

A Plethora of Pouches

Inspired by the 14th century knit pouches of Sion and Chur

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Figure 1: Knitted pouches in chronological order from top left to bottom right.

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1 Background

It all began when a friend showed me the pouches he was knitting in silk, and linen, and wool, based on the pouches found at Sion and Chur.

In the treasure of the ancient cathedral at Sion (Sitten) in western Switzerland are five knitted purses or bags for holding the relics or saints. There is a sixth in another ancient cathedral at Chur, in the German-speaking east of the country. They are considered to be of fourteenth-century origin and are notably similar. Doubtless all six came from one source, but where that source was is beyond conjecture. [Rut03] p50

The pouches are knit using the two colour stranded knitting technique, and the patterns are designed as being banded and in some cases heraldic. My device consists of a squirrel holding a book, under three acorns, and I have previously designed and embroidered a brickstitch pouch with those patterns. It seemed a logical progression to try knitting up a heraldic pouch. And thus the blue and grey pouch was knitted – the colours didn't match. but that was some weaving wool I had handy¹.

The two stranded knitting technique actually predates these pouches, as there are the cushions of Las Helgas([BB06] p 39–44) dating back to the late thirteenth century, suggesting that this technique could have spread more widely.

After the first pouch, I realized that having a sampler set consisting of one single pouch was a little weak, and that knitting these pouches was rather fun, so I kept going. I did have to experiment on the top of the pouch, trying to find a satisfying way to make holes for the drawstrings that would keep the wool from wearing out too rapidly.

¹By the time the second pouch was finished, of course, I had invested in several more pounds of wool in 6 other colours, but

2 Knitting the Pouches

The inspiration pouches were knitted top down in the round, probably using 5 needles; that way there are an even number of stitches on each of four needles, making the bind off at the bottom easier.

The pouches I knitted were typically knitted with 12 - 18 stitches per needle, usually on 0 size needles. Eventually three pouches were knitted on 000 needles, those being the second, fourth, and fifth pouch on the bottom row in Figure 1. A pouch was started on 00 needles, but was chewed up by Sammie the puppy, which destroyed the needles. The in-progress example in fuschia and dakr green is knitted on 00 needles, now that I have acquired more needles.

While the original inspiration purses were knitted in silk, I chose to work in a similar weight of wool, since wool was widely available.

2.1 Starting the Pouch

Casting on was done using a two-strand cast-on which combines the creation of the initial loops and the first row of the knitting. In this method, the left hand holds the yarn and the right controls the knitting needle. A long tail is controlled by the thumb, and for each stitch a loop is made by the thumb which is then knitted through with the needle.

After casting on an equal number of stitches to four needles, the work was knitted in the round for three rows before making the holes. The holes are made in two rounds, and each hole is two stitches wide: in round one knit together the two stitches with the previous and following stitches. For instance, if the hole is made in stitches 4 and 5, then stitches 3 and 4 are knit together, as are 4 and five. In round two, after the first knit together stitch, add two loops around the knitting needle. So in the example, after stitch 3, add two loops around the needle.

After the holes were knitted in, I usually knitted three more plain rows before

starting the pattern.

2.1.1 Variation - Mirror Image

In the pouches where one side is the mirror image of the other, colour wise – for instance the fifteenth pouch - the top wasn't knitted in the round but instead each colour was knitted separately, with the threads twisted every time the colours met. So every round one colour was knitted and one colour was purled.

2.2 Two Stranded Knitting

In the pattern area two colours were used. When one colour is in use the other colour is carried behind, creating the loops. In longer floats I experimented with various ways to twist one thread around the other, tying down the floats.

The simpler patterns, like the flowers, the dots and waves, and the fleur de lys were freestyled – I was making them up as I went along – while the more complicated patterns were graphed out first, and are available in Appendix A.

2.3 Binding off

When the bottom of the pouch was reached – which was defined “I’m out of pattern” or possibly “I’m bored” – the knitting was finished with a three needle bindoff. In this method, stitches were moved so that all the stitches from one side of the pouch were on one needle, resulting in two parallel needles with stitches on them.

To bind off, each stitch is knitted into a loop from both the front and back needles together; starting with the second stitch, after the stitch is complete, the previous stitch is slipped over the current stitch.

The exception is the fifteenth pouch, where I experimented with what I hoped was a square bottom, by decreasing two stitches on each of the four needles every round. When I was down to one stitch on each needle, I ran the thread through the stitches

twice and pulled tight. In hindsight for better proportions I should have made the pouch longer before starting the bottom.

2.4 Wet Finishing

To finish the wool pouches, they were turned inside out, soaked in hot water with a smidge of soap and then rinsed thoroughly. To dry them they were first patted dry inside a towel and then placed out in the sun with spacers inside. I used playing cards since I have lots of those, cut down to size as needed.

3 Braiding the Drawloops

The drawstrings are made from silk, to prevent the drawstring felting to the pouch, using fingerloop braiding. There are three braid techniques used, which are described in Appendix B.

The silk used was either 20/2 or 60/2 silk in heraldic colours, since I have those available in stash. The loops were measured and then run through a paper clip, which in turn clipped on to a loop attached to my floor loom. That made it easy to clip and unclip the braids as needed but did result in little bobbles at the starting end of the braid.

The drawstrings are threaded through the holes and then tied off.

4 Conclusion

These little pouches are addictive to knit; even the largest pouch only had 21 stitches per needle, so there were lots of natural stopping points as needed, making it easy to pick the pouch up during spare minutes as needed.

In wet finishing, the floats on the back didn't felt to the pouches as much as I had hoped, but I plan on experimenting with the wool more. I may not have been vigorous

enough to produce felting. The pouches as is work well for storing small items as long as they don't have too many spiky edges.

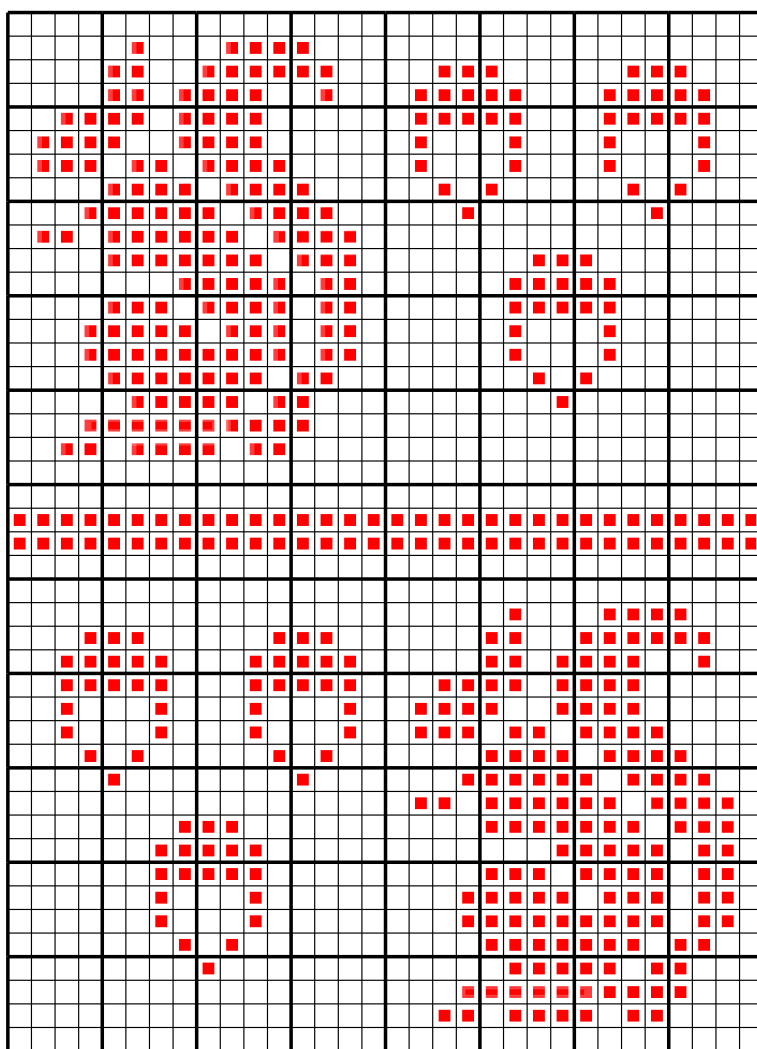
References

- [BB06] Elizabeth Benns and Gina Barrett. *Tak V Bowes Departed; A 15th Century Braiding Manual Examined*. Soper Lane, 2006.
- [Rut03] R. Rutt. *The History of Hand Knitting*. Interweave Press, 2003.

A Charted Patterns

I don't have a charted pattern for every pouch; many of them were designed on the needles, while I was knitting. Included below are the ones for which I do in fact have a charted pattern.

A.1 The Blue and Grey Pouch with Squirrel and Acorns



This was the pouch that started it all. After finishing it, I wasn't entirely happy with the pouch, so kept experimenting with a variety of other pouches.

Figure 2: Pattern for the blue heraldic pouch.

A.2 Blue Pouch with Wide Horizontal Braid

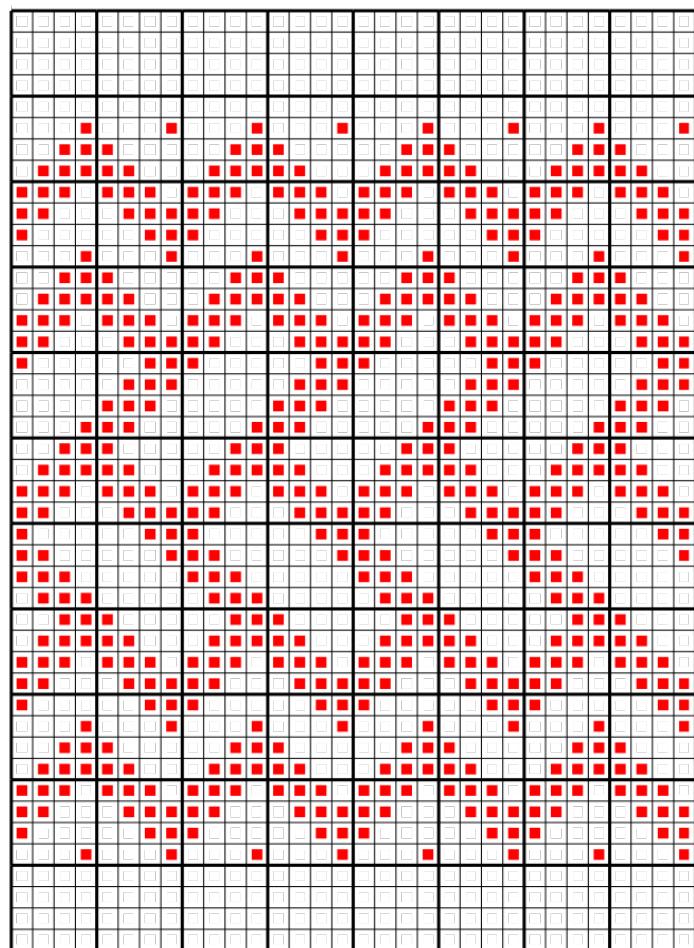


Figure 3: Pattern for the wide horizontal braid.

When I knitted this pouch I was experimenting; I graphed it after the fact because it was an interesting pattern, that took a basic zigzag and extended some lines to make a horizontal braid.

A.3 The Green and White Pouch with Squirrel and Acorns

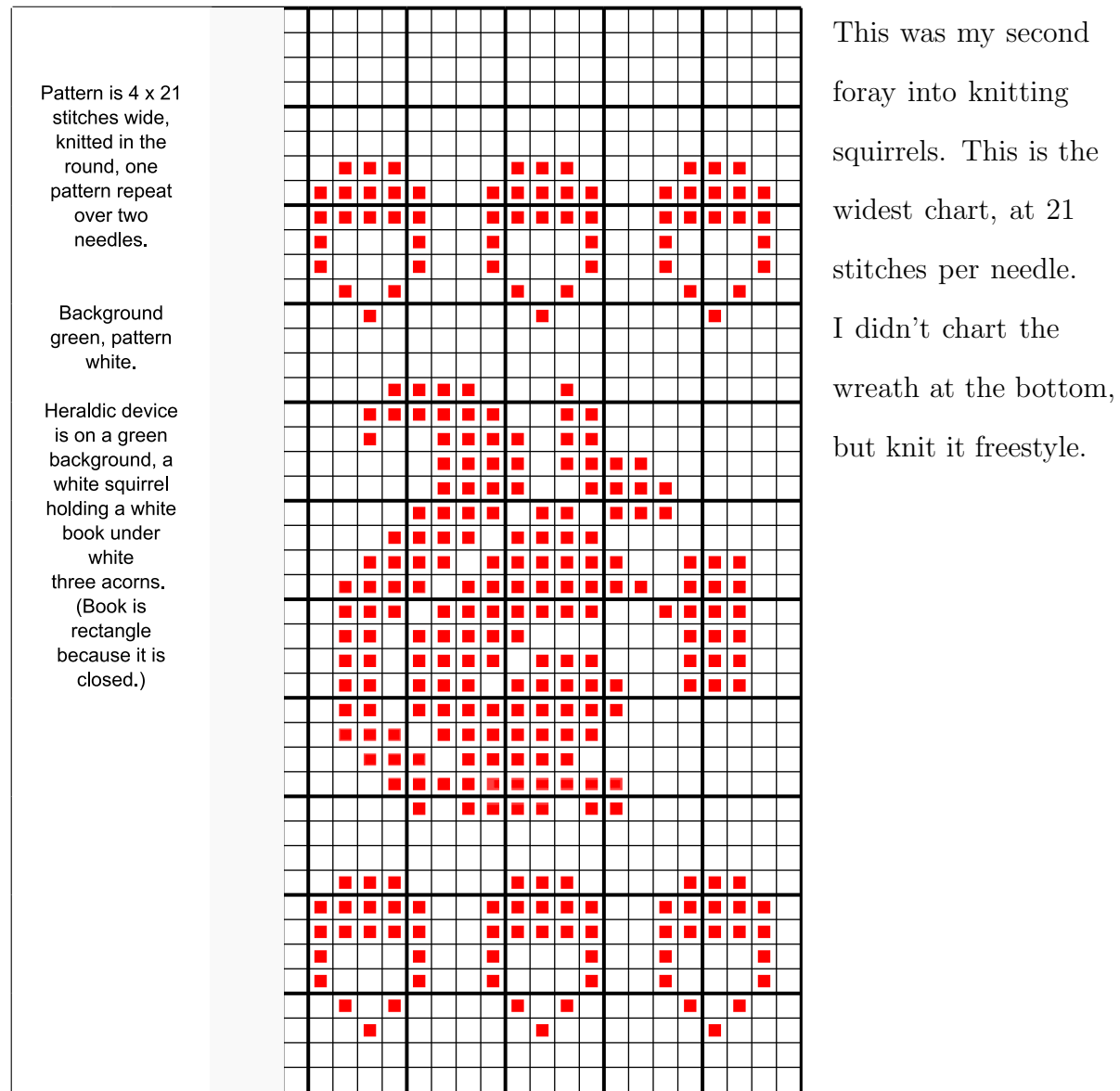
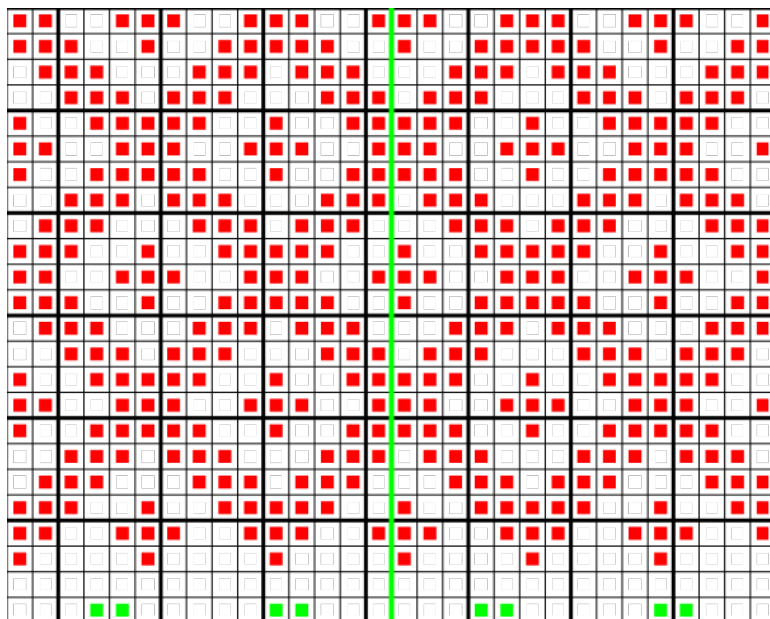


Figure 4: Pattern for the green heraldic pouch.

A.4 Fleur De Lys



When knitting a small cross top down, because of the nature of knitted stitches, the result looks like a tiny fleur de lys.

The first pouch just sprinkled fleur de lys on a plain background, but then I starts thinking about

Figure 5: Fleur de Lys in a grid.

embedding it in a grid of some sort, resulting in the pattern below.

A.5 Interweaving and Knotwork ...

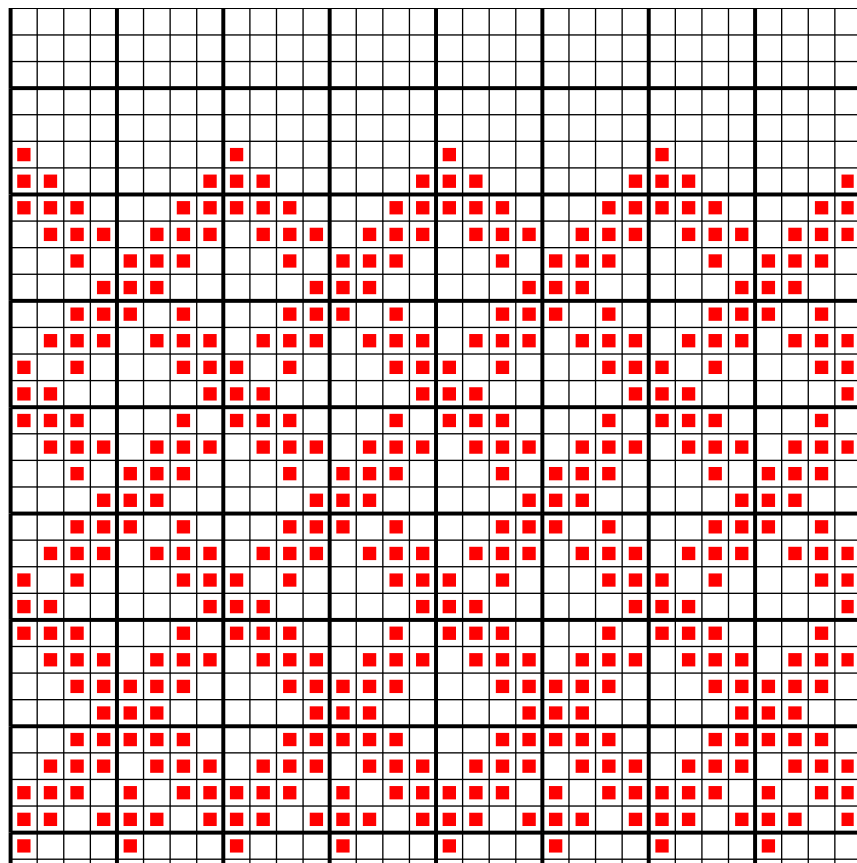
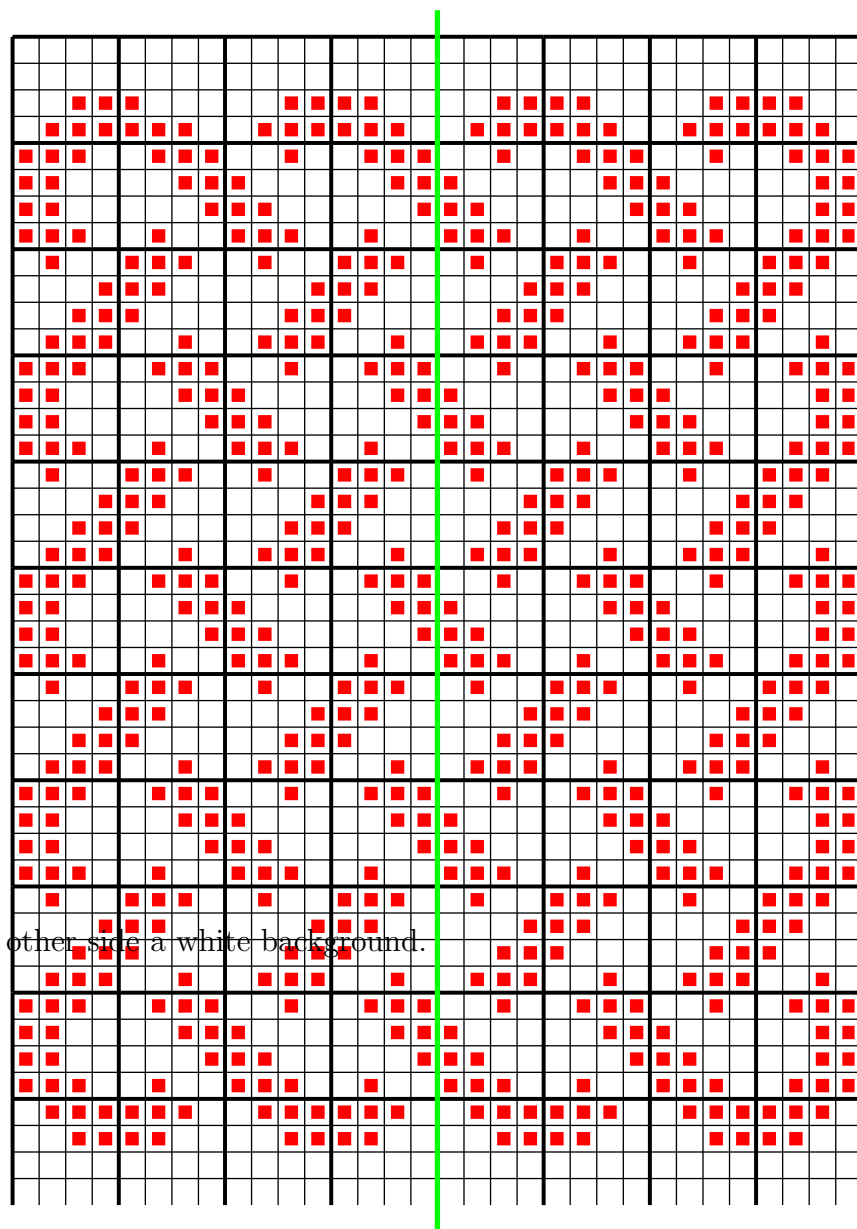


Figure 6: First Attempt at interweaving

The first attempt at interlacing – the grey pouch with the red diagonal grids – didn't work as well as expected, so I tried charting it out to work out why the pattern did not look the way I expected.

Turns out, you need more separation between the ribbons to make the separation visually obvious.



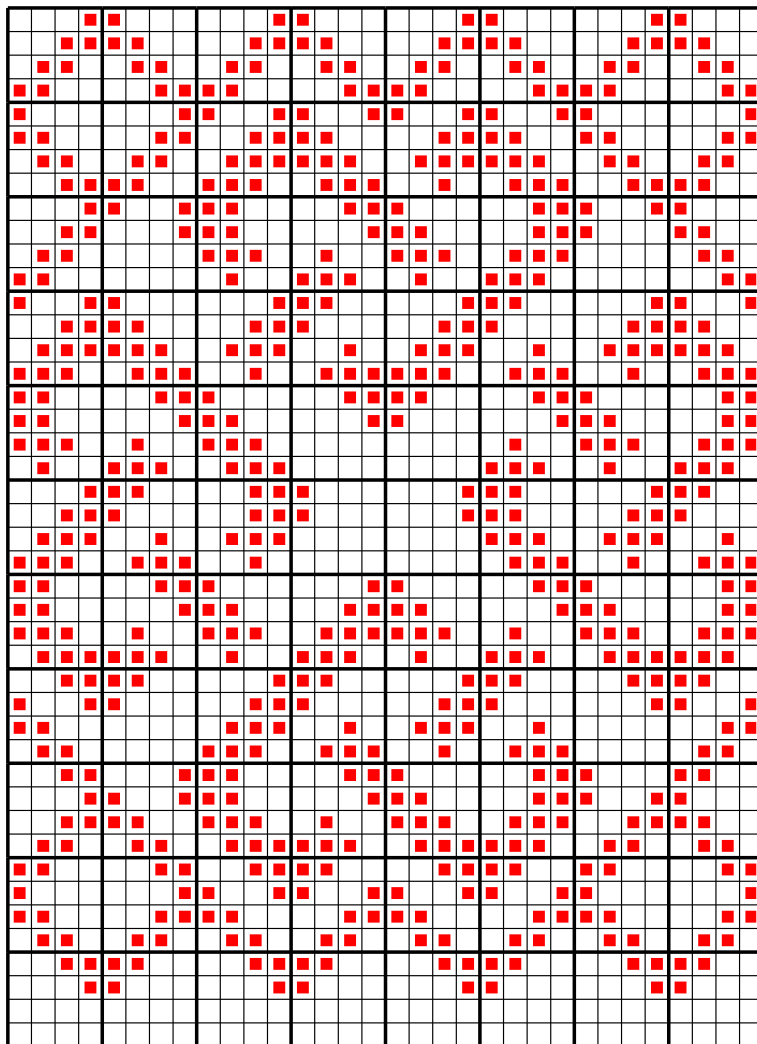
other side a white background.

So I reworked the interlacing pattern, and added edging along the top, bottom, and sides. (If you continue the grid in the whole circle, you get an ugly mismatch on one side seam.)

This pattern got knitted multiple times, includes the green and white pouch where one side has a green background and the

Figure 7: Second Attempt at interweaving

A.6 Blue Claddagh Hearts on a Yellow background



And now that the interlacing looked good ... it was time to get a little more Celtic. Because the pattern is circular, I added a little extra around the corners. This minimized the number of very long floats.

Figure 8: Four hearts in a circle.

B Finger Loop Braiding instructions

The braids used for the drawstrings are all from “Tak V Bowes Departed” [BB06], which is a translation of a 15th century braiding manual, translated by Elizabeth Benns and Gina Barrett.

B.1 Terminology

The braids are created using loops (or bowes) of string. A loop may be all one colour, or bi-coloured. The latter is accomplished by knotting two strings of different colours together.

Loops are held on the fingers of both hands and by moving loops through one another from hand to hand, braids are formed. In a given pattern, the fingers are indicated as

- A : index finger
- B : middle finger
- C : ring finger
- D : pinky finger

and on either the left (L) or right(H) hand.

A braid is defined by the starting position, and the moves made for one repeat. By varying the colours of the loops, the same braid can create multiple different appearances.

When a loop is exchanged – moved from one finger to another – it is moved either reversed or unreversed. If reversed, the active finger – the destination that the loop will end up – will swoop underneath the loop and pick it up from behind, so that the high²

²The high and low side of the loop refer to the two sides of the loop relative to the finger holding the loop. If the hands are held straight up and down in front of you, the high side is the side over top of the finger, and the low side is the side below the finger.

and low side of the loop are exchanged. If unreversed, the active finger slides through the loop and picks it up.

A braid is started by measuring the loops and knotting or binding one end together. I used paperclips for the end; it was easy to wrap the loops around the paperclip and release later. I had a second paperclip attached to a loop of string which was in turn attached to a fixed point³ so that the braid could twist freely if necessary.

B.2 A Round Lace of 5 Loops



Figure 9: A variety of round lace braids

This is braid 2, on page 40 of “Tak V Bowes” [BB06].

B.2.1 Starting Position

Loops are placed on L A,B,C and R B,C. Every exchange of loops will always be done using the index finger that is currently empty.

B.2.2 One repeat of the Pattern

1. Using the right hand finger A, travel through B and C on the right hand, and pick up the loop on the left hand finger C, reversed. (Swoop up underneath.)

³The 4 harness loom was nice and solid as a fixed point.

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2. On the left hand, walk the loops down. The loop on B moves to C, the loop on A moves to B.
 3. Using the left hand finger A, travel through B and C on the left hand, and pick up the loop on the right hand finger C, reversed. (Swoop up underneath.)
 4. On the right hand, walk the loops down. The loop on B moves to C, the loop on A moves to B.

B.2.3 Colour Variations: Varying the Starting Position

- Five loops bicoloured: this was executed in the 60/2 silk, which is very thin. Five double lengths were measured in both the fuchsia and the white, and then the fuchsia and white were knotted together at both ends. Loops were folded in half with the paperclip through the fold-over point, so that each loop was 2 threads thick.

On the left hand, the white half of the loop was on top, and on the right hand the fuschia was on top. Since the exchanges were all made reversed, the colour position of loops will flip as they move from one hand to the other, so this colour position remains consistent throughout the braid.

The result is a square braid with 4 vertical stripes alternating white and fuschia.

- Four loops bicoloured, one loop solid: Two double lengths wher measured in each colour, and one single length in one colour. One double length of each colour was tied together at both ends; after folding in half this resulted in 2 bi-coloured loops. The ends of the single length were folded together resulting in a single loop.

Starting position is similar to the 5 loops bicoloured, but the one single colour loop is placed ... on one of the fingers.

The result is a square braid with vertical stripes in the dominant colour and vertical boxes in the secondary colour.

The advantage of this setup is that it's actually really easy to set up the loops.

- All loops single colour: Here, I used two blue, two green, and one white loop, and starting position was left hand: white, blue, blue, and right hand: green, green.

The result was a round braid with – depending on which side you look at – white chevrons. The green and blue can only be distinguished in good light, because they are actually pretty close together⁴.

B.2.4 Variation - Unreversed Exchanges

If the exchanges in steps 1 and 3 are unreversed, the resulting braid will actually consist of two braids side by side. This is useful for making buttonholes, for instance, in the braid. I theorized that this would also double the speed of the braiding, since you are in effect creating two braids at once, but this proved inaccurate. The two smaller braids are thinner so that each exchange takes up less length. Between that and frequently making a reversed exchange by mistake, this proved to be a slower and more mistake-prone exercise in frustration.

B.3 A Lace Bend Round



Figure 10: A variety of Lace Bend Round braids

This is braid 25, on page 82 of “Tak V Bowes” [BB06].

⁴Oops. But in my defense, these were the colours of a specific person's device, so

This braid uses 8 loops, 4 loops of each of 2 colours.

B.3.1 Starting Position

The loops are arranged on the four fingers of both hands, one loop per finger. The most common starting arrangement has the four loops of the same colour all on fingers of the same hand.

B.3.2 One repeat of the Pattern

All exchanges swap loops between a finger on the left hand and a finger on the right hand. Exchanges can be either reversed or unreversed, but I found that reversed gave a neater braid and also braided more naturally⁵. In the exchange one loop will go through the other; whether the left hand loop is on the outside or inside of the swap does not matter, as long as you are consistent and always do it the same way.

1. Left A exchanges with right D
2. Left B exchanges with right C
3. Left C exchanges with right B
4. Left D exchanges with right A

B.3.3 A Six Loop Variation

As it turned out, lace with 8 loops was a little too heavy for the little pouches. The pattern lends itself to easy adaptation though, using 6 loops instead of 8, and giving the pinky fingers a holiday. The pattern becomes:

1. Left A exchanges with right C
2. Left B exchanges with right B
3. Left C exchanges with right A

and the braid is slimmer, but still with the same helix pattern.

B.4 A Grene Dorge

This is braid 25, on page 112 of “Tak V Bowes” [BB06].

⁵I.e. less dropping of loops and random cussing.



Figure 11: A Grene Dorge or Barleycorn braid.

This braid uses 6 loops, 4 loops of one colour, and 2 loops in a contrasting colour.

The movements are a combination of the round lace – but only 4 loops – and the reverse exchange of the round bend.

B.4.1 Starting Position

The four loops are placed on fingers B and C of both hands. The two loops in the contrasting colour are placed on left A and right D.

B.4.2 One repeat of the Pattern

1. Right A travels through right B, C and picks up left C reversed.
2. Left B walks down to left C.
3. Left B travels through left C and picks up right C reversed.
4. Right B walks down to C, A walks down to B.
5. Right D and left A exchange reversed.