

## **HISTORICAL METHODS OF ATTACHING A SPANGLE TO A BOBBIN.**

Brian Lemin October 2008.

*(Please be warned, you will be in danger of being bored stiff by choosing to read this article)*

### **Introduction.**

*This is quite an informal article. I am just chatting on about few things related to bobbin making, attaching spangles and even the origin of spangles! I have no proof whatsoever about the conclusions I have drawn, it just draws together a few historical facts, and then my imagination takes over. I would like to think it was "informed" imagination, but that is as far as it gets.*

### **What do I have to start with?**

These are the facts that I start out with.

1. Drilling holes in bobbins to enable spangling was, before the mid 1800s, a difficult job. I will tell you more about that later.
2. I have reasonable evidence that the introduction of spangles came about around the time of the invention of the Spinning Jenny to mass produce thread by machine. Others think like me too.
3. Amongst the bobbin makers at that time was Joseph Haskins who was listed in 1830 as a bead and bobbin maker. His son David followed in his father's footsteps and two other members of the extended family of Haskins family (nephews?) are recorded as being "Working Jewellers". One of them, Richard Haskins was a bobbin maker too.
4. Ladies like pretty things!

Well how ill I put all this together to make a whole? In a "convoluted manner" I am going to suggest! ☺

### **Drilling holes in bobbins for spangles.**

I was once at a modern lace fair when a very popular bobbin maker asked me if I would like to drill the spangle holes for him as (A) he hated the job and (B) he often did not drill them straight enough! I said "no" to him as I felt very much the same as him. Just imagine if we two bobbin makers found the job difficult and onerous, despite the modern machinery we had, how the early bobbin makers would have felt. Well, I tried it as they may have done.

Firstly I had heard that they burnt the holes in the wood. I heated up a nice darning needle with a candle flame and tried it. It worked after a time, but it needed many reheats to get it right through. I tried it with bone bobbins, and that worked much better. I also looked at bobbins for indications of burning around the holes and frankly failed. I did think that I saw some evidence in a few bone bobbins but I would not stake my life on my observations. From that little exercise I decided that they did not burn the holes for spangles in wooden bobbin but just might have used the burning technique for bone bobbins.

Well, how did they drill the holes? Of course they had a spinning device in the form of their lathe, but the chucks that they had did not lend themselves to fitting drills in them. Mind you that was not to say that could not have put together a drilling device. Somehow I doubt it.

I have already told you that burning a hole was probably not the method of choice. Probably what they did have was a drill like the illustration below. Clearly it was around at that time and was variously called a "hand/Breast drill"



Hand drill or breast drill



Watchmakers pump drill



Archimedean Drill

The breast drill is my best bet, but listen to the description of the watchmakers drill.. *"This is an ancient form of drill, capable of high speed rotation and therefore useful for drilling small sized holes in hard materials."*

That is a fairly interesting description. But as the 19<sup>th</sup> century went on the invention of the Archimedean drill came along. This was used by jewellers and it would seem to me that the bobbin makers would probably, have moved on to this form of drilling, especially those who were also jewellers. Enough about drills and drilling, but I am still going on with the theme of fixing spangles to bobbins.

I have to ask myself the question; when was the earliest move to spangling bobbins? I have had C and D Springett's book, *Success to the lace Pillow* for a long time, but it was not until I became interested in this question that I returned to it, as Christine and David started all the "bobbin history" stuff! It was then that I noticed a picture on page 34 (12.12) His caption is that some of the bobbins in the picture were "not" intended to be spangled! I have no idea when the penny would drop for me that this was probably the biggest hint that we have as to when bobbins became spangled. That is, during the time of Joseph Haskins. (More later)

The next question is that if the lace makers at the time of transition from non spangled to spangled bobbins had a lot of un-spangled bobbins and the drilling of such small holes was (in my opinion) rather difficult, especially for the lace maker and her family, who had no tools; what did they do to get spangles on to their bobbins? The short answer is that I have no idea! However if I am to speculate I would suggest that the lace maker gave a pile of bobbins to the maker when he came around and he drilled them, and possibly made the spangles too. But for me that is too easy, I have

to make it more difficult. I think that most probably that the bobbins which were spangled “at home” were those that had a “flat” tail and could have a staple put in them. It is comparatively easy to make small holes in the bottom of the bobbin and insert a staple. I suggest that this could be a DIY job. Of course, no matter who put in the staple, they were inherently a weak link and often failed I am sure. Then they got the bobbin drilled. I have only one such bobbin in my small collection that shows it was once stapled, then drilled, but I am sure there are many more around. You might like to have a look at your collection on some rainy weekend when there is nothing on TV and you do not want to get your pillow out. ☺ I have absolutely no proof of this and even now I can think of a few arguments that will shoot this theory down in flames..... but I have enjoyed thinking about it and imagining myself helping my sweetheart who was lace maker spangle her bobbins! (What a romantic!)

### Methods of fixing a spangle.

In “*Spangles and Superstitions*” C and D Springett identify 4 methods of attaching spangles. The “Staple” you have already heard of above. Here is an example.



By far the most common method was the “direct” or possibly “perfect” method. This is when the wire was passed directly through the hole in the bobbin. Like this.



One of the interesting methods was called the “Bent Pin”. Pins were available to the lace makers and bobbin makers and to use a bent pin as a first part of the shackle was using resources wisely. Should the DIY person be able to drill the hole then the next step might well be a bent pin. Here is one.



A similar shackle is the double loop which instead of a bent pin for the first loop another piece of wire was used.



and another “substantial” loop I found!



Before we move to the last type I should mention that the main reason for these types of shackles was so that the spangle itself could easily be moved from one bobbin to another. We tend to forget that for the most part of lace making history, lace makers were rather poor members of the community, and they had to be frugal with their equipment.

The Hinged spangle (“shackle” does not really fit this type) This is the most ornate, and skill full spangle that we see in the bobbin makers repertoire of techniques. It is where the spangle has its own hinge with the bobbin. Here is one.



These are mostly found on finely turned bobbins and add to their beauty and grace to a huge extent.

It is interesting that the spangles were not “tied” (sort of) to the bobbins. I\* have seen one example of this, but can’t find it in all my pictures at this moment. A bobbin collector friend of mine sent me this picture.



That spiraled wire with the single bead on it is, on the best authority, wire from which pins were made. I notice that it is very bendable and therefore, if that wire was available they could have avoided holes altogether and just bent the shackle around the bobbin in some fashion.

## Conclusion

Well, you have pretty well got most of what I wanted to say as I went along in this article. I do need to mention the Spinning Jenny. Linking the commencement of spangles to the invention of the Spinning Jenny (1770 though it was around a few years before that) “and” it happening during the lifetime of Joseph Haskins, (1779-1855) could be stretching it a bit, but it was a long time before the machine yarn was acceptable and for many years the two types existed together until the sheer economics of machinery produced yarn won.

We are left with the fact that only the East Midland bobbin makers used the spangle. To all intents and purposes all the lace makers in the UK were using the same yarn and did not use spangles (it is understandable for the East Devon makers whose technique uses “threading” the bobbins though their lace). The Continental makers did not embrace spangles either. I can’t think that the problem of the unwinding of the yarn was an issue!

There are all sorts of arguments about getting more bobbins on a pillow without spangles. Tension, the weight of the thin bobbins offered with spangles. (not true as far as I can make out being a non

lace maker)The “unwinding of the thread” must be considered even though most lace makers in the world did not see the need for it.

I think I am left with the romantic notion that that Joseph Haskins had an eye for beauty and business; and ladies love pretty things. I also have to mention the power of fashion.

In the end I think Joseph Haskins showed the ladies how pretty their pillows would look, how much more interesting sitting at their pillow would be, what a wonderful source of conversation and ingenuity the spangles would be. So they all joined in. 😊

Forget about research and investigation, it was just a lovely social phenomena that has lasted all down through the ages to the present day.

Enjoy the spangles.

Thanks to Diana Smith for some illustrations.

All the wanderings are all due to my “twisted mind”

Yes, I am a romantic at heart.

***I think any person who is even vaguely interested in Lace bobbins and spangles should have two books in their library. Success to the Lace Pillow and , Spangles and Superstitions. Self Published available from them via: email: [david@cdspringett.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:david@cdspringett.fsnet.co.uk) or better, their address is: 8 Strath Close, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 4GA) UK.***

***Their work has been the starting point for so many of my investigations. I see them as the “guru” of lace bobbin history.***

Brian Lemin. October 2008-