

Bear in Mind

An electronic newsletter from Bear Threads Ltd.

Volume 6 – Issue 5

May 2014

From The Editor –

I do believe we can finally look beyond the white snow and yellow pollen to a beautiful red, white and blue summer – complete with BBQ's, beaches, mountain breezes and new stitching projects. For me, I plan to finish several projects that have been neglected for the joy of implementing a new one. Just remember that the heat and humidity of the summer months can melt beeswax and cause floss to bleed, so be careful in leaving your sewing baskets in the sun or car.

As most of you know '*Bear in Mind*' was conceived as an educational publication at the time of the demise of Creative Needle. It has been my goal during the past nearly 6 years to provide educational, yet interesting and fun, articles – with no advertising! Not to step on anyone's toes, but even some shop owners, in their enthusiasm to provide a source for supplies, are not always gifted with correct knowledge. As I heard the distressing news that Sew Beautiful will cease publication of its' magazine, I thought of how our electronic newsletter could better serve your needs and wishes. Clearly, the art of Heirloom Sewing is alive and well. Many of you shop owners have told me what a great Easter Season you have had, and we at Bear Threads have experienced that zest of sewing this winter as well.

This newsletter is for YOU, both shop owners and home sewers, so I would like to hear from each of you what you would like to see. AND I need contributors – of ALL levels and skills. We all stumble upon little tricks that make a technique

easier. And your idea for a garment might just be what another has been searching for in the back of their head. So share with all – You can e-mail me at bearthreadsltd@bellsouth.net and I will put you on the calendar.

Next month we will be wrapping up our study of lace, but there are more exciting issues forthcoming. Forward our newsletter to your friends, call to subscribe, or visit our website www.bearthreadsltd.com and click on 'newsletters'. It is free, fun and informative!

Happy Stitching,

Sheila



In the South it is a Mother's Day custom born a century ago that for many people, endures. Those whose mothers are dead commemorate by wearing white flowers; those whose mothers are alive celebrate with buds of red.

A Study of Lace

Part IV

Bobbin laces may have had their peak in the 18thC, but the craft goes back to the late 16thC with portraits of a lace maker showing pillows and bobbins similar to 19thC ones. In needlepoint laces we talked last month about the four criteria of identification being *design*, *materials*, *reseau* (ground, mesh, or background) and *technique*.

Needlepoint laces have the common technique of the buttonhole stitch, so bobbin laces all use bobbins for the purpose of pulling threads taut and holding them while they are being twisted, plaited or knotted to form the 'woven' material, as their common *technique*. The *design* can be useful in dating, place of origin and type. For example, mid 17thC bobbin laces were mainly geometrical. The next hundred years saw more flowing lines, ornamental designs, garlands of flowers and scrollwork. The *material* was mostly flax up to 1833 with the exception of the gold and silver threads loved by the Stuart kings. Silk threads were often used in bobbin laces, but rarely used in needlepoint laces. And the *reseau* saw, among those you might be familiar with, Brussels, Mechlin, Valenciennes, Round Valenciennes, Point de Paris, and Torchon.

Ed. Note: Most Needlepoint laces are made by a woven tape shaped to form the design, in pieces, called the *toile*. These parts, or *toile*, of the design are then connected by brides (buttonholed) or other filling stitches. You will often see today laces where the original *reseau* has disintegrated, and the *toile* may then have been grounded or regrounded onto a *reseau* of a different type or even mounted onto machine net! Also, a few bobbin laces, mainly from the late 19thC Brussels type, do have a needlepoint ground.

ITALIAN BOBBIN LACE

Though some heavy peasant laces were produced in central Italy and Sicily, the best known are those from Genoa and Milan. Genoese lace or 'collar lace' was quite popular as a scalloped edging for collars. It went out of fashion about 1660, due to replacement of the collar by the cravat. By contrast the Milanese laces were flounces or entire collars with deep edgings, and were lighter and more fluid in design. These c1700 tape laces (of the *toile* variety) were popular, but by the mid 1800's the *toile* was shrinking and the ground was a *reseau* of the round Valenciennes type rather the buttonholed brides. The most distinct design feature was the often used double imperial eagle, a two headed eagle displayed with a crown. Although this was associated with the arms of the royal house of Spain, the right to use it was conceded to some Italian families during the time when Milan was part of the Spanish empire, that is, until 1714.



Cuff made from a Milanese edging, 17th century (GF.20.2003). The edges are outlined with a heavy cord.

Maltese (those from the island of Malta) laces are noted for being made of a lustrous natural colored silk. Using thick silk and being made on very large, tall pillow enabled a good length to be produced without too frequent an adjustment of the parchment paper. Strips several inches wide were produced, so it was quite easy to make a larger stole, shawl, parasol cover or bedspread by joining the strips. Unfortunately, many of these pieces that have survived appear to have disintegrated, when all that has happened is that they have come apart at the seams.

DUTCH AND FLEMISH BOBBIN LACE

The geographical boundaries of Flanders during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are not easy to determine but they may be assumed to have included part of what is now Belgium, Holland and north eastern France. Therefore ‘Flemish’ lace is an arbitrary term.



Flemish flounce, early 18th C, the design shows French influence (DW.20.2002)

True ‘Dutch’ lace is rare and only from the 17thC. It is a strong solid look, but was so, by being worked with very fine flax, the famous Haarlem thread, and worked exceedingly closely. As with Milanese, the toile occupied the greater part of the lace and there was almost no reseau. 17thC Flemish is known in several forms. One resembled the ‘collar’ lace of the Genoese however with a much finer thread. Others resembled the early Mechlin laces with a cordonnet and a loose texture. 18thC Flemish featured separately worked toile and reseau with the two joined with a thread running cross the back of the toile as in the Milanese laces. Many times they were undistinguishable.

Brabant, Binche and Antwerp are three others of note to the Dutch and Flemish laces. Binche lace is noted for its having been made with a gossamer fine straight edge. The best known variety of Antwerp was the Potten Kant, so named from the design of a two handled vase spilling over with flowers in the form of long stemmed tulips or lilies.

And now we move to the Valenciennes and Mechlin laces of Flanders, which bear little or no resemblance to the current laces today of their same name. Keep in mind we are still in the 17th

and 18th centuries! Valenciennes was similar to Binche in its filmy texture but with much more lovely designs of flowers, and in particular, carnations were favored. There was never a cordonnet and the edges were gently curving and not straight. Valenciennes of the late 17thC and early 18thC were extremely expensive. Not only was the very fine thread expensive, but it took an immense amount of time to work with it and because of the vast number of bobbins required by the elaborate design. Only 1½ inches of lace per day could be produced. The last Valenciennes of real skill was made about 1840.

The first Mechlin or Maline lace was recorded as early as 1657. They were almost transparent, and extremely pretty. They were often as complex as the early Valenciennes but had a silky cordonnet. In 1699 the English prohibition on the importation of Flemish laces was repealed, and by 1713 Mechlin was in very high favor.

Here I mention Point d’Angleterre as it’s’ name is of some controversy. Some consider it to be a Flemish lace produced at the time when laws prohibited the importation of foreign laces (See A Study of Lace, Part I - February) It was hoped that calling it ‘English stitch’ would convince the authorities that it had been made in England. Others consider it to be an English lace, made in the West Country but given a French name because it was based on parchments brought from Flanders.

BRUSSELS BOBBIN LACE



Part of a Brussels lappet, 1720-30 (GF.11.2011) The spaces between the motifs are filled with plaited bars or fancy grounds.

This one is quite familiar to most and while Brussels is a city the name really refers to any laces produced in Belgium. Although Brussels and Flemish are sometimes used interchangeably, Flemish should be restricted to 18thC laces and Brussels to 19thC laces. Bruges, Duchesse and Mixed Brussels laces were called guipure laces, again not to be confused with Swiss embroideries. They were called such to indicate that the separately worked parts (toiles) were connected together not by reseau but by brides. Later, other Brussels laces were machine net decorated with bobbin toiles or needlepoint sprigs, or embroidered with tambour work.

SPANISH BOBBIN LACE

The most distinctive type of Spanish lace is the so-called 'Spanish bobbin'. It was primarily used for mantillas and stoles, with the fiber used being a glistening black silk. The result was a softer and even more fragile product than Chantilly. Usually the design was of a floral nature with a cordonnet around the cloth, and although other types of bobbin laces were produced in Spain in the 18thC and 19thC, Spanish bobbin is the only type NOT produced elsewhere.

Next month we will continue with Part V of our study focusing on the English and French Bobbin laces. We will also learn about our beloved Machine Made laces of today.

Sheila T. Nicol

Mother's Day Of Long Ago

*They were lovely, all the mothers
Of the days of long ago,
With their gentle, quiet faces
And their hair as white as snow.
They were middle-aged at forty,
At fifty donned lace caps
And at sixty clung to shoulder shawls
And loved their little naps.
But I love the modern mother
Who can share in all our joys,
And who understands the problem
Of her growing girls and boys.
She may boast that she's older
But her heart is twenty-three...
My glorious bright-eyed mother
Who is keeping young with me.*



As the Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton, will soon celebrate her first Mother's Day as a mom we are sure that family photographs will be taken. Prince George would be quite dapper in this two piece suit. The new pattern from **Ginger Snaps Designs** is called Hudson's Sunday Suit so appropriately. We chose the short pants with the Heirloom shirt, but there is a more tailored version with long pants and pleated front top. Our Prince George is wearing the white and blue Swiss Bearlin (52% Irish Linen and 48% Swiss Cotton) with E-8 Swiss Embroidery and L-467 Maline Lace. Absolutely no Dad could say this is too frilly for their young prince.



Note: Any blended fabric, even of two 100% natural fiber fabrics, will not wrinkle as much as a fabric woven of a single natural fiber. Good news for children's wear!

Calais

Home of our Heirloom Laces

The town of Calais is a major ferry port in northern France in the department of Pas-de-Calais. Although it is the largest city in the department, the third largest city, Arras, is the capital. Calais overlooks the Strait of Dover, the narrowest point in the English Channel - 34km or 21 miles wide. On a clear day one can see the White Cliffs of Dover. It is a major port for ferry service between France and England, and the Channel Tunnel links the two countries from Coquelles (4 miles away) to Folkestone, UK by rail. Calais is to French laces, the equivalent of St. Gallen, Switzerland to Swiss embroideries. But before you begin to pack your bags, let me say that as is the case in Switzerland you will not find shops selling the lovely laces that you have come to know and love for your heirloom clothing. Almost all of the production is done to contract and exported. Not a single card of lace will be found in a fabric store - hard to believe, but true. Aside from its' famous lace production, Calais has a colorful and charming history which I will share with you in this brief article.

Since the Middle ages Calais has been a major port and was annexed by Edward III of England in 1347 and became a thriving center for wool production. It was recaptured by France in 1558 and was a staging area for Napoleon's troops for several months during his planned invasion of the United Kingdom. The town was virtually razed to the ground during World War II. In May 1940, it was a strategic bombing target of the invading German forces who took the town during the Siege of Calais. During this time the Germans built massive bunkers along the coast in preparation for launching missiles on England. These are clearly still seen amongst the bathing houses along the beach.

The old part of the town, Calais proper - aka Calais-Nord - is situated on an artificial island surrounded by canals and harbors. The modern part of the town, St-Pierre, lies to the south and southeast. The center of the old town is the Place d'Armes, in which stands the Hotel-de-ville, the town hall and police offices. (See photograph of the Hotel-de-ville in spring). One of the most elegant landmarks in the city, the 246ft clock tower and belfry, can be seen from the sea and chimes throughout the day. It has been protected by UNESCO

since 2005 as part of a series of belfry preservation across the region. Close by is the Tour du Guet, or watch tower, a structure dated to the 13th century which was used as a lighthouse until 1848 when a new lighthouse was built by the port. The church of Notre-Dame, built during the English occupancy of Calais, is arguably the only church built in the English perpendicular style in all of France.



If you do find yourself in Calais, do not miss a visit to the Lace Museum. It is located in the original Boulart factory. There, five floors are dedicated to the glory of Calais' often ignored lace-making heritage, and shows off a working historic loom, bobbins, threads, tools, samples and ends with a beautiful collection of fashions that ranges from Chanel and Schiaparelli to Lacroix and Chantal Thomass. Unfortunately the tours are only in French, but you can get the 'gist' of the operation. Luckily, however, most everyone speaks English with most having learned from their English neighbors, so you can enjoy a lovely French dinner comfortable in what you are ordering! FYI - As we American fish lovers know and love 'Dover Sole', the proud French only speak of 'Calais Sole'.

Viva la France!

Sheila T. Nicol

FYI

Special Notes on Maline Laces

Malines are very beautiful, delicate French laces. Their construction is a bit different than their counterparts, the Valenciennes laces. In the manufacturer of Val laces, the design and background are woven at the same time, or in one step. If you look closely at a Maline lace, you will notice that sometimes the pattern is not continuous. Parts of the design are stitched on the fine net background and then the threads are carried across from

one motif to the next and clipped by hand, leaves very short threads or 'fringe'. The clipped side is the right side. While both Maline laces and Valenciennes laces are both woven from thread which is 90% cotton and 10% nylon, the threads used to weave the Malines is much finer or smaller in diameter. Therefore, great caution and a delicate hand should be used in their care. Never use a hot iron on Maline laces as they may melt. A warm iron and light touch is sufficient.

And now you know –

Sheila



Inventory Acquisition

Maline laces are some of the most beautiful laces available today. With our recent acquisition, we are able to offer many at a 30% discount from regular price. Availability varies. Also included in the collection were fabrics and French Valenciennes laces. Call for more information.

Visit us on the web at www.bearthreads.com

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