

# A Dissertation on the Open and Closed Methods of Making Lace

In response to a number of private queries and comments, I am posting this complete, and rather long, dissertation on the open, closed methods of making lace. Any teacher or group may use this piece as needed. I would like credit to go to The Lace Museum of Sunnyvale, CA, because I intend to publish it for them to give out to those who purchase books at the Museum.

## Basic Stitches in Bobbin Lace

Bobbin Lacemaking is a type of weaving that allows threads to define the shape of holes in order to create an attractively designed fabric. It is made by winding thread onto straight pieces of wood, metal, bone or plastic called bobbins and attaching them to a padded surface with pins. This pad can be shaped in different ways; in many countries, the traditional form was a large round cushion which is called a bolster. Other communities use a generally flat or slightly domed, round or rectangular pad; however shaped, it is commonly called a pillow. In Spain, a long tubular pad is used in an upright position. Ordinarily, a cardboard or parchment pattern which defines the design of the lace to be made is pinned to the pillow before the bobbins are placed there. This pattern is usually called a pricking because of the holes that are marked or pierced into it ahead of time. These holes will receive the pins that hold the threads in place as the lace is made. The flat pillow sometimes incorporates a roller device on which to pin the pricking.

Once placed on the pillow, a bobbin can cross over the bobbin to its right or twist over the bobbin to its left. It is accepted practice to name the movement to the right as cross and the movement to the left as twist. In order to describe the movements of the bobbins, it is customary to number the position of the bobbins in order, starting at the left, from one to four. For the most part, the bobbins are handled two at a time, as a pair. The basic weaving stitch is made with two pairs. The second bobbin from the left, in the number two position, is crossed over the bobbin in the number 3 position; then both the new bobbin in the second position and the bobbin at the right end, in the fourth place, are twisted over bobbins in the number 1 and 3 positions. Finally, the bobbin in the number 2 position is crossed once more over the bobbin to its right, the bobbin in number 3 position.

These movements can be abbreviated as cross, twist, cross or CTC. If one pair of bobbins is moved in this manner through a number of other pairs back and forth across in rows, and the threads are pinned as they come to each edge, a fabric which resembles cloth or linen results. For this reason, the stitch CTC, is known as cloth or linen stitch. Some English lacemakers also call this 'whole stitch'. This stitch forms the basis of bobbin lacemaking. The pair which moves through the other pairs is called the worker pair, or workers.

It is my opinion that it is preferable to use the denomination, cloth or linen stitch for this basic stitch because the word 'whole' would seem more appropriate for the union of two half

stitches, however made. Nevertheless, many fine lace books published in England use the terms 'whole stitch' and 'cloth stitch' interchangeably and it is important to understand what combinations of movements are meant in such books.

In order to create the attractive holes which make a lace design, other movements of the bobbins and thread must be accomplished. A more open weave occurs if just the cross, twist part of the movements described above is made, because only one bobbin moves through the others. This is called half-stitch. There are two ways of making half-stitch. Bobbin number 2 can cross over bobbin number 3 and then the bobbins number 2 and 4 can twist over bobbins number 1 and 3 (CT) or, bobbins number 2 and 4 can twist over bobbins number 1 and 3 first, and then bobbin number 2 can cross over bobbin number 3 (TC).

Another variety of stitch formation occurs if an extra twist is added to the regular cloth stitch movement. This twist can begin the series or end it, that is, cross twist cross, twist (CTC T) or twist, cross twist cross (TCTC). Such a stitch slightly separates the threads from each other and makes a stronger and somewhat more open fabric. Different lace communities have different names for this stitch: double stitch; double throw; cloth-stitch, twist; and often, whole stitch, since it is a combination of two half stitches. In England, it is called whole stitch, twist.

All bobbin lace designs are created by using some combination of twist and cross movements of the bobbins. It is very important to understand exactly in what sequence the movements are to be made as this will change the resulting appearance of the lace.

Because of the way the bobbins hang on a particular type of pillow, there may be a preference for the choice of movements used for half-stitch and double stitch. Many modern technical books published in England illustrate the cross, twist (CT) and cross twist cross, twist (CTC T) sequence of stitches on flat pillows. When comparing methods this can be called the Closed Method.

However, many lacemakers who use the large bolster pillow and sometimes, the flat pillow with a roller insert or the upright, tubular pillow prefer to use the twist, cross (TC) and twist, cross twist cross (T CTC) sequences. This is because they cause the bobbins to remain in an open fashion, untwisted, and it is easier for the lacemaker to check her work for mistakes. When she needs a twist, she puts it on. Otherwise, the bobbins lie straight. This method can be called the Open Method.

As long as the lacemaker is consistent in the method used, there is no difference in the appearance of the finished lace.

Certain lace patterns contain a tightly constructed braid, sometimes called a bride or plait. This is made with a series of half-stitches. Even in communities where the Closed system is used, many lacemakers tend to make this braid with what they call "reverse half-stitch" That is, they use the twist, cross sequence. (TCTC) It is said to make a tighter braid. Other lacemakers begin the braid with a cloth stitch which in effect, causes the sequence which follows to be TCTC. (CTC..TC,TC,TC, ...)

Lacemakers who attend conferences and lace seminars or try new books need to be aware

that there are two ways to make these essential stitches. This can be particularly important if one is looking only at a colour-coded diagram because each system assumes that the bobbins begin either open or closed and generally mark only what is thought to be an added twist. Not everyone is familiar with the names “open” and “closed”, but a discussion with other lacemakers or a careful examination of a book’s illustrations can be helpful.

When asked, all lacemakers know how they make their lace.

Beautiful lace is a matter of precision and attention to detail. These are but two of the essential elements in the love we offer to our craft.

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