

# NAMING TYPES OF EAST DEVON(HONITON) BOBBINS

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## Introduction.

Comparatively late in East Devon and Downton project, with the help of Pomi Parry, I was introduced to a very old style of bobbin. In fact, it turned out to be the oldest dated bobbin (1693) we had discovered up until that time. (Salisbury Cathedral)

This is one of the Salisbury bobbins; Whose copyright I acknowledge.



The next special bobbin I suppose I could say I "discovered it" even though it had been in the Fairlynch museum (Budleigh Salterton) for a long time. The point is that up until that time I had been under the impression that this style of bobbin was only used in Wiltshire when working on the styles of Downton lace. This was because I had only known of them as an exhibit in the Salisbury Cathedral. I needed to know more about them.

Then, as I started searching it became clear to me that there was a distinct possibility that all the makers in the South of England used this particular style of bobbin whatever their geographical base.

Let's have a look at it.

HM 1662. Oldest dated bobbin  
at 2019 v 2



*This is the Fairlynch bobbin*



*This is a trolley bobbin in the collection of a private collector.*

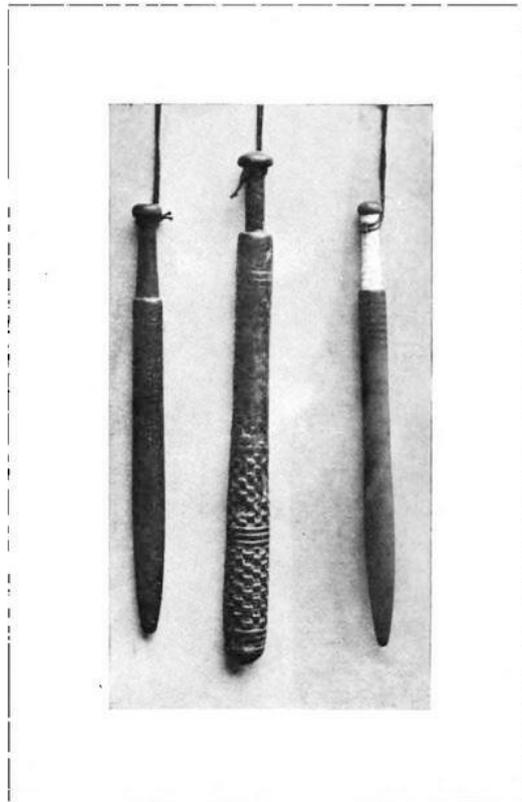
I have shared with you these three pictures to show that they come variously decorated but they all have a rounded tail (I have been known to call them "snub-nosed".) It is only recently when I was challenged to confirm the name of this bobbin style that I realised I had no confirmation of the name from historical sources. It took me three days of "research" [I sometimes call it "luck"!] to find the following photograph which is published in a book in 1908 by a contemporary of Mrs Palliser and indeed I believe edited Pallisers book.

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**Old lace**

**Margaret Jourdain**

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BEER, BRANSCOMBE, AND TROLLY BOBBINS.

The "trolley" bobbin is central.

At this point, I must pause to pique your curiosity about "Devon Trolley Lace". I have taken this paragraph from the Devon Lace Teachers review of Devon laces. ( <http://www.devonlaceteachers.co.uk/devon-laces.html> )

*Devon Trolley Lace is a lace that is worked in a continuous length and so is quite a different form Honiton lace. It was known that this was made in Devon, but it was almost a 'forgotten lace' until a chance discovery in the village school of Woodbury Salterton, in 2002. The discovery was a collection of hundreds of small samples of this lace and evidence that some of it were purchased by Queen Victoria from the lacemakers of Woodbury Parish. It is a fine lace, a Point Ground lace with its net ground, and only a few of the patterns are common to other British Point Ground laces.*

Carol McFadzean, has published two books on the topic of Devon Trolley lace, this is the latest: *Devon Trolley Lace. The Lost Lace of the East Devon Coast.* CarolMcFadzean.

### **Gimp Bobbins.**

This group of bobbins would be the next size down from the Trolley bobbins. They are a little longer than the standard bobbin but a fair bit fatter and they are quite pointed. I read a reference that said about the

trolley bobbin: refers to the single neck of a rather shorter, heavier bobbin called 'a trolley' - for gimp thread - a thicker thread, used for outlining the design.



This appears quite old with the colourful decoration worn away



East Devon Gimp, Aqua Fortis staining



East Devon gimp, HD

Here is a decorated example.

The East Midland trolley bobbins were distinguished by having one or more loose pewter rings around the shaft that "rattled" when they were used. The East Devon tradition often used the addition of a piece of red sealing wax on the head of the bobbin to more easily distinguish it when on the pillow.



East Devon Gimp. ? windows, sealing wax head

My note on "windows" refers to a decoration on the bobbin.

## **Plain sticks and decorated East Devon bobbins.**

This leads me to everyday bobbins used by the East Devon lacemakers. Generally, the lace makers called all their bobbins "sticks" whether they were decorated, plain, Gimps or Trolly bobbins.

They were mostly made of a darker type of fruitwood, though it is believed that one maker made a feature of using pale fruit woods for his bobbins.



Three examples of Honiton "sticks"

The historical typical stick would be one like the middle bobbin above. I tend to call it a "long and thin bobbin" but as the picture above shows other plain bobbins can frequently be found. It is rare to find the long thin stick decorated, but once the diameter of the shaft becomes fatter the more suitable it becomes for decorating.

*Just a note about decorators and bobbin makers that the Springetts book researched so well for the East Midland bobbins; but so far we (East Devon bobbin collectors) have no idea of who made or decorated the Devon bobbins. Gertrude Whiting drops a couple of names, but research has not yet confirmed these men as makers.*

I have written elsewhere on webdocs about the St Valentines tradition of the Devonshire lads carving bobbins for their sweethearts on the Feast Day.

When it comes to decorated bobbins I should mention that East Devon and Downton lace bobbin project is centred on this aspect of Devon and Downton lacemakers tools. It is because of this I will need to keep this section quite short as the project is far from complete.

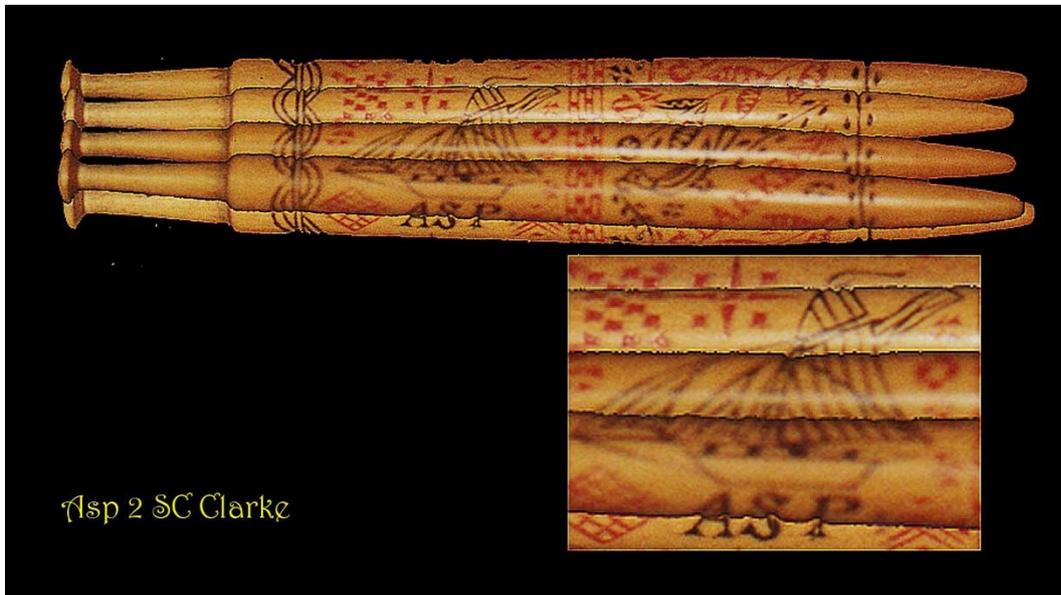
I should start with the most unique style that is almost totally associated with the Village of Branscombe. We call their typical design as "wriggled", why? I do not know!



*Branscombe wriggled bobbins.*

There is almost an infinite random allocation of colours and rings. This is probably the nearest example we have of standard sticks being decorated.

The remaining group of decorated bobbins becomes an extremely complex and large area of study. It will have to suffice by me offering a little exhibition bobbin pictures with little or no explanation. Sorry.



*Here is a ship. I have about 20 such bobbins in my database. I find these fascinating and are quite my favourite.*



*Here is a delightful SUN and fun.*



PEACE

*Here is a lady representing Peace. You can find others representing Faith, Hope and Charity, the three virtues.*

SMOKE ??



Possible railway train and carriage FILE ID = SP

*This one is quite different as it is a representation of a railway train.*



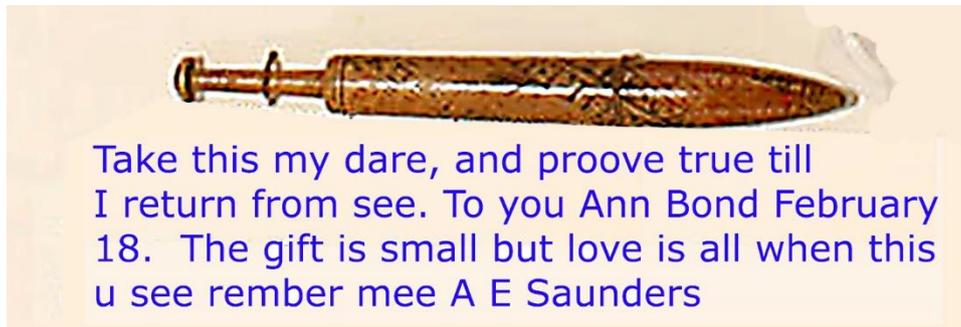
Top, Trolly bobbin  
below Gimp bobbin (soory the bobbins were  
in a plastc bag! Thus poor pic.

*I thought that I should show you that I can't spell "sooory"!! Smile.*

This picture I found on the net and it was in a plastic bag, (thus all the plastic stuff covering it) but I found it so interesting I had to get a picture of it,

It shows the size difference between the Trolly bobbin and Gimp bobbin that started this article.

Finally, here is a lovely inscribed bobbin with nice thoughts for you to take away with you.



Take this my dare, and proove true till  
I return from see. To you Ann Bond February  
18. The gift is small but love is all when this  
u see rember mee A E Saunders

Enjoy

