Passementerie: tools, materials and techniques

A companion guide to the Mastercraft Skills Transmission film with master passementière Jessica Light

This guide goes with our Mastercraft Skills Transmission film on Passementerie, made with passementière Jessica Light and hand weaver Helen Fry. It lists the tools and materials you see in the film, explains the main terms, works through Jessica's planning example, lists the film's main moments, and provides direction to courses, bursaries and the Red List. It is a starting point, not a substitute for in-person training.

> **Before you start**
> Passementerie involves looms, wire, sharp scissors and glue. Take care with tools and wire ends, work in a well-lit space, and follow the manufacturer's instructions for any glue or finishing product. See the safety notes at the end of this guide.

About the craft

Passementerie is the craft of making decorative trims and textile embellishments by hand, including fringes, braids, tiebacks, rosettes and tassels. Jessica describes it as having two main areas; hand weaving on a loom and table (or hand) work; hand-making trims, tassels, tiebacks, rosettes and many other embellishments. There are a great many applications including fashion, costume, interiors, film and TV. In the film she teaches four woven trim structures (a cut fringe, a loop fringe, loops and lattices, and a picot) and two non-woven embellishments (tassels with bound heads, and wire ruffs). As Jessica says, the techniques are not especially difficult, but they are fiddly and need a lot of practice.

Red List status: Endangered

Issues affecting viability include changing design tastes, small market, lack of training routes or formal qualifications, aging workforce, competition from cheaper mass-produced products from overseas and range and technicality of skills.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Cutaway	A section of warp that is woven and then cut, to make a cut fringe with an even edge.
Dummy warp	A wire, stick or thread woven round to form loops, then slipped out. Used for loop fringes, loops, lattices and picots.
Header	The woven band at the top of a fringe. A longer fringe needs a slightly deeper header to look in proportion.
Picot	Small loops along the edge of a trim, formed over wires.
Reed	A comb-like frame that spaces the warp threads. Each gap is a dent. Passementerie reeds are very fine.

Term	Meaning
Ruff	A gathered frill made by stitching fine warp round a needle with wire.
Selvedge	Extra fine, strong threads at the edges. They keep the edges crisp and stop the warp from moving down into the fringe.
Shed and pick	The shed is the opening in the warp for the shuttle. A pick is one pass of the weft. Dead picks are plain picks, without a loop.
Table work	Everything done off the loom, such as making and attaching tassels.
Warp-faced	The warp threads cover the weft, so the weft does not show. This gives the trim structure and keeps it in place.

Tools and materials

Everything below is taken from the film. Brand names, suppliers and prices are not given in the film; see "Where to buy" at the end of this section.

1. Planning

Item	What it is for	Notes from the film
A very fine reed	Spacing the warp	Passementerie reeds are usually 20s or 24s (ends per inch). Measure the header width on the reed and count the dents.
Ruler or tape measure	Measuring the header and fringe depth	A "10 cm" fringe includes the header.
Pen and paper	Writing the weave notation	Passementerie notation is a shorthand, not a draft on graph paper. It gives the weaver everything they need.

2. Yarns

Item	What it is for	Notes from the film
Fine cotton, such as sewing cotton (20s, 30s, 40s)	Warp	Several ends are used in one place: about three or four of sewing cotton, or at most two of a 2/16 yarn. Anything thicker does not work well.
Fine, strong cotton	Selvedge	One end at each edge. Strong sewing cotton works well.
Rayon	Weft for a cut fringe, and tassels	Drapes well and is very slippery. The film uses 14 ends of rayon for the fringe.
Silk, linen, thick cotton, wool, horsehair	Other wefts	Silk and rayon drape; linen is crisper; thick cotton or wool is bushier; horsehair or other fibres can also be used.
Jute	Weft for a loop fringe	Sticky and hairy, so it grips and keeps the warp in place. Wool does the same; slippery yarns and very fine linen move more.

Item	What it is for	Notes from the film
Fine 2/16 cotton and a linen or rayon loop weft	Ground and loop wefts for loops and lattices	The ground is woven in a fine cotton. Each loop colour needs its own shuttle.

3. Loom and weaving equipment

Item	What it is for	Notes from the film
A narrow hand loom with treadles	Weaving the trim	Passementerie looms are narrow, with a very light, sprung baton. Plain weave uses two treadles, alternately.
Lease sticks and a cross in the warp	Tying on in the right order	Keep the cross at the end of the warp, not in the middle.
A reed hook	Reeding up	Used to draw the warp through the dents.
A warping board, or nails on the back of the loom	Measuring the warp length	Jessica rigs one up on her loom.
Small shuttles and bobbins	Carrying the weft	You do not need large shuttles. Fill several bobbins evenly, from each end towards the middle, so they are ready to go.
Sharp scissors	Cutting the fringe	Cut up through the cutaway gap.
Glue	Tidying the edges and securing	Used sparingly on the edges after the trim is off the loom, and on ruffs.

4. Wire, reeds and dummy warps

Item	What it is for	Notes from the film
A wire that does not bend	Dummy warp for loops	Set it a little deeper than the loop you want: for a 4 cm loop, just over 4 cm.
An adjustable reed, or a reed with dents cut out	Holding the wire	Adjustable reeds let you change the depth of the wire. Hook the wire to a lease stick at the back to keep it stable.
Two wires	Picot trim	One on each side of the header warp, in wider dents of a reed with dents cut out.

5. Tassels and ruffs

Item	What it is for	Notes from the film
Tassel warp threads (here, rayon)	The tassel itself	The number of ends sets the thickness. For a 12 cm tassel, cut about double (24 cm) plus a couple of centimetres.
Strong thread in the tassel colour	Tying the tassel head	Wrap and finish with a strong double knot, close to the head.

Item	What it is for	Notes from the film
A binding of fine threads (two or three ends)	Covering the tie at the top of the tassel	Wound round, going down, then pulled through. No glue is needed.
Two posts, or something to pin the trim to	Holding the trim taut while you work	Makes it easier to attach tassels.
A fine warp, a wooden knitting needle or dowel, and wire	Making a ruff	The needle size sets the size of the ruff. The film uses a fairly thick wire to start with and advises nothing larger than 0.4mm gauge.
Pliers	Finishing wire ends	Curl the ends inwards so they disappear.
A mirror	Checking your design	Holding work up in a mirror gives a different perspective.

Where to buy

A list of suppliers for fine reeds, warp and weft yarns, wire, shuttles and bobbins is supplied towards the end of this document.

A worked example: planning a 10 cm cut fringe

This is the example Jessica works through in the film. Use it to understand the method rather than as a fixed recipe.

Decision	Jessica's example
Fringe depth	10 cm, measured including the header
Header depth	About 1 cm. The longer the fringe, the slightly deeper the header.
Header width in dents	Measure 1 cm on the reed and count the dents: about 8
Places per dent	3, for a properly warp-faced header
Header warp	8 dents × 3 places = 24 places, with 2 ends in each place
Selvedge	2 × 1: one fine end at each edge
Weft	14 ends of rayon. Thicker fringe needs more ends: weave a few samples to find the thickness you want.
Cutaway	Reed the first place of the cutaway at the 10 cm mark, leave a small gap of two or three dents, then reed the rest. The gap allows for the weave pulling in.

Jessica's key tips

- Plan before you weave. Work out the notation from the reed, the header width and the yarns, so you know exactly what to warp.
- Always include a selvedge. It keeps the edges crisp and stops the warp from sliding into the fringe.

- Tie on each place with weaver's knots, using the cross to find the right ends. It takes practice but saves a lot of time. For fringes over about 4 or 5 cm, tie on to two parts of the roller and match the tension on both.
- Beat up firmly but lightly and regularly. Too little pressure leaves gaps, and uneven pressure makes the trim uneven. Beating also affects the tension, so keep checking it.
- Hold the shuttle like a pen. Throw it gently, slightly away from the weave in an arc, so you do not pull the weft in. Keep your movements in a small area.
- A cutaway gives you an even edge without trimming by eye. Check the depth by weaving a little, cutting it off and measuring, then adjust the cutaway by a dent or two if needed.
- Allow for retraction. Passementerie springs back like elastic, by up to about a centimetre. Measure before cutting, and consider leaving the trim off the beam overnight and measuring again.
- For loops, set the wire a little deeper than the finished loop, and do not pull the wire in as you weave, or the loops will be uneven. Lifting the wire by hand gives more control, and putting it in a shaft is quicker but less uniform.
- Join the weft at the back, through the lower part of the warp, so the join barely shows.
- For loops and lattices, plan the number of picks between loops, keep the shuttles in order, and always pick up the nearest one.
- For tassels, keep the head tight and neat, and bind it so the finish looks clean. Make one big cut, then tidy up with a second cut both done in one go.
- For ruffs, rhythm matters. Starting is the fiddliest part, so go slowly. Note how many stitches your ruff needs so you can repeat it.
- For design inspiration look at the world around you, at the shifting trends and draw influences from other areas. Jessica notes passementerie needs updating for contemporary sensibilities, and encourages people to use the techniques creatively and in new ways.

Key moments in the film

Timestamps are minutes and seconds, or hours, minutes and seconds.

Time	What happens
00:54	Meet Jessica Light and Helen Fry
01:53	The cut fringe, and choosing materials
02:59	Planning a 10 cm cut fringe: header and proportions
04:07	Measuring the reed and counting dents
04:46	Why warps are warp-faced, and choosing yarns
08:56	Working out the warp and weft
10:29	Passementerie weave notation
13:00	Tying on the warp with weaver’s knots
17:14	Reeding up and setting the cutaway

Time	What happens
23:39	Filling bobbins
25:15	Weaving the cut fringe
28:24	Throwing the shuttle and beating up
36:25	Taking off the fringe and cutting it
39:00	Allowing for retraction
39:42	Jessica's training with Wendy Cushing
40:29	Loop fringes and the dummy warp
42:53	Weaving a loop fringe
48:05	Joining the weft, and weaving with the wire in a shaft
54:45	Passementerie and London's East End
55:11	Loops and lattices
1:01:45	Weaving the lattice
1:11:19	Using a mirror, and Jessica's approach to design
1:13:16	Embellishing: making a tassel
1:19:39	Binding the tassel head
1:26:10	Learning tassel making and table work
1:27:17	Making a ruff
1:34:35	Attaching ruffs to tassels
1:37:17	Picot trim
1:45:33	Closing reflections: teaching techniques, creativity and the future of the craft

Safety and good practice

Please read

Wire ends, scissors and loom parts can cause injury. Keep wire ends covered or curled in, and cut and handle wire carefully.

Use glue and any other finishing products in a well-ventilated space and follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Take regular breaks. Passementerie is fiddly, close work, so work in good light and look after your hands, eyes and posture.

This guide summarises the film and does not replace professional advice or training. [Heritage Crafts to confirm this wording with Jessica Light.]

Take the next step

Watch and learn

- Watch the film: vimeo.com/heritagecrafts/passementerie

- Further reading: Passementerie: Woven and Non-Woven Techniques for Making Trims and Tassels, by Jessica Light (The Crowood Press, 2025). crowood.com

Bursaries and funding

- Heritage Crafts training bursaries: heritagecrafts.org.uk/opportunities/training-bursaries
- Endangered Crafts Fund: heritagecrafts.org.uk/ecf
- matchMAKER jobs and training: heritagecrafts.org.uk/matchmaker

The Red List

- Passementerie on the Red List: https://heritagecrafts.org.uk/craft/passementerie/
- The Red List of Endangered Crafts: heritagecrafts.org.uk/skills/redlist
- Browse all crafts: heritagecrafts.org.uk/skills/crafts

Film Credits

Produced, directed and edited by Dylan Howitt

Featuring master craftsperson Jessica Light, with hand weaver Helen Fry

Production coordinator - Finn Arschavir

Camera operators - Rosa Rogers, Finn Arschavir, Dylan Howitt

Original music composed by Alex Munslow

Title sequence featuring Nick Hand

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Suppliers

Bart and Francis.
Specialist yarns.
www.bart-francis.be

Denier Studio.
Yarns; deadstock and specialist
www.denier.studio

Devere Yarns.
Threads and yarns; wool, cotton viscose, metallic, silk
www.devereyarns.co.uk
01787 237237

George Weil.
Yarns; cotton, cotonlin, metallic, silk, fancy yarns.
Equipment; looms and weaving equipment.
www.georgeweil.com
01483 565800

Habu.
Yarns; natural fancy yarns.
www.habutextiles.com

Handweavers Studio and Gallery [The]
Yarns; cotton, linen, wool, silk, bamboo, Tencel, fancy yarns.
Equipment; looms, weaving equipment, tassel moulds.
Books.
Workshops.
www.handweavers.co.uk

Harris Looms.
Equipment; looms
www.emir.co.uk
01233 622684

HT Gaddum and Co LTD
Yarns; silk

www.gaddumandgaddum.co.uk
01538. 385888

JC Rennie and CO LTD
Yarns; wool
www.jcrennie.com
01779 871400

Leclerc
Equipment; looms
www.leclerclooms.com

Loom Exchange [The]
Equipment; second-hand looms and weaving equipment.
www.theloomexchange.co.uk

Louet
Equipment; looms
www.louet.nl

Lund Precision Reeds
Reed maker.
www.weavingreeds.com
01274 818390

Macculloch and Wallis.
Threads; cotton, polyester, silk.
Cords; twisted cords, 2mm coloured gimp cord [soft rayon covered wire]
Leather cords and throngs.
Ribbons.
Sewing equipment.
www.macculloch-wallis.co.uk
0207 6290311

Scottish Fibres.
Equipment; looms
www.scottishfibres.co.uk
0131 4453899

Welsh Weaving.
Yarns; cotton, wool.
Equipment; looms.
www.wonkyweaver.com

William Hall.
Yarns; viscose rayon, linen, cotonlin, cotton.
www.williamhallyarns.com
0161 4373295

Weavers Works.
Yarns; Cotton, wool, Tencel, bamboo, silk
https://www.weaversworks.co.uk
Contact to see what is available.

Weaveshed [The]
Excellent resource for all weave related subjects.
www.theweaveshed.com
Yarn Atelier.
Deadstock yarn. Various types.
www.yarnatelier.co.uk/

Yarn On Cone.
Yarns; various
www.yarnoncone.co.uk

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