

# THE GERTRUDE WHITING SPANGLE ILLUSTRATION

Brian Lemin May2014

*Thanks to Liz Baker, Jeri Aimes and Jenny DeAngelis, for help, guidance and encouragement for this article. Please do not infer to them any blame for inaccuracies. They are totally mine.*

Grateful thanks to the Metropolitan Museum for developing an "Educational Use" policy for their Illustrations. Gertrude Whiting acknowledges this museum as a source for her illustration, but now we have access to a coloured picture of the spangle.

The Met accession register records it as a gift from: Mrs. J. Boorman Johnstone in 1910

## A FEW THINGS ABOUT GERTRUDE WHITING

Metropolitan Museum gives her Honorary Life Fellowship

*MEMBERSHIP. At the meeting of the Board of Trustees held on December 19, 1921, Edmund C. Converse was declared a Benefactor of the Museum; James F. Ballard and Miss Gertrude Whiting were elected Honorary Fellows for Life; the Fellowship in Perpetuity of the late Rufus E. Moore was transferred to Charles B. Moore, his son; and the following persons, having duly qualified, were elected to their respective classes:*

I have to say that I have but made a perfunctory look at the net for a biography and this is what I have found.

From "hearsay" I have gathered that she preferred the company of other ladies rather than men. In those days this could be considered as a social problem. To solve this social difficulty for her family, they allegedly funded her many travels abroad with her special friend. I might say that I am personally very glad they did that as without those travels we would not have her writings. I might also add that having read as many of the Needle and Bobbin Club and Bulletin, magazines that have Lace bobbin articles in them, and the fact that she founded that magazine, it would appear that she was very well accepted by a lot of society at that time.

Canonical name Whiting, Gertrude

Date of birth	
Date of death	<u>ca. 1951</u>
Burial location	
Gender	<u>female</u>
Nationality	<u>USA (birth)</u>
Country (for map)	
Birthplace	
Place of death	
Places of residence	
Education	
Occupations	<u>Lace Maker</u>
	<u>Collector</u>
	<u>Welfare Leader</u>
	<u>Author</u>
Relationships	<u>Dunbar, Sarah (great aunt)</u>
Organizations	<u>Needle and Bobbin Club and Bulletin, Founder and First President, 1916-1923</u>
	<u>New York Zoological Society</u>
	<u>Founder of The Spinster, Hollins College, Virginia</u>
Awards and honors	<u>Honorary Fellow of the Metropolitan Museum of Art</u>

## **Introduction**

Members of the internet Arachne list will undoubtedly be aware of my liking for the writing of Gertrude Whiting and of all the work she has written this Book "Old Time Toys and Tools of Needlework (Dover 1971)" is my total favourite. Elsewhere in "webdocs" I have written an essay about her thoughts on lace bobbins. She does not comment particularly on this spangled bobbin but it is illustrated on page 207 of my Dover reprint edition.

I have written on "webdocs" a reasonably detailed article on Beads, Baubles and Spangles, so I refer the reader to that article for information that they might want that is not part of this Article which is really only on this special spangle. Here it is:



You must agree it is a magnificent spangle!

### **The Context**

The most surprising thing for me is that the spangle is attached to a bobbin that is not normally a spangled bobbin. The bobbin is a wooden South Bucks, 6 ring pewter "jingle" (sometimes "gingle"). These bobbins have a split personality in life, as many of them can be found with spangles on them. I might add that their beauty and ingenious "in built" decoration should not be overlooked. I do however illustrate a painted South Bucks bobbin. (below)

I have a long held theory (and I suspect I alone hold this theory!) that English Lace makers originally used French bobbins, particularly from Northern France and possibly Bayeux and Normandy in particular. The likeness of many Northern French Bobbins to the South Bucks is pretty plain to see. My theory is that there was a time when both spangled and un-

spangled bobbins were used by lace makers in England, then the fashion for spangles spread in areas where the style of lace allowed for spangles on the bobbins, thus we have examples of the same style of bobbins, even by the same maker, that are spangled and also un-spangled. I have a classification in my mind to call them "transitional" bobbins.

This bobbin has clearly made the transition and the owner of this bobbin would surely have had many admiring comments about it as it lay on her pillow.

028

The loose bobbins inside S.Bucks "Jack in the Box" bobbins are frequently lost, but this shows something of their construction.



044

A painted S.Bucks bobbin. The spangle would most like not have been used originally.



047

S.Bucks selection, with a cow in calf (fixed miniature bobbin) on the far left.



*You know I am a bad speller but it seems I also can't tell my left from my right! Sorry. But that's me!*

## How different is this Spangle?

In some ways... not very different, large spangles were not unknown, but the size and design of this spangle out-shines all-comers. Briefly I need to repeat some things from my other "webdocs" article or lest you will have to jump to a fro, and that is not a good idea. So let me review a few of the various styles of spangles that have made the shift from pretty to outstanding. For comparison we need to bear in mind that the historically classic East Midland Spangle has 9 beads, four on each side and large top bead that is often the most pretty of all the beads.

The classic East Midland large spangle is the Steeple Claydon spangle. This is a Buckinghamshire Village that has a large Steeple and uses it to differentiate itself from other Claydon villages nearby (Middle Claydon for example)



Probably the Mourning Spangles are often larger. These are black beads and reflect the loss of a loved one by the lace maker.



For complex spangles we need go no further than the Birds Nest.



This has a traditional approach with a "birds nest" as the top bead. They are complicated and intricate to make.

For all of this we do not seem to be able to categorise the Whiting spangle. The Met itself has a couple of largish spangles on show.



### **How practical would this spangle have been?**

*(Thank you to the lace-makers who helped me with this section; have tried to put their advice in my "voice")*

The spangle in the photo shows it to be very large and must have been awkward to work with. It all looks quite cumbersome to me as a non-lace maker.

On looking at the photo of the spangle and comparing it with the length of the bobbin itself, the spangle is almost as long as the bobbin and must be heavy as it has a few larger beads within it. The Lace makers have told me that some of their old spangles with large beads on them are a little awkward at times to do certain movements in lace making.

Maybe someone wanted to include all the beads they had into the spangle rather than lose them. Lace makers can't imagine trying to do a sewing using that spangle; it would probably get very tangled with the thread being so large and with so many beads in it. Another thought that that they raised with me is the weight of the spangle. They wouldn't like to use the bobbin on a piece of Buckinghamshire Point lace as the weight of the spangle might snap the thread as it lay on the pillow tensioning the thread if a fine thread was being used. Bedfordshire lace generally uses a slightly thicker thread

than Bucks., Point lace but not so very much thicker and might still snap if a spangle that was quite heavy was tugging at the thread as it tensioned it.

I wonder what kind of lace the lady who used this bobbin made? Or did she just have this bobbin in her collection and not used. We shall never know.

### **Should we not call it the Johnstone spangle?**

After all, this bobbin was in the possession of Mrs Johnstone until she gave it to the Met.

Let us have another look at it again. (It is so lovely I keep wanting to look at it!)



It is essentially a "flat" spangle.

It has a bead column straight down from the tail of the bobbin.

There are two interlaced circles of beads with four miniature bead connections

At the top of the spangle is another circle of beads that contains the larger top bead.

This is an intricate design and indeed artistic in its realization.

The beads are mainly within the "Trade Bead" catalogue. The names of these beads are changed somewhat within the lace circle to those that



historically prevail. Just as one example is the "Kitty Fisher eyes" that we all know well, but historically the various eyes on beads are known as "Islamic eyes", after all, the Islamic legacy of art pervades the whole of Europe.

We know that square cuts were locally made; some were even decorated in a simple manner, the rest of the beads, in general terms, were European with the Venetian beads being the most expensive and sought after.

The illustration is well enough photographed to be reasonably enlarged; however I am not a bead expert and no amount of enlargement would enable me to make perfect decisions as to what the beads are. With the many references and help given to me by my friends (above) and the resources on the internet I have made what I hope are educated guesses as to what beads were used. I offer these suggestions in the following illustration.



## **Conclusion**

I am very well aware that I have not written very much about the spangle, and in some ways this bothers me, however, when I think of why I decided to write it up I realized that the purpose of this article is to bring to the reader's attention the existence of a truly remarkable spangle, in "full Technicolor" (!) Thanks to the Met. I hope I have achieved this.

It could well be argued that some of the intricate birds nest and other spangles could compete with this spangle, but this one seems to be unique in complexity and artistic use of beading techniques. The pleasure it would have given its maker and more so its owner who used the bobbin. Must have been inestimable; I can see now the admiring glances and pride of the lace maker.

We remember and thank, Gertrude Whiting and Mrs Johnstone for their gift and the recording of such a treasure.

I appreciate the Educational Use policy of the Metropolitan museum. Thank you.