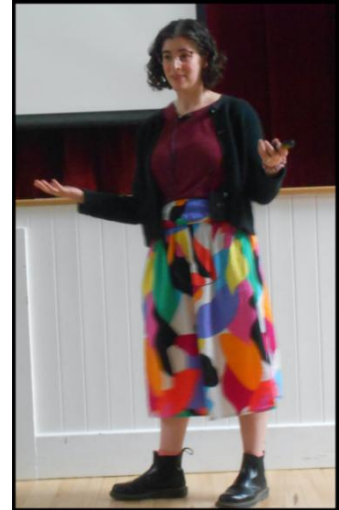


Monday 9 June 2025 meeting
Isabella Rosner – English Samplers 1600-1900

Anyone expecting a dry, academic talk about samplers from Isabella Rosner – curator of the Royal School of Needlework and associate researcher at antique sampler specialist Witney Antiques – would have been quickly disillusioned.

Isabella is one of the new age of sampler researchers, studying them not just for their patterns and techniques, but as historical documents of the lives of those most neglected citizens – women and young girls. Using samplers to track down the stories of the stitchers themselves, Isabella described them as the “most accurate genealogical records we have”. Samplers can teach us not just the names and ages of the stitchers, but who their families were, where they lived, what they read, what they were taught at school, and connect them to their teachers and schoolmates. Even unnamed and undated samplers can be matched to similar ones to build up a network of relationships.



Isabella led us through the history of English samplers, introducing us to the earliest known dated example, and hinting that she might have identified one of similar vintage. Using examples from the RSN collection that are not on public display, she led us through the various styles of samplers. She showed how they changed over the years as female education became less about stitching to furnish the home, and more about displaying a girl's education and accomplishments: advertising her suitability as a potential wife, mother and mistress of the household. Isabella tracked samplers' final decline once needlework was no longer needed to mark the laundry or create clothing and household textiles.

A native of Los Angeles, Isabella discovered a love of 18th century history through the works of Jane Austen and other novelists. Thinking that a career in costume design might be

fun, an early internship soon taught her that it was not for her. When her mother suggested the museum sector might suit, a second (importantly, paid) internship caught her attention when she learned that a specific design of tree could accurately date a sampler. She was hooked.

Isabella is a knowledgeable and enthusiastic advocate for the importance of samplers in historic research. Her love of samplers in general, and Quaker samplers in particular (the subject of her recent PhD thesis) shines through in every word she speaks.

Her work at the RSN aims to catalogue and digitise its collection of needlework, making it available for everyone to study and admire. In association with Rebecca Scott of Witney Antiques, she curates their annual exhibition of the needlework and other handiwork considered essential for the well-educated young lady of earlier times. She opens up our eyes to the lives and experience of forgotten girls and women through the creations they have left behind.

All this, and a wealth of beautiful stitchery on the screen, led to a fun and illuminating evening for us all.

Isabella Rosner: <https://isabellarosner.com/>

Royal School of Needlework: <https://royal-needlework.org.uk/>

Witney Antiques: <https://www.witneyantiques.com/>



Anna Bucket 1656



Frances Boyce 1780