

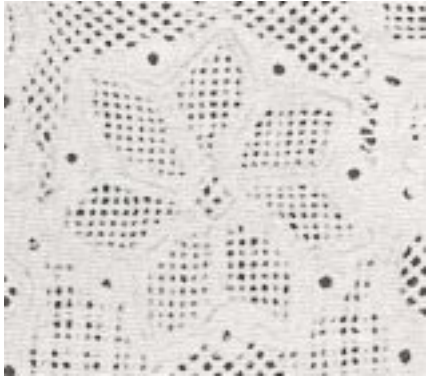
Pulled Work: a Whitework Needle Lace Technique

Class for West Kingdom Needlworkers

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by Sabrina de la Bere

The following project is designed as a sampler of stitches that have been found in whitework before 1600. The outline of the design is taken from the example below of a 16th C. English pulled work coif and apron. Historically, multiple stitches might be used in a piece, but within a single design, it would not be a “sampler” of stitches..



Whitework is a modern term that refers to embroidery on white linen (or cotton) and worked with a white thread (linen, cotton, silk). There are many forms of whitework, but the form we are

concentrating on here is pulled work. Pulled work and drawn work (where a thread is withdrawn) are the predecessors to

needle lace as it evolves in the 16th century.

Pulled work is the distortion of the warp and weft threads to form patterns. The threads are literally pulled out of alignment, bound into groups, and otherwise added to create patterns. Pulled work was also used to create a background for other embroidery. Both the use of pulled work as the pattern maker and as background are illustrated on the piece below.

The examples of whitework that have survived from the 12th, 13th, and 14th C are all church linens. Most show what we call surface embroidery stitches and some drawn work. One such example is the Opus Tunicum (“German Whitework”) that heralds from Lower Saxony in the 13th C.

In the late 15th C whitework, in various forms, is found on shirts and chemises. A number of European portraits have bits of whitework showing around the edges of necklines and cuffs. It really comes into wide spread use for personal linens in the 16th C. Europe.



As shown on the next page, we also have 15th C. Mamluk examples of pulled work as decoration on linens. The major difference is that their work was not “whitework”. In our example on the next page, the pulled work was done with yellow silk thread.

“A very early example of English Pulled work (16th century.” Piece from the Cooper-hewitt Museum, New York.

see also detail of star from original piece above

pg 14 A Pageant of Pattern for Needlepoint Canvas, by Sherlee Lantz/with diagrams by Maggie Lane. Published by Andre Deutsch. Copyright 1974. ISBN 0-233-96548-3.



“Mamluk Period: 1480±40 Linen embroidered with blue, brown and yellow silk in darning, double running, satin and pulled thread (wrapin stitch in diagonal rows) ... thread count 25/24”

pg 84 Embroideries and Samplers from Islamic Egypt, by Marianne Ellis. Published by Ashmolean Museum Oxford 2001.

Pulled Work Techniques and Hints

When doing pulled work you need to remain conscience of 3 main things:

(1) Tension is the key to making the embroidery look right. The amount of tension or pull you apply will affect the overall look of the area being worked. The tighter the tension/harder the pull, the more lacy the piece will look. Above all keep your tension even.

The starting end of your thread must be securely fastened. Thus begin your thread by fastening it in the outline whenever possible and end your thread by running it under the outline. If you need to start within a pattern, be sure to run your thread under in the OPPOSITE direction to the one you are traveling.

Since the objective is to pull evenly and firmly to produce neat holes, the direction of the pull needs to be considered. In addition, some more advanced patterns require the pulled threads to be placed up, down or to one side, rather than the middle of the area.

The general rule of thumb on pulling stitches, it to never pull on the first leg. Use the second and subsequent legs to set each prior leg by pulling in the direction opposite the line of travel on the first part of the next stitch.. Thus, if you have set the first stitch (1-2), on the next up (3) you will pull. If your stitch is to the right, you will pull to the left.

(2) Correct thread and correct fabric makes the look work. The looser the fabric weave, the more lacy the overall look. For the project we have chosen Zweigart Dublin Linen - count 25 as it has all the necessary characteristics, loose weave, even weave, well loomed (it will handle being pulled). The thread is #8 cotton perle. The rule of thumb is that the thread should be the same weight as the thread of the fabric. You also need to choose a thread that will withstand the serious pulling and will slip until the optimum tension is reached and then hold. Perle cotton meets these needs well. If you like a more lacy look, #12 perle cotton could be used. Historically, linen, cotton and silk threads

were used.

(3) Stitch choice for value or density also plays a major part when working a design. When doing a sampler, the placement of the patterns is less important. The heavier filling stitches should be placed closer to the bottom. Also, in order to give greater definition to the work, similar stitches should not be placed side by side in the pattern.

Outlining:

There are competing opinions on whether to outline the piece first or last. If you do the outline first you have a better anchor for your threads and you will have a harder time with compensating stitches. If you outline after, it can even up the edging lines. Historically it appears they did it both ways.

The Project: Making Your Own Pulled Work Star Work the project in the following order --

1. Draw the star on the linen. You can use a blue marker, light pencil, or running stitch transfer method.
2. Place linen in a working frame such as a hoop. Be sure to get the frame on tight and get the tension “as tight as a drum”. You will need to redo the tension as you work the piece. Remember that without the proper tension you will not achieve the right effect.
3. Outline the 7 pointed star with back stitch. My preference is backstitch as it creates a nice front and gives a firm outline to base beginning and ending stitches.
4. Work the center of the star in satin stitch over 4, creating stripes vertically.
5. Choose the patterns and work the 7 points of the star.
6. Work the Diamond Eyelet in each outer corner of the star leaving 1 unworked thread from the outline.
7. Work over the outline with chain stitch, satin stitch, or other finishing stitch. If doing satin stitch cover 2 threads - the outline thread and the next thread to the outside of the star. Be sure to edge the eyelets as well.
8. Have Fun and make it your piece.

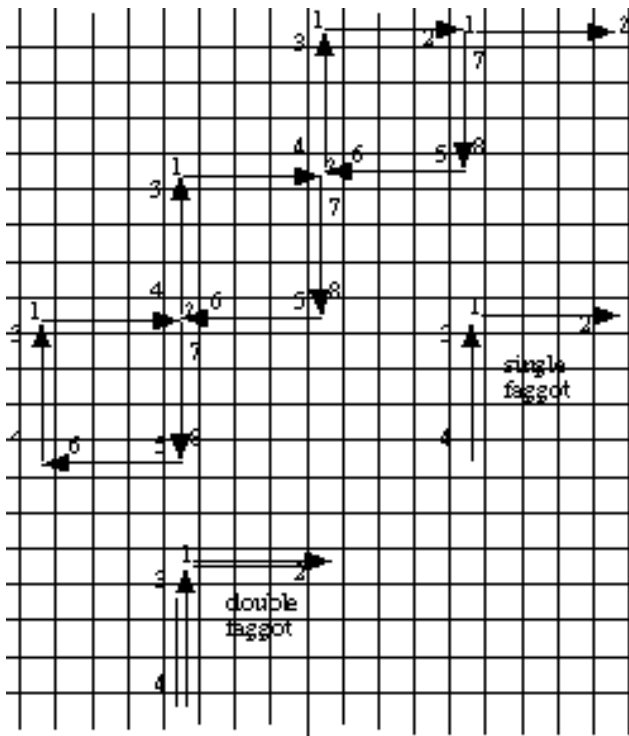
Stitch Diagrams and Working Hints

Single and Double Faggoting:

You will be working single and/or double faggot over 4 threads. The word faggot (or fagot) means to bundle. In this case, instead of wood, we are bundling threads. The Mamluk piece was done with faggoting in yellow silk. Faggoting was also used as a fill pattern in voided work.

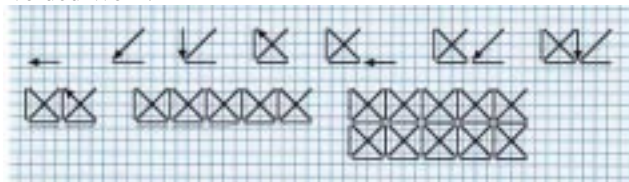
The pattern is worked diagonally, first step down the diagonal and then step up the diagonal. Repeats as often as needed. Single faggoting is worked in two steps - 1-2 and then 3-4. Double faggoting is worked in 4 steps, 1-2 then repeat 1-2, 3-4 then repeat 3-4. You will need to do compensating stitches to "square off" rows. You can determine the direction of the compensating stitch by the rule of thumb - no two abutting or parallel stitches in a line are worked in the same direction.

To give a more dense version, do double faggoting over 2 stitches.



Two Sided Italian Cross Stitch:

Work this over 2 threads or over 4 threads. Pull each leg tightly. Historically this was also used as a fill pattern on Voided Work.



Greek Cross Stitch:

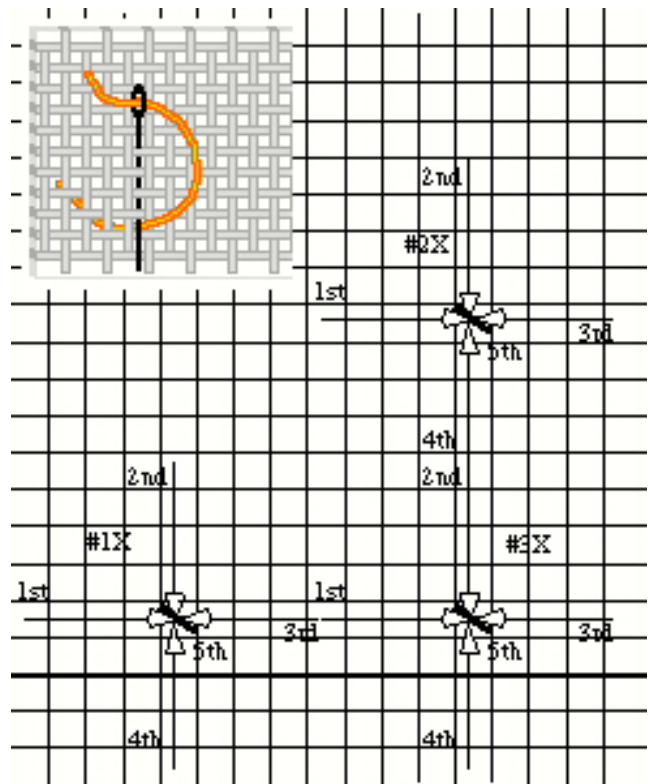
Each part of the cross is over 4 threads. Thus the stitch is 8 x 8 threads. You can do the crosses randomly or in a pattern. Some patterns align the horizontal legs, some align the vertical legs, some offset the legs.

Step 1 - do a buttonhole stitch - over 4 ending in the center of the cross. Begin with the left leg of the cross.

Step 2, 3, 4 - do 3 buttonhole stitches - over 4 ending in the center of the cross. Work clockwise around the cross.

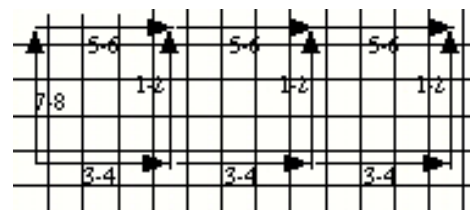
Step 5 - do a tacking stitch from lower right to upper left, over the center, but within the center square or over the center square.

Order of working crosses - work on the diagonal.



Four Sided Stitch:

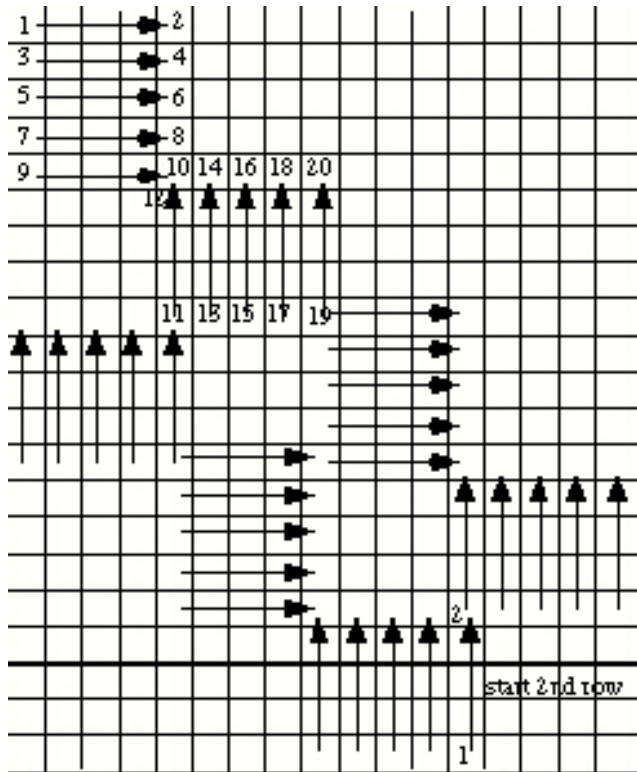
This stitch is similar to the faggot stitch, but is worked in rows from left to right. It is usually over 2 threads when used as a filling stitch. It works equally well over 4 threads. For the first stitch you will work all four sides. On subsequent stitches you will only work the first 3 legs so as to not repeat a leg. Pull tightly. In the 17th C, on samplers, it was frequently used



as a dividing row between patterns. It is also excellent for hem stitching.

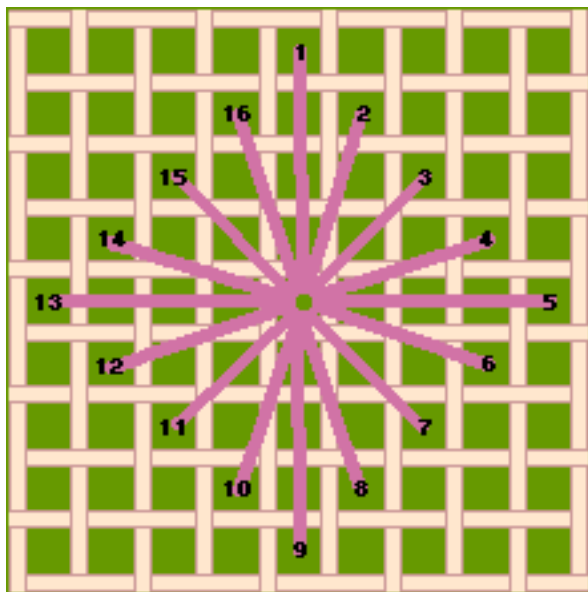
Step Stitch Filling:

Each leg is over 4 threads. Similar to working Hardanger, work all stitches in a bundle before moving to the next. You are working 5 stitches over 4 rows of threads in each bundle. Begin in the upper left corner and step down to the right. To return, begin bottom right and step up to the left..



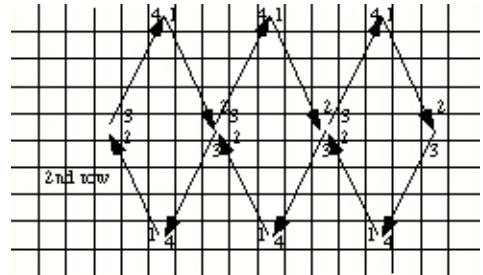
Diamond Eyelet:

This can be used in a line of stitching, singly, or randomly. It covers 8 threads by 8 threads. You always work into the center hole. Pull tightly and evenly to get a round hole. You can resize this by working over 12 threads or any even number of threads.



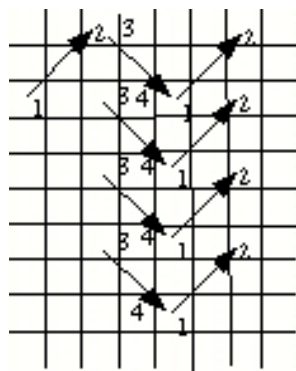
Wave

Filling: Each leg is 4 threads high and 2 threads wide. Work the first row left to right and the next row, right to left.



Vertical Back Stitch Filling:

Each leg is over 2 threads. Work this stitch vertically, doing all the 1-2 on the way down and then all the 3-4 on the way back up.



Bibliography and Additional Sources:

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Selected Charts by :

- SewExiting.com -- 2 sided Italian XS
 - Johanna Cormier www.designwest.com/Johanna/webstitch/
 - Diamond Eyelet
 - CFitzgerald, www.homepage.mac.com/cfitzgerald/Needle/
 - Buttonhole stitch
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