

# **Worshipful Company of Broiderers of Lochac**

## **Information Handout 2 - Spring Coronet 1998**

### **From the Guildmaster of the Worshipful Company of Broiderers**

To the needleworkers and embroiderers of Lochac does Mistress Bess Haddon send greetings, and bids you welcome to the Worshipful Company of Broiderers.

For those who don't know me, I have been in the SCA in Lochac for some twelve years and was awarded a Laurel for embroidery at Rowany Festival AS 28. Until three years ago I lived in Rowany but now live in Politarchopolis, where I moved to start a Master of Philosophy degree on the depiction of the Tristan and Iseult legend in medieval narrative embroidery.

At the moment I am guildmaster in name only since the patron of the Company, Her Excellency Viscountess Keridwen the Mouse is doing all the work while I struggle to finish my thesis. However, I hope to be more active soon, and plan to organise some classes and other activities for the guild. I am also itching to actually do some embroidery again, rather than just read about it.

The Worshipful Company of Broiderers is, as many of you will be aware, the resurrection of the former Needleworkers' Guild of Lochac. In taking on this task I hoped to make the guild reflect the structure and concerns of a real medieval guild, and to expand the emphasis from simply encouraging members to do embroidery to also encouraging research into embroidery and into the medieval people who did it, both as professionals and amateurs. As a result, Viscountess Keridwen and I have spent some time revising the Company's charter to better reflect the sorts of needlework which was done in the middle ages and renaissance. We also acknowledge that there is a lot we don't know, so there is provision to add to and change the categories as more research is done.

The charter needs to be approved by the members of the Company, so we will have a meeting at Twelfth Night to discuss it. If you can't be at the event, please send your views by e-mail or post to me or Keridwen and we will make sure they are represented. (I would ask that you don't phone me as I really don't have time to answer phone calls at the moment.)

We hope to see the newsletter expand for future issues, and so we would really contributions from you all. These need not be huge articles. We would also like to see such things as book reviews, materials reviews (e.g. is there a particular thread you've found useful), snippets of information or just a note on what you're working on. Huge articles are of course welcome too. Please send any contributions to Keridwen at this stage.

One final note, some of you, especially those who know me, are probably wondering why I am using such a blokey title as 'Guildmaster'. The answer is that it's period. According to the research I've done into English and French embroiderer's guilds, they had both male and female masters, that is people who had been judged by the guild to have reached a sufficiently high standard that they were allowed to train apprentices. The term I've found is always 'master', but let me know if you find any evidence to the contrary.

Yours in service,

Bess

### **Report from Midwinter**

By Viscountess Keridwen the Mouse, Patron of the Company of Broiderers

At Midwinter Coronet Investiture at Mordenvale was the first showing for the Company of Broiderers in its new form. A display of needlework was held on the Sunday, to drum up interest in the Company and make the group visible. There were other guild giving displays at the same time. Hopefully it will become traditional for guilds to use the time on the Sunday of Principality events to hold their meetings and competitions.

Unfortunately, due to the short notice of the display, many people were unable to bring items along (also many people admitted to me that they intended to display their work, but forgot). Thanks greatly to Seona Sheachnasaigh and Joanna of the Beechwoods for bringing along display items. They were given small items in appreciation.

Many people took handouts and many signed up for the guild, and many also asked many wonderful questions on needlework, which kept me talking about my favourite obsession all morning. I enjoyed it immensely. Thank you all.

mouse

## **An Idea from the North.**

Part of the purpose of the Company, is to share knowledge and good ideas. Madilayn de Mer from Queensland has sent me a catalogue from a mail order company called Fox. They deal in all sorts of needlework and craft items - threads, hoops, sewing stands etc. To get a copy of this catalogue sent to you, call 1300 361 126. It might be useful if you are having trouble getting needlework supplies locally.

## **Mouse's Guide to Beading**

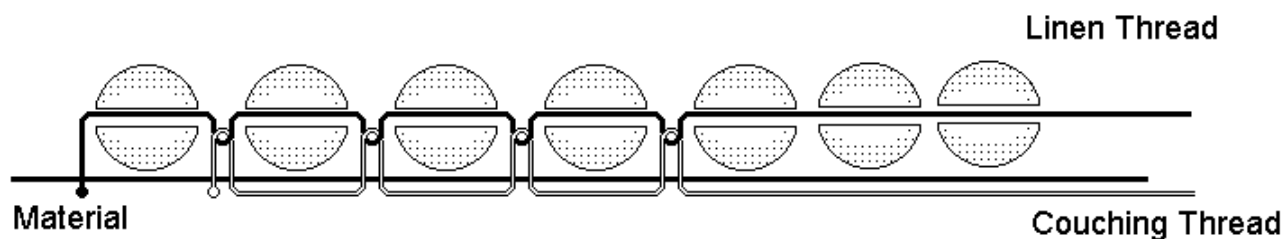
By Keridwen the Mouse (Pictures by Sir Corin Anderson)

Firstly I must say that I have learnt most of what I know by doing, and the rest by discussion with other needleworkers. I've done a good quantity of beadwork, but that doesn't mean to say it is the highest quality. I am always happy to learn new ways of doing things. And I like to teach many different ways of doing things. This way, you get to experiment and discover the best method for you. Also, some methods might be better than others in a certain situation.

Beadwork has got to be one of the easiest ways to decorate cloth with needlework. You don't get to see the final stitching and the beads take up more space on the cloth than any single stitch could. But still so many people avoid beadwork because they aren't sure of how to do it. Well this article should discuss several ways of getting those beads attached to the cloth.

### **Method 1: Couching**

This has to be the quickest method (apart from glue, which won't be discussed further because it's not needlework). Basically you take your beads and thread them onto something strong, like linen thread. You then couch the linen thread onto your garment. (See figure 1).



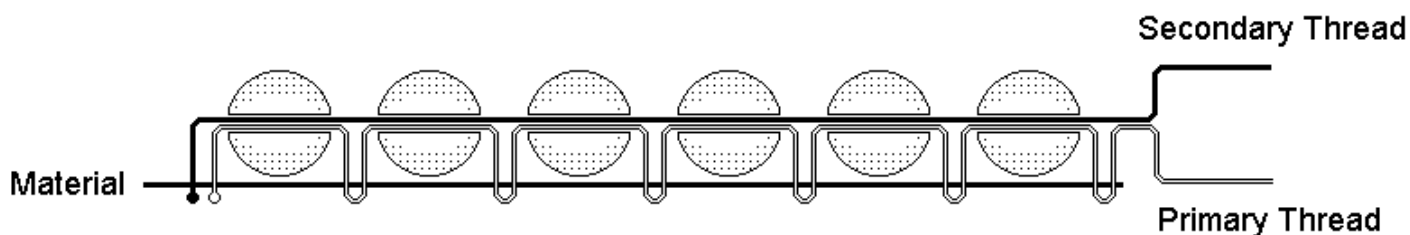
This method is very quick, but isn't very strong and therefore should never be used in areas where beads might get torn off. If the linen thread breaks, then you will lose ALL the beads. I'm sure most people have heard of Mistress Marguerite's lovely dress with pearls on the hem. Of course the hem got stepped on, the linen thread broke, and Mistress Marguerite spent the rest of the evening shedding pearls.

### Method 2: One bead at a time

This is my preferred method and I've used it in all my beading. Basically all you do is bring the thread up, thread a bead onto the needle, and then take the needle back down through the material. Repeat for each bead. You may have the occasional problem when you bring the needle back up through the same hole. Just keep trying until you find a different spot.

Also you need to think about how long your bead is and make your top stitch the same size. Otherwise your beads will crowd into one another. Don't try to make your beads sit exactly side by side, with each bead touching its neighbours. Allow a little space between them and they will sit better.

And now the secret to this method. Once to have sewn a section of beads down, you run a second thread through every bead (just through the beads). This will keep all the beads in line and make them sit straight. If you are doing a long section (ie a hem), I run a thread back through each 20cm and overlap the secondary threads. (See figure 2)

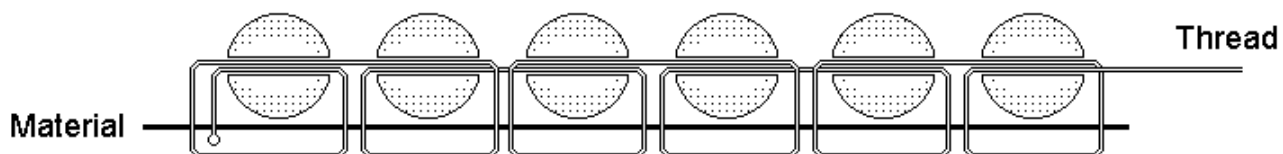


### Method 3: Two beads together

This method uses the same sort of idea as the previous one. However it weaves the beads together as you go, rather than adding the secondary thread later.

This may not be easy to describe in print, so if you still need help, ask someone who knows. Many people need to be shown how to do needlework techniques.

Look at figure 3, and I'll try to talk you through it. Firstly, you bring the needle and thread up through the cloth and thread on a bead. Take the needle down through the material and then back up behind the first bead. Go back through the first bead and then thread on a second bead and sew down. Bring the needle up between beads one and two. Go through bead two, add bead three and go down through the material. Repeat as often as required.



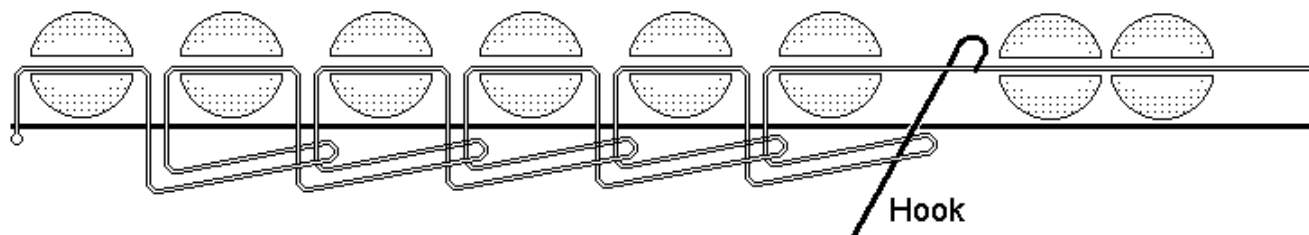
You can make this go faster, I've been told, by threading two beads on each time, and then bringing the needle up between the two new beads. This way only every second bead has two threads running through it. It would seem to me that this would be less secure, but you should try it out and see for yourself.

### Method 4: Tambour - out of period, but still a technique to know.

Tambour work is done with a hook and beadwork done this way ends up looking like chain stitch on the back. The evidence I've read states that tambour work was developed in the 18th Century and therefore probably shouldn't be used if you are entering an A&S competition. However, if you never show someone the back of your work, they will never know how the stitching way done. If you are already familiar with this style of work, then you can probably get away with it to work your beading.

You start with all the beads threaded onto your thread. You then use a special tambour hook (if anyone knows where to get one, let me know - I want to try this method!). You push this hook up through the

material and grab the thread between two beads and pull a loop down through the material. You then take the hook through this loop and up through the material to grab the thread between the second and third beads. Repeat often.



### Needles and Threads

The needle you will use will depend on the holes in your beads. I usually use fine crewel needles for my work and that will do most of the beads I buy. Even so, you will still find the occasional bead that is unusable with holes that are just too damn small. If you are desperate to use that bead, find someone who owns a tiny drill bit and a pin vice. (Available at Dick Smiths or Hobby Co - these things are usually used to drill holes in printed circuit boards).

You can buy specific beading needles but these are ludicrously thin and fine and don't look like they would go through any real thickness of material. I own some but I've never taken them for a test drive.

Which brings me to a warning: In any needlework, you will prick your finger. It happens. However, the finer the needle, the further you can push it in without noticing it. Lots of blood will occur. However, the wound is also small and therefore should heal quickly. Just be warned that you can do more damage to yourself with a beading needle.

The thread should be the colour of the material you are working on. It will show up against the beads, but the beads will be more noticeable than the thread anyway. This might not be the case in all situations, but you can use your common sense to work it out. As with all needlework, practice makes perfect, so it is probably wise to try out a test section of the beaded design before embarking on the large project.

And a final warning- Particularly with method two, once the beads are sewn down, they are really hard to unpick. Unpicking is annoying at the best of times, but this will actually test your strength as well.

I usually use normal sewing cotton for sewing beads, or occasionally I've used DMC embroidery floss to get an exact colour match. And I start and finish the thread with knots! I know for some sewers, this is a shocking practise, but I'll take the stigma. If no one sees the back of your work, then what is wrong with using real knots. Beading is a form of construction sewing and will by nature be lumpy, so a knot in the back doesn't hurt anything.

### What gets beaded

There are lots of things you can bead. I won't try to mention everything, but here are a few that springs to mind - German Renaissance dresses, especially breastbands, anything Byzantine or Holy Roman Empire, almost anything Elizabethan, or nue, pouches. There are many things that were enhanced with the occasional bead. I'll leave it to your own research to find out were exactly to use these techniques and what patterns to use.

I've used many sorts of beads, but whatever sort of bead you use, you can be sure you will use a lot of them. There are many places that sell large ranges of beads. However, these places tend to be more expensive. There are other wholesale places that sell bulk beads, but their range is very limited. I recommend that if you are buying pearl beads, you should seek out a bulk dealer. I'm always tempted by garnet beads and other stones, but I restrain myself, because I know the sorts of numbers I'd need. There are also purl beads (tubes of metal, usually gold) and spirals of gold and silver.

Beads come in various makes, and you should keep this in mind when buying beads. Beads might be glass, plastic or metal. Some beads are painted, so test them to see if the coating will come off easily. Some metal

beads might rust or corrode after washing. Plastic beads probably can't be drycleaned. Actually, heavily decorated items usually can't be washed anyway.

But this is fun. Overall, beading is a tremendous way of getting a good effect quickly. Do it lots. Let me know how you go.

### **Bibliography**

Don, Sarah, (1990) Traditional Embroidered Animals, Sally Milner Publishing, Birchgrove  
Staniland, Kay, (1991) Medieval Craftsmen, Embroiderers, British Museum Press, London.

## **What I Did on my Holidays**

by Mistress Bess Haddon

You're probably wondering why on earth you should be interested in what I did on my holidays. The answer is because I was funded by the Australian National University and the Pasold Research Fund (the people who publish the journal *Textile History*), to go to Europe to look at the embroideries which are the subject of my thesis. So, I got to spend eight weeks back-packing around Europe looking at medieval embroidery and talking to the art historians and conservators who are responsible for it. Needless to say, I had a wonderful time! So, I thought I'd share some of the experiences with you, and I'll follow it up with a collegium at Rowany called 'Bess's Holiday Snaps'.

I had arranged to fly into Vienna because it was a cheapish way of getting there and would allow me to travel by train to Italy and then Germany without going too far out of my way. By serendipity I discovered a few weeks before I left that the Vestments of the Golden Fleece were in Vienna. These are a complete set of embroidered fifteenth century Flemish mass vestments in the Or Nue or shaded gold technique in which gold threads are couched down with coloured silks to form beautifully shaded pictures, and they are pictured in Kay Staniland's book *Medieval Craftsmen: The Embroiderers*. Having discovered this, I had to go and see them. They are housed in the Schatzkammer, the treasury of the Imperial Palace, which is now a museum, and are on public display. They are unbelievably beautiful and unbelievably detailed. Despite having pored over numerous pictures of them in books, I was utterly unprepared for the actuality. They are very much finer than I had realised, using literally millions of tiny silk stitches to create an effect as detailed and subtle as the paintings of the day. I spent more than an hour looking at them, finding it difficult to comprehend the amount of work that had been needed to create them. They must have taken thousands of hours of work by the most highly skilled, professional embroiderers of the day, and in my opinion they are probably the best embroideries in the western world. I felt very, very inadequate.

Also in the Schatzkammer are the coronation robes and other garments of the Holy Roman Emperor. These include an under and over tunic, a cloak, boots and gloves, all very richly worked in gold thread and pearls. The gloves are particularly over the top, so thickly encrusted in pearls that it would have been very difficult for the emperor to move his hands while wearing them. The cloak is the very famous one pictured in Kay Staniland's book and many others, showing a design of camels and lions worked in gold on a red silk ground. It also has Arabic inscriptions on it, showing that it had an eastern source. The over-tunic is covered with rondels of eagles which have been worked on a separate fabric and then cut out and appliqued to the silk of the tunic. All of the coronation clothing was very beautiful and, while not exactly the sort of embroidery you'd want for tourney clothing, could be easily adapted to make special occasion SCA costumes. The light in the Schatzkammer was very dim, for conservation purposes, and I was not allowed to use a tripod (flash photography is particularly bad for textiles and should not be used even if the museum permits it), so my photos are not very good, but I bought numerous postcards and a book which shows some excellent details of the embroidery.

To be continued. Next: Italy and Nurnberg!

## **The Charter**

As you might have remembered from the last handout, we wanted to get the new charter approved by Their Highnesses at Spring Coronet. However, real life and theses conspired against us. There will be a meeting at 12th Night in Dismal Fogs to discuss the charter and get more input before it is finalised. The old and the new proposed charter were printed in the first handout. Please contact Mouse if you would like a copy.

## **Competitions**

Spring Coronet, Innilgard - Decorated shirts or chemises

12th Night, Dismal Fogs - Beadwork on material (I say this to exclude jewellery - we are looking for needlework)

May Coronet

Who knows? Please, send me suggestions for competitions. If your local group is doing a particular style of work then let me know and we can compare your work to the rest of the Principality. So far the competition headings have been very broad. Should we start getting more specific - ie blackwork, slips, split stitch?