

## English Pillow Lace

## Part I.

By M. Jourdain

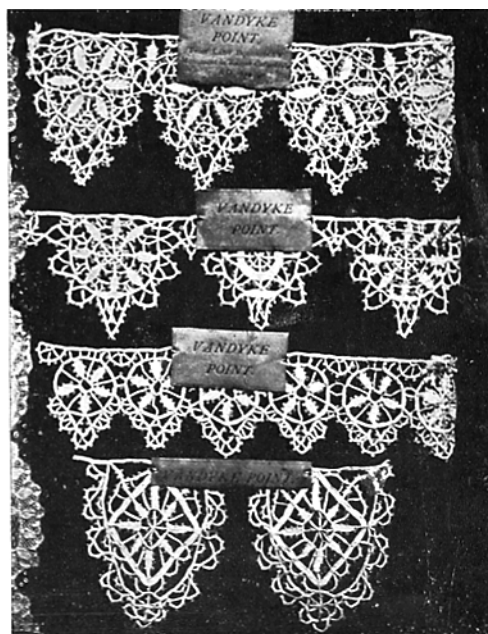
### I.—HONITON.

THE lace industry of Honiton is supposed to have been founded by Flemish refugees escaping from the Alva persecutions (1568-77), and names of undoubted Flemish origin occur at Honiton, at Colyton, and at Ottery St. Mary. An early reference to lace-making is to be found in 1577 in Hellowes' *Familiar Epistles of Sir Anthonie of Gueuara*, where he writes of seeing a woman "take her cushin for bone-lace or her rocke to spinne." Shortly before 1620 a complaint was made by the London tradesmen of the influx of refugee artisans "who keep their misteries to themselves, which hath made them bould of late to device engines for workinge lace, and such wherein one man doth more than seven Englishmen can doe," which would seem to point, not only to the national jealousy of the industrious immigrant, but to the introduction of bobbin lace, which is more rapidly worked than needle-point. The Honiton bone-lace manufacture, however, is already mentioned in 1620 by Westcote, and the often quoted inscription upon the tombstone of James Rodge, "Bone lace Siller" (d. 1617), in Honiton Churchyard proves that the industry was well established in the reign of James I.

Such lace as was made must have been similar to

insertion and vandyked edgings of twisted and plaited thread, which had their origin in Italy. Though there are no authenticated specimens of bone-lace, some early seventeenth century sculptured monuments bear well preserved indications of geometric lace, as upon the monument to Lady Pole in Colyton Church (1623), and upon another to Lady Doddridge (1614), in Exeter Cathedral, which may represent the local manufacture. The patterns of these have been copied by Mrs. Treadwin, and specimens are shown in the Exeter Museum, titled "Patent Vandyke Point."

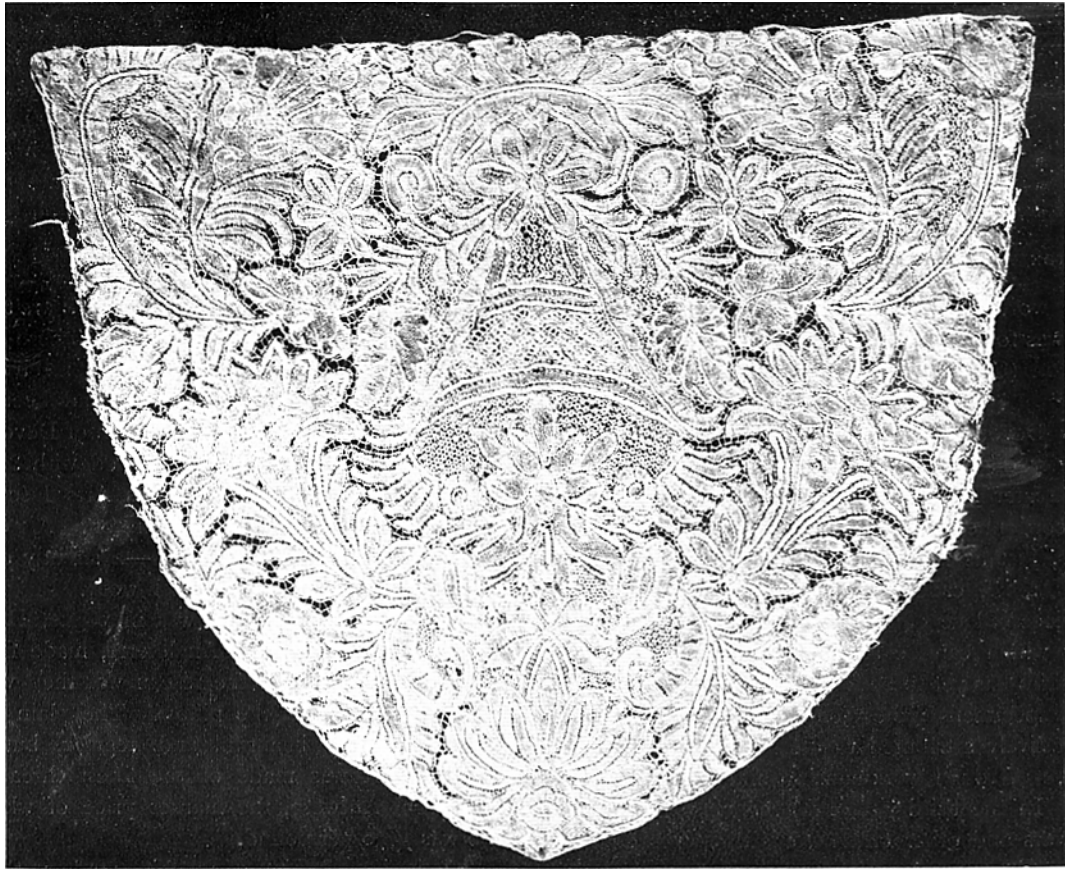
Pins\* were imported from France till about 1626, when the manufacture was introduced into England, and facilitated the making of lace. In 1636 the Countess of Leicester writes that "these bone laces, if they be good, are dear," and in the following year that they are "extremely dear."



HONITON "PATENT VANDYKE POINT" IN IMITATION OF 17TH CENTURY GEOMETRICAL LACE (EXETER MUSEUM)

\* In 1483 the importation of pins into England was prohibited by Statute. In 1540 Queen Catherine received hers from France, and again in 1543 an Act was passed providing that "no person shall put to sale any pinnes but only such as shall be double-headed, and have the heads soldered fast to the shank of the pinnes, well smoothed, the shank well shapen, the points well and round filed, canted, and sharpened." To a large extent the supply of pins was received from France till about 1626, in which year the manufacture was introduced into Gloucestershire by John Tilsby. His business flourished so that he soon gave employment to 1,500 persons. In 1636 the pinmakers of London formed a Corporation, and the manufacture was subsequently established at Bristol and Birmingham.

## English Pillow Lace



HONITON PILLOW LACE 18TH CENTURY PROBABLY DEVONSHIRE (VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM)

From a petition sent to the House of Commons in 1698, when it was proposed to repeal the last preceding prohibition of foreign lace, we learn that "the English are now arrived to make as good lace in Fineness and all other respects as any that is wrought in Flanders." Devonshire lace, indeed, must have followed much the same development as did the Flemish. It was, however, on a much smaller scale, and far less was exported. The Flemish "send it to Holland, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, France, Spain, Portugal, etc., whereas we make it chiefly to serve our own country and plantations."

In the diary of Celia Fiennes, who travelled through England in the time of William and Mary, Honiton is again compared with Flemish laces. At Honiton "they make the fine bone-lace in imitation of the Antwerp and Flanders lace, and indeed, I think it as fine: it only will not wash so fine, w<sup>ch</sup> must be the fault in ye thread."\* In the late eighteenth century in an old diary the lace trimming the wedding gown of Lady Harriett Strangeways (1799) is described as "Brussels Honiton."

\* *Through England on a side-saddle in time of William and Mary.*—Celia Fiennes.

In the early eighteenth century lace-making claimed, when resenting a proposed tax, to be the second trade of the kingdom; but its importance was much exaggerated. It was, however, widely spread, and largely practised as a bye-industry. Later, Vancouver writes of Devonshire that "its chief manufactures are the different kinds of woollen cloths, as also of bone-lace." †

The English lace industry has always been hampered by the inferior ‡ quality of native flax, which could not compete with that of Flanders. An attempt in the reign of Charles II. to induce Flemish lace-makers to settle in England was unsuccessful, for the reason that the manufacturing of linen was in a very rudimentary state on the accession of Charles II. §

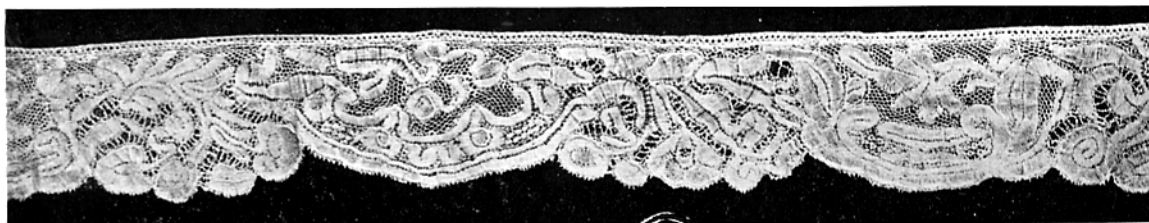
† *Agric. Devon*, 1813.

‡ The Maidstone authorities in the early seventeenth century complained that the thread-makers' trade was very much decayed by the importation of thread from Flanders.—*List of Foreign Protestants resident in England, 1618-88.* Camden Society.

"A body of Flemings, who settled at Maidstone in 1567, carried on the thread manufacture; flax spun for the threadmen being still known there as Dutch work."—*The Huguenots in England and Ireland.* Smiles, 1868.

§ "Perhaps," writes Strutt, "it was thought to be more greatly beneficial to procure the article (linen) by exchange than to make it at home, especially when the cultivation of

## The Connoisseur



HONITON PILLOW LACE

18TH CENTURY

(VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM)

It is worth mentioning in this connection that Devon was formerly famous for its spinning. As fine as Kerton (Crediton) spinning is a proverb in the county.\*

Early Devonshire lace is said to have had one peculiarity distinguishing it both from Brussels and from the later Honiton. This is the use of an outlining cordonnet, formed by massing together the bobbins, just as is done nowadays, to obtain slight veins of relief, called *brodes*, in Brussels appliqué. But a piece of lace of the seventeenth or eighteenth century which can be assigned with a certainty to Devonshire has yet to be found.†

Three specimens in the Victoria and Albert Museum are tentatively attributed to old Honiton. The first two ‡ are of rough workmanship and rather archaic design. In the third § (No. ii.) the close plaiting of the flowers and other ornament is thrown into relief

by occasional narrow margins, across which are threads linking the various portions together. These thread links are rather irregular, and group themselves into no series of definite meshes. This had been considered an eighteenth century specimen of Devonshire pillow-lace. This should be compared with No. iii., a cap crown from the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Brussels, wrongly attributed to Honiton. A "cloudiness" in the V. and A. example—a slightly coarser thread—suggests that it is English work.

When the *réseau* ground was in vogue, Honiton was, like Brussels Point d'Angleterre, made first on the pillow by itself, and the *réseau* was then worked in round it, also on the pillow. The plain pillow ground was very beautiful and regular, but very expensive. It was made of the finest thread procured from Antwerp, the market price of which in 1790 was £70 per pound.

With the introduction of machine-made net in the early part of the nineteenth century, the principle of appliqué work was also adopted in England, and the cheaper and inferior material was substituted for the hand-made ground. It is said that Queen Charlotte introduced the appliqué on net to encourage the new machine net. ||

Honiton appliqué was most commonly of white thread sprigs mounted on thread net; but black silk sprigs were also made. These were made on the pillow with black silk, and were transferred to a fine machine-made silk net. No black laces have been made in Honiton for the last quarter of a century: they went

hemp and flax was not conceived to be worth the attention of our farmers." In the fifteenth year of Charles II.'s reign, an Act was passed for the encouragement of the manufactures of all kinds of linen cloth and tapestry made from hemp or flax, by the virtue of which every person, either a native or a foreigner, might establish such manufactures in any place in England or Wales, without paying any acknowledgment, fee, or gratuity for the same.

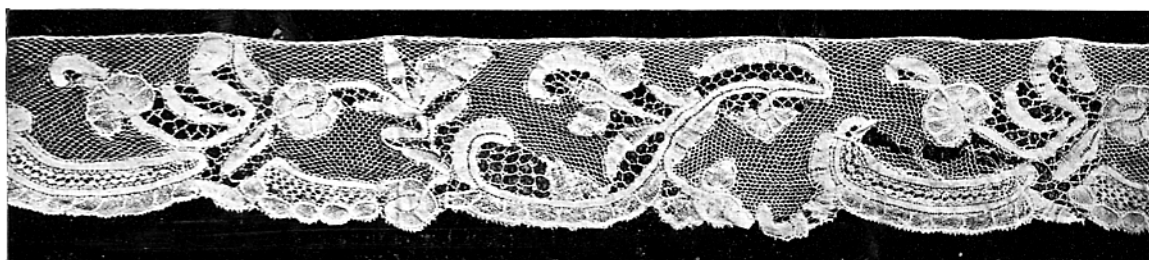
\* It is on record that 140 threads of woollen yarn spun in that town were drawn through the eye of a tailor's needle which was long exhibited there.

† "Les guipures que vers la même époque (*i.e.* early eighteenth century) on faisait en Angleterre, étaient du même genre, sauf que les différentes parties de l'ouvrage étaient reliées ensemble par des brides picotées et que, en outre, certaines portions du dessin étaient rehaussées de reliefs produits par une sorte de cordonnet que l'on obtenait en massant tous les fuseaux—comme nervures à relief appelées *brodes* dans l'application de Bruxelles—on les rattachait ensuite par un crochetage." —*Le Point de France. Mme. Laurence de Laprade.*

‡ 874-'53. 864-'53.

§ 1368-'55.

|| It took because it was so much cheaper. Designs upon old pillow net cost more than four times those upon the machine net.

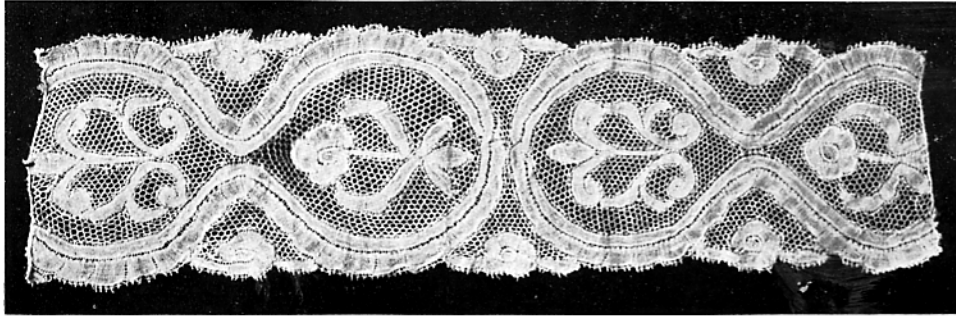


HONITON PILLOW LACE

18TH CENTURY

(VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM)

## *English Pillow Lace*



HONITON PILLOW LACE    LATE 18TH OR EARLY 19TH CENTURY    (IN THE POSSESSION OF MRS. MALKIN)

out of fashion on account of the expense of the silk, which cost just double the linen thread.

The design of Honiton is derived from Flanders, partly, no doubt, because there was frequent inter-communication between the two countries. From 1700 downwards, though the edicts prohibiting the entry of Flanders lace were repealed, the points of France and Venice were still contraband.

The invention of machinery for lace-making was the greatest blow administered to the hand-made fabric. Mr. Heathcoat in 1809, after his machinery at Loughborough had been destroyed by the Luddites, established a factory at Tiverton for *bobbin* lace (so-called because made of coarse thread by means of long bobbins) greatly to the injury of the pillow-made lace for the next twenty years. "The lace-makers have employed 2,400 hands in the town and neighbourhood," writes Lysons; "but now (1822) not above 300 are employed."

From about 1820, the Honiton lace-workers introduced\* a most hideous set of patterns, designed, they said, "out of their own heads." "Turkey tails," "frying pans," "bullocks' hearts," and the most senseless sprigs and borderings took the place of the graceful compositions of the old school. Mrs. Bury Palliser tried to provide some families with new patterns of roses and leaves, instead of the old "Duchess of Kents,"

\* *The History of Lace.*—*Mrs. Palliser*, p. 408.

"Brunswicks," or "snowballs," but with little success. To this succeeded a period of floral patterns directly copied from nature, which may be studied in the sprigs preserved at the Exeter Museum made for the Paris Exhibition of 1867.

About 1845 the application of Honiton sprigs was separated by "guipure," *i.e.*, the sprigs, when made, were united on the pillow, or else joined by the needle, like the kindred "Duchesse" of Belgium. As a class, the details in foreign guipures are far better drawn, shaped, and arranged together than the English, and the execution is more finished and delicate.

Gimp is the coarse glazed thread which is sometimes seen inside the edges of leaves and flowers. It gives stability to the lace, and is often used as a substitute for the raised work at the side of the leaves, being much more quickly made. The close portions of the toilé are worked in close stitch, whole stitch, or half stitch.

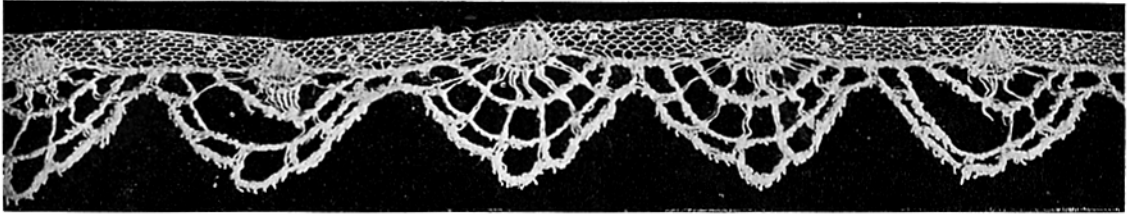
The open lighter parts of the sprays are worked in lace-stitch, the principle of which is that only one bobbin works across the leaf each time. You treat the bobbins in pairs, but the working pair is constantly changing; therefore one thread runs straight across, and the others slant down the work crosswise.

The raised work is the distinguishing mark of Honiton. In no other English lace is it introduced, and the value of a piece is estimated according



MODERN HONITON

## The Connoisseur



THIRTEEN-HOLE TROLLY MADE NEAR EXMOUTH, DEVONSHIRE

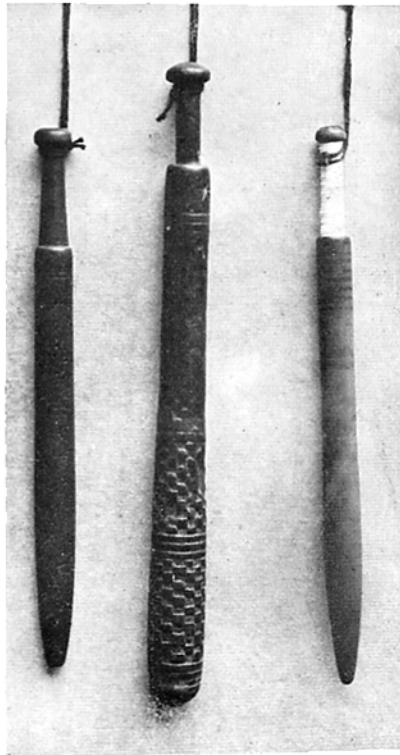
to the raised work in it. The fillings of the flowers are done with plaitings, which are largely used in Maltese and other laces.

The trade remained for several generations in some families; thus (in 1871) an old lace-maker was discovered at Honiton, whose "turn," or wheel for winding cotton, had the date 1678 rudely carved on its foot.

The Honiton pillows run rather smaller than the Buckingham ones, and do not have the numberless starched coverings—only three Pill cloths over the top, and another each side of the lace in progress; two pieces of horn called sliders go between to take the weight of the bobbins from dragging the stitches in progress; a small square pincushion is on one side, and stuck into the pillow the "needlepin," a large sewing needle in a wooden handle used for picking up loops through which the bobbins are placed. The bobbins are of neatly turned boxwood, small and light.

Devonshire trolly, which has no affinity with Honiton, is very like the laces made in the Midlands, but of coarser thread, and not so well made. Lappets and scarves were made of trolly lace in the eighteenth century, and a trolly "head" is mentioned in

1756. "It was made," writes Mrs. Palliser, "of coarse British thread with heavier and larger bobbins, worked straight on round and round the pillow. The name is said to be derived from the Flemish "trolle kant." It is quite extinct. An informant, writing from East Budleigh in 1896, says: "Some of the very old women here make beautiful trolly lace, but no young person. This is partly owing to there being no prickings left, for one of the old workers told me that when the lace trade was bad they used up their prickings as stiffenings for their waist belts, thinking they should never need them again." The specimens described as Devonshire trolly in the Exeter Museum cannot be distinguished from Midland laces.\* The specimen illustrated was bought in Somerset, and was recognised by a woman at Exmouth as "13-hole trolly," such as was made about Exmouth, the last maker dying only a few years ago. Heavy bobbins, compared with Honiton, were used, and no "gingles." Some old trolly prickings leave the net unpricked, as in one class of Valenciennes lace.



HONITON. BEER, BRANSCOMBE, AND TROLLY BOBBINS

\* 1708, August 19th. "Last Thursday was Mrs. Bedingfield married in white damask with silver trolley on the petticoat."—*MSS. of the Earl of Dartmouth.* Hist. MSS. Comm. (Vol. III.).