

The Weardale Museum at High House Methodist Chapel, England, UK

The Creation of The Methodist Tapestries Collection



In 2020, the Weardale Museum in Ireshopeburn acquired the neighbouring High House Chapel, which is now currently undergoing significant repair and refurbishment. As a flagship project, capable of attracting visitors from across the world to the proposed *Weardale Heritage Centre*, the Museum has launched the *Methodist Tapestries Project* with the intention of portraying key elements of the story of Methodism through the medium of embroidery. As High House was, until 2019, the oldest purpose-built chapel in the UK to be in continuous weekly use since its inception in 1760, it will be a particularly appropriate home for an artwork showing the history of Methodism. The completed Methodist Tapestries Collection will be displayed as part of a dedicated exhibition area once the Chapel is fully restored (expected to be in early 2022).

The work so far

Phase 1 involves the creation of an artwork which, interpreted through 15 panels, tells the story of the High House Methodist Chapel since its opening in 1760. These designs are the nucleus of the collection, in that they focus on the more local stories; each panel measures 50cm x 50cm with the artwork area measuring 40cm x 40cm. These 15 panels have been transferred to Angus Twill Linen, and some have now been completed while others are in progress. These will form the core of the collection which it is hoped will feature over 100 local Methodist stories from around the UK and beyond.

Phase 2 takes the project further afield. Individuals and communities from around the country and beyond have been invited to help us create further embroidered panels depicting scenes of familiar events, characters, places and movements in the worldwide history of Methodism, as well as stories about how a specific church or chapel has contributed. In recognition of the level of commitment required to take on a panel of this type, stitchers work on a slightly smaller piece measuring 40cm x 40cm, with a stitched area 30cm x 30cm. The format, with text in a circle around the inner design, plus corner motifs, remains the same. We are fortunate to have attracted funding via grants from a variety of organisations, including the Rank Foundation, the Radcliffe Trust, the Willan Trust and the Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage, and continue to apply for further funds to enable widespread participation.

Techniques and stitches

Unlike similar projects such as the Quaker Tapestry and the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry, the Methodist Tapestries Collection will feature a wide variety of stitches and textile techniques. These will help to reflect the diversity and breadth of Methodist history. Therefore, stitchers are welcome to use any stitches they feel appropriate to the design, as well as techniques such as applique, use of found items, stump work etc.

Example panel: Education and Sunday Schools

- Designs are based on a story from Methodist history or heritage – people, places, major events, themes
- Storyline based on Wesley's encouragement of women to exercise their talents as class leaders, teachers and at prayer meetings. This is a local story of Jane Salkeld, teaching the children in her care
- Source images: this one was drawn from imagination and background knowledge of clothing of the era
- Education and Sunday Schools, the resulting design, was sketched by our artist David Heatherington, and refined in discussion with the team and the embroiderer, Norma
- As this is one of the core collection of High House Chapel designs, David transferred the line drawing to a 50 x 50cm square of linen, using a light box
- Tracy A Franklin, our Technical Adviser, chose appropriate colours in crewel wool for a starter pack, which was issued to the stitcher with some guidance notes
- Norma, one of the members of Stitch 2 Durham (previously the Durham branch of the Embroiderers' Guild), took on this design and used a variety of techniques including appliqué, stump work and needlelace, with a wire cordonnet (frame) used to give a three-dimensional effect
- When the stitching was finished, Tracy mounted the panel prior to its framing by John Scrowston of North Pennine Studios. A short text giving further explanation of the theme was framed to match



Continuing participation

Photos of work on various panels can be seen on our Facebook and Instagram pages, as well as sometimes featuring on the Weardale Museum's Twitter feed.

Anyone with a love of needlework, and who has previously completed a sewing project of any kind, is welcome to participate. It is possible to research and design a panel, with assistance if needed, or to take on an existing design, and technical embroidery support is available as required. For further information, please email our Project Co-ordinator Liz Walsh, at contact@methodisttapestries.org.uk.

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