

Celebrating... Forty Years of the Marlborough and District Branch

Chris Cook tells us why she and the other members of her branch of the embroiderer's guild are digging through their fabric stashes looking for scraps of red...

Here I am, sorting through my hoard of red fabrics and threads, some so precious that I have never used them, while other scraps drift in and out of my magpie collection. We have been challenged by our chairman to each make a ruby square; the square is to be ten inches by ten inches, we are free to use any materials, any

techniques, any design. The colour is to be predominantly red but to include touches of other colours. Yes you've guessed it, our Marlborough and District Embroiderers' Guild is forty years old in April 2016. We are celebrating with an exhibition of members' work and to take centre stage, we are planning to show a block of ruby squares.

There are so many decisions to make when starting a piece of work. We are able to explore, invent and be excited by a whole range of products and materials. Our workbox is as likely to contain a soldering iron as a needle case. We may have fabric paints and printing blocks, brushes and rollers. We may hand stitch with the most astonishing range of threads or use

Clockwise from left:
*Ruby II; Woodpecker
and Box; 1976-77
Guild Programme;
Cockerel.*

a sewing machine as a drawing tool, employ soluble fabrics to create lacy structures, or work with a whole range of non-woven materials. Embroiderers nowadays are bombarded with so much choice. Styles of embroidery come and go and change frequently over the years. Embroidery worked an age ago dates alarmingly. Such pieces can end up in a charity shop only to be reclaimed by a new generation searching for vintage items.

As we look forward to our next exhibition, we start to wonder what our branch was like forty years ago. Thanks to one of our members, we have the Branch programme for 1976/77 and we read that meetings were held in Marlborough Public Library. Monthly talks and workshops laid the foundation for how our branch works today. In this old programme, we see Miss Kaye Norris gave a series of talks about the History of Embroidery. Kaye Norris had been taught by Constance Howard at Goldsmith's College of Art, they remained life long friends. Some examples of Kay Norris's work can be seen in "Inspiration for Embroidery", by Constance Howard published by Batsford in 1966. Constance Howard had an enormous influence on contemporary embroidery, urging that the design side of embroidery should not be overlooked and was as important as the craftsmanship. Another book by Constance Howard, "Embroidery and Colour", was published in 1976, which is as



relevant now as it was forty years ago but it appears strange to us that a book about colour has so few coloured illustrations. Nowadays, modern technology means that we have easy access to wonderfully produced books full of enticing colour, not to mention CDs and YouTube with instant access to the world of "how to do it" range of crafts. Followers of Pinterest and blogging embroiderers abound. Our own branch now communicates with members online and we have published our own newsletter since 2001. One of our members designed our website and another writes a regular blog showing photos of talks, workshops and outings.

In 1977, Mrs Vilma Wells gave a design workshop with an exercise based on black and white counter-change. The results of this can be seen in the box top designed and then the box constructed by Lorraine Lockwood. Lorraine's embroidered Cockerel was part of the Branch Challenge of 1977. Back then, members were given a preprinted picture of the cockerel and told that they could use any method excluding gold work or canvas work. Both of these pieces were in the 1978 July exhibition.

Early meetings were held in Marlborough Library, then the Scout Hut, followed by the Bowling Club and now our Branch meets in Kennet Valley Hall in Lockeridge and

we currently have a membership of sixty five. As well as monthly talks with regular and exciting workshops, we run a stitch day for members who want to come and do their own work. We run a six-session course, 'Design to Stitch', which covers machine techniques with a chance to experiment with design. Young Embroiderers began in 2003 and continues to thrive, meeting regularly during school holidays.

Marlborough and District Embroiderers' Guild has held four previous exhibitions since 1978 and our next exhibition is well into its planning stage. At each meeting, new ruby squares are finished and presented and they look very exciting. We do hope that you will come and visit our exhibition in Lockeridge, in April 2016 and see for yourself. **TC**

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Tea & cakes available all day, sales tables, textile demonstrations, Young Embroiderers' display
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