

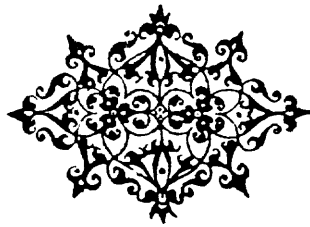
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Mary Gostelow

Art of Embroidery

*Great Needlework Collections of Britain and
the United States*



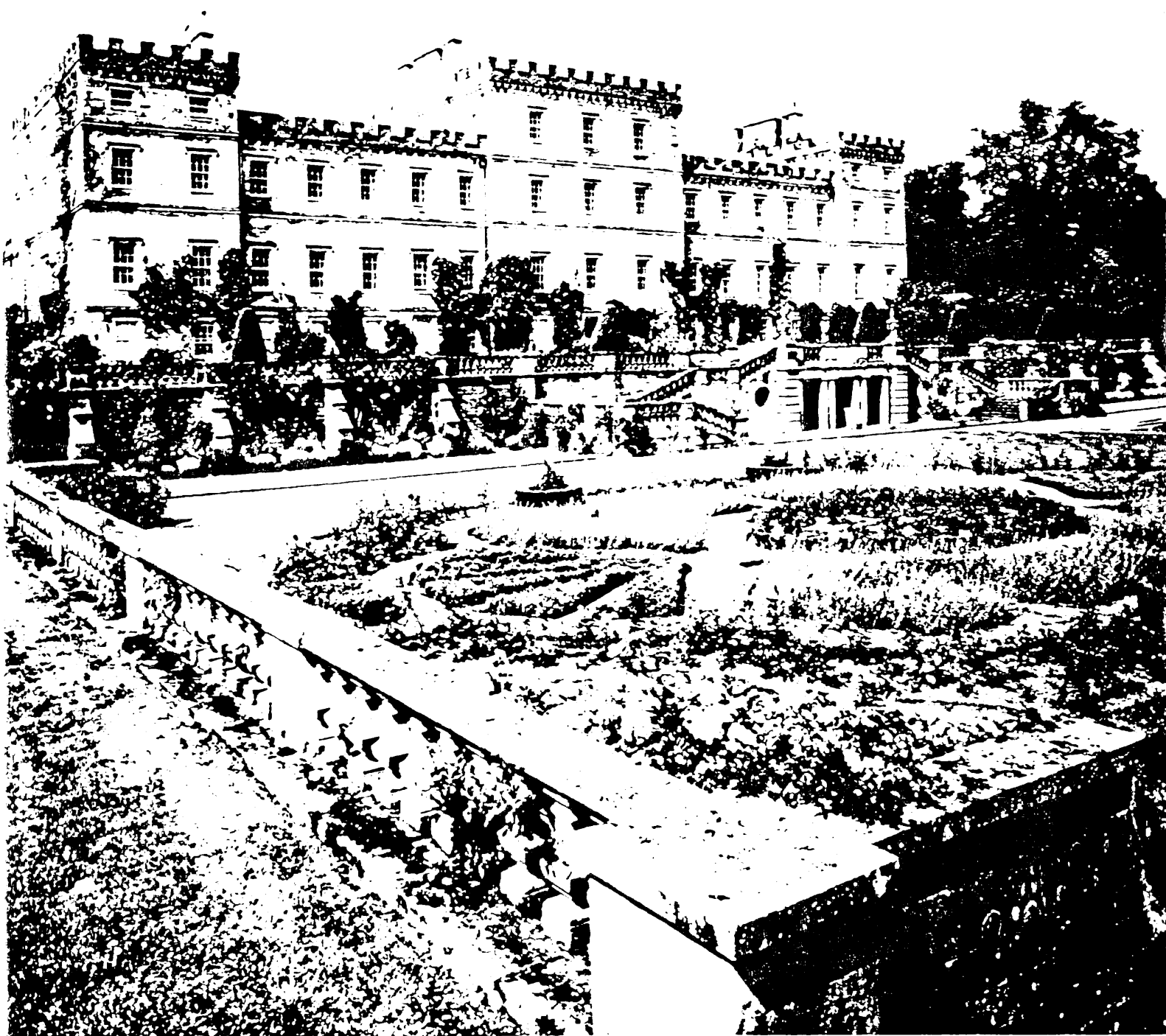
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Weidenfeld and Nicolson London

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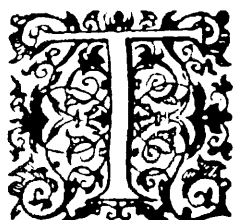


Mellerstain, Berwickshire.

11

Mellerstain

A Children's Masterpiece



THE work of children may attract more than a merely emotional interest. In the unique silk and wool tentstitch picture known as 'the Mellerstain panel' (see Plate 20) it is possible to study the exercise of two young girls and their governess who in 1706 transposed designs from a pattern book which now belongs to their descendants.

The scene is set at Mellerstain, Berwickshire, one of the most beautiful houses in Scotland. Architecturally unusual in that its outer wings were designed by William Adam (1689–1748) in 1725, nearly half a century before his second son Robert (1728–92) built the core of the house for Lord Binning, some of Mellerstain's glorious rooms may sound outrageous but in practice they are utterly exquisite. In the Library, for instance, a moulded green, pink and white ceiling is, according to Adam's design, highlighted with oil representations of Minerva, Teaching and Learning. A decorated frieze beneath is foil for plaster busts by Roubillac (1695–1762): two busts are of especial interest within the context of this anthology as they are of Lady Grisell Baillie (1665–1746) and her elder daughter, Lady Grisell Murray (1693–1759), who with her sister Rachel (1696–1773) and their governess, May Menzies, worked the Mellerstain panel, brought into the Binning family when Rachel married Charles Binning in 1717.

The girls' mother was a fascinating character. Daughter of Sir Patrick Hume, later first Earl of Marchmont and Lord Chancellor of Scotland, she had as a child to help support her family while her father was in hiding in the Netherlands under the ban of the Test Act. Sir Patrick returned to Britain with the Prince of Orange (1650–1702) when the latter accepted an invitation to rule Great Britain as William III in 1688, and Grisell later

Grisell, Lady Murray, by
Maria Verelst (1680–1744).
portrait 49½ × 40 in.
125.8 × 101.6 cm



The title page of Thomas Johnson's *A Booke of Beast, Birds, Flowers, Fruits, Flies and Worms, exactly drawne with their Lively Colours truly Described*, published 1630: it shows Orpheus surrounded by beasts.

hand-coloured engraving
 $6\frac{3}{8} \times 8$ in, 16.2×20.3 cm



married one of her father's companions, George Baillie of Jerviswood (1664–1738), whom she had first met when she was twelve. It was because of her experienced note-taking for her father that Lady Grisell Baillie was subsequently able carefully to document the accounts of her busy family, for Baillie was elected to parliament as Member for Lanarkshire. Since she was also a creative writer of some renown (she is listed in the *Concise Universal Biography* as a 'writer of prose and verse') she was well equipped to provide the notes that today aid elucidation of the canvaswork panel.

May Menzies, daughter of William Menzies of Raw, eight miles south-west of Mellerstain, was appointed in 1705 to 'wate on' Grisell and Rachel (Lady Grisell's first child, a son, had died in infancy) at a salary of eight pounds per annum. Their new governess found that the children were already acquainted with strict discipline. Their daily routine included

To rise by seven a clock and goe about ... duty of reading etc. etc. and be drest and come to Breakfast at nine, to play on the spinet till eleven, from eleven till twelve to write and read French, at two a clock sow ... till four, at four learn arithmetic, after that dance and play on the spinet again till six and play herself till supper and be in bed at nine.

The children were, therefore, already drilled in some of the accomplishments required of gentlewomen at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Their new governess brought with her a wealth of ideas contained within one loosely bound leather-covered volume, $7\frac{1}{4} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in (18.4×24.1 cm), containing twenty-one pages, nineteen of which are formed of hand-coloured engravings neatly numbered, pages fifteen and sixteen transposed, and all but one, page twelve, marked 'May Menzies'. The leather cover is embossed back and front with the initials of Katheren Logan, Miss Menzies' maternal grandmother, to whom the volume had once belonged. Further inscriptions inside the front cover record: 'May

Menzies aught this book / which contains 19 painted / leaves ... five people; prints and / flowers ... 1732' and 'originaly [*sic*] belonged to my grandmother / Katheren Logan' and, also, 'this book doth appertain to Katharin [*sic*] Logan / Julie 27 1635'. Single sheets of engravings could be purchased and the book must have been put together sometime between 1630, the date of one of the engravings, and 1635, the earliest inscription. Many of the engravings were at some point hand-coloured: red segments in particular have been applied with considerable smudging in some instances.

The first five pages are engravings 'Sould by Thos. Ienner at the Exchange', of the five Senses shown as women in country dress in the style of Wenceslas Hollar (1607–77) and thought to be copied from a Dutch prototype. 'Taste' is represented by a woman with a pipe and the legend:

*Som with the Smoaking Pye and quaffing Cupp
Whole Lordships oft have swallow'd and blowne upp:
Their names, fames, goods, strengths, healths & lives still wasting
In practising the Apifh Art of Tasting.*

This page, indeed, offers a suitable foretaste of the erudition being offered to Grisell and Rachel Baillie through the contents of their governess's book. 'Vanity' comes next, inscribed:

*To See a Churle, a Bawd, a Theife, a Whore
Or Drunkard, People oft goe out of Dore
When as they neede not from their Chambers passe
But Early may See them in their Glasse.*

The third engraving, 'Smell' (*see Plate 21*), is of direct interest to a study of the needlework panel. This design, similar to but less curvaceous than a lady on a seventeenth-century Mortlake tapestry now at Haddon Hall, Derbyshire, is annotated:

*There are a Crew of fellowes I Suppose
That angle for their Victualls with their nose
As quick as Beagles in the Smelling Sense
To Smell a feast in Paules 2 miles from thence.*

After the two final Sense pages, 'Smell' and an old lady, 'Feel', pleading 'O pittie mee, my Bird hath made mee bleede', comes the title page of *A Booke of Beast, Birds, Flowers, Fruits, Flies and Wormes, exactly drawne with their Lively Colours truly Described*, inscribed 'Orpheus / Ar to be sould / by Thomas Johnson / in Brittaines / Burse / 1630'. Interestingly, among the many beasts surrounding Orpheus is a lion similar to that described at Dearborn. Thereafter follow thirteen engravings from the *Booke* and two clean sheets of white paper.

May and her young charges must have planned their needlework panel



Plates 20, 21 and 22
 (above) 'The Mellerstain panel'
 is named after the superb
 Adam house owned by the
 descendants of Rachel
 Binning, one of the two little
 girls who, with their governess
 May Menzies, worked this
 unique tentstitch canvaswork
 in 1706. The centre design was
 copied from a hand-coloured
 portrait (right), 'Smell',
 possibly a Dutch engraving
 and one of nineteen plates in a
 loosely-bound volume that
 had belonged to May
 Menzies' grandmother as early
 as 1635. Another of the
 clearly-numbered pages in the
 pattern book (left) includes
 the stalwart rhinoceros
 stitched on the panel.



LEFT With two exceptions all the motifs around the central 'Smell' lady are taken from the other thirteen pages of engravings in May Menzies' pattern book. Corners of the panel are filled with tulips copied from page 19. *all these engravings are 5½ × 8½ in, 14.3 × 20.5 cm*

RIGHT Page 8 of the book provided the peacock at the top of the panel; it must have been a reminder of the bird the two girls' mother had bought the previous year.

very carefully. They probably transposed motifs by placing the canvas on top of the pages, for the embroidered motifs are the same size as the engraved patterns, some of which, anyway, show signs of linear indentation as if canvas had been laid above and drawn on. The embroiderers would then have put the canvas in a frame, for there is no sign of distortion, and outlined the pattern in dark brown before infilling in brightly coloured silks and wools and working the reserves in different shades of dark blue-green wool.

The centre of the panel is occupied with a representation of the 'Smell' lady framed by a delightful scrolled border. She smells one flower, holds others in her basket and, above the dog copied from the engraving, the Baillie girls and their governess added a charming butterfly as accompaniment. The four outer corners of the canvas are occupied by tulip heads, and the rest of the area is mostly filled with motifs also taken from the book and fitted in at whatever angle was most convenient. The two pariahs, at either side of the bottom of the central Smell panel, are a dog and hare. More crudely drawn than their companions around, and not taken from the pattern book, they may have been copied from a finished needlework (there is a similar dog, for instance, on the Milton Manor needlework box) or, everyday sights, they may have been drawn from life.

The other motifs, however, can all be identified from the book. A turtle dove watches the dog while, above, a rhinoceros just makes his way into the picture (see Plate 22). On the right side a graceful swan (see Plates 23 and 24) is set beneath a kingfisher fitted into the available space. A small horse, his head turned, and a carnation illustrate the fact that some motifs have been reversed from the pages of the pattern book. In one instance, at the top of the panel, a whole vignette including a splendid peacock (a reminder of the bird that Lady Grisell had purchased the year before) is a complete facsimile of the book's eighth page, which also provides the design for the 'Dubble french Marigold Flos Aphricane', trans-

formed into a cream flower placed upside down on the panel, and '*Olea Latenae Oluies*', next to the governess's initials. A whole garden of flowers is portrayed. In nearly every case they represent flora of a typical elegant Scottish garden at the beginning of the eighteenth century; the two exceptions, the olive and vine, could have been included to symbolize peace and concord or, in contrast, the sins of gluttony and drunkenness. Among the few queries that remain about this panel is why the lion, so popular with other embroiderers, is surprisingly excluded.

Grisell and Rachel must have learnt much while working on the panel but doubtless, as with young embroiderers everywhere, they would have been relieved when they were able finally to embroider their initials, GB and RB, along with those of their talented governess, MM, and the date 1706. Through the execution of this canvaswork, so full of interest and worthwhile study, they had however furthered their knowledge of flora, fauna and Latin and prepared themselves for their future roles as educated ladies. Heiress to her father's fortune, Grisell married, at the age of seventeen, Alexander Murray, son of Sir David Murray of Stanhope and Lady Anne Bruce, daughter of the Earl of Kincardine. Murray had been educated overseas but, as his wife later wrote, 'it was soon discovered that under a pleasing exterior there lurked a dark, moody and ferocious temper'. May Menzies broke the news of Murray's uncontrollable moods to Lady Grisell Baillie; Grisell Murray was granted a divorce when she was twenty-one. Thereafter she spent most of her time with Rachel, who had married Charles Binning in 1717. Literate and erudite, Grisell numbered among her friends at this time that great woman of letters Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) and the poet John Gay (1685-1732) who described her as 'the sweet-tongu'd Murray'.

After George Baillie's death in 1738 Grisell succeeded to his lands 'subject to the life-rent of her mother, Lady Grisell Baillie ... for the special love, favour, and affection he had, and bore to her, and in consideration that she had been to him a most loving, affectionate and useful wife'. Her mother died in 1746 but thereafter Grisell continued to live with Rachel and her family, which included May Menzies who looked after Rachel's children in turn, and on her own death, in 1759, the estates passed to Rachel's second son George, who assumed the name of Baillie and built the main part of Mellerstain.

Plates 23 and 24 Another page from the Mellerstain pattern book (below) includes a swan, copied on the right-hand side of the panel shown here in detail (right). All but two of the motifs used by Grisell and Rachel and their governess have been exactly identified.



Winterthur Guide to American Needlework, p.26.

p.102 line 43 Swan's *Plain and Fancy: American Women and Their Needlework 1700-1850*, p.91.

p.103 line 3 Rococo stitch was especially popular in America from about 1780 to 1810 (Swan, *Winterthur Guide*, p.49).

p.103 line 21 See Florence M. Montgomery's 'A Pattern-woven "Flamestitch" Fabric', *Antiques*, New York, November 1961, pp.453-55.

p.103 line 24 Making the reverse as well as the front of a needlework tidy and neat was not a normal ambition until the nineteenth century. See Swan, *Winterthur Guide*, p.37.

p.103 line 30 Quoted in Swan, *Winterthur Guide*, p.31.

p.105 line 10 Nancy Graves Cabot, in 'The Fishing Lady and Boston Common' in *Antiques*, New York, July 1941, pp.28-31, said there were then fifty-eight known examples, in all but twelve of which the 'fishing lady' appears.

p.107 line 17 See C. Stella's engraving, *Le Soir*, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Nancy Graves Cabot ('Engravings and Embroideries: The Sources of Some Designs in the Fishing Lady Pictures', *Antiques*, New York, December 1941, pp. 367-9) suggests that other engravings in the Stellas' 'Pastorales' set similarly provided design inspiration for these canvaswork panels.

p.107 line 28 A. Hyatt Mayor has found an early eighteenth-century playing card that shows a lady fishing in a pose similar to, but reversed from, some of the needleworks; see 'The Hunt for the Fishing Lady', *Antiques*, New York, July 1977, p.113).

p.107 line 36 Quoted in Gertrude Townsend's 'A Set of Eighteenth-century Embroidered Bed Curtains' in *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, XI, no. 242, December 1942, XL115.

10 Historic Deerfield

p.112 line 30 See Robert Bishop and Carleton L. Safford's *America's Quilts and Coverlets*, pp. 52-5.

p.112 line 38 Unlike other types of needlework which were more generally popular, crewel embroidery (that is to say, embroidery with plied worsted thread rather than with any particular stitches, for 'crewel' as a technique was not generally thus named until the end of the nineteenth century) was associated particularly with New England, although rare examples from New York or Pennsylvania are found. Within New England those pieces worked near the coast not surprisingly show more English

influence: some of these articles may have been worked by middle- and lower-class women who had been warned by colonizing companies before they left their English homeland to bring with them supplies, including embroidery designs. See Catherine A. Hedlund's *A Primer of New England Crewel Embroidery* (Old Sturbridge Village, 1963), p.9.

p.114 line 20 See a similar dress, worked in Connecticut 1730-80, at Winterthur (accession no.67.225).

p.116 line 14 Margery Burnham Howe's *Deerfield Embroidery: Traditional Patterns from Colonial Massachusetts*, p. 25.

p.116 line 18 Howe, *Deerfield Embroidery*, p.23.

p.117 line 14 It is thought that the grey paper, 70 x 77 in, 177.8 x 195.6 cm, was drawn by Olive Curtiss Baker, born in Durham, Connecticut, c. 1776 (see Howe, *Deerfield Embroidery*, pp.121-2).

p.117 line 20 *Chicago Daily News*, 10 June 1897.

11 Mellerstain

p.119 line 3 Linen canvas with twenty-four wool and silk tent stitches to the inch, 13 x 19½ in, 33 x 54.6 cm.

p.120 line 18 Margaret Swain's 'The Mellerstain Panel', *Apollo*, July 1966, p.62.

p.121 line 9 The smudging indicates that possibly the two little girls themselves had a hand in colouring the engravings.

p.121 line 25 Hand-coloured, 7½ x 5½ in, 19.1 x 14.0 cm.

p.121 line 37 See John L. Nevinson's comparison of Johnson with Peter Stent, who published 1643-1707, in 'Peter Stent and John Overton, Publishers of Embroidery Designs', *Apollo* 24, 1936, p.279.

p.125 line 21 *Memoirs of the Lives and Characters of the Rt Hon. George Baillie of Jerviswood and of Lady Grisell Baillie by Their Daughter, Lady Murray of Stanhope* (Edinburgh, 1822), p.146.

p.125 line 31 Lady Murray, *Memoirs*, p.162.

12 Milton Manor House

p.129 line 4 There are, however, one or two records of earlier boxes with needlework panels, though none survive - see George Wingfield Digby's *Elizabethan Embroidery* (Faber, London, 1963), p.127.

p.132 line 11 *Archaeologia*, XLII, 2 (1867), p.361 (quoted in Nevinson's *Catalogue of English Domestic Embroidery*, p.49).

p.133 line 13 See Muriel Baker's *Stumpwork: The Art of Raised Embroidery*, p.84.

p.136 line 3 Nicholas Ferrar's community operated at Little Gidding, Huntingdonshire, from about 1626 until 1647 (see Kendrick's *English Needlework*, p.105).

p.137 line 26 St Louis Art Museum, accession no.3.1972.

p.141 line 2 Lynn E. Springer's 'Biblical Scenes in Embroideries', p.374.

13 The National Cathedral

p.145 line 13 The British architect G. F. Bodley (1827-1907) was himself keenly interested in embroidery, not only as furnishings for the churches he designed but also *per se*; some of his work can still be seen at St Paul's, Knightsbridge. See Christa Mayer-Thurman's *Raiment for the Lord's Service: A Thousand Years of Western Vestments* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1975), pp.316-7.

p.146 line 13 Lucy Vaughan Hayden Mackrille's *Church Embroidery and Church Vestments*, p.9.

p.148 line 17 Mackrille, *Church Embroidery and Church Vestments*, p.69.

p.149 line 14 For an explanation of liturgical colours, see Marion P. Ireland's *Textile Art in the Church*, pp.71ff.

14 Ohio Historical Society

p.156 line 44 Glee Krueger (*A Gallery of American Samplers*, pl.103) illustrates another of the few Ohioan samplers. Now in the Theodore H. Kapnek collection, this 21½ x 22½ in, 53.9 x 56.5 cm, silk on linen sampler picture was worked, in many different stitches, by Achsah Carter, of Smithfield, Ohio, in 1830.

p.157 line 7 Information from Walter D. Moore, Attorney at Law, Marion, Ohio, 5 December 1962.

p.157 line 27 Central panels 8½ in, 21 cm, square.

p.158 line 4 White cotton embellished mostly with applique, quilted in various formations, 74 x 92 in, 188 x 233.7 cm, overall.

p.158 line 9 E. P. Dutton, New York, 1974.

p.158 line 11 *Dayton Daily News*, 30 July 1975.

15 Old Sturbridge Village

p.162 line 13 Quote from *Floor Coverings in New England Before 1850* mentioned in the *Rural Visitor*, xv, 3, Summer 1975 (Sturbridge), p.11.

p.163 line 18 Catherine Fennelly's *Textiles in New England 1790-1840*, p.5.

p.165 line 3 Dimity was a stout cotton fabric, woven with raised stripes or fancy