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The Embroiderers' Guild of America, Inc.

NEEDLEPOINT IN ENGLISH CHURCHES

Script by Mary P. Olsen

Mary Olsen, author of For the Greater Glory, gave this beautiful set of slides to EGA in 1987. She used these and other slides in her frequent lectures on ecclesiastical needlework. Mary has written the script that describes the slides and explains why the slides were made.

Introduction

In 1972, I was asked to design the altar kneelers for St. James' Church in Keene, New Hampshire. I wished to have a design that was unique. My husband and I decided to go to England and search out the different churches who had done needlepoint in the past, thinking we might be inspired by some of their designs.

The slides following are the result of that search. At this point, I must say, we did not find exactly what we were looking for, but did come up with ideas from several sources which were very helpful in our planning. We were surprised at how much of the work that had been done up to that time was geometric in design and struck us as stitch samplers. I wonder if you will agree

Miss Louisa Pesel was very active in church needlework in the 30's and 40's, and her influence can be seen in many of the kneelers, especially in Wells and Salisbury Cathedrals.

1. EGA Slide – use this to focus
2. The exterior of Christ Church in Oxford.
3. The Great Hall of Christ Church.

5. The same overall design with sword and cross keys.
6. Another, which is much like the Seal of Canterbury.
7. Still another motif.
8. This border design was one we adopted for use in our church. We made a series of 24 kneelers using this border, but with different motifs depicting symbols found in the church.
9. Note the use of texture in the background.
10. This little known unicorn found his way into one of our kneelers.
11. We travel now to Gloucester Cathedral. Upon entering, we passed the Chapter House and saw a group of woman stitching. We stopped to ask them if anyone could tell us about the needlepoint in the Cathedral and were told that this group of ladies had been stitching for 22 years. They met once a week. While this picture looks sunny and warm, I can tell you it was mighty chilly, as you can tell by the lady who is working in her coat and hat.
12. I am the lady with the white hair. Here the Mistress of Designs is explaining the patterns.
13. The Mistress of Stitches is helping the class.
14. Here the Mistress of Wools cuts the material and counts out the wool required. They do not use needlepoint canvas as we do, but a coarse evenweave fabric.
15. Here the Mistress of Wools is explaining her chart.
16. This is one of the wedding kneelers.
17. A large cushion with emphasis on texture rather than pattern.
18. This has the appearance of having been stitched partially covering the fabric, but it is entirely stitched.
19. Two more examples of the use of different fabrics.
20. Here they have picked up the colors from the floor tiles in the chancel.
21. Another variation on the same theme.
22. A large cushion found in the chancel.

23. This is one of a series of cushions on the choir seats. The four gospels were represented, all using the same lozenge surround against the same background color done in different stitches. Here we see Matthew as a tax collector with his feet cozily tucked into the border and the tax payers' money spilling out willy-nilly.
24. St. Mark, the Winged Lion.
25. This charming scene of the Nativity looks as though it had been dropped onto its background.
26. The Easter Theme.
27. Robert Raikes was a favorite Sunday school teacher. It is evident that pupils were no more attentive then as now.
28. Dick Whittington and his cat are memorialized.
29. This piece of music seems to float off its background. Aren't the horns done excellent?
30. The embroiderers were not overlooked.
31. Their altar kneelers were very long and displayed symbols and lettering.
32. More of the same kneeler.
33. Note the use of many textural stitches.
34. There were many kneelers done in this fashion using the same colors.
35. The kneeling pads for the congregation were done in this fashion. There were dozens and dozens of them - - no two alike.
36. Again, many individual kneelers using many designs that remind us of stitch samplers.
37. We travel next to Wells Cathedral where we found the most astoundingly beautiful needlepoint.
38. Every chair in the huge choir had its seats and backs covered with exquisite needlepoint.
39. The detail and intricacy of the designs is outstanding.
40. Note the variation in the coloring of the background. This is a trademark of Miss Pesel.
41. Every inch of the background seems to be covered with designs.

42. Precentor's Chair is especially beautiful.
43. This is a cushion that inspired me to use musical manuscript for our altar kneelers at St. James'. The material upon which the needlepoint was worked allowed the use of petit point stitches.
44. The shading here is especially good and not easy to achieve.
45. Observe, especially the minute detail in the picture and its surround.
46. Again, the beautiful varied background.
47. If the chairs were not enough, behind each chair hung a huge banner done in needlepoint. Here are a few. I wish time had permitted me to photograph them all.
48. This was the most outstanding piece of the entire trip. Notice the architectural detail and the detail in the face.
49. The backs of the chairs were not always coordinated with the seats.
50. More beautiful work.
51. Letters are always difficult to do. Working them around such a design complicates the work.
52. One wonders about the difference between the back and the seat of this chair.
53. Long benches are installed in front of the chairs of the choir. Here is part of the covering of these benches.
54. They vary in design.
55. Kneelers in this Cathedral were entirely different from the work in the choir.
56. Observe the date of the work.
57. This was a cushion found elsewhere in the church.
58. Still more altar kneelers.
59. Dozens of these small kneeling cushions for the congregation were seen.
60. I found this gem in the Lady Chapel. Is not the detail charming?

61. This is Salisbury Cathedral as seen from our hotel , on the other side of the Avon River.
62. The face of Salisbury Cathedral.
63. One of the side chapels had this kneeler on their altar rail.
64. And dozens of small coordinating kneelers for the congregation.
65. The choir stalls in this Cathedral were furnished with cushions displaying different floral designs. The backs of the chairs were not covered. Only in Wells Cathedral did I see that treatment.
66. The background is not wearing out, the shading is produced by the use of different colors.
67. On some, the flowers spill over onto the central background.
68. This holly border is particularly nice.
69. Every seat is different.
70. Poppies are stylized.
71. This poppy design had obvious dye lot problems.
72. Lilies grace this cushion.
73. For most part, the color scheme in the Cathedral used this blue and coral.
74. Iris
75. I love the clover.
76. Snowdrops.
77. Again, the blue and coral color scheme.
78. The Dean's Chair and the one opposite it, where done in similar bleeding heart designs.
79. Dozens of these small cushions were done in this colorization, and provided for the congregation.
80. And its opposite.
81. Animals were also found in the Cathedral.

82. We made a brief stop at Winchester and visited the Cathedral there. In case you can not find your way around this town, you can refer to the map found in their choir.
83. The ceiling of the Cathedral contains beautiful carvings of musical angels. Here is one worked in needlepoint.
84. Another cushion from the choir.
85. The variegated background appears again.
86. I wish I could tell you the reason for the large liner in this design, but there were seldom people around to help us.
87. Again – much emphasis on texture.
88. My husband holds and altar kneeler (upside down).
89. And another. The centers were worked in petit point.
90. More of the same kneeler.
91. The Dean's wife from Salisbury Cathedral sent us to see this little parish church in Ellington. The ladies there had done the entire church in needlepoint. They even made coverings for the seats of the pews and the kneelers. This is their little altar.
92. The name of the church is "ST. Mary's and All Saints". These pew seat covers were worked on 10 Penelope canvas using the same color scheme throughout. The Lily for St. Mary is alternated with a symbol of a saint, in this case St. Barnabas who was flailed to death.
93. St. John is depicted here.
94. St. Simon
95. St. Kentigern
96. St. Jude
97. These are two of the kneelers from the pews in the congregation. A red and a blue kneeler alternated throughout.
98. This kneeler was found in the chancel.
99. This is part of the altar kneeler.

100. Another acolyte kneeler.
101. The Rector, who invited us to tea, displays a kneeler for us.
102. Guilford Cathedral was destroyed during World War II, and was rebuilt afterwards. The architecture is contemporary brick exterior and marble interior. From the beginning the architect determined that everything that went into the Cathedral should be approved by him and the whole design coordinated.
103. A kneeler hangs on the back of every chair. Each kneeler displays this color scheme of blue and white, divided in a diagonal manner. Each has the little cross in the lower left corner, which is the outline of the church, and the flames of the Pentacost in the upper right.
104. I love the patient mother donkey and her frisky offspring.
105. We found this kneeler with Sputnik displayed. Upon arriving home we immediately made one for St. James' with the LEM, which landed on the moon, as a design.
106. For the most part, the designs on the kneelers depicted recreational activities or occupations. Here we see yachting. Although several kneelers in the church would have this same design, no two were worked in the same manner. Each worker used her own ideas for stitch selection.
107. Authors were honored on this kneeler.
108. Fishing on this one.
109. Engineers on this one. Since my husband is an engineer, this kneeler appealed to us.
110. Embroiderers' were not forgotten.
111. Of course, photography was important to me.
112. Aviation had its kneeler.
113. And the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides.
114. This is Ely Cathedral.
115. Their needlework program had just started. A display was mounted in the entrance, to show what had been done to date, and to encourage people to join in the effort or underwrite the costs of a kneeler.
116. A few that had already been finished.

117. More of the same.
118. Detail of one kneeler. I did not perceive any overall pattern as was displayed at Guliford.
- 119 - 121. These are three finished kneelers.
122. This altar kneeler is unusual because it was worked in crewel embroidery and applique.
123. A detail of the applique.
124. This is the nave of St. Edmundsbury. The unusual part of this church was the way in which they displayed their kneelers. A board was installed above the hymnal rack. It was slanted and the kneelers were laid on it. When viewed from the back of the church, one saw a sea of kneelers.
125. This altar stand is in the rebuilt portion of the sanctuary. The original was destroyed by the war.
126. The front is impressive.
127. The kneelers in this cathedral were all worked by members of parish churches of the Diocese. For this reason, we find several done for St. James and St. Peter, or other saints.
128. Compare the backgrounds of these kneelers.
129. Textured stitches have been used, making them similar but different.
130. I love the fishes caught in this net, with their tails sticking through the netting. Can you imagine how difficult this must have been to stitch?
131. Two kneelers done by two St. James' parishes.
132. And one done by the base chapel at Bentwaters.
133. This is part of their altar kneeler.
134. Before this work (which you have been seeing) was started, probably before World War II, work of an entirely different nature was done. Here you see more realistic designs. They were evidently done to honor different trades of famous people. Here is a king from early history.
135. Anselm, scholastic philosopher and Archbishop of Canterbury.
136. The carpenters were honored by this kneeler.
137. The stained glass workers were remembered here.

138. The seafarers.

139. The farmers.

CHURCH NEEDLEWORK - BIBLIOGRAPHY

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