

*Revisited Sept 2010*

## **CRYPTIC BOBBINS or PUZZLE BOBBINS**

### **Introduction:**

The practice of inscribing bobbins, both East Midland and Devon (Malmsbury too come to that) has been part of the history of lace bobbins in England. I have to say that I do not know if there is a tradition of inscribing bobbins with messages on the continent. I rather think not, but I will be willing to be corrected.

The matter of encrypting messages is just another fascinating part of bobbin history. As children we all loved the encryption of:

yyur

yyub

icur

yy4me

Well, the bobbin makers (or indeed those who ordered them) carried on with this form of code, much to our enjoyment in this present age.

Before we go on, you have to know that there are some very real problems in this area of study, the most major of them being the infamy of the bobbin makers being unable to spell! Nearly all the bobbin makers made spelling mistakes at some time or another, and if it is that they make a mistake in a person's name, we can correct that quite easily, but if there is a mistake in a code or cryptic sequence, then that makes things very difficult.

The other issue is that we are at a great disadvantage of not being locally knowledgeable about names of people (mostly) but possibly other local events or places. Never the less, you might like to have a try at some of the imponderable ones that will be included in this article.

I am sorry, but I do not have any encrypted bobbins to illustrate this article. All quality images of encrypted bobbins will be gratefully accepted! I have been sent a few now see below.

### **Modern Solutions?**

Of all the stories about encryption problems, the following to me is especially interesting and has been a precise from an article by Carole Morris in Lace #49 Jan 1988 p44/20.

It would appear that some 10 years earlier a lady wrote to lace for help in deciphering a Honiton bobbin that had the following encryption upon it.

KA-JOANES-ASI-A-TSINgWE

1833

MOKLUN-E-gOLEgANg-BATU

No solution to this cipher was received for the ensuing 10 years when a letter was received by the editor of lace saying that the message was in a South African language of "Sotho" and reads as follows (with some transliteration to make it understandable in modern English)

By Johannes before he put in the house where are tied up people.

Or

By Johannes before he was put into prison.

Do read Carols article it is quite full and very interesting.

### **We have the answers for these.**

I must say that for the most part the puzzle bobbins are very easy to solve. They just use devices such as backward spelling of words, progressive letter changes with the backward

spelling and of course anagrams. Some of the problems are related to the now famous reputation of the bobbin makers inability to spell. So along with the encryption we sometimes have to deal with a misspelling. That gets a bit complicated at times.

The other disadvantage that I have already mentioned is that we do not know the local names of makers/mothers or fathers/sweethearts etc. These are often intertwined in the puzzle.

However, let us look at few examples of those that have been solved, mostly without much difficulty.

These come mostly from the catalogue of the now defunct (VERY sadly) Knight, Baker, and Huetson collection of bobbins that I believe was kept in Olney at one time. Either in the museum there or else in Knights home in Olney. (Which reminds me, I must write to Elizabeth Knight to find out about this.)

Be warned, your mind has to be a bit flexible with some of these solutions!

ISZAUUKIC. This is generally interpreted as *I sends to you a kiss*

SUA2N = *See you again tonight*

+UR +UB ++ UR TO ME

+U ARE AND +UB AND DOBLE + UR TO ME

=*Cross you are and cross you be and too cross you are to me.*

REH YLIL DHAN SA ETIHW SA WONS

=*Her lily hand as whit as snow.* (Even here it would appear that "hand" is an encryption mistake!)

Names are sometimes anagrams. This next one has a name follow by

MNKNEYSJO = *Kiss me Jonny*

Now a few from Wright.

This next one is different in that it requires the letters to be in alternate colours of red and black. The red letters were to read William Dunkley and the black to read Betsy, Wooton. Here too the maker either deliberately or accidentally made it difficult as he mixed up what should be red and what should have been black.... and ... he put in an "o" instead of an "s" in Betsy.

Here goes, but I am afraid that I do not have the original to duplicate the colour mix up.

WBIELTLIOAYMDWUONOKLLOENY. 1844

=*William (and) Betsy Dunkley, Wooton. 1844*

This next one is a doozy! But it goes to show how "twisted" their minds could get. (What I am really getting you ready for is the tremendous difficulty that we have in de-coding those that have so far defied this activity!)

MAHER SHALAL HASH BAZ WYHES

Well, if you really know your Bible where do you turn for that text? Wright seems to think that the lace makers were very well up in their Bible knowledge.

Isaiah 8:1-4. Dont rush for your Bibles.. This is what the text says.

v1: More over the Lord said to me, "Take a large scroll and write upon it with a mans pen concerning, Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

v2: "And I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah".

v3: Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz".

v4: "for before the child shall have knowledge to cry my mother and my father, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria well be taken away before the King of Assyria".

Does that help? Well according to my Bible the literal translation of the phrase that we are studying is "Speed the spoil, Hasten the booty".

Wright seems to think that it could mean just "My father and my Mother", and the letter of WYHES be the initials of their names. Except for the makers "mistake". As there are 44 names for the family WY"K"ES in Olney, he thinks that the alternative was that this was their surname. If so it could represent that the family had a sudden stroke of luck I their lives? This would give a transcription of "*Haste to the spoil-Wykes*". He suggests that this latter is a better explanation than the former. Would you care to add to this?

### **The real puzzles.**

Having led you through the intricacies and vagaries of bobbin decryption, I am now going to lay upon you those that have, to my knowledge, defied solving.

From the Knight Baker Huetson catalogue.

1. PWATENLAMRNOADSLHZSC. 1834.
2. MALEVVTHCKAWRNLLPELM. 1844
3. HFIYLMAILYNDSPUII AFYDNHTRHESTHNFH
4. WASHOYILSALSSESLZPEKOHNNANM

And from Wright

5. TOB:TL:JS:EH:YB:KI:SLG:WL:DEARS:YEAR
6. MANUEL HINGFOR ABOBZIN IL SIN
7. WT.MS.IV.AH.MR.
8. NSEHCNQARFFP.:.TNOL;OL.:.S.:.EIHL.:.N.:.P.:. (THEN A HEART SYMBOL)
9. HFTYLMAILYNDPJUTAFYDNNHTRHESHRFH
10. NEKDWADFNRCSENRIFFROARRDLOLWWPO

## Can I Help you?

The answer is "Probably not. I have not managed to solve them, but here are a few clues.

Firstly look at the similarities of 3 and 9 above

Z seems to have a "sound" function as in "sendz"

A could well just me that..A. The same with I.

Look for common phrases, like My Dear (? MD) Love Me (LM) Kiss Me (KM)

Q possibly quick

Number 8 has to be a love inscription. The Q is in there, a couple of L's

Probably y the best thing to do would be to look at as many of the known inscriptions that we have (See Wright and Huetson) and see if there are any patterns that will fit

## ANY SOLUTIONS?

Well, you decide. Here are the attempts of some fine people from the Arachne lace list.. My comments are in italics, but I consider my talents as inferior to those of the contributors.

### 1. PWATENLAMRNOADSLHZSC. 1834.

WANT SHALL PARDON ME ZSC 1834

SHALL WANT PARDON ME ZSC 1834

MRS TOLE WAS HANDCLASP ZSC 1834

*An anagram approach. The assumption is that ZSC are the initials of a person, which is a very reasonable assumption. The first two have a good 1834 feel about it.*

*I am inclined to think that a dated bobbin has some memorial application, which implies a name together with an event. In terms of anagram interpretation, I do not see "died", "married", "engaged".*

## 2. MALEVVTHCKAWRNLLPELM. 1844

This is blatantly an early form of lonely hearts advert:- MALE Very Very THiCK After Woman, Relatives Not Long Lived, Extremely Parsimonious, Expects Loving Marriage.

*Probably my favourite contribution to this exercise, though transparently incorrect! ☺*

## 3. HFIYLMAILYNDSPUII \*\*\*\*\* AFYDNHTRHESTHNFH

(See comment under 9 also)

Happy Fate That You Love Me As I Love You. \*\*\*\*\*

How Fortunate That You Love Me As I Love You \*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*All For You, Dear; No Heartaches To Rue, Hope's Eternal, So Take Heart... New Found Heather

How Fortunate That You Love Me And I Love You; Never Depart Please, Just Us Two.  
\*\*\*\*\* All For You, Dear; Now Here's The Reason. Happiness Exists, So Take Hands...  
Now For Heaven!

*An extraordinarily good effort. I am sure that the contributor only accepts it a start for others to work upon.*

**4. WASHOYILSALSESLZPEKOHANNM**

WHEN SHALL POLY KISS SEAN MAZON

*A nice attempt at applying an anagram. As always, we have the problem of spelling mistakes in the original.*

**5. TOB:TL:JS:EH:YB:KI:SLG:WL:DEARS:YEAR**

No attempts

**6. MANUEL HINGFOR ABOBZIN IL SIN**

“MANUEL HING” an anagram of “Emanuel King”.

Emanual King for a bobbin I’ll sing

*There is something nice about this solution*

**7. WT.MS.IV.AH.MR.**

WaiT My Sweet(heart) for A Happy MaRriage

Wilt Thou My Sweet(heart) I (verily?) Adore Have My Ring

*A nice use of the Roman numeral IV as "for". I suspect that the "period" delimits the initials of people.*

If we accept that "WT.MS.IV.AH.MR." is somewhat less complicated than we are making it, then could it perhaps be “Mr. AH for Miss WT”? A statement of love or intent?



*A very nice approach to a solution.*

**8. NSEHCNQARFFP.:TNOL;OL.:S.:EIHL.:N.:P.: (then a heart symbol)**

No Attempts

**9. HFTYLMAILYNDPJUTAFYDNNHTRHESTHRFH**

In both 3 and 9, the sequence YLMAILY. Could not that be “You Love Me And I Love You”?

*I rather like this assumption. Again, it has the "feel" of cryptic bobbins*

**10. NEKDWADFNRCSENRI FROARRDLOLWWPO**

No Attempts

**CONCLUSION**

I am full of admiration for those who have contributed to this modern day attempt at solving these messages. The message bobbins or inscribed bobbins are a very important part of any collection. The fact that the makers or those commissioning these bobbins used both elementary code (spelling words backwards) and what appears to us to be very advanced code (those above) and a number of different techniques between these two extremes, is a comment on their ingenuity.

We must accept that we are at a distinct disadvantage of not being a local person at the time of their encryption. If we were, then perhaps the names and initials of individuals would

"jump out from the "page" and hit us"! I feel sure that they are there. We would also be aware of the latest "love gossip" or broken romance. This too would help in our interpretation. However, we have not yet mastered the time machine.

Perhaps diligent researchers will, in the future, look at the parish listings and discover some of these names. I cannot imagine that we will discover the latest romantic gossip, but even then, serendipity is sometimes quite a remarkable aid to a researcher.

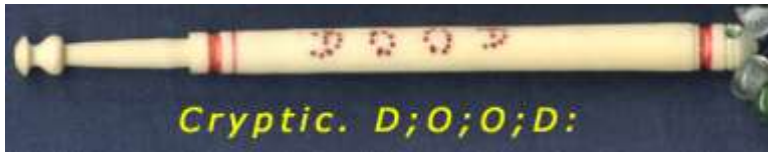
Here are a few illustrations of Cryptic bobbins i have been sent. Many thanks to the donor. Incidentally they are "new" puzzles and do not seem to be in any of the articles i have read on the subject.

This first one I have yet deciphered all the letters (sorry)



I am calling it "Brackley"



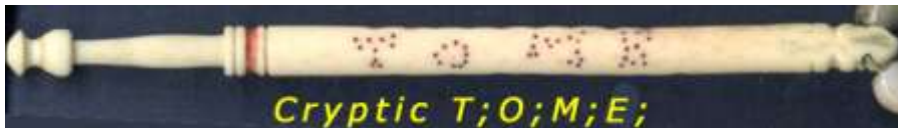


*Cryptic. D;O;O;D:*



*Cryptic. M;A;S;H:*

What about "MA, Sweetheart" ?



*Cryptic T;O;M;E;*