

# Pouch of Queen Isabel Peregrinus

## 1. Historical Context

There are many extant examples of embroidered pouches with various designs. These may have pictures or heraldic designs, but there are examples of regular geometric patterns.

There are examples from 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> Century which show a construction of an embroidered body of the pouch, with a contrasting band (fabric or contrasting embroidery) along the top. Drawstrings can run through eyelet holes in this band, or in channels stitched in this band, or in loops at the top of the pouch, or on this band. There are many variations. ( Ref <http://rosaliegilbert.com/purses.html>, various pictures on the V&A Website labelled variously as burse, purse or bag, photos of examples in the V&A Study collection, museum ref 859-1899; 8666-1863; 847-1899, found at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/medievalandrenaissance/2099763129/in/set-72157603423341763/> and then <http://www.medievalsilkwork.com/2010/06/heraldic-pouches-continued.html> for references to heraldic pouches)



This collection of 14th century German reliquaries gives one an idea of how varied the simple drawstring, rectangular purse with tassels could be. (Flury-Lemberg p. 68, from [cottsimple.com/articles/aumonieres/](http://cottsimple.com/articles/aumonieres/))

## 2. Design Inspiration

For this particular pouch, I wanted to have a central image of a lioness/leopard (big cat) to reflect the emblem that Isabel had on her existing script bag – although she does not have arms registered, I assumed this was what she wanted possibly as arms (I couldn't ask, as the gift was a surprise).

I also wanted to complete the rest of the pouch with a brick stitch design, implemented in colours reflecting the Drachenwald arms, but also with a small reference to the main colour of Isabel's

Coronation Garb, so I felt red & yellow for Drachenwald with some blue (Coronation Garb) would be appropriate colours.

I wanted a brick stitch design that was small enough that I could get multiple repeats on a relatively small pouch, but that could be adapted to give a framing effect around the cat design.

The pouch size was determined by its purpose – to hold embroidered handkerchiefs which I would also make for Isabel to use as largesse. Since the handkerchiefs are approximately 8" square, when folded into quarters to go into the pouch, they are 4" square, so the pouch was made just slightly wider than 4" and a bit longer than 4" to give a rectangular shape, rather than square as I felt this was more pleasing to the eye, and more reflective of the shape of many pouches.

### 3. Implementation

I selected a 32 count even-weave linen as the base fabric, since I felt this was a good compromise between fineness of brick stitch design and the amount of time it would take to complete the pouch (a finer fabric with more threads per inch would have led to a smaller/finer brick stitch pattern, but would have taken longer to complete and made the deadline of 12<sup>th</sup> Night impossible)

I started with the cat embroidery. The cat design was transferred to the fabric by tracing it on to thin paper, which was then tacked in place. To effect the transfer I stitched through the lines of the cat design, then torn the paper away. A more traditional way would have been to use the "prick and pounce" method, but I did not have to hand any suitable powder to use for the "pounce" on a white fabric.

Once the design was transferred, I backed the fabric with a light calico, to enable me to place stitches at points, other than just in the "holes" in the even-weave, and to provide a bit more substance to the fabric to support the cat embroidery. I then tensioned the fabric /calico combination in a standard embroidery hoop to try to minimise any puckering of the fabric caused by the stitches.

To complete the cat, I chose to use a split stitch. This stitch is a very common period technique – in fact English embroiderers produced work incorporating this stitch, amongst others, which became known as "Opus Anglicanum" in the 12<sup>th</sup>-15th Century. I have found this stitch particularly good for animal fur and for birds feathers as it gives the visual impression of the "flow" of the fur/feathers. I used 1 strand of 60/2 silk thread in yellow, which gave a good filling stitch, but was not too thick and bulky. In order to get the "flow" of the fur correct, I studied the way the fur "sat" on my pet cat and tried to stitch in a direction reflecting that.

Once split stitch was complete, I added details and an outline in backstitch using 1 strand of 60/2 silk thread

Once the cat was complete, I marked out the complete pouch, cut the excess calico away (not needed for the brick stitch areas), and put the fabric on to a larger scroll frame – the embroidery hoop was not big enough to encompass the whole design, and I didn't want to have to move the hoop during stitching.

I selected a brick stitch design (ref "A Stitch Out of Time", design Y-001A, which is based on a 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Century German bag currently in the Victoria and Albert Museum), and charted out the area to surround the cat, to give a frame whilst minimising the impact to the repeated design. To continue the brick stitch theme I also chose to continue a brick stitch pattern, in a single colour around the cat. I used chevrons, with stitches over 4 threads, to reflect the shape of the framing elements

I then implemented the brick stitch using 3 60/2 threads for each stitch. It is important to make sure that the ground fabric is completely covered by the stitching, and previous experimentation with different numbers of threads and different counts of even weave has shown me that 3 60/2 threads works best with a 32 count evenweave. I chose to use all silk, even though typically extent examples use linen thread for the white stitches, because I had no evenly spun linen thread of the right weight.

Once the embroidery was complete, I made up the pouch by stitching a lining of red silk to the embroidery, taking the end up and over the top to form a contrast strip at the top of the pouch, making a channel in this silk edging for the drawstrings. I then whip-stitched the sides of the pouch. To complete it, I made fingerloop braid, using 8 loops of 30/2 silk in the same red and yellow as I used on the embroidery to trim the sides, and to use as drawstrings. Tassels at the bottom corners, and at the ends of the drawstrings completed the pouch.

