

# Annual Review

2019-2020



Patron: HRH The Duchess of Cornwall  
President: HRH The Duchess of Gloucester

RSN

ROYAL SCHOOL  
OF NEEDLEWORK

Founded 1872



## Chairman's Report

This report covers the period 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2020. It can, without doubt, be considered a year of two halves.

We began with a visit from our Patron, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, to open the exhibition *Figures and Faces in Embroidery* and see the Blackwork portrait of herself created by the RSN Studio. It continued to March with good class numbers for the Certificate and Diploma programme (C&D), strong engagement from our Future Tutor and Degree students and the launch of the second USA Summer School, scheduled for July 2020. Then came COVID-19 and lockdown. The RSN went from delivering all classes face to face, to temporarily closing short courses and C&D programmes. Future Tutor and Degree students were sent home with as many materials as they could carry and within two days all classes and tutorials went online.

The teaching team reacted with immense speed to put information online and to set up online teaching, which is challenging for practical teaching. The fastest adoption of online learning was by the Future Tutors, as the focus of their teaching is on technical tuition. The actions that were taken by the Future Tutors team to realise online teaching were ones from which the whole organisation was able to learn.

The Degree students had completed most of their technical tuition for the year and were moving on to the project units, so were slightly better placed. They worked through tutorials, with technical back up and support online. The decision was taken to extend the hand-in dates and maintain all the pastoral support the RSN offers, throughout this period, as students coped not just with their work, but also with being away from friends, and in some cases the challenge of finding a peaceful space to study at home.

In particular, we were pleased that we had made the recent investment in IT. Without the work that had already been put in place and the drive and energy of the IT Manager, setting up Zoom and Teams, the RSN would not have been in a position to move forward as quickly as it did. Meanwhile, all staff moved off site, setting up offices at home. For the Education team, the main focus was to look at establishing the future offering of the RSN, especially with regards to day classes and C&D which are the main income generating courses. Working with available Tutors, they pioneered online tuition for both programmes. Never afraid of a challenge, the first online group tuition was with three students in Australia. For Day Classes everything changed, not just the planned programme but it was realised that online we could offer classes at different times of the day and evening and repeat classes more quickly. This is potentially transformative.

Notwithstanding these pioneering activities, we experienced a significant reduction in income, so it was imperative that the RSN made use of the Chancellor's Furlough scheme and

initially 11 administrative staff and all eligible tutors and studio stitchers were put on this scheme. The only department that remained fully staffed was the Degree.

I would particularly like to thank the RSN Friends and supporters who rallied to help when the Chief Executive sent out an emergency appeal in April. They donated over £70K through direct donations, converting class payments to donations, buying goods in the shop and becoming RSN Friends, which really helped to stabilise the situation at the most critical time. The other vital department at this time was retail, as people sought things to do with their spare time. The online shop did strong business, reaching the end of the year ahead of budget.

The RSN Council met regularly during this period, supplementing the diarised meetings with regular Zoom calls, sometimes weekly, to examine cash flow and also to start a wider review of the Strategic Plan. Clearly, however long the direct results of the pandemic might last, there were going to be enduring changes to programme delivery, which needed to be considered now, and to modify the strategic plan that was only put in place a year ago.

As the lockdown continued, even with furloughing, we had to look at ongoing costs. The year was clearly going to end in a very different financial position to that which had been budgeted and looking ahead, the position for 2020-21 was not going to be that dissimilar, so further action had to be taken. The main outgoings for the RSN are rent and people. While it is not currently possible to reduce rent, this only left people and it was decided that five roles would be made redundant.

The RSN finally returned to face-to-face teaching at the beginning of July but with social distancing, this reduced class sizes from 12 students to six for the C&D. The only rooms which could be used for Day Classes, to be economically viable, were the Degree rooms, so these could only be used while the Degree was on vacation. However, as part of public benefit, the RSN made the most of offering online activities to those with time on their hands in the summer. We developed a range of classes which also allowed us to test a number of options on timings.

I would like to pay tribute to the staff who all worked long hours, especially during the early weeks of lockdown, to support students and keep people informed. The speed and content of communication was enhanced, especially for newsletters and social media, staff experimented with new ways of working and above all were incredibly flexible with their time and willingness to learn and embrace new ways of working. As a result, the RSN is still here and has a potentially stronger future.

Andrew Palmer  
Chairman



## COVID-19 response

The RSN responded very speedily to the requirements of the lockdown and in moving the organisation forward to meet customer demand. The initial impact was devastating but the reduced-size staff team, especially in the early days of the first lockdown, made a heroic effort to ensure that the RSN survived. Swift action by the staff team ensured that key programmes continued and that we learned quickly how to adapt our offerings to an online format. It was also about seeing the possibilities for the future, potentially attracting a much more international audience. While we look forward to being able to offer more classes at Hampton Court Palace again, we will also continue to offer online courses and other activities to meet supporter needs worldwide.

By the year end, COVID-19 had been simultaneously galvanising, exhausting, demanding, isolating, transformative, challenging and horizon broadening. In other words, the impact has been a heap of contradictions. Physically, it has driven us apart, as staff work individually from home and reduced face-to-face teaching, but it has opened a number of opportunities that we can take forward.



### Timetable of activity

18 March	Final day of face-to-face teaching across all programmes
19 March	Degree Course Leader and IT Manager work to ensure Degree and Staff team set up on Teams
23 March	Degree and Future Tutors started online teaching
1 April	30 staff and tutors furloughed
2 April	First online interviews for Future Tutor candidates
3 April	Launch of RSN Postcard From Home challenge
8 April	Launch of weekly eNews as public service and keeping in touch with our supporters
9 April	Emergency appeal sent out to all supporters by email
9 April	Beginning of one to one C&D online tuition
10-13 April	Over 200 retail orders received Easter Weekend
14 April	First of a series of Tuesday Council meetings to review cashflow and actions
16 April	Launch of the NHS Embroidered Heart Challenge
4 May	Call from Office for Students checking with all HE institutions re stability
14 May	First Online Day Class led by Sarah de Rousset-Hall featuring the rainbow, above
2 & 9 June	Degree Students handed in digitally for assessment
10 June	The Chief Executive holds the first RSN Instagram Live event
23 June	Coronavirus policy produced and approved by Council to set the framework for the return to onsite classes
29 June	Staff return to HCP to prepare the classrooms for safe return of students and tutors
30 June	Launch of the eighth self-paced RSN Online Course: <i>Next Steps: Goldwork and Silk Shading</i> with Tutor Chrissie Juno Mann, in partnership with David and Charles, delayed by the lockdown
1 July	eNews goes back to twice a month
2 July	End of term for continuing Future Tutors
6 July	Start of online teaching C&D for Australian students
9 July	Certificate and Diploma being taught face-to-face at Hampton Court Palace
9 July	Online celebration of Degree Awards
15 July	Retail offered Click and Collect to those coming to classes
July-August	Testing out different options for short classes online
1-28 August	Third year Future Tutors at Hampton Court Palace to complete Studio module
28 August	Future Tutor graduation at Hampton Court Palace with families on Zoom
August-Sept	Limited short classes at Hampton Court Palace
4 Sept to 16 Oct	Completion of assessment of C&D pieces submitted by August

## Keeping spirits up

Throughout the pandemic, the RSN has sought to support, not only its long term Friends and Supporters, but also new followers through a range of tools and opportunities. We started with the regular e-Newsletters, which rose to weekly during the first lockdown, giving people something uplifting to look forward to and read. Then, there was the coverage on Instagram and Facebook. Since May, there has been the opportunity for people to take classes where they often had the opportunity to 'meet' with people from several different countries.

On this page we feature some of the wonderful comments we have had from Friends and supporters which really show the role we have been playing in lockdown and the impact we have had.

**"Where would we be without the Royal School of Needlework in these extraordinary times?"**

**Lady G RSN Friend UK**

*"During lockdown I have been on quite a few RSN Online Courses and I have absolutely loved them. I've made a mistletoe sprig, a flamingo, an apple tree, learnt how to draw flowers and have now just got my head around colour theory! It has been amazing and I can't wait to do more. With it all being online, it has enabled me to actually do these courses without the additional cost of travel which has been a massive help in me being able to afford these, so thank you."*

**Isabelle from Wales**

"I have been an admirer of the work of the RSN for many years and it took early retirement to give me enough time to sign up for the Certificate but I am having the time of my life now, and feel so privileged to be taught by such skilled professionals. We have even nicknamed the spare room where I stitch, Hampton Court! ... My grateful thanks to all at the RSN for the tremendous work you have all clearly put in to move our learning opportunities (online)."

**Liz, Online.  
Certificate Student  
Scotland**

"We have about 75 members, from beginners to some very talented advanced embroiderers. We have unfortunately just had to cancel our biennial exhibition which was due to be held in May because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Thank you for all you do to maintain and develop the skills of embroidery and for giving us in other parts of the world such high standards to aspire to, it is very much appreciated!"

**Secretary of the Needlecraft  
Guild of Zimbabwe**

**"Thank you for  
your brilliant,  
uplifting emails  
(eNews)."**

**Washington,  
USA**

*"I would like to thank you so much for all RSN has done during this really scary time to keep our spirits up."* **Tara Maine USA**

"The RSN is an amazing place and is helping me achieve my dream of learning hand embroidery. I want to take this opportunity to thank the RSN for doing all the things it has during these difficult times,"

**Laura from Maryland USA**

*"Thank you so much, my Stumpwork book has arrived, this was quick! May I say, the book exceeds my expectations, it's great. I can't wait to start working. You are doing wonderful and inspiring work, dear RSN. Here in Germany, we had 'Crafts' as a class in school, and we learnt how to knit, crochet, sew and embroider - but in very basic ways... What I'm learning now... is that needlework, knitting and stitching, is a whole world, and an art. You help me reach the next level: stitching for joy and not merely for necessity. Well, I just wanted to say Thank you so much for your work! You create a 'pool' of knowledge and techniques for the benefit and joy of us all. Thank you."* **Annette Germany**



## Public Benefit

As the RSN's mission is to keep hand embroidery alive, public benefit is an essential part of our raison d'être. However, this has come to the fore more than we imagined this year during lockdown, where stitch and hand stitch especially, have become a positive and powerful contributor to mental health and wellbeing.

**NHS Hearts** – in response to a request from the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) to all its students, RSN Degree Student Lucy Martin, with support from Course Leader Angie Wyman, came up with the idea to support the NHS by embroidering the letters NHS in a heart. This led to extensive media coverage, promoted by the RSN, and more than 220 hearts were made and posted to Lucy's Instagram account. The impact of this was very positive for the RSN student, for those who made the hearts and in support of the NHS staff.

**Postcards From Home** was a campaign launched by the RSN during lockdown. It was for any stitchers and people new to stitch. It was based on the premise that as people were in their homes, this might be the source of inspiration for stitch or they could stitch about somewhere that meant something to them, for example from their past, where they came from, or their childhood bedroom. This was a longer project than NHS Hearts and postcards are still being received. Those sending them in are using this campaign as a focus of both hand stitch skills and an opportunity to think of somewhere or sometime different than lockdown.

Throughout the first lockdown period the RSN took great pains to communicate with people through all its online and social media platforms, to give a positive focus and show the variety of hand embroidery. It has featured work from our Collection, information from our history and given a platform to our graduating students on the Degree, Future Tutor and Certificate and Diploma programmes as they were not able to show work physically. This was much appreciated by our followers:

*Every time I read an email from the RSN I am reminded how hard you are all working, and all the issues you are dealing with so ingeniously and you get my very heartfelt gratitude and admiration.*

Keira, a student at our Bristol satellite.

As a result of the lockdown we started offering beginners classes online – starting with an embroidered rainbow class, so some people chose to take this class as a commemoration of their lockdown experience.

The RSN has also continued its role as the international centre of hand embroidery excellence by teaching students in North America, Europe and Australia as well as the UK, through the online classes. Access to the classes for those in North

America, is by running them 3pm to 9pm UK time, which is 10am - 4pm Eastern Standard Time in the US. This has been particularly appreciated.

Normally, the Chief Executive lectures extensively on behalf of the RSN. Before lockdown, this included many UK locations as well as invitations to Winterthur, Delaware USA and Japan in January, visiting RSN Tutor Emi Nimura and students. The purpose of these lectures is to spread the word about the RSN and to give many more people the opportunity to understand its work and learn how they might participate. While the physical lecture has had to be put on hold, the Chief Executive led the RSN's first, free, Instagram Live session. This reached over 150 people from more than 30 countries ranging from Argentina and Chile to South Korea and Japan via America, Canada, South Africa and many European countries. The impact was to make more people feel engaged with the RSN and want to be able to participate in classes in the future, whether online or in person. This has been further developed by putting images of the works talked about from the RSN Collection online, enabling our Instagram followers to talk to each other about the pieces and share their enjoyment through the stitch community.

We will be continuing this outreach through videoing and putting online a tour of the current exhibition and plan to offer this for future exhibitions, so that people who cannot physically come to the exhibition can get a flavour of it.

**Schools programme** – this was ongoing and had been extended with a new option for students to stitch their mantra as a positive word or phrase. Information about this had gone out to existing participating schools but was just about to be launched to more schools in March. This will be picked up in the new academic year as the feedback from participating schools and pupils is that it has a calming and positive effect on pupils.

Degree and Future Tutor students participated in shows in the first half of the year to offer stitch tuition and encouragement to new stitchers. For our students, it gives them confidence in their abilities as stitchers and tutors.

Initiated by the Marketing Manager, the RSN made a partnership with a venue in Islington, north London, and when the original plans had to be amended due to COVID-19, Future Tutor Co-ordinator Kelley Aldridge recorded an introductory class, with support from colleagues, which was freely open to all, with a follow on free class for a smaller number. Participants in the class came from a wide area: as far afield as Northumbria.

Through all of this outreach, we continue to fulfil our mission and support people's mental health and wellbeing in these challenging times.





Sheila Dowling Jacobean Crewelwork



# Education

## Certificate and Diploma

The Certificate and Diploma course is the lifeblood of the RSN. It is a specialist course but taught part time so that it can be open to many. The RSN offers the course at its base in Hampton Court Palace ('HCP'), in four UK satellites, in Japan, and twice a year in America. Up to mid-March, the programme was performing well. We were often teaching to a full class seven days a week at HCP and to good numbers in all our satellites. Starting with Japan, this stopped with the arrival of COVID-19. Initially we had to stop the programme completely. Then we looked at how we could offer aspects of it online, but from survey results, there seemed to be an aversion to this from UK and US students. The only ones who jumped at the online opportunity were our Australian and Far East students.

Nevertheless, we pioneered a number of options with available tutors who were willing to try online teaching and paired them, initially with individual students to see how it would work. Early feedback from tutors and students was positive, so we tried a number of different formats with the aim being to work back to the one tutor to six students model that we have in the classroom.

It was not until July that the RSN could re-open its teaching centre at HCP. However after the initial reluctance, when students saw what we had put in place for them, they were keen to return. Albeit with social distancing, we could only accommodate half the students we had previously, and only on four days a week, over the summer. So, as a result of this, one of the major areas of reduced income is through the Certificate and Diploma. With all the issues there were also no assessments after December 2019, no End of Year Show and no awards this year.

Looking ahead, we are aware that there is a group of people who want to study for the Certificate but they live too far away from any of our sites. They want to take the programme totally online. However, to start the programme online needs more consideration so that we set people up with a good understanding of what is needed from the beginning. This was being developed in the autumn with the aim of opening this opportunity in 2021.

## Day Classes

We also had to close all our Day Classes from March, which was unfortunate as it is the second half of the year when we normally can hold the longer classes. However, we began looking at what might be possible working with tutors who had experience online. We offered our first online short course with Future Tutor Sarah de Rousset-Hall whose motif was a rainbow. This went well, but our North American supporters wanted to participate too. We then realised with a change to the teaching time, we could offer classes to reach the east coast of the US. Through July and August, we offered a series of classes in drawing and stitch, experimenting with different times of day and different lengths of course: two and three-hour sessions, evenings as well as days. It was realised that potentially this could be very liberating for the range of classes that we could offer.

The take up of both C&D and short courses in the last two months of the year really helped contribute to a better end of year position than had been forecast. Many supporters also commented on how quickly and effectively the RSN had taken on board working in a different way. However, there was just one unforeseen aspect and that was the need to send out kits to people for the start of classes. After the first couple of months of lockdown, UK postal services eased a bit and returned to a near normal service. The same could not be said of some international countries and we had to post as early as possible to get kits to their destination in time.

## Short courses, bespoke classes, tours and partnerships

For this department, COVID-19 really wrecked what had been a promising year. We had the largest number of bespoke groups booked in for classes and tours in the summer. We had a growing range of partnerships, including the Fashion and Textile Museum, V&A, Bath Fashion Museum and the D Day Story in Portsmouth, and were looking to add more partner organisations where there is a link to stitch and RSN Tutors could offer classes. There was also a new exhibition planned, *Stitch is International*, which could not be held as we did not know when we could next have visitors in the Studio. As with everything else, all these were cancelled and the responsible staff member put on furlough.

However, we are already looking ahead and will be meeting need by holding special events, like talks, online to generate income, reaching both new and regular supporters. We will also be able to offer talks to groups online and bespoke classes and events.

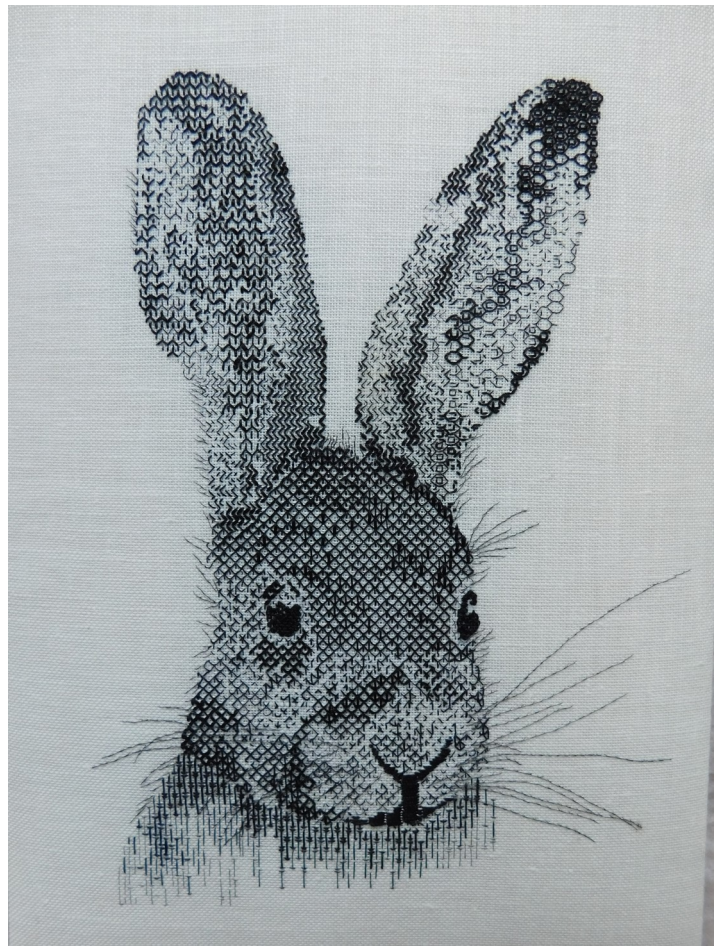


Nola  
Emmett  
  
Basic  
Goldwork





Above Canvas Stitches by Maria Gispert.  
Below Appliqué by Diana Morgan



Above Blackwork by Luiza Oliver.  
Below Stumpwork by Angela Dick







Lucy Tiley Degree



## Degree

This year, there were 56 students across the three years. All year groups were working on their major projects when COVID-19 enforced lockdown. From March, all teaching went online. Most students were able to go home and communication was through Microsoft Teams. The RSN academic and technical teams worked extensively with the students through tutorials and peer sessions to encourage and support them. Materials and resources were put online while Technical Support helped with garment construction and supplying hard-to-access threads and fabrics to enable the students to keep working. The hand in deadline was put back, not least because of the delays in materials getting through, but students were kept in constant contact to keep them motivated and encouraged.

For the assessment, all students were asked to submit images of their work digitally. For the third years, there was an opportunity to present their work live to three reviewers, so they could tell the panel about their ideas and how these had been executed. This allowed the team to see the thinking behind their projects and how they had brought them to fruition. It also gave the students an opportunity to reflect on the work and tell us of the challenges they had faced and how they overcame them.

A key part of the RSN Degree in Hand Embroidery, validated by UCA, is what are known as Live Projects. These are opportunities for RSN students to compete in open textile competitions, work on a particular project or meet a commercial

Brief. Students at all levels may get these opportunities, although they can change from year to year. This year, students from all three years excelled in these opportunities and, as recommended by their tutors, the 2020 graduates have been active in following up a number of post-completion competitions, publications and exhibitions. As we say to the students, their work is not done when they submit their pieces for assessment, that is just the start and well considered and executed pieces may continue to have a life for several years after graduation for competitions or exhibitions.

Degree Awards for 2019-20 included Sabina Lima (2<sup>nd</sup> year) runner up Bradford Textile Competition (Embroidery) and highly commended category Use of Wool. Hollie Philips, Felicity Billing, Millie Whitehead and Daisy White were also highly commended for the Embroidery award. The first years entered the Worshipful Company of Glovers awards: Eliza Gomersall was runner up in the main category Function meets Fashion and Linnea Lyndon's entry was selected as the most commercial glove from all entrants across the competition. More than that, the RSN was awarded the prestigious Silver Salver for the Institution which has contributed most to the competition. Second years also participated in a project with Chinese female shoe brand, Sheme. Originally the company was going to select two shoes to make into prototypes and potentially market. After the inevitable delay of lockdown, the company finally selected designs by three students Sabina Lima, (1) Erin Ledsom, (2) Millie Whitehead, (3 & 4).



1



2



3 &  
4



## Recognition and accolades

This year, the graduating students achieved their highest ever grades, beating the achievements of students two years ago by whom they had been particularly inspired. This year, there were 10 firsts and 9 upper second degrees. Far from grade inflation these were particularly talented students, a fact reinforced by the external awards and recognition that the students have been selected or shortlisted for. Each year we encourage students to participate in the Hand and Lock Prize for Embroidery, the most prestigious hand embroidery award. This year seven RSN students were shortlisted: five Degree thirds years, one Future Tutor third year and one Degree second year.

Three 2020 graduates, Elsa Searle-Vincent, Rachel Burnett and Emilie Mason (from left to right below) have had their work selected for the publication *Talking Textiles* (right). Entries for the book are selected by the director of Trend Union in New York, Li Edejlkoort. Each year the book features the work of graduates from around the world that she sees as leading the trends. As most of those selected are at Masters Level this is a great achievement for the three RSN students.

In this country, the Crafts Council was planning an exhibition of some of the best graduate work featuring crafts, although it has since had to go online. Four RSN 2020 graduates have had their work selected for this show including Hisae Abe, front cover, Naomi Aindow (right), Emilie Mason and Elsa Searle-Vincent below. Of the 42 students whose work was selected, this was the highest number from one single course.







Portrait by Martha Blackburn Future Tutor Signature project

Winner of the Hand and Lock Embroidery Prize for Textile Art 2020



## Future Tutors

The Future Tutors (FTs) were the pioneers of the RSN moving online, in terms of practical stitch teaching. They were faced with the potentially daunting challenge of learning two of the most demanding techniques - Whitework and Silk Shading - online, but they rose to the challenge. They tested out different media, settling on Zoom and WhatsApp: by harnessing the power of their smart phones and WhatsApp, students could take images of their work which the tutor could enlarge to see the stitches in great detail. Students quickly discovered there was nowhere to hide. Since then, they have enhanced their technology so that the tutor can, not only see the completed stitch, but also see the student making the stitch, as this is as vital to good technique as the finished stitch. Seeing how the students took to their new way of working encouraged the education department that it would be possible to offer group sessions online for both short courses and the Certificate and Diploma.

The biggest challenge, though, was for the third years as they had to miss time in the Studio. This could not be rectified until August when the five who were due to graduate came back to be taught all the remaining conservation and restoration techniques that they had

not covered, as well as how to make a set of church vestments in miniature. Although not ideal, this did ensure they had covered all the core, essential techniques. They had had a number of interesting items to work on earlier in the year including the transfer and recreation of a piece for the TV programme *Salvage Hunters: the Restorers* (see page 16) under the watchful guidance and support of the Studio. Finally the five graduated at the end of August, watched by family and friends online.

The third years had, however, been able to work on their signature projects. This project has a very open brief, students can do anything they want, and ideally combine techniques. Below is Sarah de Rousset-Hall's Titania and Oberon box, inspired by Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This year the FTs were also, for the first time, to meet the brief for the Hand and Lock Prize for Embroidery. The five projects were very different and they each submitted images for the Prize for Embroidery. From those, one Future Tutor, Martha Blackburn won the main student award for Textile Art and an ancillary award with her stitched portraits (left).



Sarah de Rousset Hall









## Studio

In the first half of the year the RSN held the exhibition *Faces and Figures in Embroidery* which was launched by the RSN Patron, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, who specifically came to see the portrait of herself in Blackwork, created by the RSN Studio team. The working of the face had been videoed using the timelapse process so it showed in just a few minutes the work of two days, this had then been put on YouTube. When Her Royal Highness arrived she immediately recognised the RSN Studio member whom she had seen on film and thanked her for her work.

In commissions this began as a quiet year, working on small pieces in the Studio. The stand out piece was for the television programme *Salvage Hunters: The Restorers* where the RSN studio transferred and brought back to life some 19<sup>th</sup> century embroidery and then added new elements to match. When finished, the owner could not work out which were the new elements and which the old.

With the first lockdown the Studio had to close, however, the enforced time at home clearly led to many people tidying cupboards, as the Studio has seen a surge of interest, with enquiries coming through the lockdown period and a steady flow of enquiries since the summer. This led to a new stream of work at the start of financial year 2020-21.

---

## Marketing

Marketing plays a vital role in maintaining and building our audience. It was a busy first half of the year promoting the usual events and activities, with more and more activity moving to social media. However, when lockdown began, we initially had little to market except the retail offering, so instead, the communications were much more about keeping our audience engaged and entertained, especially while people were somewhat scared and overwhelmed by the original lockdown.

We had to cut the marketing budget but Head of Marketing, Bryna Black, used all the social media platforms she could to ensure that far from being forgotten, the RSN was seen as dynamic, proactive, engaged and offering positive messages and actions. The positive responses to this can be seen from some of the quotes on page 4. During the lockdown period we held a competition for our 30,000<sup>th</sup> follower on Instagram, this was achieved within hours and at the year-end there were over 34,000 followers. This shows not only the power and reach of our supporters, but also highlights how much activities like needlework have become a vital outlet for people during the pandemic.

Marketing was particularly involved in the Postcards From Home and the NHS Hearts initiatives, mentioned in the Public Benefit section. The RSN eNews is normally a monthly newsletter of activities and a half monthly class availability schedule. However, for the first weeks of the pandemic it was transformed into a weekly communication. It talked about the RSN history, Archive, Collection and our plans, again to inform and entertain people during this bleak period and it really fulfilled our public benefit role, as a positive public service.

*Below are images from the RSN's history: Queen Mary with former Principal Lady Smith-Dorrien; stitching the trousseau for Princess Alice Duchess of Gloucester; modelling at-home wear 1930s at the RSN and a hanging for the Paris Exhibition of 1900.*





## Retail

One of the positive stories of the lockdown was the RSN's retail operation. From the beginning of lockdown the shop was busy with orders, more than 200 just from the Easter Weekend. We soon had both the retail manager and assistant began working on site. This was particularly necessary in terms of keeping adequate stock levels to meet demand. The team also converted Studio 2 into a mailing operation. They were particularly pleased that the Studio tables could be raised to make packing items easier.

In a normal year, online sales might only be a fraction of the total sales. This year the retail operation reached budget, even though the second half of the year was all online

## Fundraising

The RSN has to earn or raise its income. Funds are raised to support core programmes like the Future Tutors and bursaries for students on the Degree and FT programmes, and also to support new initiatives such as the RSN Stitch Bank and the digitisation of the RSN Collection and Archive. Usually these funds are raised primarily from charitable trusts and livery companies. This year, when earning income became more difficult, we looked to fundraise from Friends and supporters for our emergency appeal. Recipients could choose a number of ways to support the RSN: through a direct donation, by becoming or re-joining the Friends, by purchasing items from our shop or by subscribing to the RSN Stitch Bank.

The RSN complies with the fundraising code and with the GDPR requests of anyone who asks not to receive fundraising requests. This year the supporters and Friends were only specifically given this one request for support and they had a range of options as to how they could help. The RSN received just one fundraising complaint, following this mailing, from an international person who did not know that the RSN is a charity. Once explained this was rescinded.

Donors have included livery companies including the Broderers, Dyers, Girdlers, Gold and Silver Wyre Drawers, Haberdashers and Needlemakers as well as charitable trusts such as the Barbara Whatmore Foundation, the Weinstock Foundation, the Coats Foundation Trust and others which wish to remain anonymous. We also received many donations from our Friends and supporters from the UK, the US and elsewhere. The largest individual gift was £30,000 for our emergency support from an RSN Life Friend.

The RSN is extremely grateful for all this help and support this year.





## Friends

During the COVID-19 outbreak and the lockdown, the RSN Friends have been the most tremendous help to the RSN. They have supported the fundraising, they have bought items in the shop, they have tried out the online classes and they have sent messages of support and encouragement. Some former Friends even came back into the Friends this year. The RSN is extremely grateful to the Friends for this support and encouragement.

## RSN Stitch Bank

The aim of the RSN Stitch Bank is to put every stitch in the world on to a digital resource as both an instructional guide and also a source of preservation for old stitches. Work on this initiative was going well in the first half of the year with developments to the web framework and we had trained a number of tutors to photograph and video the creation of the stitches. However, this all came to an abrupt halt with the lockdown. The team had to be furloughed for cost savings. The original launch date of the first 500 stitches by July had to be put on hold, but interest in the scheme continued during lockdown, attracting additional support which reinforced to us how important this initiative is. The project will be taken up again in the next financial year with the aim of launching in spring 2021, even if with fewer stitches than was originally anticipated.

## Collection and Archive

During the first half of the year there were a number of queries to the Archive but these picked up during lockdown as people had time to research their ancestors. The most asked question – 'did my (relative) train/work at the RSN?' has been asked several times a week. In most cases, we cannot answer this as we do not have the capacity and working from home means there is not access to the archive. However, we did make use of the lockdown to tell people more about the history of the RSN and what is in the archive through the eNews. We particularly featured the photographs and some of the stories behind them.

It is planned that the Collection and Archive will be used for talks online in the future, to help show people what we have.

## Distance Learning

The planned series of new self-paced courses with David and Charles came to an abrupt halt with lockdown and even the course filmed in February could not be launched for lack of materials. It was eventually launched in June. There were reasonable sales of the kits available but again this was hampered by lack of materials at the beginning of the lockdown.

It is hoped that we can revive the planned subsequent programmes in 2021 as, even with online teaching now available, these offer more direct tuition that people can do when they have the time, rather than fitting into a schedule.



Map sampler of Europe worked in 1780 by Salome Whitelock, donated to the RSN just before the first lockdown.

At some time in the future this will be given to Third Year Future Tutors to bring it back to its glory through sympathetic conservation.



## IT Infrastructure

When we first went into lockdown, so much had to happen in such a short time almost all of which was focused on or through IT. All the things that we had worked on over the last three years really came to fruition at this point, making the enforced transition much smoother than it would otherwise have been.

Not that everything was plain sailing. It became expected that every time we wanted to do something new, like offer a class at a different time of day, the IT needed to be tweaked to accommodate the change. For the longer term it is helping us to determine what needs to be part of a bigger change on the system and just how far the current system will meet our needs.

Our IT manager has shown immense versatility in encouraging the system to work in different ways, so that we can offer things like discounts and special offers that were not previously part of what we did, but all of which have paid off for us, whether in income generated or elements of learning.

## Staffing

A great deal of what has been achieved in the second half of the year has been achieved with a much smaller team than usual. Only the degree kept all its staffing during lockdown, elsewhere people doubled and tripled their roles and made the best out of the challenging situation, putting in many hours to ensure the RSN would survive. New skills were acquired, including working from home adjustments, and preparing rooms for the new normal. Perhaps the staff member who had the most challenge was the interim Finance Director who was covering the FD's maternity leave, as the role became much more demanding.

The RSN has supported staff working from home with additional equipment to make them as effective as possible and the weekly team meeting of staff became a very important event as it brings most of the staff together. In addition, the Chief Executive decided to send out a weekly letter to all who were furloughed from the beginning of April. Initially, this was just for those furloughed but in the end was sent to everyone, furloughed and active, so all were kept informed and knew what had been happening. It is still sent out every Friday night. Following enquiry with recipients, this will be continued into the next academic year because although we now have more of the team back working, the limited on site access still means that many of the team are working individually so the regular updates keep everyone informed.

However, with a significantly reduced income we had to look at more drastic ways to cut costs. As the largest percentage of the RSN outgoings is on staff, we had few options but to look at reducing costs here. In the end, we had to make five roles/four people redundant, but have brought in one person to take on a combined role to support the Head of Education and Teaching.

## Review of overall performance

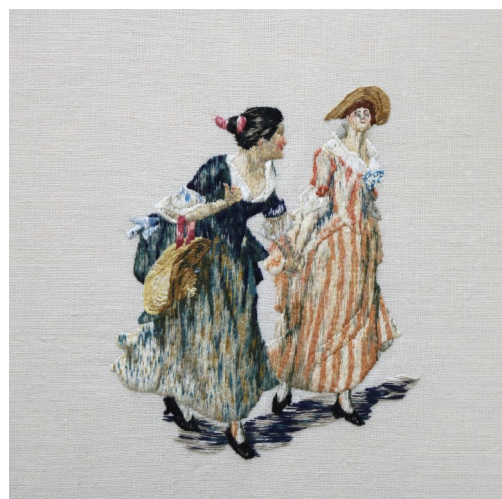
During the first lockdown, the Council took a pro-active approach to managing risk with sometimes weekly Zoom meetings to review the most urgent issues, usually around cash flow.

In the light of COVID-19, the RSN has managed remarkably well thanks to the swift action of Trustees and staff. Collectively, we made things happen at a speed that would not have been imagined just a few months before. The transition from face-to-face to online teaching was fast and we have learned from this for ongoing planning. In terms of income generation, while we could not physically make up for the months lost to the lockdown, we worked very hard to be able to offer courses online and to rebuild all our operations, so that we continued to generate income. As a result, the financial picture was nowhere near as bad as it could have been.

The active staff team worked incredibly hard to keep awareness and momentum and this has paid off with a broader online presence and greater engagement with our activities, which can only augur well for the future.

The Trustees acknowledge and thank the staff team for their commitment and dedication over this year. It has been an extraordinary year.

While not forgetting the short term, the staff team is looking ahead to the anniversary year, which actually straddles two financial years, as our opportunity to use it as an effective launch pad for the future of the RSN.



*Tapestry  
Silk Shading  
by Susan  
Chater*



## Strategic Plan

During the year, the Trustees and senior staff have looked at the way forward, taking the opportunity to revise and update the strategic plan in the light of COVID-19. While in some ways COVID-19 has, of course, slowed us down and changed many plans, it has given us new opportunities that we need to capitalise on. In looking at the strategic plan, we have enhanced even further the role of IT, factored in online tuition for the long term, and focused the goals of the business plan to be more specific in the short term. As such, we might summarise the overarching themes for the next four years as 2020-21 stabilise, 2021-22 rebuild, 2022-23 celebrate (our 150th anniversary), 2023-24 growth.

We are already looking to the RSN strengths and seeing how these can be utilised for future income and outreach. Our Tutors have high technical skills and we have a good number of tutors all trained to the same standard. As such we decided to launch a new series of evening classes in autumn 2020 called Technical Tuesdays. We started with one class, but such was the demand that we ended up running four classes simultaneously. Only the RSN can offer this level of technical knowledge and enough tutors to meet need. This is just the start of some of the new types of classes that we will offer in 2020-21 along with our first online International Summer School that will operate on three time zones UK/Europe, North America and Australia/New Zealand to create a world wide community of stitch.

*Canvas shading by Diana Cargill*





## Financial review

The consolidated statement of financial activities for the year shows a net deficit (before investment losses) of £121,680 (2018/19: surplus of £142,916).

The overall income for the year 2019/20 amounted to £1,984,354 (2018/19: £2,357,491), a year on year decrease of 16%. Income from donations and legacies increased by 5% to £475,858 (2018/19: £454,451). In 2019/20 this includes £187,659 of grant income from the Government Job Retention Scheme. In 2018/19 a donation of £250,000 was received from the HB Allen Charitable Trust upon their closure. Donations and legacies remain an extremely important source of income, particularly for the Degree and Future Tutor programmes, neither of which receives any government funding, and for all new initiatives.

The trading subsidiary's income of £278,555 (2018/19: £352,549) decreased by 21% as the Studio was closed from the end of March due to lockdown.

Income from charitable School activities amounted to £1,059,988 (2018/19: £1,377,207) a 23% decrease year on year due to reduced activity in Certificate & Diploma and short courses from the end of March. Whilst online courses replaced face-to-face classes, the volume of sales was not enough to equal that delivered in 2018/19. Investment income of £169,953 (2018/19: £173,284) also decreased marginally.

The restricted fund income of £120,622 (2018/19: £152,584) consisted of resources earmarked for the Degree and Future Tutor programmes, the RSN Stitch Bank and Collection and Archive Digitisation Campaigns. The decrease compared with last year is mainly due to appeals to Friends being focused on unrestricted donations following the COVID-19 pandemic. Restricted expenditure of £180,204 (2018/19: £234,689) was incurred against the Degree and Future Tutor programmes, for the RSN Stitch Bank project and also the ongoing depreciation on the capital costs of the set-up of the new classrooms at Hampton Court Palace in 2015.

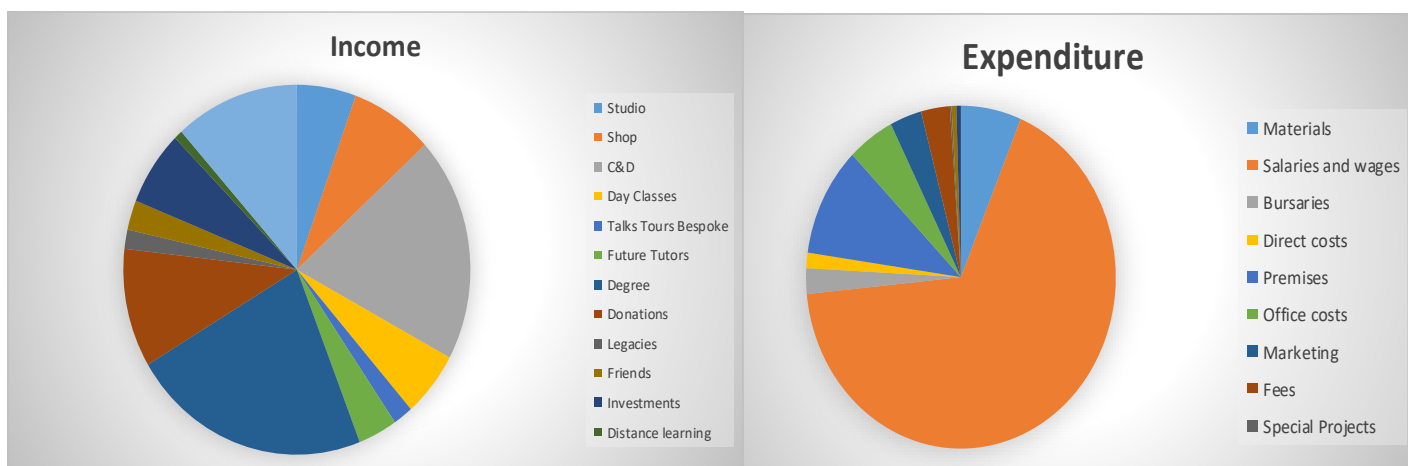
Total expenditure for the year of was £2,106,034, 5% less than the previous year (2018/19: £2,214,575). The RSN reduced all non-essential expenditure following lockdown.

Net realised and unrealised losses on investments for the year amounted to £22,433 (2018/19: £146,237 gains). At the balance sheet date, net assets totalled £5,295,875 (2019: £5,444,778) of which £2,158,779 (2019: £2,223,252) are unrestricted.

The Royal School of Needlework has an investment of £100 (2018/19: £100) in the share capital of RSN Enterprises Limited, a wholly owned company which is incorporated in England and Wales. The net trading income of the company for the year amounted to a deficit of £25,733 (2018/19: deficit of £11,332).

The immediate financial impact back in April was in classes that we could not hold and therefore had to refund or move forward the dates. As a charity, we also asked people if they were willing to donate the class fees. Across Certificate and Diploma there was £108K of income for the period mid-March to August, a further £58K for short courses and £14K for private and bespoke lessons and tours. C&D is not refundable so was moved forward and on the short courses, £16K was donated. By the year end across all categories £43K had been refunded.

Cash flow was the most critical issue, this was helped by the RSN Friends and supporters' donations and purchases and the active staff team took voluntary pay cuts of 20% or 10% for four months. This was really appreciated by the Trustees, especially as at this time, with fewer staff available, those working were putting in more hours than ever, such was the commitment of the staff team to the organisation and the students. So with this support and the enthusiastic response to online classes the RSN did not have to liquidate any of its investments.





# Consolidated statement of financial activities

Year ended 31 August 2020

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Endowment funds £	2020 Total funds £	2019 Total funds £
<b>Income and expenditure</b>					
<b>Income from:</b>					
Donations and legacies	355,196	120,662	—	<b>475,858</b>	454,451
Investments	169,953	—	—	<b>169,953</b>	173,284
Other trading activities	278,555	—	—	<b>278,555</b>	352,549
Charitable activities					
• School activities	<u>1,059,988</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<b><u>1,059,988</u></b>	<u>1,377,207</u>
<b>Total income</b>	<u>1,863,692</u>	<u>120,662</u>	<u>—</u>	<b><u>1,984,354</u></b>	<u>2,357,491</u>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>					
Raising funds	400,126	13,250	—	<b>413,376</b>	486,209
Charitable activities					
Costs of school activities	<u>1,517,704</u>	<u>166,954</u>	<u>8,000</u>	<b><u>1,692,658</u></b>	<u>1,728,366</u>
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<u>1,917,830</u>	<u>180,204</u>	<u>8,000</u>	<b><u>2,106,034</u></b>	<u>2,214,575</u>
<b>Net (expenditure)/income before investment gains and losses</b>	(54,138)	(59,542)	(8,000)	<b>(121,680)</b>	142,916
Realised losses on investments	(62,920)	(2,870)	(70,781)	<b>(136,571)</b>	(64,552)
Unrealised gains on investments	<u>52,585</u>	<u>2,399</u>	<u>59,154</u>	<b><u>114,138</u></b>	<u>210,789</u>
<b>Net movement in funds</b>	(64,473)	(60,013)	(19,627)	<b>(144,113)</b>	289,153
<b>Reconciliation of funds:</b>					
<b>Fund balances brought forward at 1 September 2019</b>	<u>2,223,252</u>	<u>388,308</u>	<u>2,828,428</u>	<b><u>5,439,988</u></b>	<u>5,150,835</u>
<b>Fund balances carried forward at 31 August 2020</b>	<u>2,158,779</u>	<u>328,295</u>	<u>2,808,801</u>	<b><u>5,295,875</u></b>	<u>5,439,988</u>

## Trustees' Statement

The trustees confirm that these summarised financial statements are a summary of information from the full annual report and financial statements which were approved by the Board of Trustees on 17 February 2021. A copy of the full annual report and financial statements, upon which the auditor has reported without qualification, will be submitted to the relevant statutory bodies, including the registrar of companies and the Office for Students. These summarised financial statements may not contain sufficient information to allow for a full understanding of the financial affairs of the Royal School of Needlework. Further information and the full financial statements are available online or by contacting the Chief Executive at: the Royal School of Needlework, Apt 12a, Hampton Court Palace, East Molesey, Surrey KT8 9AU.



# Balance Sheet

as at 31 August 2020

	Group		Charity	
	2020	2019	2020	2019
	£	£	£	£
<b>Fixed assets</b>				
Tangible assets	43,307	24,635	43,307	24,635
Investments	5,338,754	5,402,282	5,338,854	5,402,382
	<u>5,382,061</u>	<u>5,426,917</u>	<u>5,382,161</u>	<u>5,427,017</u>
<b>Current assets</b>				
Stocks	71,753	76,080	29,474	29,625
Debtors	133,595	116,688	197,682	182,539
Cash at bank and in hand	417,199	378,054	376,711	351,671
	<u>622,547</u>	<u>570,822</u>	<u>603,867</u>	<u>563,835</u>
<b>Creditors:</b> amounts falling due within one year	<u>(655,580)</u>	<u>(552,961)</u>	<u>(593,794)</u>	<u>(528,600)</u>
<b>Net current (liabilities)/assets</b>	<u>(33,033)</u>	<u>17,861</u>	<u>10,073</u>	<u>35,235</u>
Creditors due in more than one year	<u>(48,333)</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>(48,333)</u>	<u>—</u>
<b>Total net assets</b>	<u>5,300,695</u>	<u>5,444,778</u>	<u>5,343,901</u>	<u>5,462,252</u>
<b>Represented by:</b>				
<b>Capital and reserves</b>				
Called up share capital	260	280	260	280
Capital redemption reserve	4,560	4,510	4,560	4,510
	<u>4,820</u>	<u>4,790</u>	<u>4,820</u>	<u>4,790</u>
<b>The funds of the charity:</b>				
Endowment funds	2,808,801	2,828,428	2,808,801	2,828,428
Restricted funds	328,295	388,308	327,880	388,308
Unrestricted funds:				
. General fund	1,548,779	1,613,252	1,592,400	1,630,726
. Designated fund	610,000	610,000	610,000	610,000
	<u>5,295,875</u>	<u>5,439,988</u>	<u>5,339,081</u>	<u>5,457,462</u>
	<u>5,300,695</u>	<u>5,444,778</u>	<u>5,343,901</u>	<u>5,462,252</u>

## Independent Auditor's Statement to the Trustees of the Royal School of Needlework

We have examined the summarised financial statements set out on pages 21 and 22.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and auditor

The trustees are responsible for preparing the summarised financial statements in accordance with applicable United Kingdom law.

Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summarised financial statements with the full financial statements and the trustees' report. We also read the other information included in the annual report and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summarised financial statements.

Basis of opinion

We conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 2008/3 'The auditors' statement on the summary financial statement' issued by the Auditing Practices Board for use in the United Kingdom.

Opinion

In our opinion the summarised financial statements are consistent with the full financial statements and the trustees' report of the Royal School of Needlework for the year ended 31 August 2020



## Mission

The purpose of the RSN is to ensure the future of hand embroidery through teaching, practising and promoting the art and techniques of hand embroidery to the highest standard.

## Vision

By 2025 we will have underlined our position as the international centre of excellence for hand embroidery education at all levels from leisure to Degree and for practising technical hand embroidery for conservation and new commissions.

## Values

The RSN's core values, which underpin everything we do, are **Quality, Tradition** and **Innovation**. Aware of where we have come from, but always looking to the future in new ways and always operating at a high level of performance.



**Patron** HRH The Duchess of Cornwall  
**President** HRH The Duchess of Gloucester  
**Council of Trustees**  
**Chairman** Mr Andrew Palmer  
**Hon Treasurer** Ms Sam Hoe Richardson  
Mrs Elizabeth Braakenburg Dyce  
Mrs Caroline de Guitaut  
Mrs Nicola Clarke  
Prof Patsy Cullen

Mrs Victoria Farrow  
Mrs Morgan Fowles  
Mrs Deborah Lamb  
Ms Reena Pastakia  
Mrs Stephanie Wright  
**Chief Executive** Dr Susan Kay-Williams

*Images Above basic goldwork by Kazumi Furukawa*

*Back cover image Signature project—book cover in or nué by Future Tutor Jessica Ingram*





Royal School of Needlework, Apt 12A Hampton Court Palace, East Molesey, Surrey KT8 9AU

Registered Charity No 312774 [www.royal-needlework.org.uk](http://www.royal-needlework.org.uk) Tel: 020 3166 6932