



ENGLISH

dated 1656

ELIZABETH CALTHORPE

Mrs. Longman's Collection

H. 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. W. 7 in.



SAMPLERS
SELECTED AND DESCRIBED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY LEIGH ASHTON
*Of the Victoria and Albert
Museum*

THE MEDICI SOCIETY
LONDON AND BOSTON

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TO MY SISTER
KATHARINE

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

I

PLATE		
I	Sampler; probably second quarter of the 17th century	Victoria and Albert Museum
II	Sampler; mid-17th century	Mrs. Croly
III	Elizabeth Calthorpe's sampler; dated 1656	Mrs. Longman
IV	Martha Wheeler's sampler; dated 1710	Victoria and Albert Museum
V	Anne Mazelan's sampler; dated 1745	Mrs. Longman
VI	Mary Young's sampler; dated 1811-12	Mrs. Croly

II

FIGURE		
1	Cushion; English or Scotch, period of James I (1603-25)	Victoria and Albert Museum
2	Susan Nebabri's sampler; late 16th century	London Museum
3	Cut-work and embroidered sampler; late 16th or early 17th century	Sir Wm. Lawrence
4	(a) Two designs from Shorleyker's <i>Schole-house for the Needle</i> (1624)	
	(b) Panel of embroidery; Italian, 17th century	John Jacoby, Esq.
5	Embroidered sampler; period of James I (1603-25)	Victoria and Albert Museum
6	Anne Gower's sampler; before 1634	Essex Institute, Salem, Mass.
7	Sampler worked by a lady of the family of the Chichesters of Arlington, Devon; before 1640	Dr. Glaisher
8	(a) Sampler worked by B.P.; dated 1634	Mrs. Croly
	(b) Anne Bourne's sampler; mid-17th century	Sir Wm. Lawrence
9	Elizabeth Hinde's sampler; dated 1643	Mrs. Head
10	Rebeckah Pope's sampler; dated 1644	Victoria and Albert Museum
11	Sampler worked by M.J.; probably 2nd quarter of the 17th century, i.e. period of Charles I (1625-49)	„ „
12	Panel from a cut-work sampler; mid-17th century	Mrs. Longman
13	Sampler; probably period of Charles I (1625-49)	Victoria and Albert Museum
14	Sampler; probably period of Charles I (1625-49)	J. F. Glover, Esq.
15	Sampler; probably period of Charles I (1625-49)	Formerly in the possession of Mrs. Grove

FIGURE

16	Sampler; mid-17th century	Dr. Glaisher
17	Panel from a sampler; probably period of Charles I (1625-49)	Victoria and Albert Museum
18	Martha Salter's sampler; dated 1651	" "
19	Fragment of a sampler; dated 1657	Sir Wm. Lawrence
20	Panel from a sampler; 2nd half of the 17th century	Victoria and Albert Museum
21	Sarah Fletcher's sampler; dated 1668	John Jacoby, Esq.
22	Panel from a sampler; 17th century	Sir Wm. Lawrence
23	Sampler; dated 1669	Dr. Glaisher
24	(a) Sampler; probably period of Charles II (1660-85) (b) Sampler; probably period of Charles II (1660-85)	John Jacoby, Esq. "
25	Anne Lawly's sampler; dated 1676	Dr. Glaisher
26	Elizabeth Priest's sampler; dated 1677	John Jacoby, Esq.
27	Sampler; dated 1677	Mrs. Croly
28	Epistle sampler; dated 1693	Formerly in the possession of Mrs. Fletcher
29	Part of Elizabeth Mackett's sampler; dated 1696	Victoria and Albert Museum
30	Susannah Wilkinson's sampler; dated 1699-1700	Mrs. Longman
31	Susanna Ingram's sampler; dated 1700	"
32	Jane Bacon's sampler; dated 1707	"
33	Mary Moyse's sampler; dated 1709	Dr. Glaisher
34	Mary Caney's sampler; dated 1710	Mrs. Longman
35	Elizabeth Clements' sampler; dated 1712	Mrs. Croly
36	Edward and Ruth Bachelor's sampler; dated 1717	Dr. Glaisher
37	Jane Parish's sampler; dated 1718	Mrs. Longman
38	Tomasina Ashmull's sampler; dated 1724	Mrs. Croly
39	Mary Brewitt's sampler; dated 1725	Dr. Glaisher
40	Mary Stroud's sampler; dated 1727	Sir Wm. Lawrence
41	Sampler worked by H.B.; dated 1728	Dr. Glaisher
42	Mary Smith's sampler; dated 1729	Victoria and Albert Museum
43	Ann Wolfray's sampler; dated 1736	Mrs. Longman
44	Mary Wakeling's sampler; dated 1742	Victoria and Albert Museum
45	Sampler worked by A.V.; dated 1745	Sir Wm. Lawrence
46	Elizabeth Cridland's sampler; dated 1752	Victoria and Albert Museum

Errata

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

*Reference numbers
should read*

- Elizabeth Calthorpe's sampler. *Frontispiece.*
 Plate I. Sampler; probably second quarter of the 17th century.
 II. Sampler; mid-17th century.
 III. Martha Wheeler's sampler.
 IV. Anne Mazelan's sampler.
 V. Mary Young's sampler.

FIGURE

47	Catherine Benskin's sampler; dated 1754	Dr. Glaisher
48	E. Philips' sampler; dated 1761	Mrs. Huish
49	Sarah Everitt's sampler; dated 1777	Mrs. Croly
50	Elizabeth Hewitt's sampler; dated 1778	„
51	Elizabeth Hincks' sampler; dated 1780	John Jacoby, Esq.
52	Ann Seaton's Map sampler; dated 1790	Dr. Glaisher
53	Sarah Beckett's sampler; dated 1798	Mrs. Huish
54	M. Quartier's sampler; dated 1799	Mrs. Longman
55	Susanna Gellett's sampler; dated 1800	„
56	Sarah Ralph's sampler; dated 1810	Mrs. Croly
57	Mary Green's sampler; 1st quarter of the 19th century	„
58	Lucy Titehall's sampler; dated 1816	Mrs. Longman
59	Sampler; about 1820-40	„
60	Mary Ann Enderwick's sampler; dated 1831	P. C. Trendell, Esq.
61	Mary Pether's sampler; dated 1839	Victoria and Albert Museum
62	Joseph Meableroom's sampler; dated 1844	Mrs. Longman
63	Sampler; dated 1874	John Jacoby, Esq.
64	Lucke Boten's sampler; German, dated 1618	Mrs. Hemming
65	(a) Sampler; German, dated 1775	Mrs. Longman
	(b) Sampler; German, 2nd half of the 18th century	„
66	Sampler; Flemish, 2nd half of the 18th century	„
67	Sampler; Danish (?), dated 1751	Victoria and Albert Museum
68	Sampler; Danish, dated 1798	„ „
69	Theresa Casare's sampler; Spanish, dated 1762	„ „
70	Abigail Pinniger's sampler; American, dated 1730	Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, U.S.A.
71	Mary Russell's sampler; American, dated 1784	Mrs. Emma B. Hodge
72	Mary Ann Fessenden Vinton's sampler; American, dated 1819	„

SAMPLERS

THAT eminent divine, Dr. Watts, composed the following verses for his niece to embroider on her sampler :

Jesus, permit Thy gracious name to stand
As the first efforts of a youthful hand.
And, as her fingers on the canvas move,
Inspire her tender heart to seek Thy love.
With Thy dear children let her have a part
And write Thy name Thyself upon her heart.

Our immediate ancestresses spent much of their early life in the painful embroidery of such and more lugubrious aphorisms ; for that age of sanctimony and order was one in which the sampler flourished, and throughout the earlier part of the 19th century, and to a slightly lesser extent the whole of the 18th century, it was as a task for infant fingers that its popularity was so widely established, rather than in its original employment as a pattern book. During the earlier stages of its history the sampler was worked by adults as well as by children, and it is only later that this exploitation of youthful industry became universal among the instructors of those of tender age. The word itself is derived from the Latin "exemplar" through the old French "esemplaire." Palsgrave's glossary of 1536 gives it as "exampler, for a woman to work by ; exemple" : and many variant spellings exist, such as "saumplarie, sam-cloth," and others. The sampler is an instance of a widespread domestic cult, but England is its real home. There is a considerable group of Continental workmanship, among which the French examples are rarest, and a large number of American specimens, chiefly of the 18th and 19th centuries. What is probably the earliest sampler in existence is in the London Museum (fig. 2). It is in regular bands of cut- and drawn-work, in one of which Elizabeth's Arms with the royal supporters are worked and her initials. The earliest dated sampler, which is of German origin, is in the possession of Mrs. Hemming and is of the year 1618 (fig. 64).

ENGLAND

The history of the sampler in England extends roughly from the beginning of the 17th to the middle of the 19th century. References in literature take us back to the early 16th century, but we can only ascribe two examples to the Elizabethan period, none to an earlier one, and these only to the end of that reign. The earliest reference known is in the "inventorie" of the household of Queen Elizabeth of York for 1502, where "an elne of linnyn cloth for a sampler for the Quene, viijd," is mentioned. John Skelton, in 1523, speaks of the "sampler to sow on, the laxis to enbraid"; while King Edward VI, in 1552, had "xii samplers, a sampler of Normandie canvas wrought with green and black silk, and a book of parchment containing diverse patternes." From this last reference it is obvious that samplers in colour were in use in the 16th century, and it is plain that cut-work samplers were also popular in the latter part of the century from a passage in Rich's *Phylotus and Emelia* (1583): "She might goe seeke out her examplers and to peruse, which woorke would be best in a ruffe"—clearly one of those ladies referred to in the dedication of J. Wolfe and Edward White's *New and Singular Patternes and Workes of Linnen* (1591), "certaine patternes of cut-worke and others brought out of Foreign Countries, which have been greatly accepted of by divers Ladies and Gentlewomen of sundrie nations." Whether Margaret Tomson's "sawmpler with semes," bequeathed to Alys Pynchebeck in 1546, was decorated with bands of embroidery, is impossible to say, but it seems most likely, for Edward VI had eighteen pillow-cases of "holland with broad seams of silk of sundry coloured needlework," which can only put one interpretation on the word "seam." The designs on the earlier samplers were derived for the most part from pattern books, published on the Continent and in England, but these were expensive and hard to come by, and poor people could not afford to work from them only. There is no trace of any sampler among the vast store of needlework left by Bess of Hardwicke, nor are there any contemporary samplers in that great treasure-house

of 17th-century art, Knole. But this does not imply that samplers were not worked by such people, for the Chichester sampler (fig. 7) was worked by a lady of noble birth, and Anne Gower (fig. 6), who married Governor Endicott and went to America, was presumably of gentle birth also, while Lettice, Countess of Leicester, in her inventory for the year 1634 had sundry samplers, probably worked by herself and her ladies. There is, in truth, very little evidence about the workers of samplers—their anonymity is, indeed, part of their charm—but there is an exception in the case of Elizabeth Mackett (fig. 29), who was one of three sisters who lived in a small town in Sussex, and she seems representative of the type of person who sewed the sampler, a country lady of moderate means, who may have seen or been lent a pattern book, but who is much more likely to have learnt stitches and designs from her mother or her teacher. Such facts as these and the indubitable evidence of the length of time taken by some seamstresses—Susannah Wilkinson (fig. 30) took two, while Elizabeth Dean, whose sampler is in the Jacoby collection, took nine years to complete her task—are sufficient to account for the persistence of many patterns and the seemingly anachronistic character of certain of the designs during the 17th century.

To all intents and purposes it is with the 17th century that the history of the sampler in England commences. The most familiar type is long and narrow in shape, decorated in regular bands of embroidery or cut- and drawn-work. The width is, as a rule, from six to eight inches, and the length anything up to three feet or more. These samplers are worked on bleached and unbleached linen, and in the embroidery white and coloured silks and metal threads are employed. The cut- and drawn-work is always in white, as is a certain type of flat-stitch known as "white work" (*see* figs. 6, 21, 26, etc.). Both these latter forms of decoration may be seen in conjunction with coloured bands as well as singly. Another type of early sampler has only come into prominence in recent years. There are only a few examples in existence, and the decoration consists of devices dispersed over the ground in more or less regular fashion. By their design an early origin

is suggested, and it is possible that in this form a Tudor type is repeated ; but we cannot ascribe any single example to a date earlier than James I's reign, while the type is still in evidence in the second half of the 17th century.

The earliest dated sampler, German work of the year 1618 (fig. 64), and the small English cut-work and embroidered sampler (fig. 2) are unique for their period in shape and, indeed, in decoration. The former, which is very large, presents the appearance of two or three samplers side by side. The cut- and drawn-work are of the ordinary 17th-century type ; the embroidered patterns are, however, unusual, the square arrangement of designs, in particular, being uncommon, while both the feeling of the work and the use of two simple colours, red and green, proclaim its early date. This use of two single colours in an early sampler bears out the evidence of Edward VI's sampler (*see* p. 2). The name and date are placed in an unusual position, but both the lettering of the inscription and the working of the stitches are consistent with such a period, while the history of this sampler, which was acquired many years ago in a slop-shop in Deptford, is convincing enough to refute any question of an inserted date.

With the popularity of ruffs and other forms of lace adornment throughout the late 16th and the whole of the 17th century it is natural that cut- and drawn-work samplers should have been widely made. This class of work is illustrated on figs. 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 12, 17, 20, 21, 22, 26, 30, 40, 68. The first mention of cut-work is in the New Year's offerings to Queen Elizabeth in 1577-8, when Sir Philip Sidney presented her with a set of ruffs, and in the wardrobe accounts for 1584-5 mention is made of Italian cut-work. It was in Italy, in the main, that this type of work had its origin, though tradition has ascribed its introduction into England to Catherine of Aragon, who is reputed to have taught the women of Bedford the craft. The designs for cut-work are taken from lace pattern books, the majority of which were first published in Venice, where Ostaus' *La Vera perfettione del disegno, etc.*" (1561) and Vinciolo's *Isingolari e Nuovi Disegni* (1606) had a wide popularity. These books were everywhere pirated and

in some cases re-published in other countries, while Vinciolo himself was brought to Paris by Catherine de Medicis and established there with great honour. In Germany, Sibmacher's *Schön neues Mödelbuch* (1597) ran into many editions, as did Shorleyker's *Schole-house for the Needle* (1624) in England, the best known of the English books. Very few copies of these books have survived, probably because the method of transferring the designs to the canvas by pricking was apt to destroy the page.

There are several methods of making cut-work or punto tagliato. One is to arrange the threads upon a small frame, fashioning them to the patterns required ; then gum under the threads a piece of cloth, sew down those parts of the design which form the main structure, and cut away the unnecessary part of the cloth. Another method is worked without the undercloth, the designs being strengthened and elaborated, where desired, by a variety of other stitches, in particular the button-hole stitch. Drawn-work is closely allied to cut-work, but in this case some of the threads in the fabric are withdrawn, leaving a very loose web on which the patterns are embroidered. Both drawn-work and cut-work are used in the 17th-century sampler with great frequency, often in conjunction with bands of the flat satin-stitch known as whitework or damask stitch (*see above*). Needle-point lace panels, closely resembling punto reticella, are also frequently employed (*see figs. 8, 9*). The essence of the decoration of cut- and drawn-work is geometric, but letters are found fairly often and also more elaborate patterns with figures. Dated samplers are rare of this class, and neither names nor inscriptions are frequent. Examples of the former occasionally occur, the earliest known being Elizabeth Hinde's sampler of the year 1643 (*fig. 9*). There is no doubt, however, that some of the cut-work samplers in existence antedate Elizabeth Hinde's by many years. The magnificent sampler in the London Museum, worked by Susan Nebabri (*fig. 2*), contains a panel with Elizabeth's Royal Arms and the initials E.R. The design of this panel is markedly Tudor, and in addition the top two panels are worked in red and gold and black and silver thread respectively in a very distinctly Elizabethan

style. The fine needlework of the small sampler (fig. 3) is also closely allied to the work on late 16th-century caps, and the raised work is very typical of the fashion of that time. Another early drawn-work sampler is that of Anne Gower (fig. 6), who married Governor Endicott and sailed to America in 1628. As she worked this sampler while still unmarried, it must date before the year of that event. The majority of the extant samplers of this type belong to the middle of the century ; with the decline in popularity of the ruff, they cease to have their use, and it is rare to find an instance, even of the use of the lace panel, dated as late as 1700 (fig. 30).

The long banded sampler, most typical of all 17th-century samplers, had its greatest popularity in the middle of the century (figs. 8, 10, 18, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31). The earliest dated example is in the possession of Mrs. Croly and is of the year 1634 (fig. 8 (a)). The bands of decoration are often regular in width, though not necessarily so, and vary from one to three inches ; but where lettering is employed a narrower breadth is used, sometimes of as little as a quarter of an inch. The patterns on these samplers are mainly floral and geometrical. Pansies, roses, honeysuckle, carnations, lilies, strawberries and acorns are the most common flowers used, but the whole gamut of the Elizabethan needlewoman is run through and the raised and detached work found at the close of that period remain exceedingly popular. The extreme naturalism of the Elizabethan designs are lacking, however, and a formality, typical of James I's reign, persists in the earlier samplers, which later develops a marked angularity, especially noticeable in the second half of the century. A very strong current of Italian influence is found, particularly in the repeating border-patterns so common on these long samplers. Animals are used as motives of decoration, and small figures, holding upraised emblems, commence to appear early in the century. These figures, known as "boxers" (figs. 35, 41), were commonly used throughout the 17th and 18th century. They have their immediate prototypes in Italian and Spanish work of the late 16th and early 17th century (fig. 4 (b)), where their close connection with the putti of the Renaissance can be more plainly seen. Panels

with figures were popular as a main decorative feature of the sampler, but the majority of these are found in the second half of the century (fig. 23). The figures in these panels sometimes wear Elizabethan costume; in particular, a design representing a Queen and two ladies is not infrequently met with. But the character of the remainder of such samplers leaves no doubt as to their actual date. The colours used in the 17th-century sampler are paler in tone than those of the 18th century, and the variety of stitches employed is considerable, the commonest being the cross, short and back-stitch and for the lettering satin and eye-let. In addition petit-point, detached and padded work, are often used and metal-thread embroidery is widely employed, while pearls are occasionally found. Texts and verses are not common, but increase in popularity during the latter part of the century, during which a shorter type of sampler begins to appear (fig. 3), which gradually supersedes the long variety and by the end of the century is regularly adopted. With this change the bands become narrower, texts and inscriptions occupy a larger portion of the sampler, with the consequence that a more instructional type succeeds the old-fashioned form, which was in reality the substitution for a pattern book.

There remains the third group of the 17th century, which is shorter and narrower in shape than the long banded sampler and has the ground sown with devices of various kinds, more or less regularly dispersed over the sampler. These devices are for the most part geometric in character, but sprays of flowers, birds, animals, caterpillars, are frequently used, while small panels suitable for the embroidery of purses, cushions, etc., are often introduced. Such samplers are illustrated on figs. 5, 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 24; and a cushion with similar patterns on fig. 1. The colours used are very varied, and a great deal of metal thread and raised work is employed. A very common feature of the working of the geometric devices is that the pattern, which is often quadripartite, is left in various stages, only one quarter showing the completed design. There are only about twenty of this class of sampler known at present, and though others are probably lying hidden in remote places, there is no likelihood of very many more