

## **Worshipful Company of Broderers of Lochac**

### **Information Handout 6 - November Coronet 1999**

#### **What I did on my Holidays - Part 4**

Back to the continuing saga of my research trip in Europe. For those of you who might be new to this newsletter, the reason I'm telling you about my holiday is because I spent 8 weeks last year researching medieval embroidery as the fieldwork for my Masters' thesis. The trip seems a long time ago now, and the thesis is still not finished, although I am writing up now. So, for the next instalment:

From Nurnberg I travelled by train to Braunschweig in Northern Germany, where I was to stay with a German friend of my supervisor, who was a professor at the university there. He was utterly charming, and took me on a guided tour of the city, much of which had been rebuilt since being badly damaged by allied forces in the second World War. Fortunately for me, this had not affected the embroideries I had come to see.

On my second day in Braunschweig, I went to the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich Museum to see the embroidery known as the Gawain Teppich. This is a fourteenth century wool embroidery, executed in 'Klosterstitch', a laid and couched technique, somewhat similar to the Bayeux Tapestry, except that it covers every inch of the ground fabric. This piece was quite large, about 2m by 3m, but has been cut up at some stage in its life. It is a narrative embroidery showing scenes from the story of Sir Gawain, one of the knights of King Arthur's Round Table. The embroidery is currently in conservation, and I was lucky enough to speak to the conservator about the processes it was undergoing, and to see it in bits. At the time I saw it, it was undergoing a second wash in ionised water, which had lifted a great deal of the dirt off. I was able to see a piece which had not been washed, and the difference was substantial. The conservators had unpicked some restoration work, and in places it was possible to see the original design drawn on the ground fabric. It was quite amazing to see how the original colours had survived after more than six hundred years.

While waiting to meet the conservator, I had about 10 minutes in the main gallery at the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich Museum, which was definitely not enough. I did see one very interesting portrait, though, although I failed to note the artist and title. (I thought that I would have time to come back later, but it wasn't the case.) It was an early 16th century German panel painting, very much in the style of Cranach, featuring a woman wearing a dress with an embroidered breastband. The interesting thing was that the breastband was beaded with pearls to depict a little landsknecht knight and lady! Rather kitsch, but very tempting. The pearls were of different sizes, used to create a 3D effect. I hoped to buy a postcard, but there wasn't one. So if any of you get the chance to go to Braunschweig, please note the details and let me know!

The conservator at the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich Museum directed me to the Landesmuseum in central Braunschweig to see more textiles, and this was an absolute treasure house from an embroiderer's perspective. Situated below the gorgeously painted Rittersaal (knight's hall) of Henry the Lion, Duke of Braunschweig in the 12th century, is a hall full of the most fantastic objects, including a large collection of embroidered vestments and hangings. There is also one of the oldest extant medieval embroideries - the coronation mantle of Otto IV, made for his coronation in 1218. This consists of a semicircular cope of very fine red Byzantine silk, on which is embroidered in counted- thread gold stitches lions, crescents and stars, scattered all over the body of the cope, and down the straight edges, a series of angels and religious figures. The embroidery is impossibly tiny, and very beautiful. It has been identified as English work.

Other embroideries in the Landesmuseum include some more narrative embroideries in the same style as the Gawain one, these depicting the story of Moses, and Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. There was also a huge hanging showing the tree of Jesse and prophets from the Old Testament, executed in woollen applique, with the cut out motifs couched down over gilt strips of vellum. The style of German counted-threads white work, sometimes known as opus teutonicum, was also represented with a lovely piece showing heraldic beasts and knights. There was also quite a line in gruesome crucifix scenes, mostly on vestments, some of them in raised work, and one where the whole body of Christ was depicted in pearls. These textiles have all been photographed and discussed in a book by Leonie von Wilckens called *Die mittelalterlichen Textilien. Katalog der Sammlung*. Braunschweig 1994. This is in German and expensive at 98 Deutschmarks, but in case you just have to have it, you can buy it from the Herzog-Anton-Ulrich museum website at

<http://www.museum-braunschweig.de>. It probably goes without saying that I had to have it, so you're welcome to look at my copy if you're visiting.

From Braunschweig I went to Erfurt in Thuringia in the former East Germany, which I will describe for you next time.

Until then, I hope you find this inspiring, and please take the opportunity to come and talk to me about anything I've mentioned that you might be interested in. I'm only too happy to gabble at length, and I do have photos that I can bring along to events. I am also planning some classes for Rowany Festival on some of the German techniques that I've seen, so please come along and learn them.

Keep stitching,  
Bess

## **Book Review**

By Bartolomeo Agazzi

German Renaissance Patterns for Embroidery: A Facsimile Copy of Nicolas Bassee's New Modelbuch of 1568

Introduction by Kathleen Epstein. 123 pages, 100 plates from period woodcuts.

At first appearance this slim little book belies the wealth of riches it contains for not only the needleworker but for most craftspeople interested in authentic period patterns. When produced in 1568, Bassee suggested in his introduction that it would also be useful for "stone masons, silk embroiderers and net makers" and that they would find it "useful and artistic" a sales pitch which I have to agree with. The size of the book is dictated in part by the size of the plates, which are all reproduced faithfully in the same order and exact size as the original book, which only measured 13cm x 18.5cm. The history of the book is quite interesting, and is covered in Epstein's introduction, along with a commentary on the origins of the plates. Bassee included woodblocks which he had purchased from other authors, and some most likely plagiarised, with at least one design dating back to as early as 1524.

Fortunately the quality of the plates is very good, with pretty much all of them being clear enough to work from directly without re-charting them, although some of the smaller designs could easily be enlarged on a photocopier for ease of working. The plates contain a wide assortment of patterns, with 34 of the 100 plates containing charted designs drawn on a grid, suitable for counted cross stitch, lacis etc. Of the remainder there are designs for counted satin stitch, double running stitch (aka Spanish Stitch, 'blackwork' etc), designs for laid work, and then a variety of other scroll work patterns and even some woodcuts of birds and animals. Each of the 100 plates contains a variety of designs, some narrow bands suitable for cuffs or trims, and some larger repeat designs suitable for furnishings etc. Altogether a most useful resource!

Curious Works Press, Austin, Texas. US\$19.95

Available through Carllein (mka Carol Thomas)

c/- Small Churl Books, 1642 Stafford Rd, Storrs, CT, 06268, USA.

Small Churl Books catalogue on the Web: <http://www.neca.com/~scbooks/>

## **Results from the Midwinter Competition - Couching**

Congratulations to Bartolomeo Aggazi for winning the couching competition in Aneala with his couched Elizabethan doublet. From what I've been told, the standard in the competition was consistently good, so congratulations to everyone who entered. Also we had more entries in this competition than the last one. I hope to see the standard and the enthusiasm continue.

Thank you very much to Mistress Elayne Montjoy, who organised the competition over there and to Mistress Mathilde Adicoat who helped her judge.

We are now half way through the competitions for the yearly championship and one person is clearly out in front. This is partially due to skill, but mostly due to the fact that she was the only person to enter both

competitions. So I encourage people to have a go and put something into competition even if you don't think you'll win. You don't have to win any of the competitions to win the championship. The more competitions you go in, the better your chances.

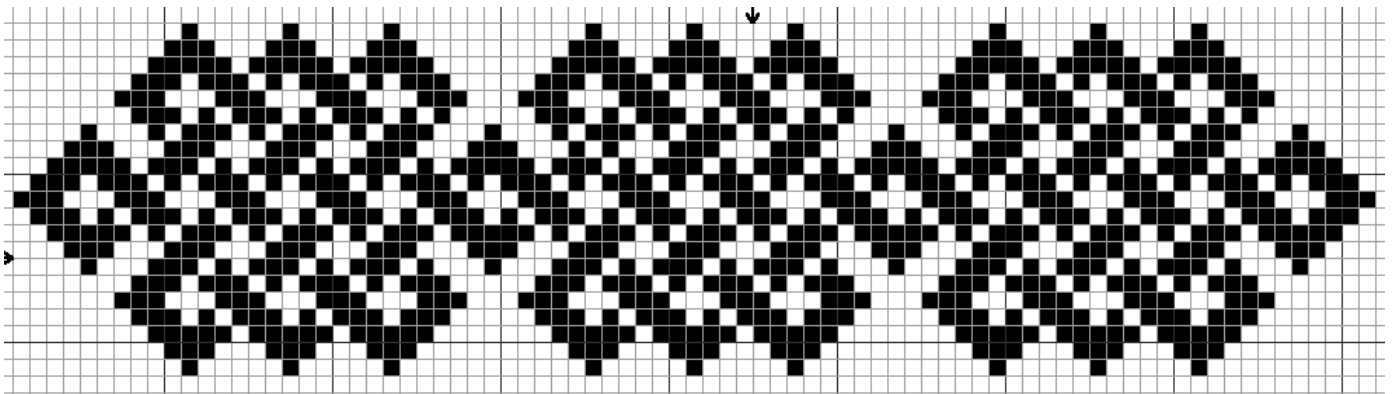
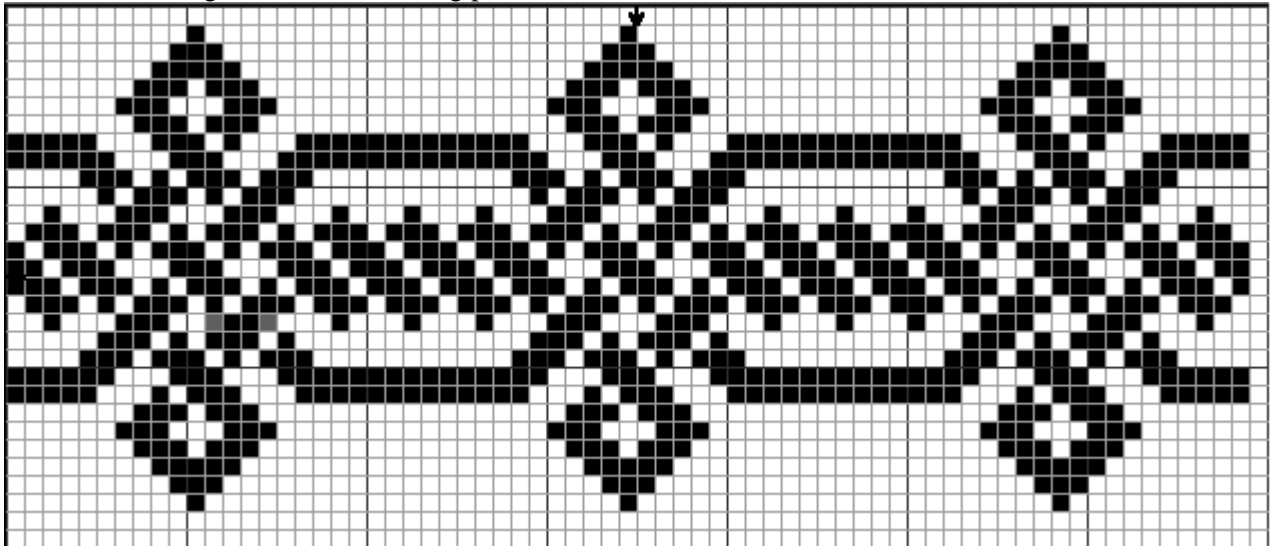
## Competitions

The next two competitions will go towards the Company of Broiderer's Championship. The points will be added up at 12th Night 2000 and the winner will be declared the Champion of the Company of Broiderers.

### Coronet Spring

Needlework using one of the following patterns:

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These patterns comes from "The True Perfection of Design by Giovanni Ostaus, In Venice 1567". These patterns were redrawn by Susan J. Evans and put into a book published by Falconwood Press.

### 12th Night

Needleworked lace (burato, filet lace, retcella, punto in aria, not bobbin lace)

Comps for next year's championship !!!!

### May Coronet

Research Article - 4 pages with pictures (of the style of those that have already appeared in the WCoB handouts. Yes I am looking for newsletter material). Topic - own choice, but we will try to come up with some hints. (perhaps write up the documentation for an item you've made - ie the pictures you used and why you made the choices on material, design etc). Articles must be present in printed format for judging, but it is desirable that they be submitted electronically for publication.

Midwinter

Elizabeth Embroidery (any type - blackwork, chromatic work, lace, sweet bags, pin cushions, canvas work, slippers, tablet carpets, the sky is the limit!)

November

Embroidered table linen and towels

12th Night

pre 1000 Embroidery

### **Lochac Arts and Sciences Competitions**

Needleworkers should note that your work can also be submitted for Kingdom or Principality competitions.

Lochac 12th Night

Needlework: Blackwork handkerchief

Trim: Lace (minimum of 6 inches). Note: This competition is not restricted to needlemade lace. However if you do make needlelace, you can enter same piece work in the Principality competition and the Broderers competition.

### **Snippets from Madilayn de Mer**

News Flash - Supplier found for Cifonda Embroidery Silk

Good news: The shop Stitches and Threads at Russell Street West End stock Cifonda embroidery silks!

They do mail order, and their details are:

Stitches & Threads

79 Russell Street

West End Qld 4101

Ph: (07) 3844 6411 or (toll free) 1800 637 898

Fax: (07) 3844 6450

This is real silk and it is really fine (those who have seen the handkerchief I have been working on know what they are like) and it is really glossy and silky. As a comparison: when you strand apart a piece of Madeira silk thread, one strand of the Madeira is about 3 strands of the Cifonda.

It is gorgeous to work with - but has all the traditional problems of silk (snags, and the one strand tends to want to unravel to finer strands, so using a short piece is good).

Georgeson Publishing Web Site

I thought that you would be interested to know that Georgeson Publishing in NZ now has a Web Site. (They are the ones who publish the lovely Elizabethan Embroidery books).

<http://www.georgeson.co.nz>

This is probably one definitely worth checking out and keeping. They would probably appreciate any feedback, and their e-mail is: [gpl@georgeson.co.nz](mailto:gpl@georgeson.co.nz)

### **From the Patron/Chronicler/Listkeeper/Webmaster/Competition Secretary/General Dogsboddy.**

As you might notice from the title, I do many jobs within the Company (pretty much everything that the Guildmaster doesn't do). This is because I have a great desire to see the Company work and share ideas throughout Lochac. However, I'm starting to get slack, and rather than see a job done badly, I'd like to give some of my titles away to people who have more time and energy. Please contact me if you feel you can help, and I'll discuss what the job entails and how we can transfer the task. (and how I let go!)

The newest and most exciting job is that of Company Webmaster. Thanks to the generosity of Master Delbert von Strasburg, we have a webpage. It is <http://sca.org.au/broiderers>. Don't bother checking there just yet. There's nothing there, but as soon as we have a webmaster, you will find pictures of competition entries, back issues of the handouts, the charter, upcoming competitions, pictures of Company presentations, roll of ranks in the company, etc, etc, etc. Feel free to tell us your suggestions for our webpage.

Also we need a chronicler to produce this handout. It is the chronicler's job to pester people for contributions as the right time. Thank you to everyone who has contributed in the past, and to Bartolomeo Aggazzi, Mistress Bess and to Madylain de Mer for contributing to this issue. I'm getting more and more material given to me for each handout. I find it very encouraging that people are taking such an interest in the Company.

Other news concerning the handout. Next year we will introduce a \$2 membership fee, to cover the cost of posting the handout. Now I know that \$2 is a stupid amount for a cheque, so if you can't hand the money over directly, I suggest you post the chronicler four stamps. (It's about the same amount and you have to pay to send the stamps, so cosmically speaking it all evens out, I'm sure)

Once again, thank you everyone for supporting the Worshipful Company of Broiderers

mouse.

## **Needle-made Lace Before 1600 (or at least as much as I know so far...)**

by Keridwen the Mouse.

### **Introduction**

Originally, I thought that lace wasn't 'period'. When I think of lace, I think of the poncey cavaliers or regency types, not medieval. Lace did exist prior to 1600, however it appears that fixing a time when lace first appeared is very difficult for many reasons.

The origins of lace are hard to pinpoint. Apparently some netting was found in an Egyptian tomb. A pulled work cushion is shown in an Italian fresco in the 1330s. Also St Catherine is found wearing a smock decorated with pulled work in an altar piece by Crivelli in 1475.

However, lace doesn't become common in portraiture until the mid 16th Century and then only in early forms. Lace reaches one of its many popular phases with the advent of Elizabethan fashions. Lace has far more styles and history post 1600 than it does in period, and the later history obscures the early history (since it involves smuggling, politics and other juicy stuff). Studying early lace seems to require caution so that you reproduce real period styles, and not a later copy of an earlier style.

### **What is lace?**

One of the reasons lace is so hard to define, is because there are so many different ways to produce it. We think of lace as a decorative sort of material with lots of holes in it. But this can be produced by cutting holes out of material, plaiting threads, knotting threads, sewing over cords or a combination of the above. Lace can also be knitted, tatted, crocheted, made from sprang or even macrame!

One big problem is terminology. In period, lace was so new that there wasn't even a word for it. A 1580s dictionary defines lace as something to tie one's hat under one's chin. And the words that they did use to describe lace were also used to describe other forms of needlework, and have also been used to describe different post-period forms of lace. There is mention in one book of Renaissance lace, which wasn't produced in the Renaissance. Plus people used foreign words to describe the lace to make it seem more exotic and got the words all wrong.

Another problem in studying lace is the lack of a good book. I've found many modern books that demonstrate lace-making techniques (although most lace books are for bobbin lace rather than needle-lace). The history in these books is very hand-wavy and rarely backed up with documentation. And then there are the history books with many examples of period laces, but with no real instruction on how to make the stuff. So one must piece together one's information, hoping to match the design and the techniques correctly.

Another confusion (am I complaining too much?) is that some forms of lace deliberately attempt to imitate another lace using a different technique. Early punto in aria and bobbin lace tried to imitate cutwork designs, for example. So if you were trying to reproduce some lace from a portrait, you could potentially use any one of three different techniques to produce the same effect.

### **So what sorts are period?**

The forms of lace developed slowly, one form merging into another, and sometimes techniques were combined on the one piece. Here is an idea of the styles which were common.

Pulled work - where holes are made in fabric by pulling stitches tight to separate threads.

Drawn work - where threads are removed from fabric. The edges and remaining warp or weft are sewn into patterns. Both of the above forms were also referred to as punto tirato, from the Italian tirare meaning pull.

Cutwork - where portions of material are removed and the edges and spaces decorated. It was also known as punto tagliato. Reticella is a form of cutwork, although the term reticella is also used to refer to some punto in aria work. The majority of lace in period seems to fall in this category.

Punto in aria - is where the lace is built from cords laid on parchment. The lace does not start with fabric but otherwise uses the same techniques as cutwork. One of the reasons that the term reticella is used for both cutwork and punto in aria, is that cutwork was more expensive, but punto in aria was faster and cheaper to produce, therefore merchants could get a higher profit for punto in aria sold as cutwork. Warning! The earliest mention of punto in aria, in 1520, referred to raised surface embroidery, not lace.

Bobbin lace - known in period accounts as bone lace. It seems that bobbin lace was frequently made from metal threads. Bobbin lace didn't reach its heyday until after period. Lace for ruffs needed to be stiff, and needlelace was stiffer than bobbin lace. When falling collars became the fashion in the early 17th Century, bobbin lace became the favoured lace. Since this article is about needle-made lace, I won't mention much more about it.

Lacis - lace form by darning stitches on a knotted net.

Buratto - the same as lacis but worked on a coarse woven material (buratto means sieve or coarse cloth in Italian)

### **Origins**

It is not known exactly when or how lace developed. It appears to be the culmination of several decorative ideas developing simultaneously and eventually combined. The origins of lace seem to stem from the growing use of linen as a visible part of dress and its use in furnishings in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Lace developed and became an industry in Italy and Flanders, and in Italy the lace production was closely linked to the convents.

The edges of the linen was sometimes decorated with needlework, or by crimping or pleating it using laundering techniques. Sometimes the edges of the linen was decorated with beads or tufts or loops of cord. Eventually these evolved into small needle-made loops and projections.

The surface of the linen was decorated with whitework with relied on texture to reveal the pattern. Eventually, this evolved into pulled, drawn and early cutwork.

Seams were decorated. This eventually became more elaborate open zigzag lacings joining the edges of material.

Tassels, fringing and macrame style work are being used to decorate the edges of material. These sort of ideas were used with bobbin lace.

Lacis had a different development cycle. Nets were used since ancient times for fishing and hunting. In medieval times, darned decorative nets were used as hair nets, girdles and some trimmings. Lacis became more popular in the 16th Century and was used for clothing and large scale furnishings.

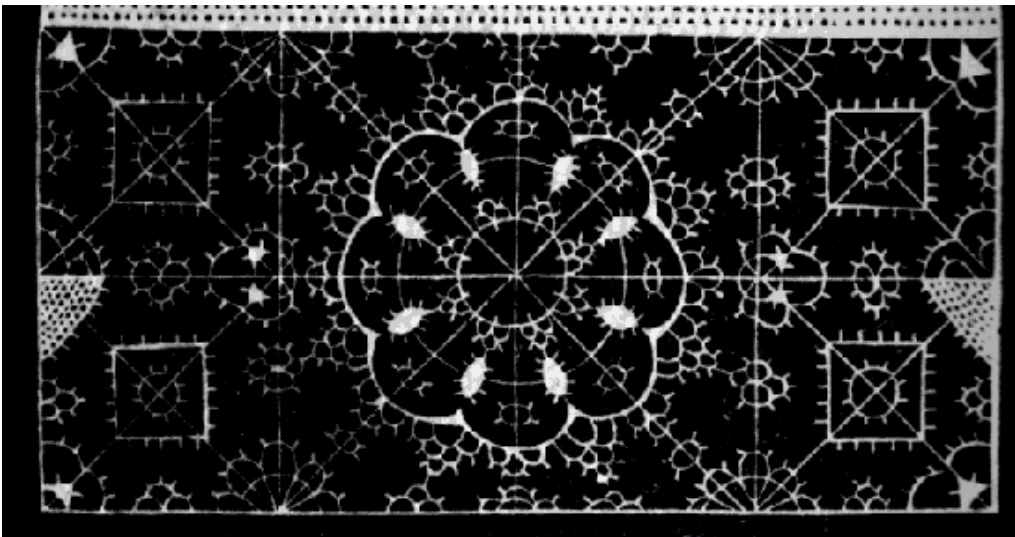
Lace was a purely decorative fabric, initially made from linen, but eventually was made with white and coloured silk, metal threads, or even black threads. Lace was used as decoration for handkerchiefs, collars, cuffs, ruffs, coifs, partlets, veils and household furnishing.

### Pattern books

The development of lace can be traced partially through the published pattern books. Pattern books were sold to the amateur needleworker to be used to copy the styles already popular. Lacis appeared in pattern books from the 1520s. The first cutwork in a pattern book was in the 1540's. True reticella (and punto in aria - more space than stitches) didn't appear until the 1580s. Bobbin lace first appeared in a pattern book in 1559.

### Techniques

Here is an attempt to give you an idea of the techniques used to create needlelace. As I've mentioned previously, these instructions have been gathered from modern books, and as I haven't been able to study real period lace, I must trust that the techniques have remained the same.



First you should look at your pattern and work out which stitches will be required where. For cutwork, you start by sewing around the edges with satin stitch. Then cut away the unnecessary material. Where the lines cross the pattern, you leave some of the fabric threads (probably four or eight). These are then woven into a bar with needle and thread.

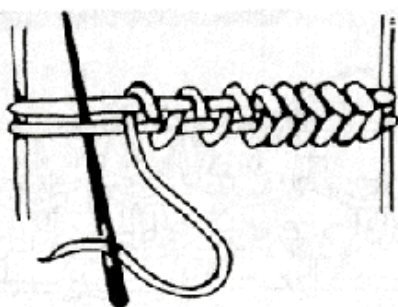


Diagram XXI.—Woven bar

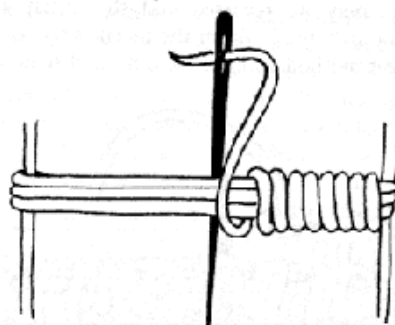


Diagram XX.—Whipped bar

The methods for sewing diagonal and curved lines are similar to each other. You take the thread from start point to end point, back to start and then back to the end point. The line should now be covered by three threads. You then work your way back to the start point using whipped stitch (for straight lines) or buttonhole stitch (for curved lines).

The short lines on the pattern indicate picots, which are made using french knots, or short button hole covered bars.

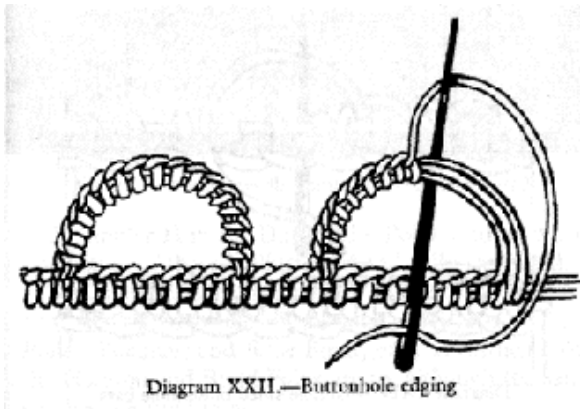


Diagram XXII.—Buttonhole edging

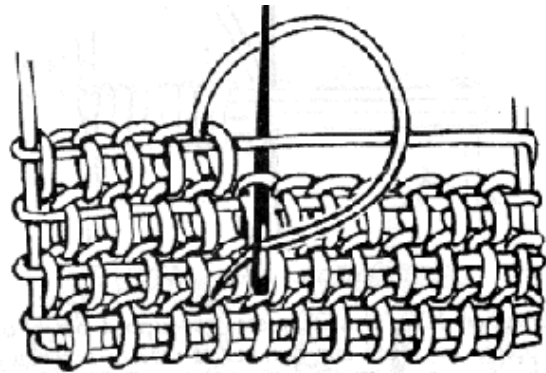
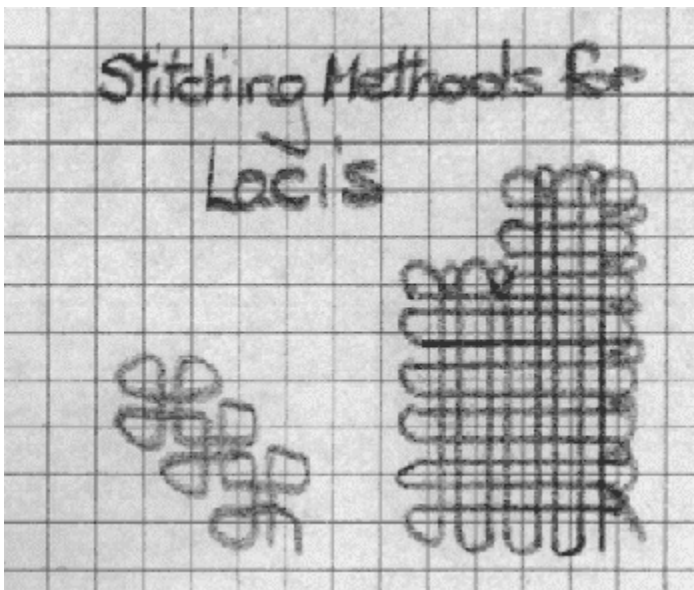


Diagram XIX.—Close buttonhole filling

The solid areas of the pattern are filled in using closely worked buttonhole stitches.

Punto in aria uses the same techniques, except it doesn't start with fabric. You start by drawing the design onto parchment or cardboard. A cord is couched down over the major lines. Work then continues as for cutwork. Once the stitching is finished, the couching stitches are removed.



Lacis and buratto starts with netting. You can find instructions for making the net in various books, and woven net can be purchased. From studying a picture of a piece apparently sewn by Mary, Queen of Scots, different darning stitches were used to create different textures. It would seem that one of the attractions of lacis, was to work out how to traverse the pattern without retracting the path or going through the blank grids.

In period, linen thread was mostly used to make lace. These days there isn't a huge variety of linen thread available, so it would seem that the modern lace maker is forced to use cotton (or silk if you are feeling confident). I've managed to sew cutwork using a round hoop, but the square pattern eventually gets



distorted. I would recommend a small square frame for sewing cutwork, lacies or burato. Punto in aria uses the parchment to keep it stiff, so I don't think a frame is necessary.

## **Conclusion**

Obviously there isn't enough information here to tell you everything about how to make needlelaces. I still consider myself to be a beginner in this, but you have to start somewhere. I hope this inspires you to go out and have a go, and learn by doing. Once you have perfected the art, then let me know what you have discovered.

Researching period laces is a challenging subject. The development of lace happened over many years, and records of its early development are rare. It is possible that lace was made in very early times, but to be sure, I'd stick to patterns and methods for which there is surviving evidence.

This research project has been enlightening about techniques I thought were developed quite recently. It has also shown me how hard it is to define something neatly when it has slowly mutated over a hundred years. It seems impossible to define all the different types of lace, when multiple techniques are used often in the same piece.

## **Bibliography**

Collier, Anne, (1986), *The Art of Lace Making*, Bracken Books, London.

Only half of this book is needlelace and only a small amount of that is pre 1600. Good diagrams and explanations that matched up. A small amount of lace history.

Earnshaw, Pat, (1988), *Needlemade Laces (Materials, Designs, Techniques)*, Collins Australia, Sydney. Lots of needlelace techniques, with good diagrams, but the pictures of lace were all modern and didn't correspond well with the text. Some history of the laces.

Levy, Santana M., (1990), *Lace, A History*, Victoria and Albert Museum, W.S. Maney and Son Limited, Leeds.

The lace 'bible'. This book is very scholarly and a difficult read. There are few black and white definitions and few generalisations. Evidence is drawn from pattern books, account books, portraits and surviving pieces of lace. It presents only the evidence that does exist, leaving the reader to fill in the gaps themselves. This sort of thinking is hard work!

Preston, Doris Campbell, (1984), *Needle-made Laces and Net Embroideries*, Dover Publications Inc, New York.

This book was originally published in 1938, and is an amusing read for its 'tone'. Very good diagrams and explanations. The history presented could almost be fiction however.

Swain, Margaret, (1986), *The Needlework of Mary Queen of Scots*, Ruth Bean, Bedford.

Primarily about Mary and her needlework, but has some pictures and diagrams of lacies, which was made by Mary and Catherine di Medici.

Warner, Pamela, (1991), *Embroidery - A History*, B.T. Batsford, London.

Primarily a book on embroidery with a chapter on needlelace. A good overview of the history of needlelace, but little information on the techniques.

Wright, Thomas (1982), *The Romance of the Lace Pillow*, Ruth Bean, Bedford.

First published in 1919. This aims to be a historical study of lace and is probably pretty good for its time. It tries to show the spread of lace with political upheavals of the time. Some of the facts however, seem to come from old sayings that have a tenuous link to lace. No techniques or diagrams are given.