



A border of bobbin lace. Honiton c1630. 106cm x 9cm. Value £500.



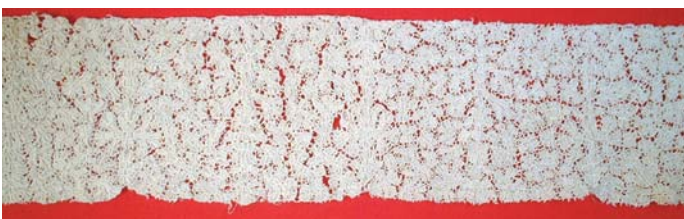
Border of bobbin lace, Flemish, c1660. 99cm x 8cm. Value £280.



Bobbin lace, probably Italian, from the mid to second half of the 16th century. 55cm x 3cm. Value £175.



Machine lace edging of parrots. Early 20th century. 25cm x 6cm. From the Jane Page Collection.



Border of densely patterned needle lace, Dutch, mid 17th century. 58cm x 6cm. Value £480.



Machine lace imitating Bedfordshire lace. 19th century. 42cm x 13cm. From the Jane Page Collection.



An edging of bobbin lace. English, probably Honiton, c1630. 88cm x 5cm. Value £350.

by Brenda Greysmith

Initially produced as a luxury for the wealthy, lace was made by hand for centuries in Europe and introduced into England about four hundred years ago. It was not until the industrialisation of the nineteenth century, that it became available to a less well-heeled audience while still retaining immense charm. Throughout its long history lace has been made in diverse materials. Linen, wool, gold and silver, silk and horsehair were all utilised before cotton came into use after 1820. Colours included white and ecru, black and polychrome, although the dyes used for these caused the thread to rot over time and little now remains.

Hand-made lace was produced by two distinct methods. Bobbin lace is a miniature form of weaving made with numerous threads each wound onto a small handle of bone or wood. Needle lace is created with a needle and a single thread. The pattern is fastened to a backing fabric, foundation threads are couched down along the lines of the design and the motifs are then filled in with rows of buttonhole stitches. Among the many varieties of English bobbin lace are the delicate designs of Honiton lace, named after the Devon town which was once the centre of a large lace-making area. Many lace styles are named after the place where they were made. Other distinctive English bobbin laces are Bedfordshire and Bucks Point. Hollie Point is an English needle lace often used in baby clothes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with traditional designs depicting flowers, birds, animals and geometric shapes.

Among Europe's many lace styles are wonderful examples from Brussels, Italy, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. Gros Point, a very distinctive Venetian needlepoint lace, often resembled carved ivory and was the most expensive and prestigious fashion lace in Europe during the 1670s. A cravat suitable to wear at court was said to have cost as much as a small farm. Today, quality bobbin and needle laces from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are much sought after by collectors. Needle lace is slightly more popular, but generally collectors like anything featuring a figure such as birds, classical figures or animals. A piece of Brussels bobbin lace

with a figure of a New World Indian, for example, fetched £1,800 at Phillips a few years ago. Designs from the nineteenth century also attract a following and are generally more affordable, although certain examples, such as Brussels needle lace, can be very expensive. Prices do not just depend on the design, age and quality of the lace itself. There is also the added dimension of the items into which the lace has been made. Flounces, for example, fetch respectable figures, with huge needle lace flounces especially expensive. Lappets are also very popular and, depending on condition, can sell for £200-£1,000. A piece of finished Honiton lace from the late nineteenth century which was five metres long with lace at the ends, not cut, sold in recent times at auction for £800. And a late nineteenth century fan (lace) sold for £200.

Handkerchiefs could be works of art, for they offered lace makers the chance to produce extravagant designs, sometimes for ceremonial use in the European Courts. But while the best might take many thousands of hours to produce, cheaper imitations were soon available and a typical Honiton or Brussels handkerchief in good condition can cost around £145. When buying a lace handkerchief, incidentally, check that it has its original lawn ground and that the surround was originally intended for the handkerchief, rather than adapted from some other purpose. Lace wedding veils can be hard to find, despite their huge popularity after Queen Victoria commissioned one for her wedding. Large bridal veils in the Honiton Lace Shop currently vary from £495-£1,250. Smaller veils made between 1780 and 1850 start from under a hundred pounds.

The introduction of machine lace during the Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century, produced many good imitations of hand-made laces, some almost undetectable copies of simple Valenciennes, Mechlin and Bucks styles. Sometimes the pattern was even highlighted by hand making things even more difficult for the

collector. While pre-machine lace remains the most popular, some collectors do look for machine-made examples which can be very attractive, relatively inexpensive and have the considerable advantage of still being wearable.

To spot the differences between hand and machine made, it's necessary to handle a lot of laces and examine them with a magnifying glass. Experts will notice the 'knitted' look of a bobbin imitation, for example, and the poor mechanisation of buttonhole stitch in a needle-point. But not only were copies made in the nineteenth century, old laces were also taken apart and re-modelled to suit current fashions, so are now no longer in their original form. It's not easy for the novice collector to judge whether a piece is authentic, or even a machine-made imitation, so always buy from an experienced and reputable dealer.

When purchasing lace of any sort, look for good condition and a pleasing design. Lace is a complex subject, so if you're just starting to collect, the best advice is to simply choose something you like. Then if you do get hooked, there are reference books to help you learn the subtle differences and decide on which type you would like to concentrate. Finally, do store your lace carefully. Keep it in the dark, interleaved with acid-free tissue, lying flat or rolled (not folded) and do not keep it inside plastic bags.

Photos supplied by The Honiton Lace Shop, 44 High Street, Honiton, Devon EX14 8PJ. Tel: 01404 42416. Fax 01404 47797. Website www.honitonlace.com The Shop is also selling the catalogue and a CD of images from the recent 450 Years of Lace exhibition which was held at Allhallows Museum, Honiton. (special offer price of £10 for the two)



Narrow border of cutwork with dentate edging in needle lace with contemporary tassels. Italian, late 16th century. 47cm x 6cm. Value £200.



Black machine lace imitating a Chantilly lappet. 19th century 160cm x 15cm. From the Jane Page Collection.



An edging of bobbin lace, probably made for a coronation. Southern Netherlands, 1700-1720. The repeat pattern is that of a figure mounted on a horse, above is a cupid holding a crown and below is a figure offering an orb. 108cm x 7cm. From the Jane Page Collection.



Raised needle lace, probably English c1670. 81cm x 17cm. From the Jane Page Collection.



Machine lace fragment. 19th century. Probably made during the pre-Raphaelite period. 17cm x 14cm. From the Jane Page Collection.