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A quotation (above), a picture postcard from Chawton, and a story in a magazine were inspirations for members of the Illinois Region of JASNA to make a replica of the coverlet Jane Austen sewed with her sister Cassandra and her mother,² using a pattern adapted by Karen Fredrickson.

Made at the time Jane was writing *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, as well as revising *Pride and Prejudice*, the patchwork now hangs in Jane Austen's former home at Chawton, Alton, Hampshire, England.

This article will tell you how you can recreate Jane's feat. It took two years for a dozen dedicated members to finish our quilt, but it is possible for one person working alone, supplied with patience, interest, and common sense, to complete the coverlet. This article will also tell you exactly how the quilt we made differs from Jane's coverlet.³ (There, a clue already!)

Hensel & Associates of Chicago donated a dozen different cuttings of the Jane Austen collection of chintzes, copied from the actual coverlet by Bailey & Grifone, England.

A replica of the fabric swatch, *Miss Morland*

The fabrics used by Jane and her family were cut-up, well-worn calico dress remnants from dressmaking, and a piece of chintz drapery fabric. As calico printing was permitted in Great Britain with the passage of the *Manchester Act* in 1736, one can assume Jane used British-made cotton chintz and calico. The quilt pattern was probably decided on after acquiring the fabrics.

We showed a professional quilter⁴ a picture of Jane's quilt, and asked her the name of the pattern. "Diamonds," she said. A perusal of several quilt books⁵ did not turn up any quilt with that name; the pattern consists of a central medallion with diagonal rows of floral diamond-shapes surrounding it, and a "set" (or frame for the diamonds) of pastel dots on white.

On checking our replica against the original,⁶ one finds that the major patterns were copied exactly, and that the colors are markedly faithful to the original. The Austens' coverlet shows more variety. Their border is darker. We were able to make the border from scraps of cloth left from the body of the quilt.

FABRIC REQUIREMENTS

Cotton chintz (Jane Austen Collection, some colors still available from Bailey & Griffing, PO Box 27429, Philadelphia, PA 19150). Names of fabrics listed refer to this collection. Descriptions of the prints are included if you wish to use other fabrics.

¼ yard each of the 6 following:

Lady Susan Basket and bird print for center

Miss Dashwood Medium flower print with beige background (A)

Miss Dashwood Medium flower print with turquoise background (F)

Miss Dashwood Medium flower print with ivory background (I)

Miss Price Small flower print on beige background (D)

Miss Price Small flower print on tan background (E)

½ yard each of the 3 following:

Miss Elliot Chinese temples on dark red background (G)

Miss Morland Pink ribbons and swags on red background (H)

Miss Morland Pink ribbons and swags on ivory background (C)

¾ yard Miss Woodhouse Large flowers on dark green background (B)

4 yards Elizabeth Pink dots on white

6 yards white² cotton chintz for backing

Our fabrics were all 54 inches wide.

1 roll batting. Cotton would be authentic for the period; we used polyester (Optional)

Depending on the accuracy of the cutting of the pieces, the finished coverlet will measure about 88 x 108 inches.

SUPPLIES

Cardboard or light plastic (available in craft shops) for templates

Typing-weight paper for backing diamonds

Ruler

Scissors

Pins

Pencil

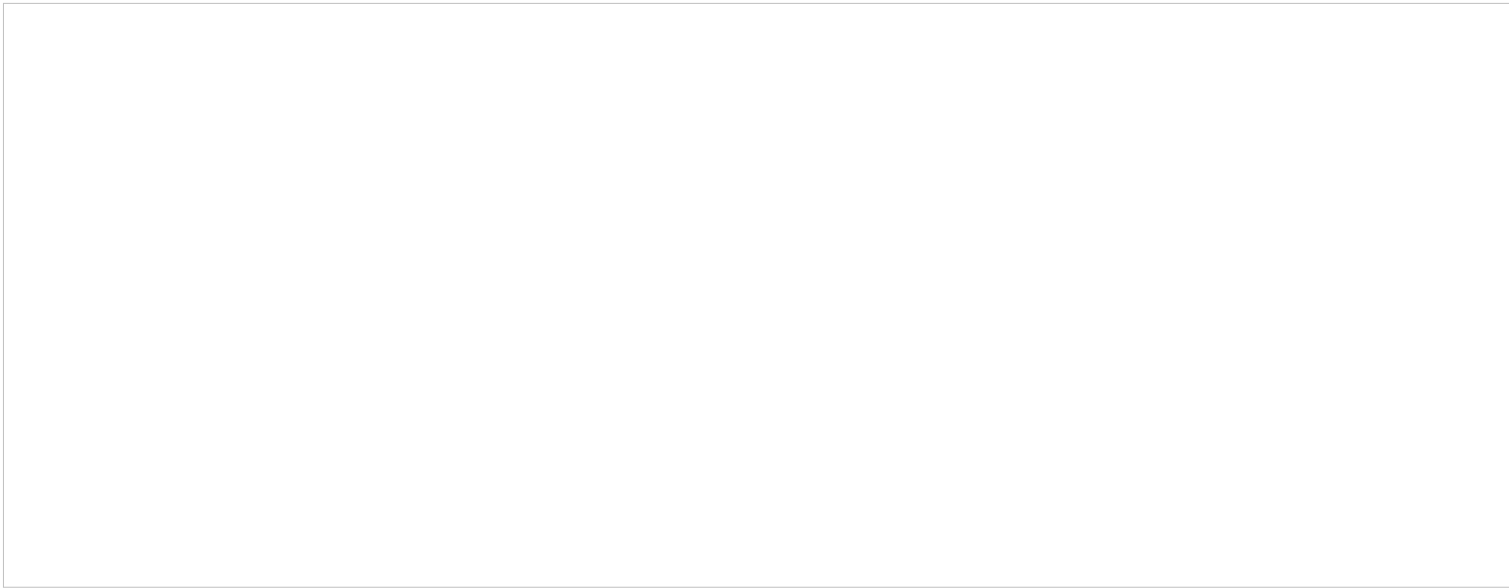
Colored thread

Basting needles

Quilting thread, needles, thimble

PREPARATION

Precision in making the templates is essential to creating precise quilt pieces. Cardboard is fine, plastic is better.



Abbreviations:

HL – horizontal half of a large diamond

VL – vertical half of a large diamond

HS – horizontal half of a small diamond

VS – vertical half of a small diamond

TEMPLATES

Large diamond 4 ¼ inches wide by 5 5/8 inches high

½ Large diamond – both horizontal and vertical

Small diamond 2 inches wide by 2 ½ inches high

½ Small diamond – both horizontal and vertical

Parallels – 1 5/8 inches wide by length of side of large diamond.

No need to make a template for the large center diamond – just cut paper pattern ¾ inches wide by 21 inches high.

The quilt was made English style⁸ with each piece basted to a paper backing to keep its shape. Cut backing papers the exact size of the templates; be precise in your cutting to ensure that the fabric pieces will fit together. You will need 212 large diamonds, 20 HLs, 20 VLs, 4 quarter large diamonds, 798 small diamonds, 142 VSs, HSs, 4 quarter small diamonds, and 216 parallels. (Make quarters by cutting 1

diamonds in half.)

FABRIC CUTTING

Use the template and a hard lead pencil to trace diamonds on reverse of fabric. All points of diamonds with straight of fabric grain. Center the diamonds on flow motifs. If the fabric has a vertical orientation, be sure the half-diamonds are cut the motifs will be upright when the pieces are assembled. Cut out diamonds with at least $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam allowance, EXCEPT $\frac{1}{2}$ inch on the long side of the half-diamond and all around the quarter diamonds. You do not need to be exact with the seam allowances as the paper backing will ensure correct size of the piece.

COLOR AND SIZE SELECTION

Fabric

A 34 large, 3 HL, 3 VL

B 30 large, 3 HL, 3 VL

C 32 large, 3 HL, 3 VL

D 30 large, 3 HL, 3 VL

E 34 large, 4 HL, 4 VL
78 HS, 76 VS,
4 S quarters

F 16 large

G 12 large

H 12 large, 4 L quarters

I 12 large, 4 HL, 4 VL

Pink dots: 66 HS, 66 VS

Assorted: 798 small diamonds

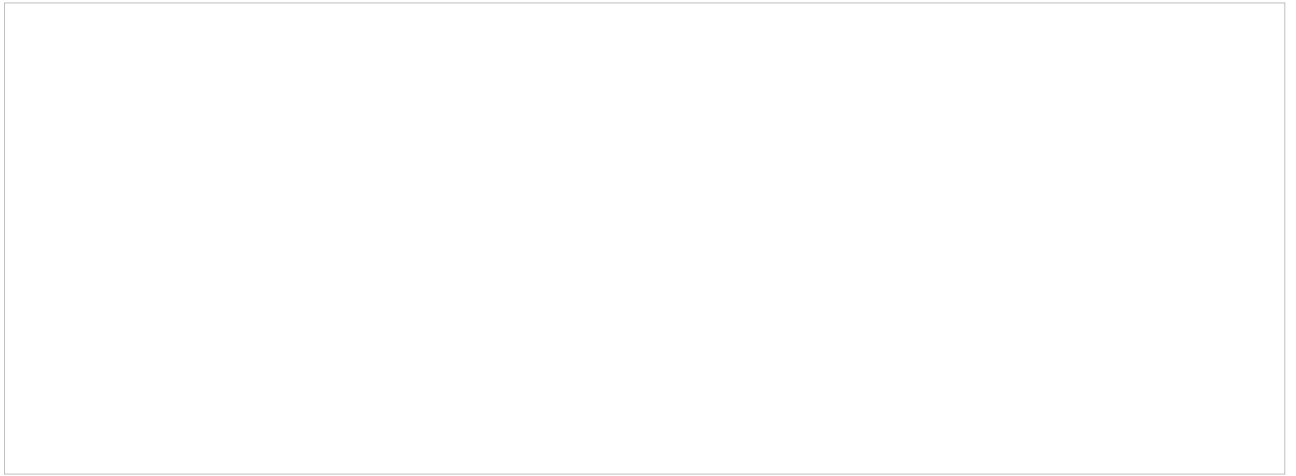
Cut 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide (1 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches plus $\frac{1}{4}$ inch seam allowances) strips of pink material lengthwise. (If using "Elizabeth," cut pink dot strips between rows of flowers.) Cut 216 segments each the length of one side of a large diamond plus $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (each end).

ASSEMBLY

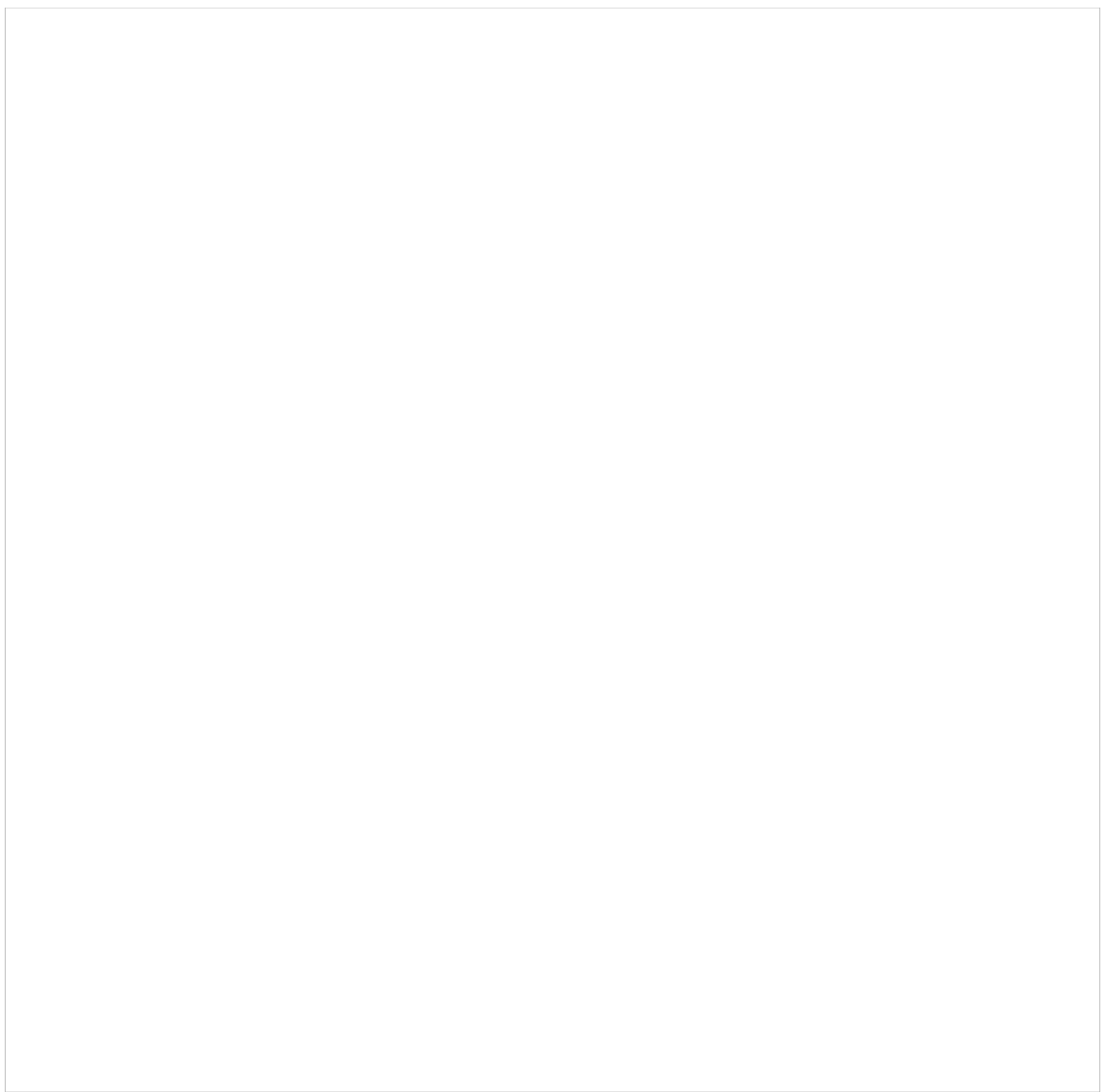
Baste diamonds and parallel segments to paper backing, turning seam allowance to the back over paper. Use contrasting color basting thread to facilitate removal at

pieces are assembled. Do *not* make neat, turned-in corners; leave points free. Do not knot thread.

Sew each large diamond to a pink dot segment: place front sides together match corners. Sew with fine overcast stitch – *this is the final stitching!* – catching only a couple of threads from each piece of material.



When all large diamonds are sewn to pink dot segments, assemble into strips following Diagram C. Sew pink dot segment to end of strip that does not have one. Sew half-diamonds to ends of strips. Inner ends (near medallion) of strips R, S and T should not have pink dots or half diamonds on end.



Cut out center medallion with $\frac{1}{2}$ inch seam allowance all around. Baste to paper backing. Cut pink dot strips to surround center. Baste to backing and sew to center diamond.

Cut $2\frac{1}{8}$ inches wide pink dot strips 12 inches to 24 inches long (whatever comfortable to work with) from remaining pink dot material; baste $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches wide to paper backing.⁹ Sew diamond-strips and dot-strips together lengthwise. (At last, you will see the top take form.) Try not to have seams in dot strips align with seams in diamond strips. Sew sections to center diamond. Sew quarter diamonds to corners to complete central rectangle.

BORDER

Before beginning assembly of border¹⁰, consider the range of colors available and group diamonds so that colors are evenly distributed.

Sew small diamonds together in strips. For each row, begin with an HS piece of fabric E, sew on five small diamonds and end with a pink dot HS. Note that this strip will be at an angle to the half diamond base; be sure all your strips angle in the same direction. Sew 33 small diamond strips, then sew together side to side. This will form the top border of the quilt. Repeat for the bottom border.

For the side borders, sew six small diamonds to VSS of fabric E and pink dot fabric

to form strip. Sew 33 strips together for each side border.

Sew border panels to central rectangle with pink dot half diamonds toward center. Fill in corners with remaining small diamonds and half diamonds. Finish with quarter diamonds in corners.

FINISHING

Pull out basting and remove backing papers – now you will see the benefits of having no knots and leaving the corners loose. If you wish, the quilt top may be washed (gently, by hand, in a tub, with mild soap) and ironed at this time.

Cut length of backing fabric¹² in two 3-yard pieces. Sew side by side with ½ inch seam. Press seam open.

COVERLET

We discovered after we had begun our project that the original “quilt” is not quilted at all. It is a coverlet formed of the pieced top backed with cotton. If you want to be authentic, don't worry about batting or quilting. Only the edges of the top and backing are sewn together in Jane's coverlet.

With wrong sides together, baste quilt top to backing starting at center of quilt. Turn in edges and slipstitch. Invisibly tack the two sides together at 6 to 8 inch intervals. Remove basting.

QUILT

If you decide to make a quilt, put a layer of batting between the top and back before basting. Do not finish edges at this time.

When top, batting and backing¹³ are firmly basted together (we basted on a grid about 6 inches apart), put quilt on quilt frame. We quilted only the large diamonds about ½ inch from seams. If you are using cotton batting, more quilting is recommended – along centerline of pink dot strips and in the border. The center diamond could be outline-quilted around major motifs or with a grid of small diamonds.

When quilting is complete, remove from frame, pull out basting threads, and finish edges.¹⁴

Elizabeth's mind was now relieved from a very heavy weight Every thing was too recent for gaiety, but ... there was no longer anything material to be dreaded, and the comfort of ease and familiarity would come in time.¹⁵

The Jane Austen coverlet replica was displayed at the 1991 AGM in Ottawa.

NOTES

- ¹ Letter 31 May 1811, Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra. Actual handwriting, from *Jane Austen's Manuscript Letters in Facsimile*, Jo Modert, editor. Carbondale, S 1990. Used with permission.
- ² There are two photos of the patchwork in popular distribution today: an 8x10 inch color reproduction in *Learn Patchwork*; a full-page color photo in *A Frivolous Distinction*, in the same tones of our handiwork. Photos can be seen in *Jane Austen's Quilt*, Brian Wilks, p. 112 (blue cast). *Jane Austen and her world*, Marghanita Laski, p. 112 (black/white [listed with incorrect date]). Dust jacket of *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, James Austen-Leigh and Deirdre LeFaye, green tones. Visitors to Jane Austen's House in Chawton may purchase a color postcard showing pink tones.
- ³ Two Illinois-region members visited Chawton and gathered details for us: Margaret Cantrall, herself a quilter, interviewed Jean Bowden, curator of Jane Austen's House and Penelope Byrde, Keeper of Costume at the Centre for Costume and Fashion Research, Bath, in 1990; Clarabeth Kerner visited Chawton in 1988 and spoke with Jean Bowden.
- ⁴ Marilyn Packer, Wild Goose Chase Quilt Gallery, now in Hotchkiss, Colorado.
- ⁵ We checked the 2400 patterns in *Collector's Dictionary* and the hundreds of historical patterns in *Romance of the Patchwork Quilt*. The closest patterns are those with stars.
- ⁶ Jane's patchwork is covered with a sheath of tulle: it is never touched, not even to be measured. Being protected by the scrim gives a dull cast to the quilt. The central medallion is chintz (she used drapery fabric), and all other pieces are calico (unpolished cotton). Our front is entirely chintz. Margarete and Jean measured Jane's patchwork – it is about 8 x 6 feet.
- ⁷ A note about "white": Whites as we know them probably did not exist in Jane's time. "There is nothing 'white' about Jane's coverlet at all," Margarete told us, "there are cream and natural tones." If some fabrics needed lightening or freshening, Jane probably used lemon juice and air. Although the chlorine bleaching process was invented in the 18th century, and bleaching powder in 1774, it is not likely Jane used this chemical procedure. Another method of whitening was to use sour milk. (An amusing story about washing lace in milk, with the unexpected aid of a cat, is told by Mrs. Gaskell in *Cranford*, London, Macmillan, 1892, pp 143-4.)
- ⁸ For a brief description, see *English Domestic Needlework 1660-1860*, chapter

Quilting and Patchwork. Margarete noted that at Chawton, all the paper pie have been removed from the coverlet.

⁹ The Illinois sewers questioned whether the strips were to be pieced with a latt effect. According to Margarete, the dot sets are joined in a hit or miss fashion: design to the placement.

¹⁰ Jane's border adds many new designs; Margarete noted that many of these fabri have black and brown tones, giving the coverlet a darker cast in those areas. T body of the coverlet shows 12-15 major fabrics, the same as ours. The original s (dots) appear to be black or sepia – they may have been pastel to begin wi because some dyes darken. Over time, there seems to have been general fading the patchwork – dyes were probably not as colorfast as those of today.

¹¹ Margarete reported that Jean and Penelope both believe Jane's coverlet was v likely *never* washed. We did wash ours, however, and luckily for us we made pencil markings on the wrong side, as these markings do not come out unless course, with bleaching, which we did not attempt.

¹² Margarete reported that it is not possible to view the backing of the original.

¹³ The coverlet was not made for warmth – it has no filling and was proba decorative only. It was likely kept folded and placed on a bed for show – no one e sat on a bed, according to Margarete.

¹⁴ The backing of our replica is stark white, and the needleworkers embroidered th names on the back in pink floss. Our quilt is always displayed so viewers can both sides.

¹⁵ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Vol. II, *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. Chapman, 3d ed. (Oxford/New York 1988), p. 377.

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