

The Winchester Panel at the Royal Hants County Hospital

The panel was designed by Jeannie Baker and worked by members of the Winchester Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild.

Jeannie worked over the early months of 1986 and produced a delicate watercolour called 'The Spirit of Winchester'. It featured many prominent buildings grouped on either side of the Cathedral surrounded by trees. At the base of the design was the inscription 'Despise not thou the Chastening of the Almighty'. This is carved on a beam from the original hospital building, now displayed in a local museum.

Six tutors from within the branch were asked to form groups from volunteers. Encouragement was given to all members to join in regardless of experience or expertise. The buildings were divided between the six groups. Photographs were taken to help with the detail of the buildings and each group was given a shade card of fabric samples matched from the design to ensure an overall colour harmony.

No restrictions were put on techniques and members were encouraged to try a variety of stitches and effects. At the first joint meeting, blackwork, canvas work, pulled work, applique, free stitchery, dyed fabrics and free machine embroidery were all to be seen working together successfully. It was exciting to look at our initial efforts and enjoy the ingenious effects and realistic details that were being created. The momentum was beginning to build. A 'Tree Day School' was held to encourage more workers and give ideas for producing the 'acres' of tree-tops required. Over the following months hundreds of trees were produced in the early summer greens of the design. The variety of styles and techniques were delightful as were the trees stitched by our 'YES' group.

A small group of more experienced workers was formed to tackle the cathedral. From samples produced, we decided that canvas work would be ideal for the shaded stonework and net, darned with iridescent silk and metallic threads, for the windows.

A working frame was made and was manoeuvred up several flights of stairs to an attic room in the hospital. The cotton duck background was stretched and stapled to the frame and the assembly work began. It was exciting to see the individually worked parts linking together so well. For the next three months we worked in shifts in the attic. Any member who could climb the stairs was persuaded to come and stitch. Groups of six or eight ladies worked at a time, often in pairs, with one in front and one at the back of the vertical frame, a needle passing backwards and forwards between them.

The final stitches were put in about 10.00pm one evening a week before the exhibition was due to open.

The attendance at the June exhibition broke all the Guildhall records. The panel was a real centre piece and attracted some visitors back two or three times. After the exhibition the pane was officially handed over to the Royal Hampshire County Hospital on September 29th 1988 where it is now on permanent loan.

The project was funded as follows:

Winchester Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild: £350.00
TVS: £100.00

The Royal Hampshire County Hospital supplied the frame, and members themselves gave many of the fabrics and threads.