

Baubles, Beads and Spangles on Lace Bobbins.

Brian Lemin October 2008.



Introduction

The history of beads is fascinating, like a novel, full of secrets and unexpected turning points. Today glass beads and beads have lots of predecessors. Firstly people began to use a material, which was given them by nature: claws, tooth and bones of animals, shells, clay, wooden sticks and seeds of plants. When they learned to treat different materials, they step by step began to make stone beads and shining metallic beads.

I find beads totally fascinating. It all had its roots in my history of Lace bobbins and was further stimulated by getting a copy of Christine and David Springett's book Spangles and Superstitions. (Available direct from them via: email: david@cdspringett.fsnet.co.uk or better their address is:

8 Strath Close, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 4GA)

Their work caused me to buy a book on making beads and even trying to make them, especially trying to make them in the traditionally reported manner for bead makers that used them for spangles; but more about that later.

History

There is no way that I can deal with the history of beads in any meaningful manner in this article, but here is what I would call "a brief sniff of the cork"... If what I say interests you had better buy the whole bottle!! 😊

The early origins used materials and objects from nature, claws, tooth and bones of animals, shells, clay, wooden sticks and seeds of plants. Then as their artisan skills began to develop they began to make stone beads and shining metallic beads.

Variations and developments on this form of beads went on until glass was invented around the 4th century BC, then the creativity of the human race exploded. This takes us through the countries of Egypt and the Mediterranean over the following many hundreds of years (just go to your local museum, if they have a bead exhibit you will be fascinated)

In this article the sources of beads will inevitably focus on those that were made in Europe and the UK for the purposes of trade, but we will also recognise the sheer beauty and skill in those beads that came from Venice.

Manufacture of Beads

This too can only outline the main approaches and also concentrate on the techniques that were used at the time of bobbin spangling (Possibly the early to mid 1800s?)

Wound Glass Beads

To do this the bead maker heats up his glass source to a temperature to make it workable and then wind it around a steel wire or mandrel that is coated with a release agent (clay like substance at the time I am talking about)

When this is done the bead can be further shaped by manipulating it with various tools of wood or other tools. The makers of our most common beads "square cuts" seemed to use files or such indented tool as they have the characteristic "dents" in

them as they pressed them into shape between the two files. This process of shaping is generically called "marvering", however, if we are to use terms as described by Christine and David Springett, we will call a marvered bead one that has corrugations' around its edge. There is nothing incorrect about this description; it is just the issue of generic versus specific. The corrugations' are created by rolling the molten glass that is wound around the mandrel over a finely corrugated surface and then the bead is allowed to cool.

Drawn Glass beads

When I first read about this I realized that I had done this sort of thing in my chemistry class when I heated a glass tube in the Bunsen burner and pulled it out horizontally to make a pipette. The creation of such beads is much more complex than this as they have to pull or draw it in such a way that there is a bubble of air in the glass. One method was to push a rod into a ball of glass and then draw it. The Venetians had special tools called "puntiles" that did this and this resulted in what they called "canes" (hollow glass tubes) which they worked their artistic magic on to make such pretty beads.

Moulded beads

This speaks for itself as it is easy to imagine molten glass being pressed in a shaped mould. I saw some cheap modern beads this weekend when I was researching this article, they were made in India and were clearly moulded into a variety of shapes many mimicking beads that historically were made in a different manner (wound beads in particular) The kind of beads pressed or moulded in an historical manner include shells and coral. This approach to bead making offers a lot of possibility for elaborate colouring .

Lampworking

This is a variation on the wound glass technique. It involves heating up existing beads made perhaps via a manufacturing method of using furnace to heat up large quantities of glass. In Venice in particular, beads were then dispersed to homes where, women mainly, used an oil lamp or spirit lamp to heat the bead and add very delicate colour and designs to the bead.

My attempts at historical bead making

There is so much more that can be said about the manufacture of beads, but I thought that I would stop here when I hope I will have whetted your appetite to learn more and share with you my attempt at making beads in a manner that is recorded in relation to making beads for the spangling of bobbins.

It is said that the tops of broken decanters was used as a source of glass and that the makers used tallow candles to heat the glass so that it was malleable. They then wound or dropped on to twisted copper wire (the mandrel) to form the hole and then shaped with files.

I tried this with modern candles and believe me though it can work the melting of glass off a decanter top is very slow and time consuming, in fact I gave up. After I did more reading I discovered that they increased the effectiveness of the flame by blowing the flame through a straw. I could say that this was an improvement but very difficult to concentrate the hot part of the flame on to the glass. Frankly I gave up and used a propylene torch to achieve my ends (Modern impatience!)

Later I saw a diagram showing a more mechanised approach to using wind to concentrate the heat from oil or candle flames. In some small way it worked like bellows that are used to get a fire burning in the hearth.

My answer to this experience is that, yes, it can be done, but it takes time and patience; I suspect that the glass decanter stop was the original source of the glass, but I think it would have been further reduced (say to rods) before it could be more easily used to make the beads. Please note that I am no expert and am somewhat inclined to require speed before accuracy. None-the-less I have given the old methods a go!

Trade and Pony Beads

Before I get more specific about bauble, beads and spangles I need to spend just a little time talking about Trade Beads. (Sometimes referred to as "Slave Beads") We have to go back to the 15th century and the Portuguese sailing and trading history. They wanted to exploit the reserves of West Africa of gold, ivory and indeed slaves and the Africans placed a lot of value on pretty decorated items such as beads, so they became a currency of trade. I should say that trade beads were also

used in Canada, the United States and Latin America.

As the result of this form of currency tonnes (should I say many tons?) of beads were made in Venice, Holland and other European centres. They were not of set design but there are in existence a number of bead "Trade Cards" that illustrate what was available for trading. Trade beads are very collectable these days. Many of our beaded spangles contain trade beads.

Spangles.

In this article I am using historical information, mostly based on Thomas Wright. Romance of the Lace Pillow. He describes the spangle as follows:

The spangle attached to the end of the bobbin consisted when perfect of nine beads, two "top beads", one on each side which were ornamental; six beads (three on each side) called "square cuts", though they are not cut glass, and a large round "Bottom bead", sometimes called the Paisley, Venetian, Indian or China bead, from the towns or countries from whence they were procured. There were also "Pompadour beads" (flowered and figured) named after the mistress of Louis XV.

He then goes on to mention different beads; Kitty Fisher eyes, greenstone, jade, coral, amber or cornaline, diamond facets, shells and coins and then "birdcage spangles".

Traditional Spangle (as per Wright)



I need to say that though I have a huge amount of antique bobbin photos from collectors and museums alike, the vast majority of spangles are 6 squares and a top bead.

Hinged spangle (Pendent spangle)

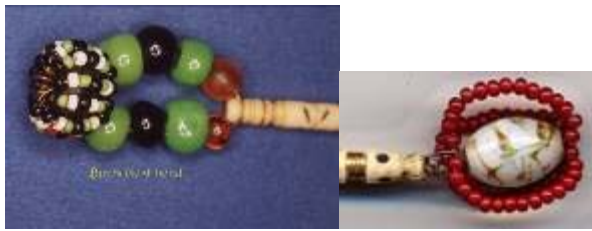


Steeple Claydon



I am not sure that any of these is truly a Steeple Claydon, but it gives you the idea.

Birds Cage Spangle



Mourning Spangle



They would often make a spangle comprising black beads when there was a death in the family or indeed someone famous.

Oddity Spangles



The Beads

Wrights List

I need to say that when it comes to beads, there are large variations of colours etc in each type of bead. Where I can I offered you a variety bead pictures. You also need to know that just anything can be attached to a spangle, and they did just that, so don't be surprised at what you may find.

Amber



China



To be honest, I am not totally sure about these having the "China" label

Coral,



I have also seen just lumps of coral on spangles.

Cornelian



Exotic



Firestone



Horn Eye



Indian



Jade,



Kitty Fishers eyes (and varieties of)



There are so many variations of these beads as you can see. I like the idea of the "reversed" version, and possibly the implication that Kitty Fisher might have indulged to some extent so as to get "bloodshot eyes" ☺

Long Wound



Paisley



Pompadour

I have no idea what sort of bead this is... What it looks like... nothing! Sorry

Square Cuts



Decorated square cuts

Venetian



C and D Springett's list

This includes other beads and spangle which they do not mention.

Annular



Camel



Confetti



Cornaline d'aleppo



Crumb or confetti bead



Some crumbed beads can be quite rough, as they are rolled in glass chips before they cool.

Evil eye bead



Faceted glass



Foil bead



Uncut (Joined at the Hip or Waisted)



These beads have not been successfully cut during production!

Marvered

Sorry I have not got an example of the type in Springett's book to show you. Quite a few beads are "marvered" by rolling them on different surfaces before they cool.

Melon



Millefiori



Nut



Plain glass pony

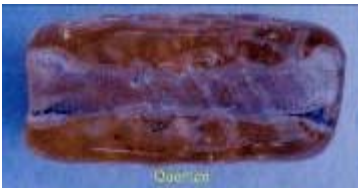


Of course these have colour in them! Sorry.

Plume bead



Quartern



Ribbon or rope bead



Rosary



Serpent's eye bead



Shell



Sweetheart



These bone hearts were made by Compton's of Deanshanger, Northants.

Venetian decorated



Wound spiral



Other beads, spangles and oddities.



Double heart



Masonic



Railway button



Bow



Button



Medallions



Peach Basket



Trinket



Pussy



Royal Trinket



Coin silhouette



Medalliona

Mystical nature of Beads

I really must recommend David and Christine Springett's book on Spangles and Superstitions. I have studiously avoided including anything of her specific research relating to Spangles and lace bobbins in this article. Beads are generic and I have no problem with that, but the stories are theirs. However, I have done just a little research on beads and superstitions and this is what I can share with you.

Beads are mostly glass. Clairvoyants and gypsies alike use glass spheres for fortune telling. The problem with beads are that they are small and therefore have comparatively small "power" However if you make them into an "amulets" then you derive from all the beads together the strength and protection of the deity that you subscribe to.

For those who know how, beads on person can be arranged to meet the frequency of your personal vibrations; clear beads can serve to open your "third eye". You can use them reduce stress (worry beads) or to ward off the evil spirits that may be besetting you. I read that pictures made from beads are very powerful "biofolds", in other words a source of energy for the person depicted.

In bead lore red is not the colour of love or passion, rather light blue will help you find your true love, possibly green colours that do not shine will work. Red is the colour that will protect you from the evil forces. That can also apply to orange. A yellow bead with a metallic shine can bring you wealth or at least good business fortune. Black and white beads make a man strong and indestructible, lilac bead can bring about a new romantic relationship.

There are believers and sceptics alike with this kind of folk lore. However you may feel about these few things, at least you can say it is interesting or at the most you will change your jewellery! By the way, if you want to do some research of your own, analyse the very old spangles and see if the makers might have had some beliefs in this area!

Conclusion.

Whilst I might consider myself and historian and a researcher, and as such demand proof or at least some evidence for what I

am writing about; this article has been a real pleasure to write as I have applied very few of these lofty principles. I have just had great fun and seen lots of "eye candy".

Yes, I have written elsewhere as to a possible date for the introduction of spangling and the evidence I have seems to be reasonable, but as to why East Midland makers used spangling I am at a loss to explain. I just like to think that the lace makers liked pretty things. Possibly, as some of the makers at the time of spangling were also jewellers, they saw that their bobbin product could have value added if they brought in spangles. (?)

Ladies love pretty things and I am sure that the beads and spangles brought them a great deal of pleasure in their working lives.



Acknowledgements

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And a few other good folks from the Lace list. Thanks.

There are many sources of bead history and bead making on the net. A judicious search will give you much information including the availability of books, classes etc.

I take full responsibility for the images in this article. If you feel you have copyright of any of these pictures I will acknowledge them in the next version or remove them as soon as I can.

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