Working diagrams - Part 1

By Susan Roberts

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. So why is it I've heard so many lacemakers say they can't follow working diagrams? Is it simply that we aren't as used to them as our continental neighbours? I've seen beginners in Belgium working their first piece of lace from a diagram (an adaptation of the 'bandage' most people probably all started making lace with). Is it that we come to them too late in our lacemaking lives or just that we don't know where to get started?

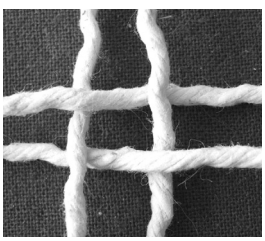
I'm a self taught lacemaker who didn't meet any other lacemakers for over five years (school and Uni meant no time to go to evening classes). When I came across coloured working diagrams suddenly all the questions I had, but hadn't been able to ask, had their answers in front of me - I knew when to twist and how many times for instance.

Diagrams are very logical (probably why I like them!) but they do take a bit of getting used to - it is worth persevering as it opens up all sorts of possibilities (the world of continental patterns is just the start).

This is Part One of my guide to following diagrams. I will then start to include more working diagrams alongside some of the patterns - don't worry, I'm not expecting you to draw diagrams with patterns you submit and I'm not going to fill the precious colour pages of *Lace* with diagrams.

For now I'm going to forget about colour, partly because there are two conflicting colour codes but actually it's easier to start thinking about diagrams in 'stitches' not in the type of stitch the colour tells you the stitch is.

The first thing to recognise about diagrams is that what you see in your finished lace will look different to what you see in the diagram. The diagram is a coding, a line represents a pair, a cross is where two pairs come together to make a stitch.



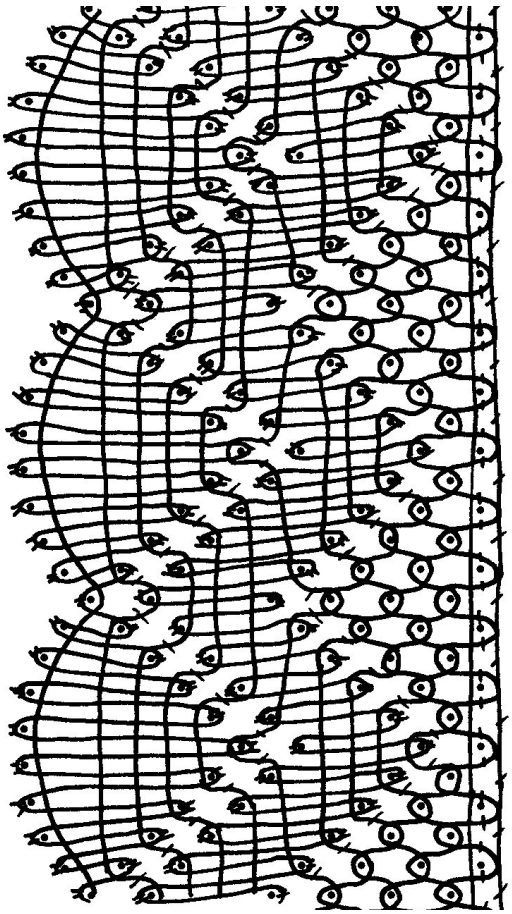
Left - cloth stitch in lace
Right - a stitch in a diagram

A line with a dash on it represents a twist, one twist for each dash (if the colour coding includes colours for twisted stitches then think of this as an extra twist).

The cross and dash are the basics of all working diagrams.

The next stage of understanding your diagram is to split it into sections. Let's start with a relatively simple Torchon pattern with a trail, some ground and a fan.

Below is a copy of a working diagram for the pattern. At first sight it looks complicated with lots of crosses and dashes. But if you can start to split the diagram up into more manageable chunks it's not nearly as complicated as it may first seem.



When you look at the pattern there are a number of distinct areas:

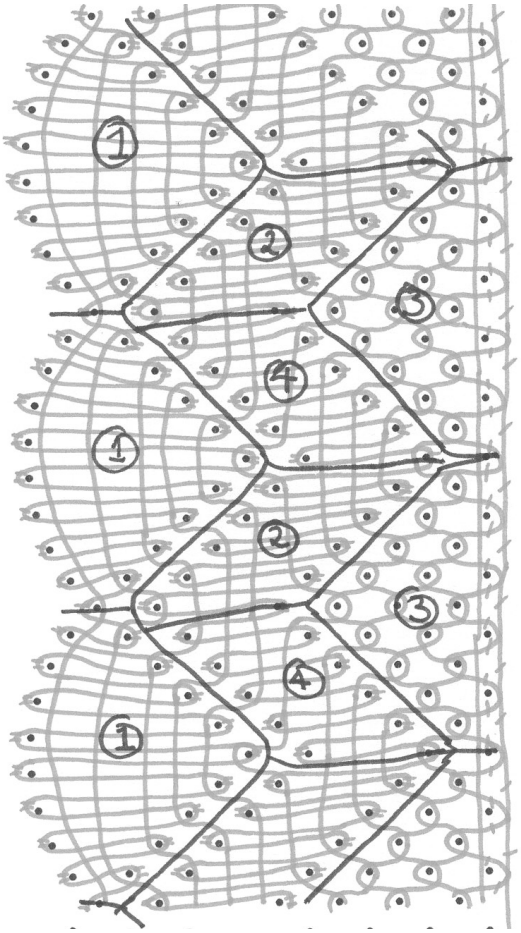
- a fan
- a trail that weaves right then left then right again
- an area of ground with a footside.

As we know we need pairs from one area of a pattern to work the next. This starts to give us a working order:

- fan
- trail (right to left)
- ground and footside
- trail (left to right)
- next fan etc

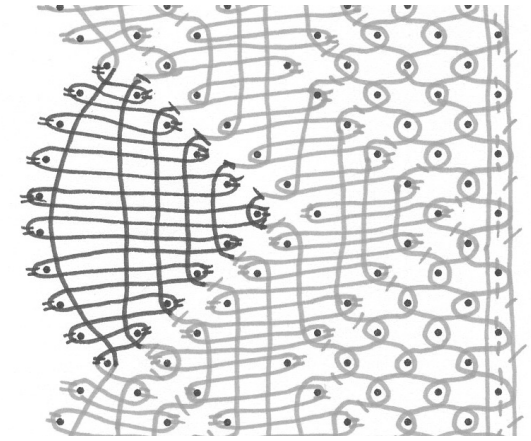
Below these areas have been marked on the diagram.

Let's look at each of the sections above in turn to help



our understanding. To make it a bit easier some of the lines in the next few diagrams are in grey and some in black. The black lines are the ones I'm talking about at each stage, the grey lines are the remainder of the diagram showing what is going on around the section of the diagram I'm looking at.

If you look at the fan you can see lines going into the



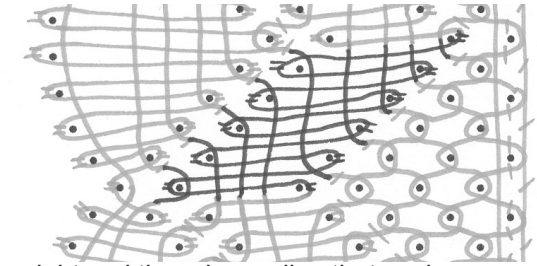
fan as it gets wider on the right, one line entering at a time, and you can see lines coming out of the fan as it gets narrower on the right with another line working back and forth across and around the pin holes.

As the lines all represent pairs the diagram shows that one pair comes in at each pin hole as the fan gets wider on the right, one pair leaves as the fan gets narrower on the right. The line going back and forth and around the pin holes is the worker pair. Note the dashes at the pin holes on the worker line (pair), the worker pair is twisted in the work as we put the pin in (total of two twists).

If you start at the top pin hole of the fan and count the crosses the working line makes you will count two before the pin, so you work two stitches, twist twice then pin. Following the working line as it continues to the headside pin, you will again count two crosses before the pin, so you work two stitches, twist twice then pin. Again, if you continue the working line as it works towards the trail, you will count three crosses before the pin, so you work three stitches, twist twice then pin. This means you have taken in a pair from the trail.

Continue following the crosses the worker makes on each row to find how many stitches you need to work on each row to the end of the fan.

Next is the diagonal trail, again you will notice that lines enter the trail area as the size increases on the left and lines leave the trail area as the size decreases

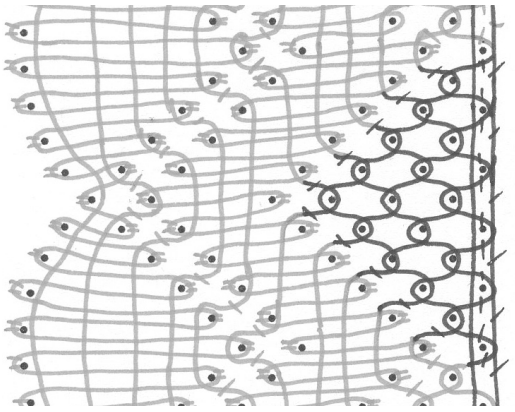


on the right and there is one line that works across the row and around the pins, again with twists at the pins.

Again as the lines all represent pairs the diagram shows that one pair comes in at each pin hole on the left hand side and one pair leaves at each pin hole on the right. The line going back and forth and around the

pin holes is the worker pair. Again note the dashes at the pin holes on the weaving line (pair). Note that the lines entering from the fan all have dashes representing a twisted pair going into the trail similarly for those lines leaving the trail.

The next section is the ground and the footside. The diagram shows at each ground pin there is a cross above the pin, a pin then the same lines enclose the pin with another cross. Or on a lace pillow: stitch, pin, stitch.



Depending on the actual stitch we are using in the lace the ground may look identical to the diagram, for example if we were working cloth stitch and twist. If we were using half stitch, pin, half stitch the effect in the lace would look very different but the diagram is still the same (other than it would be in a different colour) but we would still be doing stitch, pin, stitch.

At first sight the footside edge looks as though it might not be right:

You might think the diagram is saying 'go to the edge make a stitch, pin, make another stitch then travel back'.

By viewing the diagram slightly differently it becomes clear that actually there is a single cross at the pin (a single stitch) and we get the

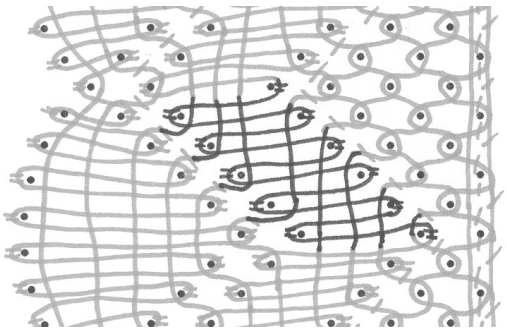
normal alternating edge that we are used to:

When we tension the lace on our pillow it does look

as though we have a straight rather than wobbly edge which is why the footside is drawn straight on working diagrams. It's also much easier to draw.

The final part of the diagram is the next section of the trail.

On the right hand side lines from the ground travel into the trail on the right and leave on the left, one at each pin hole with a line working backwards and forwards between the pin holes. So in our lace we would take a pair into the trail at each pin hole on the right as the trail moves to the right and leave one pair out at each



pin hole on the left.

Once this section of trail has been completed we are back at the fan, have completed a repeat and are ready to work the next fan.

All diagrams can be followed in this way (even the Binche diagram that appeared on page 42 of *Lace 134*). The trick is understanding what is going on in the diagram and not to look at the whole diagram in one go - that is enough to confuse anyone. Instead look for the individual features, work out what is happening in this small area and how the lines (pairs) come in from the neighbouring features and the order in which you need to work the features.

Next time I will look at colour diagrams, the difference between the two main systems and their pros and cons (although if you are working from a pattern you don't have a lot of choice).