The seventeenth century in Britain produced a distinct and unique genre of embroideries; embroideries that were the work of women who have in general maintained, historically, a low profile. In recent years, with an increased 'female consciousness', attention has been given to these textiles, and much of what has been said is a matter of some controversy. The concerns of this thesis are therefore two-fold: to look at the women and their work, and in so doing to attempt to clarify some of the arguments surrounding them. No art form exists independently of its creators, and they in turn are the product of their society, so a section of this work is concerned with the place of women in seventeenth century society. Differences in this position from one period to another may indicate the reasons for corresponding changes in the work they created. Similarly, these attitudes and aesthetics do not spring fully fledged into a new century, so it was necessary to pick up the threads of the sixteenth century, and then to look at the trends that were to be more fully developed in the eighteenth century. The scope of the objects covered in this thesis is therefore wide; a major part of the study being concerned with pattern sources of the period, in an attempt to understand the true context of the embroideries in the general aesthetic of the seventeenth century. In doing so, one may also gain an understanding of personal concerns, economic changes and political tensions of the period, as they affected the embroiderer, as well as that of the economic and sociological power bases of the period – and in the seventeenth century the influence of religion on both.