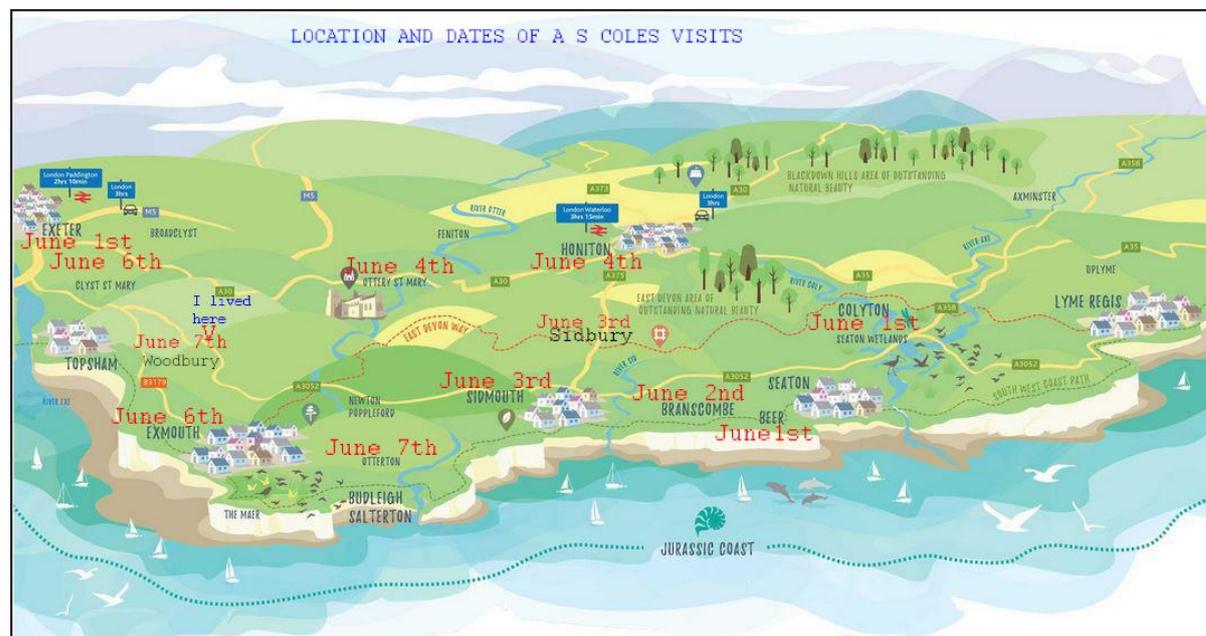


In the Footsteps of Alan Summerley COLE;

Brian Lemin December 2021



If you look carefully, you will see I lived just above Woodbury. I also live a while in Exeter.

My particular interest in East Devon Bobbins (Honiton) is not as the result of they being inferior to the bone and bespangled East Midland bobbins, but for the fact that they are understudied and written about. Another annoying personal matter for me is that as a young man I lived and worked within East Devon lace areas and at that time had no information or interest in these wonderful tools full of social history. I admit to being much more interested in the young ladies of my acquaintance at that time! Ah well, there is time for all things! Smile.

Along with Success to the Lace Pillow (C and D Springett) H D Yallop's History of the Devon Lace Making History occupies a permanent position on my desktop. It is in Yallop's book that I first get introduced to A S Cole, patron of the arts and a special friend to Lace making. (See brief biography at the end of this article) Yallop found an unidentifiable newspaper cutting album(05/11/1987)in a newspaper scrapbook that reported a letter pointing out the slow demise of the "beautiful Honiton Lace Industry". He also points out in his book (page 104) other quotations to support this reduction in lace makers making living from the industry and its possible causes.

Sir John Kennaway MP for Honiton took up this cause and Mr. A S Cole of the South Kensington Museum was appointed Commissioner to "Enquire into the condition and prospects of the Honiton lace industry". Consequently, he spent from May 31 to June 7 1887 in the lace making

area, visiting lace makers and dealers in a number of lace making areas and as the result of visits he issued a report to Parliament on March 20th 1888 to the House of Commons.

The list of Villages and towns he visited was attractive to me as I had cycled around them for some few years and had at least a passing knowledge of them. I thought how nice it would be to visit them, this time as a student of Lace bobbins and with more than a passing interest in lace and its social history. During one of my visits to the UK (a very long time ago now) I followed in his footsteps and had a most enjoyable few days in the narrow country lanes, open fields and now modern roads also.

The visits,

Cole first visited Mrs. Treadwin in Exeter on June 1st. She had taken lease on the house in 1816 for her extensive lace dealership. It included workshops and a showroom. (See following note)

Note: We have almost no information about bobbin makers and or their decorators for this style of lace making bobbins. One of the proposals is that the bobbins were made by a number of turners and then decorated in workshops for added value when they were sold. It could be that that one of workshop uses were for the decoration of lace bobbins.

In times past I have been critical of the Exeter RAMM Museum, however on the topic of Mrs. Treadwin they have covered her life and work very well. Start here:

(<https://rammuseum.org.uk/collections/collectors/charlotte-treadwin/>)

Mrs. Treadwin was a principal dealer in Lace in this area. The RAMM page introduces her as “Charlotte Treadwin (née Dobbs) was born near Dulverton, Exmoor. As a young girl she was apprenticed to a dressmaker and later learned to make lace.

Her great skill as a lace maker earned her a Royal warrant in 1848 – numerous royal commissions and prize medals followed. She exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the International Exhibition of 1862.”

I knew the Exeter Cathedral well when I lived in Exeter for a while, and indeed, now I know where it was, I recall the building too. I share two photographs of the building to enable you to create a mind’s eye view of the size of her premises and her business. It was impressive.



Mrs. Tredwin's premises



Older view of the same.

Mr. Cole introduces her to the MPs and places her work and reputation within a contemporary arena of the Arts and Education of the times. Her views on the decline of lace making are wide and reflect the lack of good schools of lace making. She emphasizes that the best work is done by those trained some 30 years ago and reflects that they are now scattered over many villages and towns around Exeter.

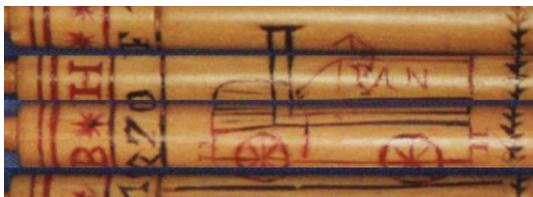
The causes of this decline she suggests the lack of regular practice, as the lacemakers just pick up work where they can and it is often done in a rush and the resulting quality is poor. Good design is often lacking. There is a need to start a high-quality lace making school in a center such as Exeter and offers her practical help to achieve these aims. Her business is built upon good standard designs and good quality workmanship which she personally oversees.

BEER

His next visit is to Beer again on June 1st (It is about 25 miles). I have fond memories of Beer some 60 years ago! What I do remember is the fishing boats all drawn up on the beach. I believe it is the only fishing village that did not have a harbour in that part of the Devon coast line. I recall scones cream and a cup of tea at a tea house in the Village. I also bought my first guitar from a male nurse who worked with me in Digby Hospital in the 1950s. In more recent times I had a very fruitful visit to the home Mrs. May Wakely (1912 – 2005) and old lace maker with so many memories of the past. It is a bobbin from her collection that has the engraving of a steam engine on it.



Above, various views of Beer



The Steam Engine Lace making Bobbin. Quite unique and rare.

Cole writes, 1st June. I visited Beer (about a mile to the west of Seaton), and called upon B., a dealer, who keeps a small grocer's shop. His daughters understand how to prick patterns, join, lace together, and make pillow-lace.

Currently he employs some 30 lace makers, whereas 20 years earlier there some 400 lace makers in Beer. He complained that the schools were

not teaching lace rather things like sewing and dressmaking so that the children could get jobs after they left school. Most of the things of a vocational nature he thought could have been taught at home by the parents. He also described the way in which the old schools taught lace, but also the competition with machine made lace and lace made in Europe was mentioned.

Mrs C another shop keeper thought that "book learning" had killed the lace trade. Here earning by selling lace had dropped considerably over the last few years and sometimes she sold no at all in a week.

The two other shops he visited were run by lace makers who bemoaned the lack of good patterns to encourage their meagre sales.

He concludes his visit to beer by mentioning: Upon my return homewards, I called at the vicarage to see Mr. Le Geyt, to whom Mr. C. E. Peek had given me an introduction. He would be glad to welcome anything that might do good to the village, and thought it might be useful to try "optional " instruction in lace-making in the school, and -encourage it by payment on results.

Colyton

In the afternoon I went to Colyton (about 11 miles) and I called at the chief lace maker "F" who had been in business for 50 years or more. His stock of lace was considerable but of lesser quality than he used to carry. When he was younger, he travelled widely over England for his lace business but he is now too old. He only has some 20 lace makers in Colyton yet years ago he managed 100 or so. A few of the older women were able to earn a shilling or two a week. Many had taken employment in brush making based on Axminster.

My personal memories of Colyton are sparse. I recall riding my bike through the village and pausing at the weir, but not much else.



Colyton Town Centre in the 1950s which coincides with my brief visit and memory.

Branscombe

On June 2nd I drove over to Branscombe. I pause at the word "drove" as cars (steam propelled) at that time were very rare indeed so I presume it was by horse and carriage. I feel as if I know Branscombe very well as the local historians of that village are very active regarding their lace heritage and most willing to talk and correspond about it. If I am to recall my cycling around Exeter etc. in the 1950s I barely remember that place at all but I do recall vividly having long conversations with people I met during my more recent visits. They were very enlightening. I remember one gentleman pointing out to me the house of a man who was currently making Branscombe bobbins. I "drove" over to his house but he was out and I waited a longish time for his return but really had to move on so I never actually met him!



Branscombe

Of course to me as a bobbin historian I remember Branscombe because of its unique style of bobbins that bare the name, "Branscombe Wiggled", the Wiggled presumably referring to a decoration that comprises groups of coloured concentric circles around the stem of the bobbin.



Branscombe wriggled with coloured bands and rings

The people of Branscombe presumably used these bobbins to make their lace, but as with most lace makers the photos I have seen shows their pillows with certainly East Devon styles of bobbins, but not all of them in the Branscombe style.

Cole visited G. who keeps the grocer's and general store shop here, and deals in laces as well, chiefly of the commoner kind, though she had sprigs and small objects of fineish work and thread. She was able to call upon some 30 or 40 lace makers from whom she buys quantities of sprigs and joins them together. Rarely are there new patterns and she is very afraid that the trade will die out. Even her own daughter has no interest in it.

"H", a second dealer in the Village has no shop and whilst she formerly employed 40 and 50 workers: now "scarcely half a dozen"! Ten years ago "H." would get rid of as much as 100 pound worth of lace a week, whilst now 10 pounds worth a week is a good quantity. She complains that the industry stagnates for want of new and young hands. Children are kept at school, and learn to grow "proudlie, and above work." "I think," she said, "our country will " come to feel it someday, if they don't now, what with our children being " put to so much schooling, and not brought up as they used to be to a trade " or occupation." She hoped lace-making might be taught in schools; but " then it would not be much use unless trade revived."



Branscombe, another view.

Sidmouth

Cole wrote, On June 3rd. I visited Sidmouth where I called upon "I" the principal lace dealer here. She does not, however, supply the trade, but deals with

private customers, preferring to produce as much as possible of the finer laces. She does not employ more than 10 or 12 workers now. She gave an interesting example of her trade fall off.

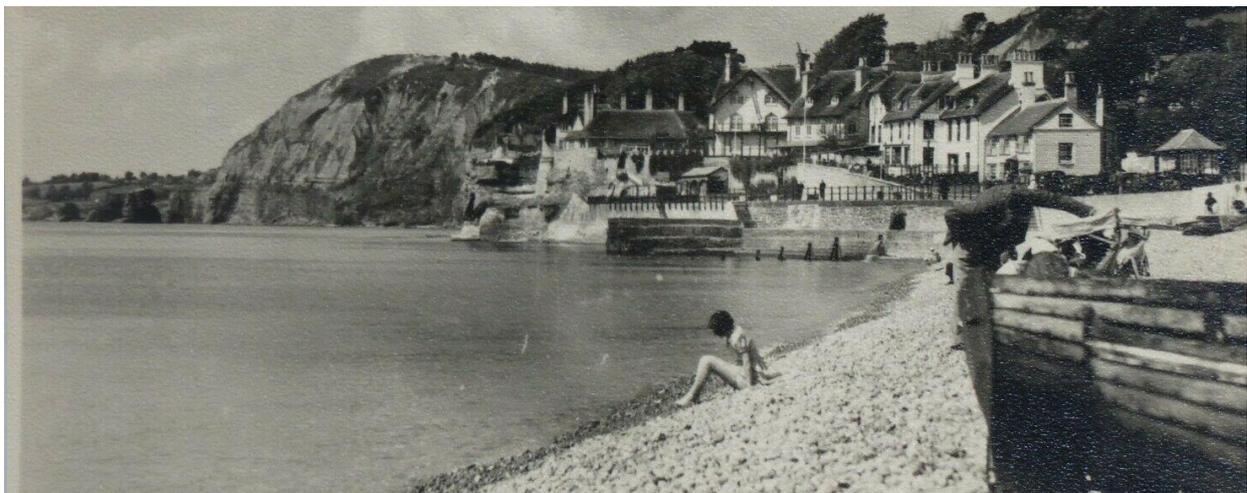
Three years or so ago, one of the best orders she had was for a flounce, at 50 guineas a yard. It took two years to make, and on its completion the workers had got into good training and organisation, so that had fresh orders for this class of work then come in they could have been well carried out. But if a similar flounce were now wanted it would take three years at least to make.

She is a prize-winner of note and feels that her work appears to sell reasonably well, but it was quality that made the difference. The more common laces are less in demand.

I have good memories of Sidmouth. I could possibly say I was a fairly regular visitor, but that was really only to the beach. My Australian friends laugh at when I tell them that it is a beach made up of large pebbles with barely a sight of sand! I tell them that there is no sand in your sandwiches, if you drop a hard-boiled egg, it bounces and you catch it and pop it in your mouth!

Of course, it was the pleasure of friends that added to the experience of the beach at Sidmouth. We young men would get a group together of ourselves and young lady friends and we had a ball! Those were the days when we had pleasure in mixed groups and innocent fun.

Sidmouth today is still an active "hobby lace" town and holds important exhibitions bi annually. I am not sure if this year was in fact held (because of covid) but I know they spent a lot of time planning it.



"Stoney" Seaton



Pretty Seaton

Sidbury

At Sidbury (just a few miles North of Sidmouth) I called upon "K". She has now given up business in lace and only keeps a small grocery and sweet shop. There used to be five or six lace schools here. Now, of course', there are none, and yet " K." thinks it would be a good thing if the children could be taught lace-making instead of leaving school " *to beg in the street and learn themselves all sorts of wickedness because they don't know what else to do.*" (Writers note... how sad!)

Honiton

On the 4th of June. I called upon Mrs. Fowler at Honiton. She is the successor to Mr. Davis (1), formerly lace-maker by appointment to the Queen. (*I will report this one positive report in detail. (Author)*)

For the Jubilee celebration the lace-makers of Honiton are going to form a procession, and already over 100 have sent in their names for this purpose. Mrs. Fowler thinks there must be at least 150 in the town. None are under thirty years of age. No children are being taught. She thinks that not less than three hours a day's practical instruction would be effective in teaching the elder children in an elementary school to make lace, though two hours would do for the younger ones. The work made with coarser threads comes from the neighborhood. Mrs. Fowler pricks all her patterns for the best work. She showed me a piece of lace which she is copying for a lady from a Brussels mixed pillow and needlepoint lace. She employs off and on some 70 workers;

fifteen years ago, she kept 200 at work. Mrs. Fowler considers that a chief cause of the failure in the lace trade is connected with the unwillingness of people to believe that Honiton lace cannot be of patterns and quality different from, and superior to, those of a certain character. Laces of this certain character, commonly known as Honiton, do not fairly represent the capabilities of the industry; they are in small demand and not fashionable. But if new patterned lace made with finer thread is produced, the name Honiton seems to bar it from the market; though if it be called by a foreign name it takes. Mrs. Fowler thinks this is unfair, and instanced how in 1871 the judges at an agricultural show put aside a piece of lace 'she submitted, to which they would otherwise have given a prize, because they were convinced it could not have been made at Honiton. Mrs. Fowler says she offered to make the lace before the judges: they declined and would not be convinced. Some months after the exhibition was over, she was offered a prize for the work, which she then, of course, refused.

Ottery St Mary

From there I went to Ottery St Mary's (about 6 miles) and there I saw "L". She too had a sorry tale to tell with the reduction of her workers from 300 to about 6 over a 15-year period. There was a lace school with some 50 students and now nothing. The gentry in the district did a little for the industry by procuring orders for lace. At that time a lace dress was made here, or rather parts were made here, in 14 skip thread, for the Princess Beatrice " L." described the pattern as one with no " reality " in it, " nothing of sprigs and flowers."

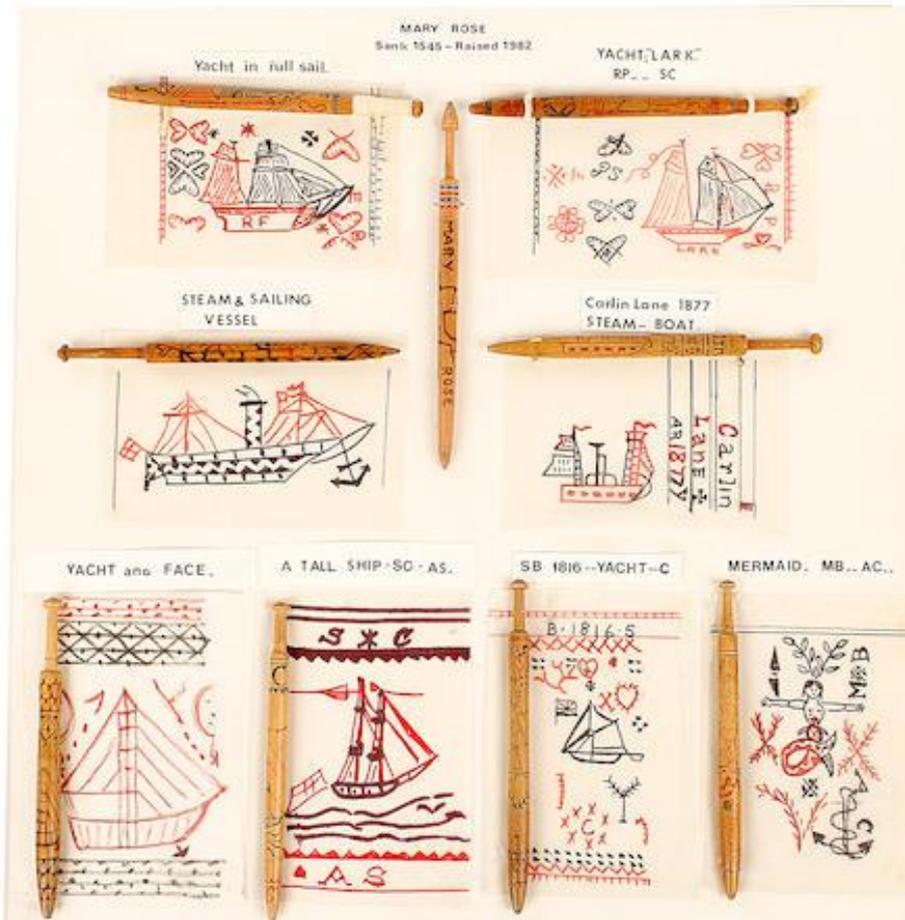
I love Ottery St Mary. I bought most of my period colour postcards of East Devon there including a postcard of hand drawn ships that are inscribed upon bobbins. I really prize them. It is hard for me to say but I think the town is a visitor's paradise with so much to see and do. As a young man I was very interested in the old Mill and the mechanics of its function, but I think this town is the prettiest of all my memories.



The unique Mill and pond



Ottery St Mary.



Some Boats depicted on bobbins in East Devon

EXETER

On Monday 6th June, I went to Exeter en-route to Exmouth, and again called at Mrs. Treadwin's, and had a considerable conversation with her. She is much averse to the purely literary training in Elementary Schools^ . and seems to look upon the establishment of technical schools, in which children will be taught lace-making, as a thing of the immediate future.

If the law would allow, she herself would start a lace school but argues that the provision of technical schools where lace may be taught is probably the best direction to take. She herself is still active in the industry and explained to me how she paid various people in parts of the lace making industry that she employs. The problem of new lace designs and the skill of lace designing was raised also.

EXMOUTH

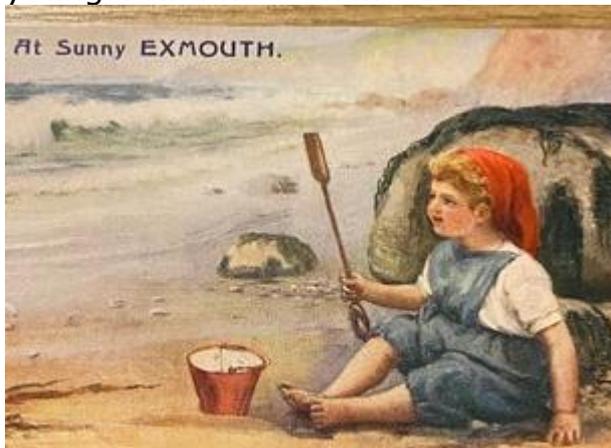
After leaving Exeter, I went to Exmouth, (about 9 miles) and called on a lace-dealer, " M." She stated that lace-making is the staple industry of the district all about Exmouth. Its failure has caused the bitterest distress. Formerly

there were 20 lace schools in the town. Now there are none. Factory regulations and School Board rules have greatly helped to get rid of them. The present 100 workers or less in the town are merely old workers. Machine laces have no doubt helped towards killing the trade.

" M." has taken several prizes at the Bath and West of England Shows and at other exhibitions. She makes up her own patterns and pricks them for the workers. Sometimes she induces a visitor to give her a drawing, at others she adopts patterns, sprigs, &c., from wall papers, tablecloths, and "Anything." She has sold a little lace lately, and has a good order in hand for a flounce, the sprigs for which are being worked in the district. She will eventually see to their being joined together. The flounce is to cost 25 I. a yard.

The poverty she says is considerable. She keeps as many workers going as she can afford to, chiefly at half-time. She also mentioned black silk pillow-lace. It has recently become a branch of the industry to fill in a needlepoint net between the sprigs. The needlepoint workers get a higher rate of pay than that of the pillow-lace workers. They belong to a better class and are thriftier.

My own memories of Exmouth are working at a hospital there that specialised in children and young people, I was only (I think they called it a Hospital for the Mentally Handicapped) there for a few weeks, but I also played their hospital quite a few times in the intra-hospital soccer league over the following years. We always lost to them as their team was much younger and fitter than ours!

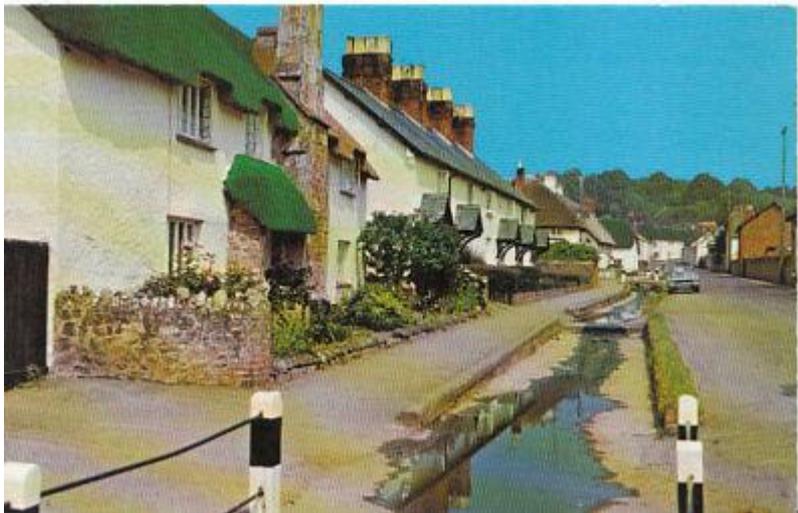


No! I am not that old!

OTTERTON

On the 7th June I left for Otterton, where I called upon " N." She said business had never been so bad as it is now. There are nearly 200 workers in this village, of whom barely a fourth are at work. The scenes of woe are depressing and frequent. " N." keeps a grocery shop, and the workers come in and cry to have their lace sprigs taken by her and goods given in exchange; but she says this state of things cannot go on, and she will have to shut up her shop and leave the place, unless

some amelioration sets in. There used to be a good trade with the North of England, but this has been destroyed, probably by Nottingham machines and foreign laces. She finds no signs of revival anywhere. "O." said he is the oldest lace trader in the neighbourhood of Otterton, He had a large business with the wholesale merchants and buyers. He spoke of the unfair pressure exercised upon the home industry by foreign duties on English lace. He noticed the other day that the papers announced that the Queen had ordered a flounce. That at once gave an impulse. Ladies were looking into the shops for Honiton lace, and a sale for little pieces was set up. It is this sort of patronage, he thinks, which revives trade.



Period view of Otterton

WOODBURY

At Woodbury, (about 5 miles) which I next visited, "P.," who keeps a grocer's shop and deals in lace, said the distress was great. People had not been trained to any other industry but lace-making, and they beg the dealers and anyone to take their work and keep them out of the union. "P." has about 30 makers at work, chiefly upon the sprigs for the flounce already mentioned in the Sidmouth notes.



This "something" like I imagine Alan Coles at Woodbury in his transport of those times?

"This completes my notes upon the condition of the industry. I attach the specimens for reference." Alan Cole.

[The rest of his report are his recommendations which you may read in the following URL <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100765101>

Click on "Full View"]

Cole writes: *•The suggestions I would submit may be classed under such headings as the following: –*

- I. As to perpetuating the Art.*
- II. As to a System of Instruction,*
- III. As to encouraging New Expressions of the Art.*

His report is quite short and synthesises the advice he has gleaned from his visits in East Devon. I think you will find it interesting reading and all his lace purchases are illustrated in it.

My personal comment relates to pre-WW1 establishment of a variety of Technical Schools that offered various aspects of lace and Lace designing (as well as design in general). Marian Powys, a Devon lace maker (Brother to the Powys Literary brothers) who went to America and created herself as (probably) the foremost Expert in lace in the USA at that time. She attended the Somerset School of Art (Taunton) which had formally opened in 1902. Later she went to the Yeovil School of Art, specially to learn design.

In some ways this reflects much of Cole's report and in her case in a very practical manner. However, the demise of Hand Made Lace continued to march on as indeed in our modern day we are finding that many

industries that were once of great importance are dying out. Sadly, inevitable in our times just as it happened in days of old.

I have written Marian Powys' "Lace Biography" in the IOLI Bulletin in two parts commencing with issue Vol 41 No 3 Spring 2021.

Note by Author.

I hope you forgive my nostalgic approach to the Coles' investigation of lace of 1888 with my time of living in that area as a young man who went there to get his first Nursing Training in the mid-1950s. I have truly never regretted moving to Australia but it certainly has been a handicap to the strange occupation (Lace Bobbin History) I have enjoyed since retirement. Frankly has only really been possible with the help of my Arachne friends; I can't stop saying "thank you" to you all.

Preliminary Alan S Cole, Biography

The following is only a starter document towards a more complete biography of Alan Coles. I fear there is much more work to do to do his life justice. He was clearly a person of the Arts who championed traditional Lace Making.

Alan Summerly Cole, 1846-1934 (*Gleaned from many web sources academic works etc. with the help of members of Arachne (lace list)*)

Nationality: English

Date of Birth: 1846.08.19

Place of Birth: Bayswater. London Middlesex

Date of Death: 1934.03.24

Place of Death: May 30, 1934 (86-87)

London, Greater London, England, United Kingdom

Identity:

Alan Summerley Cole was the son of Sir Henry Cole, K.C.B, a pioneer in design reform and the first director of the South Kensington Museum.

Marriage:

A. S. Cole (aged 32)married Margaret Elizabeth Clark (aged 19) (1859 – 1933) in March 1879 ,(or possibly on 7 January 1879)in the parish of Taunton St Mary)

They had four children,
Hilda (b. ca 1880, m. Jack Bennet),
Muriel (b. ca 1882),
Jack (b. ca 1884) and
Doreen (1901-1903).

Life:

Cole attended the Government Design Schools at South Kensington, and later became the Assistant Secretary at the South Kensington Museum. He was an expert in textiles, especially lace, and was the author of a number of catalogues on the subject. He wrote reports on the working conditions of lace makers in Britain.

He was the son of the museum's first director, Sir Henry Cole (1808-1882), and also served as Assistant Secretary at the museum. He published "A Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of Lace in the South Kensington Museum" in 1881, and in 1891 produced a supplement for specimens of lace acquired between 1880 and 1890. He was commissioned by Parliament to investigate the Irish lacemaking industry; He also wrote a report on the Devon lace industry and many important works on the subject and on lace in general. Cole knew many turn of the century Arts & Crafts leaders, and was one of the only people advocating lace in the movement.

He entered Charterhouse for a brief periods despite his father's reservations. As has been recorded, he spent his working life in the Department, as Private Secretary to his father from 1867 to 1873, and later in a variety of capacities. He continued to serve in the Board of Education to 1908. He was made C. B. in 1902, and he was a Member of the Council of the Royal Society of Arts from 1914 to 1918.

The science and art department were part of the government, and was based on the South Kensington site next to the museum that became the V&A. He was widely regarded as a textile expert, publishing monographs of textiles, silks, embroidery and of course lace. As a commissioner for the department, he went out to the lace counties and Ireland to report on the state of the lace industries there, and for the Children employment commission on children working and schooling in the lace industry in 1862.

He was a friend of Whistler.

In 1849, when Whistler was living with the Hadens at Sloane Street, he met Cole and his elder sisters at a children's party given by the Dilkes. Cole and Whistler remained life-long friends and correspondents. In the spring of 1876 Whistler began a portrait of Cole's father which was taken up again in February 1882 but never finished as Henry Cole died on 18 April 1882. The picture appears to have been destroyed. Later in 1876 Whistler and Cole played together in *Under the Umbrella*, an amateur theatrical in Kensington Town Hall. In this year Whistler also gave Cole a number of spontaneous sketches he had made of *The Blue Girl: Portrait of Connie Gilchrist* (YMSM 207) and *Arrangement in Brown and Black: Portrait of Miss Rosa Corder* (YMSM 203). In 1879 Cole helped Whistler plan a trip to Venice.

Cole's diary records many dinners and breakfasts at Whistler's house during the 1870s in the company of such persons as Frank Dicey, Cyril Flower, Louis Huth, Richard Monckton Milnes, Oscar Wilde, Jacques Joseph Tissot, Frances Leyland, Janey Sevilla Campbell, George Adolphus Storey and Theodore Watts, when they had discussed such subjects as Japanese art, Velasquez, Balzac, Sarah Bernhardt and spiritualism. In his diary Cole also followed the progress of Whistler's decoration of the Peacock Room at Leyland's home in Prince's Gate in the autumn and winter of 1876, and made records of the exhibitions of Whistler's pictures, eg. Fine Art Society in 1881.

[Alan Summerley Cole's Timeline](#)

Showing 7 events

1847	Birth of Alan Summerley Cole London, Middlesex
DEC 31 1879	Birth of Hilda Margaret Summerley Bennett
1879	Marriage of Alan Cole and Margaret Clark Taunton, Somerset, England, United Kingdom
1883	Birth of Jack Summerley Cole
1883	Birth of Ruth Jack Summerley Chaplin

1901	Birth of Doreen Marion Cole
MAY 30	Death of Alan Summerley Cole
1934	London, Greater London, England, United Kingdom

Contributions to [EB1911](#)

- "[Brocade](#)," in [Encyclopædia Britannica](#) (11th ed., 1911)
- "[Carpet](#)," in [Encyclopædia Britannica](#) (11th ed., 1911)
- "[Embroidery](#)," in [Encyclopædia Britannica](#) (11th ed., 1911) (*in part*)
- "[Gold and Silver Thread](#)," in [Encyclopædia Britannica](#) (11th ed., 1911)
- "[Lace](#)," in [Encyclopædia Britannica](#) (11th ed., 1911)
- "[Tapestry](#)," in [Encyclopædia Britannica](#) (11th ed., 1911)
- "[Textile-printing](#)," in [Encyclopædia Britannica](#) (11th ed., 1911) (*Art and Archaeology*)
- "[Weaving](#)," in [Encyclopædia Britannica](#) (11th ed., 1911) (*Archaeology and Art*)

Bibliography:

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Cole, Alan S., *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of Tapestry and Embroidery in the South Kensington Museum*, London, 1888;

Cole, Alan S., *A Supplemental Descriptive Catalogue of Embroideries and Tapestry Woven Specimens Acquired by the South Kensington Museum Between 1890 and 1894*, London, 1896;

Cole, Alan S. and Henrietta (ed.), *Fifty Years of Public Work of Sir Henry Cole, K.C.B., Accounted for in his Deeds and Writings*, 2 vols, London, 1884; Bonython, Elizabeth,

King Cole: A Picture Portrait of Sir Henry Cole, K.C.B., 1808-1882, London, n.d; *Who was who: a companion to Who's who*, London, vol. 3.

Alan S. Cole. Editor. Embroidery from the South Kensington Museum /

Alan S. Cole. Ornament in European silks;

Alan S. Cole. Ancient Needlepoint and Pillow Lace. Arundel Society, 1875. 59 pages.

Alan S. Cole. Weaving. Cambridge University Press, 1911. 16 pages.

Alan S. Cole. A renaissance of the Irish art of lace-making. London, 1888. Title no: 4.2.328 (1 mf)

Alan S. Cole. Cantor lectures on the art of lace-making. London, 1881. Title no: 4.2.577 (1 mf)

Other reports to parliament??? (Three at least)