

PERIOD SEAM FINISHES

Gianetta del Bene

Learn various period techniques for finishing your seams.


LIMIT: NONE FEE: NONE

— 4:00-5:00PM —

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT PEARLS

Kira Leonovna Zhemnadushina


We will examine photos of historical pieces and learn how to spot where pearls would have been applied. I will focus on the use of pearls in opus anglicanum and earlier period pieces. You will then choose to do either a small area design or a line design. You will fill in the small area design with cotton floss and then apply pearls. Alternately, you may choose a line design and couch down cord and cover it with pearls. Pearls (fake), ground cloth, floss, beading needles and thread will be supplied. **Bring:** scissors, needles and a hoop (max. 6 inches).

LIMIT: 10 FEE: \$5 



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 we look forward to seeing you and your needlework!

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A period workbox

— by Christian de Holacombe and
Michaela de Neuville

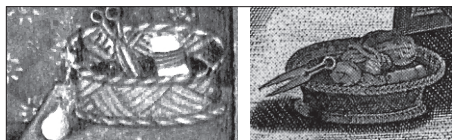
Putting together a period workbox seems to be an exercise in gathering little clues from a lot of different sources. So I was delighted when I saw what an old friend of mine, Mistress Michaela de Neuville (OL) had put together for a needlework demonstration. Her research is always excellent, and she agreed to collaborate with me on this article. Michaela's basket is on our cover, its contents are shown again on p.4, and her needlebook is this issue's project.

In my admittedly rather limited research, good written sources on period needlework tools are few. As penance for whatever needlework sins I've committed, I reread the one I have, Gertrude Whiting's *Old-Time Tools & Toys of Needlework*, and was just as frustrated by it as I was the first time I read it. In fairness, the book was written in 1928, and it shares that era's attitude that "old times" and "tradition" were eternal and unchanging, so it mixes centuries indiscriminately. It also seems to assume that life began in 1600. Probably it's a better resource for collectors of 19th-century needlework tools than for us.

The best source of information on period workboxes, therefore, is paintings and engravings. While the basket or box is always a small detail, usually over in a corner of the picture, sometimes you can make out details of its contents. So let's see what we can find.

BASKETS & BOXES

What types of baskets and boxes were commonly used as work boxes? Here are a couple of examples of what seems to be the most common type of workbasket: shallow and round, often with the top rim somewhat larger than the base. These are fairly easy to find at craft stores. Shallow baskets also seem to be the most common type in pictures showing other textile crafts, such as weaving or spinning. Sometimes all you

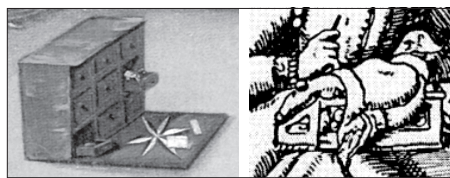


can see in them is a pair of scissors or shears and some balls of yarn or thread. Often there are napkins or pieces of cloth hanging over the basket edges as well, either a cover or perhaps a work in progress.

Sewing boxes and small chests also appear in period illustrations. One common type is a round or oval box made from a thin piece of wood steamed and bent around. There are also shallow square boxes rather like a modern cigar box, boxes like miniature trunks with round-topped



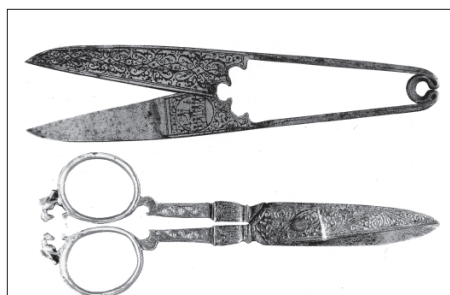
lids, and a painting from the 1630s shows a small chest of nine small drawers (*left, below*), with a flat front panel hinged at the bottom to secure the drawers for traveling. You also see boxes with slanted tops (*below right*). These look a lot like writing boxes, and sometimes (as here) have a padded top that can be used as a sewing pillow.



The lady in the portrait on this page is the wife of Philipp Gundelius, painted by Hieronymus Beck in about 1575, with some of her sewing tools, in unusually good detail. She has a small bentwood or ivory box containing little balls of thread: on the table are her scissors and a small knife, and just below her hands are some pins.

SCISSORS

Mrs. Gundelius's rather odd-looking scissors with open handles show up in other



contemporary pictures. You also see ordinary-looking scissors identical to those we use today, with ring-shaped handles, and also the classic U-shaped "spring shears" in various sizes. Michaela points out that many (though not all) 16th-century scissors seem to have "shoulders", with blades wider than the shafts, as in the photo at the bottom of this page.

KNIVES, AWLS & PRICKERS

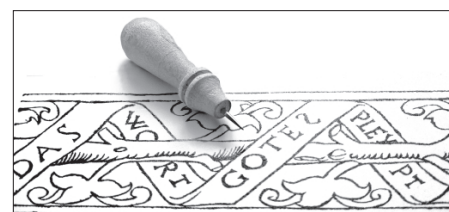
Another prominent part of Mrs. Grundelius's collection of tools is the small knife we see front and center. Since she also has scissors, I would guess a knife would more likely be used for cutting slits — for instance, buttonholes or decorative "pinks" or slashes. Pictured below are the match-



ing knife and pointed awl or "spike" from the same collection as the scissors photo.

An awl is especially useful for making round holes for eyelets, because it tends to push threads of the cloth aside when making a hole, rather than cutting them. This makes for a stronger eyelet.

Another type of sharp pointy thing used by period needleworkers is a "pricker" for transferring needlework patterns. Many period pattern books have holes pricked along the lines of the patterns, showing they were actually used for needlework, since a common method of transferring patterns to fabric is to "prick and pounce," first pricking the pattern and then rubbing "pounce" of powdered chalk or charcoal through the holes. Michaela made



one herself, using pliers to push the blunt end of a needle into a wooden handle.

NEEDLES & BODKINS

One of those perpetual questions from people just starting out in historical needlework is, "Didn't they just have bone needles back then?" Indeed, the first needles were probably bone, but by the Middle Ages there was already a thriving industry in making needles of brass and iron. Needles (and pins) became cheaper in the later Middle Ages when the greater availability

(continued next page —>)

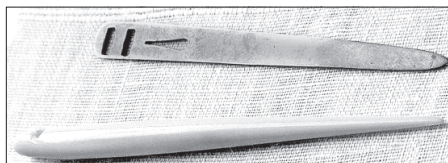
(A period workbox, *continued*)

of wire-drawing made it possible to produce large quantities of thin, uniform wire quickly and easily.

Needles were carried in needlebooks and needle cases to keep them secure and protected. (A pincushion doesn't work as well for needles: it's too easy for them to sink down out of sight into the cushion.) The Museum of London books on *Textiles and Clothing* and *The Medieval Household* have abundant examples of needles and needlecases, such as these:



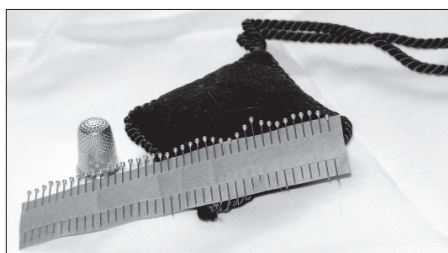
Needles come in various types, of course, and there are period examples of many sizes, different eye shapes, and needles for special purposes such as sewing leather. One common type is the bodkin, a flat, blunt strip of metal with one or more eyes, used to thread ribbon or cord through a casing. Many modern bodkins look exactly like the period ones, and they're still a useful thing to have. Michaela's bone awl and a flat bodkin can be seen in the photo below, and her needlebook is the one illustrated on the Project Page.



PINS & PINCUSHIONS

Medieval pins were made more or less like needles and of the same materials. But pins need heads. Common pins probably had small spherical or hemispherical heads that were hammered into shape or soldered on. Michaela was able to find some that look like these for her work basket, handily stored in a strip of paper. Pins were also headed with globs of glass or with the end of the wire bent over and wound around the top of the shank. The Museum of London's *Dress Accessories* book has a number of examples and some discussion of pin-making.

Pins seem to have first been stored in cases, similar to needle cases. In 1409, for instance, Marie of Sully records in her inventory a silver pincase with religious motifs. But pincushions definitely appear by



the 16th century and perhaps earlier.

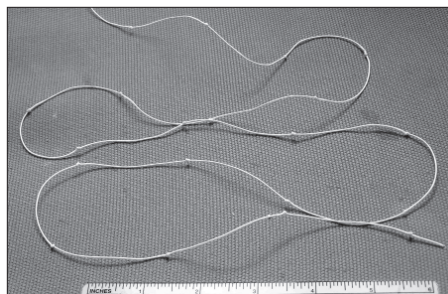
I haven't been able to find much information on pincushion shapes and materials. The pincushions you hear the most about are the highly decorative embroidered sweet bags. These aren't very practical with all that metal thread! Our guild's old "Strawberry pincushion" kit (shown in Michaela's basket) is patterned after the size and shape of these decorative pincushions, but is worked in plain wool on canvas.

OTHER TOOLS

Thimbles are relatively boring for our purpose because they don't seem to have changed much over the centuries. Michaela's basket has an ordinary plain brass thimble, which looks remarkably like the Museum of London's medieval examples, although the medieval ones tend to be shorter and to have domed rather than flat tops. Leather thimbles were also used, probably before metal ones came into fashion.

A lump of **beeswax** is standard equipment for plain sewing, though not as useful for embroidery, since you wouldn't want to wax silk embroidery thread. It's also not very practical to carry around in our area's hot weather, since it melts easily. I've known at least one friend's project come to grief because beeswax melted all over it.

Magnifiers are helpful for those of us over 40 — I, for one, can no longer do most needlework without some sort of magnification. Michaela commissioned the magnifying glass you see in the pictures from a metalsmith at Renaissance Faire, giving him period illustrations to work from, and she's pleased with the result.



One of Michaela's more ingenious items is the sort of **measuring-string** that existed before tape measures — which, at least in England according to Janet Arnold, are a post-1600 invention. Michaela has taken a length of stout linen thread (which doesn't stretch) and tied knots every "nail" (an old measuring unit of 2¹/₄ inches, ¹/₁₆ of a yard) for a total length of one ell (45 inches). Both ells and nails were common measuring units, especially for cloth.

THREAD STORAGE

Finding out how medieval embroiderers stored their thread has been a bit of a challenge. It's clear that we don't find modern-

type spools in a medieval context — what we think of as "spool shaped." Thread was sold in skeins and had to be wound into some other form to be practical for use.

One possibility, especially for ordinary sewing thread, is that it was simply wound into small balls, as we see in Mrs. Grundelius's portrait. These would have to be kept in some sort of container (and away from cats!) to prevent unwinding and tangling.

Another possibility is that thread, especially fragile silks, was wound from skeins onto the flat objects known as thread winders (illustrated below). We know they were used in the centuries after 1600, and they seem perfectly plausible for the Renaissance as well, although I'm not aware of any surviving examples. Thread winders don't hold a lot of thread and would be better suited for expensive thread bought in small quantities.



Simpler possibilities include winding thread around a plain stick, and there's an example of one from the Museum of London that has a protruding "stop" carved at one end, the predecessor of the flared ends of modern spools. Thread could also have been wound around a plain flat rectangular piece of card or thin wood, and insofar as I can decipher the details in paintings and engravings, that seems to be what we see most often depicted.

From this discussion, although it's a very quick overview, you can see that it's possible to put together a period sewing kit that's also quite practical to use. A little "creative shopping" may be required, but it doesn't have to be expensive either. I, for one, plan to enjoy mine. —



Knives have sheaths, scissors have cases or point protectors, and needles and pins need something that keeps them together, rust-free and safe from accidental stabs. Professional seamstresses may have a “non-aggression pact” with their pins and happily walk around barefoot on a pin-strewn floor, but most of us are not so lucky!

A needlebook is a little period item that’s quite easy to make. Michaela’s is a 16th-century type which can be hung from a belt, with “pages” of fulled wool, a cover, and an outer case closed at one end. A length of ribbon is attached to the spine of the “book” and threaded through a hole in the closed end of the case, so that the book can be slid into the case by pulling on the ribbon, holding it securely shut. A tab or loop on the other end of the book makes it easy to pull the book out of the case and open it to take out and put away needles.

Michaela’s book is about two by three inches. To make one like it, wash some thin wool fabric to slightly felt it, and when it’s dry, cut four or five strips as wide as the book and twice as long (2 by 6 inches if you’re copying this example). Make a cover from a scrap of pretty fabric (Michaela’s is velveteen) and a scrap of lining the same size, with a piece of thin cardboard inside for stiffening.

(By the way, while people in the Middle Ages and Renaissance certainly didn’t mass-produce cardboard or use it in the quantities we do now, it’s quite easy to make for yourself by gluing several layers of paper together, and we do have evidence this was done.)

When the cover is stitched together all the way around and the pages are cut, lay them together, mark a line in the center for a “spine,” and stitch together through all layers with strong thread.

For the case, you’ll want two more rectangles of outer cloth a little larger all around than your needlebook — exactly how much larger depends on how thick your book is, but 1/4 to 1/2 inch larger all around should be enough. Michaela’s are velveteen in her persona’s household colors. You also need a piece of lining for each, and more cardboard for stiffening; the case shouldn’t be completely rigid or it will grip the book too tightly, but stiffening helps the sides lie flat and look nice.

For this project, it’s best to make each side of the case and line it separately. Then stitch the two parts together along both long sides, and also across one end, leaving an open slit in the middle for the ribbon.

Sew a piece of ribbon to the spine of your book, and thread it through this gap in the cover. Add a small loop or ribbon “pull” to the open end of the book cover, and your needlebook is done!

WEST KINGDOM NEEDLEBOOK COVER PATTERN

While a needlebook really only needs a scrap of pretty fabric for the outside of the case, it’s a small enough project that a canvaswork cover can be finished in reasonable time. In fact, it’s small enough to make a good trial piece for working on really small-scale canvas, rather than the 8 or 10



stitches per inch many of us are used to. I have only just started mine, but here’s the pattern I’m using for the front. This makes a cover about 2 x 3 1/2 inches on 18-to-the-inch needlepoint canvas. One strand of Paternayan-type two-ply needlepoint yarn covers this canvas nicely, as long as you don’t pull the stitches too tight but allow them to “fluff” a little.

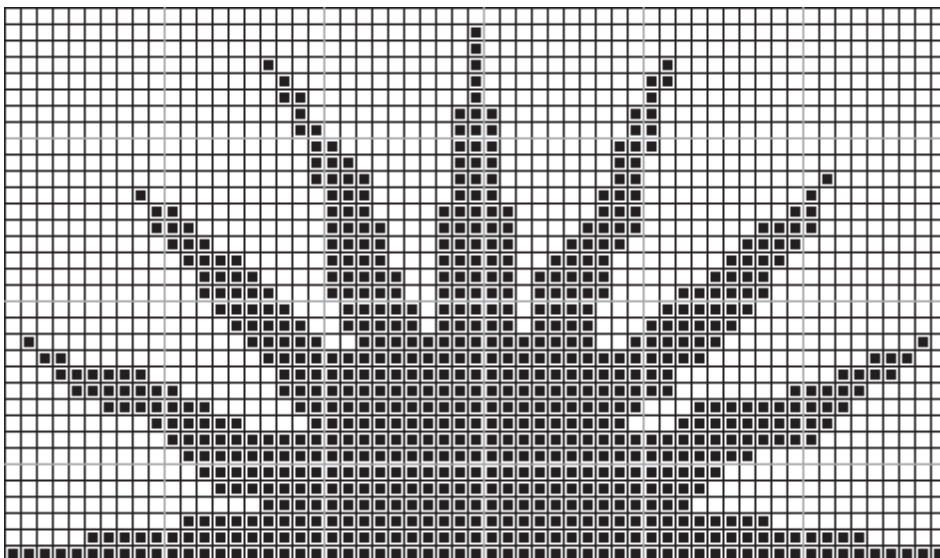
A canvaswork front can be combined with a canvaswork back if you’re ambitious (mine will have my arms on it) or just a back of plain fabric. I’ll be sure to post photos of mine when it’s finished.

A WORD ON PINCUSHIONS

Pincushions are not at all hard to make. I’ve made all my own for years, and they’re wonderful for using bits of exotic fabric that are too small to make much else out of. The only practical restriction is that if the pincushion is actually going to be useful rather than decorative, you can’t use any fabric that the pins will catch in or have difficulty penetrating. Mine tend to be denim, velveteen or upholstery fabric.

Most of the ones I make are square or circular, with a fabric top, a cardboard-stiffened base the same size and shape, and a long strip of fabric to make the sides. Usually I use a strip that will finish 1 inch high after seams, to keep the pincushion from being so deep that needles get lost in it. Close hand stitching with sturdy thread is actually easier than machine stitching for this project.

Wool fleece makes a good traditional stuffing, and a pencil or knitting needle is a good tool to pack it in firmly. You can also use bran, or sawdust which you can get for free at a lumber yard (and which I sift before using). I learned to prefer sawdust after carpet beetles ate holes in my cushion stuffed with bran! —



An Ansteorran Rose

— by *Giuliana di Benedetto Falconieri*

One of the most common complaints I hear about beaded embroidery is that the common $1\frac{1}{2}$ glass beads used cannot be “period.” But even smaller beads are shown in Janet Arnold’s **Patterns of Fashion: The cut and construction of clothes for men and women c1560-1620** — beads 0.8mm ($\frac{1}{32}$ of an inch) wide, which translates to a size $2\frac{4}{5}$, about the size of a large grain of sand! Pictures of gold and glass beads in historical beaded embroidery can also be seen on the Medieval Beadwork Page, <www.medievalbeads.com/>.

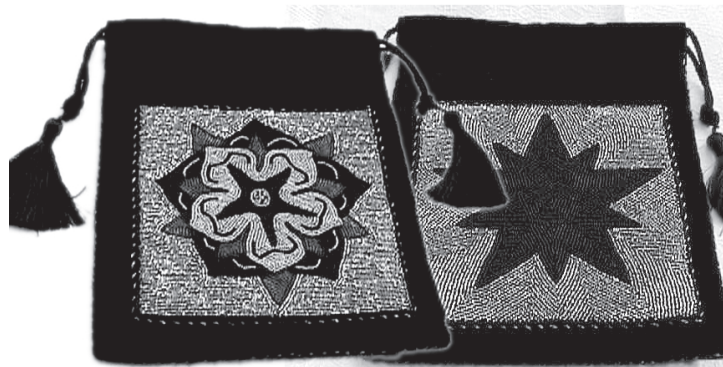
The beads on my embroidery are all glass. I usually stitch with 22K gold charlotte beads. Charlottes are a very pretty bead that is flat on one side, and they add a bit of sparkle to the design, but I can’t find any reference to charlottes in period, so I used gold-colored round glass seed beads.

I used both modern and medieval methods of beaded embroidery. The flower and the star are done in the modern method, the backgrounds in the medieval method. The modern method (also known as Athabaskan) consists of laying down six beads, couching them down, and then backstitching through three of the beads before adding more. The period technique consists of laying down a strand of beads and couching them in place. The medieval technique is quicker, but the modern technique is more secure. The end results look identical on the front of the work.

The rose and rose background are done completely in $1\frac{1}{2}$ beads. At 49 square inches, there are an estimated 11,760 beads on the front. I used gold beads, black beads, and two shades of green for the flower.

The background is done in silver-lined amber-colored beads. A lot of people think silver-lined beads aren’t period, but they were used in Italy during the later period of the Renaissance. **Arts & Crafts in Venice** by Doretta Davanzo Poli describes glass beads “filled with a special gold and silver paste.” There was also an especially prized type of glass bead called “avventurina,” a cinnamon colored or amber glass incorporating thousands of glittering specks which looked like gold. I thought these silver-lined beads might give a similar effect.

I used three shades of beads on the back of the bag: the darkest near the star. Getting the straight lines for the star was a bit difficult to do from only a chalk drawing, so I took a printed design, and stitched it to my fabric. Once that was done, I simply stitched over the outline of the star, and



Front and back of the bag; below, a detail of the beadwork. Color photos of this and other pouches can be seen at www.bayrose.org/wkneedle/Qpouches.html

then ripped the paper away. The lines on the star were completely straight. Stitching onto paper in this manner is similar to several pieces of Medieval German beadwork, which were sewn with linen thread onto animal hide parchment.

Once completed, I appliquéd the beaded panels onto black cotton velvet. I outlined the appliqués with black and gold twisted cord and ended with a trimming of black bugle beads. My lining was yellow linen. I did a drawstring at the top, and put tassels on the drawstring. From start to finish, I put in over 500 hours worth of work. —



From time to time we feature a particularly spectacular piece of needlework by a Guild member here for everyone to admire. Nominations are welcome. Pictures, please!

POINTERS

Needlework tools

(These are only a few of the many possible sources; no endorsement is implied.)

The Spanish Peacock has thread winders, needle cases, and bone needles:
www.spanishpeacock.com/

Nice pewter needle cases are available from Pewter Replicas, and also from Billy and Charlie:
www.pewterreplicas.co.uk/billyandcharlie.com/misc.html

Fettered Cock Pewters has nice inexpensive period thimbles from England, snips, bone awl. Note that “stork” scissors were invented in the 19th century and are not medieval.
www.fetteredcockpewters.com/page_sewing.htm

Historic Enterprises and Wooded Hamlet both have nice brass pins. At \$1 each you probably want to use them for decoration, not for sewing!
www.historicenterprises.com/
www.woodedhamlet.com/

Bibliography

Margaret Abegg, **Apropos patterns for embroidery, lace and woven textiles**. Abegg-Stiftung Bern, 1978; ISBN #3-727-29005-6

Geoff Egan, **Dress Accessories: Medieval Finds from Excavations in London**. 1996, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, Museum of London; ISBN #0-112-90444-0 (reprinted by Boydell)

Geoff Egan, **The Medieval Household: Daily Living c.1150-c.1450 (Medieval Finds from Excavations in London)**. 2004, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, Museum of London; ISBN #0-112-90490-4

Gertrude Whiting, **Old-Time Tools and Toys of Needlework**. 1928, reprinted 1973 by Dover Publications; Dover ISBN #0-486-22517-8 (*See the article on p.3 for comments on this book.*) —

Greetings, dear needleworkers! I'd like to take a moment and publicly thank everyone who has graciously volunteered to create a needlecase for the 2006 Pennsic queens' needlecase project. Your time and effort are very much appreciated and will make our kingdom shine!

Aethelmaerc Alexandra Sinclair
 An Tir Katherine McGuire
 Ansteorra Vigdis Vestfirzka
 Artemesia Gwenyth of Mousehold Heath
 Atenveldt Madelena Hidalgo de Valencia
 Atlantia Sorcha Fhionn inghean ui Ruairc

Caid Catherine Lorraine of Stonegate Manor
 Calontir Felicia Margerye Amondesham
 Drachenwald ... Rhiannon MacLennan
 Ealdormere Brid Hecgwiht
 East Katherine de Langelei
 Glen Abhann ... Caiterina nic Sheamus
 Lochac Morgana yr Oerfa
 Meridies Evaine ni MacGreger
 Middle Francesca von Hesse
 Northshield Chiara la Trombottiera
 Outlands Ellen of the Western Wind
 Trimaris Adriana Tacita
 West Margery Garret

Although the deadline for this project is June Crown of 2006, I enthusiastically encourage all volunteers to complete their needlecase as soon as possible, so that we may proudly display pictures of them on our website. Thanks also to Mistress Isela who is coordinating this project; she has always done and continues to do an exemplary job of organization. Thank you all, once again, for pitching in with our project!

Yours in service,

Nelia Apollonia

INTERVIEWS • THROUGH THE NEEDLE'S EYE • & MUSINGS

Question: What's your favorite needlework tool and why?

My favorite is the little pair of thread snips I picked up a long time ago at some merchant or other. I use them on my weaving and spinning too. A friend made a little leather sheath to go over the blades so I don't cut myself while rummaging in my basket to find them, or when I wear them on a cord suspended from my belt. The sheath holds the blades closed, and the spring in the snips holds the sheath on.

— *Edwinna of Hawk's Bluff, formerly of Ravenshore (West), now Dreiburgen (Caid).*

As a quilter, both mundanely and in the society, my favorite tool is a small pair of pliers that I "borrowed" from my lord's toolbox. The pliers are a great needle puller for those times I manage to get the needle stuck in a seam, take too many stitches, or my hands are just plain tired. I don't suppose this is really a period tool, but no doubt, they had something similar for the same useage and same reasons.

— *Ellspeth Nadel*

My favorite Needlework tools are Ziplock Brand 2 gallon freezer bags. I wouldn't be caught without them! As unperiod as these are they are sturdy, big enough to carry any of my projects in, can hold my working reference documentation, and all the materials I need. I always carry embroidery to events and it is important to me to be able to keep my projects clean and together through all of the travels and these fit the bill to a T. One bag usually lasts the entire working life of a project and then I use a

fresh one for the next project. Every time I go to the store I pick up a box or two so that I will never run out.

— *Martelle Von Charlottenburg, Bright Hills (Atlantia)*

My favorite needlework tool, at the moment, is a hand-made needle. It has a round eye, and I've been doing a lot of metal thread embroidery of late (sweet bags, anyone?). The round eye almost threads itself. The metal threads are hard to thread through a slit-eyed needle, because they do not want to flatten.

— *Eowyn Amberdrake, Lyondemere (Caid)*

I LOVE my nimble thimble, soft leather metal on the pad and open at the top so my nail can peek through. I also have an ivory soap box with implements (needle case-bodkin-scissors-awl) with silver mark circa 1848. Nowadays I am a little paranoid to take it with me to use, for fear it might be the peice I leave behind...

— *Arianwen ferch Arthur*

My favorite doo-hickey of the moment is a leather thimble I made myself. I love the leather quilting thimbles you can buy, but they don't look at all period, and I hate to use them at an event, so I took a leather scrap and made one to fit my finger- it works great!

— *Richenda Elizabeth Coffin (Caid)*

I have a favorite needle case. Catherine Loraine made it for me years ago. The outside is made with Aida cloth and the inside is made of a scrap from a tunic she made for herself. The closing has a bead attached. It is very sentimental to me and I use it every day.

— *Elizabeth of the Blue Rose (West)*

My favorite, and most useful, tool in my needlework & sewing basket is my collection of thimbles. The two most used thimbles are a modern silver quilting thimble, which is useful for more than quilting, and a worn leather thimble that had been my mother's. The leather thimble is the sentimental favorite since my mother was responsible for encouraging my lifelong love of sewing and embroidery.

— *Elsbeth the Semstress of Dunkeld (formerly West, now Middle)*

My favorite needlework tool has come to be because I am notorious for breaking needle threaders. The little wire ones, the hookish ones, the big round loop ones — I can demolish them all in record time. And what I don't break, I lose. Pronto. So my favorite needlework "tool" is to use a loop of finer thread as a threader. I can pull a heavy yarn or thread through a smallish eye using a loop of fine thread, or even pierce the end of the thick thread with the finer one and then "drag" it through the eye.

I've also learned that a needle's eye has a "right side" and a "wrong side" for threading, depending on from which side the punch was driven to make the eye. I can thread a much more recalcitrant thread going the same direction as the eye was punched than fighting the microscopic ridges the punch has formed on the other side.

— *Caiterina nic Sheamus (West)*

I'm going to echo the recommendation of 2 gallon ziplock bags: they're wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. Second favorite tool, a tailor's awl: the sharp point and very smooth steel come in handy at the oddest times. If I'm working eyelets it's a necessity. It's also good for picking out stitches and

(continued next page)

(NEEDLE'S EYE, continued from p.7)

for widening holes when I'm working with wool yarn.

— Robert of Stonemarche (East)

My baroness pointed me to a wonderful little device that is a clip-on, battery powered (4 AA), light with an optional magnifier and AC power. If you have a table, it will sit on that. I sometimes set it in my lap to magnify and illuminate my work if the item is too small to clip onto. This wonderful tool is called the Mighty Bright. It comes in several lovely bright colors. I got mine from Nordic Needle, but I am told folks have found it at Borders as a book light. Now if I could find something short of surgery to fix the arthritis in my thumbs, I'd be a happy embroiderer.

— Ysolt la Bretonne, Windmasters' Hill (Atlantia)

My needlebook is one of the first things, besides my costume, I made for myself about 20 years ago when I first joined the SCA. It is sometimes the only thing (aside from a tiny wooden box containing 6 small spools of thread) that I take with me to events and such. It has one "thick" leaf in the middle that was originally two leaves of black felt that I sewed together. On the top and bottom of the "thick" leaf I insert straight pins so that only the heads are visible. The shanks of the pins are between the two layers of felt so the tips don't stick out to prick my fingertips. I also include various sizes and types of needles, a few safety pins, a small pair of golden stork scissors and a needle threader. The book ties together with ribbons that are secured to the center outside edge.

— Eormenthryth the northerne, Wyewood (An Tir)

Over the years I've managed to collect a bunch of cheap fabric-covered hard-shell eyeglass cases that you get with new glasses. They make an excellent case for those crucial little emergency sewing kit items. The two open wells intended for the lenses will fit the bulky-ish items — scissors, seam ripper, magnifying glass (no, I never need this, really!) — and you can slide pins and needles into the fabric sides of the case. They close with velcro, pretty securely. Since they have the hard shell, it's harder to stab yourself than when using a cloth pouch. As for my **least** favorite, I have a love-hate relationship with my beautiful wooden lucet — but that's because during the time span between lucetting binges, I keep forgetting how to do it. And I have never found a good diagram for lucetting, except for the ones written in an archaic form of Klingon, which I do not read fluently. Darn it. (I LOVED this question, could you tell?)

— Baroness Lina St Albans (Atlantia)

I like those metal binder rings in diameters bigger than 2" for unused floss. I just slide one of the loops over the ring, and by spinning the ring, I can open the ring at which-ever color I need without having to take all of the others off too. I can keep a whole color family on a ring and it's all completely visible, as opposed to being in a bag where the color may look different. The best part, for me, is that I can hang the rings from hooks or clip hangers in my closet, thus freeing up shelf, drawer, etc. space for other craft supplies. — Bianca di Bari (Atlantia)

My favorite has to be the weaver's scissors my daughter gifted me. They are incredibly sharp with wonderful points, but are not as slender as most embroidery scissors. I have found them as useful as embroidery scissors and for other needleart tasks as well. The only thing I don't use them on is metal threads. They are definitely a permanent part of my basket.

— Elyn de Haoucmore, Dreiburgen (Caid)

I have a very old 6-inch plastic-and-metal

hoop, at least 20 years old, which I am very fond of. The original designs of this kind of hoop hold much tighter than the current versions, and I will be very unhappy if it gets out of my possession. Not period, but I've never been able to get a wooden hoop to hold as taut. But I do have a **least** favorite, or at least least-used tool. I can't use thimbles. Every time I put a thimble on a finger, I end up not using that finger, but holding it out like it's injured.


— Morgana yr Oerfa (Caid)

THANK YOU

to everyone who has responded!

NEXT TIME:

What was your first piece of needlework? Do you still have it?

E-mail your answer to **WKneedleowner@yahoo.com** by December 1st. Please sign your full SCA name and Kingdom. Responses may be edited. 

C R E D I T S & C O N T A C T S

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

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- WK Needleworkers Guild Website http://www.bayrose.org/wkneedle/
- WKneedle Mailing List http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WKneedle/

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