LACE BOBBIN REPAIRS.
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Introduction.

Bobbins were a comparatively expensive item for the lacemakers of old. *(Give an example of costs)* Naturally should a bobbin break then it would be worthwhile repairing it. The following is a review of the repair techniques undertaken by the bobbin makers and presumably the lacemakers also as some repairs did not require the skills of the lace bobbin maker.

Cricket bat splice.
This repair is explained by its name, at least by those familiar with the game of cricket! The method by which a cricket bat handle is attached to the blade is by a characteristic V shaped splice. This can be seen on many antique lace bobbins, though it could be conjectured that not all splices of this nature are repairs. So let us look at the repair technique.
The most common breakage occur when a bobbin is being wound on a bobbin winder. This invariably involves a breakage in the neck of the bobbin. This, particularly in times without modern adhesives, would be almost impossible to repair without a total replacement of the neck; clearly a case for the cricket bat splice.

The repair requires the following steps.
1. trimming the neck off at the top of the shank
2. cutting a deep narrow V in the shank.
3. turning a new neck with an extension to be shaped to fit the V in the shank
4. shaping the extension to fit the V
5. inserting and gluing the repair.
6. putting additional strength to the repair by either riveting, or wiring the repair.

Usually the repair can be both wood to bone or wood to wood. By far the most common are wood to bone. I have not seen a bone to bone repair but that does not mean that there are none. It is the combination of three factors that gives rise to the conjecture that some of these were not repairs but that of original construction.

The factors are
1. The frequency of the wood to bone splice
2. The supposition that bone necks did not break as easily as wooden necks, which is entirely reasonable despite the fact that bone necks could be quite thin.
3. Closer examination of the splices.

Looking closely at the splices there appear to be some indications that the splice was part of the original construction. The are such features as decorative rings being continuos around both the splice insert and the shaft. Any decoration either fancy turned or wire that fits in with the total decoration of the shank. It is proposed that these splices that were part of the construction were made in order to use a useful length of bone that may have been left over.

There really is no evidence for the above conjecture except that some repairs are obviously repairs and some "repairs" are so well done as to suspect that they were not repairs but part of the original bobbin. One needs to look at lot of these, probably more than I have, to be on firm ground to suggest this.

Bittings
Bitting are the insertion of different coloured woods or pieces of bone into or onto the shank of the bobbin.
Bitted bobbins would appear to be a problem, in that the natural movement of the wood or bone, may well work the bitting loose. With regard to the wood bitting in wood bobbins, it would be comparatively easy to reinsert and glue the bitting or implant a new bitting. One type of bitting however did require a repair and that was the bitting of bone (usually) panels on to a wooden shank. The two coefficients of expansion were such that these invariably came off and the only way to repair these was to rivet them, usually with a pewter rivet.

Broken small necks (heads)

These were easily chipped and one might say it happened frequently. I suspect that they were not always repaired or else succeeding generations just threw them out as useless. The other thing is that strictly speaking the short neck is not really necessary for an effective hitch. (witness the number of modern lace makers that hitch on the long neck as opposed to the short neck!)

When it comes to repairs, it is interesting to note that I have only seen examples of South Bucks and Honiton bobbins that have repairs short necks or heads. The most common is that of the use of ceiling wax blobs, which look very effective. Bu the most unique repair that I have seen was that of a cloth shirt button being stuck on the long neck of a South Bucks bobbin. I have that bobbin in my possession.

The other more elegant solution is to force a bead or even a pearl on to the neck as reported in Kant 83/3.

Before leaving ceiling wax, it is reported that some lacemakers used ceiling wax to enlarge the head of the bobbin to enable it to take more (thicker) thread. You can see pictures of this in Skovgaard I. The Technique of Tonder Lace. Batsford 1991 p. 27

Pewter

Whilst it is almost certain that pewter fell out of the decoration and also that pewter degraded on the lace makers bobbins, I have not seen examples of any obvious repairs. There are two situations when I would have thought that repairs may have been necessary. The first one is when the spots of a leopard began to protrude. It has been suggested that this was done deliberately so that the lace maker that had arthritis could get "therapeutic" help by handling the bobbin. One presumes that this would be a means of enabling them to get "more" pewter than when handling the ordinary pewter inlay bobbin.(?)

In practice, if any of you have felt the harshness of these protrusions it is hard to believe that the lace maker would put up with the ensuing soreness even pain after handling this bobbin a number of times.

If indeed a repair was needed these protrusions can be easily filed down to the shank.

If pewter inlay falls out it can comparatively easily be re poured and thus replaced.

The last damage that pewter can cause to a bobbin is when the degrading of the pewter causes the bobbin to split. Again I have no example of this being repaired, only one showing the damage caused. But the repair would be to remove the swollen pewter, replace it, glue the split together under some pressure (wire binding) and replace the pewter.

Spangle fixings.

The common breakage is of a staple coming out or the spangle hole wearing away.

When a staple comes out it can be replaced and pushed in further, just as when a hole has worn away it can be re drilled in a different place. If a staple is not successfully replaced then there is evidence to say that they drilled a hole in order to re-spangle the bobbin. Though it is just as frequently seen that they just wound the wire around a suitable fancy turning shape at the bottom of the bobbin.

Conclusion.

There is not a great deal of evidence for bobbin repairs except for the cricket bat splice techniques, rivets for bitting and sealing wax for heads. This is one of the problems that lace bobbin historians have, they are mainly exposed to collections and collections are usually the good bobbins or the best examples of workmanship and beauty. Personally I get a great deal of pleasure sifting through handfuls of ordinary and second rate bobbins in the hope that serendipity works on my behalf and I find just something of interest, as has indeed happened.
Just a final personal comment. I have experimented with making a cricket bat splice and I found it VERY difficult. It gave me added admiration for the bobbin makers of old!