



First Threads: preparing girls for life?

EXHIBITION BOOK

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Series editor

Mark Copley

Photography

Fiona Bureau

Amanda Chapman-Bruce

Georgia Hutchins

Book design

Susie Jackson

www.susiesoo.com

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Foreword

With a history of religious tolerance in Hitchin, the town's poor in the early nineteenth century benefitted from schools set up by Baptists, the Church of England and the British Schools (non-denominational, but with strong Quaker links).

The Third Annual Report of the Hitchin Girls' British School (1821) shows that the 72 pupils at the school had all studied Reading and Spelling that year. They had all studied Needlework, but only 1/3rd had studied some form of Arithmetic. While this curriculum was certainly narrow in focus, for the very poor girls coming to the school at this time there were scant opportunities elsewhere to gain a formal education.

In the following decades, the number of subjects offered to girls expanded, although their purpose was primarily to prepare them for the lives society dictated they must lead – predominantly in the domestic sphere. Indeed, it is interesting to note that actually 84 girls started the academic year – two were expelled, two went to another school, two went into domestic service and eight were 'needed at home' (usually to look after ill family members or help with the family income).

The *First Threads: preparing girls for life?* exhibition (July–December 2019) at the British Schools Museum is a chance to re-examine girls' education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some 200 years after the Hitchin Girls' British School was re-established. It's a chance to view the amazing needlework samplers created by girls in schools up and down the country. We can marvel at their beauty and intricacy, as well as reflect on the girls' lives and, perhaps, lost opportunities.

As always, I must thank all of the volunteers who have helped with the research and production of this exhibition and book. The Eliza Carr research comes courtesy of Terry and Rosemary Ransome. Diane Maybank and others have provided wonderful help with other research, along with co-authors Lynda White and Sue Mitchell.

Mark Copley*Curator*

July 2019

Cover:

Girls performing Drill at the Hitchin British Girls' School (early 1900s).

BSM - JGC8323

The Need for Girls' Education Lynda White

The nature of childhood in the industrial revolution

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were different ideas regarding the 'nature of childhood'. The eighteenth century French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau put forward the theory that childhood must be treasured as it was the one time in life when one can be happy. However, in the first half of the nineteenth century, most children of the labouring poor were destined to be working from the age of eight (and some from the age of four). The social conditions of the time impacted upon the education of the poorest classes and the labouring poor were not wholly against sending their children to school. However, the harsh realities of their life meant that a child's wage was vital to the family income. The dramatic social, political and economic changes that occurred during the Industrial Revolution highlighted the problems of a society divided by wealth and class, and the inadequacy of English educational provision for children of the lower orders.



Jean Jacques Rousseau
(1712-1778).

The first national census took place on 10 March 1801; information was collected on a parish basis. Local officials recorded the number of inhabited and uninhabited houses in the parish and how many people occupied them. Employment in the parish, the number of baptisms, burials and marriages were also noted. The census revealed that the majority of children received no education at all, and those who were educated had to pay for the privilege. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, experiments in day school instruction took place, the aim being 'Education for All'. However, schools were reliant on reformers and self-help until 1833 when State Aid was slowly introduced. It was against this background that the foundations of new day schools were laid.

During the Victorian era upper class boys were tutored at home until the age of 10 then sent to boarding schools such as Eton or Harrow and then university. The criteria for entry into higher education was as follows: 1 they were male, 2 they were unmarried, and 3 they were members of the Church of England. Thus, privileged young men were being prepared for the professions.



Young women employed as matchstick makers in London, on strike here due to poor working conditions in the 1880s.



Children working on the farm, providing much-needed family income.

Women and their place in society

English society in the eighteenth century did not believe in educating women. Therefore, if men preferred women to be intellectually inferior and women were prepared to accept this, there was little chance of improvement in girls' education or a woman's place in a patriarchal society, i.e. a society ruled by, and dominated by men. This is despite the fact that there was a need for girls to be educated. Girls had the right to be educated as much as boys. To be numerate and literate was advantageous and necessary. A working class girl who could read and write was prepared for the world of employment in the service industries.

In the sixteenth century, certain powerful men such as Thomas Moore, believed in treating girls as the intellectual equals of boys, but this only referred to upper class girls. In the seventeenth century, girls' boarding schools were created for the daughters of the nobility and gentry. However, few people accepted that girls deserved an academic education and where it existed, emphasis was placed upon 'domestic subjects' and the academic quality of these schools was low. From the early eighteenth century, schools for upper and wealthy middle class girls were more widely established, but the more 'suitable' feminine attributes and accomplishments – good manners, poise, singing and playing a musical instrument – were considered more important than academic excellence.

Before the eighteenth century, there was little educational provision for the daughters of the poor unless they attended the local parish school or Sunday School with their brothers. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, charity schools were established for the children of the poor, both boys and girls, but these were of a low academic standard. After they completed their formal tuition, the children were usually apprenticed to richer families, a system open to abuse.

Some poorer children were not even considered eligible for charity schools.

In the nineteenth century 'feminine accomplishments' were still being promoted, but by the 1860s there was a move to include studies closer to those taught to boys. 'High schools' for girls were appearing and serious female schooling was expanding, but this education was still aimed at the privileged daughters of the upper and middle classes.

The British Girls' School in Hitchin

The nineteenth century saw significant changes in the education of girls in particular. Up until the time of the Industrial Revolution, educational opportunities for the lower classes, boys and girls, were extremely limited. The State was not concerned with schools for the poor, it was content to rely upon the involvement of voluntary helpers and charities. The number of poor children who went to school was very small and they were mainly boys. However, the Industrial Revolution affected females as well as males. The spread of the factory system in the late eighteenth century meant 'schools of industry', where children learnt to spin, knit, sew or cobble shoes were introduced. Sewing in particular meant girls were useful in a range of industrial processes. 'Dame Schools' and other Charity Schools for poor boys and girls offered little in the way of education. The 'Ragged Schools', established in 1844 offered free education for those who were too poor to wear 'respectable clothes', but were predominantly restricted to London. Working class women as well as men worked in factories to supplement the family wage. In this way women gained a level of economic independence they had not previously experienced.



A Dame School in the 1870s as depicted by the photographer Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936). Dame Schools were run by elderly women, often in their own houses, and were little more than child care. In this instance the schooling is being conducted in a fisherman's cobbled yard.



Depiction of a Ragged School for boys, 1850s. These charitable schools were established to serve the poor and destitute, mainly in London.

It was at the lowest levels of society that discrimination between boys and girls disappeared almost entirely and survival was the key. Workhouse schools for destitute children were established for cheap labour. In 1804, nearly 20,000 children aged 5 to 14 were on parish relief but little more than 10% were receiving an education. These children were compelled to support themselves from a very early age. Elementary education in the nineteenth century attempted to prepare the 'lower' classes, male and female, for life and labour in an industrialising society. Education was needed for the economic development of the country. The Factory Acts of the 1870s required children between the ages of 8 and 13 to attend school on a part-time basis, but factory girls had traditionally learned little from school besides sewing. It was with this backdrop that the Girls' British School in Hitchin, founded upon the Monitorial System, was founded in 1810 and following a rocky start, re-opened fully in 1818.

Hitchin: a pioneering town for female education

Happily, the ambitions of far-thinking residents did not stop at elementary education alone. It should also be noted that Cambridge University's, Girton College, the first institution in England to educate upper and middle class women, originated in Hitchin. Emily Davies, the suffragette and pioneering campaigner for women's rights and university access, was co-founder of Girton College, in Hitchin's Benslow Lane. Davies' vision was for women to benefit from the same kind of Higher Education as men and at the highest possible level. For Davies that meant Oxford and Cambridge. She campaigned for the rights of women to enter university and study for a degree. In 1866, in her book *The Higher Education of Women*, she wrote:

Female School, FOR THE Children of the Poor.

The Ladies, and Gentlemen, of this Parish are requested to attend a General Meeting of the Inhabitants, to be held, at the GIRLS' SCHOOL ROOM, in DEAD STREET, on WEDNESDAY next, at Two o'Clock, precisely; to enter into Arrangements, for re-establishing a SCHOOL, for the Female Children of the Poor, in this Town, and Vicinity.

Hitchin, September 18th, 1818.

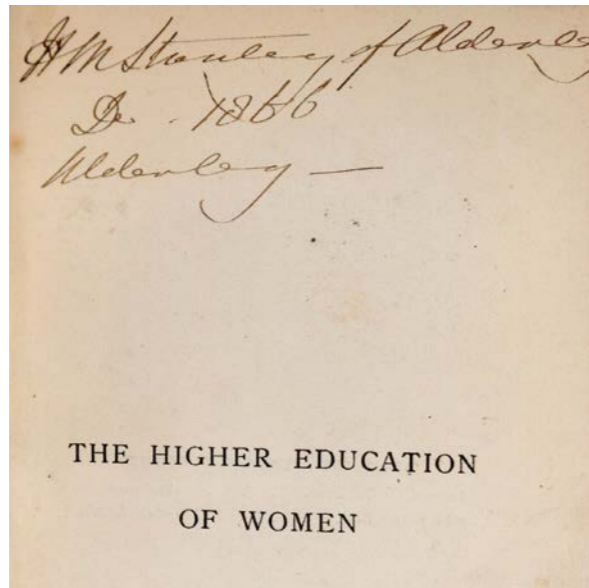
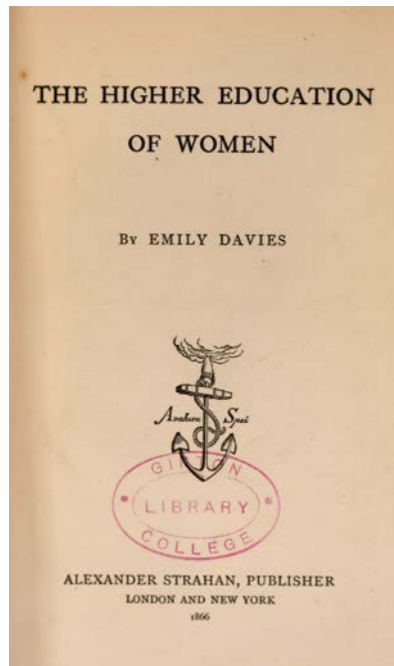
Paternoster, Printer, Hitchin.

Poster printed in Hitchin announcing the re-establishment of the girls' school in 1818, following the initial founding in 1810. A committee of 14 ladies was responsible for the management of the school. It was anticipated that half the intake were Church of England and half from other denominations. Unlike the Hitchin Boys' British School, there was no endowment: subscriptions were raised from individuals, most of whom were already connected with the boys' school. Later, in 1865, attempts were to introduce an evening school for working women, although that did not get off the ground.

'Many persons will reply, without hesitation, that the one object to be aimed at, the ideal to be striven after, in the education of women, is to make good wives and mothers. And the answer is a reasonable one, so as far as it goes, and with explanations. Clearly, no education would be good which did not tend to make good wives and mothers; and that which produces the best wives and mothers is likely to be the best possible education. But having made this admission, it is necessary to point out that an education of which the aim is thus limited, is likely to fail in that aim.'



Collaborating with her Quaker friend, Anna Richardson, she used all her connections and influence to establish the first college for women in Benslow Lane in 1869. Following on from the opening of the Girls' Monitorial School, for daughters of the poor, fifty- one years earlier there can be no doubt that Hitchin was a pioneering town for the education of girls from all classes.



Emily Davies (1830-1921). Feminist and suffragist, and a pioneering campaigner for women's rights to university access. Davies is third from the right, aged about 70 in this turn-of-the century photograph.

Second edition of *The Higher Education of Women* by Emily Davies (1866), signed by Baroness Stanley of Alderley, who with Emily Davies and Barbara Bodichon, co-founded Girton College.

Courtesy of *The Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge.*



Photograph of the Women's College at Benslow House, Hitchin c.1869, co-founded by Emily Davies. As a train approached Hitchin Station on one occasion, a Reverend was overheard exclaiming, 'Ha! This is Hitchin, and that, I believe is the house where the College for Women is: that infidel place!'. The college moved to Cambridge in 1873.

Photograph courtesy of *The Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge.*

Needlework Samplers

Mark Copley

with contributions from Barbara Millman and Ann Agar



Blue sampler worked on cream even-weave linen by Mary Clark Bayfield in 1795. Lines of decorative stitching in cross stitch and eyelet stitch demarcate the sections; hemming has been worked in blue. 'Learn to excel in doing well' provides the improving text for Mary's sampler. 213mmx317mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.8

Learning needlecraft

Needlework was an important component of young girls' education for many centuries, with samplers often used to improve and demonstrate skill.

Samplers are pieces of material on which a variety of stitches and patterns are embroidered, and were initially created as practice pieces as well as for reference; indeed, the term is derived from the French for 'example', *essamplaire*.

In the seventeenth century, samplers usually served as a demonstration of ability, using high quality materials such as silk and fine linen. As the need for female literacy within the working poor increased in the nineteenth century, girls' samplers created at school tended to contain a variety of letters and inscriptions, usually in cross stitch. Needlework lessons were essentially preparing girls for domestic life or life in service, although many samplers were also created in adulthood by women as a hobby.

Work by Annie Spence for presentation at school for Standard VI (often school-leaving level in much of the nineteenth century). Brown single weave linen canvas with lilac cross stitch, with narrow hem worked in brown thread. Annie has produced a single, well-spaced, upper case alphabet over 5 lines on this nineteenth-century sampler. 168mmx163mm.

BSM - A29.12





Edith Young's 1887 Standard 5 sampler, from the British Girls' School in Kelvedon, Essex. After her schooling, Edith worked as a domestic servant while still living at home. Later, in her 20s, she was living and working in Chelmsford, Essex.

Cross work sampler worked on cream even-weave linen with fringed edging, using red and ecru thread. 190mmx145mm.

BSM - U289

School income

In many schools, samplers were created to be presented for inspection by the school's Trustees – indicating individual achievement as well as the school's teaching competence.

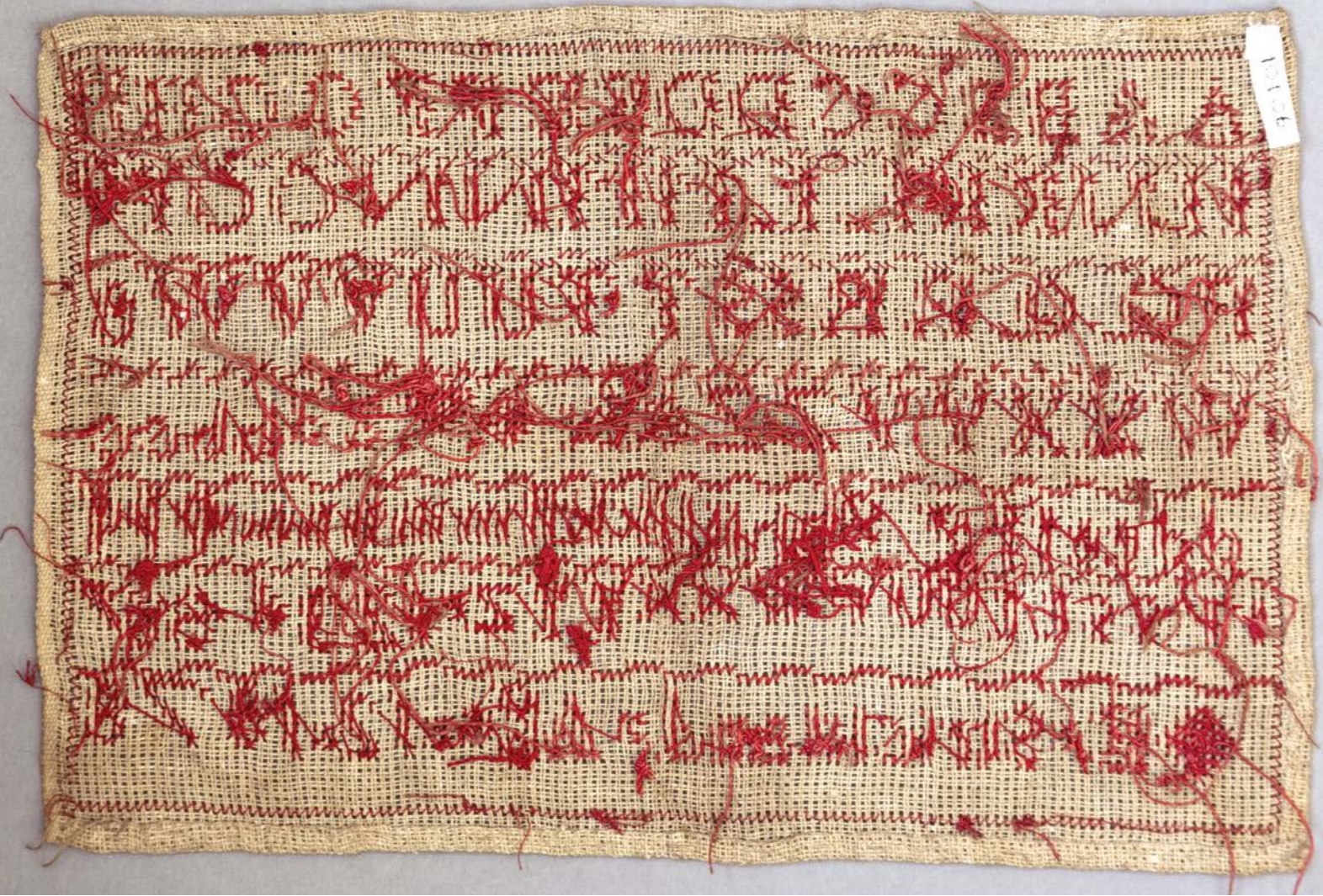
Samplers were also seen as a way of providing additional income. For example, in 1822, the Hitchin British Girls' School gained an income of £1 18s 4½d through the sale of needlework. Two years later, the school's committee reported that despite some deficiencies amongst the scholars' work, they note that:

'in the most useful part of Female Education, namely Needle Work, there has been an unusual degree of industry exerted as we find the money received for the payment of work amounts to £5 15s 6¾d, a larger sum than ever before'.

Overleaf, pages 18 and 19:

E. Strickland's sampler completed in 1878 when she was aged eight, showing the back of the sampler. There is a double weave canvas, with border in single line of cross stitch. The reverse side has all ends left long, sometimes tied. 290mmx190mm.

BSM - JG10106



Design

Nineteenth-century samplers largely employed the use of cross stitch and were designed to be visually appealing. Indeed, they were sometimes specifically created to be placed in a frame and displayed. The designs featured many components previously used in earlier samplers, such as alphabets, numbers, decorative bands and floral motifs, for example. Occasionally the name of the creator is recorded, as well as date finished and sometimes the place or school where they were located. This enables us to delve more into the history and lives of these girls and discover how their fortunes unfurled (at least as far as we can determine through genealogical records). Indeed, one of the wonderful aspects is that they are the work of individuals who otherwise would not be represented in any historical context, were it not for the product of their endeavours.

Elizabeth Kempton completed this work in 1843, aged 13. The cross stitch sampler was worked on loosely woven light brown linen. The alphabet has three letters in cream then one in green. Lines are separated by decorative stitching, the verse in green is not wholly legible, but the various motifs - peacocks, trees, other birds, and large houses have been used in samplers for generations. Elizabeth may not have started the sampler herself, however, as the letters at the top are of much higher quality compared with the rest of the sampler. 270mmx400mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.4





Sarah Cooper's 1889 well-constructed sampler. Sarah grew up in Watton, Norfolk, and after her schooling went into domestic service. Here she did well, and was placed in charge of a ladies' hostel in Welbeck Street, London. She later married Henry, a Scots Guard, in 1917. The couple then bought a tobacconist shop in Tooting, London before Henry secured a job with the First Garden City Corporation in Letchworth. They had a son and daughter; unfortunately, the daughter died in infancy during the 1919 flu epidemic.

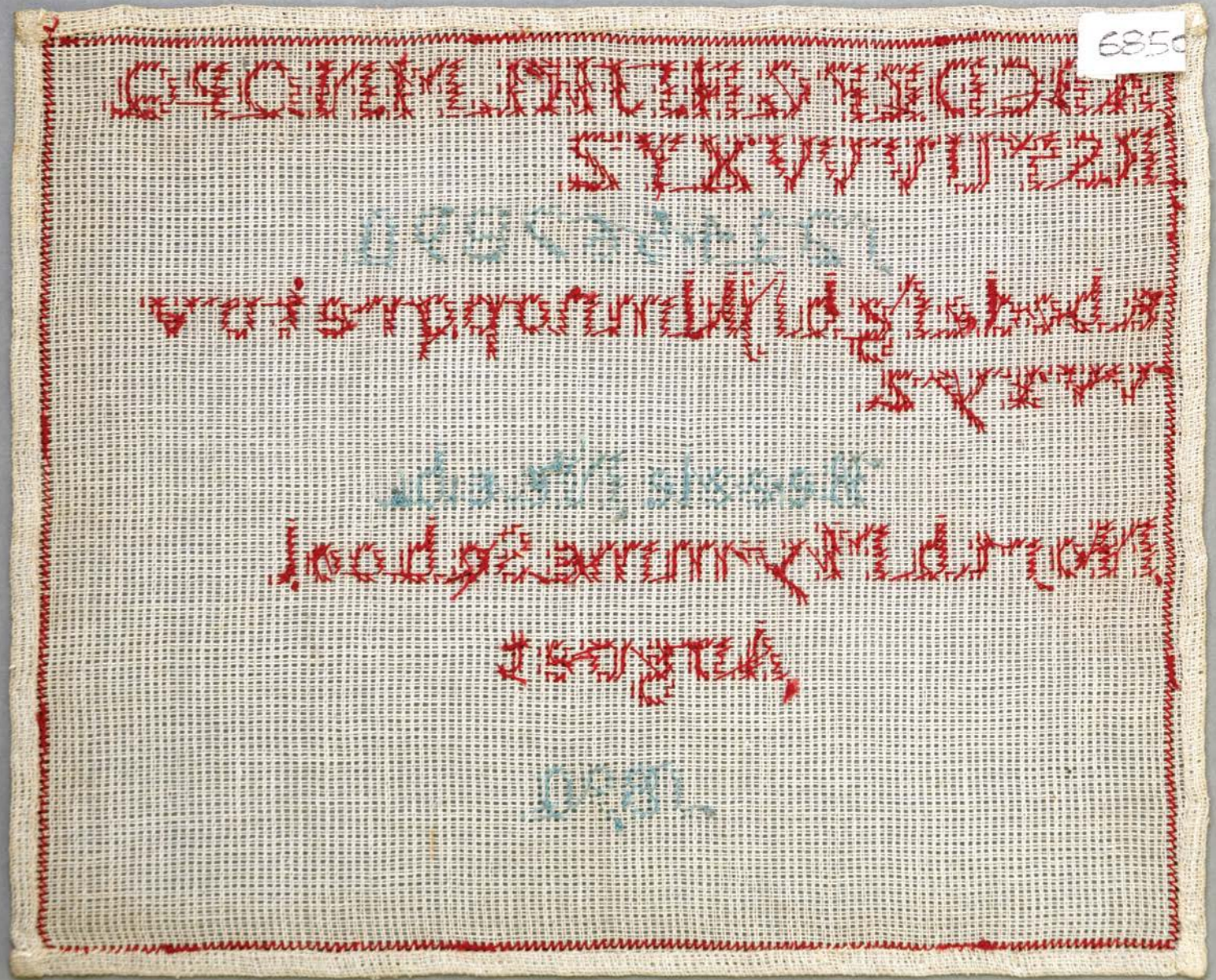
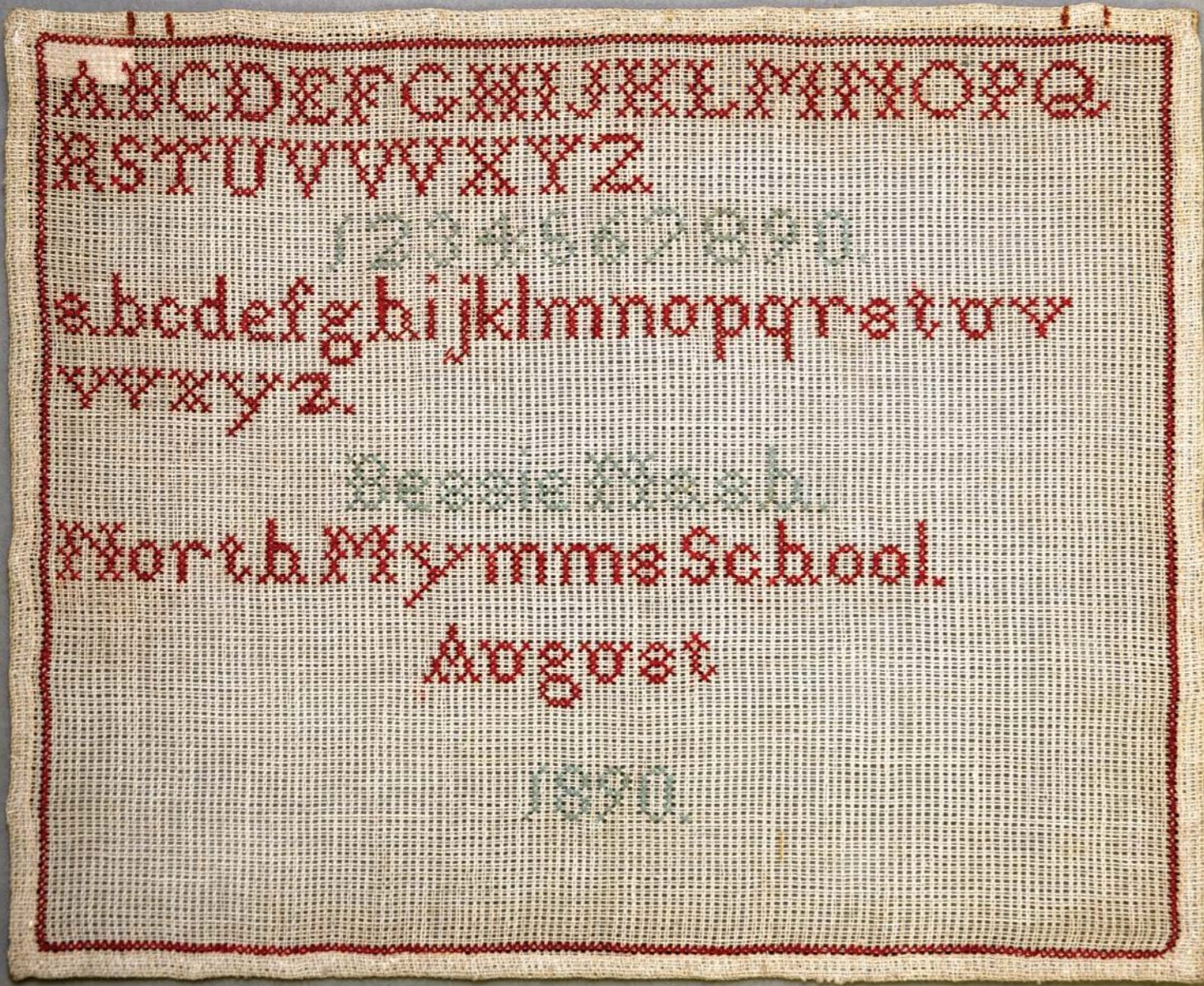
Sarah's work exhibits good designs, featuring animal and floral motifs with detailed borders, on even-weave cream linen. With very fine stitching throughout, the sampler uses mostly cross stitch with some eyelet stitch worked in green, brown, black, light blue and beige. It includes a flower and leaf border worked continuously round the piece. Larger upper case alphabet A-M letters are worked in eyelet stitch, with decorative line of eyelet stitching above. Also has lower case alphabet and numbers 1-3 with flower borders above and below. 345mmx350mm.

BSM - C133

Overleaf, pages 24 and 25:

Bessie Nash's sampler created in 1890 while at North Mymms School, Hertfordshire. Bessie worked as a dressmaker in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, never marrying. Note the neat reverse side compared to E. Strickland's example. Bessie was eight-years old when she created this. 233mmx190mm.

BSM - JG6850



Focus on: Eliza Tabitha Carr (1850-1919)

'Her Work' completed in 1865 when she was aged 15 at the Bratton British School (Wiltshire). Her parents, William and Clara Carr lived in the parish of Edington, village of Tinhead, Wiltshire when she was born. William was a 'journeyman limeburner', and they lived 1.5 miles away from the Bratton British School which Eliza attended and would have walked to on a morning. By the time she was 21, Eliza had moved to Paddington, London, working as a servant for Thomas Croggan, a merchant originally from Falmouth. She only stayed in London for a short while before moving back home to marry Henry James Miles in March 1879. Soon after, the married couple returned to Paddington, where Henry found work as a butler and their family started to grow. By 1901, Eliza and Henry moved to Combe St Nicholas, Somerset with their three children, living with Eliza's father, now a widower, and Henry working as a poultry dealer by this point. Eliza died in May 1919 in Combe, and was followed by her husband a few years later.

The verse sampler has wide borders worked on fine even-weave cream linen, featuring entirely cross stitch, with a green garland above and verse below. On either side of the verse are three vertical rows of motifs, the sides are symmetrical, with five types of tree in outer row in probably pink and green. The middle three have more complicated designs with birds, flowers and a squirrel. The inner row includes butterflies, flowers and a crown. 320mmx350mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.5



Mary Ann Kerby's unfinished sampler may have been created at home, and features an abridged version of the poem *Like* to the Damask Rose which was set to music by Edward Elgar in 1892. A Damask rose is featured above the poem, which examines the brevity of life. We can only speculate as to why Mary chose this design and why it was never completed.

The nineteenth-century sampler is on finely woven light brown linen, with a grape and vine leaf border around the verse, made to look like an arbour, with top swag containing pink rose and buds. Below this is a pencil drawing of a fisherman and a river bank, which has been partly worked in small cross stitches. Selvedge to the left has a double row of blue thread. 350mmx550mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.1



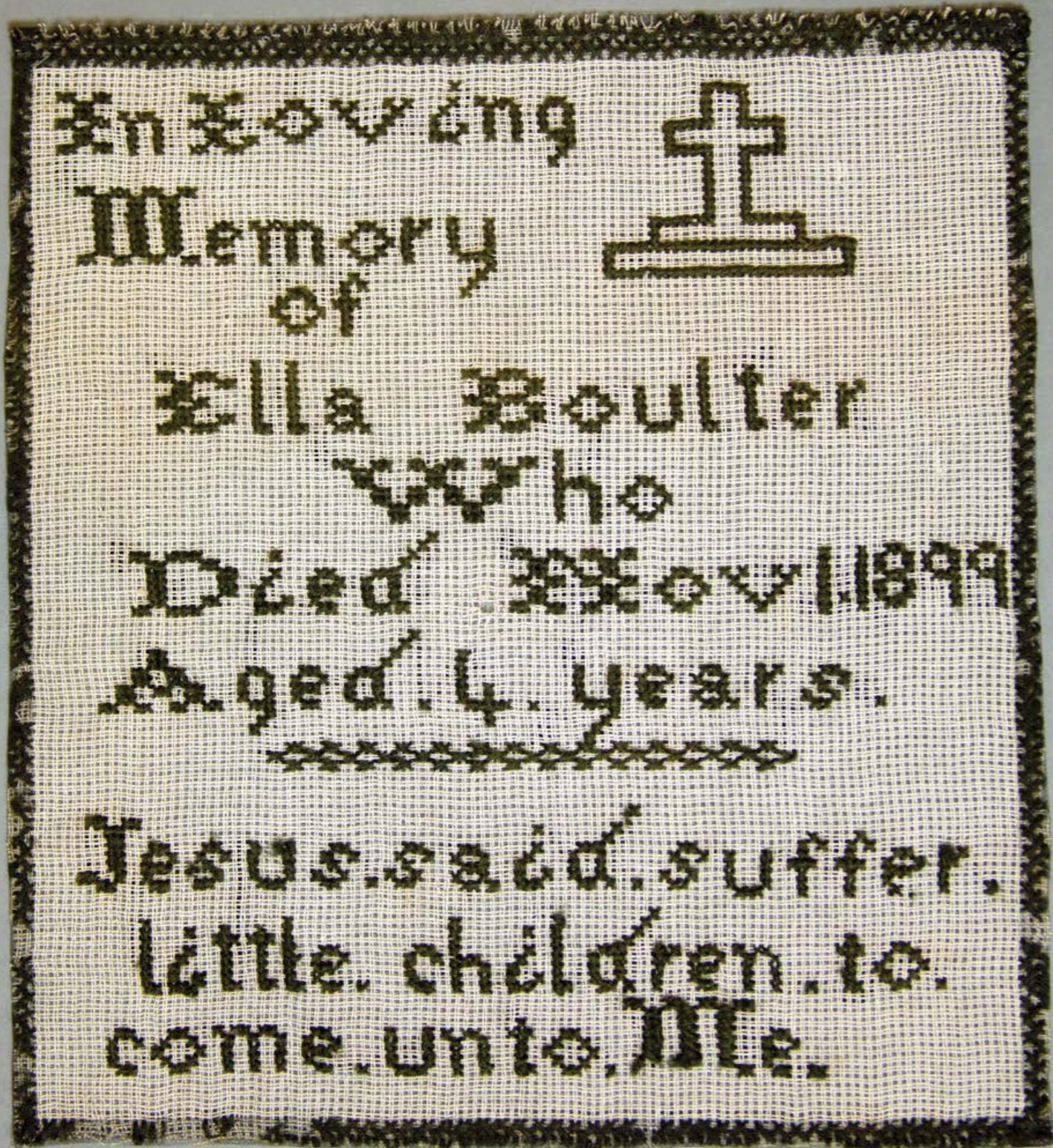
School samplers could be quite varied, with perpetual almanacs, maps of the British Isles and samplers commemorating Royal events being manufactured. Samplers were also produced to commemorate family events, such as the death of a relative. They might feature Biblical text, verse or proverbs, or other improving prose. As well as at school, women continued creating samplers as a hobby in adulthood.

Overleaf, page 30

Ella Emily Boulter died of croup in 1899, aged only four years old. Croup was a relatively common viral illness in babies and young children at the time. She lived in Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire, with her parents, Frank and Emily, and younger sister Winifred. The sampler perhaps was created by Ella's mother and features a black border as deployed in Victorian mourning cards.

The central section of the sampler is worked in cross stitch, with herringbone stitch used for the edging. Biblical text shown in bottom third. 305mmx335mm.

BSM - U290





Unknown creator, possibly contains the initials of the girl's family at the bottom, c.1804. The girl mainly used cross stitch when creating this needlework on linen, along with some examples of eyelet and four-sided stitches. It was once backed on plywood, and in a frame; nail holes are still visible around the edges. The un-dyed, even-weave linen, has alphabets worked in red, green and yellow thread. Some motif crowns are found along the bottom. The 'J' is missing from all the alphabets: before the end of the eighteenth century, the letters J and U were often left out. Sometimes Z was as well (due to its relative low usage). 291mmx432mm.

BSM - JG15396



Eleanor Johnson's sampler finished while she was aged nine, at Bishop Wearmouth National School, Sunderland on 11 November 1846. The National Schools were created by the Church of England in response to the success of the secular British Schools (originally founded by Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker).

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.6

Mary Lyde's sampler was completed in 1800. Mary mostly used cross-stich, although the large letters are formed using eyelet stitches.

BSM - JG15379



Overleaf, pages 36 and 37

Samplers created by sisters Jane Abbott Rumfitt (left, when she was aged ten) and Annie Rumfitt (right, when she was aged 12 in 1872), from Ripon, Yorkshire. Using the same design, the girls have displayed some of their individuality, for example in the depiction of the rose.

BSM - A29.11.1 and .2





Sewing skills

The 1851 census reveals that nearly 75% of Hitchin women employed in manufacturing were straw plaiting (mainly for the local hat trade), whereas only 15% were involved in dressmaking/needlework. By 1891, this changed such that 50% of women were straw plaiting, and 40% involved with dressmaking/needlework.

Nineteenth-century plain sewing samplers were produced by older girls or women. Unlike the decorative cross-stitch samplers, these were supposed to be illustrative of the creator's advanced dressmaking skills. These samplers would contain various techniques and be presented in a visually pleasing fashion. Techniques typically observed include hemming, frills, gathers, various types of stitches, buttons and buttonholes. Repair work includes patches and darning.

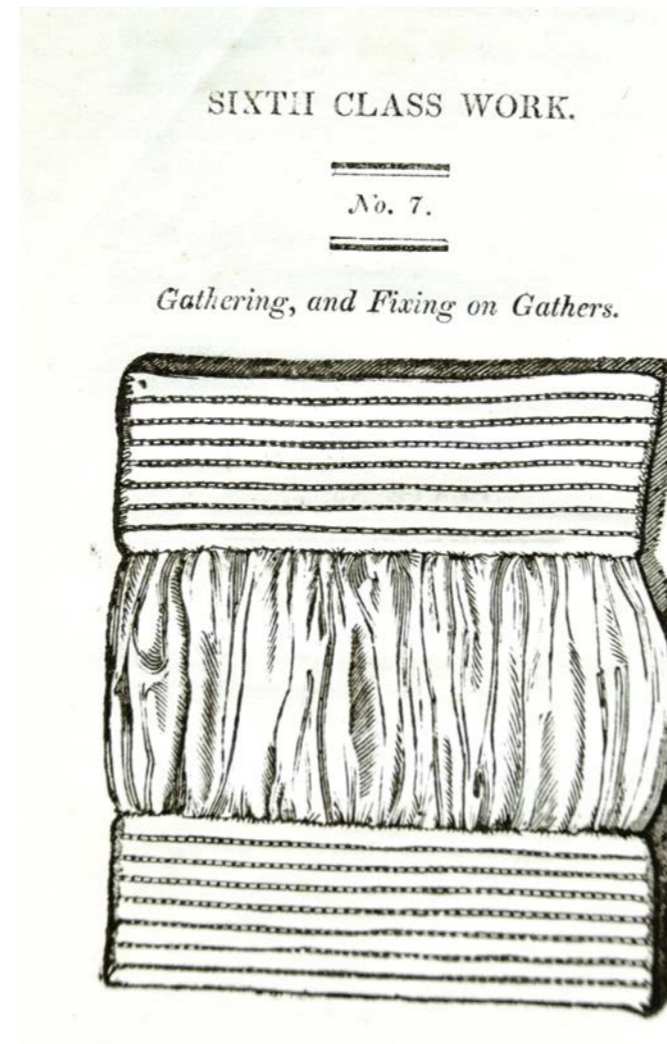
Mary and Sarah Lancaster, sisters of the education reformist Joseph Lancaster, wrote *A Report on the Rise and progress of the School for Girls in the Borough Road, Southwark* (1812). This was the blueprint for many of the girls' schools established across the country, and detailed the needlework lessons that were to be covered.

Alice Smith's sampler was completed on 16 January 1791, when she was aged nine. Her design features various initials along the bottom, possibly those of her family.

BSM - C2.10

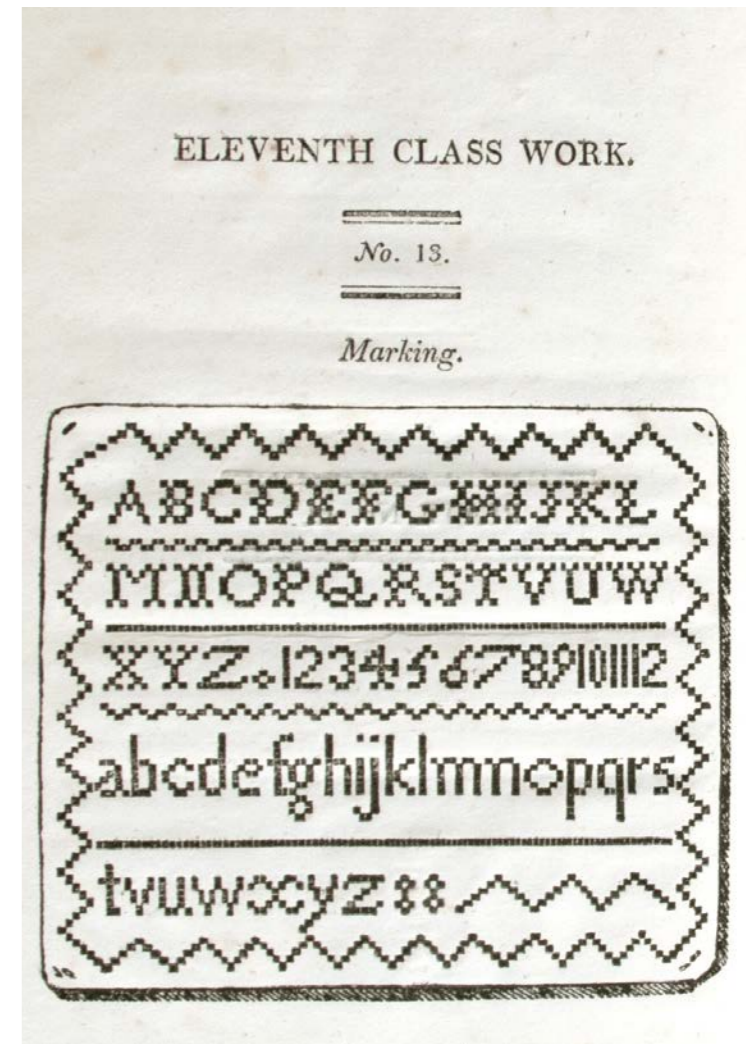


Sixth and eleventh class work from Mary and Sarah Lancaster's 1812 book on girls' education: *A Report on the Rise and Progress of the School for Girls in the Borough Road, Southwark*. The illustration for the sixth class shows a part of a sleeve with a double wristband, enabling the pupil to gain twice the practice at its creation.



Seven rows of stitching are found on the wristband. This approach was continued for decades and can be seen in Martha Stapleton's needlework (see below). As this manual was intended for use in poorly funded schools, there is also practical help in terms of keeping the cost of materials to a minimum.

BSM - HITBS:2008.8

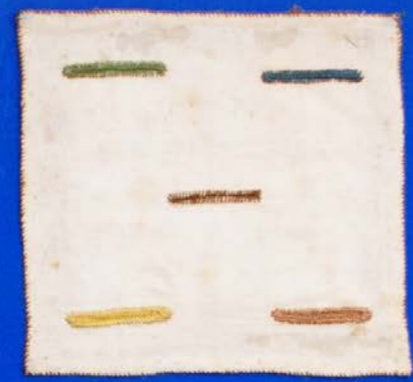


Focus on: Martha Eaynor Stapleton (1840-1907)



The 1852 map sampler created by Martha Eaynor Stapleton as a 12-year old pupil demonstrating needlework and geography skills would have also looked nice framed and on a wall. The sampler is on a cream wool ground. Worked in black, beige, blue, green and cream silk threads. The lettering is done in cross stitch and the county borders and other features are either in chain stitch or tambour stitch. 345mmx430mm (unframed). BSM - E24





The 1853 samples are mounted and framed, and are indicative of someone with excellent needlework skills. On the left are examples of gathering and pin tucks, bands of herringbone stitch in bands of green and red, herringbone edging and joining and a small sampler with two alphabets, numbers, name, place and date. On the right side buttonholes, darning, two examples of hemming, two samples of back stitch and gathering. 610mmx500mm (framed).

Martha's samplers were created while she was at Hitchin British Girls' School. She was born in 1840 in Hitchin, daughter to Jane and George (a bricklayer). Martha spent most of her youth living on Nightingale Road, Hitchin. The school was initially housed in the Old Malthouse, until it was badly damaged in a fire that swept the street in 1845. The girls' and infants' schools were later rebuilt in 1857, although owned by the Hitchin Boys' British School. The family were extremely familiar with the local area: in the 1860s, her father George worked nearby at the Sun Hotel, and then Martha married Alfred Lofts, a grocer, on 26th December 1868 in St Mary's Church, Hitchin.

These paintings of the pair are probably wedding portraits. Alfred's father was a Schoolmaster at the British School down the road in Baldock. They had four children together, before Alfred died at the age of 51. Nevertheless, Martha continued living at Nightingale Road into the 1890s, working as a newsagent and school mistress. She later moved to Leicester, establishing herself as an independent clothier dealer, with her children becoming clothiers and hairdressers. Martha died in 1907, leaving behind an established family and these beautiful needlework samplers.



Portraits of Martha and Alfred Lofts, possibly wedding portraits, painted some 16 years after Martha created the map sampler.

BSM - E25 & E26

Fourteen examples of needlework samples on cream cotton (c. 1900). Most samples are attached with two red, embroidered stars in the top corners. There is a border top and bottom, finished with feather stitch worked in red. The sides possess narrow hems with minute stitching. The samples include examples of darning and patching worked on various fabrics; the cotton, linen and woollen samples all have frayed edges. The sampler also displays tucks, gathers, pleating and one fabric-covered button. The initial 'J' worked in cross stitch is on the patch in the lower row. A paper ticket on the reverse of the sampler indicates that this was the work of J. Dean who produced it in her 'first year' (possibly in Grammar School). 295mm x 410mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.9





Samples by Annie Elizabeth Bearman. Despite her unusual name, we know little about her.

Off-white cream miniature apron made of heavy cotton in two parts, with a run and fell seam joining the two sections. The apron has a waistband, but no ties, and the skirt is pleated into the waistband. The side seams are hemmed, a wide hem at bottom edge has been over-sewn with herringbone stitch on the right side. All stitched in cream thread. Decorative stitching is in red, with four round-ended buttonholes on wide hems, and 'A.E.B.' in cross stitch between the two pairs of buttonholes. On the main body of the apron are two rectangles of tiny running stitch giving the impression of pockets. 150mmx135mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.11



Cream cotton long miniature nightdress which has long sleeves with a cuff and frill. The back is gathered into a yoke and the front has three tucks on either side of a placket opening, with decorative herringbone stitching down the placket and across the tucks to hold them in place. The frill round the neck is fastened with a fabric button and buttonhole. There is a patch on the right front and decorative darning on the left, with cross stitch initials centre front. A wide hem with herringbone stitching on the right side. 345mmx520mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.11.1



A collection of seven needlework samples mounted on cream cotton, displaying a variety of skills: darning, patching, buttonholes, gathering etc., worked mostly on plain cotton but two are on flannel and one on a patterned fabric. A length of white cotton tape has been added to the centre bottom hem. Initials 'A. B.' have been embroidered in red cross stitch above the tuck in the centre. There is a self-covered button on the gathering sample. This is unlikely to be an exhibition piece as one would expect all the stitches to be better lined up. 390mmx410mm.

BSM - HITBS:2019.1

Examples of needlework, possibly made by the same, unknown maker (late nineteenth century):

Cream knitted fabric sample with five red examples of darning, worked on the reverse side of the knitted sample, comprising four pattern darning samples and one hole repair. 108mmx243mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.10.4



Miniature cream knitted sample showing how to turn a heel. It possesses a reinforced heel and shaping for the foot. 46mmx50mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.10.5





Off-white cotton miniature hand-stitched shirt showing different techniques. The sample has long sleeves, and the back is longer than the front, which opens to the waist, showing an example of pleating below a reinforcing bar. It is gathered into the back at the neck and gathered into the cuff.

Buttonholes have been worked at the cuff and left front neck band but there are no buttons. Gussets are in place at the under armhole and reinforcing the slits at the sides. The high quality stitching is minute throughout.

BSM - HITBS:2012.2.10.6



Further examples of needlework possibly by the same creator (late nineteenth century).

Cream woollen fabric with decorative patch, worked with red herringbone stitching on both sides of the sample. There are raw edges on all sides. 67mmx75mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.10.2.8



Cream cotton rectangle with an added frill. The tightly-gathered frill has been hemmed on three sides. The rectangle is double fabric and over-sewn on three sides. 128mmx97mm.

BSM - HITBS:2012.10.2.9



Postcard of girls taking a needlework lesson, 1910s.

BSM - JGC9713



Paper pattern sewn together as part of school instruction, early twentieth century.

BSM - A29.26



Elizabeth Blanchard's small apron sampler (dated 1877), with buttonhole and cloth button. Elsewhere, there are examples of a cloth patch, cross-stitch initials, darning, backstitch hem, as well as over-sewing and gathering.

BSM - A25.1

Page 57

A 1910s sampler by D. Saunders showing many needle work techniques, such as tucks, frills, patches, hems and button holes. She produced this exquisite piece while learning to become a nanny.

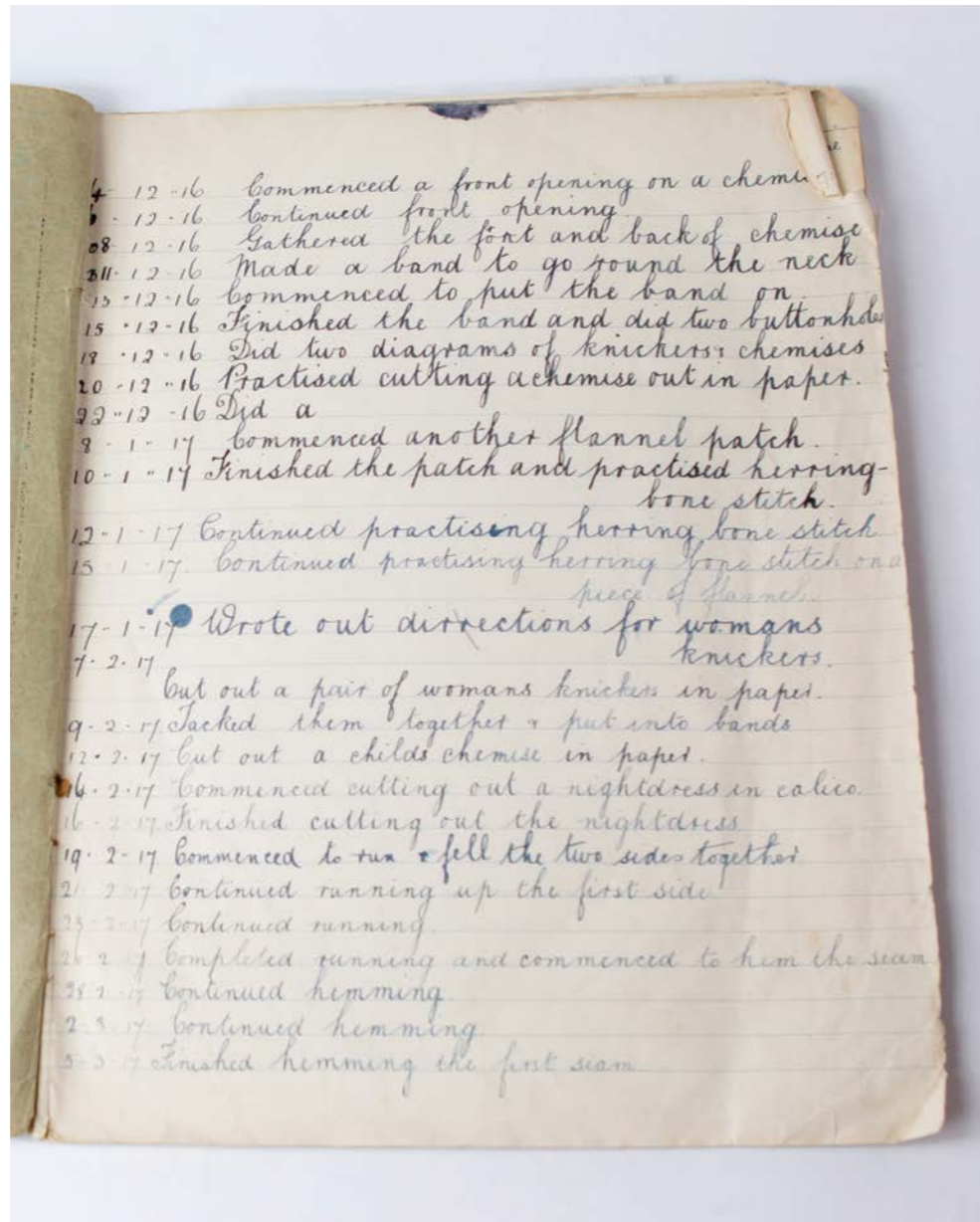
BSM - B54.2.10





Diagram book from 1916/17 where Olive Graves has listed her work each week, and attached needlework samples. The students here were receiving three needlework lessons a week.

BSM - 219.12



The Hitchin Girls' British School was set up to educate the daughters of the poor in Hitchin and the local area. In the early days the aim was to give the children 'plain and useful knowledge' for their 'humble walk of life'. Even these modest aims caused problems for many families, who needed the income their daughters earned from activities such as straw plaiting and needlework. Consequently, only months after it opened and due to requests from the parents, the School changed its timetable to allow the girls to do their own work for 2 days per week, and on Saturday mornings.

Aside from needlework the main subjects initially taught in the school were the 3Rs; reading, writing and arithmetic. Scripture and moral education would also have been important.

Reading:

After learning the alphabet children were taught to read increasingly complex words before finally being issued with a 'reader'. Readers were books often containing a religious or moral theme.

Other Subjects Taught *Sue Mitchell*



Postcard showing a reading class at Stockwell College (early 1900s).

BSM - JGC9061

Writing:

Children began by forming letters in a sand tray, progressed to using slates, before finally moving onto a copybook. In these books the pupils copied examples of formal copperplate writing.

Arithmetic:

The youngest children were taught using an abacus and wrote on slates. Older children had arithmetic exercise books. They also learned mental arithmetic and to recite their times tables.

Spelling:

This was a subject frequently assessed by the School Inspectors.

Drill:

Was a military style exercise using sticks and weights. The idea was to promote discipline and sharpen the mind in preparation for school work.



21962. Stockwell College Senior Practising School. (Drill Class). P.T.A.

Postcard showing girls performing Drill (c.1900).

BSM – JGC9060



Drill equipment, including dumbbells, sceptres and Indian clubs.

BSM Collection

Overleaf, page 64

Implements used for laundry work. Domestic Economy lessons include the theoretical and practical aspects of all domestic chores.

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From 1862, in order to receive funding, elementary schools were required to keep a log book, into which the head teacher would make brief daily entries. These typically included details of staff recruitment, attendance levels, subjects taught, visitors to the school or any special events. Schools were organised on the basis of ‘annual progression’, with the children passing through a number of **Standards**. The Standards were initially named I – VI, and roughly corresponded to ages 7 – 12. However, children would remain in a Standard if they did not pass the necessary examination.

In 1867 specific subjects, other than the 3Rs, became eligible for grants. The Yearly Schemes of Work were recorded in the School Log Books and in 1884 this shows that the girls studied the following:

English:

Various poems including Standard I Two little kittens, Standard III Kind Words and Standard VI The Lady of the Lake.

Geography:

- Standard IV British Isles and British North America
- Standard V & VI Europe, longitude and latitude, day and night and the seasons.

Historical Readers:

- Standard III Nelson’s Stories
- Standard. IV Simple History
- Standard V & VI Pictures from English History.



Singing:

Always an important part of school life singing was often mentioned as 'good' or 'of a high standard' by School Inspectors. The girls took part in music festivals and gave a concert for parents each Christmas. School songs were sometimes listed in the Log Book and for 1884 included: Ripe Strawberries, Dawn of Day and The Ghosts of Childhood.

The Log Book shows Grammar & Composition and Elementary Science were also taught.

Grammar & Composition:

This began with the formation of correct oral sentences. In higher Standards children progressed to the analysis of the structure of written sentences.

Elementary Science using Object Lessons:

Science was often taught as a series of Object Lessons in which the teacher introduced everyday objects or pictures and the children were asked questions about them. They were encouraged to handle and explore objects brought into the classroom.

The Scheme of Work lists the following topics were covered at the Girls' School in 1902:

- Lessons from common objects: such as metals, cork, candles and starch
- Lessons from plant life: to include: roots, stems, leaves, corn, tea and sugar cane.
- Lessons from animal life to include: bees, sheep, sponge, beer and milk.

We can see from this list that lessons often concentrated on domestic objects that the girls would be expected to encounter in their lives at work and home.

Domestic Economy:

This became a compulsory subject for girls in 1878. They learned topics such as laundry, cookery, health and home management. Subjects that would prepare them for a life in service, to work in local laundries or to run their own homes in the future.

In the 20th century the girls took part in sports days and netball and in 1924 regular swimming lessons began; there were also weekly gardening lessons. Various exhibitions were attended including the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley and girls often saw magic lantern lectures about faraway places such as Egypt and Malaya.

Despite some broadening of girls' education in the first half of the 20th century, it still reflected their lack of equality in society. A significant change came with the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975. This banned discrimination on the basis of sex or marital status in many areas, including education. In 1970, more than twice as many men as women obtained a first degree at university in the UK; now we are seeing tens of thousands more women than men graduating, with female students outnumbering males in traditionally male fields, such as medicine and dentistry.

Overleaf, page 66

Cookery items.

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