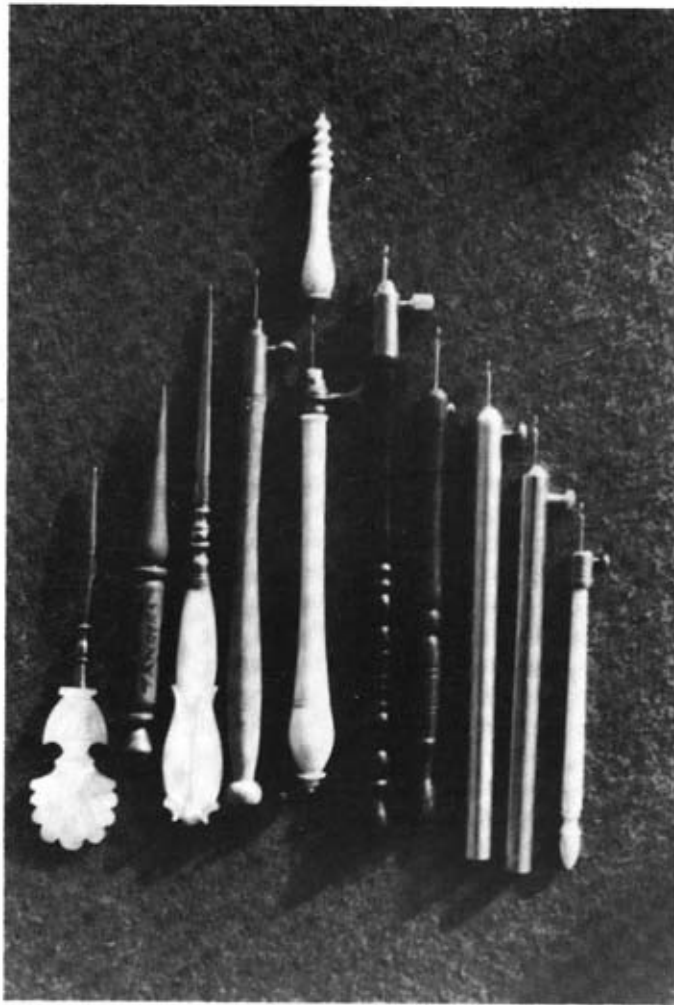
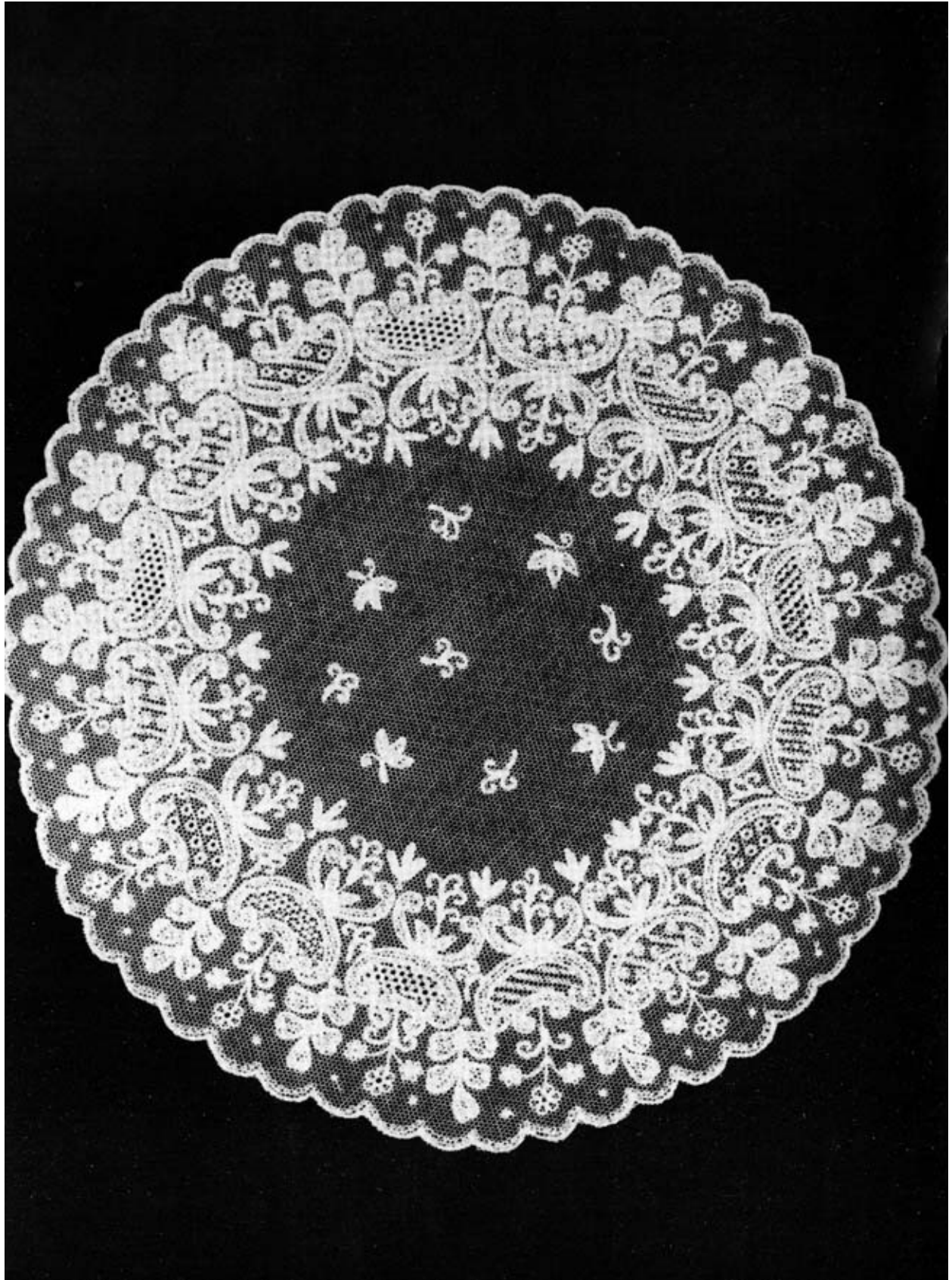


Coggeshall Tambour Lace

a short history



by Jean Dudding



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A special thank you to Jane Crowther for processing my hieroglyphics into legible print and my ever supportive and patient husband.

COVER PHOTOGRAPHS

Front cover

Selection of 7 tambour hooks and 3 stilettoes used to enlarge holes.
The centre one of ivory showing a protector which screws over the point
with spare hooks stored in the hollow at the end of the handle.
Other handles made of mother of pearl, wood, ivory and metal.
(David Menzies)

Inside front cover

A place mat showing many varied filling stitches.

Inside back cover

Close up showing the use of course thread, and fine thread for the "slack"
stitch and the rows of "line" and "spot" stitches. Note the little loops
by the individual spots, denoting the use of "knot" stitch,
whereby a single thread is carried from one spot to the next
on the wrong side.
(David Menzies)

Back Cover

Footing Pattern and Flounce Pattern - 1824.
Simply drawn designs on rough paper, as handed down
through the generations.
(David Menzies)

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INTRODUCTION

Very little is written about Coggeshall Tambour Lace. In this book I have attempted to describe some of the historical background that led up to the introduction of this lace into Essex. In an attempt to give a true record, I have also included many of the small references given to me by many kind people regarding the lace in later years.

Since writing my two original booklets on the history and methods of creating Coggeshall tambour lace in 1976 and 1979 respectively, a great deal has happened. In 1976 Coggeshall lace was no longer made, and the cotton net was no longer available. Since then, however, the net can once more be obtained and the lace is being made in many parts of the world.

1976 saw the formation of the Lace Guild in England when 400 people attended the inaugural meeting. Now there are over 8000 members. A new City and Guilds Examination syllabus has been set up for lace, and Coggeshall tambour lace has been included as one of the nominated laces.

Therefore I feel it is time that I rewrote the history, including further knowledge that has been gleaned during the past 11 years.

Coggeshall itself is a small Essex town lying on the Roman Road between Braintree and Colchester and was an important centre for the woollen trade. Consequently it has some beautiful old houses, not least Paycocke's House, now owned by the National Trust. This was built by Thomas Paycocke, a wool merchant of the 15th Century. Coggeshall was famous for its "Coggeshall Whites", a fine woollen cloth. The making of this cloth was introduced into Coggeshall by Bonvise, an Italian weaver who arrived in the Town in 1528.

The names of two old inns, "The Woolpack" and "The Fleece" also underline where the wealth of Coggeshall originated. The "Wool" Church was badly damaged during the last war, but has been restored to its former glory. There are many old weaver's houses to be seen and now that the Bypass Road has been built it is a very pleasant place to visit.

*Grateful thanks!
Best wishes
Jean.*

Jean Dudding
January 1988

April 2nd 1988.

ONE

WHAT IS TAMBOURING?

Tambouring is of Eastern Origin and has long been a technique used in many countries, including China, India, Persia and Turkey.

The hook used for tambouring resembles a crochet hook, but the point is sharper allowing it to enter the material more easily, and the head is curved inwards to avoid tearing the material on withdrawal. The hook itself is inserted into a handle and held in position with a small screw. This enables a change of hook to be made if required. It also limits the distance that the hook can pass through the material, thus preventing the sharp point from piercing the hand below! As the hook is inserted carefully into the handle, facing the screw, the actual position of this hook is known (by the worker) when it is below the material or net.

In tambouring the hook is passed downwards through the material or net. The thread, lying below, is wrapped around this hook and is then withdrawn upwards through the same hole. This thread passes through the loop already on the hook, leaving a new loop on the hook for the next stitch. This movement when repeated continuously gives a chain stitch, as in crochet, and the most beautiful designs can be created.



Primarily in the East the material to be decorated was stretched tightly over a round frame resembling a tambourine or drum and held in place by a leather strap or circle of wood. This frame had an open cage of wood beneath, which could be gripped between the knees, freeing the hands for the actual tambouring. This would be suitable for small pieces of work. Today, the same type of round frame (without the cage) is still in general use for many embroidery techniques. However, when tambouring on large areas a rectangular frame is necessary, consisting of two long parallel lengths of wood, on which the material can be rolled. These are joined by two adjustable crossbars, the frame thus formed resting on a stand.

In order to keep the work pristine a white cloth is tacked along the top length of the net and is used to cover the unfinished lace, when the frame is laid aside. Also as work on a continuous length of lace proceeds, the finished lace can be rolled inside this protective material.

By the middle of the 18th Century tambouring had reached France. As with so many embroidery techniques it was indulged in, and enjoyed, by ladies of the French and, later, the English court.

There is an interesting portrait of Madame Pompadour (by Drouais C. 1760) sitting tambouring at her beautiful rectangular frame. A painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds (C.1780) of the sisters, the ladies Waldegrave, also shows one of them tambouring, but, in this case, on a round tambour frame.

Wealthy ladies always required elegant accessories for use in the pursuit of their crafts and some superb examples were accordingly constructed, including those for tambouring.

The handles holding the tambour hooks were made of various materials including mother of pearl, gold and ivory. The points of the hooks would have protectors to shield their sharpness when not in use. The tops of the handles would also unscrew and would hold spare hooks. In addition specific hook cases were constructed, great ingenuity being displayed in their design. The fashionable ladies usually wore a reel holder, about 4 inches wide, of varied elegant craftsmanship. This would consist of a reel revolving on the spindle of the holder which was attached by a chain and clasp to the waist band. This allowed the thread to lie conveniently below the frame.

Also in the 18th Century large imports of Indian muslin were arriving into Western Europe, and tambouring was used extensively as a quick method of decorating it commercially, especially in Western Scotland. This was undertaken in tambour work-rooms or in cottage homes. The tools of the commercial tambour workers in the tambour rooms or cottages were much simpler.

Whereas the rectangular frames made by the craftsmen would have ratchets on each side of the long rollers which held the material taut, most commercial frames would have simple holes in the four lengths of wood. Homemade pegs could then be inserted through the two thicknesses of wood making the frame adjustable in size. The frames would be large enough to allow a whole width of material to be tightly stretched between the crossbars, thus enabling several workers to tambour simultaneously; a great asset when it was a commercial enterprise. When working at home in their cottages, where space was limited, it was frequently necessary to support one side of the frame on the window ledge, while the other side would rest on the table.

The handles holding the tambour hooks of the cottage workers were incredibly simple, and the one hook and handle were frequently used throughout a workers' life (or until the head of the hook was completely worn down). Sometimes the lead from a pencil was removed, to be replaced by a tambour hook. Alternatively a small twig would suffice, into which the tambour hook would be inserted. In either case the hook would be held securely in place with sealing wax or tightly bound string.

The thread was first wound onto a spool which, in turn, would rest on a spindle of wood (again shaped from a twig) inserted into a hole on top of the frame. This thread then led down beneath the material.

These tools as used by commercial workers on muslin, in Scotland and elsewhere in England, would be identical to those used later by the Coggeshall lacemakers.



**Mrs Emma Percival aged 95 (mother of Mrs Thorpe)
holding her large tambour frame**



TWO

LACEMAKING METHODS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MACHINE MADE NET

At this point perhaps we should describe briefly some of the methods used in lacemaking during the transition from purely hand made lace to the machine made variety, and thereby indicate what position Coggleshall tambour lace occupies.

A definition of lace is that it is "an airy patterned fabric consisting of holes made by the manipulation of threads". Different techniques can be used.

The first lace to consider is Needlepoint lace which developed from cutwork. This is the cutting of holes in a piece of material, the resulting spaces being ornamented with many varieties of buttonhole stitch and/or needleweaving. As time passed the holes became larger and consequently the material diminished in size until it was eventually discarded. The drawn pattern for this lace was tacked on linen. The important lines of the design were held down with small stitches. After the design was worked these small stitches were easily cut, releasing the lace. This is the method adopted today.

Bobbin lace has various names, such as "pillow lace" and "bone lace". In this type of lace, the middle of each length of thread used is attached to the pillow by a pin. The two ends hang down and each surplus thread is wound around a bobbin. Bobbins are made from a variety of materials including bone, wood, ivory and metal. Additional weight is given to the bobbins by coloured beads. These threads are then woven – plaited together making beautiful patterns including a closely worked "cloth stitch" and an "open mesh" ground.

It was this type of "mesh" ground which was imitated by the machine at the beginning of the 19th Century, and it was this type of machine "bobbinet" which was the usual material on which Coggleshall lace was worked with a tambour hook. Some embroidered net laces are needlerun with needle and thread.

There are also a number of knotted laces, including filet lace using as its base a hand knotted net made with a shuttle, and then decorated by the darning method. Macrame is yet another, where the threads are attached to a pillow as in bobbin lace and then knotted together by hand. Then we have tatting which is made with a shuttle and thread. There is a further whole range of knotted laces using needle and short lengths of thread.

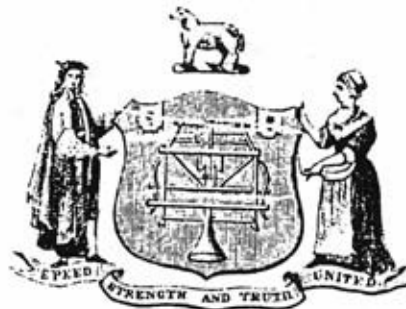
The tambouring or the needlerunning method, used on a machine made net, are both much quicker than any of the completely handmade methods of lacemaking. It will therefore be seen that Coggleshall tambour lace was one of the links between the purely handmade laces and the completely machine made laces of the latter part of the 19th Century.

These machine made laces became so complex that it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between them and the original hand made products, especially as in many cases old designs were copied.

The problem of how to produce the machine made net used in Coggeshall tambour lace (and needlerun laces) had taken many years to overcome.

Nottingham was noted for the skill of its carpenters and locksmiths, while Sherwood Forest provided the wood for both these crafts (raw material and fuel). As he lived in this area, this may be one reason why in 1589, the Rev. William Lee, a graduate of St. John's College Cambridge, and a curate of Calverton, near Nottingham, invented the stocking frame. Prior to this, stockings had been hand knitted or cut out of woven material. The delightful story is told that the lady he was courting (Mary Paton) was too preoccupied with her knitting for romance when he visited her. Therefore he set to work and after much trial and error produced the stocking frame (knitting machine). This was fifteen times faster than by hand. It was a marvellous invention and was virtually the birth of the lace industry, for it was the basis on which the many improvements and inventions relied. This eventually led up to the production of machine made lace.

The Rev. Lee approached Queen Elizabeth and requested her support for his invention. She refused, fearing for the livelihood of her hand knitters, and asked him to produce a machine which would make silk stockings instead of those of wool. It took him eight years to complete this request, but still no support was forthcoming. Disillusioned, he travelled to France and set up a workshop in Rouen. Again he did not receive the help he had hoped for and died a disappointed and penniless man. One wonders what happened to Mary Paton! Fortunately his brother James returned to England with the machines and met with some success. The trade started in Old Street Square, London and thus began the framework knitters hosiery trade. It is interesting to note that the supporters to the Arms of the Framework Knitters Company show the Rev. Lee in full canonicals on the one side and a lady holding thread and knitting needle on the other.



Arms of the framework Knitters Company

The first recorded framework knitting in Nottingham was during the 17th Century. The industry was slow to develop but during the 18th Century Derby and Leicestershire joined with Nottingham in becoming the centres for the hosiery trade.

By the late 18th Century the designs of lace were not so heavily patterned, but were lighter, with larger areas of undecorated mesh ground. This opened up great incentives to produce a machine made net. By 1769 after continual improvements to the stocking frame machine, this was achieved with the production of "point net". During the following years in the Nottingham area, which became the centre of machine lace making, there were countless patents taken out by rival inventors in attempts to develop a machine which would make a twisted net similar to the bobbin made "ground". This included the introduction of the warp frame. Inevitably there was much piracy of ideas. More and more frame-smiths and knitters became lacemakers as the machinery improved, and more and more firms were started. There was an added incentive as the wages for lacemaking were higher than those in the hosiery trade. Women and children were employed to decorate this net with darning or chain stitch, (which I suspect was tambouring). Unfortunately this net had one fault. Being a looped stitch as in knitting, if a thread broke it quickly unravelled.

It was at this point in history in 1808 that a remarkable man, John Heathcoat, born in 1783 and son of a Derbyshire farmer, invented the machine which would make the two-twist "bobbin net" or "bobbinet". This is so called because each thread of the weft is wound between two copper discs joined together (the Bobbin). Each pair is set on a small carriage which oscillates through the warp from side to side, as in weaving. This type of net has the great advantage of not unravelling, the threads being twisted and not looped, and therefore being much stronger than all previous inventions.

John Heathcoat's first machine was called "Old Loughborough" after the town where he set it up. This made lace only 1 inch wide. In 1809 (together with his financial backer Charles Lacey) he patented his second machine. This would produce net of 36 inches in width. The success of this net was also assisted by the fine but strong cotton thread that had been developed by Samuel Cartledge of Nottingham and which was available at this time. This ensured that the threads did not break so easily. All these attributes made it a durable and washable commodity.

The production of this net, together with the introduction (in 1813) of the machine invented by John Leavers, who is regarded as the founder of the machine lace industry, brought about the division between the hosiery and lace manufacturers. Thenceforth they were regarded as two distinct products.

Over the years, in addition to lacemaking, many uses were found for the net, including millinery, mosquito netting and the making of parachutes, to name but a few. It was also found to be an excellent background on which to apply motifs of pillow lace (Honiton and Brussels). It was realised that this fine net was ideal as a basis for embroidery, and vastly superior to the previous nets for this purpose. Beautiful patterns were worked on it with needle and thread, and also with the tambour hook.



THREE

PROBLEMS AND PROGRESS OF THE BOBBINET

The classical influence predominated at the end of the 18th Century and into the early 19th Century. The excessive ornamentation and artificialities of the earlier periods of the 18th Century were discarded. This applied to all art forms, not least in the fashion world. The French Revolution and its aftermath was an outcome of the excesses of the wealthy and was also largely the reason for the new approach to clothes, for Paris was always acclaimed as the centre of fashion. Silks and satins in brilliant colours disappeared, to be replaced by muslins and cottons in pastel shades and of simple design. Draped short bodices, full skirts and stoles were very fashionable, for which this new decorated net was a perfect medium.

At this period in history when machines were replacing work done by hand, there was a great deal of distress and unemployment, especially in the Midlands. The stocking frame workers were particularly at risk. In 1811 it is said that a man called Ludham led an association called the Luddites, whose intention it was to destroy these new machines. In 1817, when the unemployment situation eased, they dispersed. One of the last victims of this vandalism was John Heathcoat, for in 1816 they wrecked his machines, killing one of his employees in the process. Despite being offered financial help to build a new factory in the Midlands, he decided to move, and rebuilt his new factory in Tiverton, Devonshire.

This business is still carried on in his name. He must have been a caring employer for many of his workforce moved with him.

English net was vastly superior to the French variety. Therefore Napoleon prohibited its importation in order to protect the French manufacturers. Naturally this increased the demand. When the Heathcoat bobbinet appeared the French sought to introduce this type of machine into their country. Despite a penalty of transportation for exporting English machinery, and despite continual watch over the machines by the lace manufacturers in Nottingham, an old workman of Heathcoat's, Cutts by name, managed (in 1815) to convey a machine to Valenciennes. He then moved it to Douai where he entered into partnership with a M. Thomesini and proceeded to make the net.

Later, near the end of 1816, James Clark, with the connivance of French sailors, introduced a machine, piece by piece, into Calais, which became the centre of bobbinet manufacture. In the following year a Mr. Bonnington emigrated with his family to Calais. There a lace factory was set up with James Clark and a Mr. Webster where his son Richard Parkes Bonnington, born near Nottingham in 1802, became the designer. (One wonders whether this was the needlerun or perhaps tamboured net lace?). Unfortunately as the fine grades of thread suitable for the production of net were only available at that time from England (as were also the machines) primarily the business was not so successful as had been anticipated. Later the family moved to Paris, where they had a shop selling lace. In the interim Richard Bonnington had discovered his gift of painting, especially in water colours. We must be thankful that this was so, for during his short life (he died in 1828) he became famous and his work as a painter influenced many other artists.

In 1823 Heathcoat's patent expired and there ensued a feverish rush to set up bobbinet machines in and around Nottingham when many fortunes were made and lost. Consequently as a result of over-production and a lowering of the duty on French tulle in 1826, there was a great slump and resultant poverty. The price of net slumped from £5 per yard to as little as eight pence per yard.

Accordingly ladies at court were asked to use English net only and in 1832 Queen Adelaide appeared at a ball in a dress of Coggeshall tambour lace.

Heathcoat in Devon prospered. He kept his output down to reasonable levels during the 'twist net fever' period. It must have been necessary to make many sensible but difficult decisions over those years!

Heathcoat's 'bobbinet' or 'two twist net' was a hexagonal net. Four sides had two twists and two sides were crossed threads. In 1831 the three twist or Brussels net was invented. This diamond shaped mesh was formed with three twists on four sides and very short crossed threads on the remaining two sides. This has since gone out of production.

It has always been claimed that Coggeshall workers favoured the earlier 'two twist net'. This may well be the case as this was the type of net in production when Coggeshall tambour lace was first made, and is the variety which is still available. Also, the formation of some of the decorative filling stitches which are synonymous with Coggeshall tambour lace, would, if worked on a diamond mesh, provide problems.

Over the years there were further refinements made to this cotton net. In 1862 the loose fibres of cotton, which could spoil the clean cut appearance of the net, were removed by the process of 'gassing' invented by Samuel Hall. A flame of gas was drawn through the lace by means of a vacuum from above leaving the holes clean.

It is interesting to note that the Roman Catholic clergy were very disappointed that this new net was made of cotton, instead of with linen thread. Ecclesiastical law dictated that they were only allowed to wear albs of flaxen thread.

John Heathcoat was indeed a very gifted man. Another of his inventions which greatly enhanced his reputation, was the development of an improved method of winding raw silk from cocoons. Filatures for this purpose were set up in Italy and Messina in Sicily. The construction of the machines, together with the making, mending, dyeing and finishing of the nets, were all accomplished at his factories in Tiverton, so that the whole manufacture from the silk worm to the finished net was under the control of the family business. In 1833 John Heathcoat received an offer to disclose the process of dressing and finishing his silk nets. Wisely he refused to disclose these secrets and the family firm continued successfully, using the inherited skill and long experience of generations of workers. In turn this gave them a legitimate pride in the quality of the finished nets.



FOUR

TAMBOURING IN SCOTLAND

No record of Coggeshall tambour lace would be complete without a short resume of the tamboured muslin in Scotland, as this type of decorated muslin was also made in Coggeshall, where it seems to have been favoured by some clients, even after the advent of the bobbinet.

In the 18th Century there were vast imports of translucent Indian muslin, sometimes plain, but also frequently decorated with tambouring. An Italian named Luigi Ruffini arrived in Edinburgh in 1782 and set up a workroom to train little girls in the art of tambouring. As in continental workshops he realised the importance of good design, and consequently had young men trained as designers.

At the end of the 18th Century cotton mills, powered by water, were being built in many parts of the West of Scotland, where very high quality yarn was spun. This was then woven on handlooms by expert weavers, especially in Renfrewshire and Lanarkshire. The result was a very superior quality muslin compared to the Indian product.

It is always essential when producing a craft commercially to have a good designer, a good craftsman, a good organiser and a good businessman. Perhaps Ruffini did not possess the last two attributes for he never appeared to have had sufficient capital; nor did he make his fortune as he had hoped. However, the Glasgow manufacturers were quick to realise the potential of decorating this home produced muslin, and accordingly set up workrooms themselves, and tamboured muslin became an important industry for many. In fact it is quoted that 20,000 females were employed wholly or partly in the West of Scotland during its greatest popularity, many living in the vicinity of Glasgow.

Evolution is very strange! Man has always attempted to improve life on earth with new ideas and inventions. These have sometimes been set in motion by attempting to improve the lot of the poor. This was the case when a Mr. Duncan was disturbed to see the unhappy conditions of tambourers in Glasgow at the beginning of the 19th Century. He therefore invented a machine which had forty tambouring needles, watched over by one workwoman or 'tenter' (a general term used in factories for the person who attended the machine). Initially this machine was not completely successful. As a result of the Napoleonic Wars, exports into Europe were curtailed, and the changes in fashion during the 1820's meant that the large market for tamboured muslin had declined. One has the impression that these factors influenced Mr. Duncan in omitting to rectify the faults and improve his machines. He is quoted to the effect that 'it is unwise to expend large sums of money on machinery which produces articles of mere fashion. It is expedient to direct this effort on machinery which provides for the needs and conveniences of mankind'.

'Flowering' muslin was the general term used in Scotland over the years to describe the mainly floral type of decoration worked on the muslin, using various embroidery techniques. Tambouring was the first technique used, as it took over from the Indian

imports of decorated tamboured muslin. Ayrshire embroidery, using needle and thread, which was made later, received the greatest acclaim for its superiority to the many other techniques which were employed in Scotland during the 19th Century.

Around 1840 a certain Mr. Hall, travelling in Ireland, discovered that a proportion of the 'flowering' of muslin was also carried out there for the Glasgow manufacturers. Mr. Hall quotes that they were paid a fixed rate of about 3/- (15p) per week, which was equivalent to that received by the lace runners of Nottingham.

The following poem may give some indication of the unhappy conditions that beset many women who tamboured the muslin so beautifully. The poem was written by Janet Hamilton, the shoemaker's wife, obviously when the temperance movement was flourishing.

A LAY OF THE TAMBOUR FRAME

Bending with straining eyes
Over the tambour frame,
Never a change in her weary routine —
Slave in all but the name.
Tambour, ever tambour,
Tambour the wreathing lines
Of 'broidered silk, till beauty's robe
In rainbow lustre shines.

There, with colourless cheek;
There, with her tangling hair;
Still bending low o'er the rickety frame,
Seek, ye will find her there.
Tambour, ever tambour,
With fingers cramped and chill; —
The panes are shattered, and cold the wind
Blows over the eastern hill.

Why quail, my sisters, why,
As ye were abjects vile,
When begging some haughty brother of earth
"To give you leave to toil?"
It is tambour you must,
Naught else you have to do;
Though paupers' dole be of higher amount
Than pay oft earned by you.

No union strikes for you; —
Unshielded and alone,
In the battle of life — a battle it is,
Where virtue is oft o'erthrown.
O working men! Oh, why
Pass ye thus careless by,
Nor give to the working woman's complaint
One word of kind reply?

Selfish unfeeling men!
Have ye not had your will?
High pay, short hours; yet your cry, like the leech,
Is, Give us, give us still.
She who tambours — tambours
For fifteen hours a day —
Would have shoes on her feet, and dress for church,
Had she a third of your pay.

Sisters, cousins, and aunts
Are they; yet, if not so,
Say, are they not sisters by human ties,
And sympathy's kindly flow?
To them how dear the boon
From brother's hand that came!
It would warm the heart and brighten the eyes.
While bending o'er the frame.

Raise ye a fund to aid
In times of deep distress;
While man helps man, to their sisters in need
Brothers can do no less.
Still the tambourer bends
Wearily o'er the frame.
Patterns oft vary, for fashions will change —
She is ever the same.

ONE OPINION OF THE PRESS

Every page of the book testifies to a sound judgment, a fine fancy, warm feelings, good taste, rich and varied, and, for her position, chaste and singularly correct expression.

Rev. George Gilfillan, in Dundee Advertiser, November 13, 1863.

FIVE

EARLY DAYS OF LACEMAKING IN COGGESHALL

Having described how tambouring in the Far East progressed into England, Scotland and Ireland, leading up to the invention of the bobbinet machine in Loughborough, it is pertinent that we should return to Coggeshall.

As recounted, Coggeshall had long depended on the production of woollen cloth for its employment. However, at the beginning of the 18th Century duties were imposed on the wines of Portugal and Spain when entering England. In retaliation, reprisals were taken by them preventing the export of woollen cloth from England to their countries. Coggeshall suffered badly as ninety per cent of its output had been destined for the monasteries and churches in these two countries. Also there was no longer a flourishing market for woollen cloth in England, as fashion decreed the use of satins and silks. This was followed in the last quarter of the century by the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, The French Revolution and finally the Napoleonic Wars. All these factors were responsible for much distress in Coggeshall.

However, in 1815 silk weaving was introduced into the town which was followed shortly afterwards by the manufacture of Coggeshall tambour lace, both of which became important sources of employment.

According to local tradition, at some time between 1815 and 1820 an emigre Monsieur Drago, with his two daughters, arrived in Coggeshall. He is alleged to have been a Frenchman, but as his name appears in the vicinity of Brussels and Antwerp, and tamboured lace is made at Lier, he may well have emigrated from that area. He introduced this new skill of tambouring into Coggeshall on the newly invented bobbinet. This, together with the new silk industry, provided much needed work for the soldiers returning from the Napoleonic wars, and their families.

Johnson and Rudkin, the last of the woollen clothiers were already weaving silk in their Church Street establishment in Coggeshall when they closed in 1816. Thomas Johnson carried on as a silk manufacturer and in 1827 he is recorded as making "galloon" at "Monkwell" next to the bridge over the river Blackwater. This factory, which he hired from Swinburnes (leather manufacturers) is thought to have provided the necessary space to set up a centre for the teaching of the new trade of tamboured lace. In this workroom little girls of seven and eight years were taught the new craft. Soon, others followed Drago's and Johnson's lead and set up tambour workrooms of their own.

Some records claim that Coggeshall was the place in England where tambouring on the bobbinet began and where the last tamboured lace was made before its revival in 1976. Naturally when this bobbinet appeared in 1808 the women in and around Nottingham were quick to see its possibilities and began embroidering it with needle and thread, using the needlerunning technique. The needle is a tool with which all women are familiar, but the tambour hook requires an unfamiliar skill in its use. It is known that the tambouring method was employed in Nottingham, especially for the outlines of the

design, for it is quicker and gives a stronger line than with needlerunning. However, their attractive filling stitches were generally produced with needle and thread. On the contrary, true Coggeshall tambour lace uses the tambour hook for both outlines and filling stitches.

Tambour lace is worked more rapidly than the needlerun variety but initially it is more difficult to learn how to make it well. Working stitches of even tension with an unusual tool requires practice, and there has always been the problem of transferring the design onto the net. As the thread for tambouring is released below the net, the design cannot be secured underneath while work is in progress. The most proficient workers in Coggeshall fastened one side of the design along the top of the framed net, and then held it up while enlarging some holes of the net along the outlines of the design. The paper was then dropped and they would work along the line of enlarged holes. This process was repeated until completion of the pattern. Many experienced trade workers found it was quite sufficient to have the design laid in front of them, which they then copied. However, those who were less proficient would attach the design underneath the net and would draw it in with a pencil. This practice was frowned upon by the experts but was adequate for utilitarian articles which were made by the less adroit workers on the coarser net. It must be remembered that during the 19th and first half of the 20th Centuries there were many white people living in the hot countries of the world where mosquito nets were essential. For everyday use these could be made of this coarse net, with a simple edging and design, if required.

In many cases the edges would be strengthened and finished with a "pearl" edging. This could be bought by the yard, to be attached to the edge of the lace with needle and thread. A "lace pearer" was a worker who sewed on the pearl edging, after the tambouring had been completed.

The best work would have a tamboured edging, which was then overcast to give added strength. In some cases the plain or scalloped edge would first be indicated by a running stitch before the chain stitch and overcasting, thereby giving an even stronger edging. Naturally this would all be worked prior to cutting the net away.

Limerick lace has always been well known and appreciated, but very few have been aware of the excellence of Coggeshall tambour lace. It is suggested that this was largely due to the fact that no specific name was attached to our Essex lace. It appeared in many exhibitions including the Great Exhibition of 1851 under a variety of descriptions, such as Nottingham, Honiton, British, Essex and even Limerick. The name Coggeshall lace was never given! Occasionally records noted that lace was made in "Coggeshall in Essex", which is a subtle difference from "Coggeshall Lace". or "Coggeshall Tambour Lace". It must be remembered that this town was situated in a backwater with no railway passing through it, and that it had no long history of lacemaking.

Coggeshall tambour lace has often been classed in quality with Limerick lace. This is not surprising for it was a certain Mr. Charles Walker from Essex who introduced tambour lacemaking into Ireland.

SIX

LIMERICK LACE

This Mr. Walker of Oxford, who was trained for the church married the daughter of a lace manufacturer in Essex. He became very interested in tamboured lace and having artistic leanings set up in business himself while living in Mardens Ash near Ongar.

It is interesting to read that he himself set up a tambour room, for there is a note recorded from the minutes of Wanstead Parish Vestry during 1823, that on 24th June Mr. Walker consented to take 6 parish children as apprentices to the trade of tambour workers until 21 years old, at £4 premium each. Apparently this arrangement could not have been very successful because on the 8th July following, it was reported that "3 children were no longer chargeable to the parish, as their parents did not agree to their children being bound apprentice to Mr. Walker"; while on August 5th Mr. Walker returned 3 children (presumably the remaining 3) because "they were inattentive to their duties".

Whether Mr. Walker pursued his aim of setting up further new schools for teaching tambouring in the vicinity of Mardens Ash or whether he relied on lace being made in Coggeshall is uncertain. Sufficient to say that in 1823 he was described as a "lace manufacturer working for the London wholesale trade".

Despite the fact that Coggeshall is remote from the Capital, links must have been made with London as Queen Adelaide wore a gown of Coggeshall tambour lace at a ball in 1832.

In 1829 after a holiday in Ireland, Mr. Walker founded a lace school at Mount Kennet near Limerick bringing with him 24 skilled lace makers many of whom were from Coggeshall. This is borne out by the statement made at the turn of the century by a Coggeshall man, Mr. Jacob Dalton, to the effect that his mother, who had been a pupil of Mr. Drago, had refused a lucrative offer to go to Ireland.

Unfortunately the central house in St. Pauls Churchyard where all Mr. Walker's lace was sent to be sold, became bankrupt in 1834. This meant that he had to rely on travellers, dispatched throughout the British Isles, to collect orders for him. In 1841 he sold his business, but the purchaser also became bankrupt before making payment, and Mr. Walker died in 1843 a poor man and ill rewarded for all his endeavours.

Undoubtedly he introduced good designs for the early Limerick lace and it is sad that his influence was of such short duration. Some of the women from Coggeshall subsequently returned to Essex, some remained in Ireland, while others emigrated to America.

It is recognised that early Limerick lace was of a very high quality. Without the artistic lead and steady market that Mr. Walker had provided, designs and standards of work deteriorated. Cheapness of manufacture became the chief criterion of its production.

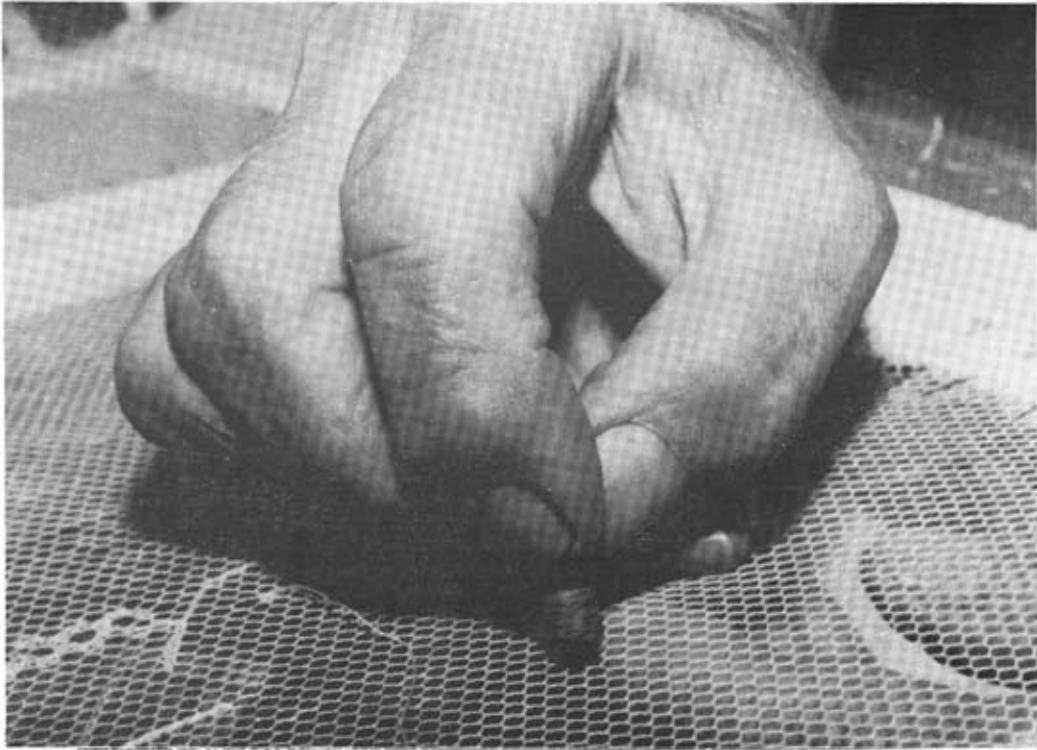
However, a Mr. A.S. Cole arrived in Ireland in 1888 and gave a lecture encouraging good design in the making of lace. He displayed examples of early Limerick lace, which were compared with the more modern pieces. He suggested the establishment of art classes to improve design. These were implemented by a Mrs. O'Brien who introduced and maintained the Limerick lace training school. The quality of the lace consequently improved.

It must have been very difficult to teach children how to design when there was very little school teaching, and certainly never the elements of drawing.

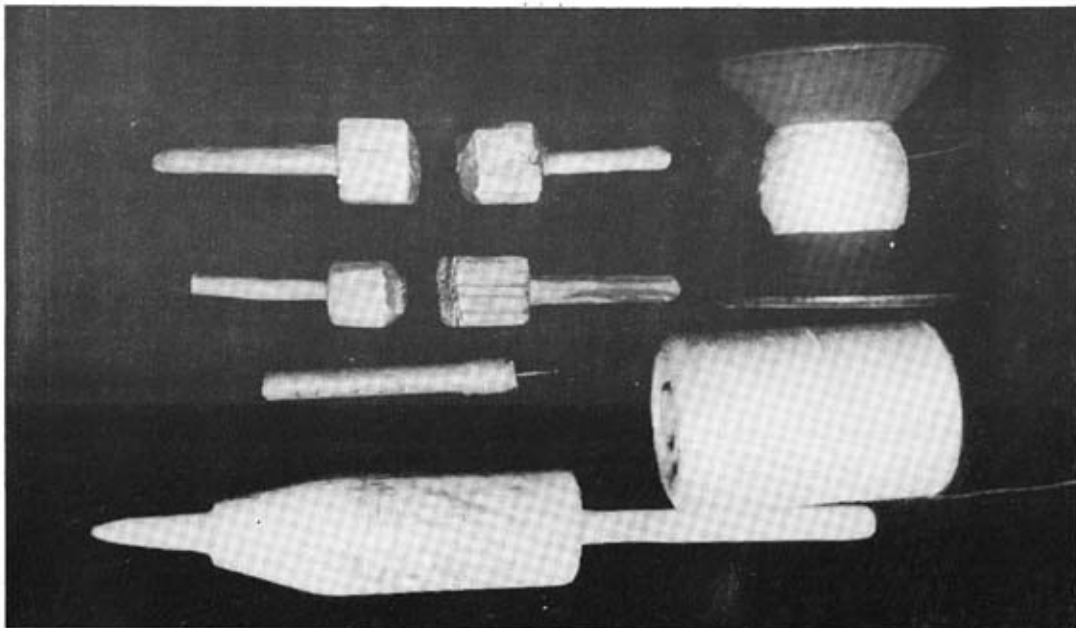
It is recorded that in Ireland children would be required, for the first two to three months, to spend their time "stabbing". This was pricking, (with a needle) the outline of the design marked on calico. This apparently prepared them to follow designs given to them, when they began making lace, and also to help them to make accurate prickings for their bobbin lacemaking. Later in the century when the elementary schools were set up, the children were able to follow a design at their first lacemaking lesson. It has been mentioned many times that it is important to start lacemaking at an early age in order to acquire a "remunerative speed at this craft". Lacemaking may be learnt at any age but if begun late in life a good "speed" is rarely acquired. This particularly applies to tamboured lace.

Early Limerick lace used the tambouring technique throughout its execution, which is understandable as the teachers came from Coggeshall. Coggeshall laceworkers have always been very proud of their tamboured filling stitches. However the Irish preferred the appearance of the needlerun technique. It was considered to be more delicate and lighter. Of course, initially it is easier to accomplish. Sometimes the outline was tamboured while the fillings were worked with needle and thread. However, run net for all of the creation of Limerick lace became the favourite method and now tambouring is no longer used. Nuns at The Convent of the Good Shepherd have kept alive the making of Limerick lace.





The position of the hand when holding the short twig handle tambour hook.



4 wooden pegs used to hold the sides of the frame in place. The tambour hook inserted into the twig handle tied with string. The spindle which holds the spool of cotton.



Bonnet with frills, tamboured with white thread on black net.



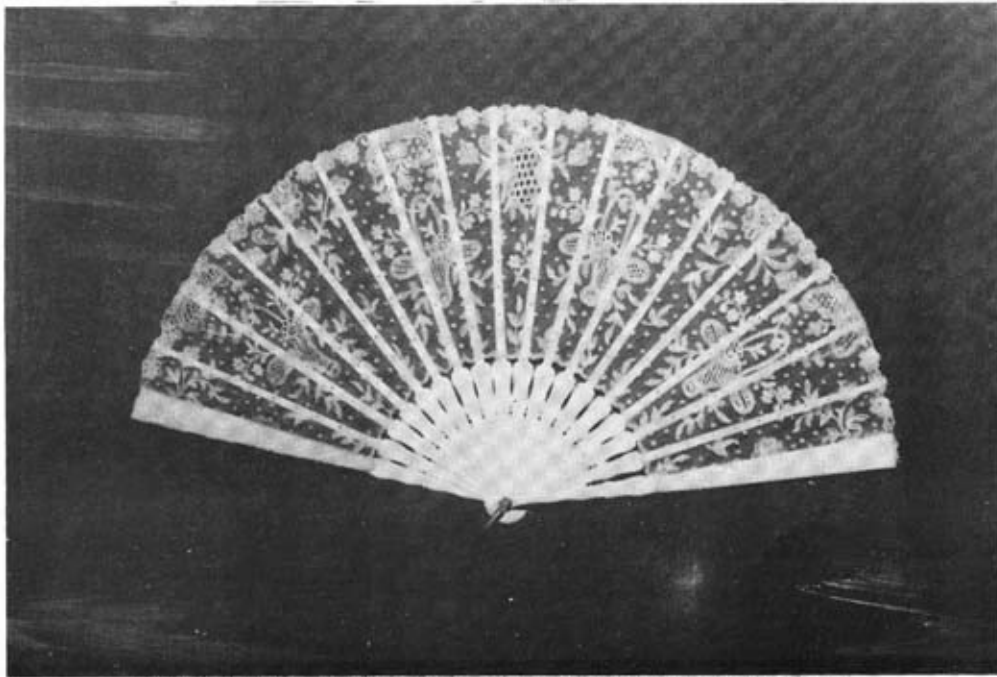
High collar mounted on a net bodice held in position around the neck, using wire "collar supports".



Bonnet without frills and with short ties or lappets.



Bolero showing beading, spangles and ruching from Miss Surrige collection at Hollytrees Museum Colchester. "By courtesy of Hollytrees Museum, Colchester". (Chris Holby)

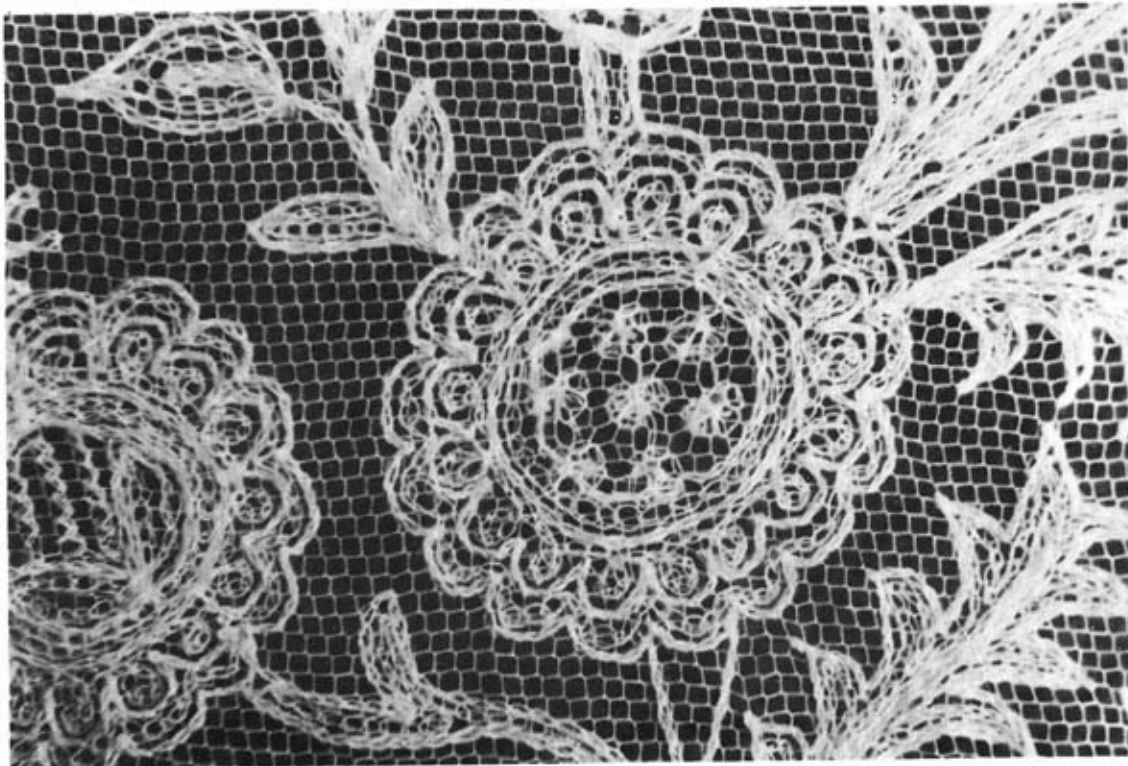


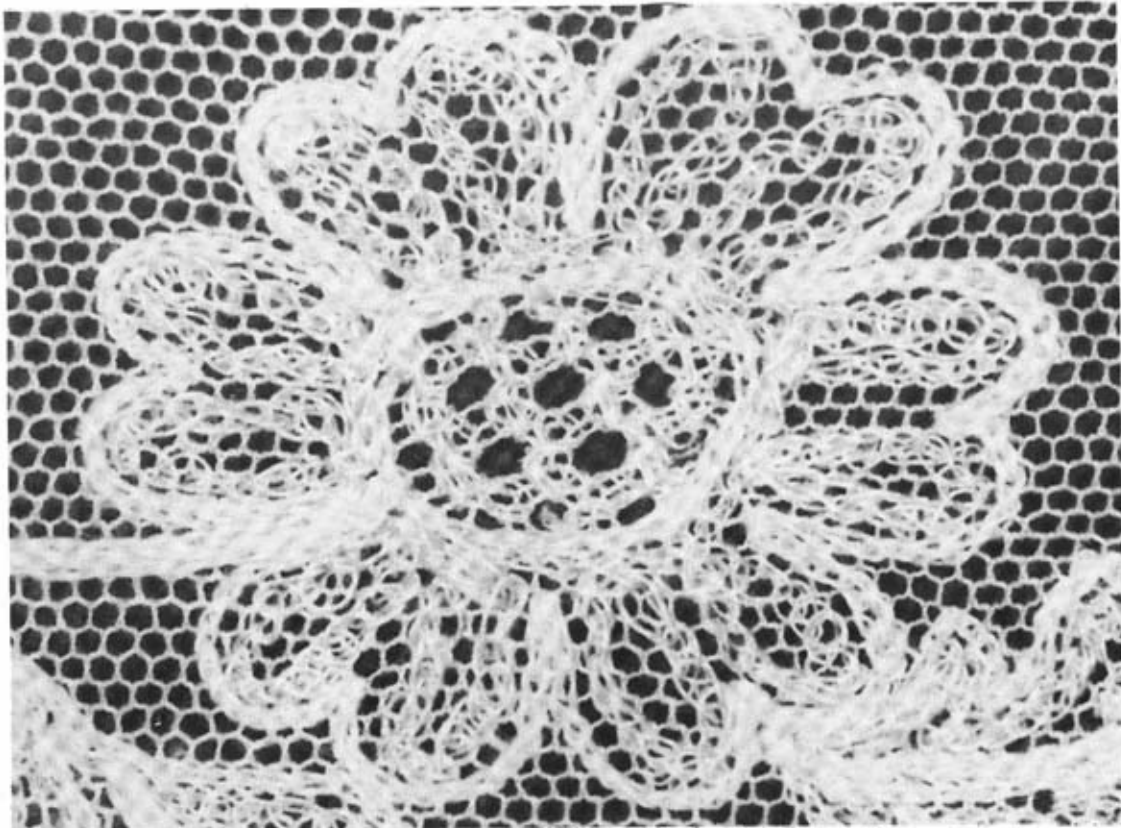
Bridesmaid's fan 1912. Baskets of flowers, sprigging on background.

Wedding veil of 1912 with design of roses for the English bride and thistles for the Scots bridegroom.

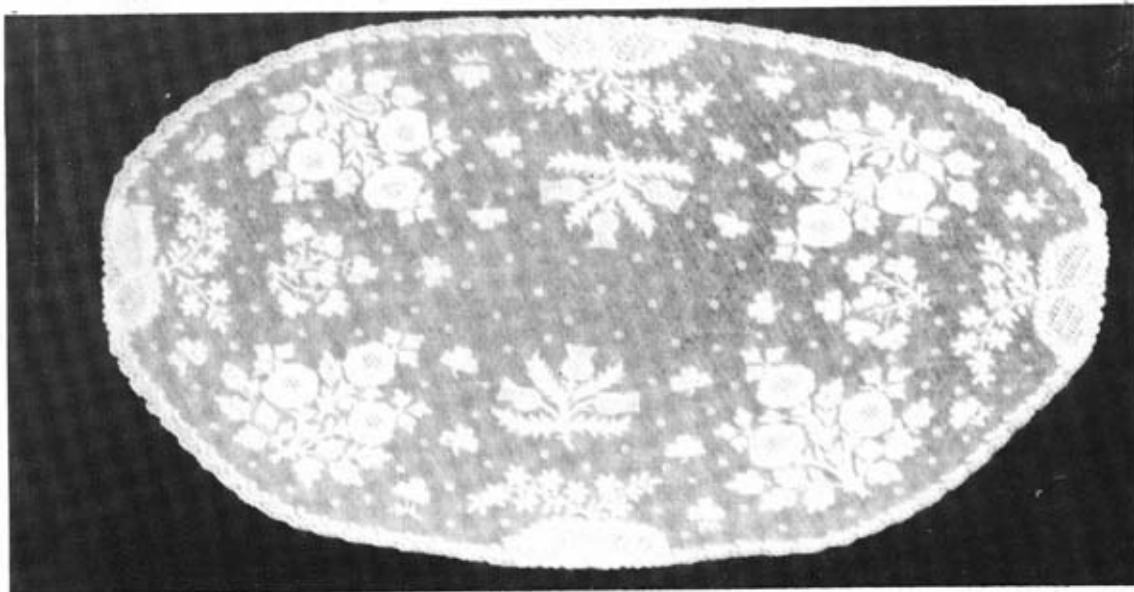


Close-up of wedding veil showing "bold smuggler" and "line" filling stitches (both in modified form worked on the diamond mesh net). Rows of plain chain also worked with fine thread.





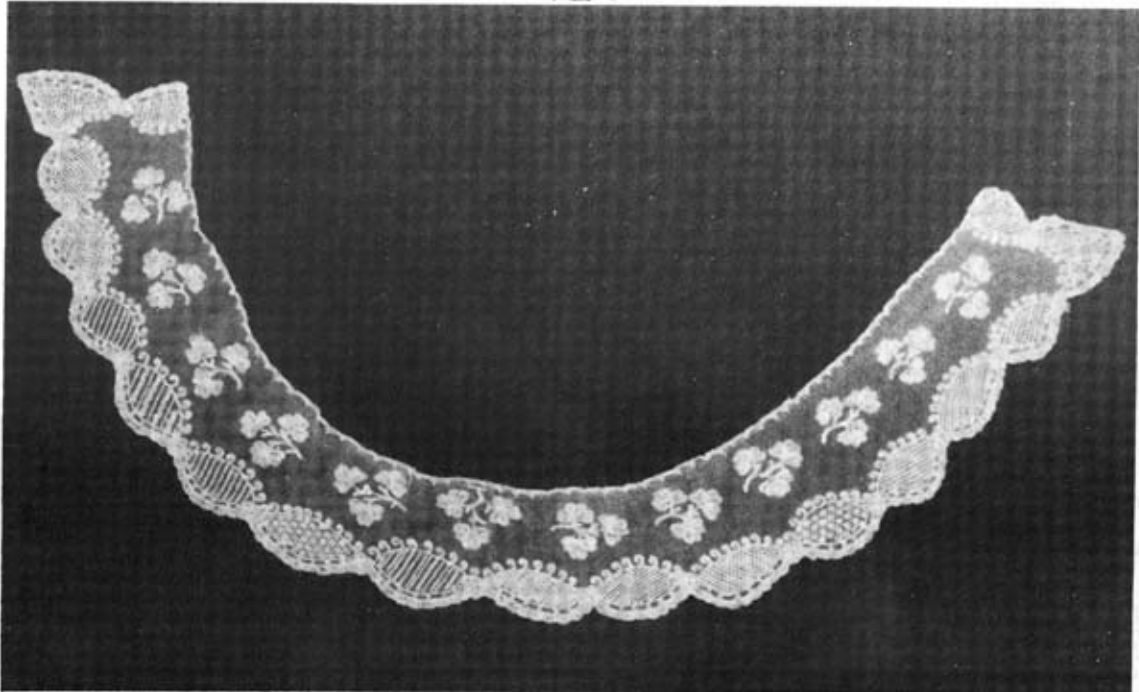
Close up showing "honeycomb" filling stitch and "slack" with fine thread. Coarse thread used for the outlines, on Heathcoat twist net. (David Menzies)



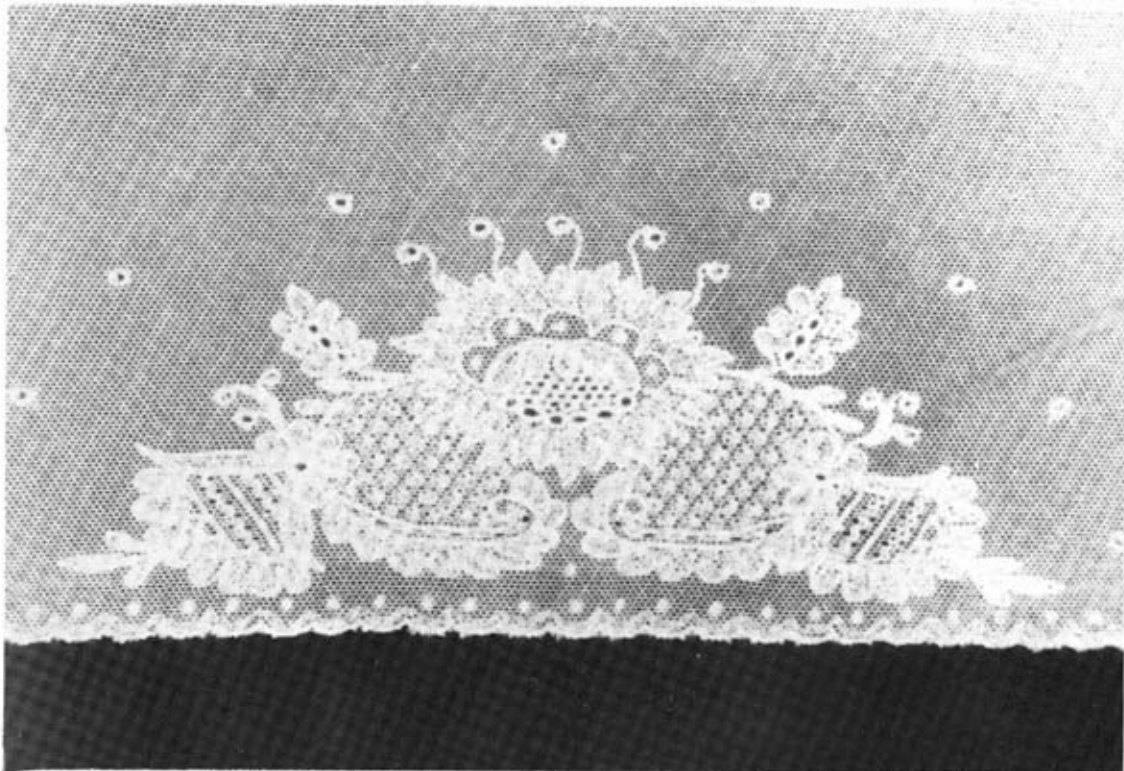
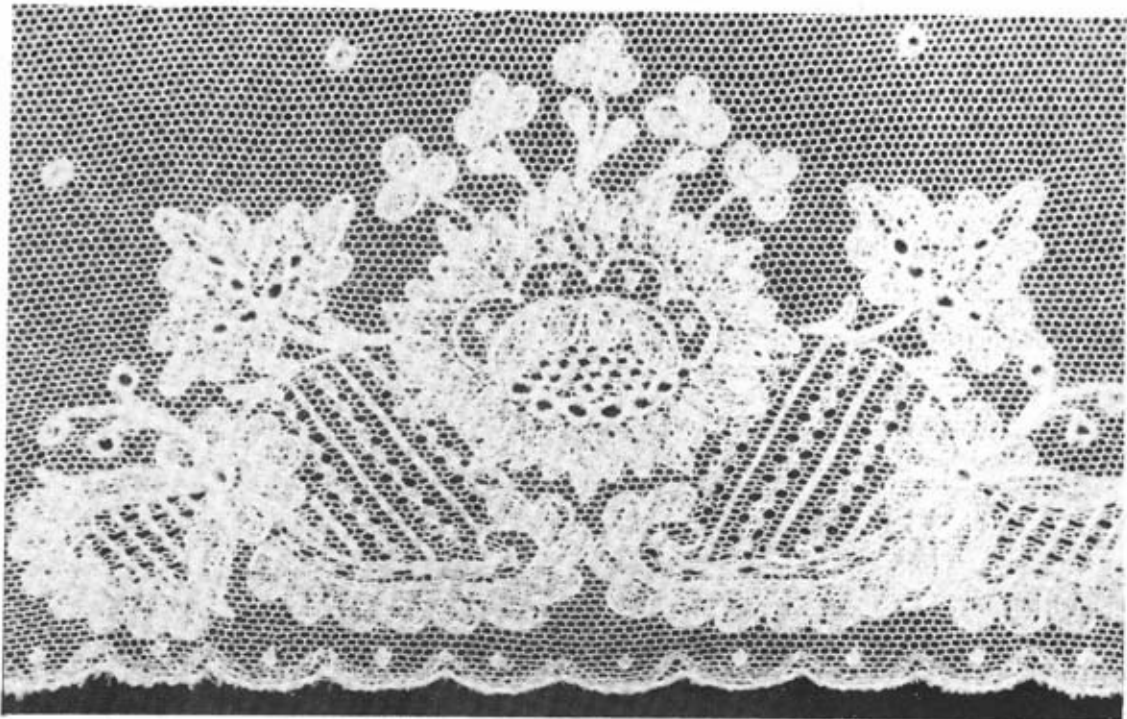
Oval mat worked by Mrs. Thorpe with roses, thistles, and back-ground sprigging.



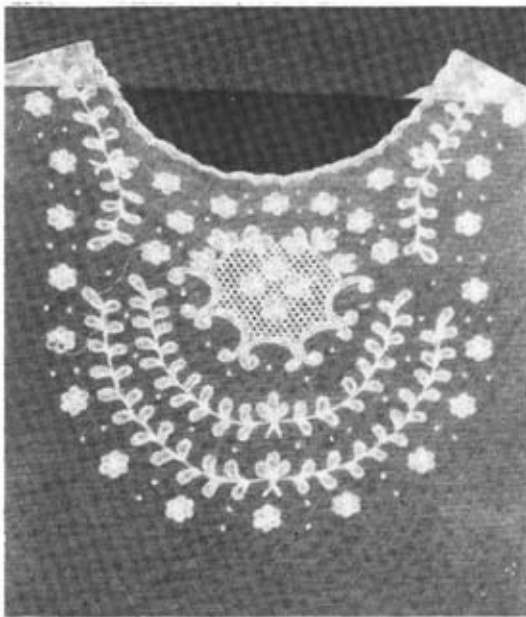
Mrs. Thorpe aged 87 working at her tambour frame in 1960. (Picture by courtesy of Essex County Newspapers).



Collar with caskets on the edging showing a good selection of filling stitches.



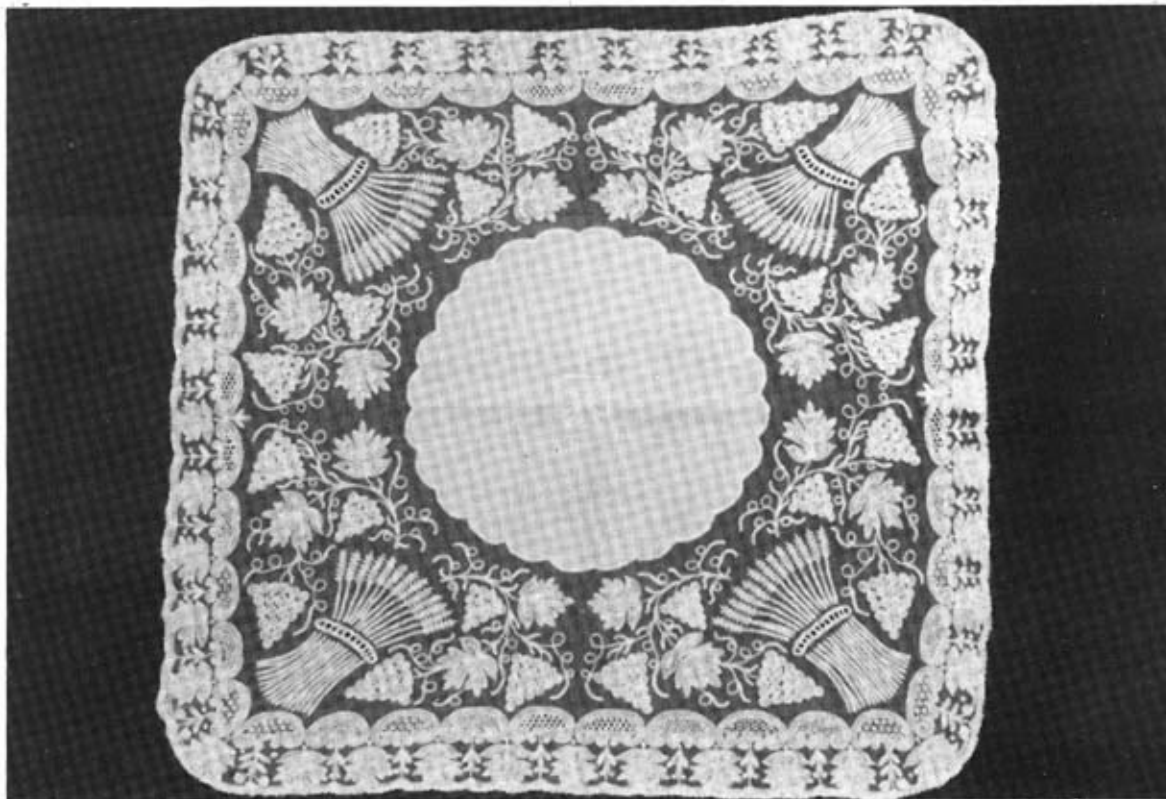
2 modesty vests of the same design showing small variations in the treatment and varied filling stitches.



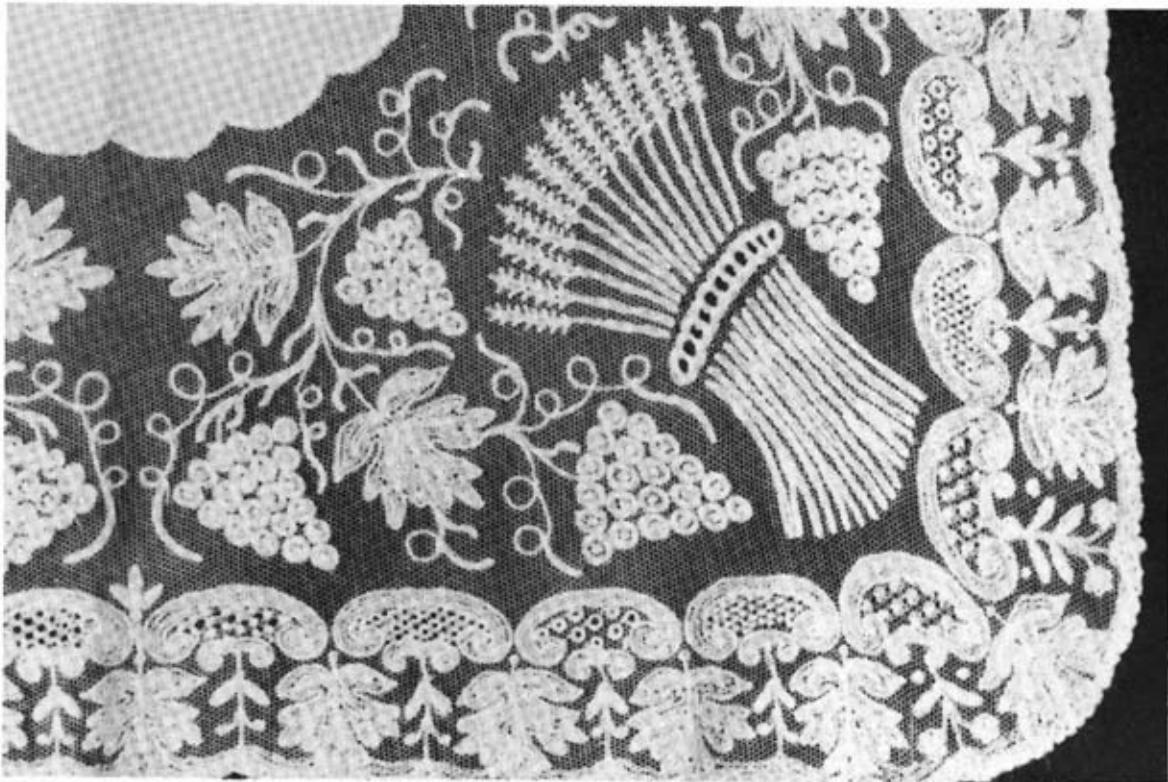
Shaped modesty vest.



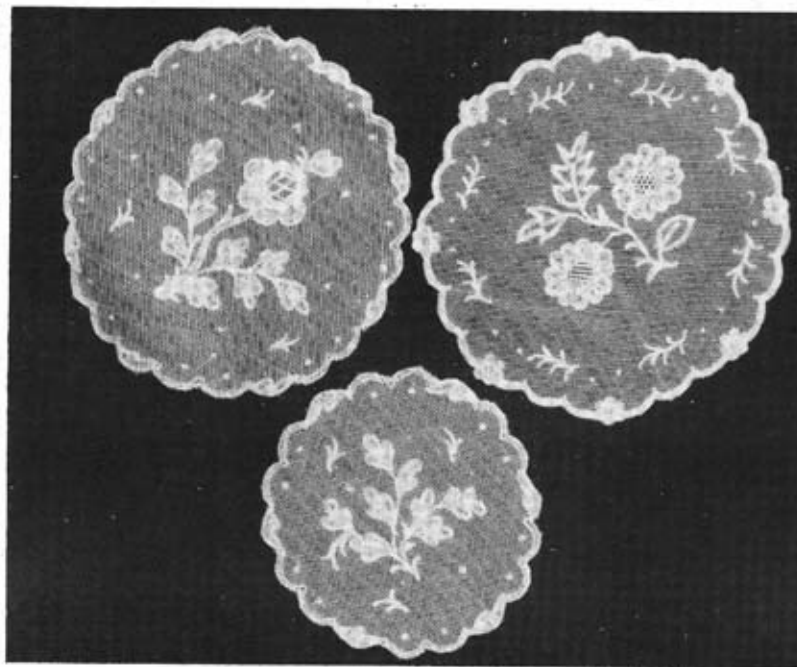
Handkerchief sachet, "By Mrs. Saunders".



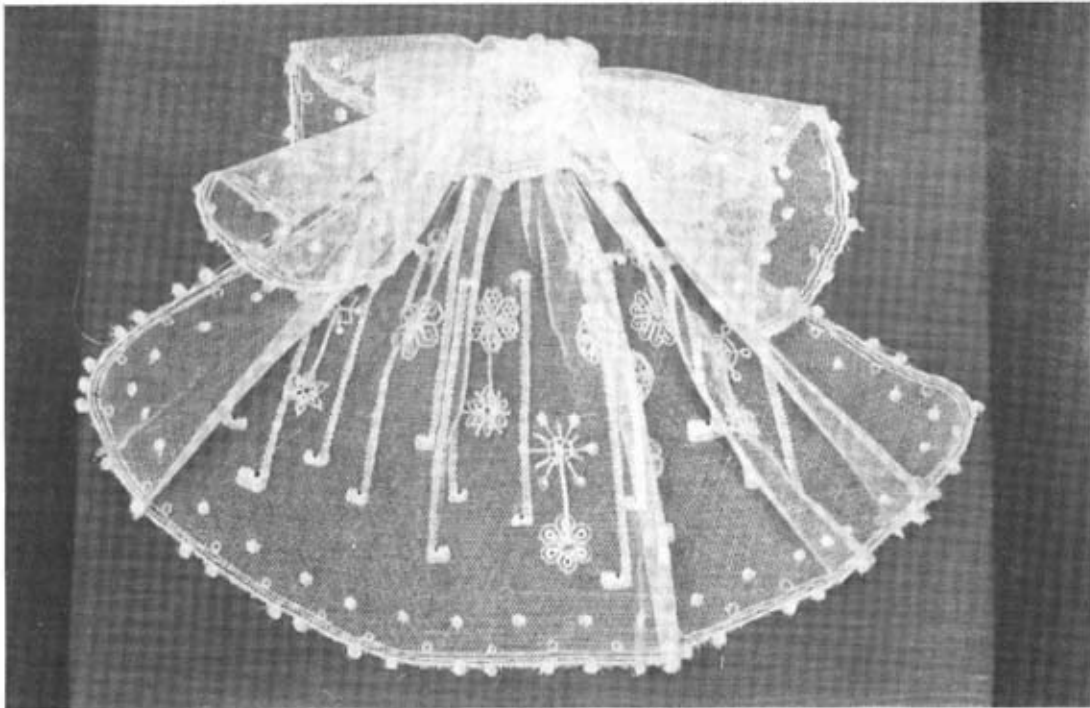
A corporal. Design as worked by Mrs. Saunders for a chalice in Exeter Cathedral.



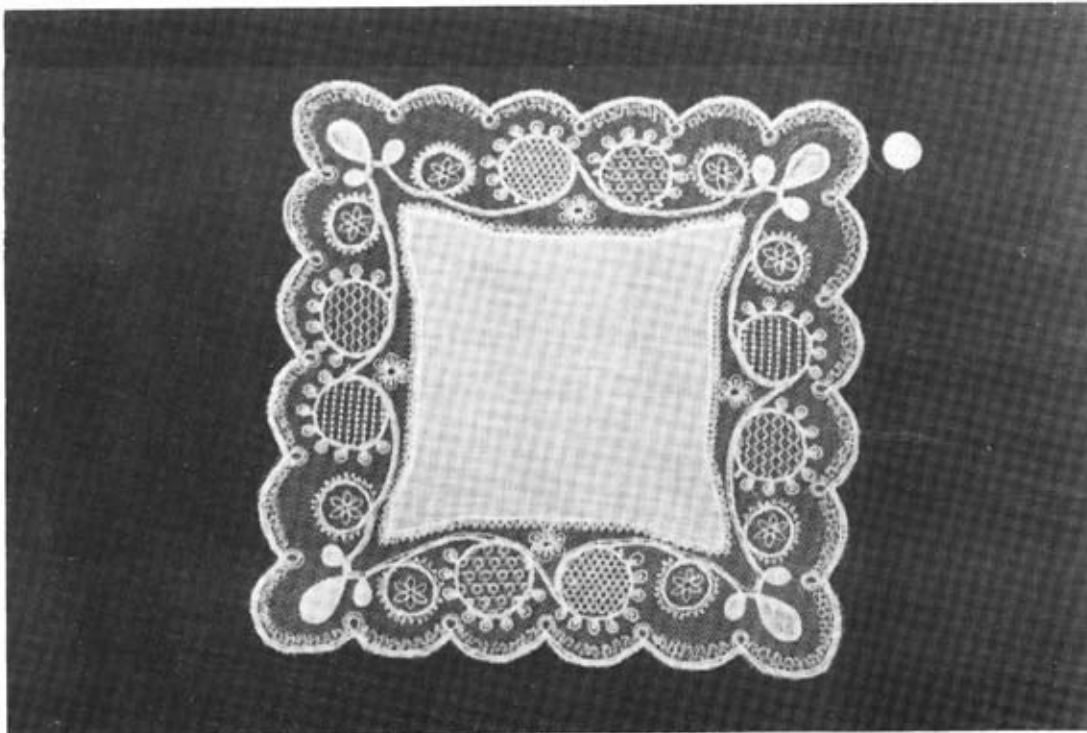
Close up showing sheaf of wheat, grapes, vine leaves and a wide selection of filling stitches.



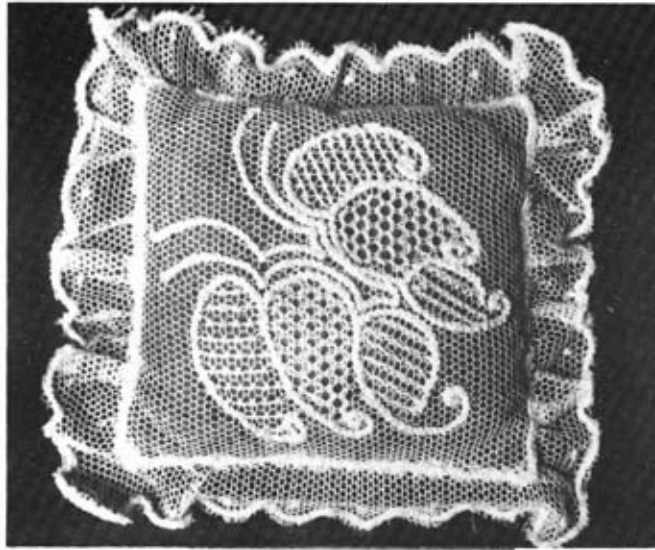
3 lace mats. Typical designs of the 1930's. "By Mrs. Avis".



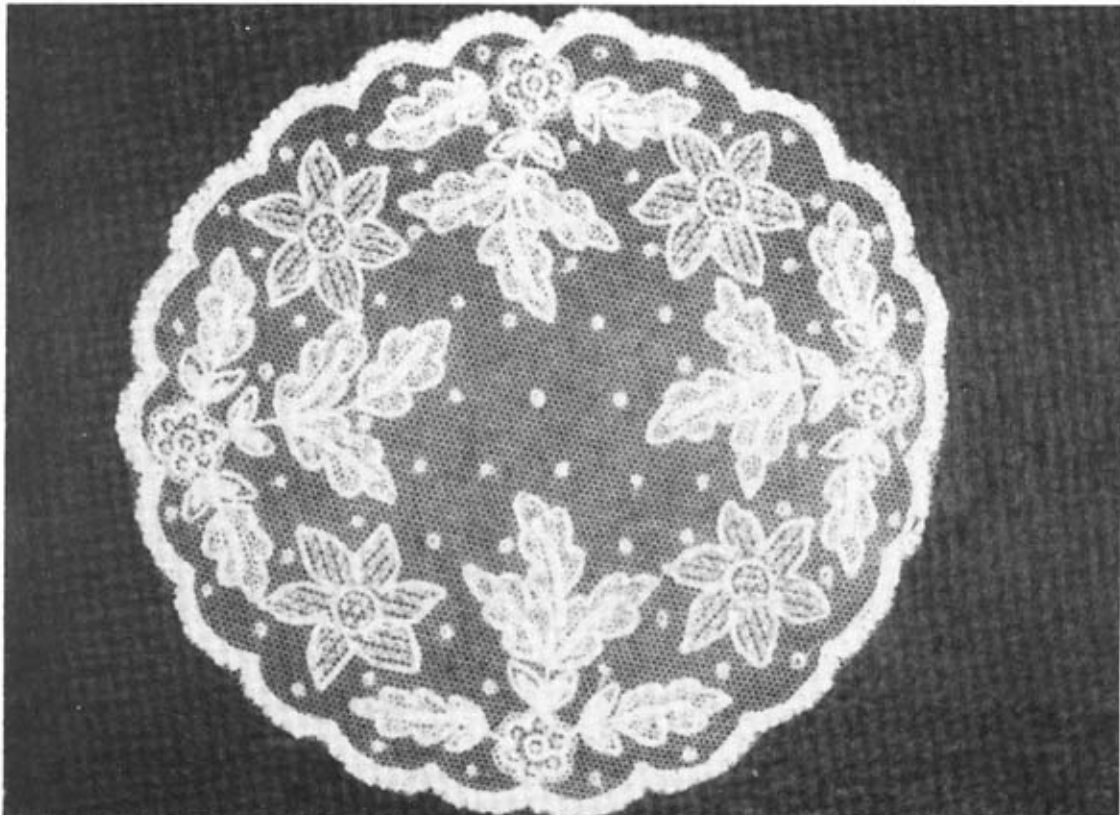
Bridesmaid's head dress — 1980's.



Handkerchief 1987 with "honeycomb", "bold smuggler", "spot" and "quarterfoil" filling stitches.



Small simple lavender bag.



Antique Lierre tambour lace mat with slack stitch within the leaves, tamboured fillings stitches for the flowers and sprigged background.



Jacket - Tamboured with varieties of textured wool.

SEVEN

COGGESHALL TAMBOUR LACE IN THE 19th CENTURY

The story of Coggeshall tambour lace during the 19th Century is very thinly recorded. The best overall picture of its progress can be gleaned from the census at the Essex Record Office and an admirable article in the "Victorian History of Essex". Various small references from other sources, including those whose relations were involved in this tamboured lace, (and who have stories to tell) help to give life to the mere recital of numbers, dates and names.

Thomas Johnson seems to have been the central figure in the first organisation of Coggeshall tambour lace. Monsieur Drago's name does not appear again. His importance seems to lie in the fact that, according to local tradition, he brought the technique into the town. It would appear that Thomas Johnson had several daughters who continued to organise the cottage industry in the following years. It is interesting to note that in Pigots Directory in 1823 Thomas Johnson is described as an "engine weaver", while in 1832 his name appears as "lace manufacturer" together with the names of John Birkin (a Richard Birkin founded a lace firm in Nottingham in 1827) and John Byng Banks.

In 1839 Sarah and Eliza Johnson, presumably Thomas Johnson's daughters, were recorded as having a "Millinery and Dressmaking" establishment in Market Hill. It is also mentioned that they were laceworkers. In the 1841 census they were living with James Spurge, and his wife Hannah Spurge, presumably a younger sister, as they were described as sisters in law to James Spurge. Hannah Spurge at that time employed 100 hands as a lace manufacturer while James was described as a tambour worker. By 1861 the two unmarried sisters are described as "Proprietors of Houses", with Mary Pilgrim answering to the same occupation, William Anthony as a "tambour lacemaker" with 24 hands, James Popham as a "laceman, tambour worker", and Ann Heather as a "lace manufacturer". These are all known to have been lace manufacturers and all lived in Church Street. Perhaps "Proprietors of Houses" was a more genteel description than "lace manufacturer" or "laceman"?!

In the 1841 census William Spurge, also of Church Street, is described as a hairdresser. (Prior to this, in 1839, the description of his occupation was "perfumier and haircutter"). His wife was Judith Spurge, a lace manufacturer with 20 hands. They had four children, the youngest two being only one year old and two months old respectively. Tragedy must have hit this little family, for in the 1851 census William Spurge is now described as a "lace manufacturer" and his wife is Charlotte Spurge. There are now five children recorded, the elder girl and boy would be by his first marriage, while the younger ones would appear to be by his second wife.

According to local tradition, the two brothers William and James Spurge married 2 daughters of Thomas Johnson. I suspect that Hannah and Judith were two younger sisters, both of whom were lace manufacturers, and married to the brothers. It is significant that William Spurge became a "lace manufacturer" when Judith apparently died. The two elder sisters Sarah and Eliza Johnson owned another establishment.

In the early days when it was necessary to teach the tambouring technique, a 'lace manufacturer' would have a tambour room. It is known that William Spurge built a special room in his garden for this purpose, with windows on three sides and an outside staircase. This accommodated 50 or more workers, mainly children, where they could be taught the craft of tambouring the net. When these children became housewives they continued lacemaking in their homes and taught their children and grandchildren the technique. In this way designs and skills were passed on from one generation to the next. Large tambour rooms therefore became obsolete and were consequently closed as the lace became an established cottage industry. The tambour room owned by William Spurge was the last one to close its doors in 1862–63.

In 1831 at Colchester three "lace dealers" were returned in the census. It is suggested that the difference between a dealer and a manufacturer may be that the dealer was an agent giving out materials and designs to the workers and collecting and delivering orders to the customers. The lace manufacturer, besides having tambour rooms for teaching, distributed materials and designs to workers, organised the finishing of the articles (which would include making up, sewing on the pearl edging where required etc.) and provided outlets for the sale of the lace in London and elsewhere.

It is obvious that many other tambour rooms were opened in the early days of Coggeshall lace. It is recorded that various elderly ladies early in the 1900's told how they had all learnt the craft in these workrooms.

Although there were intermittently lace dealers and manufacturers in various other places, Coggeshall remained the centre of the lacemaking, and workers living at some distance from the town would bring their lace into Coggeshall.

In 1841 there were 247 tambour workers and lacemakers in Essex. The majority of these lived in or around Coggeshall. Besides Hannah and Judith Spurge the lace manufacturers mentioned were Rachel Dalton, wife of Isaac Dalton, innkeeper and smith, and also Orpah Alger. John Byng Banks name again appears in 1845 when his is listed as having establishments in Coggeshall and London.

In 1851 there were 382 lacemakers recorded and tambour lace was at the height of its popularity. Some very fine examples of Coggeshall tambour lace were shown at the Great Exhibition, but unfortunately under the name of Nottingham lace!

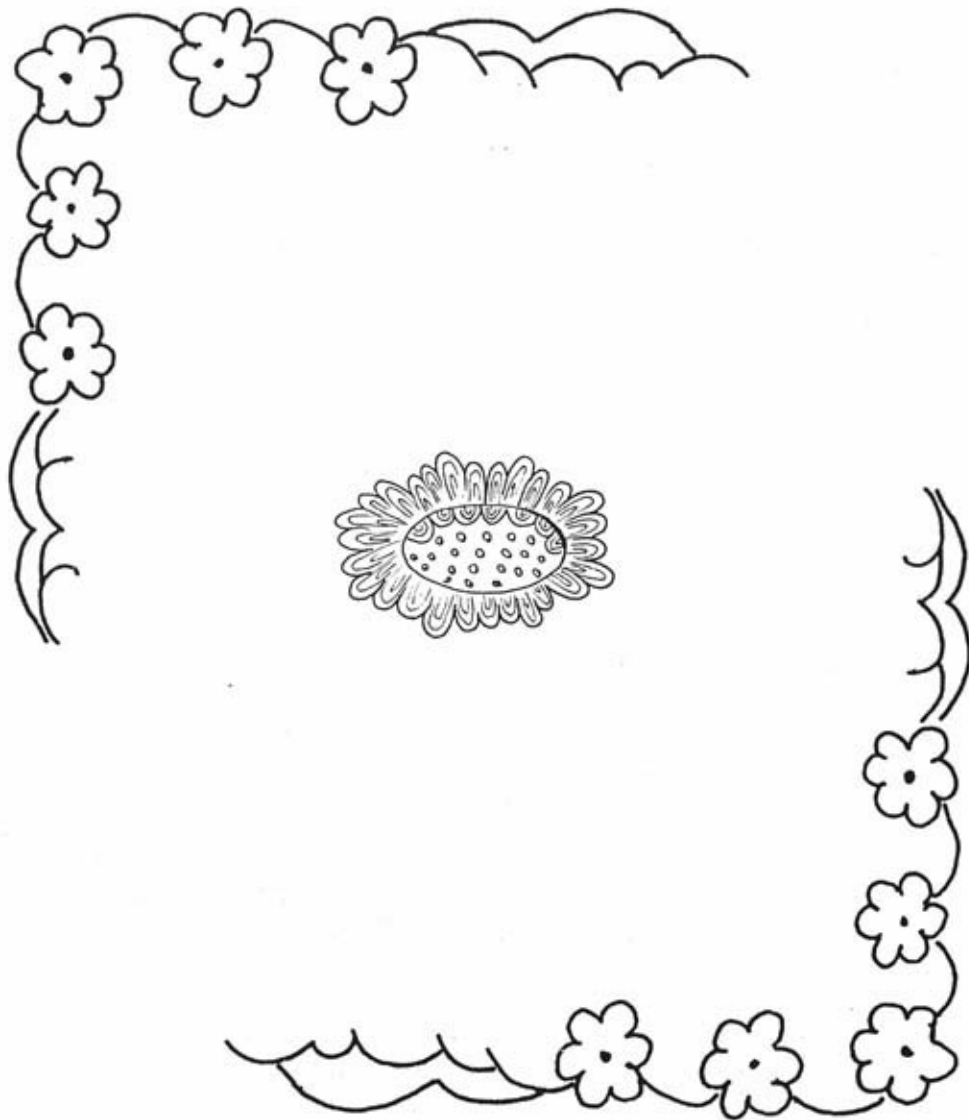
In 1855 there were at least seven lace manufacturers, the names included Jacob Dalton, The Misses S. and E. Johnson and the two brothers William and James Spurge. In addition, John Alger, J. Walter, W. Anthony and W. and J. Popham were all lace manufacturers who were in business for many years during this period.

After the Great Exhibition there was a gradual decline. The effect of the advent of quantities of improved machine made lace was reaching Coggeshall. This lace could be produced more quickly and cheaply, making lace available to a far wider circle of buyers.

In 1861 there were only 84 tambour lace workers in the district, which included Coggeshall.

A revival occurred in 1866 and by the 1871 census 449 lacemakers were recorded in Essex. In 1881 the numbers had sunk to 222, in 1891 to 156, while in 1901 to a mere 149, eighty five of whom were married women.

This is a brief resume of the numbers given in the various census years, but it is noted that some are quoted as being in the Coggeshall district (which included Witham and Halstead) while others were quoted as being for the whole of Essex.



EIGHT

TRENDS IN FASHION

Lace has always been an important adjunct for dress and much in favour for all the necessary accessories required by the fashionable lady. The whims of fashion throughout the century were a contributory factor in influencing the ebb and flow of the popularity of Coggeshall tambour lace.

In the 1850's fashion required flounces and edges of lace, but in the early 1860's flounces in dress disappeared, and braid and cord were the popular trimmings. This may have partly accounted for the decline in the numbers of the lace fraternity in the 1861 census. The 1870's were the great age of trimmings, and lace again was of more importance.

For costume, white was popular in the early part of the 19th Century, but in the latter decades black came into vogue, not only for mourning, but also for all types of dress. Queen Victoria gave a lead in this, when she went into deep mourning on the death of her husband Prince Albert in 1861. She was very partial to little fancy caps and bonnets, which naturally encouraged the use of lace, and these became very popular. They provided great scope for the designer, ranging from sober daily wear to little pieces of frivolity.

In the 1861 census it is fascinating to read that in the vicinity of Tilkey there were no less than seven ladies described as "Tambour cap makers" – Sarah Laurence, Elizabeth Lode, Sarah Byam, Ann Cresswell, Mary Potter, Elizabeth Potter and Sarah Dyer. The latter is also described as a "lace pearler", which means that she would sew on the pearl edging to the cap or bonnet as well as working as a tambourer.

Harriet Fenn who lived in this area is described as a "tambour work finisher", which means that she would be responsible for making up these caps ready to be sold.

Black lace was used extensively in dress, but by the 1880's the machine made product had largely supplanted all the handmade varieties. This included Coggeshall tambour lace, which in its turn was more rapidly executed than the bobbin and needlepoint products. Hand made lace was still bought by the very wealthy. Naturally those who made and dealt in the needlepoint and bobbin laces were scornful of all the embroidered net laces, as the basic net itself was machine made.

Prior to the advent of the machine made lace, only the Church, the aristocracy, and (during the late 18th and the earlier periods of the 19th Centuries), the families of the "nouveau riche" industrialists, were able to afford handmade lace. Lace had always been a very precious commodity, for when worn it denoted that the wearer was a genteel person of substance.

Machine made lace altered all this, as middle class members of the public were then also able to indulge in following the fashionable trends of the day.

NINE

THE EARLY 20th CENTURY

In addition to lace, jet beads, bugle beads (the longer cylindrical beads) and sequins were in fashion at the turn of the century. As the lace was usually machine made, many tambourers transferred to the tambouring of beads and sequins onto the popular black silk and satin dresses. The Edwardians were very partial to using this form of decoration for dress fronts, flounces and sleeves. Hats were of great importance. "Hat crowns" and "brim pieces" were greatly enhanced with the rich addition of beads and sequins. The little boned collars that Queen Alexandra wore with such elegance, were an obvious choice for bead tambouring. The pay for this type of work was better than for lace-making, but the glitter of the black jet and sequins was very trying on the eyes.

As the machine made lace had reached a very high standard of excellence and as the pay for Coggeshall tambour lace was inadequate, a great deal of inferior quality lace was being produced. Speed was of paramount importance to provide a living wage. However, in a few years, thanks largely to the influence and organising ability of two sisters, Alice and Annie and their brother Charles, children of William Spurge, the market for lace itself doubled. The brother, an art teacher who later moved to Brighton, improved the quality of design for the lace.

Besides these new designs, some beautiful old Italian lace was also copied by the workers. The sisters had a representative in London and this gave an added impetus to the wholesale trade.

They also received many private commissions, which would be executed by skilled workers.

These distinguished customers ordered many beautiful teagowns, coffee and bridge coats, boleros, berthes, scarves, christening and wedding veils together with many other articles. Orders were also received from India and the Colonies, where the ladies would appreciate the coolness of embroidered cotton net.

Miss Betts also had a thriving business in the town, which had been established by her father in 1870.

It is worthy of note that both Limerick lace and Coggeshall tambour lace reached high levels of excellence, when the designs were of good quality. Too little attention is so often paid to this need in many crafts. This particularly applies to cottage industries. If there is no design school to complement the teaching of the craft itself, the quality of the finished product is at risk. The success of a craft commercially required good designers, as well as good craftsmen, if the salesman is to be able to interest outlets, which appreciate a high standard of workmanship.



The designs of the cottage workers themselves were simple, mainly of country flowers, trailing stems and leaves. These designs were recorded on rough scraps of paper.

Besides stating where they were to be used, they frequently included the date and name of the owner. Such designs would be handed down from generation to generation.

After paper doyleys became popular, these were used as a source of design. A transfer could be created by rubbing cobbler's wax over paper laid on the doyley. Sometimes this method was also adopted when recording a design of lace. The paper would be placed over the lace itself and by rubbing with cobbler's wax the design would appear. Although this was a quick method the detail was not always so accurate as by using greaseproof paper (when available) over the lace, and carefully tracing the pattern with a pencil.

It is important to learn lace tambouring at an early age and at this time young girls were unwilling to learn the art, but sought other forms of employment. There was a hope that the Essex County Council would support the revival of Tambour Schools to encourage the lace industry of Coggeshall. However, the Boer War and then the Great War curtailed any such plans and the lace industry suffered drastically during the latter conflict.

As far as can be ascertained the term "Coggeshall tambour lace" or "Coggeshall lace" (as opposed to "lace made in Coggeshall") does not appear until the year 1910. In 1823 it was called "British lace" made by tambour workers, which in turn became "Tambour lace". It has been suggested that "Essex lace", as it became known in the trade, suffered because no specific name was adopted, such as in the case of "Limerick lace". Coggeshall tambour lace was equal in quality to some of the best tambour lace made in other places, but, unfortunately was frequently sold under an incorrect name.

Many places in the British Isles decorated the cotton net with tamboured outlines for the designs, but used the run net method for the decorative stitches, which filled the larger areas of the design. These areas were frequently found around the edge of the lace and in Limerick lace were called "caskets". However, Coggeshall tambour lace is unique, as the decorative stitches are worked with the tambour hook, and they have delightful names, e.g. Eyelet, Honeycomb, Birdseye, Spot, Bold Smuggler, Neat, Line, Zig-Zag, etc. When an area of a close plain texture is required, rows and rows of loosely worked chain stitch are used, and this is called "slack". As further old Coggeshall tambour lace is studied, unfamiliar stitches continue to appear and have to be analysed. New stitches, as in embroidery, also continue to be invented. In this way the number of stitches and effects, which can be worked with a tambour hook is always increasing. In one area two, and sometimes three, stitches can be combined giving a further variety.

TEN

RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLIER DAYS

At this point in our history perhaps we can share some of the recollections of those who treasure pieces of Coggeshall tambour lace, or who are able to remember the lace being made, or who have even made the lace themselves.

One such was a lady whose grandfather was a lace manufacturer over a hundred years ago, who owned a warehouse in London, and dealt in tambour lace. This was described as "Coggeshall" and made by workers living in Coggeshall. He sent designs and net from London to the workers. His name was T. B. Vaile and he exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1889. His son carried on the business, but found it impossible to compete with machine made lace made in Nottingham. He changed to millinery with embroidered decoration, still tamboured by workers living in Coggeshall. This bears out the reference to "hat crowns" and "brim pieces", already mentioned, as having been made in the early 20th Century when beads and spangles were so popular. Unfortunately this business closed in 1924.

From the many letters I have received it is clear that many people greatly prize their pieces of Coggeshall tambour lace. One lady having been given a handkerchief as a wedding present, has pinned the same handkerchief to the wedding dress of each of her three daughters – "something borrowed" and something to be treasured.

Mrs. Moore who died in 1981 aged 101 wrote an interesting article for the magazine "Embroidery" (see bibliography). I had a very pleasant afternoon and interesting conversation with her several years before she died. In her article she includes descriptions of various pieces of work in her collection, which she inherited from her grandmother, Mrs. John Thomas Hedge, who lived at Reed Hall near Colchester. It is interesting to find that a traveller called every 6 months bringing samples, collecting new orders, and returning work from the previous visit. Mrs. Hedge obviously preferred the tambouring on muslin to the net variety, as there is only one example of the net. This is a wedding veil of 1909 made for Mrs. Moore, using the flounces of a dress made for Mrs. Hedge's daughter in 1851. In this collection are two beautiful muslin capes, one yard deep both front and back, made in 1851 and 1853.

Mrs. Moore spoke to me of the very long narrow veils which she called pillion veils and which many think of as wedding veils. These long veils were apparently required when travelling along the dusty roads to church or visiting friends. This may well be the type of veil in the following story.

Designs were frequently sought after and copied. On one occasion the Squire and his lady occupied a pew behind which sat a young girl who was to be married. The lady had thrown her veil back over her hat and the girl during the long sermon proceeded to copy the design and duly tamboured it on her wedding veil.



If a woman was left a widow, life must have been desperately difficult. One lady tells me of her mother and herself in just such a situation, and one marvels how they managed. Before the mother's marriage in 1907 she had joined two other tambour workers, later to be her sisters in law. They hired a room and worked together making the lace, and when the market for this declined, they tamboured spangles (spangling is working with sequins).

When she became a widow with a little girl of 6, she continued tambouring lace and spangles. On Fridays the daughter would take the finished work very carefully down to the collecting centre, Miss Dalton's house, and would receive the princely sum of 3/6 – 7/6, and the materials required for the next weeks' work. She can remember her mother sitting over her frame working by the light of an oil lamp, shaded with a little circle of brown paper, which was moved along the frame as she worked. She would also help her mother by making small whirls of braid, which would be scattered onto the net between ruched braid feathers.

One of her aunts, who remained unmarried, continued tambouring for many years. She was approached by a London firm and made them velvet shoulder straps decorated with coloured spangles.

It is therefore clear that some workers had commissions direct from London firms, while there were also various people in the town who acted as collection points for those working in their cottages.

A typical salary for a farm labourer and his family was 10/– per week, later it became 14/–, and still later it eventually reached 18/–. Therefore if the mother and, later, the daughters were able to earn extra money with their tamboured lace it was a tremendous help.

Conditions for the cottage tambourer were difficult. In the tied cottage of the farm labourer there was the one room where the family of mother, father and children lived. The families were large and many women took in washing. The facilities for this were very primitive. Every cottage had big nails for pictures, which during the night, when the family went to bed, held the lines for the washing to dry. One elderly man, who was the youngest in the family of nine, tells how he used to sit on his mother's lap as she tamboured and would play with the thread, while she proceeded with her handkerchiefs, veils etc. Another mother with three small children under 4 is remembered as rocking the baby in the cradle with her foot, while she had another child on her lap as she worked!

Keeping the lace clean on the frame, in these circumstances, was a great problem. The frame itself was very large and would be stored propped against the wall, while the net was kept well covered. In this family, living outside Coggeshall, it would be the task of one of the children to return the completed lace to the collecting point; quite a responsibility for a child!

Another aspect of lace which is rarely mentioned, is that being such a delicate subject, it was sometimes necessary to have it mended. This would be a skilled task to undertake. A Mrs. Wallis repaired the Coggeshall tambour lace which came from Marks Hall, Coggeshall. When her work was ready to be returned she would wait until it was a moonlit night and she would call her husband and say, "Come along Harry, we must go along by the brook to Marks Hall tonight!" We forget how dark the countryside can be at times, and in winter people were never free from work to walk during the daylight hours. Repairing Coggeshall tambour lace would be an exciting occupation. She also did spanglework.



Muslin cape favoured by some Coggeshall tambour lace clientel.



ELEVEN

PROGRESS BETWEEN 1920 AND 1940

The heyday of the very short skirts and the lowered waistline on the hips was of short duration (between 1926 and 1929). Decoration with beads, bugles and sequins, but now worked in many colours, was still popular and continued to be so well into the 1930's. Sometimes the entire dress would be covered in beads, but these were found to be very heavy to wear. However, patterns of flowers and sunray motifs were the favourites.

The production of net was a flourishing trade in England. Heathcoats were still providing a very high quality product. In a fascinating booklet, advertising their net, entitled "Filmy Fabrics" "Heathcoat's Devonshire nets and tulle" it is recorded that "the production of the firm are sold in every market of the world. France takes hundreds of miles every year. The firm has branches and agencies in Australasia, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Italy and various other countries".

From the style of the dresses and the delightful fairy like illustrations in the booklet it would appear that this was the position in the 1920's and early 1930's. The nets and tulle were made in silk, cotton and artificial silk. A distinctive feature which they adopted in order to differentiate from other makes was the policy of rolling the net on **Striped Boards**.

"Tulle" is the traditional name for silk net in England. A very fine silk net made by Heathcoats was used for the wedding veils of our Queen Elizabeth (1947), Princess Ann (1973) and for the Princess of Wales (1981).

It was at this time between the two wars, that a great effort was made to ensure that the production of Coggleshall tambour lace remained alive and Miss Edith M. Surrige was the driving force behind this new upsurge of interest. She was ably supported by Mrs. Reginald Hill. Miss Surrige was the eldest daughter of a well known Coggleshall family. She herself was an excellent needlewoman and included tambouring among her skills. She died when nearly 90 years of age in 1959. She it was who organised the distribution of designs and materials, and the collection of the lace when completed. In this way she was able to decide which articles should be made and also to choose and adapt the designs suitable to the ability of the individual worker.

The industry was given the title of "The Coggleshall Tambour Lace Workers". "The aim was to keep alive this interesting and beautiful craft; to give employment to women of all ages in their own homes by giving them regular work with prompt payment; to train young workers in the various fillings, and to adapt designs to modern requirements, thus producing only the best tambour lace." A leaflet setting out these aims was printed by Mrs. Campbell of Layer Marney Hall, and Miss Surrige.

“Oyster”, a new colour for net and thread was introduced at this time. This was the new fashionable colour replacing white. Where white had been used extensively in home decoration it was replaced by “oyster” and creamy shades, while brown replaced the white woodwork.

Unfortunately despite all this encouragement, those who had transferred to bead and spangle tambouring never reverted to lacemaking again and only a few skilled workers remained. These were very proud of the quality of their lace, but not every one was capable of reaching this very high standard.

When working complicated designs and filling stitches, the number and direction of the holes covered in each individual stitch is important, in order to give an evenness in the overall effect. One lacemaker said that the hexagonal net represented a “series of little flowers” to her.

Miss Surridge knew the capabilities of her various workers. Those who were less proficient would be given work with a simpler design. Some would only be required to tambour and strengthen the edge of squares in a coarser net and perhaps include a small design. These squares were in demand for the protection of babies from insects in foreign countries.

In the 1930's Luncheon Sets were used in place of tablecloths and a complete set comprised 2 large mats, 12 dinner mats and 12 small mats for the wine glasses. A catastrophe struck Coggeshall laundry one day, when it was discovered that a set of these small delicate articles of lace had disappeared with the heavy washload. A harrassed laundry owner hurried to the home of a skilled worker and pleaded with her “please make another set, I'll pay anything!” This she did, working all day and late into the night. Three or four days later they were completed. For this she received £2 – £3. It is difficult for us, living in this age of inflation, to remember or realise, the very small amounts of money that were both paid in wages and also charged for completed articles.

The pay at this time continued to be low having regard to the hours of work as the following prices will indicate:—

For a Lace Collar 1/3 – 1/6 (7p)

For a Modesty Vest 9d (3p)

For a Handkerchief 2/6 (12p)
(as presented to Princess
Marina on her marriage)

Sewing the lace to the fine lawn centre of the handkerchief with close satin stitch, (often done by the daughters) represented a days work for which the payment would be 6d (2p).

Other articles which were popular at this period were handkerchief sachets, dressing table sets, fans, boudoir caps, babies bonnets etc.

Mrs. Lester was one of Miss Surrige's skilled workers and her daughter, the late Mrs. Catermole, very kindly showed me some of her beautiful pieces of lace which were of a high standard of design and execution. She was one of the three people who made a handkerchief for Princess Marina on her marriage to the Duke of Kent. The design of her handkerchief originated from her grandmother Mrs. Emma Smith. I was also shown the letter of thanks sent from the Duke of Kent on behalf of his wife, together with a little box with a portion of wedding cake still lying within, (naturally it was with great pride that these were treasured). Both of Mrs. Lester's grandmothers had been skilled workers carrying on the industry for over 60 years. She herself was taught, at the age of 14.

In 1937, under the direction of Mrs. Campbell and Miss Surrige, some lovely specimens of Coggeshall tambour lace were sent to the United Kingdom Government Pavilion at the Paris Exhibition. For this Mrs. Lester made a set of table mats of modern design depicting stylised fish for the fish course, fruit for the fruit course etc., and consequently won a coveted Commemorative Diploma (judged by an International jury). These mats were greatly admired.

These designs were the result of the interest and help given by Mr. Geoffrey Holme, owner and editor of the prestigious modern art magazine "Studio". Naturally he encouraged a new approach to designing for this lace, away from the traditional country and garden flower motifs. One wonders what further new exciting trends may have followed, if the Second World War, when materials were no longer available, had not curtailed such ideas.

In the 1930's Her Majesty Queen Mary, in order to encourage the production of Coggeshall tambour lace, sent a command asking for some lace to be sent to Balmoral for her inspection. Later a letter was received from her lady-in-waiting saying that "Her Majesty greatly admires the work and is graciously pleased to retain 2 dresses and one tea-cloth. She hopes that the lace industry will become better known and that sufficient orders will be received to keep the lacemakers employed".

In order to keep the lacemaking industry alive in Coggeshall, Miss Surrige gave the workers greater latitude in the decoration of the net, and provided that the basic design was followed, the filling stitches were left to the discretion of the worker. There are examples of this period where needlerunning is sometimes to be found, with the edges buttonholed or finished with bought picots. One example shows a cordonnet (the thick thread or cord) couched down around the outline of the design. Miss Surrige also introduced the use of silk or rayon threads and net, thereby giving a further variety of textures. In much of the tamboured lace, large areas were filled with "slack", while only small areas used the decorative stitches. All these factors helped to speed the execution of the lace.

Therefore unless the history of a piece of lace is known it is unwise to be dogmatic about its origin. Embroidered net lace both tamboured and needlerun has been made in many parts of the world in addition to the British Isles.

However, Miss Surridge still had a few skilled workers who continued to make the true Coggeshall tambour lace with its distinctive "filling" stitches.

It was at about this time that many references appear stating that Coggeshall seemed to be the only place in England where the original characteristic tamboured filling stitches as carried out by their grandmothers, were still retained. (It is very disappointing as Miss Surridge mentions a sampler showing 35 filling stitches, which has since disappeared. Unfortunately she only names a few decorative stitches but finishes with a tantalising "etc"!).

With the death of Miss Surridge in 1959 the making of Coggeshall tambour lace practically disappeared. Since then Mrs. Sebastian, who has lived in Coggeshall for many years, has helped to keep alive interest in the lace. She has given talks on the subject, and has organised Exhibitions in Coggeshall and elsewhere of her own collection, together with examples belonging to other people. Her interest was aroused when she arrived in Coggeshall in 1920 and discovered that a fan of lace given to her as a bridesmaid in 1910 was of Coggeshall tambour lace.



First Exercise of those learning to tambour Coggeshall lace set by Miss Surridge. Straight tambour, curves and spots. (David Menzies)

TWELVE

SOME COGGESHALL TAMBOUR LACEMAKERS OF GREAT TEY

When handling lace it is of added interest if its history and the maker are known. This applies to several Coggeshall tambour workers who lived in Great Tey.

A collar, the work of Mrs. Ellen Dale who died in 1942 when over 90 years of age, was given to me by her daughter very early in my research into Coggeshall tambour lace. It is greatly prized. Her work shows an excellent use of filling stitches. She never made any lace after 1912.

Another of the experienced Coggeshall tambour workers who also lived there early in this century and who encouraged a high standard of workmanship was Mrs. Thorpe born in 1877. It was lacemakers like her who helped to give Great Tey the reputation of producing skilled Coggeshall tambour lace. She moved to Parkeston some time after the First World War, but continued her lacemaking and demonstrating.

She encouraged her students to embellish and enrich some of the designs that they received, so that each piece of lace had an individuality of its own.

Mrs. Thorpe made several tambour lace articles for the Royal family. These included a dress collar for Queen Mary, a flounce to be made into a dress for Princess Margaret, and one of the three handkerchiefs sent to Princess Marina on her marriage to the Duke of Kent. She demonstrated and exhibited all over the country, including the Crystal Palace and Albert Hall where Royalty, including the Emperor of Germany, were interested in her tambour lacemaking. Her work was also included in exhibitions in other countries.

Mrs. Thorpe won the coveted Grand Belgique Diploma Commemoratif in Ghent in 1913. She had to wait until the war ended to receive her diploma but unfortunately it disappeared when she died.

As she remarked in 1960, "The craft is dying out. I learnt from my mother and she in turn was taught by her mother. The young ladies of today are not interested". She has left a memory of being generous in sharing her knowledge and in giving away her lace to those who admired it.

During the First World War, when Mrs. Thorpe's husband was serving in the forces, she enjoyed the company of a little girl of 7 who sat and watched her tambouring her lace. One day this little girl said that she would like to learn how to do it. Mrs. Thorpe promptly turned a chair upside down and secured the net between the upright legs, gave her a hook and thread, and proceeded to instruct her. This little girl later became Mrs. Saunders and was another of the skilled workers of Great Tey.

The first article that Mrs. Thorpe set her to tambour was a small high collar which turned over round the neck. On this band she worked rows and rows of little roses.



Miss Surrige gave Mrs. Saunders the task of working a long flounce which was made into a dress for Princess Alexandra. This flounce for the skirt was very full with a distinct wide design and was gathered over an underskirt. The yoke had "sprigging" and the puffed sleeves little flowers as decoration.

Another important commission was for a chalice veil for Exeter Cathedral. She wrote to Mrs. Thorpe, who was then living in Parkeston, for advice. She sent her a design with minute details of stitches to be used. This makes fascinating reading, and gives some indication of the care and thought that was expended on this lacemaking. Unfortunately the chalice veil was destroyed, together with the records, when the Cathedral was bombed during the Second World War.

A corporal of the same design is a prized possession of Laver Marney Church. As Mrs. Campbell lived at Laver Marney Hall, it is probable that she would have commissioned it from the Coggeshall tambour lace workers.

Mrs. Saunders had many commissions over the years and tells how during the last war she was asked by an American soldier if she would make a collar in Coggeshall tambour lace for a local girl whom Mrs. Saunders knew. As this was a rather special personal commission, and as the collar was to be worn on a new black dress at the village dance, she planned it with great care. It was a rather large collar in size with the same depth back and front. The ensemble was a great success. Mrs. Saunders had many repeat orders, which she declined, as it was this young girl's own special collar.

Mrs. Saunders and I have had several very interesting conversations concerning Coggeshall tambour lace and the varied filling stitches, for which I am most grateful. Over the years she has taught many people how to tambour this lace and has given talks on the subject, even after her eyesight became too weak for tambouring herself.

The name of Mrs. Percy Percival appears among the demonstrators on a programme of the Essex Handicrafts Association Exhibition and Sale, held at the Corn Exchange, Colchester in October 1932. There she demonstrated the making of Coggeshall lace. She was another of the gifted Coggeshall lacemakers of Great Tey and was responsible for teaching many the art of tambouring. She obviously demonstrated in many places, later appearing under the name of Mrs. Percival Smith.

One of her pupils was Mrs. Chaplin of Great Tey who also produced some very good Coggeshall tambour lace. Another was Mrs. Avis whose very interesting sampler shows many filling stitches. Her standard of tambouring was also very good. We are fortunate in having this sampler recorded, as she was one of the last lacemakers to have learnt this craft before it died out.

In recognition of all this excellence over the years, one of the new roads in Great Tey has been called Tambour Lane.

It was the custom for the lace workers of Great Tey to walk into Coggeshall with their completed lace and collect the materials and orders for the following week. The 'high light' of this journey was to have a pint of stout at the "Alexandra" in Coggeshall, before the walk home. At sometime in the 1930's someone with a bicycle, on payment of 1d by each of the laceworkers, would take all the completed lace from Great Tey into Coggeshall.

Coggeshall tambour lace has featured in many exhibitions, but there were obviously many unrecorded. The first reference is to the 1851 Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, where it was unfortunately incorrectly labelled, which caused much annoyance. Further achievements were as follows, giving the name of the recipient of the award where known.

- 1911 Cambridge Handicrafts Exhibition – 1st Class Certificate
- 1912 Southend – Medal
- 1913 Ghent – Grand Belgique Diploma Commemoratif presented to Mrs. Thorpe
- 1914 (Palais De Louvre) British Exhibition of Arts Diploma
Dunmow Essex Handicrafts Exhibition – Award
Lincoln Art and Industrial Exhibition Medal

During the war it is recorded that "many exquisite specimens" were shown at various exhibitions held in connection with the "Home Arts" and "Arts and Crafts Societies".

- 1923 Holland, The Hague, Amsterdam and Arnheim Exhibitions sent in by (British Institute of Industrial Art).
- 1930 Monza – Diploma
- 1937 Paris (United Kingdom Government Pavilion) Commemorative Diploma presented to Mrs. Lester
- (around 1927) Central Hall Westminster (English Women's Exhibition). Notable display of Coggeshall tambour lace
- 1938 Essex Handicrafts Association – most outstanding exhibit in exhibition



THIRTEEN

THE REVIVAL OF COGGESHALL TAMBOUR LACE

Initially two factors were in our favour for the revival of Coggeshall lace in 1976. We were fortunate in having the support of the Essex Handicrafts Association, who held classes on the tambouring technique in 1977, under the experienced tuition of Mrs. Beryl Johnson from the London College of Fashion. Also, since the Lace Guild was formed in 1976, the very same year as my booklet appeared, there was naturally a new enthusiasm for all types of lace. This fact did present problems in several ways, as we were asked to demonstrate at prestigious venues including Gawthorpe Hall and the Costume Society at an early date, and tambouring was an unfamiliar technique for us. However, we were very grateful for the opportunity to advertise our Essex lace.

Fortunately during 1977 we were able to obtain cotton net, which was a great improvement on the nylon variety, which we had previously been forced to use. Added to this, the handles required to hold the hooks, which had been imported from France, began to be made for us in England.

In 1978 Coggeshall tambour lace was included as one of the Demonstrations at the Annual Exhibition of Essex Handicrafts Association and attracted a great deal of interest. Following this, in the autumn, we held a class at which 42 students attended and four of us acted as tutors. At further classes held in Autumn 1979 and spring 1980, 32 and 40 students respectively took part. These came from Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridge, Hertfordshire, Surrey, Kent and London. In this way we were able to spread interest in the lace.

In 1979 the English Lace School at Tiverton, (now moved to Rickbeare near Exeter), was opened and Coggeshall tambour lace was included in the prospectus. Since then it has been demonstrated and taught there by Joan Merrifield.

It became increasingly obvious that an instructional booklet was required. Therefore in 1978 I produced a booklet on the technique, called "Creative Coggeshall Lace". This seems to have encouraged lacemakers everywhere to enjoy making this lace, for books have been dispatched to many countries, including America, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, South Africa, France, Belgium and Holland. One lacemaker even met one enthusiast (from England) making Coggeshall tambour lace in Tennerife!!

Talks, weekend courses, day schools, demonstrations etc., have continued over the years. The lace has been exhibited at many venues including The English Lace School, Lace Guild Exhibitions, at the OI DFA Exhibition in Brighton in 1986, and in Ruama, Finland in 1987.

The exciting aspect of Coggeshall tambour lace is that there are many avenues to be explored in experimentation. As in all forms of embroidery new stitches are continually being invented. These can be used in the "filling" areas of the lace. One lace member has produced a folder containing twelve of these!

A new interest has opened up which is attracting the embroidery fraternity as well as lacemakers. The use of this technique gives rewarding results when used on coarser nets with coarser threads, i.e. wool (both textural and plain) crochet threads, raffine, plastics, ribbon etc. All the "filling" stitches can be used in a modified form. This does not always produce a "lacy" product, but gives fascinating textures.

Another aspect which should be included in our story of Coggeshall tambour lace is the liaison which has been established between the lacemakers of Lierre in Belgium and those in England. Their lace has so many similar characteristics. A beautiful piece of tamboured Lierre lace won an award at the 1986 competition held at the English Lace School.

The inhabitants of Lierre are very proud of their lace and the lacemakers are given support by being provided with accommodation and teaching facilities. It comprises a six year course in which lessons on design are an integral part.

A group of lacemakers who have completed this course continue to meet regularly at the centre each week and produce some beautiful lace. In October each year they have an Exhibition. To celebrate their 5 years existence in 1987 since the formation of this group, they have produced a little book on Lierre lace.

Luneville was another important centre of tambouring on net. Luneville embroidery, i.e. with beads and spangles has been famous for a very long time, it's origins being in the 17th Century. Over the years court and church requirements became more and more sumptuous, and the beautiful rich creations of Luneville provided this need. The French Revolution was a critical period, but by the middle of the 19th Century Luneville embroidery was again producing fantastic creations using beautiful designs. This new impetus was greatly assisted in 1867 when the tambouring technique was introduced to attach the beads and spangles.

In conjunction with the beading, a great deal of tambouring on net with a single thread was embarked on, producing many beautiful examples of lace. However, after the Second World War, the production of tamboured lace on bobbinet practically ceased. Old pieces of this work are treasured by many of the local people. Beaded and spangled embroidery is still produced in large amounts, not only for haute couture but also for the theatre, television etc.

The history of all handmade lace is a long saga of poverty for the workers of this beautiful craft. However a new situation has arisen since the formation of the Lace Guild. Thousands of enthusiastic amateurs are making every type of lace, finding it not only a rewarding pastime, but also therapeutically a great relaxation.

Meanwhile the commercial production of lace is in the capable hands of the experts who produce the machine made variety. I feel sure that with the upsurge of interest in handmade lace, there is a much greater appreciation and demand for their product.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

The Lace Guild, "The Hollies", 53 Audnam, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 4AE.

Hollytrees Museum Colchester
Saffron Walden Museum

These museums have some Coggeshall
lace but not always on display

Folder of 12 new filling stitches

Norma Pollington,
15 Westwood Road,
South Chingford,
London, E4
Tel: 01-531 7371

SUPPLIERS

"NEEDLWORK" Bucklers Farm, Coggeshall, Essex CO6 1SB. Tel: (0376) 61505.

Coopers, 82-84 High Street, Witham, Essex. Tel: (0376) 512337.

A. Sells, "Lane Cove", 49 Pedley Lane, Clifton, Shefford, Beds. Tel: Hitchin 814725.

Mrs. S.M. Cox, The English Lace School, Honiton Court, Rockbeare, Nr. Exeter,
EX5 2EF. Tel: (0404) 822735.

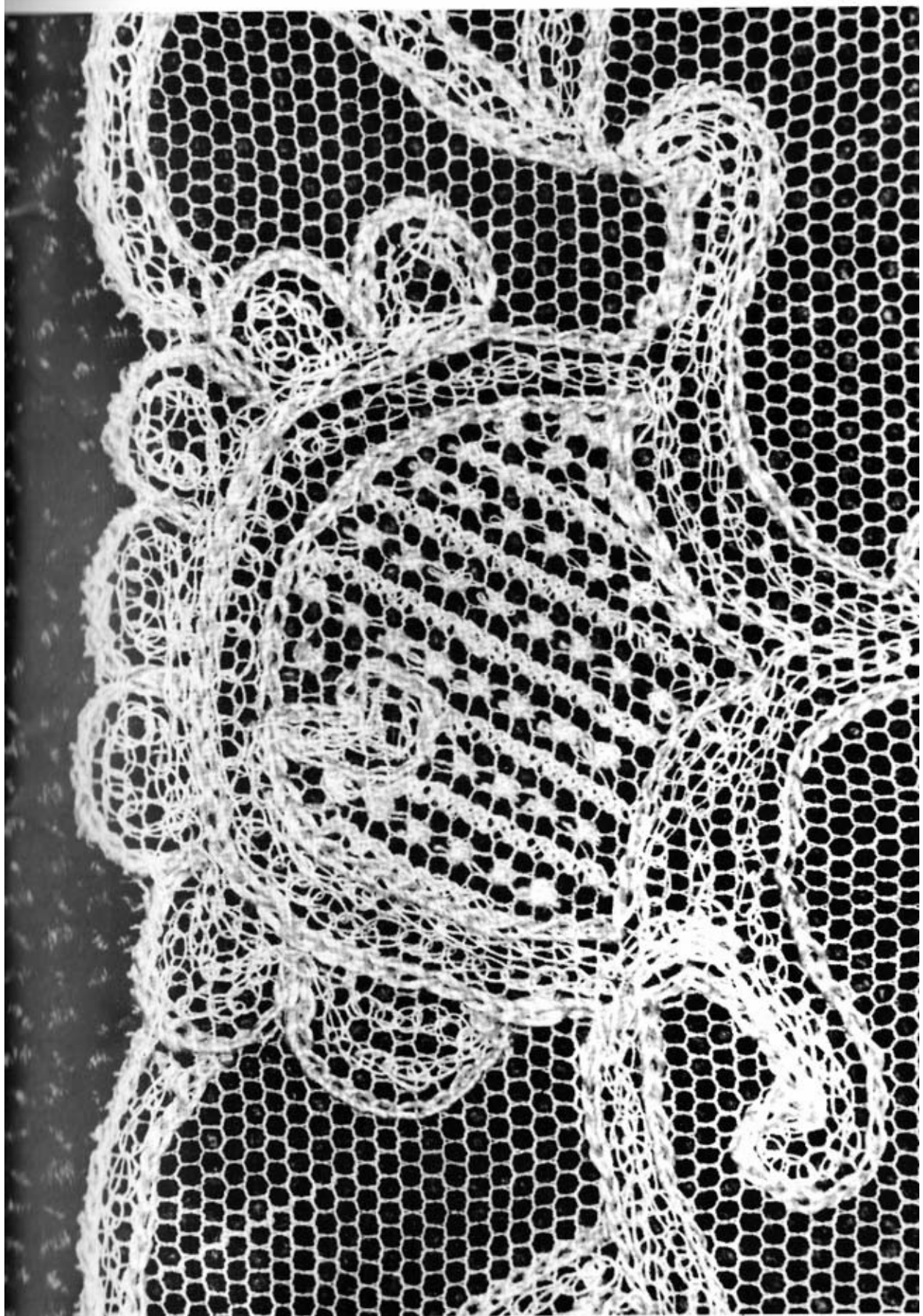
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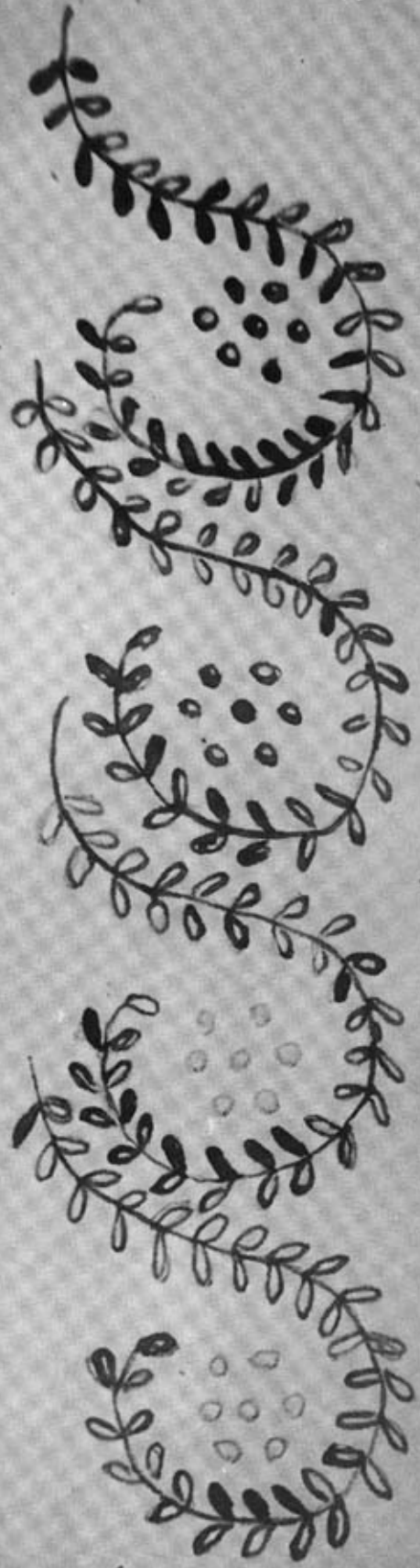
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43-50



Flowers Pattern 824-202



Flowers Pattern