

NON EAST MIDLAND LACE BOBBINS.

INTRODUCTION

For the October bobbin I covered the South Bucks bobbin family. This month I want to cover those bobbins that carry the names of other areas of lace making in England.

These are **Malmesbury, Downton and Weddesdon**. Of course I should add to the Honiton Bobbins, but they are a bigger topic and I will write on them separately on another occasion. I will briefly report on what may be called the **Suffolk** bobbin and also Carole Morris's two special finds of "**England's Oldest Bobbin**" and "**A Shepherds Bobbin**." I will also briefly stray into a peculiarly American bobbin that carries the name "**Ipswich Bobbin**."

DOWNTON BOBBINS

Downton has given its name to a particular kind of lace used for edgings and insertions. It appears that at least some of these might include gold and silver lace. The general type of lace for that area differed little from traditional Torchon and Bucks laces. It was made in Downton and surrounding areas which is quite close to Salisbury in the South of England. Those interested in Downton Lace are referred to Earnshaw.P. (1980) and other books on lace identification. A specific Downton resource publication is Hartley and Parry. (1991)



What is clearly different is the bobbins that they used. They are not unlike Honiton bobbins having a single head, a slim shank (though not as slim as the Honiton bobbins) which is characteristically tapered for to a point from the widest part of the shank which is approximately 3/4 inch from the bottom of the shank. The overall length of the bobbin can be from 3 inches to 3 1/2 inches. They are plain or variously decorated with a wide range of geometrical and artistic styles of designs. There are also names, dates and inscriptions incised on them. I have only one such bobbin in my collection and it is unfortunately a plain bobbin, but from the pictures that I have seen the decoration

appears to be incised in a similar manner to the Honiton bobbins. Again from what I have at my disposal there is a notable absence of turned decoration even to the extent of rings that are turned on the lathe which quite a few Honiton bobbins have. The colour on the decoration appears to be the typical red and or black wax which is introduced to fill the incisions (chips or scratches)

The oldest bobbin in the Salisbury Museum Collection is dated 1693. It is not what we would today call a typical Downton Bobbin. It is both longer and thicker and does not have the characteristic tapered point, the shank being quite parallel and snub nosed at the end. There are two other later examples of this style of bobbin. They are undoubtedly Downton in origin as their decoration is typically from that area. If one wants to speculate on its original design source, it has some similarities to some Spanish bobbins that I have seen. I have to admit that this is probably a little fanciful to suggest Spain as an origin.

MALMESBURY BOBBINS

Malmesbury is a town situated in the northern area of Wiltshire. Unfortunately I can not find any references to the type of lace that was made in that area, perhaps a visitor to this page could offer me information on Malmesbury lace if there is such a classification. (I have just got out Springett and they suggest "Point Lace" was made in Malmesbury.)



The bobbins are similar to Honiton bobbins in length and diameter and though most have a distinct, almost decorative collar to the neck, some bobbins do not have distinct neck at all. The shank is parallel and is squared off at the bottom of the shank. They have a single neck and on the whole they are plain. The most decoration they have is of a few inscribed rings and sometimes a short turned concave design just below the neck.

Unfortunately I do not own a Malmesbury bobbin but I refer readers to Springett C and D. (1997) for some good photographs.

WEDDES DON BOBBINS



Occasionally one finds bobbins that are not particularly distinctive from the main types above called by the names of the area in which they were used. A good example of this, though rarely used is Weddesdon bobbins. Springett tells us that "the Saunders Brothers were makers of South Bucks bobbins in that area, probably the northernmost area where these bobbins were made". Bedfordshire bobbins were used all over the East Midlands and this generic term has basically supplanted the name of Bedfordshire bobbins. However, some have put forward a case for the Bedfordshire bobbins as a distinct type of bobbin. In my opinion it is possible to say that, whilst conforming to the basic East Midland bobbin, Beds bobbins were thinner and more delicate in nature. I have not compiled enough evidence to back this up and I think the differences are so small that true distinction would be hard to identify in many cases. I do not have an example of a bobbin attributed to Weddesdon to show you, but Springett has pictures of the work of the brothers. Richard made rather chunky bobbins characterised by beadturned shanks (Catapillar) and shanks with multiple grooves. His brother Jonah was famous for pewter inlay and other designs produced by the brothers were loose wooden rings ,pewter rings and the above mentioned multiple grooves. Sprigett also quotes Elsie Turnham, who is quoted as saying that the Waddesdon makers preferred wooden bobbins over bone bobbins.



SUFFOLK BOBBINS

Geof Caulton wrote a most interesting article in Lace (26/16) on the finds of bobbins in the ceiling space of old cottages. He reports some 50 finds of this nature. These finds backs up the existence of a Suffolk Lace industry in the 17 century. The picture (though poor) that accompanies the article leave no doubt that the bobbins are Flemish in origin.

IPSWICH BOBBINS.

To include these bobbins in this article is technically incorrect as I am dealing with *English* lace bobbins, but they are so unique that I feel there is merit in their inclusion. Ipswich is in Massachusetts, USA. The town has a long history of lace making and it was certainly a well established industry in the 1700s. In general the types of lace made in the area is described as "English looking, and along the lines of Bucks and Downton" Cotterall (1997)

The lace may well be English looking but the bobbins are quite unique and unlike any other lace bobbin. Not so much as regard to their overall shape or size; they are about 4 1/2 inches long and approximately 3/8 in diameter, but they are very light and this is because they are *hollow*!



It is being hollow that is so unique. Many are made out of bamboo or reeds, but also they can be made out of willow and walnut, presumably locally available wood. It is not reported if those made from wood, as opposed to bamboo and reeds have been hollowed out. [I have made quite a few attempts to contact the museum and Marta Cotteral, but as yet have not managed to get a reply. If any reader has special knowledge of these bobbins, or can get answers to my questions on them, I would be very pleased to enrol them as "honorary researcher"!] They have an ill defined collar that leads into the neck. It is a single neck bobbin. They do not appear to have been decorated in any way whatsoever. The nearest comparable bobbin of English origin would be the Malmesbury. They have similarity in overall shape to the Malmesbury but is thicker, a little longer and, of course, hollow!

ENGLANDS OLDEST BOBBIN?



Carole Morris (1990) wrote a report in *Lace* (58 p28,29) about an archaeological find of a bone lace bobbin in the Gloucester area of England. The find can be dated as late

1600s or early 1700s. The bobbin is made of bone which is especially thick, 7/16 inch in diameter at its largest part and is 3 inches long. It is unspangled but has a remarkable double neck. The long neck is divided roughly into two by a second "head". This is certainly reminiscent of what later became a double neck of the standard East Midland bobbin. The shaft is covered with concentric rings and ends in small turned ball and a little knob on the end.



I have made a rough copy of this bobbin to include as picture in this article, but I must warn you that my "copy" is much thinner as I could not locate solid bone at more than about 1/4 inch diameter. From making it I can see that is much shorter than the original picture appeared to depict and it is quite light and of course is unspangled. A lot more work and comparisons with other lace bobbins, including continental bobbins must be done before we speculate any further, however the fact that it is not spangled contributes towards establishing when spangling began. The divided neck is a fascinating feature also.

THE SHEPHERDS GIFT.



Another bobbin that I have hurriedly made (at close to midnight) to enable me to illustrate its type in this article is the beautifully fashioned and decorated bobbin reported again by Carole Morris (Lace. 1990. 68.p 28-29) You must read her article to do the decoration justice and read a more complete explanation of the decoration. It is hand carved but remarkably round. It is single necked a slight collar and the shaft ends in a cove. Attached to it via a staple is a hand carved, chip decorated bead that is somewhat like a nut or other large seed.

The decoration is incised or scratched and depicts the shepherd and his wife, together

with sheep, flowers, a bird, a "sun" or perhaps a man in the moon, a heart and finally the initials EB and IF together with a date, 1795. It is speculated that the bobbin was carved by the shepherd and given to his wife. Possibly before they were married as the tradition was for the man to carve a bobbin for his sweetheart.

This has to be yet another unique bobbin.



OTHERS?

As I have said, the Honiton group of bobbins have not been included in this article as they deserve an article on their own at a later date. Having included the American Ipswich bobbin, I should really have included all those non English bobbins that had their origins in the East Midland bobbins that the missionaries took to the foreign lands. There are many examples of the results of East Midland type bobbins being made in these foreign countries, and they have naturally taken on the artistic characteristics of the country they were made in. The most frequent examples are those from India and Sri Lanka (Ceylon) Just one comment, these bobbins are not spangled, yet the English one are?! I have often wondered why this is when we consider that the English bobbins developed the spangle and presumably they made the same kind of lace as the English lace makers.

CONCLUSION.

I hope you have enjoyed this brief survey of the non East Midland lace bobbins. I must apologise for the quality of the illustrations as I do not own any of these bobbins (except the Downton) I literally went out into the shed at close to midnight and turned them in about 30 minutes, came in and drew the decoration on the Shepherd bobbin and went to bed by 12.30 am. I just think of how long that Shepherds bobbin must have taken to carve and decorate. I do not do *his* love and devotion justice!

If you can help with any of the queries that I have raised, or can add in any way to the discussion on these bobbins, please e-mail me.

Many thanks.

Brian

REFERENCES

Caulton. Geoff. **Suffolk Lace**. Lace Number 26 April 1982. p 26/16

An article describing the discovery of Flemish lace bobbins in Eye and the making of Suffolk Lace in that area. Illustrated with a photograph.

Cotteral. Marta. M. (1996) **The Laces of Ipswich, Massachusetts**. The Bulletin of the ILOI 17:4. Summer 1996-97. (:14-16)

A good article that includes quite good information on the bobbins together with a couple of photographs featuring the bobbins.

Hartley. Susan and Parry. Pompei, (1991).**Downton Lace: a history of lace making in Salisbury and the surrounding area**. Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum. The Kings House. 65 The Close Salisbury Wiltshire SP1 2 EN.

An excellent booklet on the Lace industry in Salisbury with quite a good section on the bobbins together with a picture of a good group of Downton bobbins.

Morris. Carole **England's Oldest Bobbin?** Lace. Number 49 January 1988

Carole makes a good case for the oldest bobbin. Line drawing of the bobbin.

Morris Carole. **A Shepherds Gift**. Lace Number 58 Spring 1990.

A description of a very special bobbin that Carole found in the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge. Fascinating.

Springett, Christine and David. **Success to the Lace Pillow**. Privately Published. C & D Springett. Rugby. 1981.

This book is at its best when discussing the makers of the bobbins. As the result of steadfast study, a number of makers have been identified either by name or by "letter" it also treats the inscribed bobbins well. Some valuable information on the historical approach to making bobbins. Not so much as other publications on the general treatment of bobbins.

There is now a brand new edition (1997) that is an expertly produced edition, with very good photographs and enlarged textual content containing new information as the result of their research.

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