

3 Raised Stitches in Elizabethan Embroideries: Detached Buttonhole, Trellis Stitch, and Hollie Point

October Crown AS XXXIX

by Sabrina de la Bere

The class will explore 3 of the major stitches used during Elizabethan times that were worked ON TOP of the fabric rather than stitched through the fabric. As such they are considered raised stitches. These stitches may also be stuffed, with thread or cotton wadding, or worked over a laid network of thread or items like cardboard or felt.

Detached Buttonhole Stitch:

Probably the most commonly used of these stitches, Detached Buttonhole is used with a variety of methods to create a base framework and to create a different density of stitching.

Base Framework:

- Backstitch - backstitch around the outer rim of the area over which you will lay the stitching. The backstitches become the framework to hold the stitching in place. As the size of the stitch will help determine the density, tailor the size of these stitches to the coverage desired.
- Chain Stitch - chainstitch around the outer rim of the area over which you will lay the stitching. The chain stitch becomes the framework to hold the stitching in place. As the size of the stitch will help determine the density, tailor the size of these stitches to the coverage desired.
- Buttonhole Bars - when the bottom of the stitch is to be left free, perhaps to be turned back as in the peapods on page 2, do a buttonhole bar (double tacking stitches) the length of the base where the stitches are to be attached. If it covers a wide area, consider doing a few couching stitches over the bar to help guide the placement of the buttonhole stitches.
- Couched Cord - when detached buttonhole moves into the realm of being needlelace, the base is a couched cord. Then once the piece is stitched, the couching stitches are removed and the piece of lace is then stitched into place on the final item. If done on a wire cord frame then more of a stumpwork technique.

Density Variations:

- Across and back - 1 per stitch (backstitch or chain base)/or as needed with any base framework.
- Left to right and return - 1 per stitch (backstitch or chain base)/or as needed with any base framework.
- Across and back - as desired for effect (usually more of a lace technique).



Note: for all the 3 stitches, a new thread needs to be joined at the beginning or end of a row!



Object: Purse

Date: 1600-1625

Techniques: Silk, embroidered with coloured silks, silver-gilt and silver thread and pearls, lined with red silk and silver brocade, with cords of plaited red silk and silver thread

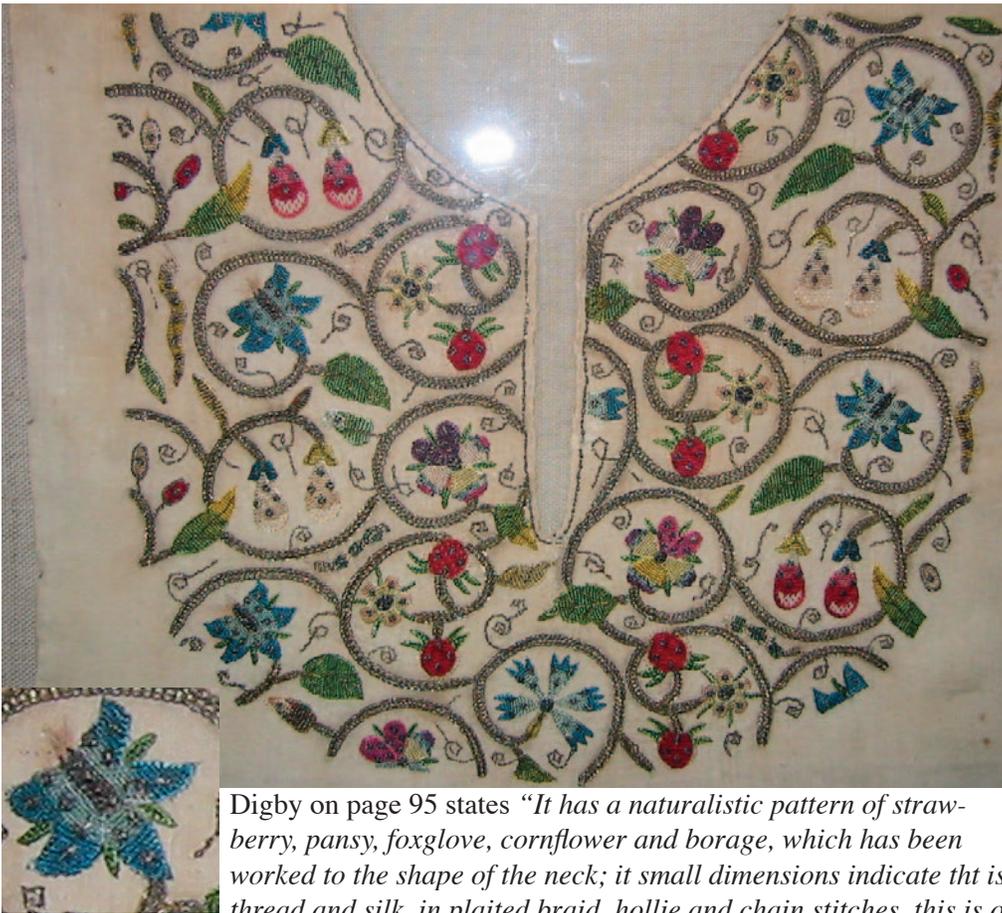
Place: England

Dimensions: Height 8 cm, Width 5.5 cm, Depth 3 cm

Museum Number: T.172-1921

Front view; T.57-1978 left; T.172-1921 right (CT59156)

From: <http://images.vam.ac.uk/>



Shirtfront from the V&A - child's T. 143-1911

Silk and metal thread on linen.

Photo courtesy of a friend. See also Digby - frontispiece. Inserts: detail of borage, heartsease and strawberry.



Digby on page 95 states "It has a naturalistic pattern of strawberry, pansy, foxglove, cornflower and borage, which has been worked to the shape of the neck; its small dimensions indicate that it was for a child. Worked in gold thread and silk, in plaited braid, hollie and chain stitches, this is one of the loveliest and freshest pieces of Elizabethan costume embroidery to come down to us."



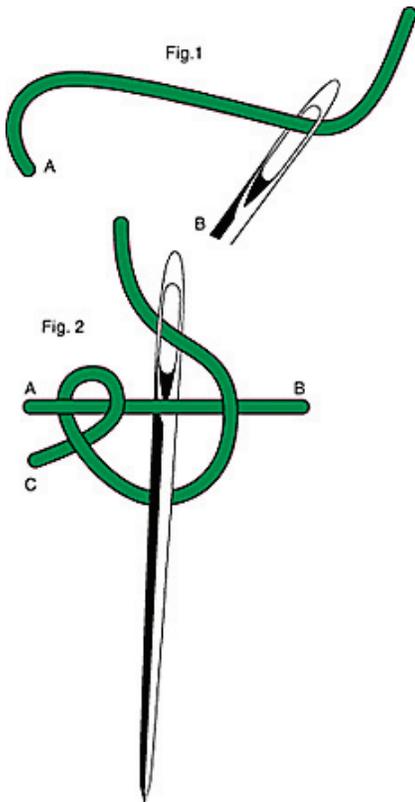
From the Embroiderer's Guild Collection EG 79-1982, Plate 12, cover, pg 28 & 38. English, Early 17th C.

Silk and metal thread on linen.

Panel, originally a coif.

22.5 x 42.5 cm

Coiling stems - plaited braid with tendrils in chain stitch. Silver gilt thread on peascods and for veining on some leaves. Flat silver strip sometimes twisted with silks. Stitches include trellis, darning over detached threads, double chain and detached buttonhole. Top half of peascod and some flower petals are detached from the ground.



DETACHED BUTTONHOLE STITCH

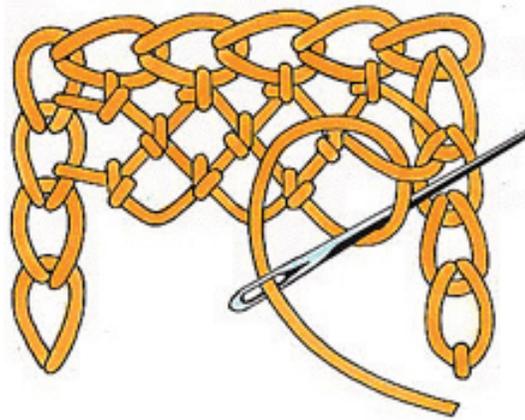
Come up through the material at A and down through the material at B (Fig. 1) making a horizontal straight stitch across the area to be covered (for a firmer base work 2 horizontal stitches). Do not pull the stitch too tightly. Bring the needle out at C and buttonhole stitch closely over the loose thread without picking up any of the fabric (Fig. 2). Every following row of stitches is worked into the loops of the previous row. Work alternately from side to side. Shaping is created by increasing or decreasing stitches at the end of each row.

<http://www.classicstitches.com/>

TRELLIS FILLING STITCH (for needlelace)

Firstly, outline your desired shape with an evenly-spaced chain stitch. This will make a foundation row with which to attach the filling. Work the first row of the filling into the chain stitch at the top of the shape by making alternate loops and knots from left to right. Tighten the knots before proceeding to the next loop by pulling the work thread to the right. When the edge is reached, and without entering the fabric, take the thread down to the next chain stitch and continue the knots and loops in the other direction. This row and all following rows are worked into the loops of the row before. When the lower edge is reached, work the last row of loops through the chain stitch to attach it firmly.

<http://www.classicstitches.com/>



Trellis Stitch:

- is primarily worked as a filling stitch. You need the same base framework as for detached buttonhole. The angle of the thread and hence the knot gives it the distinctive look (see the bird inset on page 2).

Usually you work the lines from side to side - R-L and L-R. It can be run with a return at the end of the line to have all the lines slopping the same direction. In order to achieve a chevron pattern you can work several (ie. 3) rows in one direction and then several in the reverse direction. To further accent direction sometimes the silk color was changed.

Trellis can also be worked in a spiral pattern and is used thusly for centers of flowers. To do this you work from the center out, with a tiny bar stitch as the base or a single chain stitch. Periodically you will need to work 2 stitches into the prior stitch to maintain the roundness of the pattern. If you have worked the spiral in place then work your final stitches into the base or outline of the petals. If you have worked the spiral on a separate ground, trim all around the base stitch to remove the spiral leaving the base stitch attached to a tiny piece of now detached ground.

From the Embroiderers Guild Collection EG 16, Plate 11, page 27 & 37. Women's coif early 17th C. English.

Silk with silver gilt thread and silver strip with sequins on linen. 25.5 x 43 cm

Coiling stems in silver gilt thread in plaited braid stitch. Cornflower, columbine, borage and pea flower worked in trellis with the other flowers in varieties of detached buttonhole. Details in chain and heavy chain.



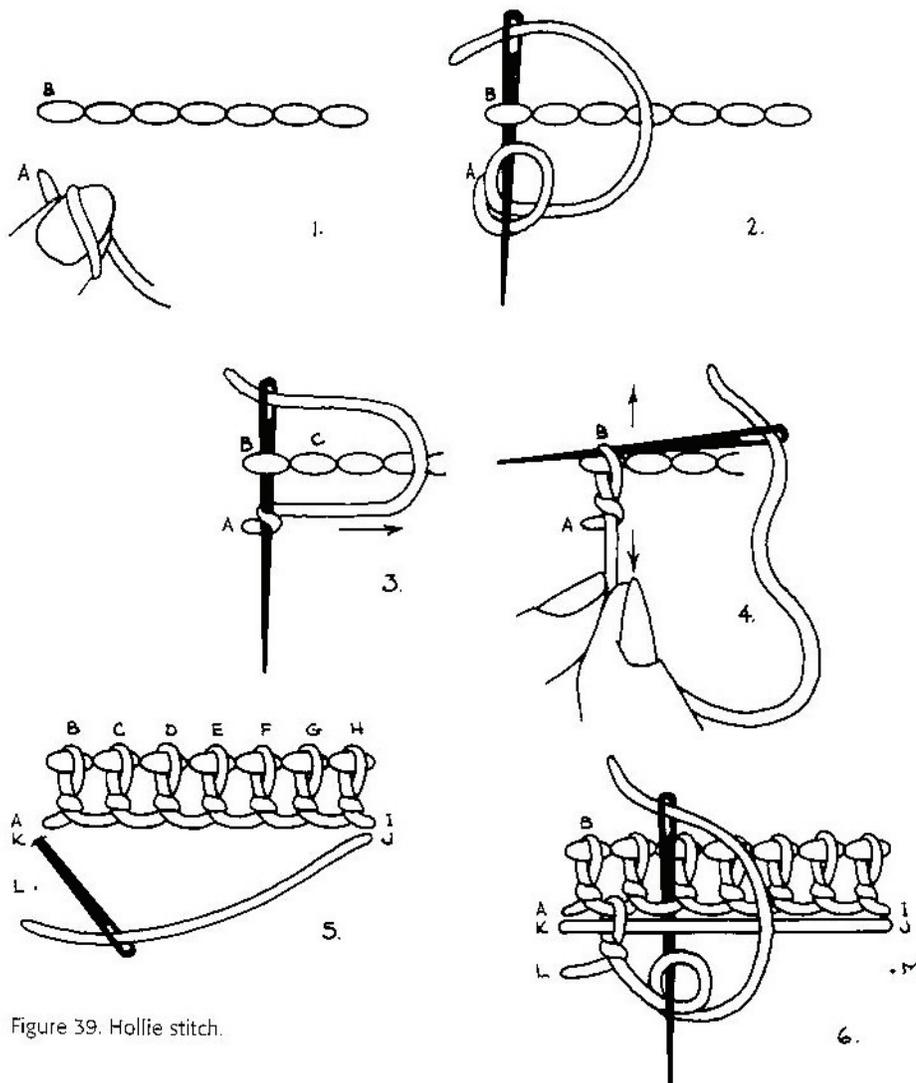


Figure 39. Hollie stitch.

Diagram from Clark - page 57.

Hollie Point Stitch:

There is some debate as to whether this stitch as it is used in the needle-lace of the later 17th C and 18th C. is indeed the same one as identified in various inventories including Mary Queen of Scots. Digby sights Christie when identifying the stitch. Christie identifies it as useful for embroidery of petals, centers, and calices of flowers and seen on 17th C samplers. Clark discusses the stitch as being used as a background stitch for Holy Point needle-made laces for the church. Earnshaw thinks that it was another stitch or lace methods done by nuns. Whether it was or not, here is the stitch -- a variation of a detached buttonhole stitch.

As with the detached buttonhole stitch it needs a base set of stitches. It is worked from Left to Right and then there is a return.

In lace and in samplers it is used to create a groundwork. Then by skipping stitches an opening is formed. Frequently the opening was in the form of a verse of poetry or dates.

Raising Raised Stitches: As mentioned previously, you can raise the stitches from the ground fabric with various methods. Here are some hints on the order of working for several methods.

Stuffed - prepare the ground frame stitches. Complete all but the last line of stitching. Stuff with thread matching the threads used of that section. If you changed the color part way through, do this also with the threads used for the stuffing.

Thread Ground - lay the underlying threads perpendicular to your working direction of the raised stitch being sure that the underlying threads gently abut the raised stitch ground threads. Work the raised stitches.

Felt - tack the felt down as you would for gold work (random stitches and not on the edges unless you specifically want to pull the sides down. Do your ground stitches as close to the felt edge as possible without including the felt in the stitch. Then do the raised stitches ignoring the presence of the felt and being careful not to snag it.

Bibliography:

A Dictionary of Lace, by Pat Earnshaw. Published by Dover Publications, New York, 1984. ISBN 0-486-40482-X.

Elizabethan Embroidery, by George Wingfield Digby. Published by Faber and Faber, London, 1963.

Needlelace Techniques and Inspirations, by Jill Nordfors Clark. Published by Hand Books Press, Wisc. 1999. ISBN 0-9658248-5-3.

Samplers and Stitches: A Handbook of the Embroiderer's Art, by Mrs. Archibald Christie. Published by BT Batsford Ltd, London, 1929. 2nd Edition.

Three Hundred Years of Embroidery 1600-1900: Treasures from the Collection of the Embroiderers' Guild of Great Britain, by Pauline Johnstone. Published by Wakefield Press, South Australia, 1986. ISBN 0 949268 81 X.

The Victoria & Albert Museum's Textile Collection: Embroidery in Britain from 1200 to 1750, by Donald King & Santina Levey. Published by Canopy Books, New York, 1993. ISBN 1-55859-652-6.