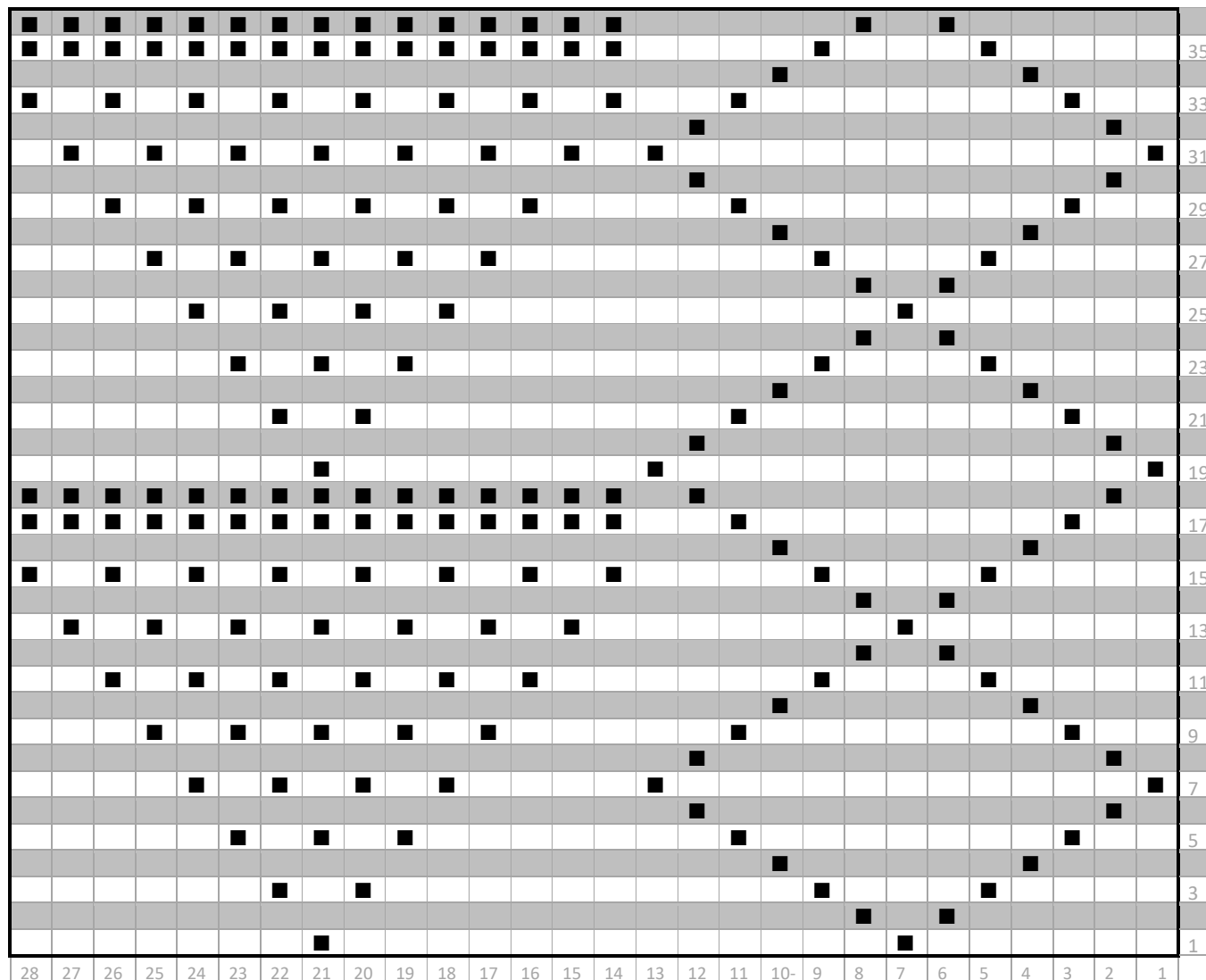
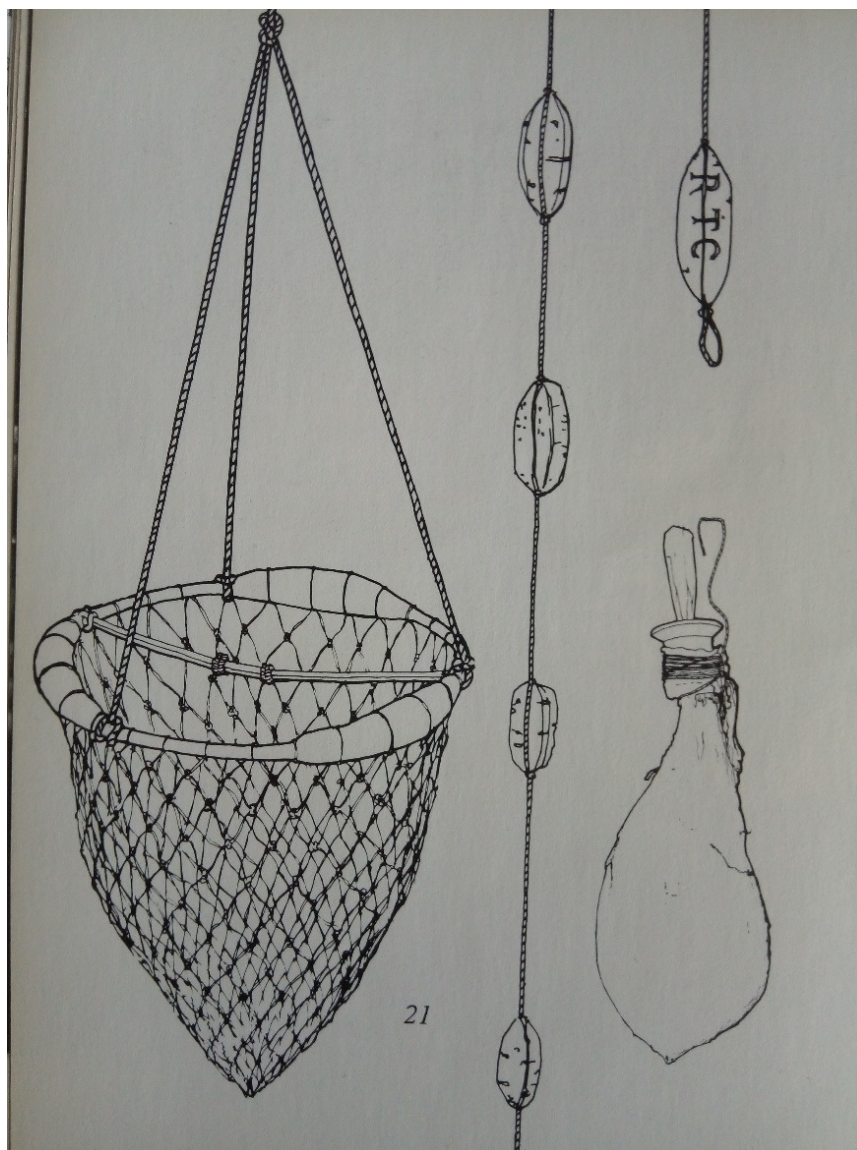


GP39 Esther Nurse hoop nets and meshes

■ = purl stitch on the right side (knit stitch on the wrong side)





This pattern is a beautiful and subtle version of the 'tesselated' patterns that Sheringham (and Esther Nurse) are noted for. Tesselated means a pattern of repeated motifs that are not confined to defined columns as most ganseys are. So, what do the curious triangles and bars represent? They are not an obvious pattern to create, as they are not simple geometric shapes. The answer I think lies in the habit of incorporating motifs from the fishermen's lives into gansey patterns – ropes, meshes, lightning, hailstones, flags and so on. Until the crab pot was introduced to the Norfolk coast from Yorkshire around 1863, crabs were caught using a primitive device called a hoop net. This is a simple ring of iron with three swellings created from lead to give it extra weight. On to this ring was braided a conical bag-shaped net of lightweight 'pot stuff'. Then light ropes joined the hoop to a single long rope (or tow') with corks at intervals, that led from the seabed to the surface, where a pig's bladder and cotton reel float acted as a small marker buoy. Although less efficient than the crab pots, they remained in limited use into the twentieth century.

In the illustrations you will see the resemblance between the Esther Nurse's motif and the hoop net. The pattern of purl and knit imitates the meshes and knots of the bag-like net beneath

Illustration: fig 21, p 20 in 'Crabs and Shannoeks' by Peter Stibbons, Kitty Lee and Martin Warren, published by Poppyland Publishing, 1983.



Test swatch by Val Smith 4-ply Signature by West Yorkshire Spinners on size 16 needles, with a knitting sheath (shield), 12 stitches per inch. Here the very net-like moss shows up more clearly than in the dark wool used in the original.

The pattern for this gansey was first published by Michael Harvey, who had the actual gansey in his private collection. The Dover edition of Gladys Thompson's *Patterns for Jerseys Guernseys and Arans* (1979) was expanded to include a chapter on Norfolk ganseys contributed by Michael Harvey. He also showed a black and white photograph of this gansey and placed a chart alongside. In the text he makes no actual claim that the chart is of the gansey in the photograph, but most readers will probably assume that it is. However, most unfortunately, the chart is wrong in multiple ways. The most glaring issue is that the pattern repeat in the chart has one

diamond mesh to one triangle (more in that element below). Whereas the gansey in the photograph has three diamond meshes to two triangles. The second discrepancy is that the triangle of 'moss' stitches is charted as single moss, whereas in the photograph it is a more complex version of moss stitch (see the chart above). The triangles are also too narrow (13 stitches wide as opposed to 15) and the pattern repeat is too small, at every 12 rows as opposed to the correct interval of 36.

The chart by Harvey has however been used by several authors (e.g. Michael Pearson, Beth Brown Reisel, Rita Taylor et al) and has either been reproduced, more or less, as Harvey showed it or has been incorporated into modern designer patterns. No one it seems has looked hard at the photograph and worked out what Esther Nurse actually knitted in the photographed gansey, verified by knitted swatches, until now. And none of them (except Compton) creates a shape which represents a hoop net. All the crabs would have escaped from the shallow bag net created by single moss stitch!

Researchers in Sheringham have postulated that there were two similar ganseys and that Harvey photographed one and charted the other. The only evidence for this comes from the considerable number of differences between Harvey's chart and the photograph. Sadly we never got to meet Harvey before his death in February 2019 but his collection has been acquired by the Sheringham

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Museum Trust and there is no second gansey amongst it with the design that Harvey charted. Michael Pearson's 'Traditional Knitting: Aran, Fair Isle and Fisher Ganseys' reproduces photographs and corresponding charts of two gansey patterns that are also featured by Michael Harvey in Gladys Thompson (Mrs Bishop's gansey of 1900 and Esther Nurse's of 1950). Both were in Michael Harvey's private collection and it is not thought that Pearson ever saw them. Harvey states that the Esther Nurse gansey is 400 stitches (around the body) and knitted very finely at 12 stitches and 17 rows to the inch. Pearson also states that this pattern was finely knitted. However, Pearson's photograph is of a gansey knitted in much coarser wool with only 260 stitches around the chest at about 7 or 8 stitches per inch (five columns of hoop nets and six columns of net mask on the front and the same on the back). This is so uncharacteristically coarse for a Sheringham gansey that both photographs must have been of ganseys knitted specifically for Pearson's book (he had many knitted for the purpose of the book). Thus, the photographic evidence does not support the existence of a second Esther Nurse gansey with this pattern of hoop nets to netmask with a ratio of 1:1. Rather, Pearson's chart is similar to (but not exactly the same as) Michael Harvey's and most likely derived from it. Hence the errors in Harvey's chart were perpetuated, and even compounded.

The pattern reproduced in 'Sheringham Ganseys' by Rita Taylor, Lesley Lougher and Lisa Little is a variant of the Harvey chart, with one less stitch in the diamonds (6, like Pearson's) and hoop nets of a greater width at 17 stitches. The bag net below is single moss stitch which when knitted up makes a triangle of the wrong proportions – being too shallow. There is a corollary to these sizes: the repeat of the hoop nets is one stitch greater than the repeat of the meshes, causing a gradual offset of one row at every repeat. The colour photograph of the whole gansey on the previous page demonstrates that this is incorrect, as there are 18 meshes and 12 hoop nets up the yoke, in the exact ratio of 3:2.

The only author to have correctly charted the pattern was Rae Compton in Traditional Guernsey and Jersey Knitting in 1985, although I had no copy of her book to hand and had overlooked it when doing this chart in 2019. She saw that the hoop nets needed to be deeper, were not single moss stitch and repeated with the meshes in a ratio of 2:3. So having forgotten about Compton, by trial and error and numerous test swatches, Val Smith and I confirmed the true pattern that gives the required texture. We worked from photographs at first but when we finally got to see the original (when it was acquired by Sheringham Museum after Michael Harvey's unfortunate death) we were astonished by just how fine the knitting is and so how small the pattern actually is. It astonishes us every time we see it. The chart given at the top here has the correct ratio of hoop nets to meshes of exactly 3:2; the meshes are 13 stitches wide and the hoop nets are 15 stitches wide by 18 high. The infill of 'moss' created by k1 p1 rows with knit rows in between creates the correct effect and the detail of the plain row beneath the top bar is essential too.

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A very similar motif, a much larger inverted triangle and without the heavy bar across the top, was photographed by Lewis Harding (1807-1893) on Richard Seale, a fisherman in Polperro, in the second half of the 19th century. Could Esther Nurse have known of this 'hoop net' pattern from elsewhere?

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