

Decorative Fabric Boxes

LEAFLET
533



Decorative Fabric Boxes

Clemency Greatorex

Lovely boxes of all shapes and sizes to serve many different purposes can be made of cardboard panels, covered with embroidered or plain fabrics. A desk-box may be fitted with compartments for paper clips, pins, pencil sharpener, stapler, etc. A workbox can be like a Victorian etui with just thimble, scissors, needles and pins, or can be larger and more elaborate to include fitments for reels of thread, tape measure, tailor's chalk and a bag for buttons. Jewel boxes lined with fine velvet look luxurious when fitted with a padded slot for rings, a pincushion for brooches and a 'well' for chains and necklaces. Then there are ordinary boxes which cheer up everyday things - even a packet of tissues looks better when it is fitted into a box made to match the furnishings of a bathroom or bedroom. Or a box can be just smugly decorative, designed for a table in the sitting room amongst other ornaments.

When designing a box, the first consideration is to make it right for the job it will do and the person who will use it.



Embroidery on Boxes.

All embroidery must be done on the material before it is put onto the individual cardboard panel for which it is designed.

Every needlewoman will have her own ideas about the type of embroidery she wants to use and she can experiment with many kinds: gold-work, fine stitchery, canvas work, appliqué, patchwork, etc. Delicate embroidery on fine but firm fabrics, such as fine cotton or cotton/polyester, gives an excellent effect and is easier to handle, although the lids of rounded boxes look superb with heavier, encrusted embroidery. Very fine fabrics may need lining.

One of the most attractive workboxes I know is a flatish oblong, with the lid opening across the middle. It is made of fine blue-green linen worked in white cotton counted thread stitches. The inside is glazed chintz and is fitted with all sewing aids readily to hand. Another lovely oblong box is covered in heavier linen patterned in purple and orange with the joins elegantly finished in cross-stitch of the same colours. An unusual hexagonal, domed lid, workbox was made in white kid, (from old gloves), embroidered with gold and beadwork.

When deciding on the lining of a box, choose colours which are a slightly surprising complement to those used for the outside.

For your first box, choose the type of embroidery you most enjoy, or make it up in plain fabrics.



Basic Construction.

There is one basic method of construction. Whatever the size and shape of your box, it is made up of panels of firm cardboard, each one covered with fabric on which any embroidery required has already been worked. The cardboard must be firm, say mounting board, (six sheet). When finer cardboard is needed, this has been noted in the text. For a large box, bigger than a shoebox, something with less bend in it must be used, say fine hardboard or polystyrene.

The secret of success is to cut the panels exactly the right size and shape. Never be too impatient to unpick the fabric from a panel which does not fit neatly, trim and re-cover it. Cut the cardboard with a craft or Stanley knife and a metal ruler, or with a stout pair of sharp scissors, which is the easiest tool for a curved line. As well as these tools and your sewing things, you will need a sharp pencil and a pair of compasses for drawing circles.

If box making is new to you, start by making a rectangular one to get accustomed to the basic method of construction. Cut four panels of firm cardboard for the sides, one for the base and another for the lid. All these are for the outside of the box and their size and shape depend on the size and shape of the box you have decided to make. Cover each panel by lacing on the fabric chosen for the outside. (See fig. 1a). Make sure that the material is straight with the grain of the fabric and is taught and evenly stretched on the right side. Any embroidery worked must be correctly centred on the panel. Stitch the four side panels together, sewing through the material only and not the cardboard. The first three joins can be oversewn on the wrong sides with the right sides together as if joining patchwork. The last join will have to be worked on the right side and is best done

in stab-stitch so that the stitches hardly show more on the right side than those of the other three joins. Cover the base panel and over-sew it to the sides. This time all the stitching will be on the outside so must be neat and even.

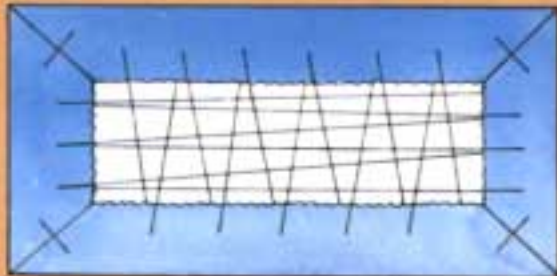
Make the lining of the box by the same method, cutting the panels slightly smaller than those for the outside to allow them to fit snugly into the outside when they have been stitched together. How much smaller will depend on the thickness of the fabric and the cardboard; one sixteenth of an inch all round each panel is usually about right.

When the lining has been made up, slip it into the outside and over-sew or slipstitch the two together, (see fig. 1b).

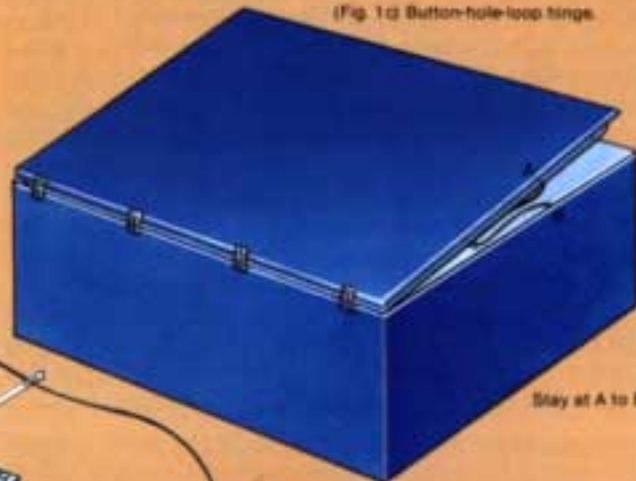
Cover the panel for the outside of the lid. Make sure it fits the box. Cut the panel for the lining of the lid in finer cardboard and very slightly smaller so that the stitches joining the lids will lie just below the top. Cover the lid-lining panel with lining fabric and over-sew the two together.

Join the lid to the box by making a hinge of several loop buttonholes along the back, tight enough to keep it firmly in place, but loose enough to allow it to shut with a plop. The lid should not fall backwards when open, but to prevent it straining in wear, a 'stay' may be added halfway along one side, (see fig. 1c).

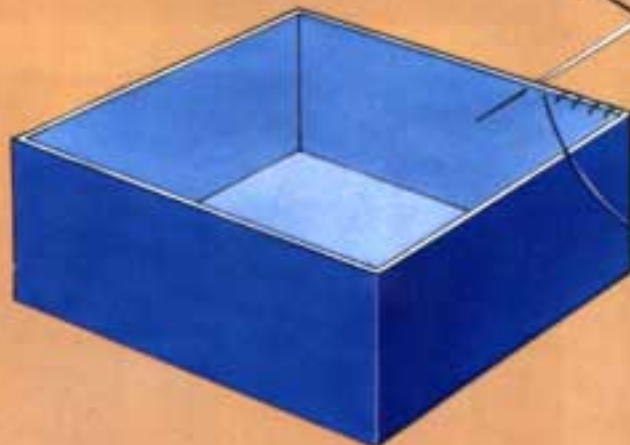
(Fig. 1a) Fabric laced on panel, wrong side view



(Fig. 1c) Button-hole-loop tings



Stay at A to B



(Fig. 1b) Oversewing the lining and the outside together

Fig 1a, b, & c

A harder wearing hinge may be made of fabric. This is done when the lining and the outside are being joined together. Join the lining and the outside of the box, except at the back, and do the same with the lid. Cut two narrow strips of fabric, one to match the outside and the other to match the lining, each a little longer than the back of the box. With the right sides together, join them across the ends, turn right sides out and then iron. (See fig. 1d). The double strip should now be slightly shorter than the back of the box. Slip the bottom raw edge between the lining and the outside of the box and stab-stitch into place, catching the lining and the outside of the box, as well as the hinge, with each stitch. (See fig. 1e). Slip the top raw edge between the lining and the outside of the lid and stab-stitch together in the same way. (See fig. 1f). To keep the lid in the right position and the hinge an even width while doing this, make a firm tacking stitch at each end of the hinge. It is a fiddly job, but it does make a firm hard-wearing hinge.

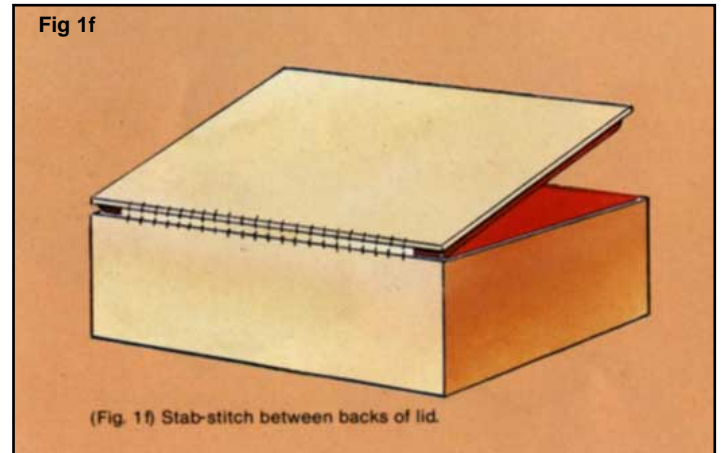
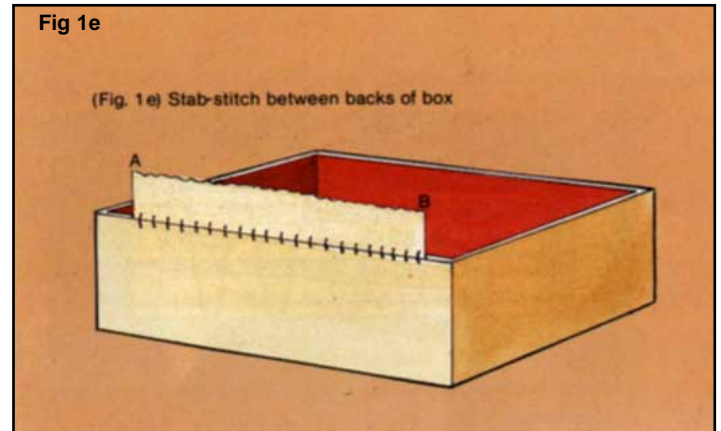
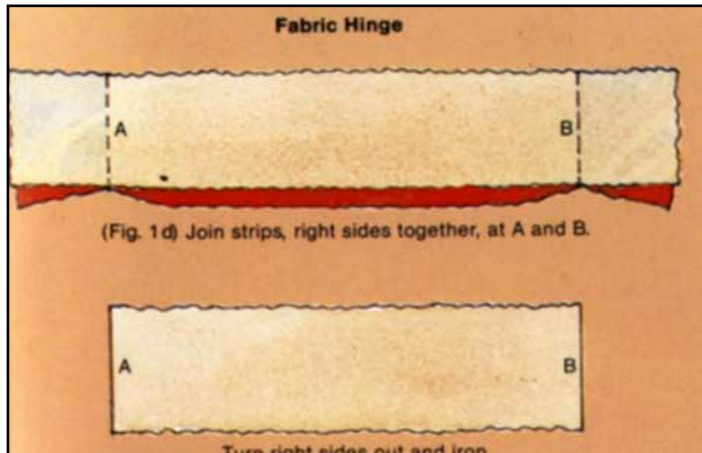
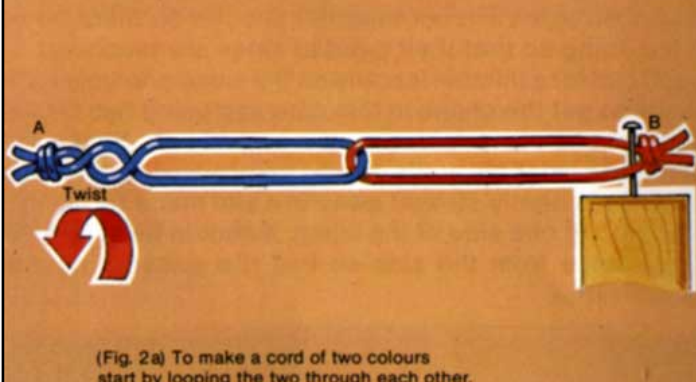


Fig 2a



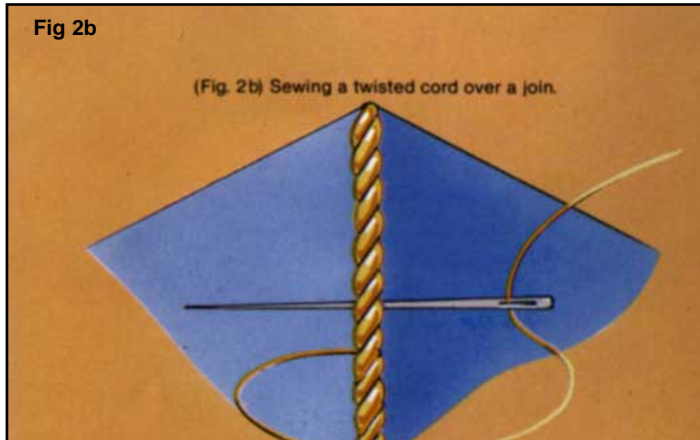
Joins Between Panels

The appearance of any box is greatly improved if the joins, both outside and in the lining, are neat and decorative.

Oversewing is the simplest method and may be turned into cross-stitch by working two rows of slanting oversewing. Chain-stitch, worked on the bars of straight oversewing makes another attractive finish. Cords laid over the original stitching on the joins make a most satisfying decoration both inside and outside, especially if you twist them yourself from the same thread used for the embroidery on the box. The simplest twist can be made of one or several colours, by cutting the threads $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the length required and tying the ends together. Slip one knotted end over a pin stuck into an arm of a padded armchair. Pull the other taut and twist until the threads try to twist back on themselves. Without letting either end go, hang a pair of scissors over the centre of the threads, closing the handles over them; hold the knotted ends together and let the scissors spin around and round in the middle. Tie the two knots together and release the scissors. For a two coloured twist with a clear-cut contrast of the two colours, the same method can be used, but start by looping the two sets of threads through each other. (See fig. 2a).

When sewing a cord over a join, use stitches which slant the same way as the twist so that they get 'lost' in the valleys of the twist. (See fig. 2b).

Fig 2b



Fastening and Feet

Neither of these are essential, but both make a box longer wearing. Four buttons or beads sewn firmly to the outside of the base of the box, before it is joined to the side panels make hard wearing feet and save wear and tear on the bottom of the box.

A bead or button sewn on to the front t of the lid, before it is joined to its lining makes a good handle and saves too much fingering of the fabric or embroidery. It can be made into a fastening by working a loop on the outside of the front before the lining is fitted into it.

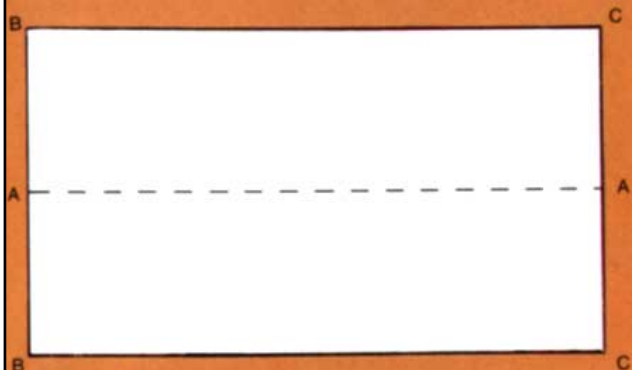
Fittings

All fittings must be made and stitched into the lining before it is sewn into the outside of the box. In this way all knots and fastenings-off can be left on the outside of the lining and will not show when the two are fitted together. Compartments are made by using divisions, and when planning the layout of a box which is to hold objects of different shapes and sizes, (such as a desk-box with a stapler, well for paperclips, pincushion, etc.), it is helpful to make a birds eye view drawing of the compartments you will need, then you can measure the lengths of the divisions needed to make them.

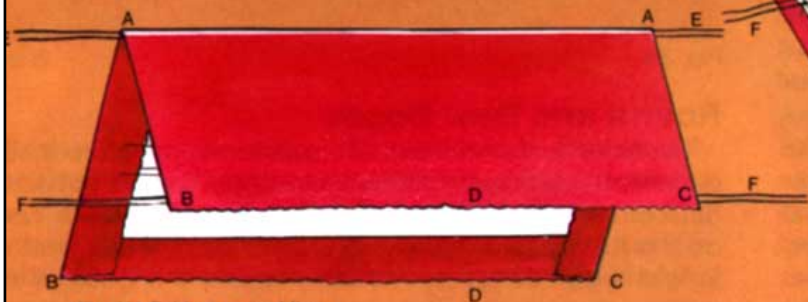
To make a division, cut a cardboard panel slightly shorter than the length needed, to make room for the fabric which will cover it. Cut it twice the height required and, with a craft knife and metal ruler, score it horizontally across the middle. Cover it with fabric on the scored side, lacing it horizontally only, on the wrong side. Fold the panel along the scored line, tuck in the raw edges round the other three sides and oversew them together. The plain fold of the material over the scored fold of the panel will form the top of the division. Stitch it firmly into position in the lining. (See fig.3).



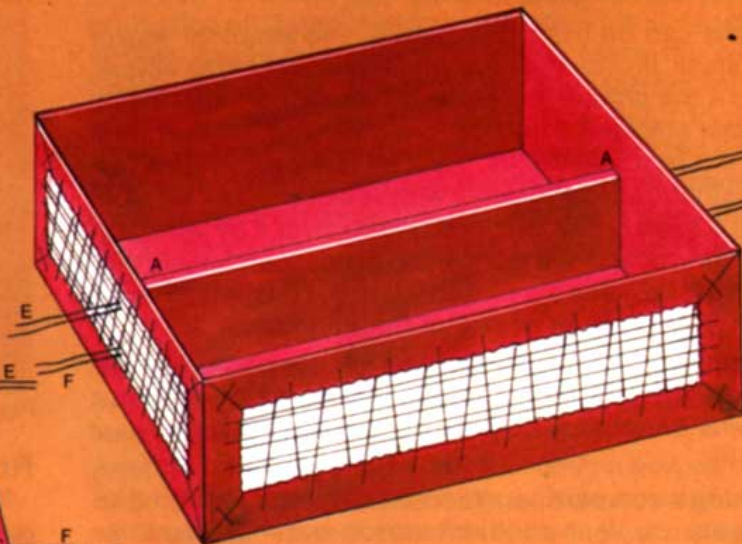
making a Division



(Fig. 3a) Cut card twice height required.
Score on right side - A to A.



(Fig. 3b) Fold on scored line.



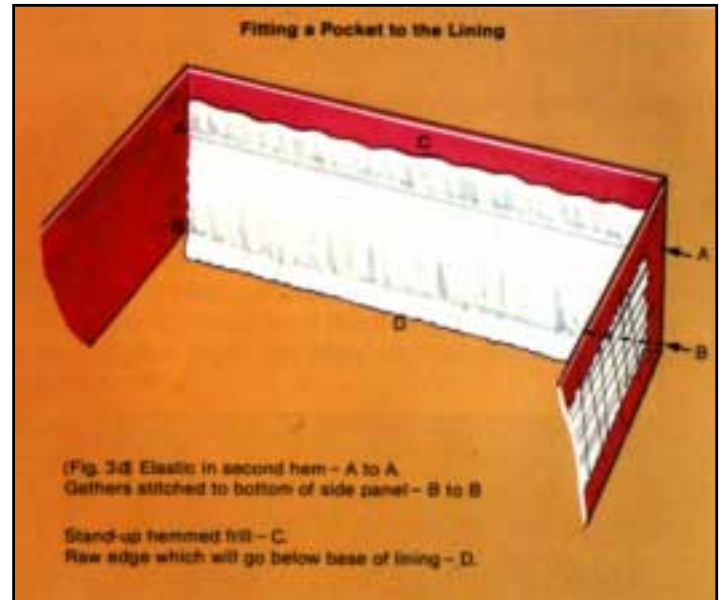
(Fig. 3c) Tuck in raw edges D and D. Join B to B, and C to C.
Oversew edges together. Fit into lining of box and sew in position with threads E and F.

Pockets can be useful round the sides of the lining, or on one or two sides. Cut a strip of fabric about 1 1/2 times the length needed. Make a small double hem the top and thread elastic throughout the lower of these two hems, leaving the other as a standing up frill. Run a gathering thread along the edge at the bottom and stitch to the bottom edge of the side panels of the lining before sewing in the base, which will then cover the raw edges of the gathers. Fasten the sides neatly to the corner joins. (See fig. 3d).

Pincushions can be fixed or moveable. The simplest way of making a small, firm pincushion, which will not lose its shape, is to cut out the shape you want in underfelt or other thick, loose-weave material. Then cut another, and another until you have the required height. Tack all the layers with a few stitches right through and cover with velvet or other suitable fabric. Cut a base in firm cardboard and cover it by lacing on the fabric, then oversew it to the base of the cushion and trim as you please. To make a rounded top to the cushion, reduce the size of the top layer or two of the padding.

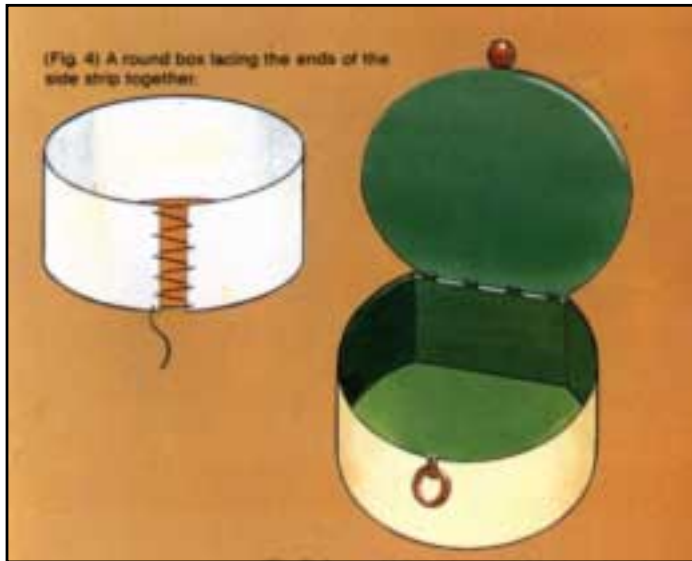
So many embroideresses have made needle books as their first venture into sewing that description of the different types seems unnecessary. Give it a slot of its own in your workbox.

When making a compartment for reels of thread, design it so that the reels are kept on their sides in order to see their colour at a glance. Another way to keep them is to thread them on elastic fastened at one end to the side of the lining and at the other, on the opposite side, with a hook and eye.



Round and Oval Boxes

To make a round box, set your compasses to half the diameter you require, draw a circle on firm cardboard and cut it out with strong, sharp scissors. This is the base. Decide on the height and cut a strip of finer card of this width and long enough to go comfortably round the base. Bend it round a tin from the store cupboard, steaming it a little if it looks as if it might crack. Tie it top and bottom and leave to dry. Lace the fabric onto the base of the box, stand the side strip around it and trim the ends to meet. Join these ends by bringing the needle up from the back for every stitch so that the two ends meet but do not overlap.



Sew loosely and pull the thread tight and fasten off when the stitching is finished. Cover by lacing on the fabric with stitches up and down the inside of the drum. Fold under the raw ends at the join and sew them neatly together. This join can form part of the embroidered pattern on the box, or it may just show the centre front of it. Oversew the bottom edge of the drum to the base of the box.

Make the lining by the same method, cutting the base and the drum slightly smaller so that they fit neatly into the outside. Fit the lining into the outside and fit the two together round the top. Slip-stitch is particularly suitable. The lid cannot be hinged, so it

will have to fit over the top, and therefore will need a rim. Decide on its depth and cut it from finer card.

Remember that the lining of the rim will have to fit over the box, so cut this out first and then the lid lining, and make these up. Slip-stitch the two together.

A lid can be made with the rim inside the box and the lid projecting all round the top of the box. This suits some types of fairly heavy embroidery on the lid. Make the outside rim first, to fit inside the top of the box, then the rim lining. Cover both and sew together. Make the lid lining to project all round the box, cover it and sew the completed rim onto it, with a stout needle through the card. Do not space stitches close to each other as this would make a weakened ring in the lid. Make the outside of the lid, cover it and slip-stitch it to the lid lining.

Oval boxes are made in the same way but by starting with an oval base and lid, drawn from a small oval dish or with the help of your geometry box.

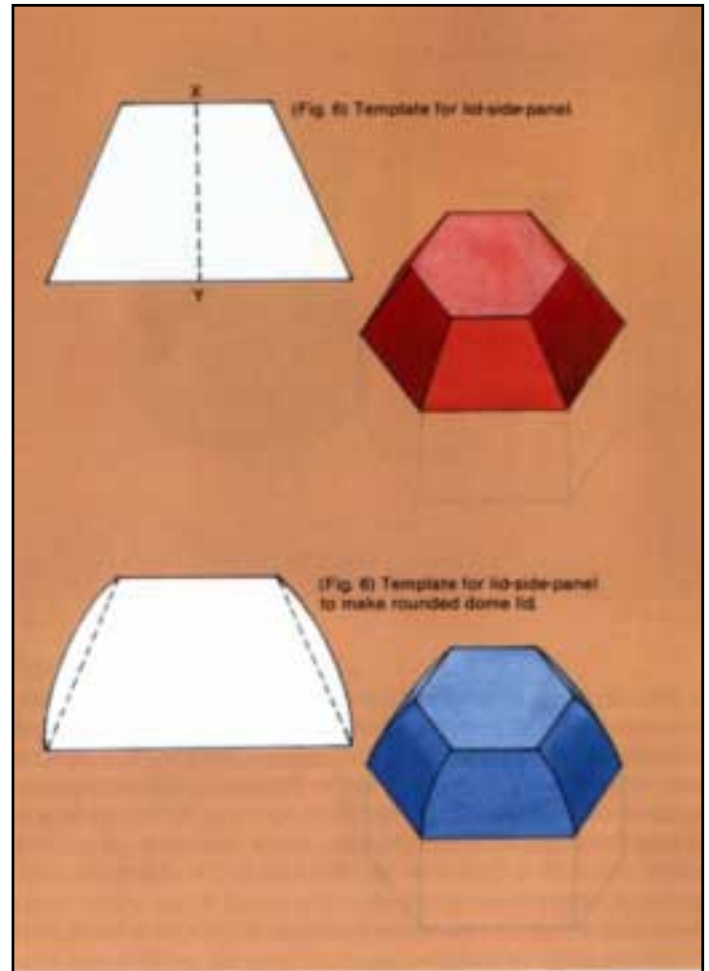
Another attractive shape is like a cuff-link box, with a hinged lid on the straight side at the back. Draw a circle for the base with a straight line across the back as if you were going to draw a square in the circle. Cut the base and the lid from firm cardboard in this shape. Cut the straight side from firm card and the curved one from finer card. Cover both. Tuck in raw edges and stitch the ends of the front to the ends of the straight back. Make up in the usual way, using the 'rectangular' method for the square back and the lid, and the 'rounded' method for the rounded front. Use either a buttonhole-loop hinge or a fabric one. (See fig. 5).

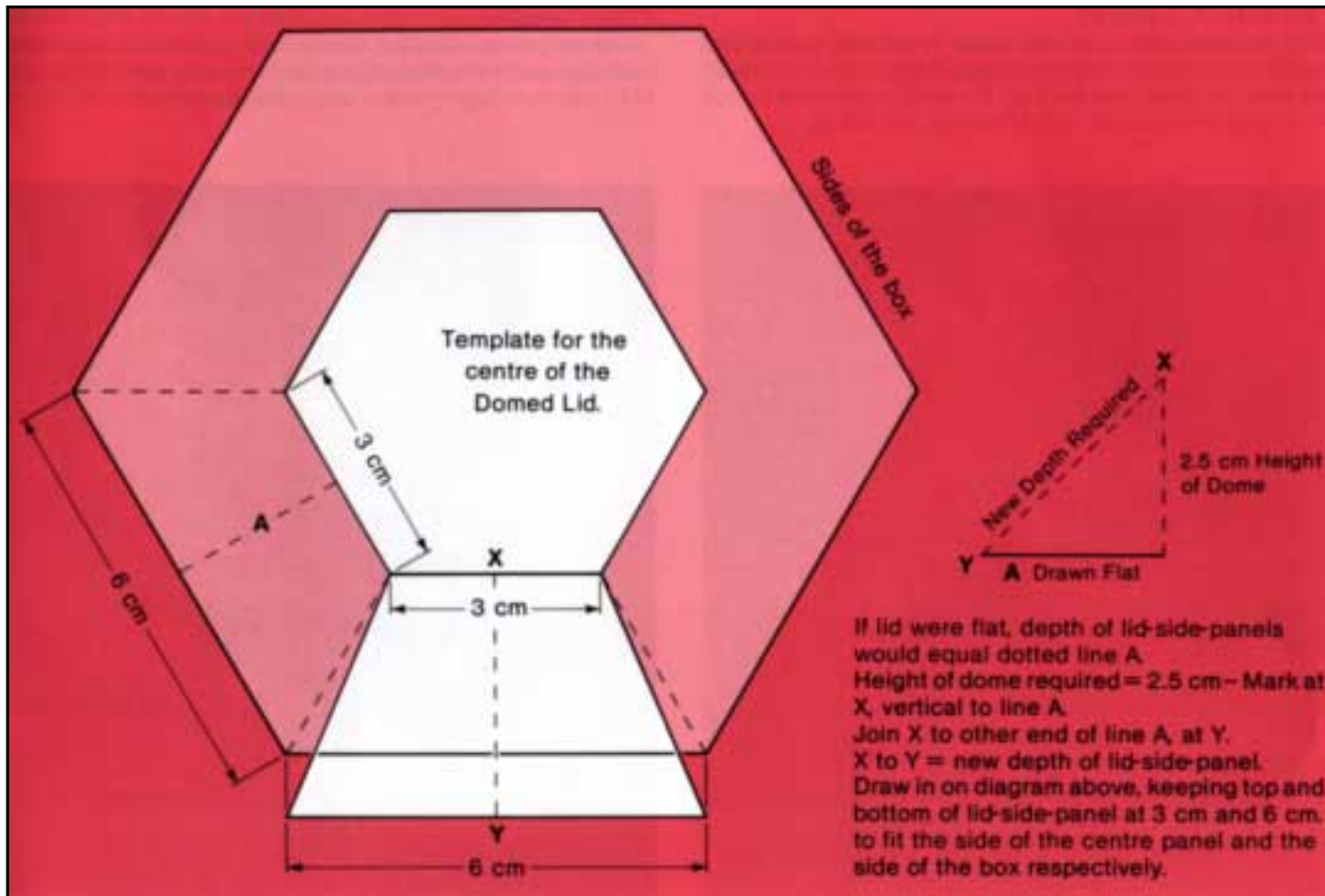
Hexagonal Boxes

Decide on the size and make a template for the base as you would for a hexagonal patchwork. For instance if your box is to be 12cm across set the compasses at 6cm and draw a circle. Without altering the set of the compasses 'walk round' the circle with it, marking six points on the circumference. Join these points by ruling straight lines between them. Cut out this shape in cardboard for the base and another for the lid. Decide on the height and cut six side panels to fit the base of the box and make them up on the basic 'rectangular' method. Make the lining to fit neatly inside. Cover the two lids, sew them together and use either type of hinge. A quilted or padded lid looks well, or even a pincushion lid. An attractive variation on this shape is to give the box a domed lid with a charming convex interior. This will need seven panels, one for the small hexagonal top of the dome and six lid-side panels. Decide on the size of the centre panel, (about half the size of the base looks well), and make the shape in the same way as the base, with compasses and ruler.

The tops of the lid-side-panels must fit the sides of the centre panel and at the outside edge, they must fit the sides of the box. They must be long enough to lift the centre panel sufficiently to make the dome of the lid. First decide on the height of the dome, then calculate how long they must be. This is best described in a diagram. (See fig. 6).

Make up the lid of these seven panels in firm cardboard in the usual way. The lining is also made in the usual way but is difficult to get exactly the right size to fit snugly into the dome and sometimes needs several attempts to get it right. It is well worth the effort.





Ideas for cards

The design of the card will depend on the following: -

- a. Your abilities and the facilities, tools and materials that you have available.
- b. The reason for sending it, be it birthday or Christmas greetings, a sympathy message or a Valentine.
- c. The person who is receiving it, their age, their interests and possibly how much they will appreciate the work that goes into it.

All these factors should be considered as the card is being created. There are a number of traditional symbols and motifs, which can be used for each particular occasion. Associated with birthdays, for example, are cakes with candles, numbers to show age, celebratory drinks, signs of the zodiac and so on. Christmas card symbols include angels, Christmas trees, holly leaves, candles and lanterns. Whatever the type of card, think of something simple in this way, and build the design and method of construction around it.

Alternatively, think of some hobby or habit connected with the recipient, fishing, gardening or cooking for instance. Stylise some item associated with the hobby, garden tools for example, and adapt it for the card

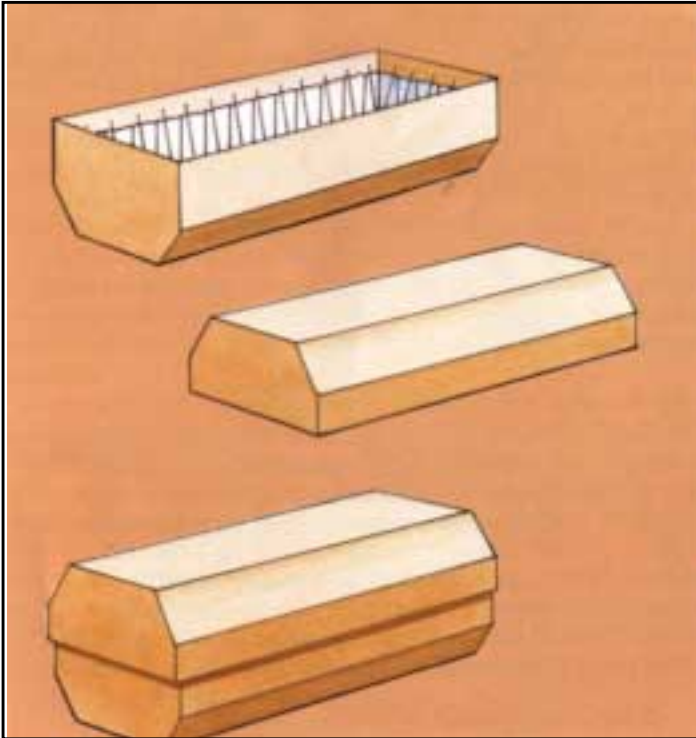
You may choose to make a general-purpose card using a pleasant picture or print which is not directly connected with the reason for sending it. Such cards are becoming more popular and you will find plenty of scope. Greetings, written in bold lettering are a good standby for any occasion.

These are just a few very basic ideas, the final decision is very much an individual one. Remember though, that the thought that goes into the card will usually be appreciated regardless of the actual design.



A Victorian Casket

This is a long low box, with ends which are eight sided when the box is closed. It can have a hinge, or the lid may fit right over the bottom of the box. It makes an excellent desk box or a small Victorian etui. (See figs. 7a, b & c).



Conclusion

This is only an introduction to making embroidered and fabric boxes and new designs are constantly being evolved. May you thoroughly enjoy your own experiments.



Homecrafts are pleased to be able to offer you everything you'll need in the kits below!
Just click through to take a look!



[Small Square Boxes](#)



[3D Domed Boxes](#)

HEMECRAFTS DIRECT
PO BOX 38
LEICESTER
LE1 9BU

www.homecrafts.co.uk

TEL: 0116 2697733

FAX: 0116 2697744

EMAIL: info@homecrafts.co.uk

