

English Lace I. Needlepoint By M. Jourdain

It has been said that originality has never been a marked feature of English needlework, and that at all times its patterns and stitches have shown well-defined traces of foreign influence, and skilful adaptation rather than invention has distinguished its executants even when the art has been at its highest level in this country. This is entirely true with regard to the English needlepoint laces of the early seventeenth century, in which the design and the method of workmanship is that of the contemporary Italian work. The fine flax for lace-making was also not home-grown, but imported from Flanders* and France.

* "If the law made for sowing hemp and flax were executed and . . . provision made for growing woad and madder in the realm, as by some men's diligence it is already practised, which growth is here found better than that from beyond seas, we should not need to seek into France for it. Besides Flanders hath enough; no country rob-beth England so much as France."—*Considerations delivered to the Parliament, 1559. Calendar of Cecil MSS.*

According to Fuller not a tenth part of the flax used in England was home-grown.†

Cutwork, described as of Italian and Flemish manufacture, the former being the more expensive, is of common occurrence in Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe accounts, and an English version of Vinciolo‡ was

Part I., Hist. MSS Comm.

† Lydgate, in *Ballad of London Luckpenny*, writes that Paris thread was the most prized:—

"Here is Paris thredde, the finest in the land."

"Our whole land (doth not) afford the tenth part of what is spent therein; so that we are fain to fetch it from Flanders, France, yea as far as Egypt itself. It may seem strange that our soil kindly for that seed, the use wherof and profit hereby so great, yet so little care is taken for the planting thereof, which well husbanded would find linen for the rich and living for the poor. Many would never be indicted spinsters, were they *Spinsters* indeed. . . . Some thousands of pounds are sent yearly over out of England to buy that commodity."—*Fuller, Worthies of England.*

‡ *New and Singular Patternes and Workes of Linnen Serving for Patternes to make all sorts of Lace Edginges and Cutworkes*, by Vincentio. Printed by John Wolfe and Edward White, 1591. In the

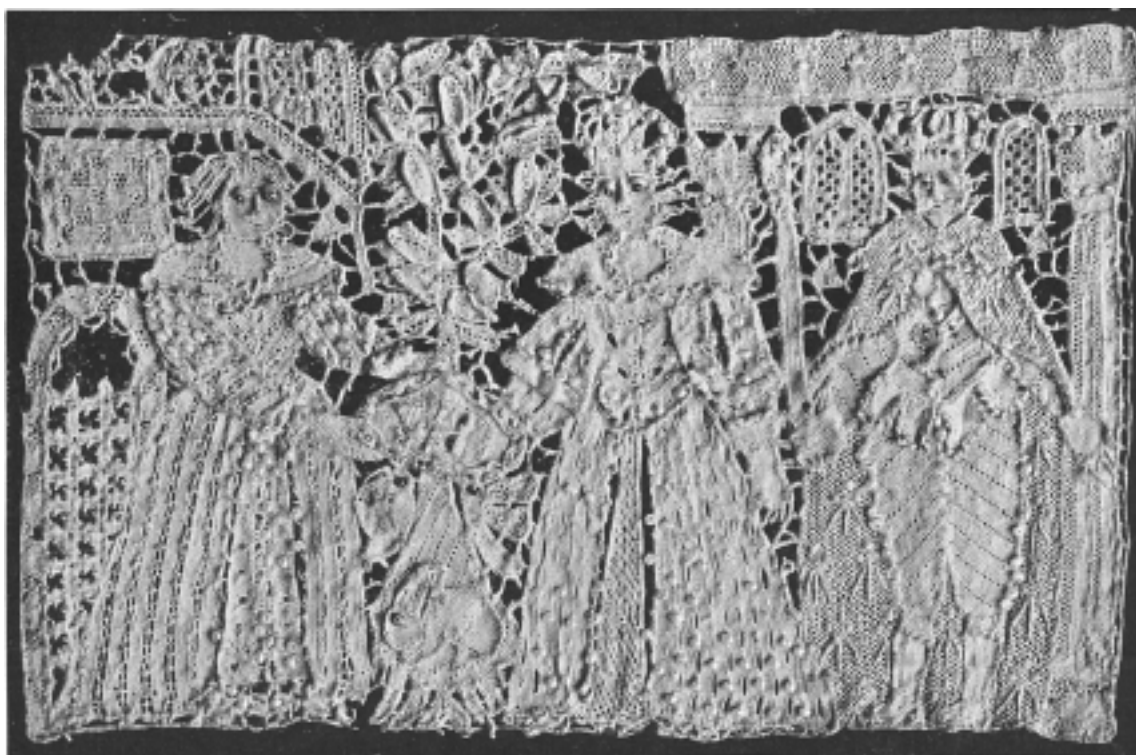


PORTRAIT OF ELIZ. PAULET, ASHMOLEAN GALLERY, OXFORD (*Copyright*)

The Connoisseur

printed in 1591, in which we are told that cutwork was "greatly accepted of by ladies and gentlemen, and consequently by the common people." An illustration from the Ashmolean Gallery, Oxford, shows a fine apron* of cutwork, perhaps made by the wearer, Lady Elizabeth Paulet, who holds in her left hand a small picture of the Magdalen, probably in needlework. It is attributed to Daniel Mytens the elder (d. 1656), and was painted in England in the reigns of James I. and Charles I. The *English Connoisseur* (ii. 80) mentions a "Lady

When needlepoint lace forsook purely geometrical lines, certain "English" characteristics are noticeable. In the Victoria and Albert Museum a pair of scallops of needlepoint lace contain within one compartment a thistle, within the other a rose, and there are two of similar design in Mr. Sydney Vacher's collection. In the interesting collar described as Italian in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the design is of flowers arranged stiffly on an angular stem. These flowers, Tudor roses and pinks, are more naturalistic than any Italian lace, and the Tudor rose, with stiff



ENGLISH NEEDLEPOINT: SALOME WITH JOHN THE BAPTIST'S HEAD IN THE POSSESSION OF MRS. ADY

Betty Paulet, an ingenious lady of the Duke of Bolton's family in the reign of James I., *drawn in a dress of her own work*, full length," probably the same "Lady Eliz. Paulet" whose gift of certain admirable needlework was accepted by the University of Oxford in convocation July 9th, 1636.†

Epistle to the Reader we have its foreign origin admitted: "It being my chance to lighten upon certaine paternes of cutworke and others brought out of Foreign Countries which have bin greatly accepted of by divers Ladies and Gentlewomen of sundrie nations and consequently of the common people," etc.

* A similar apron composed almost entirely of geometrical lace is seen in the portrait of Anne, daughter of Sir Peter Vanlore, Kt., first wife of Sir Charles Caesar, Kt. (about 1614), in the possession of Captain Cottrell-Dormer. This portrait is the frontispiece of *The History of Lace*, Mrs. Palliser, ed. 1902. The lace is there stated to be probably Flemish, Sir Peter having come from Utrecht.

† Many of the verses written in her honour by Cartwright and

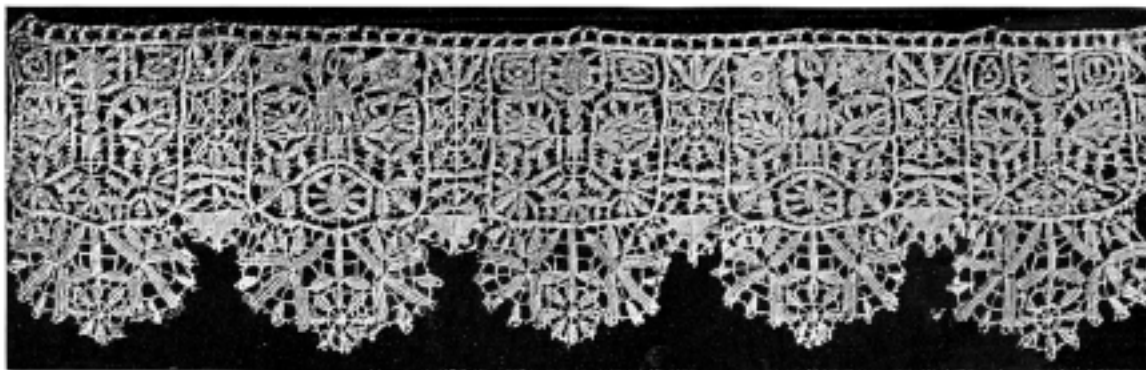
opposite leaflets, is not infrequently to be found in English samplers. The raised free petals of the rose are also characteristic.‡ The design also is compact and closely crowded, showing no feeling of the value of background so characteristic in Italian lace. Somewhat similar qualities may be seen in the collar of needlepoint in the picture of James Harrington§ (author of *Oceana*), by Gerard Honthorst, in the National Portrait Gallery, and various portraits of the reign of Charles I. The somewhat torn collar

others have been preserved. In the Bodleian a volume of them is MS. Bodl. 22.

‡ In a coverlet 348, 1901, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, some of the petals of the floral sprays embroidered upon it have been separately worked, and afterwards fixed to the satin, so as to stand away from the ground.

§ Painted between 1630-1640.

English Lace



ENGLISH NEEDLEPOINT (SEVENTEENTH CENTURY)

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS⁷

from the Isham collection† is of the same type, close, compact, and thick. In the same collection is a boy's doublet of white linen, quilted and embroidered with gold coloured silk, and edged with needlepoint lace.*

In 1635 a royal proclamation, having for its object† the protection of home fabrics, prohibited the use of foreign cutworks, and ordered all "purlles," ‡ cutworks, and "bone laces" of English make to be taken to a house "near the sign of the Red Hart, in Fore Street, without Cripplegate, and then sealed by Thomas Smith or his deputy."

Needlepoint lace representing some Bible story is occasionally to be met with in samplers of the

seventeenth century. A sachet in the possession of Sir Hubert Jerningham shows Salome, with the head of John the Baptist, before Herod. The dresses are picked out with seed pearls, and the eyes indicated by small black beads. A similar but larger specimen is in the possession of Mrs. Head, and represents the Judgement of Solomon. A third piece in the possession of Mrs. Croly, in which Salome and the head of John the Baptist are again represented, shows the same crowded design and finely-wrought costume, and the same application of beads.

The application of bugles, seed-pearls, and spangles upon lace is a detail that cannot fail to strike the reader of the Wardrobe Accounts of Queen Elizabeth.§

The singular custom of representing religious subjects, both in lace, cutwork, and embroidery, became prominent towards the end of the reign of

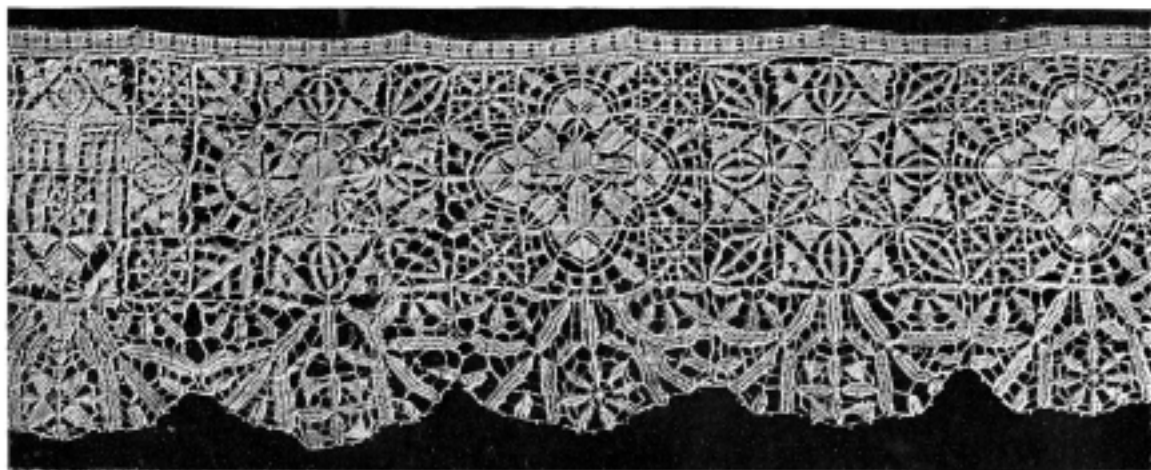
* Worn in the reign of Charles I.

† Rymer's *Foedera*.

‡ Purl is to form an edging on lace, to form an embroidered border. It is a contraction of the old word *purfle*, to embroider on the edge. M.E. *purfilen*, Old French *porfiler*, later *pourfiler*. "Pourfiler d'or, to purfle, tinsell, or overcast with gold thread."—*Cotgrave*.

"Lace, a cord, tie, plaited string (F., —L.), M.E. las, laas, King Alisaunder, 7698; Chaucer, C.T. 394—O.F. las, lags, a snare; cf. lags courant, a noose, running knot; *Col.*—Lat. laqueus, a noose, snare or knot.—*Skeat*.

§ In the New Year, 1559-60, the Countess of Worcester offers a ruff of lawn cutwork set with twenty small knobs like mullets, garnished with small sparks of rubies and pearls.—*Progresses of Queen Elizabeth* (Nichols).



ENGLISH NEEDLEPOINT (SEVENTEENTH CENTURY)

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS

James I.,* and was a reflection of the Puritan taste. "For flowers" now are made "Church Histories."† Stuart raised embroideries, better known as stump work, have the costumes of the figures and various accessories covered with the stitch used in needlepoint lace.

Samplers carried on the tradition of cutwork, which was still made for "seaming" lace, for linen‡ sheets, shirts, cupboard

cloths, cushion cloths, etc., long after freer designs were in vogue for other uses. The latest sampler which includes a band of cutwork bears the date 1726.§

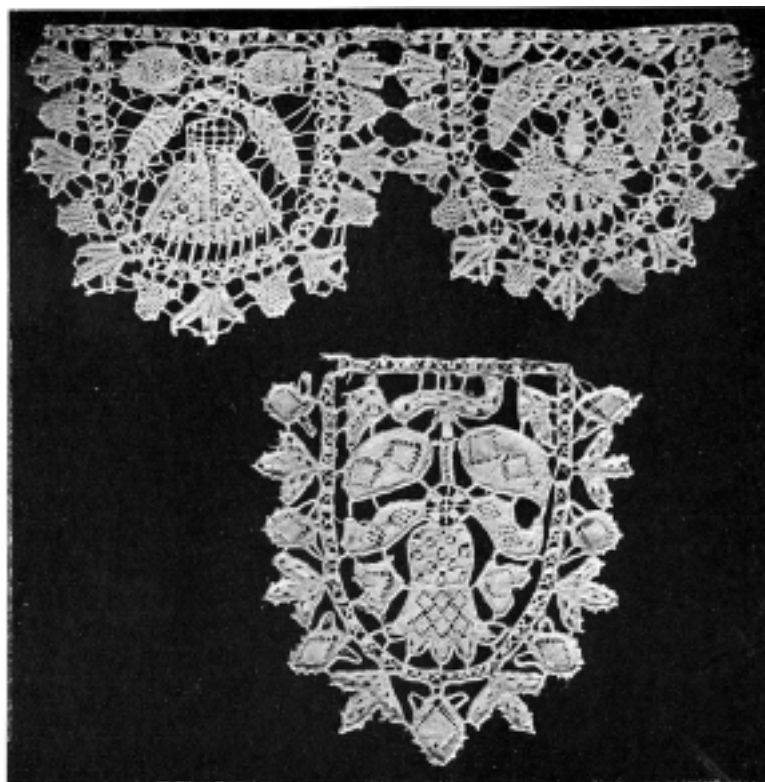
A quantity of coarse lace continued apparently to be made in England until the eighteenth century, for the author of *Britannia Languens* complains that

* "The linen of men and women was either so worked as to resemble lace, or was ornamented by the needle into representations of fruit and flowers, passages of history, etc."—*Every Man out of his Humour* (Ben Jonson).

† *The City Match* (Jasper Mayne).

‡ In Anne Hathaway's cottage in Shottery, Warwickshire, is shown the best linen sheet, which has a narrow strip about an inch and a half wide of cutwork joining the two breadths together, where there would otherwise be a seam. The pattern is of a simple zig-zag character.

§ In the possession of Mrs. C. J. Longman.



NEEDLEPOINT SCALLOPS ENGLISH SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN THE POSSESSION OF MR. SYDNEY VACHER

"the manufacture of linen was once the huswifery of English ladies, gentlewomen, and other women; now (1680) the huswifery women of England employ themselves in making an ill sort of lace, which serves no national or natural necessity."

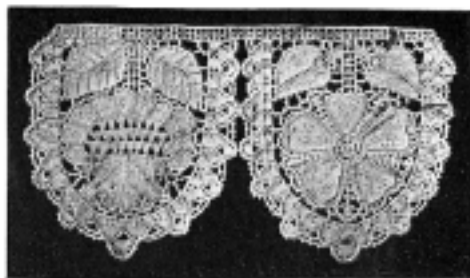
A kind of work formed of very fine needlepoint stitches, with the pattern formed by a series of small pinholes, is the "hollie point,"*

or holy point, which was so much used to ornament christening caps of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A sampler in the possession of Mrs. Head† in most places has the linen completely cut away, and the round or square holes so formed filled up with "hollie point," showing an initial or coronet, a small ornament like an acorn or a fleur-de-lys, or a small diamond diaper pattern. Many of the small designs are almost exactly reproduced in the crowns of some

caps in Mrs. Head's collection. Some of the designs for hollie work are more elaborate, and show a plant or an angular stem, in a flower pot, or two doves alighting on a flower.

* Collars of "Hollie Work" appear in the Inventories of Mary Stuart.

† This sampler is dated 1728. It is illustrated in "The Sampler, its Development and Decay," by Mrs. Head (*The Reliquary and Illustrated Archeologist*).



ENGLISH NEEDLEPOINT SCALLOPS SEVENTEENTH CENTURY VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM