

Pilgrim Stitchers 2011

As we arrived for the traditional opening night at Loch Fyne, Winchester, we were thrilled to discover that this year's event was full, a first for our organiser Sue Blomley (www.pilgrimstitchers.org), and so well deserved. It was lovely to meet new pilgrims from the UK, France, Holland and the USA, among the regulars and we had the upstairs at the Restaurant all to ourselves, to get to know each other and to catch up on all the news. Some of the new ladies had taken advantage of a catch-up class during the day, where Sue offers the previous year's projects.

Our first full day was such a treat. Sue had been given permission from Louise West curator of the Jane Austen House Museum at Chawton (www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk), the home of Jane Austen from 1809 to 1817, to recreate Cassandra Austen's sampler, on permanent display in one of the bedrooms there. We all felt so privileged as the House was allowing us to meet there, to stitch Cassandra. When we arrived we were met by Sue, in a beautiful Regency Dress borrowed from the Collection, and we soon settled into our stitching, using 28ct linen and Pearsall's silks. During the day we toured the house and took our samplers into the kitchen and/or library where we were free to put in some stitches. Such the perfect start to our event.

Day two took us to Portsmouth where we spent the morning visiting The Overlord Embroidery, a magnificent undertaking by The Royal School of Needlework, to depict The D-Day Landings. The museum was very moving and the embroideries themselves took our breath away. They measured 272 feet in length and were commissioned as a tribute to the sacrifice and heroism of the men and women who took part in D-Day. In the afternoon we met Katy Ball of the City Museum Portsmouth, to study some of the samplers from their collection. When first approached, Katy thought there were only a handful of samplers, but she soon found many beautiful examples of needlework hidden away. I personally had two favourites, the first stitched on 70ct linen (yes, I do mean 70ct) by Mary Nicholls, with the following verse:

Who learnt me both to read and spell
And with my Needle work so well
And call'd me her good little Girl
 My Governess
Who as I scann'd the letter'd page
Took pity on my tender Age
And made the hardest task engage
 My Governess
Who made the Scholar proud to show
The Sampler work'd to friend and foe
And with Instruction fonder grow
 My Governess

The second was stitched by Eliza Forfter in 1817, aged 11 years, on 55 ct linen, which featured two bunnies (although there was debate as to whether these were stags!). Eliza stitched the following verse:

Kind Parents I Prefent to You
This Work I Have Been Taught to Do
The Faults Appear to Damp My Fame

My Governefs to Free from Blame
What Praife Is Due With Her I Share
Who Taught Me Oft With Anxious Care
Loves Mantle Spread on Errors Paft
Succefs May Crown Your Wifh At Last

(I have used 'f' to represent the 'long s' and a link to both Portsmouth Museums can be found at www.portsmouthmuseums.co.uk)

Our third and final day took us back to Chilcomb House, the home of Hampshire county's textile archive (www3.hants.gov.uk/dress-and-textiles.htm). Sue had recreated for us a beautiful sampler from Hampshire's collection, stitched by Roseanna Clark in 1797, on 30ct linen over one thread, when Roseanna was just nine years old. We affectionately call this the Christmas sampler as it features a verse entitled 'On Christmas', which we think is quite unusual. Gill Arnott brought out some wonderful examples from the archives, for us to look at in detail and we were given the opportunity to see two of Sue's projects for next year's event – two samplers stitched in 1826 by sisters Mary and Eliza Plummer, the daughters of John and Mary.

We were so pleased to have John from Pearsall's Embroidery (www.pearsallseembroidery.com) with us and this year he talked to us about some new products coming our way. He has adapted Pearsall's fly fishing thread (an 81 count, i.e. 81 km per kg thread) for embroidery. The usual filosome thread is 30 count, so this obviously is much finer and suitable for miniature work, appliqué and very fine needlework. John uses 10 dyes, making ranges of colours within each dye and he has recently reintroduced a gold colour not made for 40 years, a wonderful new dragonfly blue and some fluorescent shades. Optical brighteners have been added to the range of whites to give some brighter whites and he explained the processes involved.

Before the event came to a close, Sue informed us that she is hoping to return to Chawton in 2012, to stitch at Chawton House Library, the dates being September 11th –14th. These dates are in my diary now! As always, Sue and husband David did us proud, and I for one was so pleased that we had a 'full house', here's hoping for the same next year!