

**Crewel embroidery** or Crewelwork, is a type of crochet embroidery using wool and a variety of embroidery stitches to follow a design outline applied to the fabric. The technique is at least a thousand years old and was used in the Bayeux Tapestry.

The origin of the word crewel is unknown but is thought to come from an ancient word describing the curl in the staple, the single hair of the wool.

The crewel technique is a style of free embroidery. The linen is part of the design and many stitches allow the sight of the linen through and around the design. A firm fabric is required to support the weight of the stitching. Special crewel needles or [sewing needle] are required, with a wide body, large eye and a sharp point.

The outlines of the design to be worked are often screen printed onto the fabric or can be transferred by the old fashioned “pinprick and chalk” method. This is where the design is outlined on paper which is then pricked with a needle to produce perforations along the outlines. Powdered chalk or pounce material is then forced through the holes onto the fabric using a felt pad or stipple brush in order to replicate the design on the material.

The traditional designs are often referred to as Jacobean embroidery featuring highly stylized floral and animal designs with flowing vines and leaves, as seen on the Jacobean bedspread on display. Crewel embroidery was, in the past, embroidered to create elaborate and expensive bed hangings and curtains. Now it is most often used to decorate cushions, curtains, clothing and wall hangings.

Unlike canvas work, crewel embroidery requires the use of an embroidery hoop or frame on which the material is stretched taut and secured prior to stitching. This ensures an even amount of tension in the stitches, so that designs do not become distorted. Although nowadays, crewel and free embroidery is generally executed with a small portable hoop, early embroidery was executed on large free standing frames. Such free standing frames were common parlour furniture in most homes. The rectangular canvas mount could tilt and pivot over so that the needle-worker could also access the back of the canvas with ease.