

FIRST WORDS

A look at the first use of words applying to what we now call “lace” in the literature.

Introduction

The Unabridged Oxford English Dictionary has always been a source of fascination for me. Not that I own a copy, but from time to time and especially in my professional research role, I have frequently consulted it. Now I have had a look at it in my amateur research role in relation to lace and, of course, lace bobbins.

It has not revealed anything “earth shattering” except perhaps for what it did not contain, namely the exception of the names of the tools of the lace craft. No mention of the Bed fly or the Leopard. No mention of the maid or even the candle stool. I have come to the conclusion that the Dictionary does not attempt to define these words. (I admit that I have not tried to confirm this with the publishers)

So these then are my findings. I did use a scanner initially but that caused the OCR a great deal of trouble. So what follows is a mixture of both the scanner and my two fingered typing. (I must learn to touch type one day!! ☺)

The Dictionary entries. (With some very minor editing by myself)

LACE

5. a. Ornamental braid used for trimming men's coats, etc.; *a trimming of this. Now only in gold lace, silver lace, a braid formerly made of gold or silver wire, now of silk or thread with a thin wrapping of gold or silver.

1548 HALL Chron., Hen. VIII z39 Flatte olde of Damm,Ske with small lace myxed betwene of tte same golde, and other laces of the same so goyng traverse wyse, that the grounde lytte appered.

1591 GREENE Disc. Coosnage 111. 36 The Tayler had.. so tinuch gold lace, beside angles

as valued thirteene pound.

1633 G. HERBERT Temple, Peace ii, Surely, thought 1, This [a rainbow] is the lace of Peaces coat.

1634 PEACHAM Genil. Rxe,c. . 5 Garters deepc fringed with gold lace.

1681 DRYDEN Prol. to Uni of Oxford 16 Tack but a copper lace to drugger suit.

1702 Lond. Gaz. No. 3793/4 Mary, Presbury.. Gold and Silver Lace-seller.

1704 Swift T. Tub §2. 67 So without more ado they got the largest Gold Lace in the Parish, and walkt about as fine as Lords.

1787 O'KEEFE Farmer ii. iii, But now a saucy Footman, 1 strut in worsted Lace.

1791 BOSWELL Johnson an. 1749, In a scarlet waistcoat, with rich gold lice, and a gold lace hat.

1867 SMYTH Sailor's Word-bk., Lace, the trimmings of uniforms.

6. slender open-work fabric of linen, cotton, silk, woollen, or metal threads, usually ornamented with inwrought or applied patterns. Often called after the place where it is manufactured, e.g. Brussels lace. For bobbin-, chain-, pillow-, Point-, etc. lace, see the first member. Also BONE-LACE, BRIDE-LACE.

1555 WATREMAN Fardle Facions x. v. So The men satte at home spinning, and woorkyng of Lace.

1613 (title) The King's edict prohibiting all his Subjects from using any gold or silver, either fine or counterfeit; all embroiderie and all Lace of Millan, or of Millan Fashion.

171S GAY Epist. Earl Burlington 118 The busy town..Where finest lace industrious lasses Weave.

GORING Microg. 208 Manufactured fabrics, such as lace, blond, muslin, [etc] transf.
1866 G. MACDONOLD Ann. Q. Neighbxi (1878) 211 In the shadows of fine webs and laces of ice.

lace-designer I789

bobbin ('bobinn), sb.1 Forms: 6 bobbyn, 6-8 bobin, 7- bobbin. [a. F. bobine 'a quill for a spinning wheele; also a skane or hank of gold or silver thread' (Cotgr. 1611); origin unknown: see guesses in Littré and Diez.]

1. An article round which thread or yarn is wound, in order to be wound off again with facility, and as required, in weaving, sewing, etc.

a. 'A small pin of wood, with a notch, to wind the thread about when women weave lace.' J. (A cylinder 3 or 4 in. long, like a thickish pencil.)

b. A wooden or metal cylinder, perforated so as to revolve on a spindle, having a flange or 'head' at one or both ends (according to the purpose for which it is adapted), used to receive thread or yarn, and give it off by unwinding, in the processes of spinning, warping, weaving, frame-work knitting, etc.

c. A small spool for receiving the thread, placed within the shuttle, in some sewing machines.

d. In many parts of England: An ordinary reel' or 'spool', on which sewing cotton, silk etc. are wound for sale and use, having the form of a small wooden cylinder, with a broad edge or rim at both ends.

1530 PALSGR. 199/1nBobbyn for a sylke woman, bobin.

1603 HOLLAND Plutarch's Mar. 122o Turned in maner of spindles or bobins, as folke spin or twist therewith.

1662 FULLER Worthies 1. 246 Bone-lace it is named, because first made with bone (since wooden) bobbins.

1729 PULLEIN in Phil. Trans. LI. 23 The old method of reeling the silk over a bobin.

1736 SHERIDAN in Swift's Lett. (1768) IV. 165 If my skin were dry, my bones would rattle lill a bag of bobbins.

1869 PALLISER Lace vii. 110 The oftener the bobbins are twisted the clearer and more esteemed is the Valenciennes.

1876 J. WATTS Brit. Manuf. 111. 136 It draws out the cotton, twists it, and winds it upon a bobbin.

Bone-lace [f bone sb 5c + lace]

1. Lace, usually of linen thread, made by knitting upon a pattern marked by pins, with bobbins originally made of bone; formerly called bone-work lace; now largely superseded by bobbin-net.

1574 LOWES Guevara's Ep. (1577) 316 To see her....cushin for bone lace, or her rocke to spinne.

1666 Lond . Gaz. No. 94/3 Our Manufactures.. of Points and Bone-laces.

1709 STEELE Tatler No. 61 P 4 [They] should be sent to knit, or sit down to Bobbin lace or bone lace.

1807 VANCOUVER Agric. Devon (1813) 4 Its chief manufactures are the different kinds of woollen cloths, as also of bone-lace.

2. attrib. and in comb., as Bone laced edging maker.

1634 Simp. Reasons in Harl. Misc. (Malh.) IV. 178 Davison a bonelace-maker.

1883 Daily News 26 Jun ; 5/7 An Innish-macsaint body-trimming and a bone-laced ing.

'bone-laced, Ppl. a. [f. prec. + -ED*.] Trimmed with bone-lace.

1762 STERNE Tr. Shandy V. vii. 43 Her bone-laced caps.

Conclusion.

I hope you have found this as interesting as I have. Perhaps it is you “trivia” learning for the day! However it is a valuable tool for the researcher and if it has helped anyone, I am pleased.

Just finally. A “net” friend kindly did the first look at the dictionary for me and what she sent was so minimal that I feared she had not done her research well. I now apologise to her unreservedly as there really is very little in it; “just as she said”!

Brian Lemin.

Written whilst my wife was in bed with a severe allergy and I was [supposed] to be caring for her! [GST day 2000. (Australia)]