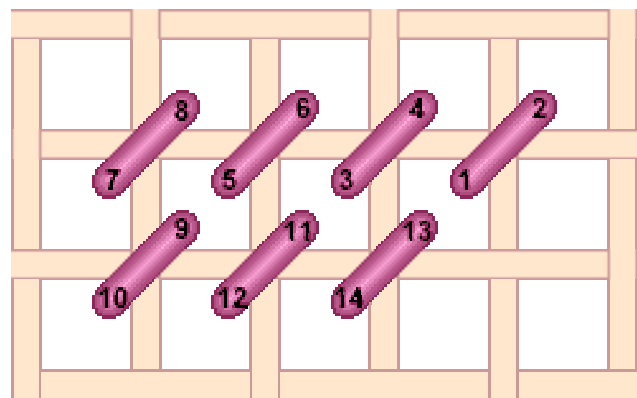
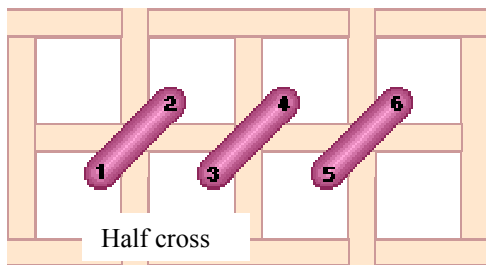


## 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CANVASWORK (primarily English and French)

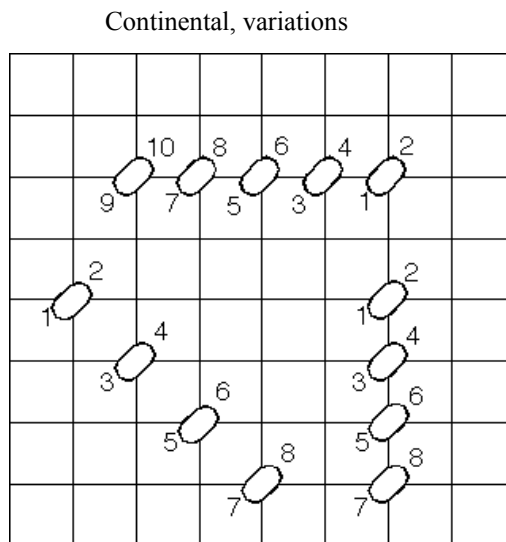
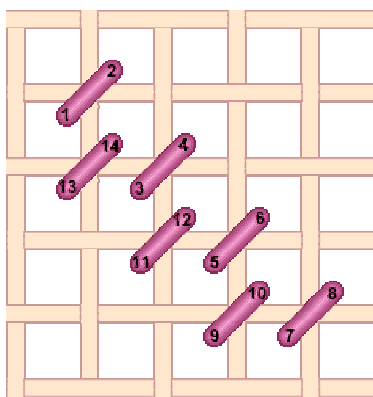
**What is Canvaswork?** Canvaswork is a type of embroidery done on stiff evenweave ground fabric. The fabric is woven in such a way as to create a clearly discernable and regularly spaced mesh. In period, this base ‘canvas’ was made from linen, hemp, or a combination of the two. **TENT STITCH** and **CROSS STITCH** are the two most commonly used stitches found in period canvaswork. The embroidery was done using silk or wool. 16<sup>th</sup> Century canvaswork was used for household furnishings, such as pillows and bed hangings. It was not used for costuming. An entire textile could be created with canvaswork (such as bed valence, table carpets, and cushion covers), but embroiderers also used the technique to create “slips” for appliqué. Surviving canvaswork textiles indicate that both professionals and amateurs were active in creating this type of embroidery.

### TENT STITCH & CROSS STITCH

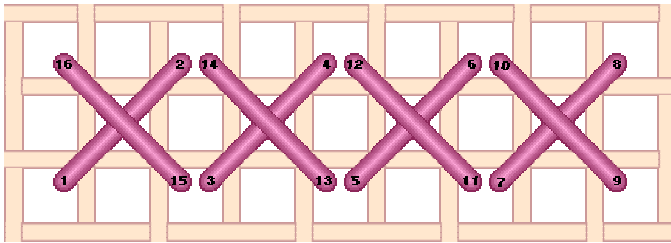
In period, the word “tent” could mean an embroidery frame. There are 3 basic ‘tent’ stitches (**Half cross**, **Continental**, and **Basket weave**), which are illustrated below. The secondary sources I’ve consulted never indicate which of these tent stitches were used on any particular piece of canvaswork. I have been told that basket weave is not a period stitch, but I won’t swear to that. In modern stitching it is most used to fill in large areas of solid color. Continental stitch is considered more hardwearing than half cross, and it is the form of tent stitch I use most often when doing period style canvaswork. The greatest problem in using tent stitch is the tendency to create a noticeable directional slant, especially in large pieces. As a result, finished textiles such as the BRADFORD TABLE CARPET are noticeably slanted rather than being a perfect rectangle.



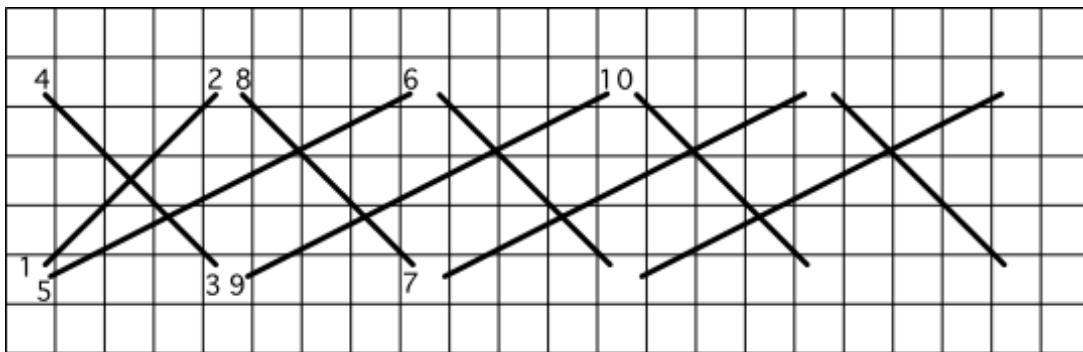
Basket weave (not period?)



**Cross-stitch** is seen in fewer surviving examples of period canvaswork than is Tent stitch. The most famous examples of cross-stitched canvaswork are the appliqué panels created by Mary, Queen of Scots (and others) that decorate the OXBURGH HANGINGS.



**Long arm cross-stitch** was also still in use—for example, the two related square cushion covers from the early 17<sup>th</sup> C (one is at the Met, the other at the Art Institute of Chicago).



### STITCH COUNTS

**18, 20, 22 ct is right on target!** There was variation on stitch counts, of course, and some photographs I've examined suggest counts in the mid 20s. See Mary Rhodes' *The Batsford Book of Embroidery* for stitch counts on specific English items, including the Bradford table carpet, which she claims is 20 ct. Also George Wingfield Digby's *Elizabethan Embroidery* list stitch counts for a handful of items. The higher stitch count pieces (such as the Calthorp purse, 40 ct) were almost certainly done by professionals.

Some of the Oxburgh pieces as well as the early 17<sup>th</sup> C square cushions at the Met and the Art Institute of Chicago (long arm cross-stitch) are worked at even lower stitch counts—somewhere between **11-14 ct** (estimates).

### THREADS

**“Crewel”** = thin, lightly twisted double stranded worsted wool yarn, used in embroidery & other textiles. OED cites it (in this context) as early as 1494.

**Silk** = Imported into England, but reeled/spun/dyed in England. 1 ounce of embroidery silk cost between 2-3 shillings in late 16<sup>th</sup> C England (translation: Very Expensive! Proportionally MUCH more expensive than modern embroidery silk)

**Metallic**= gold, silver, “gilt” threads. The metal was hammered amazingly thin, and wrapped around a silk core. Silver threads do eventually tarnish.