

the
stitchbook
COLLECTIVE 2022

Workshop 10 of 12

Hearts & Lace

These notes should be read in conjunction with the online video



www.untangledthreads.co.uk/MEMBERS

Video Password: HEART

Hearts & Lace

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Introduction

There is something particularly poignant about a heart shape in conjunction with lace. I have to admit that I instantly think of 'Great Expectations' and the tragedy of Miss Havisham, but it doesn't all have to be sadness and decay (!) Hearts and lace are classic symbols of romance and an enduring devotion to a love or a memory. My interest in the representation of the heart in textiles really began when I discovered World War 1 Sweetheart Pincushions and their connection to Occupational Therapy.

The combination of hearts and lace already has lots of emotional connotations, historical and literary connections. There has been a real surge in the 'tattered lace', off-white natural calico and 'shabby chic' look in recent years. If you look on my Pinterest page [untangledthreads.co.uk @helenbirmingham](https://www.pinterest.com/untangledthreads) you will see a Board called Hearts & Lace which demonstrates this perfectly.

In this workshop, we will be looking at different ways of constructing a fabric heart, and the significance, for me, of leaving a scar 'visible' on the reverse of 3D hearts. We will also look at how you might incorporate padded hearts (in relief) into your work, the beauty of tessellating heart and star shapes, and lastly, I will show you a simple idea/ layout for a page in your stitchbook, which has endless possibilities for decorating and narrative (storytelling).



The History of WW1 Sweetheart Pincushions

It was during WW1 that Queen Mary realized the potential of using the practice of decorating sawdust-filled hearts as a means of therapy for convalescing soldiers. She organised for kits to be made and distributed to hospitals where wounded or shell-shocked soldiers were recuperating.

The hearts were decorated with whatever notions were available and once decorated they were sent to loved ones at home, gaining the name 'Sweetheart Pincushions'. Pincushion is something of a misnomer; they are actually more akin to folk art or keepsakes, since the pins were not intended for use, simply as decoration.

The therapeutic effect a wounded soldier gained by making and sending one of these sawdust hearts was immense, and indeed the practice of Occupational Therapy in the UK can be traced back to this time in history.



Layette and wedding pinstuck pincushions, made from c 1650, were the forerunners of the first military pincushions, which date to just after the Crimean War 1855/56. Military pincushions continued to be made through the two Boer Wars and into The Great War 1914/18.

1,568 Sawdust Hearts Exhibition

While researching the military hearts I became fascinated not only by the links to Occupational Therapy, but also by the emotional bond between the maker and receiver of the hearts.

November 2018 was the centenary of the end of World War One. 1,568 was the number of days the war lasted despite the assurance that it would be 'over by Christmas'.

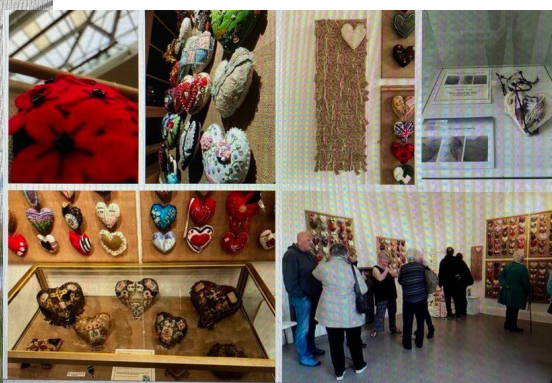
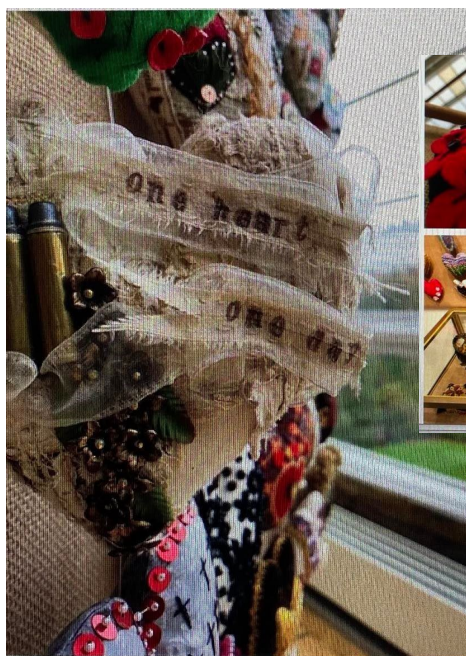
I liked the visual poignancy of one heart representing one day, so I went about making 1,568 handmade replicas of the original WW1 kits. These were distributed to makers all across the UK, decorated, returned for the exhibition, and then finally, in early 2019, reunited with their makers.

Copies of the catalogue (with images of ALL 1,568 hearts) is still available on Untangled Threads website, together with a booklet of 'Inside Stories'. ALSO, if you go to www.untangledthreads.co.uk you will find a link to



Sawdust Hearts Project.

This is the archive for the project and contains images of the hearts, a video tour of the exhibition and the original resources and video presentations related to the project.



www.helenbarter.wixsite.com/ww1hearts

Making 3 dimensional hearts

You have lots of choices:

- Use a whole piece of fabric, or use a patchwork of fabrics.
- Use plain fabric for the back and decorated for the front.
- Decorate your fabric BEFORE making it into a 3D heart.
- Decorate your fabric AFTER making it into a 3D heart.
- Make your heart with a visible scar.
- Make your heart with an invisible join.
- Add a hanging loop before stitching.
- Add a hanging loop with a button or other visible fixing.
- Stitch or pin your decoration.
- Compress the stuffing with your stitches, or confine them just to the surface.
- Hand stitch or machine stitch.
- Large or small.
- Add your own options ...

I'll show you lots of examples on the video, but the basic principle is the same to make any 3D heart. The finished heart can then be used as a stand-alone keepsake, a hanging decoration, etc, etc ...



Making and stuffing a Heart (with scar)



Draw the heart shape on double thickness calico



Stitch ALL THE WAY ROUND
Don't leave a gap for stuffing



Strengthen the top angle with a double row of stitching



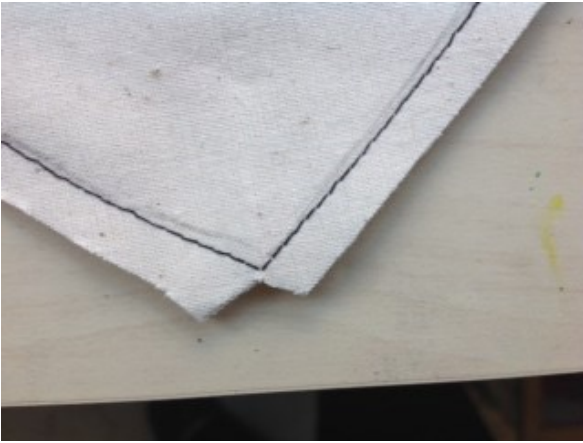
Cut around your shape, leaving approximately 1cm all round



Snip downward at the top, being careful not to cut stitching



Cut notches out around the top curves of the heart



Clip the bottom point, being careful not to cut stitching



Make a slash **THROUGH ONE LAYER** of the heart.



Turn the heart the right way out.



Stuff with sawdust.

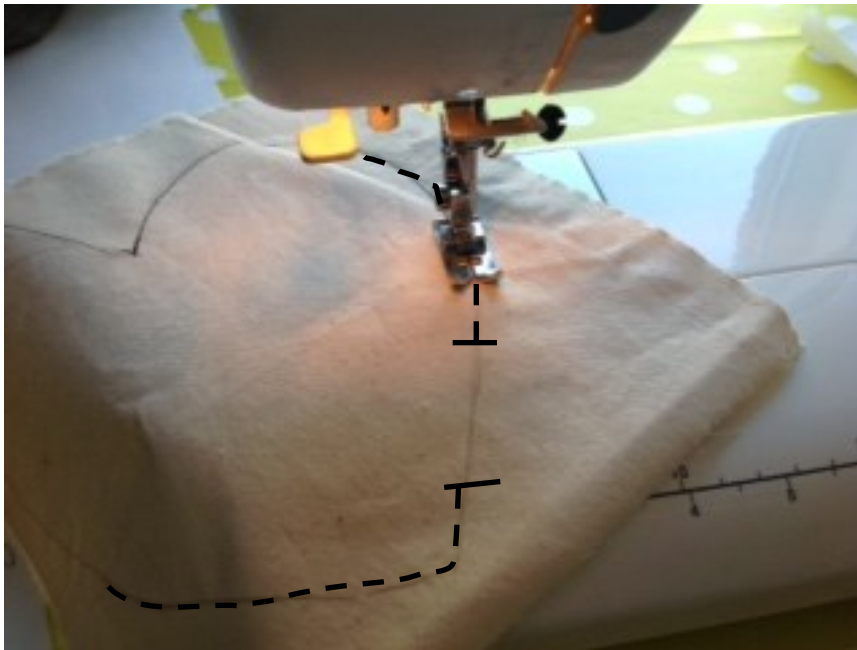


Sew up the hole using a running cross stitch or mattress suture.



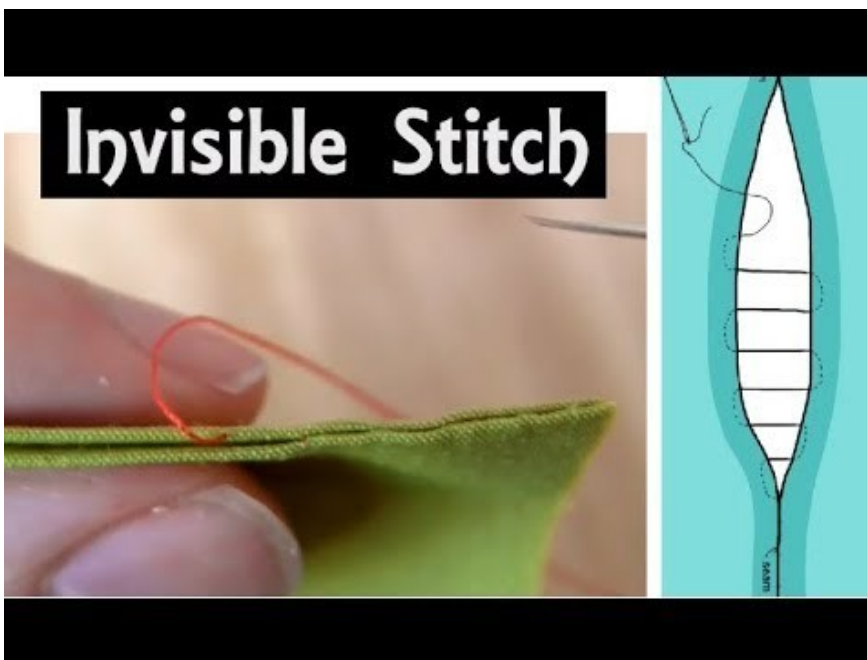
Accept and respect the scar
* See note on scars and kintsugi

Making and stuffing a heart with an invisible seam



When you stitch around the heart shape, leave a gap in one of the seams.

I recommend leaving this approximately centrally on the straight part of the edge. Don't go too close to the v at the bottom, or you'll have trouble folding in the seam allowance neatly.



After you have stuffed the heart, you can close the seam using an invisible stitch. (ladder stitch)

This method is not recommended for sawdust. It is too hard to keep the sawdust in position and stuffed fully or evenly enough.

I prefer the slash and scar method of stuffing because it gives a much more even shape to the edge of the heart. i.e. When you are stuffing from the center you can pack the stuffing to a consistent firmness without the fear of losing any tension.

Different types of stuffing for Hearts

The type of stuffing you use will depend upon what the end use of the heart is. If your intention is making a pincushion (decorative or functional), the stuffing needs to be firm enough to hold the pins in place, and sawdust or straw is the traditional choice. I have found from experience that the finer the sawdust the better it is. (If you find a product which is labelled wood shavings, this can be very disappointing, as it has relatively large chunks in it, which can prevent pins sitting exactly where you want). If you are making a purely decorative heart, the stuffing you use is a personal choice. Here are some suggestions:

- Sawdust/Straw
- Polyester / Acrylic toy stuffing
- Cotton stuffing
- Wool
- Kapok
- Fabric Scraps
- Bamboo
- Old Socks
- Old Clothes shredded
- An old stuffed toy
- Shredded Paper
- Tissue
- Pillow Filling
- Recycled Cushions / Quilt Filling
- Old Packaging Materials such as Bubblewrap
- Lavender or Dried Flowers (Makes the toy smell nice)
- Rice (Can be used to add weight but watch if there is a chance of vermin)
- Beads (in combination with other stuffing to give it a different texture)
- Polystyrene Beads
- Sand (Wrapped up of course. Adds weight)
- Ground nuts or shells
- Fish Tank Gravel (Again to add weight)

Kintsugi and the Significance of the Scar

I want to take this opportunity to sing the praises of the scar on stuffed hearts.

I do know that leaving the scar won't suit everyone or every situation, and it may feel a bit sentimental, but I see the scar as an intrinsic part of the making process, and liken it to the Japanese practice of Kintsugi, the art of resilience...

Kintsugi invites us to repair a broken object by enhancing its scars, instead of trying to hide them. The word Kintsugi comes from the Japanese Kin (gold) and Tsugi (join), and therefore literally means: join with gold. In an age of mass production and quick disposal, learning to accept and celebrate scars and flaws is a powerful lesson in humanity and sustainability. The scar becomes a reminder of the beauty of human fragility as well. In a world that so often prizes youth, perfection and excess, embracing the old and battered may seem strange, but you can also see it as a reminder to stay optimistic when things fall apart and to celebrate the flaws and missteps of life.



Memorial Hearts

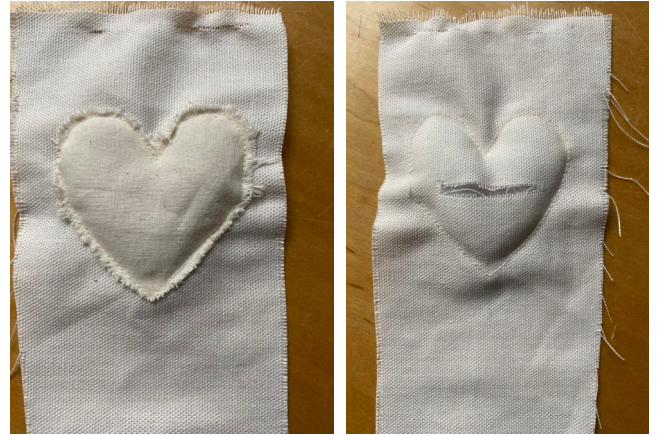
I like to make hearts which memorialise Births & Deaths, and all significant life events in between. Framed or free-standing, they make perfect gifts or keepsakes. I describe them as being:

For Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow



Raised Hearts (in relief)

I think that the easiest way to make a heart in relief is to stitch a 2D shape onto the backing, and then slash the backing to stuff the heart from behind, but this does mean that the heart is attached all the way round at its outer edge.



If you don't want to stitch right around its edge, you can attach a heart (or other shape) to a backing BEFORE you construct and stuff the heart. This would sound so complicated if I try to describe it in words; it is much easier for me to demonstrate on the video rather than in diagrams., and it really isn't difficult at all! The heart is stuffed from a hole left in one edge, rather than slashed on the back.



(Incidentally, this is also the way you would construct a wrist pincushion)



The other very easy way to add relief to your work is by creating the heart in the same way as the 3D heart, but this time stuff it very loosely. You can then stitch THROUGH both layers AND the stuffing, so creating a flattish but textured heart, which can then be attached to the backing fabric, or straight into your stitchbook. This compresses the stuffing in a way which I really like, and enhances that 'slow stitched puckered look'.



(OR maybe you could add a brooch back?!)

Adding Lace, Beads and Buttons



Lace is wonderful to work with! It is so forgiving in terms of how you add it to your work. As long as you use a thread which is a similar colour, your stitching and beading will virtually vanish within the texture and design of the lace itself.

There seems to be so much vintage lace on ebay and etsy at the moment, and if you aren't particular about having whole and unstained pieces, you can buy it very cheaply. Don't forget that doilies and tablemats/cloths give a huge amount of useable lace or crochet work.

I quiet often use modern lace, buttons and beads in conjunction with small pieces of vintage lace. For example, the ribbon/lace around the edge of my hearts is generally an off-white modern cotton lace.



Combining Hearts

Having made several hearts (!) I became aware of the beautiful ways in which they can be combined to make wonderful 'Presentation Cushions'. Small ones can be used for wedding ring cushions, or used on a dressing table to display items. Here are a few suggestions. If you are a quilter, you will already be aware of the enormous potential for combining hearts and stars!



'Memories' *Stitchbook Project*

This project is intended to be as 'non-prescriptive' as possible. You know by now, that whatever you make, and however you display it in your Stitchbook is up to you. It is YOUR book ... This is just a suggestion:

You will need:

Calico, Thread, two small beads and a small amount of stuffing.

You can decorate your work with anything, but here I have used some vintage lace, small pearl beads, felt heart, velvet square and a luggage label (optional)



SUGGESTED PAGE

Of course you can change the size of the elements to suit your design.

Stage 1 Cut out 4 squares of calico each 7cm x 7cm .Cut out 2 hearts from calico (measuring no more than 7cm in any direction)

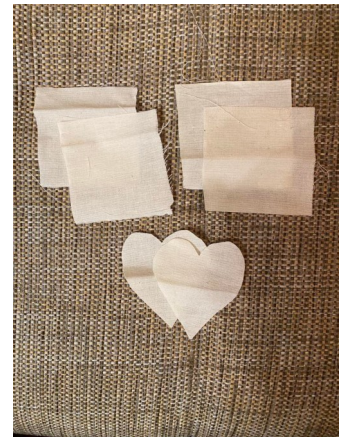
Stage 2 Right sides together, stitch around 2 squares and 1 heart. *1cm seam allowance all around.* Leave gap to turn squares. Clip edges, slash back of heart to turn, and stuff lightly. Clip then turn squares.

Stage 3 Join squares together with beads forming a 'hinge'

Stage 4 Stitch stuffed heart onto top square.

Stage 5 Attach top square to backing or straight into stitchbook. *You could leave the top edge unstitched to form a pocket?*

Stage 6 Decorate as you like. You have lots surfaces or 'hiding places' to put notes, small objects, messages etc.



the stitchbook

COLLECTIVE 2022

Next Workshops

PLEASE NOTE:
There will be
2 workshops in December

Workshop 11 of 12
Image Transfer

Workshop 12 of 12
Embroidering Felted Surfaces

A list of supplies needed for both of these workshops will be announced in the next Newsletter (November 25th 2022) and online

These are the last workshops to form part of your 2022 subscription. *Thank you so much for your patience when things were tough, and the timing of the workshops needed a bit of a re-think.*

Subscription for 2023 membership opens on 7th November 2022.

For full details of how to sign up go to:

www.untangledthreads.co.uk

