

Embroidery: Eight Period Stitches

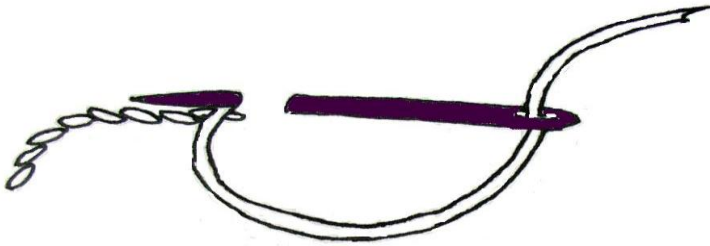
Method of construction and a brief history of each stitch

Mistress Ealasaid nic Suibhne
Kingdom of Atenveldt

© 2005 Mary Elizabeth Jenkins

Permission is granted to make and distribute verbatim copies of this document for non-commercial private research purposes provided the copyright notice and this permission notice are preserved on all copies.

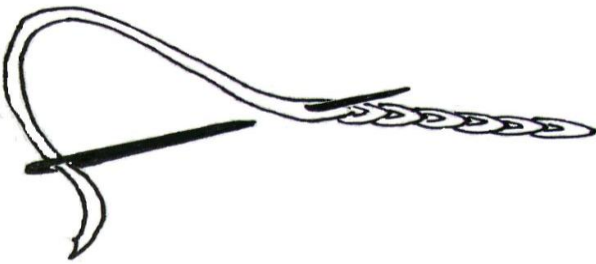
last updated 9/26/2006



Stem Stitch or Outline Stitch

The Stem stitch is worked left to right. The needle emerges at the end of the line to be covered. It then enters the material a little to the left on the line to be covered and emerges half way between where the needle emerged and where it enters the fabric. Be sure that the needle always emerges on the same side of the line being worked, or your stem stitch will appear twisted. For a thin line, always pass the needle through the drawn line of your pattern. For a fuller, more cable-like look, push the needle down on one side of the line, and bring it up on the other side of the line, giving each stitch a slight slant. Be sure to be consistent on which side you go down on and which side you come up on.

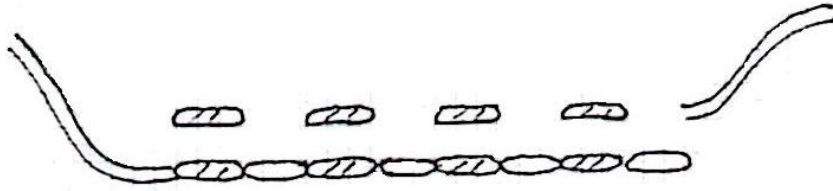
The stem stitch can be used to make outlines, or when lengths of stem stitches are worked side by side, it can be used to fill a design element.



Split Stitch

Work just like the Stem Stitch, only instead of the needle emerging beside the previous stitch, the needle passes through the preceding stitch. Also, only back up about a third of the previous stitch, not half way as in the stem stitch.

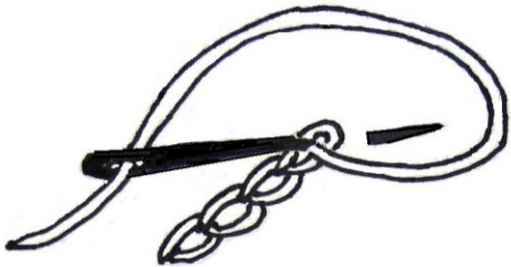
Can be used as an outline stitch, or as a filling stitch.



Running and Double Running Stitch

The Double Running (or Holbein Stitch) is a simple running stitch that requires two passes to cover the line of the design. The needle emerges at the beginning of the line. Make a series of short stitches - leaving a gap between each stitch that is the same length as the stitches. Also take care that each stitch is the same length. (i.e.,)
 When the end of the line is reached, turn the work and work back to the beginning, filling in the gaps.

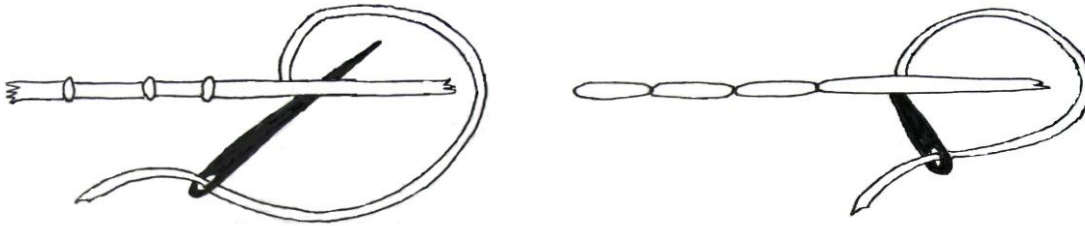
The Running Stitch is a simple decorative technique, especially effective for necklines and cuffs. The Double Running is the main stitch used in Blackwork, and when done with care, results in the back of the work being identical with the front of the work.



Chain Stitch

Bring the needle up at the beginning of the line. Use your thumb to hold the thread against the fabric, a little to the left of the line. Pass the needle back down through the fabric in the same spot it came up through. Do not pull the stitch tight! Bring the needle up a little farther down the line of the design, passing through the loop this has created. Now pull the stitch tight until the bottom of the loop is snug, but still laying below where the thread is emerging from the fabric. Insert the needle in the same spot the thread is coming out of the fabric and insert it a little farther down the design line, again coming up through the loop. Continue in this fashion.

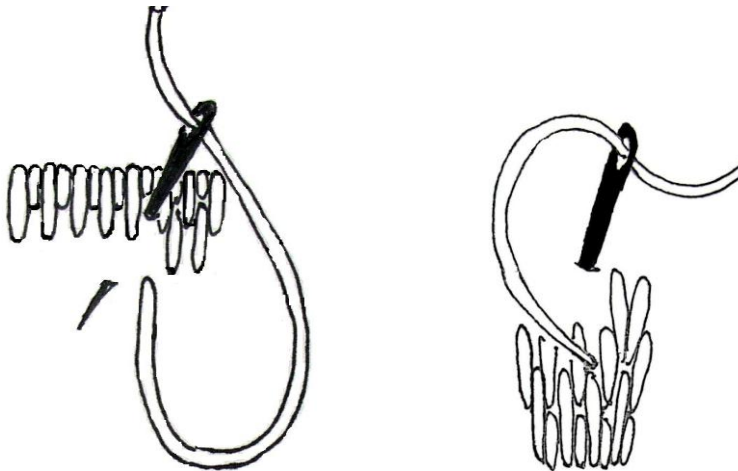
You can create a wider chain by inserting the needle beside the emerging thread, instead of going back down the same hole you came up through. The farther to the side, the wider the chain.



Surface Couching (and Underside Couching)

Bring one or more threads up through the fabric at the starting point of the design. Lay the threads on the fabric. With another thread (either a contrasting, or matching color), make a series of small stitches across the main thread. Be sure the main thread lies smooth and does not pucker or bunch. When using couching to fill in a design, you can create a further design effect by how you place the couching stitches, whether you stagger them, or line them up from thread to thread. The commonest method for working metallic threads.

An older version of couching is called Underside Couching. In this method, the main thread is laid on the fabric. With a different thread, come up beside the main thread, pass over it, and put the needle back through the same hole. Tug the couching stitch all the way back through the fabric, pulling the main thread through the fabric just enough to let the couching thread disappear from the surface.

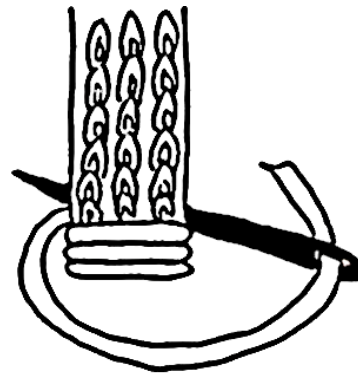
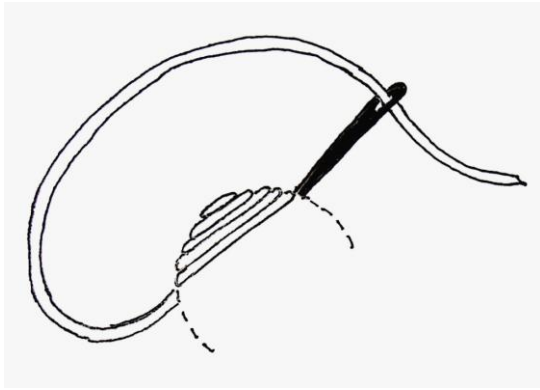


Brick Stitch and Long & Short Stitch

Work first row right to left, second row left to right, third row right to left, and so on. The first row consists of alternating long and short stitches (see diagram above). Each succeeding row consists of long stitches only, until the last row, which is again worked in alternating long and short stitches. All long stitches should be the same length, with the short stitches being half as long. All stitches should lie parallel to each other.

The stitches can be packed together tightly so that no fabric shows through, or they can be worked with a slight gap between stitches to create a more airy effect. This works well to fill in backgrounds, or rectangular areas. Does not do curves easily.

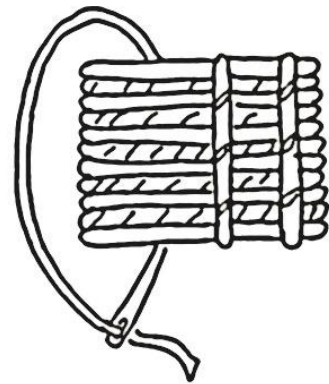
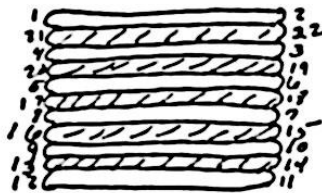
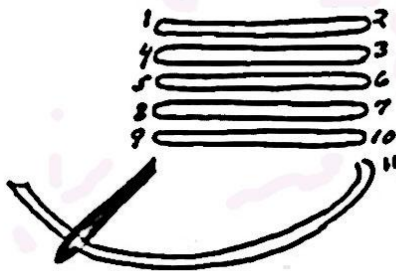
A variation on this, known as the Long and Short stitch, was also used in medieval embroidery. In the Long and Short stitch, the stitches do not stay strictly parallel and can fan out to fill the design area. In order to fan the stitches you add in extra stitches as needed.



Satin Stitch

Bring needle up on left side of design element. Lay thread across design and push needle down on right side of design element. Bring needle up on the left side, right beside the previous stitch. Push needle down on left side, right beside where the needle passed down on the previous stitch. Continue in this manner until the design is completely covered. The back of the work will be as fully covered as the front. Pull the stitches tight enough so that they lie flat and do not flop around, but not so tightly that the fabric puckers.

For a raised satin stitch, cover design area with chain stitches or brick stitches, then satin stitch on top of them. It is also easier to keep the correct tension on your satin stitches if you do this. Under stitches don't have to be perfect, since they will not show in the finished product.

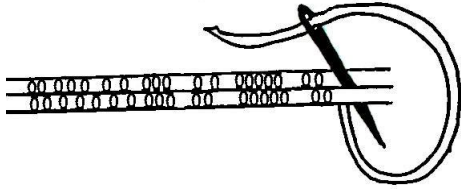


Bayeux Stitch or Laid Work

Bring needle up at position 1 and down at position 2 (far left example). Bring needle up at position 3, leaving a gap between the two threads that is the same width as the thread. Take needle down through position 4. Continue until you reach the bottom of the area to be covered. Turn the work 180 degrees. Bring the needle up between the original 1 and 4 positions, push needle down between the 2 and 3 positions, filling the gaps. Continue in this manner until area is completely covered. (middle examples above)

Lay thread across work at right angles to first sets of threads (see the far right example). Lay couching stitches over this thread.

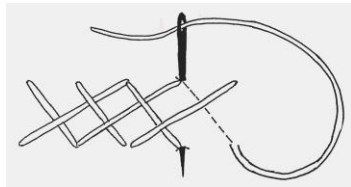
Extra Stitches you might want to learn



Or Nue

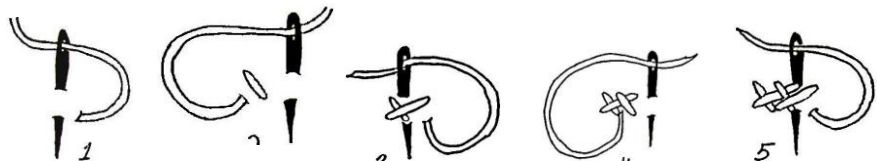
Gold thread is laid side by side to cover the entire ground. Underside couching is used at each side to pull a small part of the gold to the reverse side. The design is worked in topside couching stitches. Various colors of silk thread are used to create a detailed image. Couching stitches are placed close together where the color should be dark and farther apart where the color should be light. The gold thread shining through the silk creates highlights.

To create such embroidery you need to draw the outline of your design on ground fabric. Lay one gold thread and stitch all couching stitches on that gold thread, following the outlines on your ground fabric. Then lay the next gold thread, using underside couching where you turn the thread at the edge. Couch this thread. This technique has the advantage of allowing you have a drawn pattern to follow.



Long Armed Cross Stitch

The Long Armed Cross Stitch can be worked from left to right or from right to left. In this cross-stitch variation, one arm of the cross is twice as long as the other. These instructions are for working from left to right.



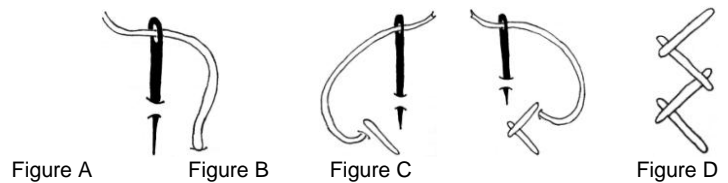
Imagine a series of squares (or a piece of Aida cloth). The first leg of the cross is worked from the lower right corner to the upper left corner.

The second leg of the cross is worked from the lower left corner to the upper right corner of the second square.

The third leg is worked from the lower right corner of the second square to the upper left corner of the third square.

The stitches continue in this pattern, short leg from right to left, long leg from left to right. The stitches interlace, creating a lattice when widely spaced or a braid when worked closely.

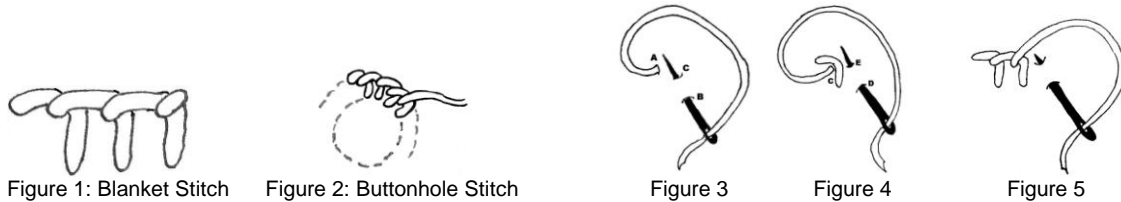
Herringbone



The Herringbone stitch is a variation on the Cross Stitch. This is a good stitch to work over the stop of seams as decoration and to strengthen a hand sewn seam. To begin, make a slanting stitch, slanting from lower left to upper right. Bring the needle back up even with where the needle passed through the fabric but slightly below. See Figure A. Make a slanting stitch that slants from lower right to upper left. Bring the needle up even with where it went down, but slightly below. See Figure B. The cross thus formed is crossed very near the top. Continue in this fashion. See Figure C. The end result is a line of crossed stitches which cross near the ends of the legs forming the cross.

This stitch can be worked with long legs, as in the diagram, for an open look, or can be worked with short legs to create a more braid like look.

Buttonhole Stitch or Blanket Stitch



The Buttonhole Stitch and Blanket Stitch are actually the same stitch. In the Blanket Stitch, stitches are spaced apart (Fig. 1) and in Buttonhole Stitch, stitches are placed against each other (Fig. 2). Buttonhole stitch is used, obviously, for buttonholes, eyelets, and also for pure decoration.

Bring the needle up through the fabric at A (see Figure 3). Pass the needle back through the fabric at B and back up at C. Pull the thread fairly taut, being sure that it forms an upside down L. The next stitch will anchor this stitch.

Put the needle down at D (see Figure 4) and bring it back up at E. This creates another upside down L. Continue in this manner, each new stitch anchoring the stitch to its left (see Figure 5). To anchor the last stitch, do a small stitch to anchor the angle of the last stitch (see Figure 1).

This stitch can be worked right to left, as well. There are many variations you can do with this stitch. You can vary the length of the 'legs,' alternating long and short legs. You can group stitches, doing some close together, then leaving a gap, and then more stitches close together. You can work this stitch over the edge of the fabric. This is a good stitch to use to appliqué one piece of fabric onto another.

Summary by Century

Compiled from the descriptions of examples of embroidery found in museums. This is not to limit your choices, but to give you a list of choices that can be documented via Primary Sources. To design an authentic embroidery, you will need to pick a culture and time period and look at the embroideries and other art forms of that time and place.

4th Century - Coptic and Byzantine

Wall hangings, decoration on tunics, altar cloths;

Stitches: Stem, Satin, Chain, Long and Short stitches worked in wool and silk
Fabrics: Linen
Designs: human figures, birds, animals, flowers and plant forms.
Imitating weaving patterns of the time.

8th-9th Century

Vestments, secular garments

Stitches: Couched Gold and Silver threads, split and stem stitches in silk.
Fabrics: Linen, silk
Designs: rondels, animals, birds, interweaving (Celtic Knotwork), Biblical figures, arches, diaper patterns, Latin inscriptions

10th-11th Century

Vestments, Ceremonial garments, Bayeaux Tapestry (though possibly 12th century)

Stitches: Split, Chain, Bayeaux Stitch, couching, stem in wool, silk and some linen
Fabrics: Linen, silk, wool
Designs: figures, animals, birds, plant forms, tree of life, decorative borders, Biblical scenes, Latin inscriptions; Historical scenes
Bayeaux Tapestry best known, well preserved example

11th-12th Century

Vestments, seal bags, wall hangings,

Stitches: Split, Stem, Underside Couching, Surface Couching, Cross, Bayeaux stitch, wool, silk, linen, gold and silver threads
Fabrics: Linen, Silk Twill
Designs: Stiff figures, Biblical scenes, animals, mythical figures, scrollwork

13th-14th Century

Copes, mantles, vestments,

- Stitches: Split, Underside Couching, Surface Couching, Bayeaux stitch
wool, silk, linen, gold and silver threads
- Fabrics: Linen, Velvet, Silk Twill
- Designs: Heraldry; softer figures, scrollwork, mythical figures, Biblical scenes,
interlacing (knotwork), animals, arches, lion and leaf masks
Pearls worked into the embroidery

15th Century

Wall hangings, altar cloths, vestments, bed linen,

- Stitches: Underside Couching, Split, Surface Couching, Double Running,
Cross and Long Armed Cross, Metallic and silk threads
Or Nue: Placement of colored silk couching stitches on metallic threads
used to add depth and shading for 3 dimensional effect
Assisi: pattern outlined in Double Running, background filled in with
cross or long armed cross, design itself not embroidered
- Fabrics: Brocade, Velvet
- Designs: Animals, flowers, Heraldry, Biblical scenes, Saints,
pearls and precious gemstones worked into the embroidery

16th Century

Secular embroidering gains popularity; wall hangings, secular garments, bed hangings,
cushions, book bindings, book bags, first appearance of samplers (1598)

- Stitches: Couching, Split, Satin, Double Running (Blackwork), Double Running,
Cross, Long Armed Cross, silk and metallic threads
- Fabrics: Velvet, Linen, embroidery on Linen and appliqued to velvet
- Designs: Biblical scenes, Saints, floral motifs, scrolling stems, flowers,
insects, animals, vines, pastoral scenes, interlacing knotwork,
mythical figures, demons, satyrs

17th Century

Clothing, especially collars and cuffs of shirts and chemise, gloves, handkerchiefs, coifs;
Blackwork - design worked exclusively in Double Running stitch

- Stitches: Double Running, Cross, Stem, Couching, Chain, silk thread
- Fabrics: Velvet, Silk, Linen, Satin
- Designs: Scrolling Vines; pastoral scenes, stylized plant forms, imitating woodcuts,
geometric forms, diaper pattern

General Tips

An easy way to anchor the beginning of your thread is to put a knot in your thread. From the front side of the work, push the needle through the fabric about 3 inches away from your starting point. Bring the needle up through your starting point and embroidery. Be careful not to pull the first stitches so tight that the fabric puckers near the knot. When you reach the end of your thread (or the end of the area to embroidered with this thread), snip the knot and thread the 3 inches of thread onto a needle. Weave this into the back of the stitches just worked. You can also use a very small crochet hook to weave this 'tail' into the back of your work.

If you are doing the brick stitch or satin stitch, you can take four or five little running stitches (in the area you are about to cover), at right angles to the direction your first 'real' stitch will be going. Hold these stitches in place with your thumb while you pull the first three or four embroidery stitches taut. After that, you don't have to worry about them, they'll stay. This anchors the thread, and your brick or satin stitches will completely cover the running stitches. If you are careful, you can anchor the end of the thread the same way - just be careful not to catch the embroidery threads on the front.

When you reach the end of your thread, or a stopping point in the design, always weave the thread through the back of the stitches to anchor the end of the thread. If you are embroidering a garment, and if you are worried that this method of starting and ending a section of embroidery will not hold, you can iron on a very light weight fusible interfacing to the back of the work. If your fabric is very light weight, you can touch the interweavings with a bit of fray check, instead. However, if you are planning on entering your work in an A&S competition, don't add the fusible interfacing until after the competition! Lining a garment that has been embroidered will help reduce wear and tear on the back of the stitches.

Having a neat back to your work is something that many people will tell you is necessary. This is not necessarily a medieval trait. While it is true that a tremendously messy back will affect the front of our work, fascination with the back of the work is a modern trait. However, it would be unfair to tell you that you don't have to bother with neatness. Most judges will look at the back and neatness definitely counts for most of them. More importantly, a neat back leaves fewer stray threads to be caught and pulled, causing puckers, or caught and broken, causing your stitches to unravel. Do not become obsessed with the back, however. Some stitches are naturally neater than others. Only certain forms of blackwork will be as neat on the back as on the front. If you snip the extra thread after tying off and watch for the thread knotting on the back and leaving large loops of thread, you won't have any problems. If you do discover a loop created by a knot in your thread, weave it through existing stitches to anchor it and snip the excess.

Don't pass the thread on the back side of the work more than an inch to get from the end of one set of stitches to the beginning of the next set. It could show, and the thread is more likely to catch on something and pull or break, increasing the probability that your fabric will pucker. You can, however, weave your thread through the back of existing stitches to get it where you need to start the next set of stitches.

Do have several needles going at once for a multi color design. By switching from working one color to working another, you decrease the temptation to carry the thread across the back without weaving it into the back of stitches. Unless individual design elements are so small that there is no room to weave in the beginning and the ending of the thread, just don't hop from one design element to the other - tie off and start fresh with each design element.

Suggested Reading

Embroidery: A History
Pamela Warner
B.T. Batsford, Ltd. London

The Victoria & Albert Museum's Textile Collection:
Embroidery in Britain From 1200 to 1750
Donald King & Santina Levey
Canopy Books, a division of Abbeville Press, Inc., New York

Guide to English Embroidery
Patricia Wardle
Victoria & Albert Museum

Medieval Craftsmen: Embroiderers
Kay Staniland
University of Toronto Press

Assisi Embroidery: Old Italian Cross-Stitch Designs
Eva Maria Leszner
B.T. Batsford Ltd., London

Art of Embroidery: History of Style and Technique
Lanto Synge
The Royal School of Needlework/Antique Collectors' Club

Suggested Websites:

Anglo-Saxon and Viking Works of the Needle
by Carolyn Priest-Dorman (Mistress Thora Sharptooth)

<http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/asvembroid.html>
<http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/vikembroid.html>

Atlantia's Embroidery Guild
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AtlantianEmbroiderersGuild/>