

# Pincushion in Elizabethan embroidery

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## Introduction

I wanted to do something that my gift-taker could have use for, that would be rather small, fit her colors and flower interests – and last but not least be close to an existing object and beautiful. After reading into Elizabethan embroidery (and starting on a sweet bag I have not yet finished) I decided to do a small double sided pincushion.



Figur 1. The finished pincushion backside.



Figur 2. Original pincushion.

## The original pincushion

The original that this project was based on is a small pincushion at Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Acc.No.316-1898). According to a picture of the object it seems to be about 5x5 cm and the whole embroidery is performed in tent stitch. I tried to copy the motive, but changed the colors to better represent my gift receiver. In the end I also simplified the edge decor – leaving out the Turk's head knots.

## Material

The embroidery is worked on a linen fabric 10x12 threads/cm. That is similar to most pincushions and sweet bags with similar design. I have used silk thread (6 threads) for the embroidery, tassels and braid. The cushion is sewn together with a white waxed linen thread and it is stuffed with unspun flax fiber. I have not been able to find out what a pincushion in 16<sup>th</sup> century Britain would be stuffed with. I though the flax fiber would be softer than old fabric pieces and that unspun wool might come out through the cushion after some use.



Figur 3. Unspun flax fiber.

## Technic

The motive was first drawn on paper and then transferred to the linen fabric. Step one of the embroidery was to make the background. The tent stitch is worked over every thread crossing, about 100 stiches per square centimeter – adding up to over 6000 stiches for the whole cushion. The next step of the embroidery was adding the black outlines, after that the stems were sewn and last the flowers. When doing the detailed motives I tried to make the shading of stems and flowers similar to the original object – even though some shading was not possible to figure out from the picture I worked with.

At last the braid was finger looped with a square cord – it is similar to the original but probably not

the exact kind of finger looping cord. I tried to make Turk's head knots to decorate the tassels but they did not turn out well and I was already late so I made simpler tassels than used on the original.



Figur 4. Background is finished and the outline is worked in black silk.



Figur 5. Outline and stems done! The flowers are worked one shade at a time. The yellow roses are done in four shades of white and yellow.



*Figur 6. The embroidery is finished.*



*Figur 7. Fingerlooped cord.*



*Figur 8. The pincushion has been sewn together. It's suddenly tiny.*



*Figur 9. Cord and tassels have been sewn to the cushion with a white silk thread. Front side.*

## References

Carey, J. (2009) Sweet Bags – An Investigation into 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Century Needlework. Carey Company: Ottery St Mary, Devo