

A QUICK LOOK AT TREEN AND SOME COMPARISONS IN BOBBIN DESIGN.

Brian Lemin March 2022

Introduction.

I often troll auctions to see if they are offering anything a bit different or special that might interest me. Currently we on the East Coast of Australia are living under what is known as a "rain bomb". To interpret that, we have rain "all the time" for days and you would be crazy to venture out except for emergencies! That explains why I decided to have look at "treen" (wooden made objects) on various internet sites.

Imagine my surprise when I saw the following object which I will now show you along with the description of the object provided by the seller.



Description: A Rare George III Love Token in the form of a miniature knitting sheath. The decorative pierced wooden spindle incorporating 'ball & twin cage' section, chip carved embellishments and carved initials MH with date 1814. The end pierced and hung with a 1813 one shilling and sixpence bank token, 4" (10 cm) in length.

Of course, it is not a "miniature knitting sheath" rather a lace bobbin dated 1814 and I suspect it was first turned then the shaft squared and the whole bobbin interestingly chip carved. To that the owner added a George III one shilling and sixpence piece.

The ball and cage decoration are also known as a lantern and ball and is part of the carvers and turners work-book of designs. The turner has various similar designs around the mother and babe genre. This made me look around for anything else I might find!

Chip Carving

I am old enough to remember that any man or boy of any standing carried a pocket knife with him at all times. In my days, even though cars had become relatively numerous, we had the feature on our knives to take a stone out of the hoof of a horse! I have to say that we used it as did many before us to carve and or make various items out of wood. The favourite was a whistle (needed a bit of skill but our fathers passed this on to us!) The next item was a catapult followed by bows and arrows or say Robin Hood staves! We were all "Big John" as he beat Robin at this skill.

Then we might decorate the object. The easy way was to carve circles around the wood. The next would be to create a row or line of triangles, as these are very easy to carve; after that you became an expert and many of my friends were such experts and spent many happy hours making their creation both unique and pretty. This is what the makers of knitting sheaths, (a third hand, as it were, for knitters) decorators of "stay busks" (slim carving that slid into the channels in corset) did for their wonderful creations.

Incidentally these are the hallmark decorations of East Devon (Honiton) bobbins and their triangles and bricks can be very creative indeed.

Like I have said, this is but a quick look at parallel carving on some different tools other than the lace bobbins I usually write about.

Stay busks and knitting sheaths,



Here is a good start from a knitting sheath, as this cage and balls can often be seen on lace bobbins and occasionally it is the mother and babe design. It can really only be bobbins that have the MiB design as a knitting sheath does not lend itself to babe procreation!



Description: An Early 19th Century Chip Carved Treen 'Ball & Cage' Knitting Sheath decorated with conjoined hearts and inscribed "Ann fell Prepar to met thy God", 8½" (21.5 cm) in length.

Knitting sheaths also had the tradition of being inscribed and I include this picture and the following to make the point that the lettering skills of knitting sheath carvers were far superior to lace bobbin makers.



Description: A Large 18th Century Finely patinated Treen Knitting Sheath with chip carved decoration. The reverse with initials "E:H" and date 1753, 9¾" (24.5 cm) in length.

I suppose that knitting sheaths were very much larger and easier to put lettering on, but I think that is a poor excuse for most of our known antique bobbin makers.



Description: An Interesting 19th Century Treen Knitting Sheath attributed to North Yorkshire, carved with seven date ranging from 1812 to 1834 and initialled "M.R", the dates possibly marking the births of children.

The sheath above is what I would class as primitive, but how interesting are the carvings on it. Almost like a family Bible opening page! As it so happens. The shape of it is similar to a unique East Devon bobbin that is owned by a friend of mine. After much searching, we seem to think it is the shape of a "washing bat". Neither of us is sure how it was used but I am guessing it was used as a paddle in the large laundry container and perhaps used to "whack" the clothes too?



Laundry paddle Honiton bobbin.

Except for its length, this could be mistaken for a bobbin. I include this picture as, in another article, I am writing, I wanted to show the transition and designs available to bobbin turners from about the mid-1700s. Also, yet another example of excellent lettering.



Description: A Fine 18th Century Chip Carved 'Ball & Cage' Knitting Sheath initialed "J W" and dated 1767, 8¼" (20.5 cm) in length.



A group of hand-carved East Midland bobbins.

I have left the "Stay Busks" until last just to tell you that my mother wore corsets that had "wire" stay busks in them, and yes. I pulled the strings for her from time to time. I well remember my mother blessing the day that she first bought "roll-ons!" They were elastic versions of corsets!! She stepped into them and "Heaved" them up wriggling all the time.! Oh dear, getting old brings back strange memories.

I find the decoration of stay busks very pretty but I have to question why they were decorated so well when they were never to be seen as they were slipped into the corset channel and lost to view!

The decoration on these objects bare a similar style to those on some East Devon (Honiton) bobbins



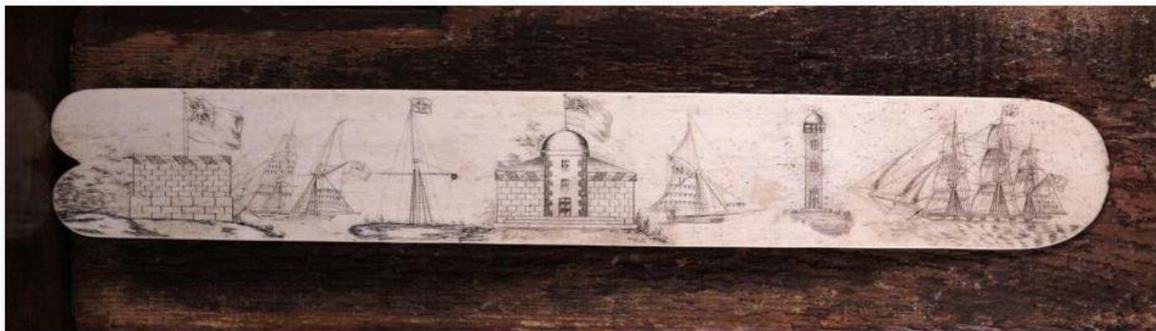
Description: An 18th Century Sycamore Love Token Stay Busk with bifol finial. The apexed front embellished with hearts and geometric chip carving, the back inscribed MARY T S MG 1785, 12½" (32 cm) in length.

Hearts and 1791 plus other designs



Here is a Honiton hearts design

Just look at the following seafaring design on this whalebone stay busk.



Description: A Delightful Early 19th Century English Scrimshaw Whalebone Stay Busk, finely engraved with images of harbour scenes including sailing ships, a lighthouse, fort and customs house, 14½" (37 cm) in length.

It does not take a lot of imagination to think that the whalers decorated them to sell when they got home. Who can blame them for cashing in on their long time away from home?

Well to end this little jaunt of memories and various chip carvings but an example of the same skill from a Honiton bobbin.

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Two ships. One in the mid band the other on the bottom band. Tail palin. Top band mirrored hearts and diamonds. Note previous spangling hole.



Small unchained anchor in bottom band.

Whilst there are better Honiton ships, none of them compares to the skills of the seaman who carved the stay busk. [Note about the above picture! yes, I am a bobbin maker and can't spell] {plain}