

Royal School of Needlework

Jacobean Crewelwork – Certificate

Academic year 2025/26

Jacobean refers to a traditional design style where forms are stylised, lines are flowing, and colour schemes are not necessarily naturalistic. Scale can also be irregular; a large bird can sit on small trees.

Crewelwork is a term used for pieces worked using 2 ply crewel wool. For this first module of the Certificate, we use linen twill, crewel wool and a wide variety of surface stitches to produce a “tree of life” embroidery.

Aim

To design, work and mount a Jacobean style crewelwork embroidery to include a variety of the traditional elements associated with a tree of life such as a main stem, leaves, flowers, fruit, buds, hillocks, together with an insect, an animal or a bird.

Materials and equipment

There is a starter kit for the C and D (Certificate & Diploma) course which is purchased at the time of booking the first Jacobean class. It contains many items that will be used repeatedly e.g. the slate frame and the bracing needle used for framing up. Linen twill, Appleton’s crewel wool and additional needles can be purchased from the RSN.

Fabric: Linen twill.

Needles: Embroidery 5 and 7, Chenille 24. (Chenille 22 and Tapestry 24 may also be useful but are not included in the starter kit.)

Threads: Appleton’s crewel wool. Colours to be chosen in discussion with the tutor, see below.

Reasonable adjustments

If there is a reason you may have difficulty completing the module e.g. visual impairment, allergy to some materials, please discuss this with the tutor and the C and D team before starting. Adjustments are possible.

Essential requirements

Design area

- The final design must be no more than A4 in size, 21 x 30 cm (8 x 11 inches) or equivalent. It may be portrait or landscape in orientation.

Colour

- There should be two main colour ranges, each with five shades (light to dark), and an accent or highlight range of two shades. In each case the shades should come from the same Appleton numerical group if possible.
 - Each main colour range should be distributed to achieve a good balance of the colour and the variety of shades.
 - Overuse of the accent colour should be avoided. It is there as a highlight, about 5% of the total.
 - There should be several areas of shading. In each case using most, if not all, of the shades in a range.

Stitches

- At least 17 different stitches should be used.
- The following stitches **must be included** and worked in sufficient amount to demonstrate that working of the stitch is understood. The stitches can be explored in the RSN Stitch Bank www.rsnstitchbank.org which is free to use.
 1. and 2. Two different Trellis patterns – at different scales and angles and/or orientations. At least one trellis must have a filling.
 3. Long and Short
 4. Chain
 5. Buttonhole
 6. Stem
 7. Satin (including padded satin)
 8. Block Shading – minimum of three rows
 9. Laidwork
 10. Woven and/or Whipped Wheels
 11. French Knots
 12. Bullions
 13. Fly (open or closed but not detached).
- At least one stitch from each of the following groups should be chosen:
 14. Group 1. Heavy Chain, Pekinese, Back Stitch, Coral
 15. Group 2. Raised Stem Band, Vandyke, Cretan, Burden
 16. Group 3. Seeding, Herringbone, Feather, Detached Chain
 17. Student's own choice of stitch.

Stitches can be further developed by whipping, weaving and interlacing.

Scale

- There must be a mix of sizes and shapes of motifs; some large to accommodate stitches such as Trellis, Long and Short, Laidwork and Block Shading and some smaller areas for decorative stitches of various types.

Finishing

- The finished work will be mounted on card and backed with sateen.

Getting started – before class

It is not necessary to arrive at the first class with a finalised design, but you should come with some ideas. Search out examples of traditional Jacobean style crewelwork so that you understand the design style and its main elements. Try using search terms such as “Tree of life”, “Jacobean style embroidery” or “Jacobean style crewelwork”. For examples of work by other C and D students look at the C and D gallery on the website. <https://royal-needlework.org.uk/courses/certificate-diploma/canddgallery/>.

Getting started – in class

Preparatory work

Preparation prior to stitching is an important part of the learning process. Your tutor will give guidance on how to prepare the following:

- A line drawing on tracing paper. The tracing will be photocopied several times and used to create:
- A colour plan to help achieve a good colour balance and identify areas suitable for shading.
- A stitch plan to ensure a good range of stitches and inclusion of the mandatory ones.
- An order of work (where to start and finish).
- The original tracing will be turned into a pricking and used to transfer the design to the fabric.

Initial plans can be amended as the embroidery progresses. If you choose to have your work formally assessed, you should submit the preparatory work listed above. It will form part of the assessment.

Things to think about when planning the embroidery

- There is source material available from the tutor to help you with your design.
- Include some (but not necessarily all) of the traditional elements: a main stem/or trunk, hillocks, leaves, flowers, an insect, animal or bird. It is not necessary to be logical in placing elements. Different flowers or leaf shapes

can come off the same branch. Nothing need be to scale – a small bird can sit on a large flower.

- Aim for a design that flows, is organic, with branches and tendrils to create movement.
- Aim for a balance of open and solid areas. Give motifs space and avoid making the whole design too dense.
- Do not forget texture as an element of the design.
- Distribute the colours you have available.
- Use the highlight sparingly (think 5% at the most).
- Shade as much as possible throughout the design to create depth, perspective and interest.
- Avoid creating something too large and complex as you may struggle to finish in the eight lessons. Remember you will mount the work in that time too.

Intellectual property

The final design must be original to you. Use of your own visual media (photographs, drawings) is encouraged. Referencing and interpreting other visual media is acceptable. Copying is not. The intellectual property of others must be respected.

Additional information

Additional information can be downloaded from the website

- Good Embroidery Practices - Make sure you have a copy of this leaflet. Following this guidance will help you develop good stitching habits.
- Resources - Websites, Books, Suppliers for C&D
- Assessment Options - As a C and D student you have three options regarding assessment of your work. These are:
 - No assessment,
 - Informal verbal feedback, or
 - Formal written assessment.

The “Assessment Options” document gives more detail about each. You do not need to decide immediately. Take time and discuss the options with your tutor. If you are undecided, then make sure that you follow the requirements of the briefs carefully to ensure the best outcome should you decide later to have your work formally assessed.