



Alison Larkin, Embroiderer

WORKSHOP: Nov 1798 Sprig Handkerchief



This handkerchief design is based on a sprig pattern published in *The Lady's Magazine* in November 1798. It provides a good introduction to hand embroidery, using simple stitches used both in the Georgian period and today.

You will need:

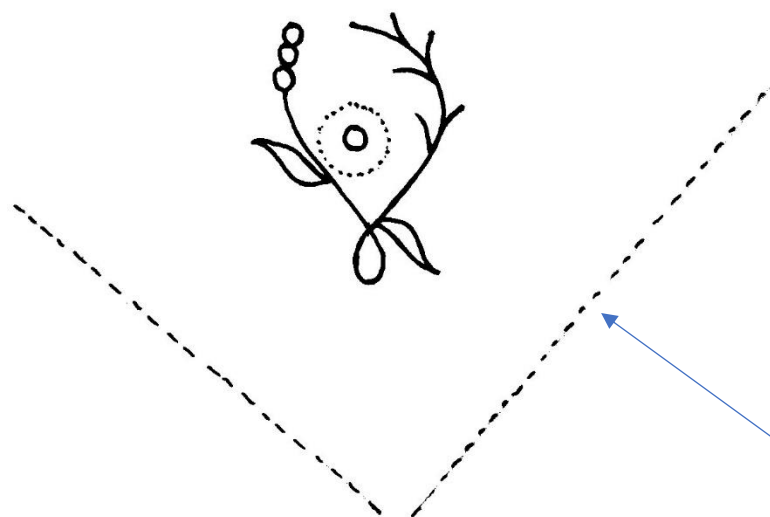
- a white cotton handkerchief, ready-hemmed, or a piece of white cotton lawn about 35cm (14 ins) square
- a marking pencil or pen, or a sharp, ordinary pencil
- an embroidery needle eg crewel size 8 or 9
- 10cm (4in) embroidery hoop, or a 10cm (4in) aperture card mount (used for making embroidered cards)
- Stranded cottons in 5 colours: Dark Green, Light Green, Yellow, Peach and Dark Red. One length of each about 45cm long will be enough.
- If you are using a card mount, you will also need a large sharp needle and some strong thread such as buttonhole thread. The colour is not important.

SETTING UP THE FABRIC:

This embroidery will be easier to do if it is held fairly taut. This can be done by putting it in a small embroidery hoop, or by mounting it in a card mount.

Marking your fabric:

Lay your fabric over the sprig image below. Line the dotted lines up with the hem if you are using a ready-hemmed piece, or with the weave of the fabric if it is not hemmed. Pin the fabric to the paper to hold it in place. Carefully (and lightly) trace the pattern using your pencil: it might help to trace the pattern onto tracing or greaseproof paper, and then hold the pattern and fabric up to a window. If you are working with fabric which is not hemmed, lightly trace the dotted lines as well – that will help you place your hem afterwards.



Positioning lines for hem edge or fabric weave

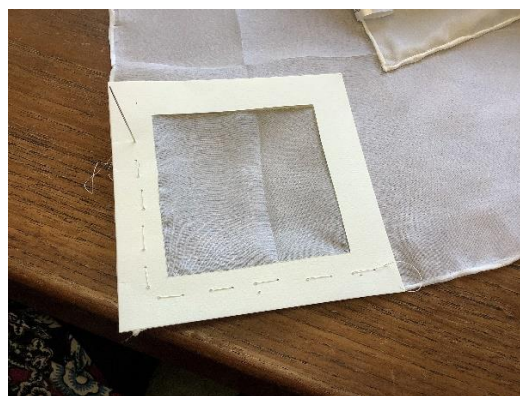
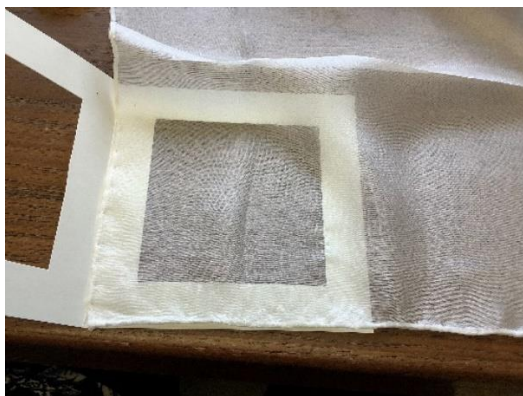
Working with a hoop:

Use a small hoop 10cm (4in) in diameter. Place the fabric over the inner ring of the hoop, with the hem just outside the hoop and the marked design in the circle. Place the outer hoop over the fabric and press it down onto the inner hoop so the fabric is caught between the two hoops. Gently pull the edges of the fabric and tighten the screw on the outer hoop until your fabric is held taut.

Working with a card mount:

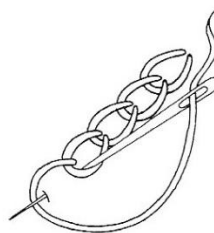
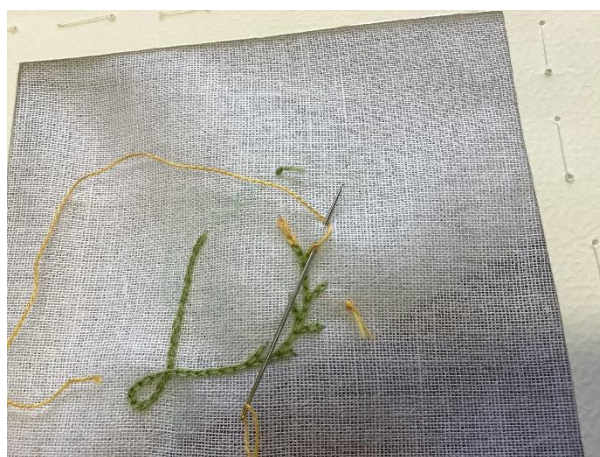
1. Use a sharp knife or similar to cut an identical aperture in the back of the card.
2. Place the handkerchief in the card with one hemmed corner in the fold of the card
3. Fold the card over. Using a sharp, strong needle and buttonhole thread or similar, baste the handkerchief into the card mount. Start at the bottom left corner, and baste along the edge one way then the other.
4. Then baste the other two sides, pulling gently on the handkerchief as you stitch to make it as taut as possible.

(Images see next page)



WORKING THE EMBROIDERY:

1. All the stitching is done with ONE strand of the cotton thread. Each colour length has 6 strands: loosen the end of the length and gently pull one strand out of the bundle. Thread this into your needle.
2. Try to keep the back of your work fairly tidy, as it will be visible. Start stitching by making a knot in the end of the embroidery thread, and taking this through from the front of the work about 5cms from where you will be stitching. Once you have done some embroidery, cut the knot off, thread the end of the thread into your needle, and stitch the loose end through the back of the work you have done. This is called the 'waste knot method'. Later on you can just stitch a new thread through the back of your embroidery.
3. To finish off a piece of thread, weave it under some of the stitching on the back. Try to keep it neat.
4. Start with a strand of Light Green thread. Beginning at the base of the berries on the left of the design, work CHAIN STITCH along the stem, round the loop at the bottom, and up the stem on the right (see image next page) . Make your stitches 2-3mm long. Stop stitching about 5mm from the end of the line, and make a small stitch over the last loop of the chain to finish it off.
5. Now work the thread through the back of the stitching until you reach a side-stem. Bring the thread up through a loop of your main stem, and work 1-2 stitches to form the side-stem. Again, stop stitching just short of the end of the line. Finish off the light green thread by taking it under the stitching on the back.
6. Using the yellow thread, make two chain stitches at the end of each line of the stem to finish off the end of the stems. Work the yellow thread through the back of the stitching to go from stem to stem. I made the second stitch (at the end) slightly larger and looser.

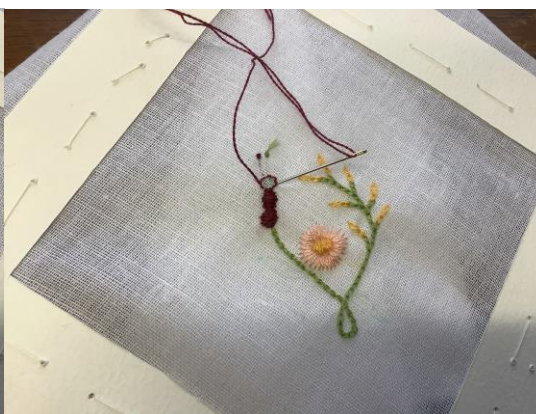


CHAIN STITCH

7. Using the yellow thread, make small back stitches round the centre of the flower, following the line on the pattern. Bring your needle up outside the line of stitching, and take it across the centre and down outside the line on the other side. Bring it across the back and up again right next to the first stitch. Cover the flower centre with parallel stitches in this way, placing them close together so the back-stitched line and the fabric are covered completely. This is called SATIN STITCH (see also images for step 9).
8. Thread the pink thread in your needle. Bring it up on the edge of the flower centre and make a straight stitch to the outer dotted circle of the flower. Work 4 stitches like this, evenly spaced around the flower. Then continue to stitch round the flower, making stitches half-way between the previous ones, until the flower looks complete.



9. Use the dark red thread to stitch the berries: first outline the berries with tiny back stitches, working round them in an extended figure-of-eight. Bring the needle through just outside the marked line, and take the stitch straight across the berry, and down just outside the line on the other side. Continue to cover the berry with satin stitch, making the stitches close together so they cover the fabric completely.



10. Stitch the leaves with satin stitch as well, using dark green thread. Make the top layer of stitches at an angle rather than straight across the leaf – it looks better for shapes like this! This is called SLANTED SATIN STITCH (image on next page).



Slanted Satin stitch leaves

FINISHING OFF YOUR HANDKERCHIEF:

Remove the handkerchief from the hoop or card mount (just unpick the basting stitches!) if you were using unhemmed fabric, make a narrow hem on all four sides of the fabric, using the dotted positioning lines to set where these two hems should be. Stitch the hems with running stitch or catch stitch. Wash your handkerchief gently to remove any marks that still show, allow it to dry and iron it.

If you want to embellish it further, stitch a 1.5cm (0.5 in) lace around the hemmed edge, gathering it together at the corners so it lies flat.

THE FINISHED HANDKERCHIEF:



I hope you have enjoyed this introduction to Georgian period embroidery.

There is a lot more to try in *Jane Austen Embroidery*, by Jennie Batchelor and Alison Larkin, published 2020 by Pavilion Books (UK) and Dover Publications (USA).