



Victoria and Albert Museum

***Elizabethan
Embroideries***

Price One Shilling and Sixpence

Victoria and Albert Museum

***Elizabethan
Embroidery***

London

Published under the authority of the Ministry of Education

Crown Copyright Reserved

First Printed 1948

Small Picture Book No. 5

This publication may be obtained directly from the Victoria and Albert Museum, price 1s. 6d. net (by post 1s. 8d.). It may also be obtained from H.M. Stationery Office at the following addresses: York House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2, and 13a Castle Street, Edinburgh, 2; 39-41 King Street, Manchester, 2; 1 St. Andrew's Crescent, Cardiff; 80 Chichester Street, Belfast; British Library of Information, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City, N.Y., U.S.A.

Designed and Printed by Lund Humphries

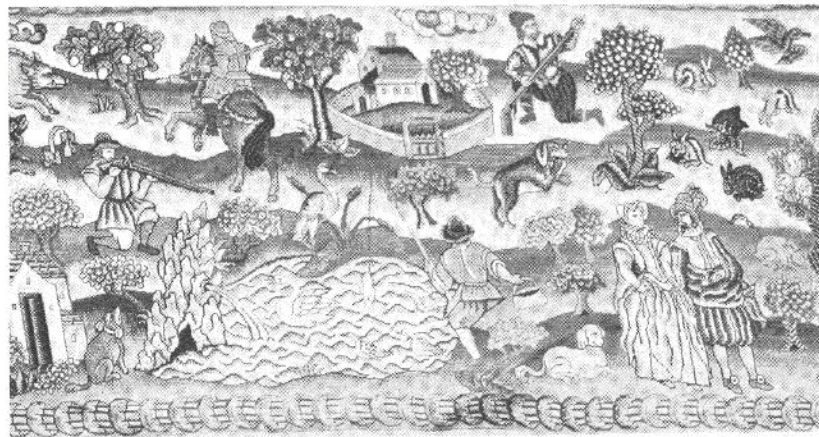
Elizabethan Embroidery

The origin of Elizabethan embroidery is something of a mystery. The medieval tradition of *Opus Anglicanum* dies with the 15th century, and the seventy-five years between its death and the middle of the reign of Elizabeth are at present a blank period from which little has been recovered. Yet about 1570 or 1580 we are abruptly faced with the type of embroidery illustrated here, a fully-formed tradition, showing an overflowing vitality and, in most cases, a considerable technical competence. Nor is this competence restricted to embroideries we may reasonably suppose to be professional; it characterises the great majority of pieces which must be household work. The greatly improved economic position of the English middle class explains how the house-wife and her assistants had the necessary leisure; the importation of silk direct from the Levant and the manufacture of steel needles—replacing the older drawn wire ones—which began in this country in the reign of Queen Mary explain how the result attained was technically possible. But the mystery of the blank period remains.

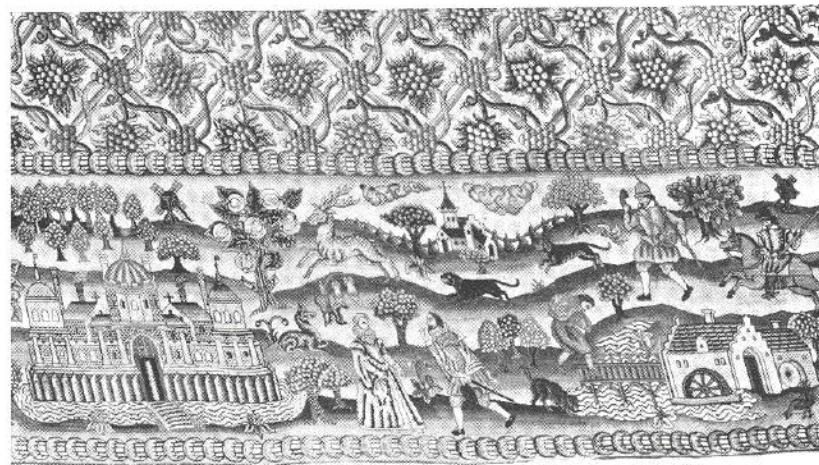
The range of objects worked by the Elizabethan embroideress was a wide one, and a book of this size can give only a small sample of the richness and variety of the Museum's collections. There are two main groups; furnishing embroideries and costume embroideries. In the first are table and floor carpets (e.g., the Bradford table carpet, pl. 1), cushion covers—a tent stitch group (pl. 2 and 3), an appliqué group (pl. 4-6), pillow covers, long (pl. 7), and two

square examples (pl. 8 and 9)—larger covers, probably for use as quilts (pl. 10 and 11) and the group of hangings worked in *petit point* on canvas (pl. 13 and 14). Costume embroideries include bodices and jackets (pl. 15–17)—those illustrated were all made for women, but garments with similar embroidery were worn by men also—coifs (pl. 18, 20–23) made up and not made up, men's caps (pl. 24 and 25), and gloves, worn alike by both sexes (pl. 26).

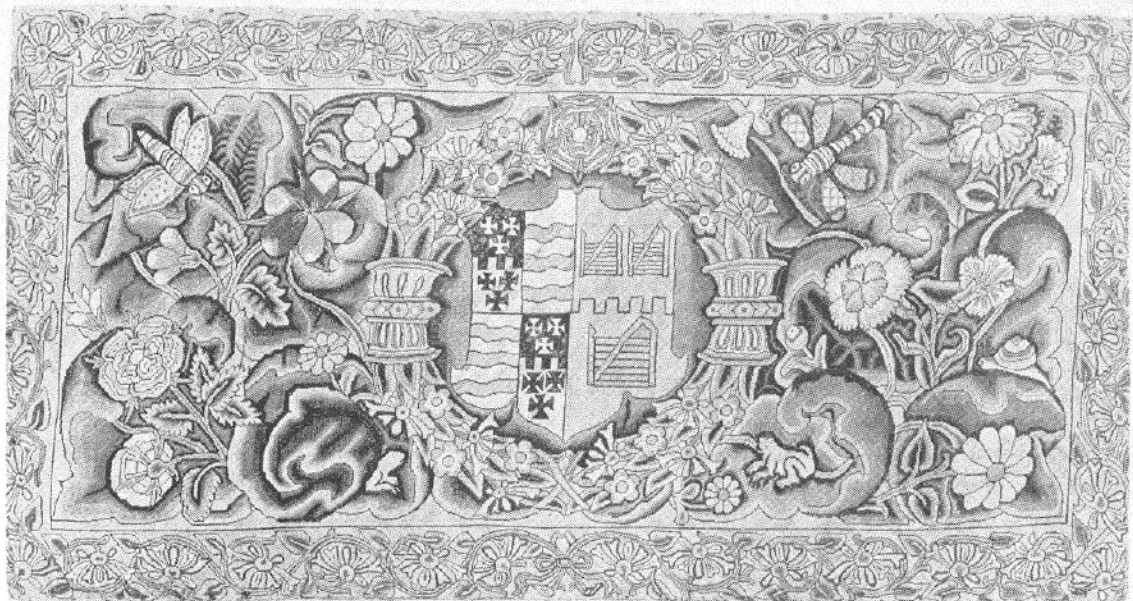
The embroidery is mostly floral in type, despite great variation among both the objects it covers and the actual designs, and has a character that always retains its life and independence, holding a nice balance between pure naturalism on the one hand and extreme conventionalisation on the other. In most cases no doubt the designs were drawn out on the cloth by such an artist as that for whom Mary Queen of Scots, the most famous embroideress of her day, petitioned the Lords of the Council from her imprisonment in Lochleven Castle in 1567—"an imbroderer to draw forthe such worke as she would be occupied about". The sources from which they were taken are difficult to locate with certainty, but are in the main to be found among natural history, botany and embroiderers' pattern books of the later 16th century and, further back, the late illuminated manuscript tradition. The whole subject is discussed in the general introduction to the Museum's *Catalogue of English Domestic Embroideries*, 1938. G.B.



1A From the border of the Bradford Table Carpet
T.134-1928

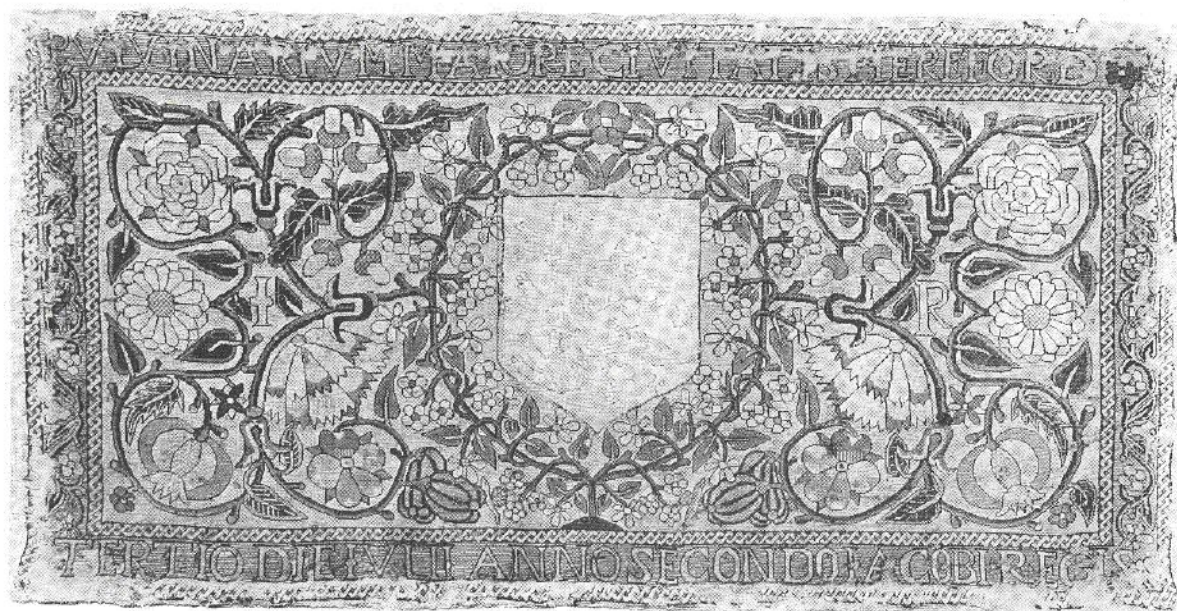


1B From the same. Scale rather smaller to show part of the centre design
T.134-1928



2 Long cushion cover. The arms of Warneford impaling Yates
 Given by Mrs. N. D. Cotton
 T.120-1932

L. 3 ft. 8½ in., W. 23 in.



3 Long cushion cover. Arms of the City of Hereford, dated 1604
 T.147-1941

L. 3 ft. 6 in., W. 22 in.



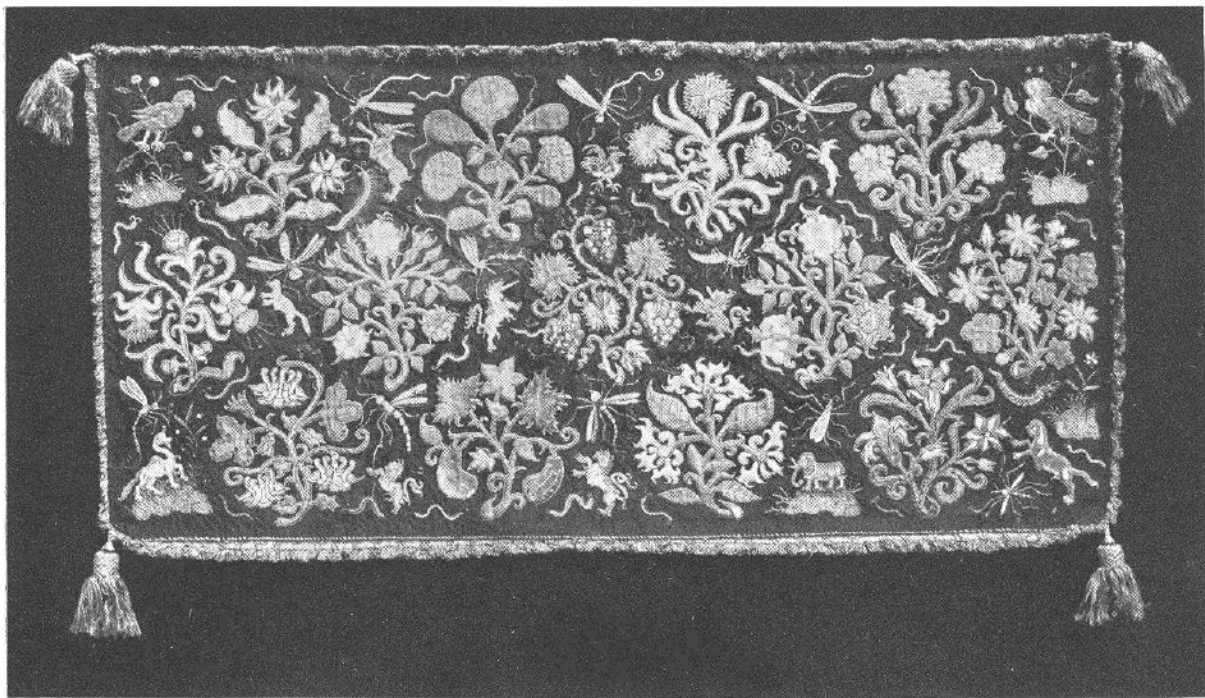
4 Long cushion cover
T.79-1946

L. 3 ft. 5½ in., W. 22½ in.



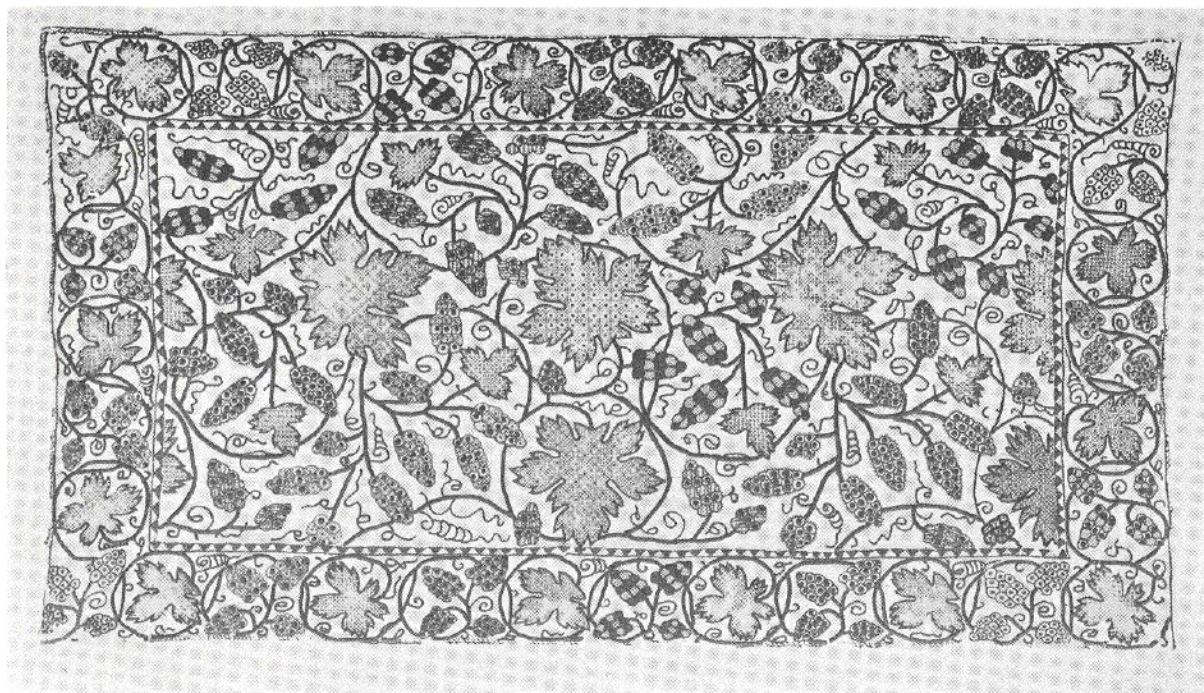
5 Long cushion cover
T.79-1946

L. 3 ft. 5½ in., W. 22½ in.



6 Long cushion cover
T.80-1946

L. 3 ft. 7 in., W. 21 in.



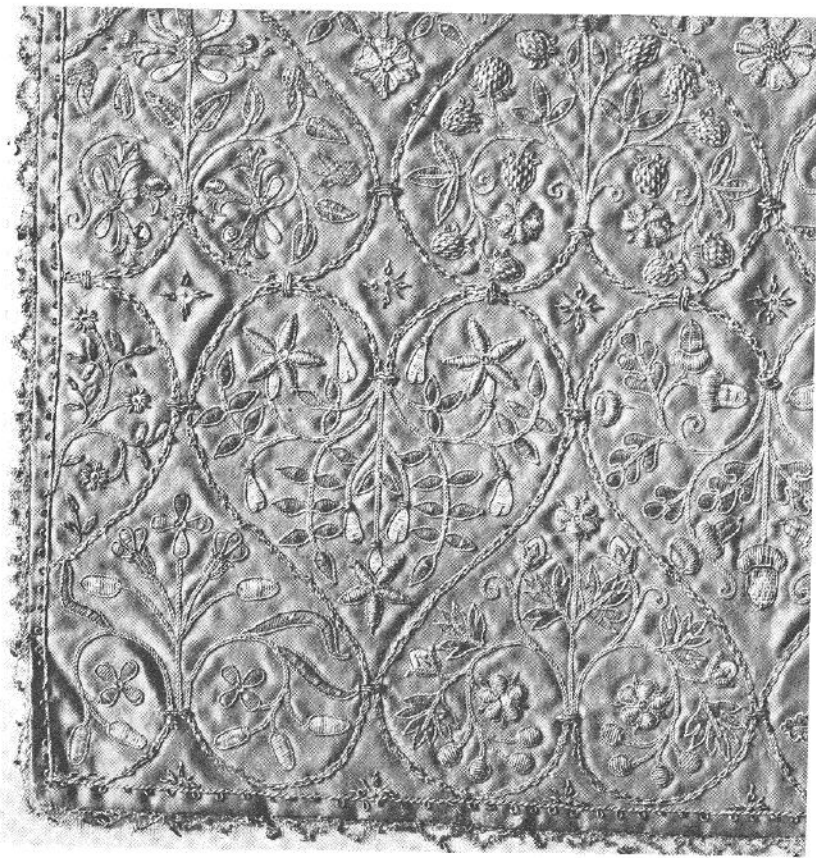
7 Pillow cover
T.81-1924

L. 2 ft. 10 in., W. 19 in.



8 Square cushion cover
T.31-1914

L. $19\frac{1}{2}$ in., W. 19 in

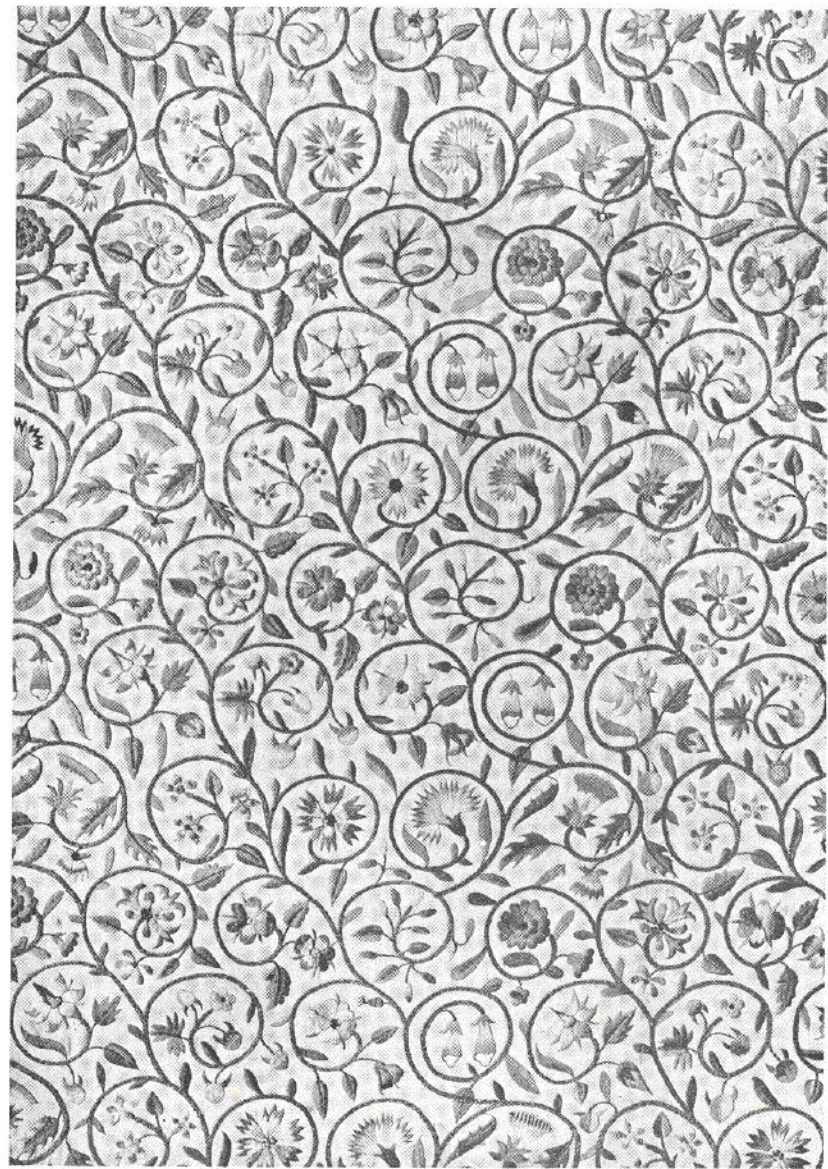


9 Part of a square cushion cover
T.21-1923

L. $20\frac{1}{4}$ in., W. 19 in.

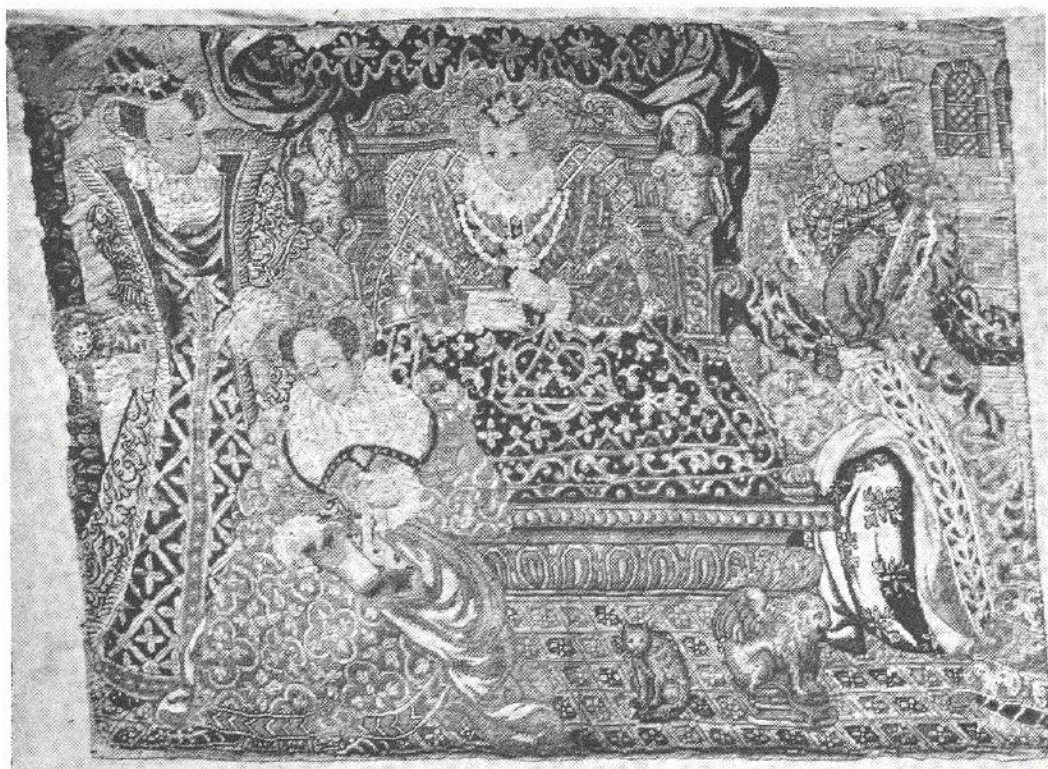
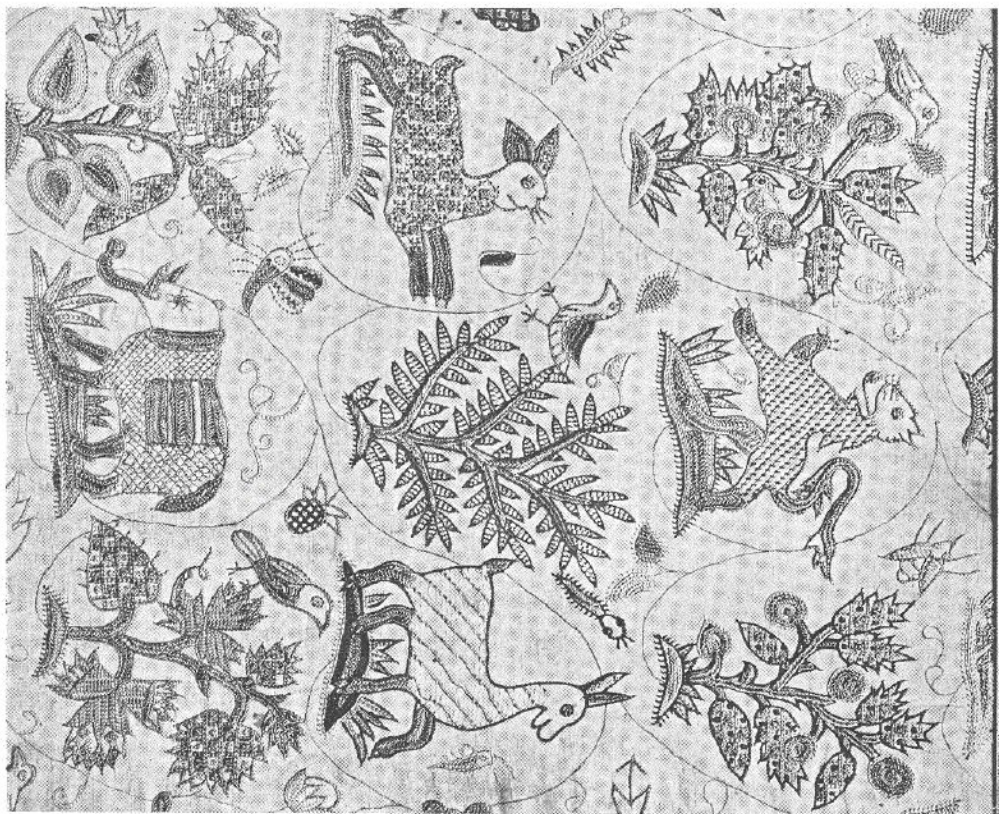


10 Part of a large cover
348-1901

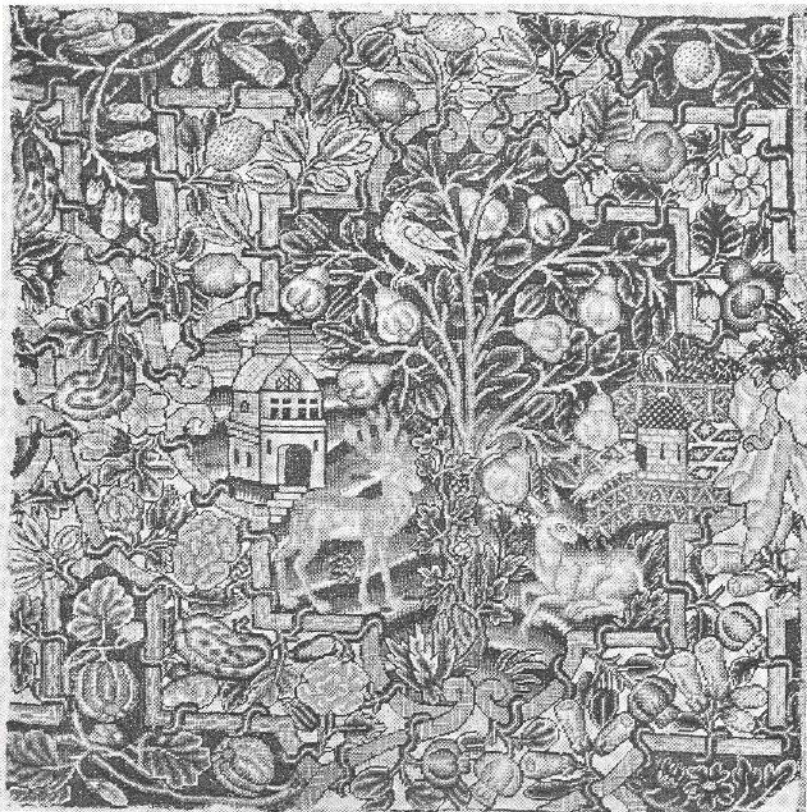


11 Part of a large cover
T.222-1927

12 Part of a long cover
T.53-1926



13 Part of a valance
T.127-1913



14 Part of a valance
T.134A-1913



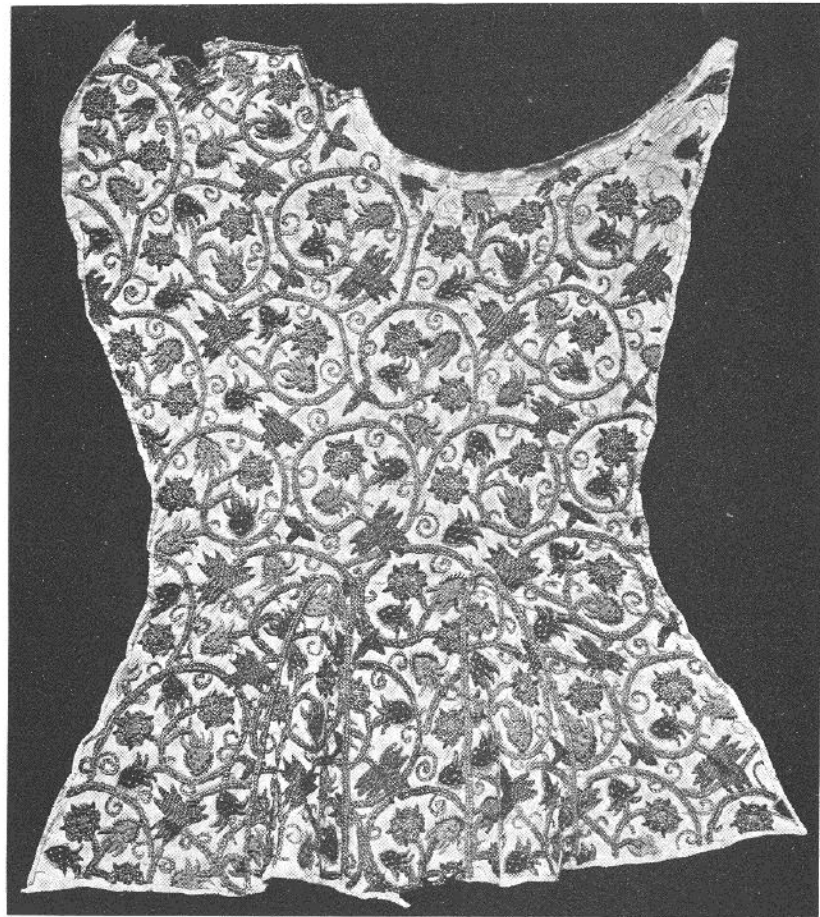
15 Woman's Jacket
919-1873

L. (back) 25 in.



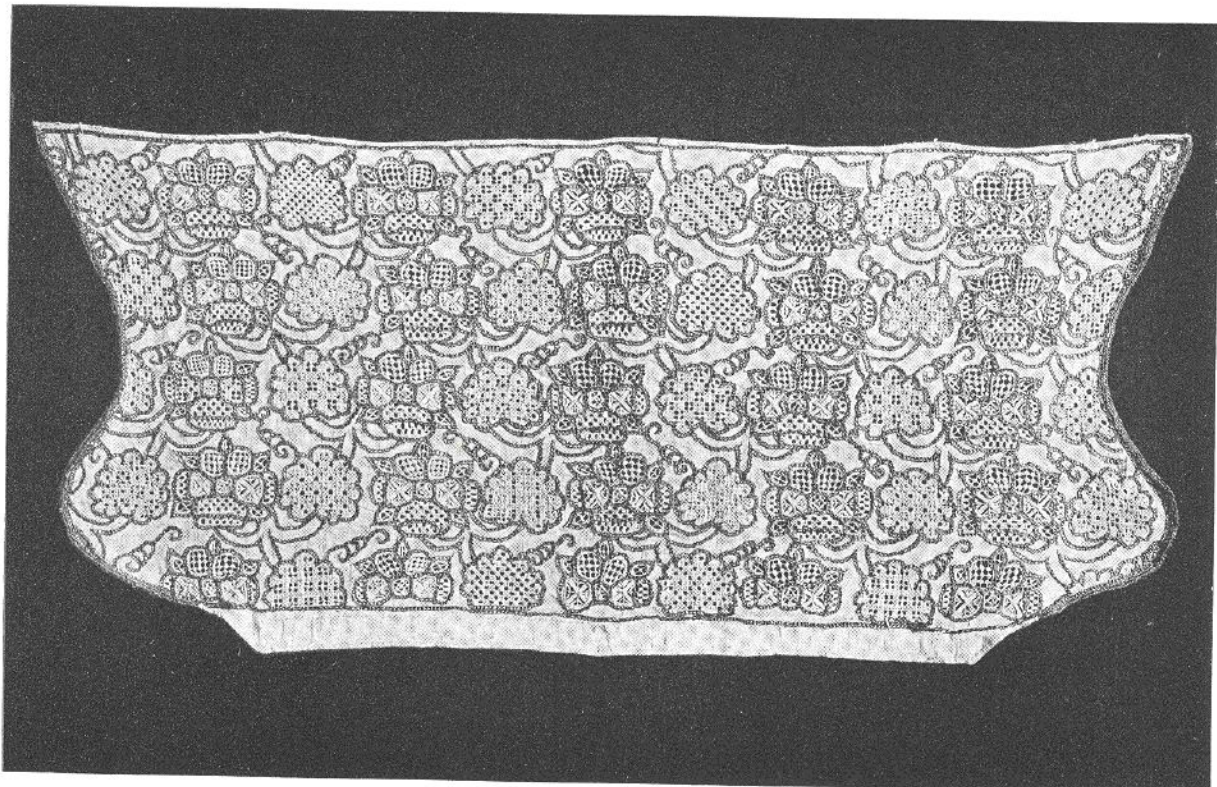
16 Bodice
1359-1900

L. 17½ in.



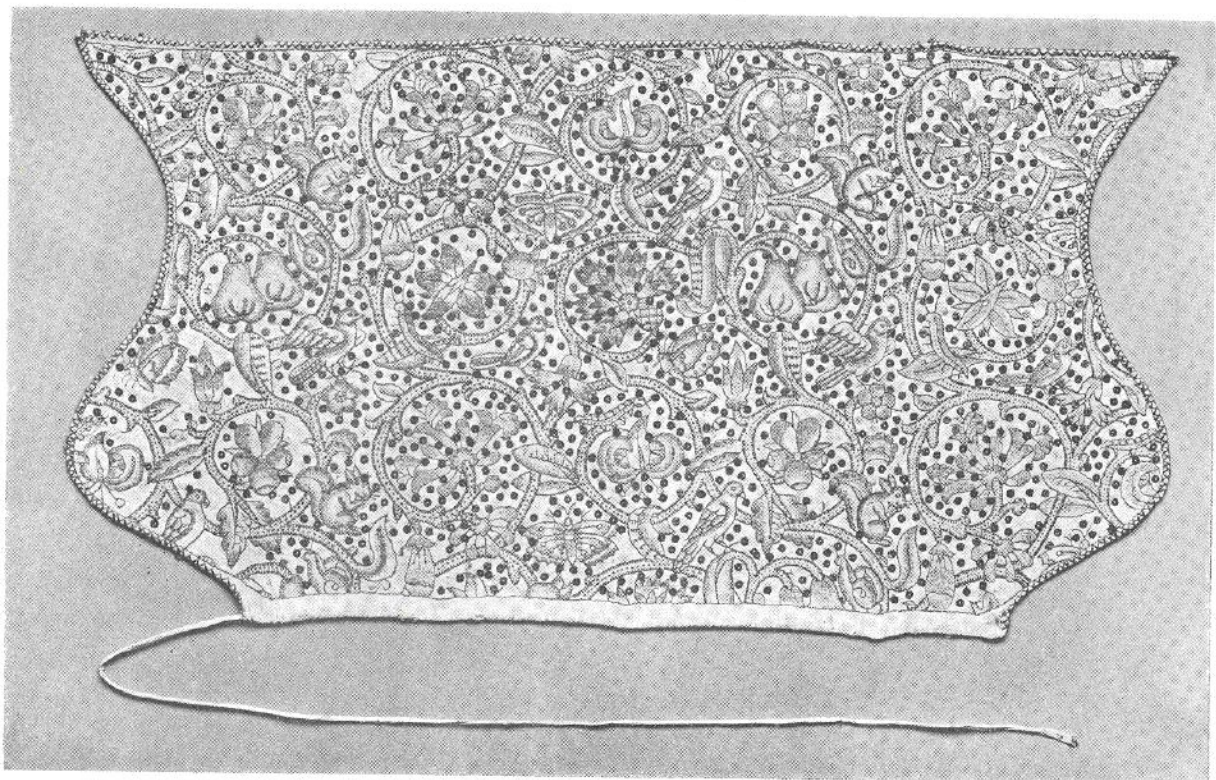
17 Part of a bodice
T.259-1926

L. 15 in., W. 16½ in.



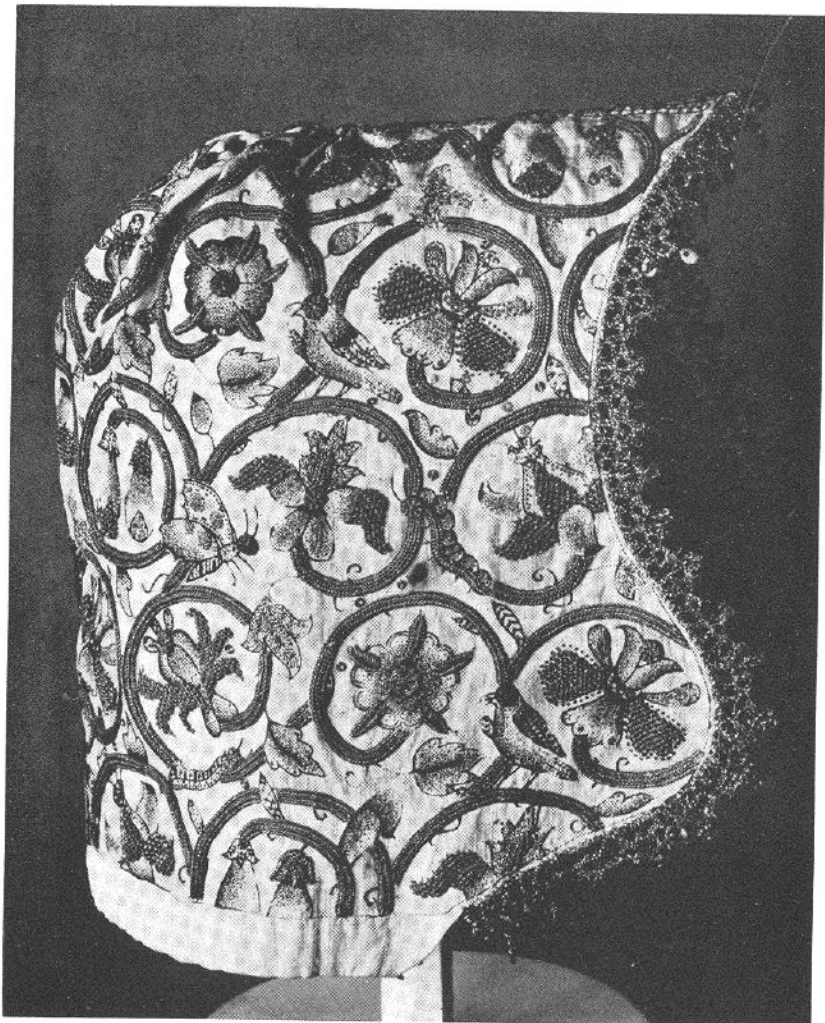
20 Coif, not made up
T.98-1925

W. $19\frac{1}{2}$ in., H. 9 in.



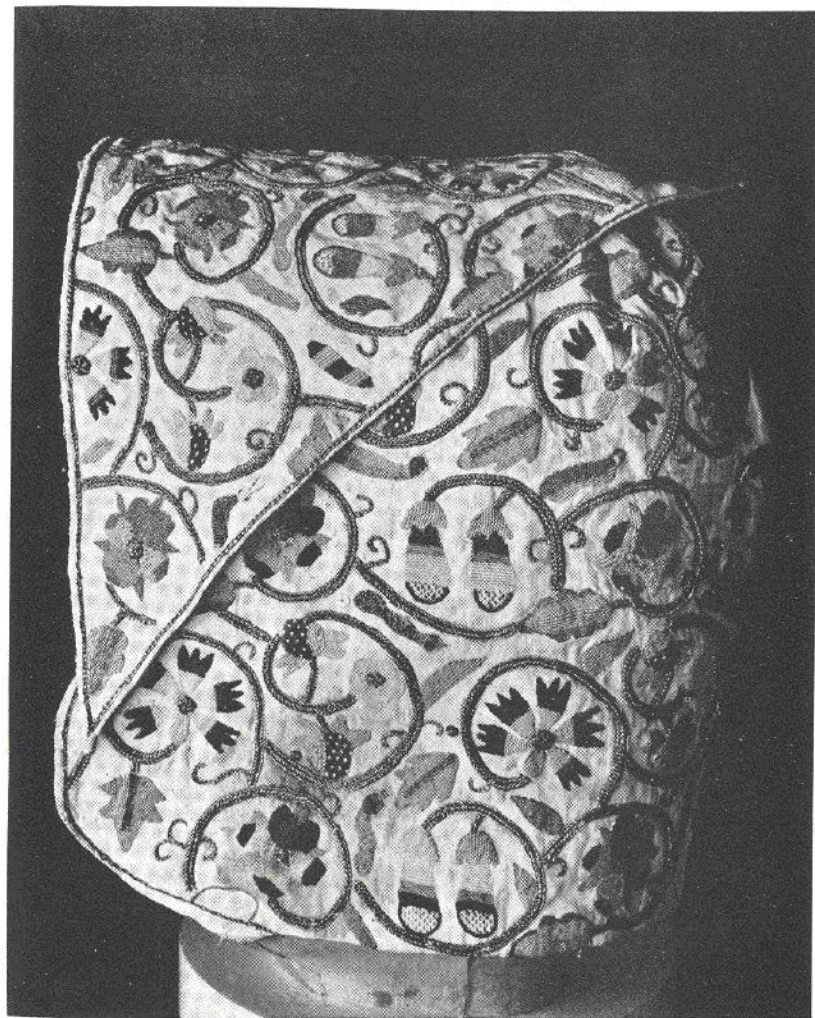
21 Coif, not made up
T.32-1936

W. $16\frac{1}{2}$ in., H. 9 in.



22 Coif
252-1899

W. 9 in. (made up), H. 10 in.



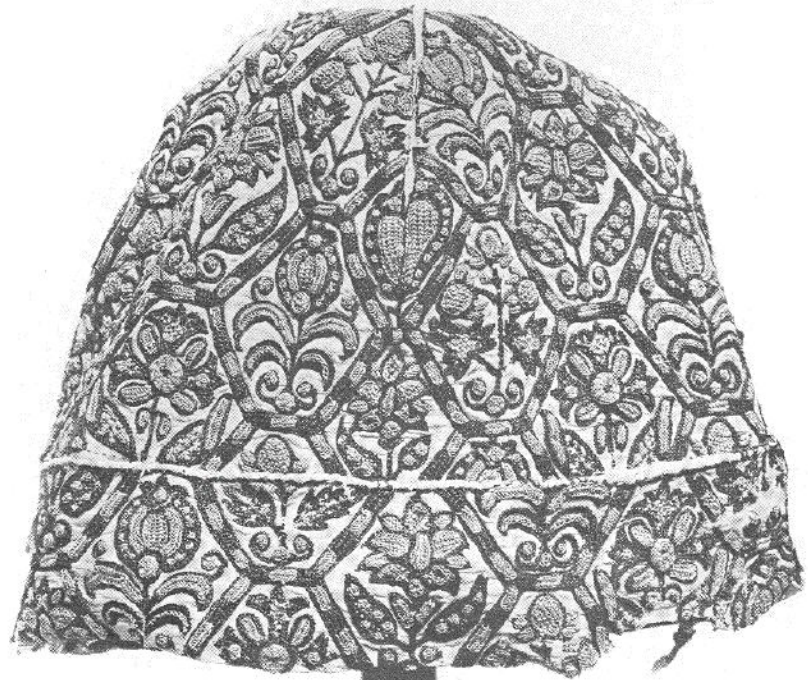
23 Coif and forehead cloth
Circ. 868 & A-1924

*Coif: W. 8½ in. (made up), H. 8½ in.
Forehead cloth: W. 14 in., H. 6½ in.*



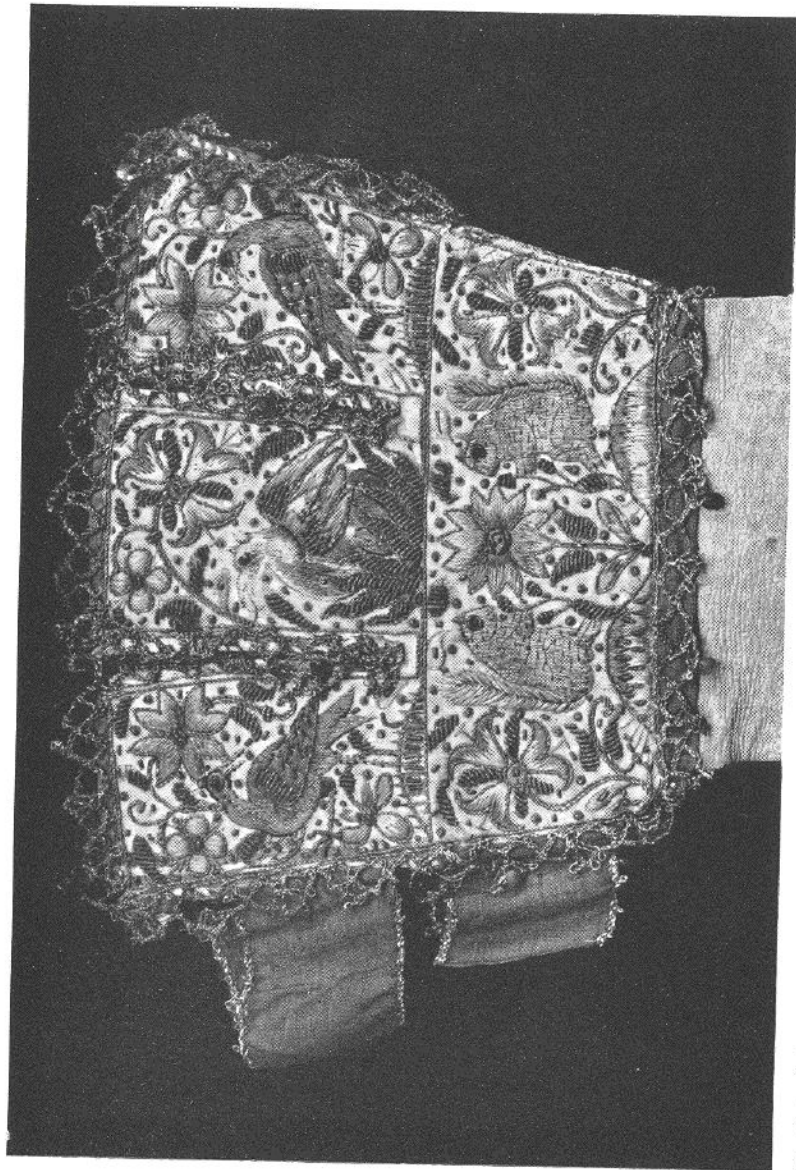
24 Man's cap
2016-1899

W. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (made up), H. 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.



25 Man's cap
198-1900

W. 11 in. (made up), H. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.



26. Pair of gloves
907A-1904

Technical Notes

- 1 Silk on linen canvas; tent stitch.
- 2 Silk on linen canvas; tent stitch.
- 3 Wool and silk on linen canvas; tent stitch.
- 4 and 5 Silk and silver thread on linen canvas, appliqué on white satin; tent and cross stitches, and couching.
- 6 Silk, silver and silver gilt thread on linen canvas, appliqué on black velvet; tent, cross and stem stitches, laid work and couching.
- 7 Silk on linen; back, chain, cord, braid and buttonhole stitches.
- 8 Wool and silk on linen canvas; cross and long-armed cross stitches.
- 9 Silk, silver-gilt thread and metal strips on satin; satin stitch and couching.
- 10 Silk and silver-gilt thread on white satin; chain and plaited braid stitches, buttonholing and couching.
- 11 Silk and metal thread on linen; long and short, and plaited braid stitches, spangles and metal purl.
- 12 Silk, silver-gilt and silver thread on linen; stem, chain, buttonhole, herringbone and plaited braid stitches, and couching.
- 13 Wool and silk on linen canvas; tent stitch.
- 14 Wool and silk on linen canvas; tent stitch.
- 15 Silk, silver-gilt and silver thread on linen; chain stitch and buttonholing.
- 16 Silk and silver-gilt thread on linen; mainly chain and plaited braid stitches, and buttonholing.
- 17 Silk, silver-gilt and silver thread on linen; couching and buttonholing.
- 18 Silk, silver-gilt and silver thread on linen; chain and satin stitches, couching and buttonholing.
- 19 Silk on linen; stem and double coral stitches, and speckling.
- 20 Silver-gilt and white linen on linen; chain and plaited braid stitches, cut and drawn work with needlepoint lace fillings.
- 21 Silk and silver-gilt spangles on linen; buttonhole and herringbone stitches, and speckling.
- 22 Silk and silver-gilt thread on linen; chain and plaited braid stitches, couching and speckling.
- 23 Silk and silver-gilt thread on linen; mainly buttonhole and plaited braid stitches.
- 24 Silk, silver-gilt and silver thread on linen; mainly buttonhole and plaited braid stitches.
- 25 Silk and silver-gilt thread on linen; chain, interlacing and plaited braid stitches.
- 26 Silk, silver-gilt and silver thread on satin; long and short, and satin stitches, and couching.