

RE-VIEWING LACE IN ARCHIVES:  
CONNECTING THE LACUNAE

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## Abstract

The archive is widely understood to be an ordered keeper of factual truth and a solid foundation of historical accuracy. However, the inherent lacunae within the archive can render this assumed accuracy fallible. This thesis questions the potential of such gaps and absences to impact on the understanding of objects in archives. An archive is defined as any collection of material which has been withdrawn from its normal circulation and stored for potential future reference.

Specialist knowledge of how to read lace as both a social and a manufactured product is applied through two case studies. Contemporary lace practice is used to investigate the usually unseen connections and histories within the archives. The application of specialist knowledge to the reading of the case studies and the integration of practice and theory contributes to the body of knowledge both within and beyond the archives.

The Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery lace collection case study considers the effects of contingency on the creation of the collection and its understanding. In-depth research on the Museum's lace holdings is documented and alternative interpretations of objects highlighted. The research reveals that whilst the traditional museum interpretation of lace as a signifier of social status is fully justified, lace can also be understood as an item of trade and unit of currency which touched the lives of people at many levels of society. The insertion, *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*, utilises items from across the Museum's collections to create an original narrative structure which forms connections around lacunae identified in the archive.

The case study relating to the legal deposit registers held at the International Centre for Lace and Fashion in Calais is concerned with the re-reading of a material archive. The lace samples in the registers provide unique evidence of technical advances and innovative material changes. The registers can also be shown to hold much information which can only be revealed through the application of an informed eye. The research repositions the first legal deposit register outside its original context as an instrument of copyright protection, showing that it also conceals a much broader history of the lace trade in Calais and beyond. The researcher's contribution to the design of a new lace, to be manufactured on one of the Centre's historic lace looms, provides an opportunity to mediate an artistic bridge between the archival research and a product which leaves a lasting legacy at the Centre.

Key Words:

Lace, Archive, Lacunae, Museum, Collections, Birmingham, Calais

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## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated

# 1. Introduction

‘ . . . by means of its materials, construction, design, and use of signs and symbols, the artefact functions as a vehicle of communication conveying status, ideas, values, feelings, and meaning’.

(McClung Fleming, 1982:169)

A deep love of lace, its making and its history lies at the root of this research. In combination with a fascination for fine detail and an inquisitive nature this has led to a scholarly interest in the interpretation of historic lace. The re-viewing<sup>1</sup> of lace in museum archives questions whether or not the lacunae in archives may be used to challenge the conventional reading of lace in museum collections. Lace is inextricably linked with lacunae – holes, gaps, voids, absences. The lacunae give lace its distinctive identity. The lacemaker’s skill lies in effectively drawing together many individual threads to form a coherent whole around the absences which are the essence of the fabric. In this thesis the same skills will be employed in identifying archival absences, drawing together hints and clues and adding information from specialist sources to facilitate new readings of historic lace collections.

The research will question whether the lacunae in the archive can affect the way in which textiles in archives are understood. Eastop (2000:26) notes that ‘textiles are historic documents because they have tangible and factual links to the past’. She goes on to point out that ‘textiles are not documents of a single, uncontested history, but are open to multiple, interpenetrating interpretations. They are historic documents open to contestation’. The research will also consider whether the lacunae in the archive can be used to challenge the established reading of the archive as a solid foundation of historical accuracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Re-viewing is understood to mean active viewing from a number of different conceptual positions which incorporates reflective reconsideration and revision.

New insights into selected archives will be demonstrated through the interlinking of case studies and contemporary lace practice. This thesis, and its accompanying practice, will situate new studies of lace archives in the public arena and encourage public engagement with the reinterpretation of the past. It has been suggested that 'an object has a past and a future and contains evidence of its history, evidence that can be shared and added to the general pool of knowledge' (Javér et al, 1999:147). The scholarship and practice evidenced in this thesis will offer new contributions to knowledge.

For this research an archive is being defined as any collection of material that has been withdrawn from its normal circulation and stored for potential future reference. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida (1995:36) states that 'the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past'. Archives may be a record of past information or occurrences but they are primarily created for future use. He continues: 'it is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and a responsibility for tomorrow'. This thesis will be about one such response; it is concerned with the multiple ways in which an archive can be interpreted.

The archive is widely understood to be an ordered keeper of factual truth and a solid foundation of historical accuracy. However, the research in this thesis will expose biases which challenge the established reading of the archive as presenting an entirely accurate view of the past. Consideration of the lacunae within the archives is expected to uncover previously unknown connections which will challenge the conventional reading of museum objects. This in turn will lead to the formulation of alternative understandings of the meanings of lace in museum collections.

The potential for archives to be interpreted in differing ways is observed by Osborne (1999:55) in his comment that 'the archive is there to serve memory, to be useful, but its *ultimate* ends are necessarily indeterminate'. This variation in the possibilities of future interpretation is also addressed by Saumarez Smith (1989:19) who notes that:



‘artefacts can change their meaning not just over the years as different historiographical and institutional currents pick them out and transform their significance, but from day to day as different people view them and subject them to their own interpretation’.

Both observations make the point that it is almost impossible to know who will make use of the archive in the future or what their interests or agenda might be. The interpretations put forward in this thesis will be nuanced by a subjective agenda. This agenda is, however, informed by knowledge and respect, not only for the material in the archive but also for those who created the archive, and those who have previously interpreted its contents according to their own knowledge and interests.

Hooper-Greenhill (2000:3) observes that ‘one critical element in the construction of meaning within museums is the presence or absence of particular objects’. In considering the formation of lacunae in archives, and how such lacunae affect the reading of objects in the museum, this thesis will necessarily be as much concerned with what the archive does not contain as with that which is present. The term lacunae is used as an umbrella for all forms of voids, including gaps and absences, but gaps and absences can also be considered as quite specific notions. Cooke (2008:25) refers to gaps as the missing pieces in a collection. He contends that: ‘the gap is capable of fulfilment’; a document or artefact that is known to be missing can be sought in order to fill a gap. He goes on to describe an absence as: ‘something we may not even be looking for – in fact may not even be aware of’. Absence may also be concerned with the hidden; that which is present but may not be readily accessed or the presence of which has been forgotten. Not knowing that something is absent until it is shown to be so can perhaps be seen as one of the most challenging aspects of this research. It may also come to be amongst the most rewarding as this is an area which is rich in possibilities for original contributions to knowledge.

Lace has traditionally been understood as a textile created through the manipulation of threads in which the formation of voids is an integral part of the design (Earnshaw, 1982). This understanding encompasses many techniques and materials but Millar (2011) makes the observation that ‘lace is continuously

evolving; as a material, how we think about it and how we use it'. Contemporary lace takes the medium beyond the need to include thread and does not require the use of specific techniques or stitch patterns. It is perhaps best summed up as a pattern of 'holes, random or geometric as the subject requires, and constructed <sup>2</sup> in whatever medium is most appropriate' (Baxter, 2011).

Lace, whether traditional or contemporary, can be seen as being formed of presences which delineate absences. This research, by contrast, will focus on the ways that absences may impact on presences. Cooke (2008:31) makes the point that 'one of the things that artists are particularly good at doing is mediating between visible presences and invisible absences in experimental ways'. Both lace and archives have been the sources of inspiration for many artists but few, if any, have considered the archive through the medium of contemporary lace. The tacit skill and specialist knowledge of a practicing lacemaker will bring an original understanding to this research. The practice will throw new light onto the archival research by manifesting previously hidden connections and presenting them in new contextual and conceptual forms. The practice will also inform the evolving methodological approach to the archival research.

### **The thesis**

The main thrust of the thesis will be written in the third person in accordance with academic custom. The chapters concerned with practice will be written in the first person in recognition of the subjective nature and direct personal production of the practice. The contemporary lace practice <sup>3</sup> is documented as a series of insertions between the theoretical chapters of the thesis. The term insertion is borrowed from traditional lace where it is understood as a band of lace used to connect two sections of plain material.

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<sup>2</sup> Lace can be formed through both additive and subtractive processes.

<sup>3</sup> The possibilities of what might constitute contemporary lace are discussed in the chapter Situating the Research.

In Insertion I – Revealing the Lacunae contemporary lace practice will be used to consider the ways that lacunae are formed in archives and what influence they may exert. This will include the effects of fragmentation, layering and contingency on the formation of the archive, and the way that information is lost in the deposition and classification processes. The practice will address the ways in which the influence of the lacunae can be exposed. At the same time, it will illuminate the importance of looking beyond the obvious surface information to seek the information which may lay hidden deep within the archive.

The literature and practice which underpin the conceptual and artistic framework of the research will be considered within the chapter Situating the Research. The main texts which have influenced the research will be reviewed to offer a broad contextual grounding. This will include works on the historical background of lace and philosophical debates on the role of the archive. Further influential works will be cited throughout the text in order to contextualise the research. The activities of artists who have interacted with archives are to be examined in anticipation of a debate on work which may be considered to fall into the sphere of contemporary lace practice.

The practice for Insertion II – Seeking Order will be concerned with the way that what a researcher is actively looking for in an archive can impact on what they find and how they understand an archive. The influence of taxonomic placement will be considered in relation to the problem of dealing with a surfeit of information and the need for order in the archive. The potential for taxonomy to create lacunae within the archive is also to be discussed.

An Exercise in Contingency will map the methodological strategy of the research and discuss the importance of the interrelationship between theory and practice. Reflection will be discussed as a key tool. Both the case studies and exploratory practice will involve reflective processes of analysis and filtering in order to draw out the essence of the material under scrutiny. Subjectivity will also be considered as a major factor in the interpretation of objects and data. The chapter will also reference the importance of the researcher being open to the possibilities offered by contingency and intuitive deduction.

The overlapping paths of certain threads within the archive will be examined in Insertion III – Tracing the Thread. Individual object histories will be considered as forming sub-strands within the larger story that is being woven in the archive and in its interpretation. The importance of the hand of the curator in choosing which part of a story to tell and the subjective nature of selection and interpretation will be discussed.

The first case study will be concerned with the highly important Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG) lace collection. This chapter will consider the effects of contingency on the formation of the Museum's collections and how this might have created lacunae within the archive. The cultural significance of lace and its consumption will then be examined through examples from the collection and contextualised through historic documents. The chapter will challenge assumptions about the historical positioning of lace in museums through discussion of the darker underside of the conditions of its manufacture and trade. The in-depth research of the case study will add significantly to the understanding of the relevance of the collection. The research will also contribute to the Museum's archive with the addition of new information in areas of the collection where little, or no, previous research had taken place. This case study and the accompanying practice will offer examples of ways in which materials from across the Museum's collections can be recontextualised and understood within a textile framework.

The themes of the first case study will be made manifest in Insertion IV. The chapter will discuss the curation of historic lace, and related material, from the BMAG collections to form the insertion *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. The insertion will create a narrative structure which will form connections around identified gaps in the archive. In this practice the connections will not be presented as a material piece of lace, there being no physical linking threads. Instead the connections will be formed by the conceptual links which offer alternative readings of the objects on display.

The second case study will centre on the potential alternative readings of the first legal deposit register held at the International Centre for Lace and Fashion, Calais (CIDM). The original context of these registers was one of specific legal and industrial concern: copyright protection. The registers offer an unrivalled provenance of date of manufacture, and names of active lace manufacturers, but the text within the registers is very limited. This inherent gap renders treating the first register as a material archive the most appropriate methodological approach. The chapter will open with an introduction to the background to the establishment of the registers. This will include discussion of the international problem of design theft in the textile trades. The significance of chronological gaps between deposits in the first register and the loss of technical knowledge of how to read the deposits will then be addressed. By exposing some of the alternative narratives which lie hidden within their volumes, the legal deposit registers will be recontextualised and repositioned as sources of social history and design inspiration.

The practice relating to the research undertaken at CIDM will be discussed in Insertion V – New Leavers Lace Design. The practice is to be undertaken as part of a team creating a new lace design to be manufactured on an historic Leavers lace machine at the Centre. This knowledge exchange project is intended to foster design and innovation in the textile trades. Producing the original design concept will provide an opportunity to mediate an artistic bridge between my research and a product which will leave a lasting legacy both within the Centre and beyond. As a result of this project the Leavers lace machines and the legal deposit registers will no longer be seen as purely historical artefacts but will be reinvigorated as objects capable of inspiring a new generation of designers including those from disciplines outside lace design. The collaborative practice will also pave the way for future international projects.

## 2. Insertion I – Revealing the Lacunae

### Introduction

This insertion considers some of the processes at work in the formation of the archive and the ways in which the resulting lacunae may be exposed and understood through contemporary lace practice. There are many reasons why archives may contain lacunae and the impossibility of trying to form a complete archive was the subject of Kabakov's (1985-88) installation *The man who never threw anything away*. In this installation gaps were seen as inevitable, whether because of physically missing items or through the loss of emotional and experiential information associated with the objects that were retained in the archive.

Archives are widely understood as ordered keepers of factual knowledge but the information they hold could have been subjected to filtering and loss on many levels. Fragmentation,<sup>4</sup> layering and contingency<sup>5</sup> may all play their part in the formation of lacunae within the archive. The decontextualisation within the archive, which is created when papers or objects are removed from normal circulation, can also lead to lost connections and the introduction of gaps in knowledge and comprehension.

Hill's (1993) discussion of the creation of archives as a process of sedimentation highlights the potential for loss of information through the manner in which it becomes hidden from view. As layer upon layer of information is added to the archive older deposits become buried beneath ever newer ones leading to small details and delicate connections becoming hidden in the greater mass. This notion of sedimentation is particularly relevant to the working methods adopted for this area of experimental practice.

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<sup>4</sup> The fragmentation of the complete original material into what is held in the archive and what has been dispersed into other archives or lost, possibly irretrievably.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this thesis the term contingency is being taken to indicate chance happenings; possibilities which may arise but are not certain to do so.

Contingency affects the understanding of the archive in many ways. These may vary from chance conversations that reveal previously unknown connections to taxonomic decisions on the most relevant place for an object or paper. Within the case studies the application of specialist knowledge and addition of information from external sources offers the opportunity to expose previously unseen lacunae and to create new connections across the archival material.

My particular view of archives is mediated through a specialist knowledge of lace structures which offers a unique understanding of the formation of lacunae. Lace is widely understood as a series of positive connections which give rise to negative spaces; these can be viewed as voids or absences. Traditionally the connector is seen as active and the void as passive, but in this practice the void is seen as offering the greatest potential for revealing hidden and untold stories. Within the archive and the practice, lacunae relate not only to their material and conceptual connectors but also to each other. They offer the potential to look beyond the obvious surface material and to set up new interrelated correlations within the voids. Through practice I aim to link, rather than separate, presence and absence. A lacuna is often only revealed by the material which surrounds it and what is physically present is used to posit questions about what might be absent.

### ***Arkheion***

The title of my work *Arkheion* (Figure 1) comes from the Greek, meaning house of the archon or residence of those who command (Derrida, 1995:2). It is the concept of the archive being the residence of the archon, or law giver, which invests the archive with its authority – it is the place that gives the law – when we require the facts we turn to the archive (Derrida, 1995). The archive can be understood as the source of truth but my assertion is that the lacunae within the archive reveal numerous different truths. These may vary according to how deeply the archive is explored and who is undertaking the interpretation.



Figure 1: *Arkheion*



The experimental practice for my work *Arkheion*<sup>6</sup> references the archival sedimentation process within a formal framework. It can be seen as a metaphor for the formation of the archive and the way that information is lost in deposition and classification processes. The metal outer frames of the cubes reference the traditional formality of the archival grid. They form a rigid yet penetrable barrier. The randomly interlaced inner grid reflects the unstructured way in which many museum collections were acquired.<sup>7</sup> The cubes form ordered spaces which contain disordered ambiguity, a network of material and lacunae brought together through the actions of practitioner and contingency. Because they enclose lacunae and connections, the cubes make apparent both the highly structured archival tradition and the museum collecting process which in the past may have been heavily influenced by the contingency of spontaneous donations.<sup>8</sup>

Traditional archives are noted as being paper-based. In Hill's (1993) description of the sedimentation process through which archives are formed, files and filing cabinets form the substrate onto which papers circulating in an office are deposited for archiving. In *Arkheion* each cuboid frame is laced with thread to form a substrate onto which information, in the form of cotton paper fibres, is collected. The fibres represent the papers in an office setting; they give form to the structure and represent the information held in both the written records and physical objects. The accumulation of paper fibres onto the irregular grid system thus mirrors the way in which materials are collected into an archive. The variation in density of the paper fibres reflects the collecting process in which it may be a matter of contingency as to what escapes through the voids and what is captured in the archive for future interpretation. The appropriation of the medium of papermaking to create lace has precedence; cotton fibres are a

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<sup>6</sup> A series of cuboid frames supporting and containing 3-dimensional lace structures.

<sup>7</sup> The BMAG lace collection was not created as a reference collection. It was initially formed mainly through unsolicited donations from wealthy benefactors with later, equally unsolicited donations, coming from locals interested in social history.

<sup>8</sup> Most museums now have formal collecting policies. Whilst offers of gifts are often spontaneous, objects are now only accepted in accordance with a museum's collecting policy framework.

traditional material for making paper in Britain<sup>9</sup> and cotton thread is often used in the making of traditional lace.

Within the rigid formality of the cubes the irregular grid and contingent variations in paper density combine with the voids to create a three-dimensional labyrinth of light and shadows. The variation in intensity of lighting on the displayed cubes reflects the way in which some areas of information take precedence in the hierarchical systems of museum taxonomies and index cards.



Figure 2: Chiharu Shiota, *Trauma* series

Visual parallels with the *Arkheion* cubes can be found in Chiharu Shiota's (2010) works which form part of her *Trauma* series. However, Shiota's cuboid frames contain enclosed information in a different way to those of *Arkheion*. They are about the very visible, yet unattainable, object at the core of the piece and not the formation of the grid or lacunae. Black wool is used to 'draw in the air' giving space a tangible presence (Shiota in: Millar, 2011a:96). This both marks the existence of space and fragments it into smaller more irregular units.

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<sup>9</sup> In her 2001 essay 'What a rag rug means' Carolyn Steedman discusses the way that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century even the most meagre of rags had a value to the poor as they could be sold to the rag merchant for paper making.

Shiota's cuboid frames form a barrier that both encloses and excludes, the randomly interlaced web prevents physical entry but allows visual access to the dress trapped, immobile in the mesh like a ghost hovering at the edge of a waking nightmare. The frames form a boundary between the viewer and the enclosed object but also create an element of ambiguity, is the dress being protected from the audience or is the audience being protected from the dress? This question can be equated with that of whether the viewer is seeing the deposits or the voids in *Arkheion*.

### ***Reading shadows***

The next series of pieces consider the effects of the gradual build-up of material in the archive. Each layer of sedimentation overlays and transforms the substrate it covers, contributing to the stratified accretion of knowledge. In the process of forming a new surface these additional deposits have the potential to mask or obscure the information contained in previous sub-stratum.



Figure 3: *Reading shadows* (detail) - Obscured information

My work in the *Reading shadows* series hints at the possibilities which exist beneath the surface – hidden connections which may lie buried deep within the archive. A small detail, recorded in a hand written letter, at the very back of a long un-opened object history file, may prove to be the key link in bringing to light previously unconsidered connections, but its very existence may have been obscured by many subsequent layers of information rendering it invisible to all but the most determined researcher.

The base form of *Reading shadows* is created in the same way as for *Arkheion* but subsequent layers of grids and paper fibres are added to enhance the richness of the deposits in certain areas. One of the potential side effects of the additional layers is that some previously visible information may become obscured, still present but hidden beneath other information which has been deposited more recently or has been given higher priority. In *Reading shadows* the additional layers of grids and paper are viewed as corresponding to attempts to fill gaps in the archive or to make connections via the addition of specialist knowledge.<sup>10</sup> The additional layering also creates a greater degree of impenetrability. Too many records can become a confused mass where it is all but impossible to see what lies hidden beyond the upper layers. Far from producing the transparency so important to archivists the increased density of material obscures the deeper understanding of the archive. *Reading shadows* seeks to make evident the opacity of meaning within the archive by looking through that which is at the forefront of what is being said, or shown, to reveal the possibility of deeper meanings.

The obscuring of information through layering was graphically illustrated by Roman Ondak's (2011) *Measuring the Universe*. On entering the gallery visitors were offered the opportunity to have their height, name and the date of their visit recorded on the wall. Schwenk (2008) considers *Measuring the Universe* to be 'a performance involving museum attendants and visitors who are coequal in the process through which the artwork comes into being'. It can be said that in a

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<sup>10</sup> In the BMAG case study linking objects that were catalogued elsewhere to the lace collection was akin to filling gaps by adding extra threads to the grid. Similarly, whilst lace was not actively being collected by the museum the research added material to the archive.

similar way collectors, curators and archivists, as well as the makers of objects, all contribute to the process through which the archive is created.



Figure 4: Roman Ondak, *Measuring the Universe* (detail)



Figure 5: Roman Ondak, *Measuring the Universe* (detail) - Gail 05.07.2011

As the number of visitors participating in Ondak's evolving artwork increased many of the earliest recorded details became obscured, or completely submerged, beneath the subsequent layers of information. Schwenk (2008) described the cumulative nature of the artwork from its earliest days:

'the high walls were still largely bare and empty, and the individual names were infinitesimal in the expanse of the white hall. But over the course of the following weeks and months, the number of marks increased: a wall drawing encircled the space, becoming more and more dense, the black intensifying, its darkest zone in the middle of the stripe levelling out an average height'.

Although not intentionally a hierarchical work, those whose names were recorded on the peripheries came, in some ways, to have a greater significance as their marks could still be read whilst others within the darkest area had become submerged under the weight of information in that zone.

The marks on the wall can be regarded as representing the absent visitor: 'by leaving behind these traces of their presence, they also maintain a palpable presence for subsequent visitors' (Schwenk, 2008). Although there might be only one or two visitors in the room the former presence, and current absence, of those who had previously visited was made visible by the marks on the walls. Those visitors who were not measured, whose records were not collected, formed invisible lacunae within the artwork escaping the archive in much the same way as the paper fibres that were not picked up on the grids of *Arkheion* and *Reading shadows*.

The ultimate and most enigmatic layers of *Reading shadows* are the shadows themselves which are essential to the full reading of the work. A shadow, like a ghost, is seen as a sign of both presence and absence. A shadow requires the presence of light to exist; it is also an indication that something which is present is partially blocking the path of some of the light. For a shadow to become an obvious presence some form of surface, such as a wall, is also necessary. A shadow can thus be said to be a partial absence, a tangible reminder of the connections that may be hidden, hinted at but unseen, in the archive. The multiple shadows also act like the multiple layers of information in the archives, with the greater density of overlapping shadows making the information beneath more difficult to read. The multiplicity of shadows can also be seen as referencing the multiple readings of an object which are possible when it is viewed from differing positions. In addition, a shadow may appropriate a space not inhabited by the physical work hinting at the relevance of the core material to areas beyond the specific archive in which it is contained.



Figure 6: *Reading shadows* (detail)

## Summary

*Arkheion* and *Reading shadows* engaged with the inherently permeable quality of lace, they looked beyond the surface and highlighted the gaps in the archive which so often went unnoticed. The works could be seen as a material manifestation of my archival research and as a metaphor for the formation of the archive. The visible surfaces were the result of materials being captured on substrates. They were a layering of sediments, impressions and voids which were reliant on what had gone before for their eventual structure and which formed a nuanced image of that past.

As three-dimensional works the pieces had both surface and depth. Whilst the surface might be thought superficial and depth given greater value, both contributed to the overall coherence of the work. The voids, which could be considered empty and meaningless, were shown to reveal otherwise hidden material. They offered hints to the potential of greater insights into what might be accessible to those who took the time to delve deeper into the archive. Shadows deepened the sense of the void, often enhancing the appreciation of the surfaces on which they fell at the same time as creating a degree of concealment.

Within the archival research that informed *Arkheion* and *Reading shadows* it became apparent that different people might seek different information from a single archive which could lead to significantly varied readings of that archive. The visual permeability of the pieces offered a continually evolving interplay of surfaces and shadows viewed through multiple voids, with glimpses of what lay beyond emerging and disappearing as the audience moved past the works.

At their core these works were about the relationship of material connections and the lacunae around which they were formed. The interpretation of archival facts was seen as being dependent on what information was available to the reader. The variations in readings were pushed still further by the subtleties of personal interpretation – with the lacunae often appearing ‘in the shadows that fall between what individuals and objects are and what they appear to be’ (Kastner 1993).



### **3. Situating the Research**

#### **3.1 Literature Review**

#### **3.2 Artists Working with Archives**

#### **3.3 Contemporary Lace**

## 3.1 Literature Review

### Lace

There is a wide range of literature on the subject of lace, its history, identification and making. Scholarly works are, however, comparatively scarce. There is also a good deal of lace related folklore some of which can be shown to be based on fact but some of which appears to be entirely fictional.

The publication, in 1983, of Levey's *Lace: A History* marked a significant turning point in the way that the history of lace was addressed. Impeccably referenced and with emphasis on the stylistic development of lace the book set the new standard for the study of lace. The books by Earnshaw (1980, 1982, 1986, 1995) have provided invaluable technical information on the production of lace and an indispensable guide to the identification of lace.

Yallop's *The History of the Honiton Lace Industry*<sup>11</sup> was the first serious study of an English lacemaking area to be meticulously researched and fully referenced. The book covers not only the facts behind the production of lace in the area but also looks at some of the folklore associated with it. By consulting contemporary documents, such as Parish Records, Yallop disproves the long held notion that lacemaking was brought to the area by Huguenot refugees.

Much historical evidence relating to lace can be gleaned from period sources such as diaries, letters, newspapers, wills and other legal documents. These sources can provide insights into the production, trading and use of lace. The Northampton Records Office, for instance, holds a letter written by Elisabeth Isham to her father c.1627 which has five lace samples attached (Dye, s.d.). These offer immaculate evidence for the existence and usage of narrow linen bobbin lace edgings at this date. Trial transcripts from the Old Bailey can offer evidence of the worth of lace at many levels of society (Walsh, 2009). Royal Commission (1863-67) reports can include evidence taken from employers and

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<sup>11</sup> Published in 1992 and based on his thesis of the same title.

employees as well as from magistrates and physicians thus offering a wide range of views.<sup>12</sup>

A good deal has been written on machine lace manufacturing in the Nottingham area and works by Earnshaw (1986, 1995) and Mason (1994) form the cornerstones of information on this area of the research. The information in these books is supported by a wealth of information held in museum archives and public records offices. Writings on machine lace manufacture in Calais are, naturally, predominantly in French but more recent CIDM publications include English translations. Kelly's 1998 book, *Well Suited to the Colony* throws light onto the situation of the Calais lace workers during the Second French Revolution. This focus on the worker rather than the industrial process or the consumer offers a very different insight into lacemaking in Calais.

Lace has increasingly become a topic associated with doctoral theses. These range from detailed examinations of the role of lace during a specific period (Brompton, 2002; Walsh, 2009) to lace as the source of artistic inspiration (Castles, 2011; Buttress, 2013). Of these it is Walsh's (2009:3) discussion of 'how lace functioned in early modern English society' and her understanding of lace 'as a material that formerly involved far wider concerns' (Walsh, 2009:6) which are of most significance to this research.

### **The archive**

The archive is widely understood as a repository of historical documents (physical or virtual) and seen as an ordered keeper of factual truth. As has been noted, for this research an archive is being defined as any collection of material that has been withdrawn from its normal circulation and stored for potential future reference. The research considers the formation of lacunae in archives

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<sup>12</sup> Nix (1997:128) makes the valuable point that some of the witnesses would have been offering the 'official' version of the situation but that the evidence does 'give an interesting indication of the way individuals thought things should be, or how they thought they were meant to answer the Commission'. This observation is perhaps most pertinent in relation to the girls who worked in the lace finishing rooms who might have had reason to be fearful for their jobs if they gave unsuitable answers.

and the way in which they may challenge the perceived accuracy of the archive and the interpretation of the objects it contains.

There has been much philosophical debate pertaining to archives, their actuality and their function. Within these debates the writings of Derrida and Foucault have been of greatest interest for this research.

Foucault (1969:146) states that for him the archive is not 'that which collects the dust of statements that have become inert once more, and which may make possible the miracle of resurrection'. He considers the physical documents and objects subservient to the discursive practices through which they are understood. The research for this thesis has focused on the lacunae in the archive and how these might influence the reading of the archive, in essence affecting the possibility of the resurrection which Foucault denied his archive. However, Foucault also notes that the archive 'reveals the rules of a practice that enables statements both to survive and to undergo regular modification' (ibid.). It is the potential for the reinterpretation, and modification, of the archive with which this research has been primarily concerned.

Although Foucault's view of the archive is influential it is in fact Derrida's writings, on the authority of the archive and the power of those who interpret its contents, with which this research is more directly aligned. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* Derrida (1995:2) takes a substantially different standpoint to Foucault when he states of the archive that 'its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*' a physical place of residence belonging to the '*archons*, those who commanded'. He accords the archons the duty of guardianship<sup>13</sup> and the 'hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives' (ibid.). This establishes the archive as both the place where archives are stored and the objects which are stored in that place. It also confirms the authority of those who reside in (or oversee) the archive to impose the law as they consider it to be laid down in that place. It is from this position that the archive derives its legitimacy and its authority. Echoing

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<sup>13</sup> A guardianship that includes the maintenance of the integrity of the contents of the archive.

Derrida's etymological account of the archive Yiakoumaki (2009:21) summarises archives as:

'places and sources of inherited knowledge, that is, they are sources of *information* and simultaneously places of *preservation*. These characteristics make them pedagogic by nature, and ascribe to them an element of authority and power'.

Today the archivist and the curator have assumed the formal, professional, role of the archon. It is they who control access to the archive and maintain its integrity. As archivists attempt to maintain a neutral position<sup>14</sup> in regard to the archive it is the curators who have taken on the power of the interpreter.<sup>15</sup> This authority of interpretation is appropriated by all who access the archive in order to form new understandings from their research and the power to create new associations and meanings is particularly potent in the hands of artists.<sup>16</sup>

According to Breakell (2008):

'Derrida writes not only about the archive as a site of power and authority but also about the ambiguous and fragmentary nature of its contents – the "presentness" and absence of traces that make up archives, the fact that they record only what is written and processed, not what is said and thought'.

Because archives contain selected records and objects, they can be said to contain selected histories. In addition to maintaining awareness of the fragmentary nature of its contents, it is important for those who read the archive to consider who created the archive, why they did so, what they put into it and what they left out. The selection processes can reveal much about the interests and biases of those who created the archives. These interests and biases, and the wider context in which the archive was created, are all important factors in determining the accuracy with which the archive is able to bear witness to the past. An archive's relationship to the past may be mediated through many hands including the archivist, curator and researcher.

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<sup>14</sup> Neutrality and transparency are key tenets of archival practice.

<sup>15</sup> Curators have, in recent years, moved from a neutral stance to one of accepting their own subjectivity in dealing with the documents and objects in their care.

<sup>16</sup> Artists working with archives are discussed in the following sub-chapter.

In considering the contents of archives Porter (1988:106) notes that:

‘objects are likely to survive through obsolescence and rapid technological change; superiority of materials and construction; relative prosperity and permanence of the owners; and through the actions and influence of certain individuals and groups who consider themselves and their possessions to be significant’.

This naturally precludes the minutiae of everyday life <sup>17</sup> and objects associated with the poor. <sup>18</sup> Porter (1988:109) goes on to state that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the majority of people ‘left virtually no material evidence in museum or other collections’. This situation was to change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the introduction of the welfare state. The later interest in social history instigated the collection of vast amounts of archival information on the daily lives of the common man. The archive has been understood as being formed of accurate facts about historical events but the inconsistencies in its contents, along with the inherent gaps and absences, are now seen as making this assumed accuracy fallible.

Kavanagh (2000:47) raised the question of the origins of documentary evidence:

‘Eyewitness accounts and verbatim testimonies were brought increasingly into the public domain via a number of different routes. Newspapers carried detailed extracts from evidence given in court cases and witness statements on accidents or events. The minutes of formal meetings, regardless of whether they were of major importance or only local significance, similarly contained verbatim records of discussions and decisions taken’.

Much written evidence can thus be said to be a second-hand rendering of verbal evidence and so vulnerable to errors of transcription, whether intentional or otherwise. In addition to the potential for bias to creep into transcriptions it should be remembered that even first-hand and eyewitness accounts of history are only one person’s view of what took place. In this thesis transcripts from

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<sup>17</sup> Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century this was only available through the relatively rare survival of the personal correspondences or diaries of the literate, well educated, classes.

<sup>18</sup> Unless they came into contact with national institutions such as the workhouse, Government Commission or the law.

trials at the Old Bailey are used to illustrate the worth of lace through its illegal trading. Although such transcripts may be seen as the most accurate accounts of court proceedings they are still based on verbal descriptions and personal perceptions.

Breakell's (2008) comment that 'the archive is popularly conceived as a space where things are hidden' holds more than a grain of truth. Despite archivists' attempts to maintain transparency in their working methods, without an understanding of the codex through which documents and objects are filed researchers are unlikely to find what they are seeking. Whilst the archivist may be scrupulous in their dealings with archival material, 'archival study . . . is rife with opportunities for deceptions and misconceptions' (Hill, 1993:7). Without reference to the wider context of the archival holdings the researcher has no way of knowing what information is being concealed, or by whom: 'we know not where it leads - or who may want to lead us in one direction rather than another' (ibid.). Biases can be introduced into the archive as a deliberate attempt to influence the future reader or to protect a person's reputation (by the depositor of the material or a third party).

Absence and presence are central to the research being undertaken. In his doctoral thesis, *The Presence of Absence*, Hegarty (2002:11) states that 'the absence of forgetting is dependent upon the presence of remembering: we remember there is something missing'. Indeed it is not possible to identify an absence without knowing of the possibility of its existence. What is vital here is the researcher's ability to recognise that a document, object or idea is missing from the archive that they are investigating. A good example of this is Cooke (2008:25) who noted during his research into the archives of Kilmainham Gaol <sup>19</sup> that he 'gradually became aware of an absence: the story of the common man, woman and child'. As no archive can keep everything that relates to its holding remit, it becomes vital that the researcher is aware of the potential of that which 'has been lost in the process of reduction' (Merewether, 2002:134).

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<sup>19</sup> Kilmainham Gaol and Museum in Dublin, Ireland, is one of the largest unoccupied gaols in Europe. Displays in the museum cover the major events in Ireland's emergence as a modern nation from 1780s to the 1920s.

What was once considered everyday and unimportant can later be viewed as an invaluable aide to comprehension.

Breakell (2008) tells us that 'in reality just as much as in theory, the archive by its very nature is characterised by gaps'. She goes on to note that 'any archive is a product of the social processes and systems of its time, and reflects the position and exclusions of different groups or individuals within those systems'. Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* is concerned with the reading of repressed histories which can be construed as gaps in the archive of the mind. As with the repressed gaps in the mind, the lacunae in the physical archive can result from unconscious exclusion through the repression of certain material or ideas. They can also be the result of suppression through conscious decisions to exclude materials or ideas. Lacunae may also be created through manipulation and may involve the insertion of certain materials which obscure the presence of other materials or ideas.

The contingency of accidental loss or assumed irrelevance of material, or ideas, can further add to these gaps and absences. Merewether (2002:135) considers that 'gaps and absences are a form of evidence . . . evidence of their [archives] own partiality'. Hill (1993:66) also raises the importance of the lacunae in the archive: 'noting what is not in the collection may be as important as knowing what has survived. Absence of materials does not mean that they or their authors are unimportant'. Breakell and Worsley (2007:179) see the lacunae as central to a researcher's drive to interrogate the archive: 'for it is precisely in the serendipitous survival of some information, and not others, that lies the joy of using archives . . . the thrill of a discovery lies in the uncertainty of its survival'. The researcher should be aware that the absence of material in one archive does not preclude its existence in another; an understanding of the wider context of the subject thus becomes an imperative.

### **Interpretation**

Hooper-Greenhill (1992) identifies the end of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) in Europe as a turning point in the understanding of the knowledge embodied in



collections. Formerly there had been a consensus on the understanding of assigned meanings among those wealthy or learned enough to possess a Cabinet of Curiosities. However the newly established balance of power brought these collections into new hands and the 'need for expertise and explanation of the objects [in the *Kunstschränk* or cabinet of the world] and their relationships marks the beginning of the emergence of the cultural agent or "museum maker" as "expert", or "connoisseur" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:122). Here, again, we have the archon, the guardian of the collection, the person charged with both its care and its interpretation. Over time the curator became synonymous with an intimate knowledge of the contents of the collection and how the documents and objects in their care fitted into the larger picture. As collection curators are becoming fewer in number<sup>20</sup> much of this detailed information is being lost or misplaced and is thus rendered unavailable to future researchers.<sup>21</sup>

Although archives are undisputedly carefully guarded places of storage and preservation, Derrida (1995:36) insists that 'the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past . . . it is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow'. In individual archives the stacks may be closed<sup>22</sup> or the archive closed by the ceasing to function (or death) of the original producer of the archive. However, Derrida (1995:68) suggests that 'by incorporating the knowledge deployed in reference to it, the archive augments itself . . . the archive is never closed. It opens out to the future'. This future is almost inevitably linked with an unintended reader. Archives are rarely created for a specific reader<sup>23</sup> and who will use an archive once it enters the public realm cannot accurately be foreseen. The interpretation of the contents of an archive similarly cannot be foretold as each reader brings their own agenda to the

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<sup>20</sup> This is a contemporary problem and largely due to cutbacks in museum funding.

<sup>21</sup> Despite the ability of computer systems to store vast quantities of knowledge this knowledge has to be entered into the system. Within the museum system time and money can rarely be made available for such transferences of knowledge and when it is it can be difficult for the curator to know where to deposit the fine details and less tangible aspects of their innate knowledge which may have been built up over many years.

<sup>22</sup> Closed stacks are those archives where the researcher is not allowed full access to the deposited material. The researcher must request specific documents which are then brought from the main archival storage area (stacks) to the reading room by the archivist, or trained assistant.

<sup>23</sup> An exception would be family archives created to be read by the next generation.

archive: 'they situate, contextualize and allow multiple readings or stories to be constructed . . . In this way the past resonates in the present' (Breakell and Worsley, 2007:188).

Steedman (2001:112) comments on the tense of her essay title 'What a rag rug means', that it was always intended to be 'about what a rag rug means, rather than what a rag rug meant'. What an object meant at the various stages in its life can be at odds with what it may come to mean in the future. On the variations of meanings associated with an object Hooper-Greenhill (1994:116) makes the important observation that:

'objects are open to manipulation in terms of meaning. This is their strength, but also their weakness. We see things according to what is said about them. The words used to talk about an object fix the way in which this object is to be seen at that particular time'.

Once an object has had an exhibition label assigned to it, or been written about in a catalogue, then that interpretation will hold true for the object until it is re-examined at a future point in time. Hearn (2008:148) remarks that the material traces in the archive are 'once, maybe twice or thrice removed from the initial action'. It is in this removal that meanings and interpretations can change. We enter the archive to seek the traces of the past but our interpretation so often speaks of the now – of our current interpretation, of the future situation of the object, rather than of its origin or original meaning.

Interpretation has many similarities to translation and Prenowitz (1995:105) comments on the position of the translator: 'customs officer, judge and executioner, mountebank medium, impassive impostor, forger of authority, illiberal host and ungracious guest, the translator should never really be there'. Any reading of a work, or object, may be subject to dispute by those who approach it from a different perspective. This is borne out by McClung Fleming's (1982:173) insistence that 'an artefact is not subject to just one "correct" interpretation, but many . . . interpretation will vary as the personal, class, ideological, and national interests of interpreters and their audiences vary'. The reasons for variation in the interpretations of archives can be as wide ranging as

the reasons underlying the original selection of items for inclusion in, or exclusion from, the archive.

Although a researcher may never have entered a specific archive before and is therefore reading its contents for the first time it can be said that they are also re-reading the archive as they are bringing a new perspective to bear on the contents of the archive.<sup>24</sup> Hill (1993:67) makes the point that:

‘the potential to read and reread archival data with the benefit of hindsight and widening understanding places the archival researcher in a radically different relation to events than that experienced by historical participants at the time’.

The meaning, and significance, assigned to an object may alter with time and with the person assigning the meaning. Hooper-Greenhill (1992:215) notes that ‘the radical potential of material culture, of concrete objects, of real things, of primary sources, is the endless possibility of rereading . . . the potential of a return to the concrete material evidence is of overriding importance’. These primary sources stand mute, untouched and unaltered by external readings; it is the readings of their meanings that are subject to change not the documents and objects themselves. Just as these were interpreted by their originators, so they are re-interpreted by each subsequent set of users and each re-interpretation is to some degree coloured by the readings that have gone before.

Whilst the readings may change, in essence, the material objects do not. Where change does occur in material objects it is often as a result of the inexorable forces of natural decay which, although these can be slowed by careful conservation, cannot be halted all together. Such changes can sometimes offer insights into the past, becoming valuable evidence of the origins and/or history of the objects concerned.

The importance of re-reading in relation to a widening understanding of the research area should not be underestimated. It may reveal ‘something new in a

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<sup>24</sup> Similarly the researcher can be said to be re-searching the archive.

document already considered many times before and, perhaps, dismissed earlier as irrelevant' (Hill, 1993:67). The discoveries associated with re-reading are often not of new materials but of new connections. Hill (1993:64) refers to the interpretation of archives as an 'iterative process in which researchers organize and impute meaning to the archival strip through repeated reconsideration of older data combined with the constant infusion of new data'. Reconsideration, rereading, reinterpreting – all necessitate the researcher going over old material, in essence re-searching it for new meanings and fresh connections. It is the constantly growing and changing corpus of information that the researcher carries with them that allows these new meanings and connections to be made.

Whilst based on real documents and physical objects, the interpretation that a researcher makes can often be inferential. The researcher must be careful to guard against inferring more meaning from objects or documents than they can be proved to contain.<sup>25</sup> As Kavanagh (2000:102) suggests, a blacksmith's apron cannot directly tell us if their business was profitable or not, how they came to learn their craft, what they liked/disliked about the work, what kind of life they led, what their connections /importance locally were – they could have been the village drunk or a pillar of the community. There is no way of telling such things from the apron. However, the blacksmith's apron can be taken as indicative that a blacksmith did exist. Scientific examination may offer details of the materials with which they worked<sup>26</sup> and it may be possible to link the apron to information in other archives which could add more personal details about the blacksmith, thereby offering a human background to an inanimate object.

This research focuses on the meanings assigned to objects, which includes the narratives produced by museums in the displays, leaflets and books through which they communicate with the public. As Hooper-Greenhill (2000:3) points out:

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<sup>25</sup> Conversely artists are at liberty to create speculative, or even completely fictional, narratives around factual objects and documents.

<sup>26</sup> Minute particles of hammer scale or rasp debris can be analysed to reveal the metals with which the blacksmith had been working.

'the pedagogic functions of museums can be analysed by reviewing both what is said, and how it is said. Museum pedagogy is structured firstly through the narratives constructed by museum displays and secondly through the methods used to communicate these narratives'.

She goes on to observe that whatever interpretive narrative the museum facilitates through its displays, and their attendant labels, it will be reinterpreted as 'visitors deploy their own interpretive strategies and repertoires' (ibid.). This further level of interpretive rereading will vary according to the personal knowledge and experiences of the museum visitor. Such visitors can range from primary school children to learned academics and subject specialists and may include those who cannot read the labels but must rely on visual connections to form their own narratives. <sup>27</sup> Taborsky (1982:68) raises the point that the validity of meaning can vary from person to person, that meaning is constructed through 'an interaction between two units, the object and the observer, the speaker and the listener, the text and the reader'. Each person's understanding of a museum display will be filtered through their own set of life experiences.

Gibbons (2007:138) describes museum displays as being about 'creating mutable and multiple perspectives through which the past can be experienced'. Hooper-Greenhill (1994:139) makes the point that 'the language used in museums and galleries is as important as the objects. It structures the visitor's experience, it welcomes or discourages, it informs or mystifies'. For many visitors the version of history that they experience in a museum has 'the authority of the official, the authenticated' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000:18). However, the history put forward by a museum expert may be at odds with a viewer's own experiences and values. This can lead to a degree of alienation in the viewer or the notion of their personal experiences and judgements being undermined, devalued or discredited. As van Alphen (2008:82) suggests: 'when the archive is worshiped, privileged, and trusted as an authority, it destroys, even kills critical and autonomous thinking'.

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<sup>27</sup> Many museums now arrange specialist tours for blind and partially sighted people and provide additional labelling in a variety of different languages. The provision of audio guides, in a choice of languages, can help to ease this situation but can be expensive to produce, especially in relation to temporary exhibitions.

Osborne (1999:54) proposes that, owing to their traditional role as subject experts, curators are accorded a higher degree of 'ethical credibility because knowledge of the archive is a sign of status, of authority, of a certain right to speak, a certain kind of author function'. Hooper-Greenhill (1994:118) stresses the duality of the danger and power of the written texts produced by curators when she states that 'there is no possibility of producing texts that do not do ideological work'. Whilst there may be no specific intention, on the part of the curator, to impose ideological views on the audience, words carry such a powerful array of potential meanings as to make neutrality almost impossible.

In a critical reading of traditional museum displays Porter (1990) asserts that 'curators use objects as pure reflections of the world, re-presenting the past simply and unambiguously. They don't address the gaps and omissions in museum collections and in the material culture'. She goes on to state that 'feminists are concerned to show that we interpret experience differently according to gender, class, and race'. Porter's comments are not purely about the feminist point of view but suggest that there have been a range of interpretive gaps and omissions in the conceptual and contextual lenses applied to museum curation in the past. Versions of history that have traditionally remained untold, of the oppressed, the unrecognised and those unable to assert their right to be heard are now being rehabilitated as museum displays are reorganised and reassessed for their hidden biases and contentious implications.

### **Authorship**

The preceding discussions have centred on the making of meaning through the interpretation of documents and objects. Mention has been made of the idea that the original meaning of these documents and objects may be at odds with later interpretations. The notion has been introduced of the possibility of multiple meanings being assigned to a single object by different interpreters. Each interpreter can be regarded as an author of meaning. As has been shown the original authorship and intended meaning of a document or object can become

lost in the later layers of readings and 'authorial slippages that arise within a process of translation' (Wilson, 2007:197).

The question of authorial authority has been much debated in the field of literary criticism. In his 1968 essay, *The Death of the Author*, Barthes proclaims that the author of a text can no longer be considered as the only source of its meaning. 'To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing' (Barthes, 1977:147). He argues that as any text can be read as containing multiple semantic meanings so it is the reader of the text who is central to the meaning that is understood from the work: 'there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author' (Barthes, 1977:148). For Barthes the 'birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author' (ibid.) and he equates this shift with the acknowledgement that a text can be considered to have no fixed meaning.

In challenging this notion of the overriding authority of the reader Burke (1989:181) states that:

'the death of the author emerges as a blindspot in the work of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, an absence they seek to create and explore, but one which is always already filled with the idea of the author . . . everywhere, under the auspices of its absence the concept of the author remains powerfully active'.

Literary criticism has moved beyond the contentious proposition of the 'death of the author' to encompass the 'death and rebirth of the author' which provides a more broadly spread notion of authorial possibilities. Burke recognises this new position as one of shared, multi-positional, authorship. He comments that 'the denial of an absolute authorial centre implies not the necessary absence of the author, but the redistribution of authorial subjectivity within a textual *mise en scene* which it does not command entirely' (Burke, 1989:198). Thus it can be said that in literature, whilst the originating author may intend their work to be imbued with a certain meaning, subsequent interpretations by those who encounter the work can also be said to carry the weight of authorial validity.

In the field of contemporary art the absolute authorial authority of the artist was established by Duchamp in 1914 with his ready-mades.<sup>28</sup> This authority has maintained the centre ground and is particularly well illustrated by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century ascent of conceptual artists who consider the idea more important than the product. In conceptual art it is not unusual for the artist who originated the idea to have no physical hand in the making of the artwork but they retain the authority of authorship. It is, however, recognised that once the work has entered the public domain all control on its interpretation is lost.

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<sup>28</sup> Parkinson's *The Duchamp Book* offers an excellent introduction to Duchamp's 'ready-mades' (Parkinson, 2008).



## 3.2 Artists Working with Archives

Writing in the opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Foster (2004:3) identified an 'archival impulse at work internationally in contemporary art'. Similarly Spieker (2008:4) stated that 'in late-twentieth-century art and art criticism, the archive became the trope of choice for a dazzling variety of activities'. Although both Dadaists and Surrealists had worked with archival concepts earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Foster discerned a different character in the work associated with the new interest in the archival. It was the connections that these new artists sought to make within and around the archive which Foster (2004:21) considered to be the factor 'to distinguish the archival impulse from the allegorical impulse attributed to Postmodernist art by Craig Owens'.

The questioning of authorship and the original object has been pushed in new directions as artists have sought to bring new interpretations to the lost and found, to everyday discards and to the importance of archival absences. Contingency is at the heart of much archival art – material lost in the archive, found on the street, disconnected from its original meaning or inserted fictitiously. This material is subjected to archival logic and displayed in formal archival arrangements whilst leaving space for the viewer to add their own interpretations.

The presentation methods associated with archival art, whilst favouring installation, range from the decontextualising artifice of the vitrine to the equanimity of the grid form. As Putnam (2009:21) notes:

'artists have gone on to create museum-style displays of fictional or real artefacts, such as the installations of Ilya and Emilia Kabakov or vitrine works by Marcel Broodthaers, Joseph Beuys, Christian Boltanski, Sophie Calle and Damien Hirst'.

The grid form has, similarly, been successfully exploited by artists including Kabakov, Boltanski and Hiller. Spieker (2008:174) again cites the works of Calle and Hiller: 'Andrea Fraser, Susan Hiller and Sophie Calle – who have variously

questioned the archive's archaeological logic by introducing error'. These artists' comments on the accuracy of archival material and methods are expanded still further by completely fictitious archives meticulously created and exhibited by Jamie Shovlin.<sup>29</sup>

A number of works which have been influential on this research are discussed here; others are considered within the practice chapters to which they relate.

Andrea Fraser has critiqued the creation, legitimisation and control of knowledge in the museum. In her installation *Information Room* (Fraser, 1998) she questioned how the information held in museums was accessed, and how the public might be empowered to make use of it by presenting boxes of archival material with their contents list hidden.<sup>30</sup> The deliberate withholding of this information raised issues of visibility and invisibility, presence and absence. Without a guide to the contents it was impossible for the visitor to know what the boxes contained, thus introducing an element of contingency into the process of accessing the information contained in the archive. The lack of information on what was present in the archive also made it impossible to assess what might be absent from the archive or how complete or accurate it might be.

As Fraser's *Information Room* dealt with the public gaining access to the archive so Kabakov's (1985-88) *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* considered, through the use of everyday materials and discarded items, what materials were worthy of admission to the archive. It also made the point that an archive that attempted to keep everything must of necessity forego judgements on the quality or usefulness of its contents. In its unquestioning acceptance of the materials that were deposited, Kabakov's archive highlighted 'an analogy between the dustbin and the museum' (Groys, 1998:50). Kabakov (c.1977:103) commented that a dump 'devours everything, preserving it forever' and it could

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<sup>29</sup> Naomi V. Jelish (2004) was one of several fictitious works originally exhibited by Shovlin in the guise of authentic archives.

<sup>30</sup> *Information Room (Informationsraum)* was a multi-phase installation. Boxes containing the Kunsthalle archives were installed in the gallery with the side showing their contents towards the wall. Later, posters which had previously been produced by the Kunsthalle were hung on the gallery walls. The final addition was the Kunsthalle's library which was later added to the gallery in the same reversed format as the archive boxes.

be said that in the on-going process of archival deposition a similar process takes place. As an archive grows so material is layered upon material, with the accumulating mass gradually obscuring the previous layers and so producing pockets of hidden information.

The work of Christian Boltanski has ranged widely to include the authenticity of the photograph as archive<sup>31</sup> and the inconsistency of interpretation in the way that we perceive good and evil in visual sources. In Boltanski's series *Les Archives (Detectives)* (1972-3) the photographs of criminal and victim could not be distinguished from each other, their individual identities and fates lost in the unifying format of the display. The absence of textual information<sup>32</sup> undermined the authenticity of the images: 'without text, the photographs lack specific meaning; they are falsified by omission' (Brock, 2000:7). Stewart (1998:294) considers that 'labels and captions for photographs lend them a reality that they might not otherwise possess'. Boltanski, however, is not averse to using names and photographs from different sources and encoding them within his own subjective (and occasionally fictitious) narrative. Boltanski's work often disrupts the notion of the archive as the ordered keeper of factual truth; questioning the audiences' biases and impartiality.

Boltanski's frequent use of the grid form in his displays of photographs is a deliberate levelling device. This non-hierarchical format can be read in any direction thereby, theoretically, precluding bias towards the pre-eminence of any specific image. It is a device which Susan Hiller also uses to good effect. In her series *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (Hiller, 1972-76) she presents, in grid format, groups of postcards which have been sorted, numbered and catalogued by visual similarities. Many postcards have their location printed on the image but on a few the personal correspondence has spilled over onto the front. Whilst the viewer may attempt to place interpretations on these messages, their full meaning is long lost. As Spieker (2008:141) notes: 'writing, in this instance, decidedly does not serve the purposes of objectivization and authentication'.

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<sup>31</sup> 'Because the camera is literally an archiving machine, every photograph, every film is *a priori* an archival document.' (Enwezor, 2008:12).

<sup>32</sup> The images were shown without captions.

With her displays of postcards Hiller 'elicits hidden meanings by discreet intervention, which leaves the material intact but altered by the mode of presentation' (Dimling Cochran, 1996:76). By using appropriated materials Hiller not only raises the issue of the anonymous maker but also questions the authoring of their stories.

Artist Gonzalez-Torres authored his works from very specific standpoints whilst still allowing 'viewers to interpret the work as they will, in recognition that meaning is always dependent on cultural context' (Krens, 1995:viii). The issue of cultural context, and the meanings it privileges, was raised in Fred Wilson's seminal installation *Mining the Museum* (Wilson, 1992) which challenged the authority of the museum to tell only one story with their collections. Wilson used the display of museum objects to query the value judgements inherent in museums; particularly what was deemed worthy of display and which objects were displayed together. As part of this installation Wilson presented three empty plinths bearing the names of important local African Americans. The absence from the museum collections of any portrait or bust of these three celebrated people was brought to the attention of the institution and visiting public alike. This critique questioned not only whose history the museum was displaying but whose history it was repressing and with it 'Wilson exposed the racist threads that are an integral part of our historical fabric' (Stein, 1993). It was noted that Wilson questioned 'how curators shape interpretations of historical truth, artistic value, and the language of display—and what kinds of biases our cultural institutions express' (Art21, s.d.).

### 3.3 Contemporary Lace

The formative years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have seen an upsurge of interest in contemporary lace. A series of international exhibitions <sup>33</sup> have sought to expand the boundaries of what can be considered as lace and how this can include not only textile techniques but also fine art practice.

This research is based on the premise that:

‘the term lace does not require the use of specific techniques or stitch patterns, it is taken as being a pattern of constructed holes, random or geometric as the subject requires, and constructed in whatever medium is most appropriate’ (Baxter, 2011).

The stitch patterns and techniques of traditional lace can, however, lead to dynamic contemporary lace when used in concert with innovative materials and cutting edge technology. London design studio Loop.pH employed traditional bobbin lace stitch patterns to construct the large scale <sup>34</sup> work *Sonumbra* (Loop.pH, 2009). The structure was fabricated in electroluminescent wire. Individual wires were programmed in such a way as to illuminate a series of selected thread-paths giving the illusion of movement within the work (Figure 7).

From the standpoint of lace as ‘a pattern of constructed voids’ (Earnshaw, 1982:91) it is the fabric that constructs and thus connects the voids, leading to the notion of ‘Connecting the lacunae’. Within this research the term contemporary lace is used to describe work that references the techniques and traditions of lacemaking but takes contemporary lace practice beyond its traditional boundaries, setting it within a fine art context encompassing the interlinking of ideas and concepts.

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<sup>33</sup> *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting*, Museum of Art & Design, New York, 2007. *Kantlijnen (Face of Lace)*, Bruges, 2009. *Lace in Translation*, The Design Centre at Philadelphia University, 2009. *Love Lace*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 2011 and *Lost in Lace: New approaches by UK and international artists*, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Approaching 3 metres high.

In his catalogue introduction for the exhibition *Radical Lace & Subversive Knitting* the curator David Revere McFadden (2007:9) describes lace making as 'creating interlocking structures in patterns that permit light to pass through them' thereby stressing the importance of the visual permeability of lace. Moving beyond matters of structure, many of the exhibiting artists also explored conceptual issues. Annet Couwenberg, for example, created *Discarded Ruffled Collar* (Couwenberg, 2007) which references the lace trimmed ruffs depicted in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch portraits. Like many of her works this explores the connections between lace and personal identity. The work not only provides a link to her family heritage but also a connection with the ways in which different people use lace to signify different things. Barbara Zucker, by contrast, 'subverts conventional ideas about beauty by turning signs of aging . . . into patterns evoking lace' (Scanlan 2007, in: McFadden 2007:38). With *Inuit Woman* (2005) Zucker traced the patterns of lines and wrinkles from an aged face to produce a striking triptych, of water-jet cut steel, which exudes power and permanence rather than the fragility and transience more usually associated with lace.

The 2009 exhibition *Kantlijnen (The Face of Lace)*, in Bruges,<sup>35</sup> encompassed consideration of the role of lace in contemporary design. Exhibits included selective-laser-sintered chairs, outdoor wallpaper in cut aluminium and hand punched leather clothing. Dutch design team Demakersvan's *How to Plant a Fence* (2009) was a site-specific lace fence (Figure 8). The company have developed a production method which interlinks the beauty and craftsmanship of handmade lace with the ubiquity of chain-link fencing; aesthetic and functionality combined. Fences are about boundaries, the duality of enclosing and excluding. The boundary defined by a lace fence is permeable: air, sound, light, small birds and animals pass through it almost without interruption. Just as the lace fence delineates the edge of the space it encloses so the strands of wire from which it is fabricated outline the voids within its structure which are the essence of the lace.

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<sup>35</sup> The city is a UNESCO world heritage site which gains part of its tourist trade from its associations with traditional handmade lace.

Writing about the exhibition *Love Lace*, at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, curator Lindie Ward (cited in: Powerhouse Museum, 2011) refers to lace as any 'openwork structure whose pattern of spaces is as important as the solid areas'. She expands this notion to encompass the invisible web of the internet:

'the web has a clear synergy with the fundamental idea of lace and its networks of connecting threads. Cutting-edge digital works explore interactivity and ingeniously connect the exhibition to the outside world. Some artists interpret lace threads as the pathways of social media' (Ward 2011, cited in: Gibson, 2011).

As part of *Love Lace* artist Shane Waltener also considered pathways in an installation in a eucalyptus grove at the Powerhouse Discovery Centre.<sup>36</sup> The work referenced the interconnecting pathways so often found in open woodland but rather than leaving an imprint on the ground *Outdoor Weave-In* (Waltener, 2011) mapped the participants' chosen routes in thread. Waltener (2011a) described the outcome as 'a physical manifestation (in stitch) of the participants' negotiation between their own making, and the environment they found themselves in'. The work could be seen as relating to bobbin lace with the trees standing in for the pins which support the lacemakers threads but in a broader reading of Waltener's installation the threads might also be seen as supporting the trees.

Waltener's practice frequently involves audience participation. In 2012 he collaborated with dance artist Laura Glaser at the Siobhan Davies Studios, in London, to reinterpret lace stitch patterns as movement. The underlying process could be understood as a form of transdisciplinary translation: 'the crossing of two lines for example would not adequately be described as a turn or a cross, as with bobbin lace, but as a handshake between two dancers, with either the back of the hand or palm facing each other' (Waltener, 2012). For *Stairwell Suite* (Waltener, 2012a) a group of dancers used jute thread to create a physical trace of their movements (Figure 9). Waltener described this as being

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<sup>36</sup> This was a one-day participatory event in which Waltener worked with the public and local students to create the collaborative installation.

'the result of a negotiation between space, material and the dancers' (Waltener, 2012).

For *Lost in Lace: New approaches by UK and international artists*, at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, curator Lesley Millar (2011a:7) challenged the artists to 'revolutionise the configuration of the space through the use of the structural and cultural implications of lace net-works'. She envisioned the resulting artworks as being 'materialisations of ways by which we might transpose lace net-works into a means of configuring and negotiating the boundaries and thresholds we encounter as we move through the spaces in which we live and work' (ibid.). The visual permeability of the pieces offered a continually evolving interplay of works viewed through openings and voids with new vistas and glimpses emerging as the audience moved on their chosen path through the exhibition space.

In her catalogue essay Millar (2011a:9) describes lace as a boundary 'performing between the open and the secret, the pure and the impure, innocence and transgression'. This concept was very much in evidence in the work exhibited by Michael Brennand-Wood. The title, *Lace the Final Frontier* (Brennand-Wood, 2011), was no mere play on words from science fiction<sup>37</sup> but a serious political statement relating to international conflicts. Rather than the floral motifs of traditional lace the artist deliberately scatters motifs of military imagery across a ruptured network of lines (Figure 10). This underlying network, with its references to Islamic patterns, highlights the tensions at borders and crossing points. The addition of strong shadows adds to the sense of threat that hangs over contended territories. In this work Brennand-Wood echoes the duality of lace; its immediate beauty on closer inspection reveals a darker, more unpalatable, side.

Piper Shepard adopted a completely different approach to Millar's challenge. Her work, *Lacing Space* (Shepard, 2011), has its point of origin in a sample of

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<sup>37</sup> *Lost in Space* was the title of a 1960s television series (and 1998 film). 'Space, the Final Frontier' was the beginning of the introductory voice-over for the 1960s television and (later) film series *Star Trek*.



traditional handmade lace in BMAG's collection. With its architectural scale Shepard's piece is much more about the physicality of lace and its ability to divide space whilst leaving it visually accessible. Referencing the embedded labour, time and skill involved in fabricating handmade lace Shepard meticulously hand cuts the lacunae of her hangings. That Shepard's works are cut by hand can be lost on audiences, who assume the work to be laser cut,<sup>38</sup> in much the same way that they fail to comprehend handmade lace as being the manipulation of individual threads.

By moving beyond the confines of lace exhibitions, the works of many other artists can be considered for potential relevance to the field of contemporary lace. Antony Gormley is widely known for his public sculptures featuring steel body-forms. Whilst these works are the antithesis of lace, others such as the figure of *Firmament* (Gormley, 2008) are formed of interconnected steel struts which can be seen as forming the traceries of three-dimensional lace (Figure 11). *Firmament* is sited on the horizon, silhouetted against the continually changing sky, the human form dissolving into a chaotic network of struts as the viewer approaches and walks beneath it. At close quarters the viewer is surrounded by a mesh of apparently randomly connected corten steel elements, the sense of the figure is lost, the perspective displaced. An intimate inspection of the steel elements reveals that many still bear witness to the codes that enabled the assembly of this complex structure; these codes are not dissimilar to accession numbers used to identify objects and documents in museums and archives. It is taking the standpoint of lace as 'a pattern of constructed voids' (Earnshaw, 1982:91) that leads to the understanding of this sculpture as lace.

Tomas Saraceno's *Galaxies Forming along Filaments, like Droplets along the Strands of a Spider's Web* (2009) is another piece of three-dimensional sculpture which asks the viewer to engage with its changing perspectives as they move through the work (Figure 12). Formed from elastic ropes the 'galaxies' are held in a fragile tension which is often disrupted, sending a quivering ripple through the installation, as members of the audience attempt to

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<sup>38</sup> Despite the presence of a commentary on how each artwork was made 'laser-cut' was overheard in relation to the fabrication of *Lacing Space* on a number of occasions.

negotiate a pathway through the strands. Although on a vastly different scale to a spider's web this work also forms a porous network of interlinked strands in which the voids are as important to the design as the strands which surround them. The notion of constructed voids and visual permeability are at the heart of the understanding of this work as lace.

These exhibitions and artworks show that many artists, designers and craftspeople create work which can be considered to be contemporary lace. As the scope of the term expands so it increasingly encompasses the work of artists, such as Gormley and Saraceno, who do not make reference to lace as inspiration and are not likely to have considered their work in terms of contemporary lace. However, for this research, any work that is concerned with mapping space or forming connections that expose the void may be regarded as falling under the umbrella of the term contemporary lace.



Figure 7: Loop.pH, *Sonumbra*. V&A, 2009

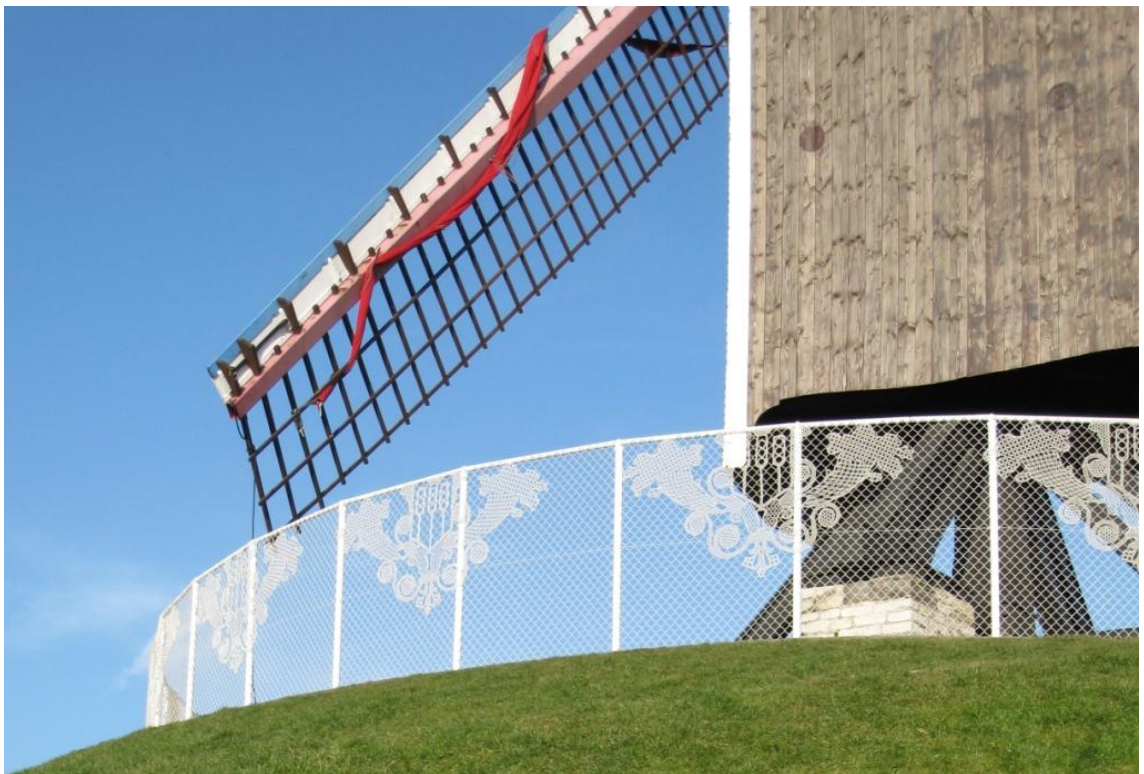


Figure 8: Demakersvan, *How to Plant a Lace Fence*. Bruges, 2009

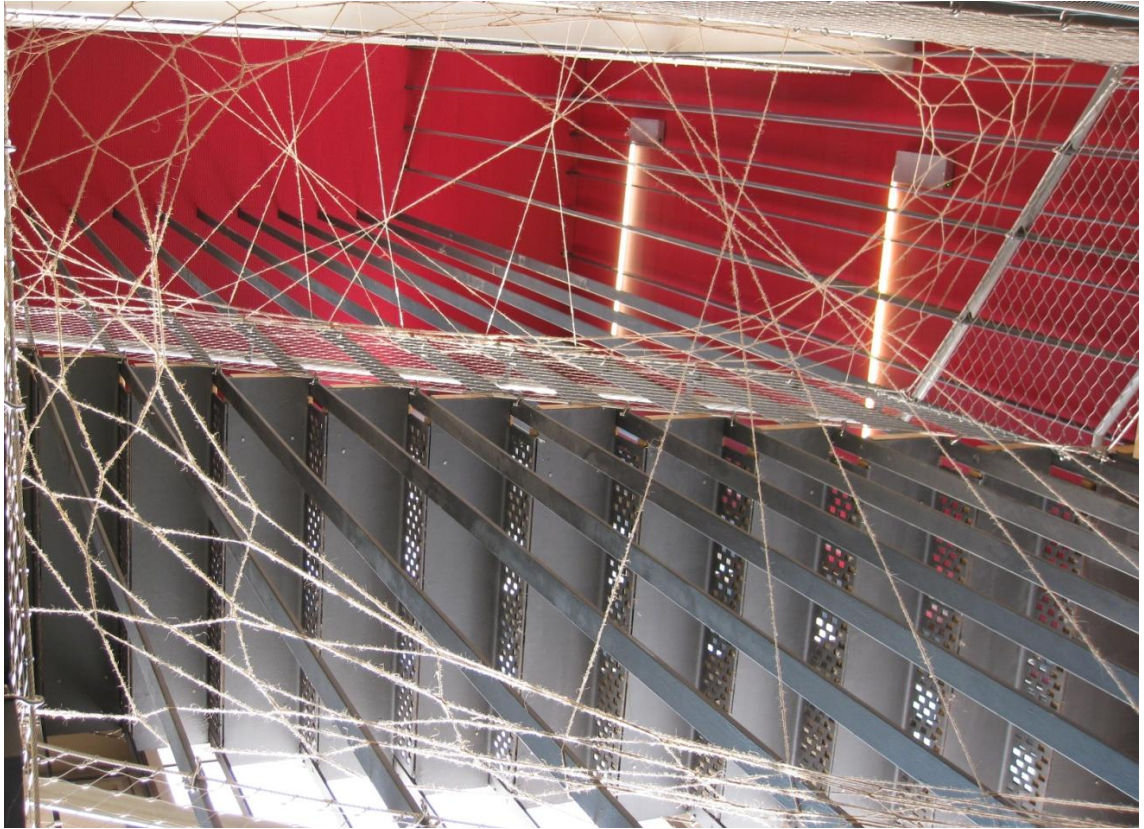


Figure 9: Shane Waltener, *Stairwell Suite*. (Detail) Siobhan Davies Studios, 2012



Figure 10: Michael Brennand-Wood. *Lace the Final Frontier*. (Detail) BMAG, 2011



Figure 11: Antony Gormley, *Firmament*. (Detail) Jupiter Artland, 2011

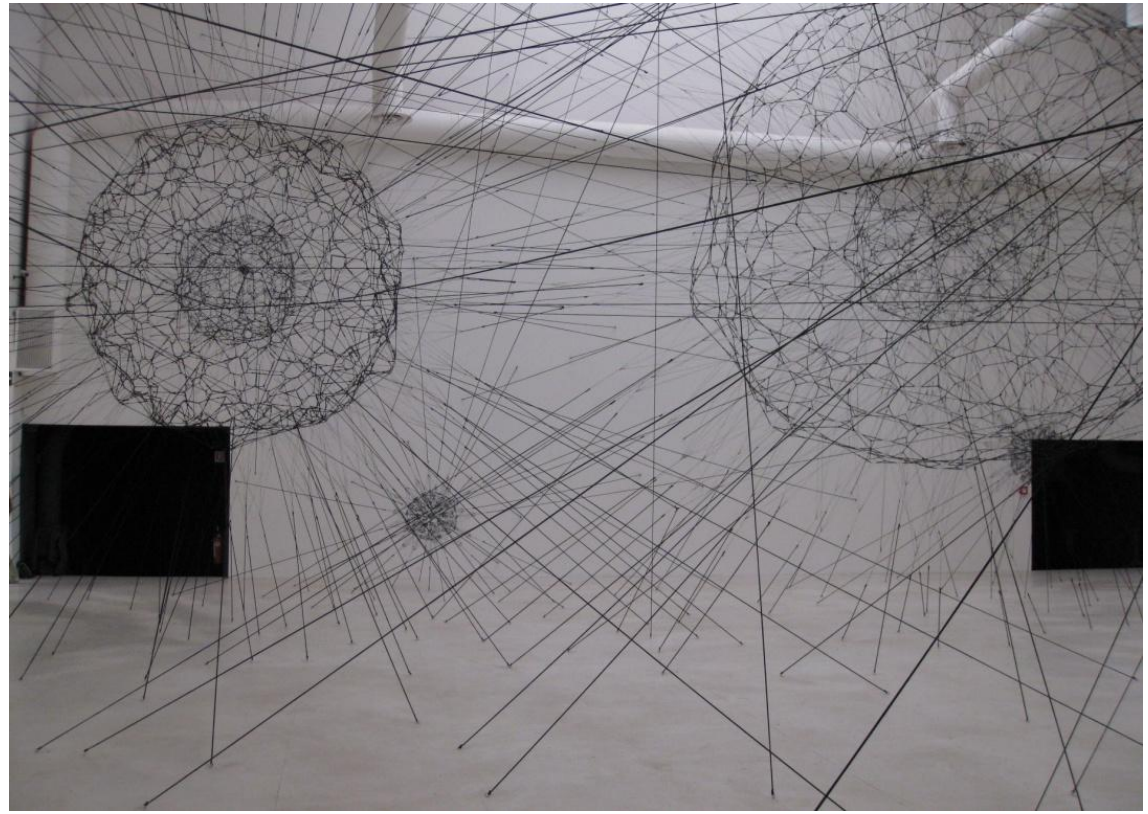


Figure 12: Tomas Saraceno, *Galaxies Forming along Filaments, like Droplets along the Strands of a Spider's Web*. (Detail) Venice Biennale, 2009

## 4. Insertion II – Seeking Order

### Introduction

Researchers actively look for something in archives. This can be a single object or piece of information or they may follow a broader path of enquiry. I am postulating that the very act of looking for something in the archive affects what is seen in the archive and how it is understood. This thesis highlights the notion that active looking can make a difference to the way that an archive is understood by addressing the influence of that which is not present. Archives can be said to hold a series of truths and the decision as to which story is told can be influenced by what a researcher is not seeing in an archive as well as by what they are seeking.

Many individual object histories form sub-strands within the larger story that is woven in the archive, and in its interpretation. When textiles are considered as an archive, complex aspects of unwritten social messages come into play in tandem with the recorded information. Within an archive it may also be that information is lost in the apparent chaos of too many stories. This insertion explores the artifice of the grid as an aid to making sense of information overload in archival research.

The fragmented view offered by lace is entirely relevant to research into archives where fragments of information, history and material are held together by networks of imposed connectivity. The many histories in a single archive can be said to form the sub-strands of an interlinked structure. As a lacemaker, I use my specialist knowledge of the way that many strands can be interwoven to inform my understanding of the archive. My work for the *Mediation* series (Figure 20) is informed by the notion of objects each having their own story and by the ways in which these stories can get subsumed within the archive in the collection and classification processes.

The *Mediation* pieces are constructed in bobbin lace. Each piece is

multi-layered; *Mediation I* is worked as double cloth whilst *II and III* are worked as triple cloth. These interlinking layers relate to the layered stories within the archive and the way that different stories may come to the fore depending on who is interrogating the archive and what their interests are.

### **Chaos and order**

Collectors, curators and archivists assign objects to specific taxonomic compartments or groupings which highlight certain commonalities. To the untrained eye the complex range of material within these groupings may make them appear chaotic and undecipherable. The chaos of too many story lines in the archive is seen as analogous with the apparently random networks of the white lace in the *Mediation* series. The practice highlights the difficulty in picking out the most important story amongst a multiplicity of diverse strands and an excess of information.

The formality of the non-hierarchical square grid offers a lens through which to make sense of that which is set against it. Higgins (2009:257) considers that 'the experience of chaos as chaos requires an organizing principle, a frame of reference through which it is perceived as chaotic relative to something that is not. What's less chaotic than the standard, orderly, ordering grid?' However, it can also be said that like the contents of an archive, a grid can be read in a number of ways – horizontally, vertically or diagonally. Within the *Mediation* series the formal structure of the black grid provides a constant ground against which to assess the potential pathways and connections within the more informal white lace.

Liz Nilsson's (2011) *The Latticed Eye of Memory* employs both the grid format and visual variances to explore the ways that memories are formed and how different people remember the same event differently. Nilsson sees the panels as:

'suspended in the space with access for the viewer to move around the piece and through this to discover new visual perspectives . . . I want to

invite the viewer to get drawn into the visual play of the layering and repetition in the work' (Nilsson, 2011a).

As the viewer moves across one face of the work they experience a series of subtly changing vistas through the grid-work of voids in the panels. There is, however, no hint as to the variance of colours presented by the reverse of the work and it is left for the viewer to decide which of the sides they consider to be the positive and which the negative. In a similar way the two layers of the double cloth in *Mediation I* question whether the black grid is imposing order on the white layer or the white layer is subverting the order of the black grid.

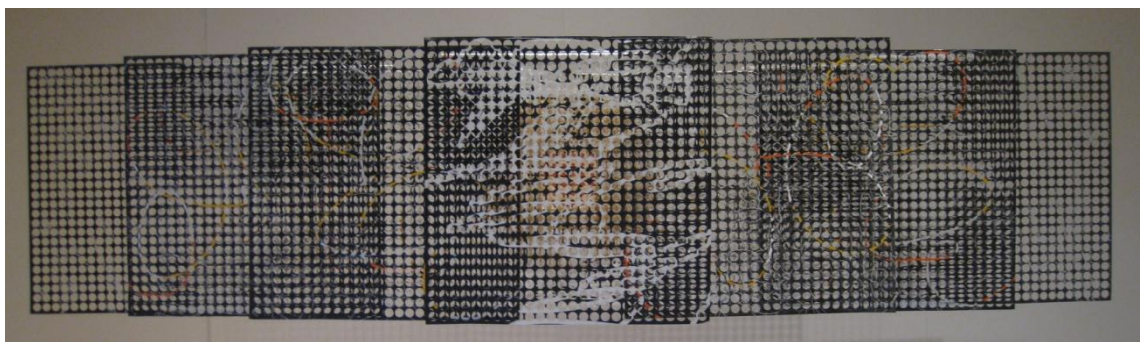


Figure 13: Liz Nilsson, *The Latticed Eye of Memory*. BMAG, 2011

Nilsson (2011a) is tentative about her use of the word lace, describing the work as lace-like: 'circles are cut away from the surface to create open, *lace-like* [my italics] structures which integrate the play of light and shadow into the work'. When the work is physically present the grid-work of voids is obvious but when reproduced in flat photographic form it is possible for the work to trick the eye. The voids can be perceived as a grid of patterned, coloured, discs stuck onto a boldly patterned black and white



Figure 14: *The Latticed Eye of Memory* (detail)



background. The *Mediation* series also utilises the potential of visual deception but in this case it is in the layer of white lace and brought about through the deliberate use of threads of varying texture, weight and tone.

The visual slippage of readings highlights the importance of the individual reader's interpretations and of the interaction of audience and displayed object. Both Nilsson's *Latticed Eye of Memory* and the *Mediation* series eloquently demonstrate how the same object may be understood quite differently according to where it is being visually viewed from and what conceptual lens is being applied. The *Mediation* pieces also highlight the possibility of the absence of technical knowledge as a lacuna in the reading of objects as only those with a good working knowledge of bobbin lace can trace the patterns within the stitching.

### ***Mediation I***

The two layers of lace in *Mediation I* are a common aspect in all of the pieces in the series. These are the regular black grid and the more informal white lace.

The formality and uniformity of the black grid offers a counterpoint to the apparent disorder of the white lace. The grid can be seen as an attempt to formalise the chaotic, to make sense of disorder, in much the same way as taxonomies are used to bring order to the often vast holdings of museums.

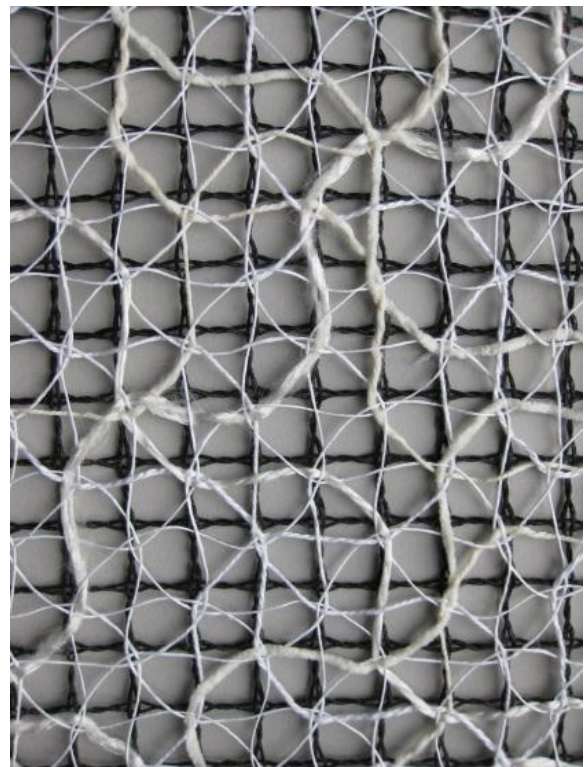


Figure 15: *Mediation I* (detail)

When the black grid is at the front of the work, order rules; the chaos of the white lace is viewed through neat compartments which allow it to be analysed

and assessed in manageable bites. Prioritising the black grid means that adjoining squares can easily be considered for connections and commonalities. In the white lace layer, which is common to all pieces in the series, the threads reflect the notion of individual object histories being overwhelmed by the greater whole of the archive or taxonomic group. Whilst in each of these common layers the stitch pattern remains constant, the variation in thread placements at the beginning of each piece causes the lace to appear visually different. The use of different weights and tones of white threads relates to the way in which many different objects may fall under the same taxonomic classification.

Within the white lace many threads are manipulated and controlled according to a chosen set of working rules, these threads can be seen as representing the individual objects in an archive which are categorised according to an established set of guidelines. In bobbin lacemaking questions as to which stitches are to be used and whether or not threads are to be twisted to make them move in a certain direction have much in common with decisions on where to place items taxonomically in a museum system. Without the specialist knowledge to read the lace it can appear rather chaotic and highly complex. The variety of threads may be distracting and cause confusion as to what the common factor is. Only those who know the code can make the connections which reveal the true formality of the lace pattern; without this information it can be seen as just so much randomly interlinked thread. In this layer order rules but the eye can be deceived. The white threads are all worked in the same stitch pattern (\*Half stitch – whole stitch, Rpt from \*) but the variety of threads causes confusion to the untrained eye.

### ***Mediation II***

An extra layer of lace is employed in *Mediation II*, which is worked as triple cloth. The two common layers are further interlaced with a third layer which focuses on a selected sub-story within the larger work. The selected group of white threads which form this layer can be considered as representing a small group of individual object histories which form sub-strands within the broader archival narrative. The filtering which takes place in the selection of a sub-group

of threads makes it easier to highlight specific stories which might otherwise be lost within the more chaotic mass of the white lace. It can be said that the filtering process which is applied to these threads operates in much the same way as a curator selecting objects from the main archive for an exhibition with a specific theme.

Groups of objects may have natural connections through their origins or may have been brought together during their natural circulation or in the collection or archiving processes. Only through access to the full history of objects can such connections be fully understood. In the same way it may not be obvious to observers that the threads of the third layer are the same as those used to form the highlights in the main white layer.

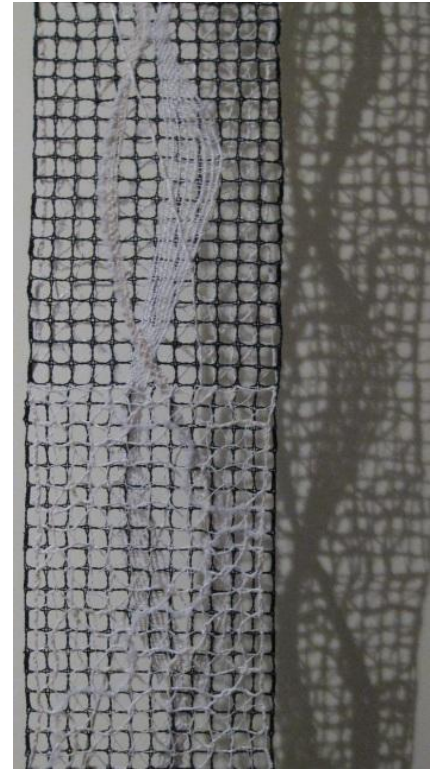


Figure 16: *Mediation II* (detail)

### ***Mediation III***

Triple cloth is also used for *Mediation III*. Here the common layers are interlaced with a third layer which emphasises the problem of information overload which can sometimes be experienced in archival research.

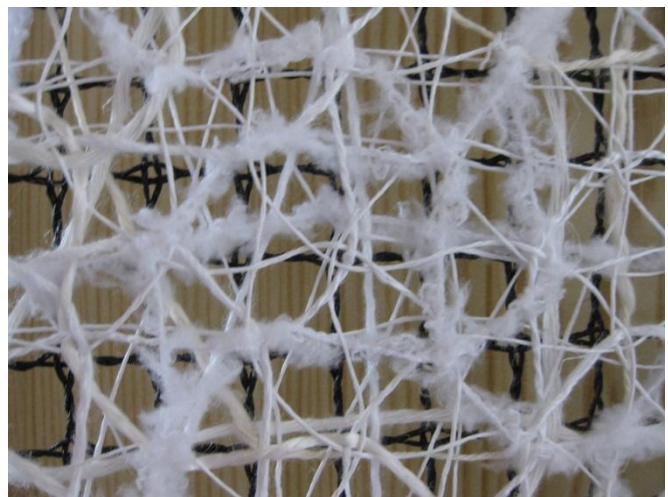


Figure 17: *Mediation III* (detail)

In this third layer the three core bobbin lace stitches are worked in a constant order: half stitch, cloth stitch and whole stitch. An experienced bobbin lacemaker may be able to pick out the pattern of the three stitches being worked in a constant rotation. An example sequence might be: three half

stitches, seven cloth stitches, one whole stitch followed by eight half stitches, two cloth stitches and five whole stitches. However, even someone who recognises the stitches may wrongly conclude that the pattern to the number of times each stitch is worked is entirely random. The number of times that each stitch is worked is dictated by computer generated random integer patterns. The numeric list is then rigorously followed thus making the stitching pattern as controlled as the numbers are random. This tiny piece of information is vital to the understanding of the pattern but is not presented with the work. This absence may be seen as equating to a vital piece of information which has been deliberately withheld from an archive in order to create a biased view of the contents.

### **Layers**

All of the *Mediation* pieces are also concerned with the inherently permeable visual quality of lace. When the pieces are shown as hangings it depends on which area of the work is being viewed as to whether the chaos or order is dominant. This relates to the interpretation of the archive often being dependent on what information comes to the attention of the researcher. When the pieces are shown folded they become much denser and less visually accessible, small details and delicate connections are lost in the overwhelming mass of information. Although the regular black grid is still visible towards the surface, the extra density of the additional layers breaks the lacunae between the threads into ever smaller and more irregular units. This fragmentation confuses the eye and makes the possibility of tracing a threadpath more difficult.

The folded pieces hint at the possibilities which lie beyond the surface but the depth of material obscures the fine details of the lower layers which are rendered invisible by the density of the combined upper layers. In the same way, in the archive, too many records may become a confused mass where it is all but impossible to see what lies hidden beyond the most prominent features. In the hanging pieces a threadpath can be followed relatively easily but in the folded pieces this becomes impossible due to the density of material obscuring the connections at deeper levels.

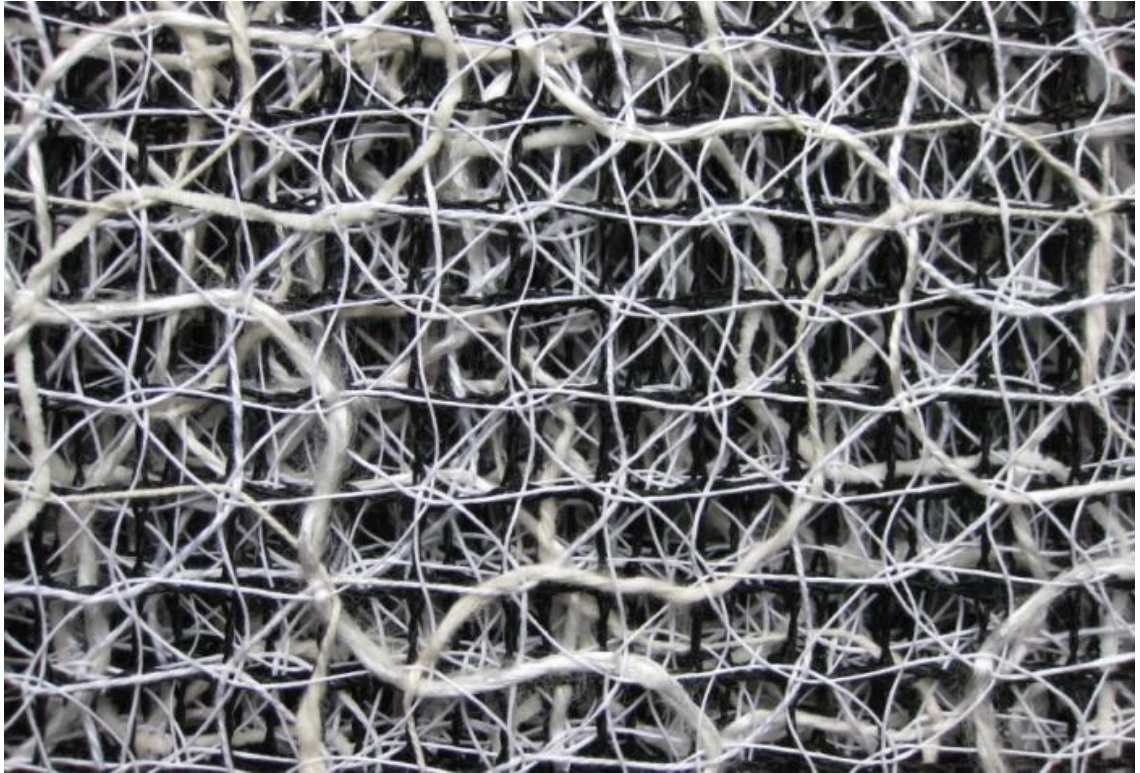


Figure 18: *Mediation I* (detail) – Folded, with white layer uppermost



Figure 19: *Mediation I* (detail) - Folded, with grid layer uppermost

If the black grid is uppermost when a piece is folded then the connections within and around each unit are easier to assess visually. Each square can be viewed in detail or in relation to its neighbour in any direction. In the archive, taxonomic subdivisions are intended to perform a similar function. It is, however, also possible that the boundaries of the grid squares, like taxonomic classifications and subdivisions, may form barriers to the making of broader connections.

## **Summary**

This insertion focussed on the imposition of order on an almost overwhelming mass of material and how lacunae might be created through this process. It also addressed the ways in which the act of looking might influence what was seen. This was particularly relevant to the ways in which the lacunae could be said to impact on the understanding of that which was present.

No object exists or evolves in isolation and every object in an archive has its own history. These individual storylines were equated with the way that each thread in the lace had its own path. It was only by combining these threads through stitch patterns that the greater whole of the lace was formed.

*Mediation I* introduced the core elements of the series; the black regular grid and the apparently random white lace. By offering something regular against which to assess it, the black grid both broke down the mass of the white lace and imposed order on it.

To understand the white lace fully it was necessary to discern that each stitch and each individual thread made a contribution to the greater whole that was the completed lace. For the non-lacemaker this whole could be seen as complex beyond understanding. By selecting, and placing emphasis on, a selected sub-group of threads *Mediation II* made visible connections which might otherwise have been lost in the mass of threads in the common layers.

*Mediation III* focused on how difficult it could be for the eye to discern a pattern when there was too much information present. Here the emphasis was on the

notion of the eye being tricked into believing that the stitching pattern was random. This was achieved through the use of threads of differing weights and textures combined in a single piece of lace. This was seen as being akin to the placing of different objects under one taxonomical heading. It could also be seen as relating to the different weight of value assigned to certain objects in museum collections. The most technically advanced object might not be the most aesthetically pleasing or the most socially relevant.

Additional lacunae were formed within the three-dimensional labyrinth of the folded works. With the extra depth it became impossible to detect what had been buried within the excess of information.



Figure 20: *Mediation I, II and III*. Crypt Gallery St Pancras Church, 2013

## 5. An Exercise in Contingency

### Introduction

This chapter maps the methodological strategies which have been employed in the integrating of practice and theory in this research. According to Gray and Malins (2004:15) 'methods are specific techniques for exploring, gathering and analysing information, for example observation, drawing, concept mapping, photography, video, audio, case study, visual diary, models, interviews, surveys and so on'. In this research the adoption of this activity based list is qualified by Johnson's (2004:88) insistence that 'theory is intrinsic to research activity. Research is as much about thinking and reflecting as it is carrying out surveys, conducting interviews or reading texts'. Whilst contingency is noted as being an essential element within this research, reflection is at the core of both the theory and practice. In practice as research reflection manifests itself as both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action.

Writing on the current position of practice as research, Vincs (2007:99) states that:

'We are no longer in the era of positivist, objectively verifiable research outcomes, at least in significant areas of the arts and humanities. Understandings of knowledge have shifted from positivist to subjective perspectives. This is a different cultural moment that draws on a subjective understanding of knowledge'.

The shift away from the traditional objectivist view of scientific research to the subjective view of arts research places the reflective practitioner at the centre of knowledge production. This is largely as a result of the increased critical self-awareness exercised within both practice-led and practice-based doctoral studies. The researcher's personal subjectivity is central to the interpretations produced and the awareness of the biases which this subjectivity may introduce is crucial to the broadly hermeneutic approach of the research for this thesis. In discussing the subjectivity of interpretive research Hannula (2005:168) contends that 'the important thing is to bring out, with maximum openness and



clarity, who does the research, why, and on what subject'. This 'openness and clarity' are central tenets of both archival practice and doctoral research.

Whilst purposeful and reflective actions lie at the heart of the research process it is essential that the researcher remains open to the unpredictable potential of contingency. In discussing research in the archive, Ofield (2005) notes that 'you can never be quite sure if you will find what you are looking for, or even if you will come across something you never knew you wanted, or even knew existed'. In seeking the gaps, absences and hidden histories in archives, unexpected and contingent discoveries can become the forces that drive the research forward into previously unconsidered territories.

### **Mapping the research**

Mapping is a recurrent theme within this research. The chapter *Situating the Research*, mapped the work previously undertaken by theorists, practitioners and researchers working on and around the subjects being considered in this thesis. It also considered the wider theoretical framework which underpins the research. This review ensured that the research being undertaken has a valid role to play in the advancement of knowledge. It also helped to refine the initial research questions and to produce the hypotheses to be tested by the research.

It is the contention of this research that the lacunae in the archive can affect the way in which museum objects are understood. It is also proposed that the lacunae in the archive can be used to challenge the established reading of the archive as a solid foundation of historical accuracy. These hypotheses are reflected upon through theoretical lenses and tested both within practice and through case studies of selected museum collections. Within this research the application of specialist knowledge of lacemaking can be seen as a unique methodological tool. The documentation of the testing of the hypotheses within the thesis, academic papers and exhibitions, provides a lasting map of the research methods used, outcomes attained and new questions postulated.

This chapter maps the routes considered and employed for this exploratory research. These modus operandi are interdisciplinary<sup>39</sup> mixed-methods and are open to adjustment according to the emerging needs of the research. Mixed-method research practice can be referred to as bricolage and its practitioner as a bricoleur.<sup>40</sup> This is, however, a term which can be read as having undertones of lack of care; the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (s.d.) refers to bricolage as ‘using whatever comes to hand’. The catalogue of the Victoria & Albert Museum’s *Postmodernism* exhibition is equally negative, describing the bricoleur as ‘a “jack of all trades” who, with cunning and resource, ransacks the “ready-at-hand” to create something new’ (Adamson and Pavitt, 2011:113). The implication is, again, one of haphazardness rather than considered decisions relating to the appropriateness of the methods, tools and materials that have been selected.

Stewart (2007:126) however, posits that bricolage can be seen as:

‘a term that offers a way to describe what we do. Here it refers to approaches to research that use multiple methodologies. These consist of a pieced together, close-knit set of practices providing solutions to a problem in a concrete situation. The construction changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods and techniques are added to the puzzle. For example the methodology of cultural studies is a bricolage that is pragmatic, strategic self-reflexive practice. In creating a bricolage, the bricoleur appropriates available methods, strategies and empirical materials or invents or pieces together new tools as necessary’.

For Stewart the bricoleur is a knowledgeable researcher, familiar with a wide variety of methods and interpretive strategies from a range of different disciplines. They are able to select those that most suit their research without being tied to them when they have outlived their appropriateness. Turkle and Papert (1990) similarly see bricolage as step-by-step growth with continuous

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<sup>39</sup> For the purposes of this research ‘interdisciplinary’ is being understood as a process of experimenting with meaningful ways in which concepts and methods of two or more disciplines, and their specific contexts, are brought together in order to illuminate an object of study anew, to observe it and reconsider it (Mey, 2012). An example from this research would be the use of material culture studies in tandem with archival research to reconsider the objects within the BMAG lace collection.

<sup>40</sup> Levi-Strauss introduced the idea of bricolage and the bricoleur in *The Savage Mind* (1962).

re-evaluation, maintaining that 'the bricoleur resembles the painter who stands back between brushstrokes, looks at the canvas, and only after this contemplation, decides what to do next'. The need for the reflective researcher to be open to changing methodological needs is echoed by Barrett (2007:6) who comments that 'methodologies in artistic research are *necessarily* emergent and subject to repeated adjustment, rather than remaining fixed throughout the process of enquiry'. This strategy of continual considered reassessment is adopted throughout the research.

Stewart (2007:124) also offers an elucidation of the often misused term praxis, stating that 'my approach to practitioner-based research is to conceptualise it as critical, reflective, investigative praxis. . . . Praxis, for me, involves the crucial and inextricable meld of theory and practice'. Praxis is more than the illustration of theory with practice or the explanation of practice through theory. Essential to the practice of praxis is the interlinking of concept and action, so that as a result of conscious reflection, each informs the other in a dynamic cycle of communication. Whilst it can be viewed as the manifestation of ideas, the process of manifestation also informs the ideas which are being formed.

The research for this thesis adopts a broadly hermeneutic approach which produces multiple interpretations of the significance and meanings of data and objects. These multiple interpretations reflect not only changes in the context in which an object is situated but also aspects of, for example, the ideology, class and gender of the interpreter. Analysis of the, sometimes competing, meanings and narratives can engender a more nuanced understanding of the discursive nature of the research. In undertaking the synthesis and analysis of the research findings the researcher will often come to regard the interpretations in hierarchically ranked positions. This affords some interpretations greater weight and validity than others, which adds another layer of subjectivity to the process. The multiplicity of interpretations afforded by this approach is in keeping with the positions set out in the research questions which seek new meanings and understandings. It also allows a fluid dialogue with objects and data which can inform, and be informed by, evolving theories and practice.

## Transparency

In carrying out the case studies for this thesis, collaboration forms an essential element of the research process. Access to records and artefacts is negotiated with those responsible for their care and administration. In order to maximise the potential of research visits, and draw out often unrecorded specialist knowledge, a good working relationship with the people who interact with the archives on a regular basis is essential. This applies to both professionals and volunteers. Collaboration is also an integral part of certain aspects of the practice within this research. Acknowledging the input of others in the curation and design elements of this practice is viewed as an essential part of the reflective process and of maintaining the integrity of the research outcomes.

It is necessary for the researcher to apply meticulous attention to detail if information that has been lost, forgotten or misplaced within the archive is to be rediscovered and rehabilitated. At the same time the importance of contingency and the researcher's intuition and instinct cannot be understated. The smallest fragment or tiniest, normally overlooked, detail may lead to the formation of tangible connections which expose the otherwise invisible absences within the archive. In addition the researcher must allow time for ideas to grow and come into focus. Claxton (2006:351) recommends doing this through a process that he describes as 'thinking at the edge'<sup>41</sup> which requires 'inward attention to a somatic process of "epistemic evolution", in which pre-conceptual ideas are given time to unfold'. This apparently hazy free-association, or speculative musing, can lead to the bridging of gaps in knowledge with unexpected links or materials.

Methodological transparency is an integral part of all academic research and applies equally to practice as research. Newbury (1996:9) asserts that 'a well-designed object or a piece of sculpture embodies the knowledge and research employed in its production as does the scientists formulae or the sociologist's written text'. Reflection-on and in-action are processes of conscious, objective, abstraction. They are often processes of reduction; of choosing what

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<sup>41</sup> Claxton's approach is based on the therapeutic practice of 'focussing' devised by Gendlin (Claxton, 2006:351).

information may be of relevance and what can be left out. This distillation makes connections and relationships clearer and allows the researcher to grasp the essence of the data. Both case studies involve the consideration of large amounts of information which require the application of multiple layers of filters in order to extract the most useful data.

### **Exploratory practice**

As has been shown, contemporary lace practice can take many forms and the methods used in this practice as research are those deemed most appropriate for the exploratory work being undertaken at the time. These include, but are not limited to, the use of tacit knowledge and intuitive experimentation.

The exploratory work uses the threads of contemporary lace practice to draw together and interlink the strands of knowledge held within the archive. It is the uncovering of these strands and their interlinking which reveals the gaps in the information and delineates the boundary between the known and the unknown. In order to know that there is a gap or absence in the archive the researcher must necessarily know that the object or story exists. A greater breadth and depth of knowledge can be introduced by researching beyond the archive. Considering the archive through a new medium, such as contemporary lace, can offer fresh insights and new ways of viewing the archive and its lacunae.

The exploratory nature of the practice draws upon many existing haptic and visual skills. This knowing-in-action relates to the using of skills with which the practitioner is so familiar that they have become unacknowledged and tacit. Schon (1991:51) notes that 'although we sometimes think before acting, it is also true that in much of the spontaneous behaviour of skilful practitioners we reveal a kind of knowing which does not stem from a prior intellectual operation'. The effective researcher acknowledges these tacit skills and reaches beyond them, embracing the process of continual evaluation which marks out the reflective practitioner whose every action is assessed for its appropriateness and potential impact. Reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are the key aspects of practice as an active research method. It can be said that the

practice produces and the writing articulates the process of that production, illuminating the impact of intuitive and contingent occurrences as well as reflective actions and decisions. In addition to writing, the use of photography (still or time based) as documentation of visual and haptic practice can bring multiple benefits in revealing actual working practices to both the practitioner and those who may wish to follow on from their experiments.

### **Case studies**

The museums, and specific collections within these museums, of this research have been selected for their differences rather than their similarities. This is intended to offer a greater breadth of examples with which to test the proposed hypotheses.

The first case study examines what might be described as an accidental archive and the second a formal archive; both are considered through the lens of a specialist eye. Whilst the first case study deals with both objects and documents the second case study is considered as a material archive. The testing of the hypotheses within these case studies affords an opportunity to consider how the lacunae in the archive can affect the understanding of objects and the potential for lacunae to reveal biases within the archive.

### **Data gathering and analysis**

The first phases of research can be seen as expansive; reaching out and gathering any data, information or arguments which may be of potential relevance. This collection phase may include notes, lists, photography, materials, samples and other forms of documentary evidence. The second phase is reductive; the data is subjected to analysis and filtering in order to distil the essence of the knowledge acquired. It is this process which usually reveals the voids in the archival information. The third phase, of analysis, draws together commonalities within the voids to create narrative groupings of the alternative readings.

The analysing and filtering of objects and documents is a continual process. Each item that is viewed is assessed intuitively, comparatively and hierarchically. Only those that are thought to be of sufficient relevance are retained for further consideration. Reflective analysis and filtering takes place on these items. A residual memory, and documentary evidence, is retained of those items which have been rejected as they may prove to have significant links at a later stage in the research. Aesthetic assessments are largely set aside as being beyond the remit of the study area.

Artefacts and objects can be viewed as documents in a non-verbal language and as such can be examined through the lens of material culture. The model for artefact study devised by McClung Fleming was selected as being most readily adapted to this research. This model is based on a series of five properties for each artefact. According to McClung Fleming (1982:166) considering the artefacts history, material, construction, design and function will 'provide a formula for including and interrelating all the significant facts about an artefact'. He goes on to indicate that the four operations of identification, evaluation, cultural analysis and interpretation should be applied to each property.

Function is seen as a highly significant area for this research, with McClung Fleming noting that 'function embraces both the uses (intended functions) and the roles (unintended functions) of the object in its culture, including utility, delight and communication' (ibid.). The hypotheses of this research are based on a premise that many museum archives record a moment in time rather than the evolving history and meaning of an object. By considering the varying roles of an object from its creation to its arrival in a museum collection it may be possible to offer alternative readings of that object. These readings may be further extrapolated to address issues of contemporary concern.

McClung Fleming (1982:169) sees the artefact as a communicator noting that: 'by means of its materials, construction, design, and use of signs and symbols, the artefact functions as a vehicle of communication conveying status, ideas, values, feelings, and meaning'. He goes on to state that 'the study of the

artefact is not complete until an interpretation of its significance has been offered' (McClung Fleming, 1982:173). Curators and researchers uncover and interpret messages hidden within artefacts but their original values and relationships may be quite different to those of our current value system. Contemporary interpretations of historic objects may vary according to the personal background and interests of those putting forward the readings.

### **Testing the hypothesis**

The practice and case studies are undertaken as a series of simultaneously evolving and interlinking strands. These form a continuous information feedback loop allowing reflective synthesis of the experiments, discoveries, analysis and evaluation which are taking place.

The testing of the hypotheses is continual within the reflective processes of the case studies and experimental creative practice. It is interesting to note that Diaz (2007:95) equates experimenting with testing: 'experiment shares with *empirical* and *experience* a common root in the Latin *experiri*, "to try or put to the test"'. She also notes that:

'subsequently *experience* came to indicate that which has previously been tested, a past accumulation of knowledge or skill . . . [but it also] continued to carry a second meaning, that of a full and active consciousness or awareness, an experimenting with, testing, or trying out something' (ibid.).

With the reflective assessment and interpretation of each successive object, or group of objects, the hypothesis is tested and assessed in light of new insights and accumulated knowledge.

### **Formal documentation and dissemination**

The formal writing-up of the research processes and outcomes is essential to the transparency, reproducibility and transferability of the knowledge gained. It is also a part of the dissemination process that makes the research available to the wider research community and beyond. This includes the presentation of



research papers at conferences, participation in exhibitions and the publication of essays, exhibition catalogues and the thesis.

The creative practice, theoretical and archival research were conducted concurrently. In accordance with this the documentation of practice is spread throughout the thesis as a series of insertions. The insertions are written in the first person in recognition of the personal, subjective, nature of the processes of practice. Calderoni (2007:75) notes that in catalogues and essays 'the curators' use of the first person immediately indicates the rejection of a supposedly neutral enunciation position'. This emphasis on a lack of curatorial neutrality is of particular relevance to the discussion of the practice at BMAG where the curation of *Lost in Lace: Concealed & Revealed* reflects a specific personal agenda.

Just as it is important for the researcher to acknowledge their starting points and tacit knowledge so it is important for them to pause, reflect, and draw conclusions from time to time. These summations are not the end of a strand of research but a reflection on the ground covered. They also afford the opportunity to consider what new questions have been generated and how these might be used to negotiate new avenues for future research.

## **Summary**

This chapter has mapped the methodological strategy of adopting a cross-disciplinary, mixed-method, approach to research that is open to negotiation according to arising needs. The key role played by reflection-in and on-action in the research processes of the creative practitioner was noted as being a vital part of the continual testing of the hypotheses within practice. The case studies and practice involve equally reflective processes of analysis and filtering in order to draw out the essence of the objects under scrutiny. These two methodological areas interlink and inform each other, helping to refine the decision making processes and resulting observations, as the broader understanding evolves.

It was noted that in both creative practice and material analysis, subjectivity is a major factor in the interpretation of objects and data. Vincs (2007:100) suggests that 'the subjectivity of the artist, itself a complex, rhizomatic web, is part of this field in which knowledge is produced'. The creative practitioner's interaction within the archive is not that of the remote, neutral, objective observer. It is that of the active producer of meaning who recognises their tacit knowledge, agenda and biases prior to entering the archive or engaging in exploratory practice. They are also aware of the effect that the discoveries made within the archive can have upon that agenda and how such changes can impact upon future practice.

Gray (1998:88) offers a succinct summary of the methodology of practice as research in her observation that 'the whole process will be intentional, deliberate, accessible and creative – a contribution to knowledge is an act of creation'. I would, however, also highlight the importance of the researcher being open to the possibilities offered by contingency and intuitive deduction which can produce unforeseeable opportunities and fruitful research avenues.

## 6. Insertion III – Tracing the Thread

### Introduction

The making of meaning is a key concept within this research. Meaning is produced, transmitted, presented and received by a wide variety of people who interact with the archives at many levels.<sup>42</sup> Meaning is constructed through interpretation but according to Svenungsson (s.d.) ‘there is no way of knowing exactly what is supposed to be taken away and learned from either text or image’. It is my understanding that the same can be said of objects. This insertion looks at some of the ways in which the meaning of an object may be influenced by curatorial and interpretive decisions.

No object evolves in isolation and thus every object is part of a larger story and groups of objects can often be shown to have what Higgins (2009:8) describes as ‘histories that converge in interesting ways’. Object histories may overlap, or travel on similar trajectories, at different points on their journey from design to museum artefact. These parallels and points of contact form links which may contextualise the objects in different ways. On entering an archive objects are partially decontextualised by removal from their normal mode of circulation. Within the archive these objects are then recontextualised by the other holdings of that archive. In selecting objects for an exhibition a curator can be said to be making choices about which strands of the archival story to bring to the attention of the exhibition’s audience. The curator’s choice of which items to display together can also impact on the wider understanding of those objects.

Whilst the contents of an established archive may be static the interpretation can vary. Different people may seek significantly different information from the same archive and may also offer varying interpretations of the contents of that archive. It can be said that in an exhibition it depends on who is writing the labels as to which interests are being promoted and what judgements are being

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<sup>42</sup> Interaction with archives can vary from passive acceptance of the interpretations of others to in-depth research or the creation of archival material.

made on the value of an object. In writing about explanatory texts to accompany photographs Spector (1995:110) notes that 'only an accompanying text can help to secure its meaning: but then again it must be remembered that language itself is context dependent and grounded in ideology'. Exhibition curators can offer specific readings of objects through their chosen text and contextual positioning, but this may be subject to reinterpretation based on the experiences, tacit knowledge and interests of the audience.

### ***Tracks***

Within museums, objects are subjected to taxonomic filtering in order to subdivide the collections into manageable sections. Lace is most usually found within the Applied Arts classification under a Textiles section. Within Textiles lace may appear within a number of sub-classifications including Male, Female, Children, Ecclesiastical and Furnishing. These sub-classifications are sometimes further sub-divided into lace on garments and flat lace. Lace also frequently appears within the Social History classification. This classification is most often associated with lacemaking equipment which is an important area in the wider understanding of lace. Many bobbin lace pillows found under this heading hold examples of lace being made and can thus offer vital clues as to the type of lace being made in a geographical area at a particular period as well as the style and quality of bobbins being used.

It can be said that taxonomical classifications highlight both the similarities and differences within a collection. Museum taxonomies establish specific contexts for objects but an object may also have an intrinsic connectedness to other objects held under different taxonomic categories. Lacunae in museum documentation can mean that objects which are related in some way may have no point of connection within their museological referencing. Despite the recognition that objects can tell multiple stories, once an object is placed into a taxonomic category it can be hard for that object to be displayed or understood in an alternative context.

By displaying only a selected part of its collections a museum can be said to be making its archive easier to read. My work *Tracks* (Figure 21) considers the implications involved in selecting objects for display. An exhibition curator chooses which of many potential stories to promote from the overlapping paths of certain threads within the archive. By implication the curator must also select what is to be left out of an interpretation and which stories to suppress. The selection process can be seen as akin to unpicking the connections made within the archive and realigning the strands to offer visualisations of alternative narratives and potential connections.

*Tracks* is worked with needle and thread on a square mesh forming a contemporary interpretation of traditional filet lace. It also has parallels with the needlerun laces which developed in response to the availability of relatively cheap machine made net in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The filtering processes used in this work have similarities with certain mapping techniques. Gray and Malins (2004:146) note the potential of drawing up a map which 'could be used to interrogate and organise data'. They go on to state that 'a map forces you to extract and select from a large amount of data and present your understanding in a single visual' (ibid.). As with curatorial selection the filtering process associated with mapping may create new lacunae but it can also demonstrate the influence of existing lacunae in certain areas.

One of the major decisions in both map making and exhibition curation relates to the questions surrounding what not to show. Higgins (2009:95) comments that 'every map reflects a set of vested interests' and the same can be said of the selection process that is applied by an exhibition curator. The curator may choose to enhance, disrupt or realign the accepted connections within the archive according to which of their research interests they are intending to promote.

On a wider stage *Tracks* can be seen as referencing the hand of the curator in deciding how to present the facts of a story from the objects that they have chosen to display. The context in which objects are displayed can lead to the

distortion of their original meaning. Examples of historical lace can be used to promote lace as a symbol of social status or as the product of a system of exploitative labour relations or as a model of high quality design.<sup>43</sup> The objects may themselves be unaltered but the elements of their story which are being displayed may be manipulated in such a way as to promote a specific research strand. The focus of the display may not be in line with the object's normal taxonomical placement within the archive.

Artist Jamie Shovlin notoriously created fictitious archives, such as those of the exhibition *Naomi V Jelish* (Shovlin, 2004), to question the subjectivity of interpretation and the way in which information gains authority. Shovlin's exhibition and its accompanying material were conceived as a means of exploring:

'the way in which content and meaning are filtered and controlled by the curator via its context and presentation to the audience, thereby influencing how the work is received and the long-term historical view of the project' (Rifle-maker, 2004).

Such false archives, and their revelation of the potential to deliberately misread objects, challenge the accepted view of the archive as a solid foundation of historical facts. Whether *Tracks* is based on authentic threadpaths extracted from actual pieces of lace or is an entirely fictional conceit of the artist cannot be ascertained from the work itself.

When *Tracks* is displayed against a black background the grid visually disappears and the whitest of the threadpaths is most dominant. By hanging the work against backgrounds of differing tonality alternative threadpaths can be emphasised. Which of the storylines come to the fore is dependent on which background is used to contextualise the work. Whilst certain storylines may be more visually prominent than others in *Tracks* the presence of the less dominant lines is a reminder of the connections which may be missed if a single reading is promoted to the exclusion of others.

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<sup>43</sup> Examples are discussed in Case Study I.

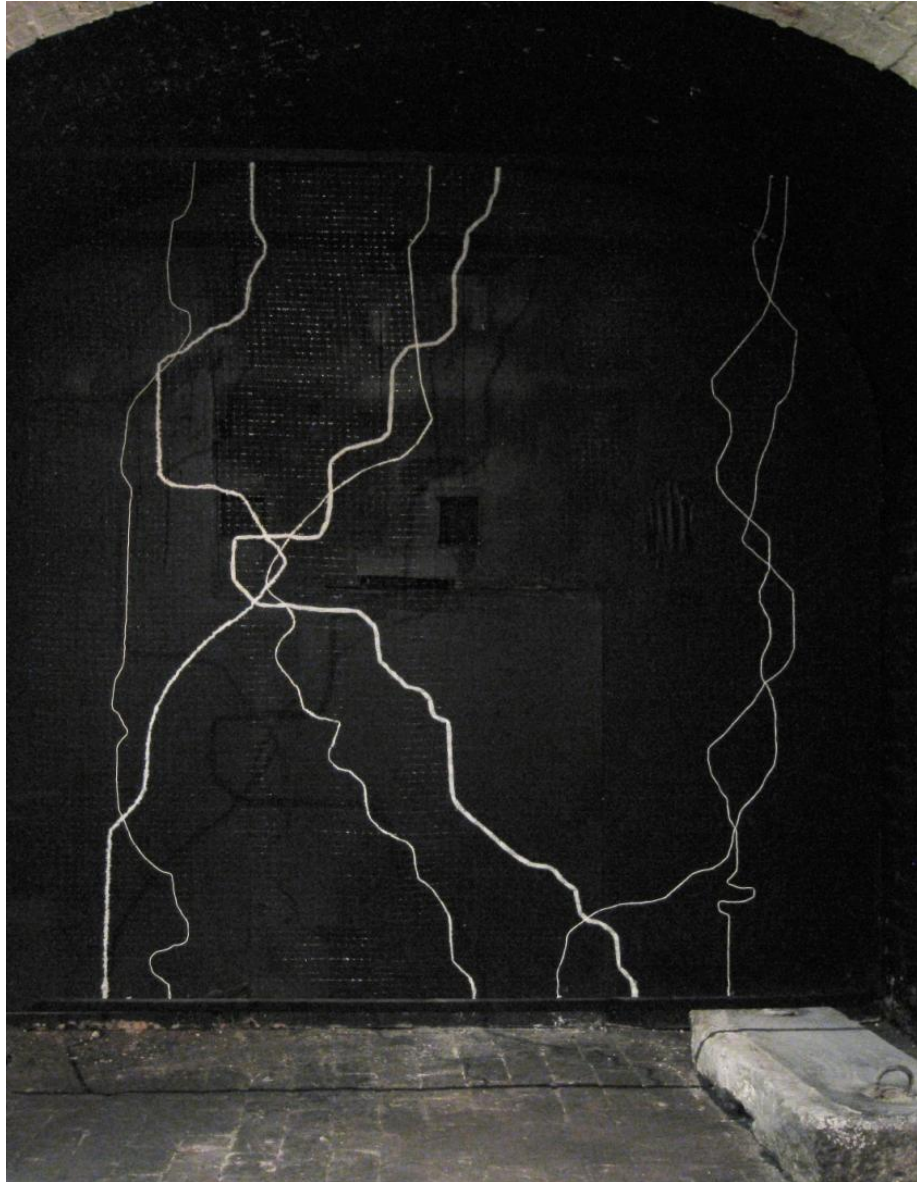


Figure 21: *Tracks*. Crypt Gallery St Pancras Church, 2013

### **Interpretive labels**

In the course of my research I have become progressively more aware that meaning is not controlled by the person who made the object or wrote the text. Once an object or text has been made available for public scrutiny it is open to interpretation, or misinterpretation, by anyone (Williamson, 2012). My work for the series *Reading objects* is concerned with the specific, and potentially conflicting, interests at work in the interpretation of an object or archive and considers the ways in which the meanings and interpretations of objects may vary with the source of their authoring.

When an object is put on display in a museum it is usually accompanied by a label giving information about that object. The label is a powerful tool in contextualising objects. As has already been noted, the curator's choice of what to put on a label can influence how the audience understands the piece. Labels can be seen as a formal exchange of information between the curator and the viewer; they may also represent an interpretation of the object which influences the viewer's understanding of the object. This may include interpretations which differ from the original meaning or context of the object. Labels also form connections with the wider context, often hinting at the conceptual idea behind the physical juxtapositions on display.

Where no labels exist, or where they remain unread, it is left to the viewer to insert their own readings from personal experience. For the viewer with little or no knowledge of the subject this lack of guidance can lead to a bewildered dismissal of the objects. By contrast, for those with a sound working knowledge of the objects on display, having no labels can be a revelatory experience. Commenting on *Concise Dictionary of Dress*,<sup>44</sup> an exhibition deliberately lacking traditional labels, Arnold (2010) notes:

'Provenance and description are rejected . . . It articulates ideas about the relationship between looking, reading and meaning. Allied to this, it asks what value we attribute to objects and labels and exposes the role of curator in choosing, positioning and writing our experience of dress and its histories'.

In this exhibition the audience were challenged to think for themselves and to make their own value judgements rather than relying on the curator to inform their opinions.<sup>45</sup>

Readings on artefact studies, and in particular McClung Fleming's (1982:173) statement that 'an artefact is not subject to just one "correct" interpretation, but many', have led to the consideration of how different readers might interpret the same object. Numerous positions can be identified for potentially differing

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<sup>44</sup> *Concise Dictionary of Dress*, V&A Stores, Blythe House, London 2010.

<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that the exhibition was not open to the casual, passing, visitor. Admission was by appointment only and viewing strictly controlled through escorted tours, it was very much aimed at the cognoscenti.



interpretive agendas. A social historian may be interested in who made, sold, purchased and used the object as well as how, when, where and why it was traded and used. A conservator is usually thought to be concerned with the materials from which the object is made and the stabilisation of the materials in order to prevent degradation. However, as Eastop (2009:174) notes, it is also 'important for conservators and curators to recognise the differing values and utility attributed to objects and collections' in order to make the most appropriate decisions regarding conservation, display and storage methods.

Part of the value associated with an object may be the aura of the original. A slightly soiled and worn lace sample in a museum collection is valued more highly than a pristine modern version, from the same pattern, that has taken just as much skill and equally as many hours to make. The new version however has not acquired the patina of wear or the embedded narrative of time and ownership of the older version. It is interesting to question why today historic handmade lace of even the poorest design and workmanship is so often valued above well designed and manufactured machine made lace from the same period. Huge amounts of skill were involved in the production of machine made lace. The pattern drafting process was highly complex and the twisthands who controlled the vast machines were also highly skilled. Machine made lace was originally considered to be a marvel of technological innovation and thus an object to be highly prized. This perception of value has changed with time.

### ***Reading objects***

The installation *Reading objects* is based on a series of lace-edged handkerchiefs displayed on plinths. The maker, salesman, conservator and social historian might all label the handkerchiefs in different ways. In recognition of this, each side of the plinth bears a label offering an alternative reading of the displayed object. The information given in the labels may vary dramatically according to the technical knowledge, interests and personal agenda of the researcher. No attempt is made to indicate which of the readings is technically accurate or which I favour.

Four potential labels for a single handkerchief (Figure 22) are included on the following pages as an example of this area of practice.



Figure 22: *Reading objects I* - Lace edged handkerchief (detail)

### **Vintage Venetian Floral Lace Wedding Handkerchief**

Cotton

20th century

27 x 27 cm

Ladies fine white cotton handkerchief with delightful border and elaborate corner of fine lace.

Lace handkerchiefs are especially welcome as gifts at the celebrations of life. Handkerchiefs with elaborately shaped centres and wide lace edgings are sometimes known as Wedding or Ball handkerchiefs. These elegant cloths are traditionally passed along through generations becoming valued heirlooms. Originally a needlepoint lace, this example resembles the highly sought after Venetian laces. Slightly raised lace is called Venice; lace with more variety of stitch heights can be called Grospoint. The bars that connect the floral motifs are called brides.

2007.459.6

### **Cotton handkerchief with Swiss lace edging**

Cotton

20th century

27 x 27 cm

Ladies cotton lawn handkerchief with machine made Swiss lace edging.

This style of lace is also known as chemical or burnt-out lace. The technique was invented in 1883 and used cotton threads to machine embroider onto a silk backing fabric. The backing was then dissolved with chemicals to produce the lace.

The nature of the cloth areas in the flowers and leaves are the primary indicators of the method of manufacture. No individual thread-paths can be traced and no distinct stitches can be observed. The slightly raised satin stitch motifs lack the outer bar of the needlelace stitches which they imitate.

2007.459.6

### **Antique Point Lace Needlework Wedding Handkerchief**

Cotton

20th century

27 x 27 cm

This spectacular antique point lace needlework wedding handkerchief is unused. The lace and body are a very light cream in colour. It is in excellent condition, complete with the original label 'Pure cotton made in Switzerland'. Lace edged handkerchiefs were popular, decorative, ladies accessories often given as gifts.

This handkerchief was given to Miss Amelia Smythe on the occasion of her engagement to the Reverend James Thomas Mercantile in 1909. It was one of a number of such handkerchiefs bequeathed by Mrs JT Mercantile (nee Smythe) to her niece, Miss Mary Jennings, who collected antique textiles for many years.

Presented by Miss M Jennings (2007.459.6)

## **Handkerchief edged with machine made Swiss lace**

Cotton

20th century

27 x 27 cm

Patented by Jacob Sutter, Swiss or Chemical lace was first produced in 1883. By 1908 there were 16,000 machines operating in the St Gallen area of Switzerland. Machines were also exported to Germany, Poland and America. This was the first machine that could imitate heavier laces such as Venetian Gros Point and enabled the relatively easy production of elaborately shaped pieces such as collars.

The manufacturers copied the best examples of handmade lace as well as producing contemporary designs. The large quantities of Swiss lace that survive are an indication of the success of the technique and the manufacturers' designs.

2007.459.6

### **Summary**

As with the works in Insertion I the practice discussed in this insertion demonstrated ways in which the interpretation of archival objects and facts might vary. This variation could be influenced by what information was available to the viewer or by the subtleties of personal knowledge and interests. This practice however concentrated on the ways in which the lacunae created by curatorial selection and labelling could create biases within the presentation of museum objects. The exposure of these biases challenged the established reading of the archive as a solid foundation of historical accuracy.

*Tracks* considered the importance of recognising intertwining and overlapping paths of certain threads within the archive and how these connections might be disrupted or realigned by curatorial selection. The vitality of the museum archive was noted as being in part due to the possibility of re-combining selected elements to form new connections. Equally exciting was the potential of exploring an archive with an eye to picking out patterns which differed from the

norm. These patterns might relate to similarity or difference but they could illuminate connections which were normally hidden from view.

Lace could be seen as a linking process and if certain links were removed then the lace could take on a quite different appearance. Some lace structures, such as needlelace and machine made lace, can be skilfully cut into smaller sections to extract specific panels or motifs.<sup>46</sup> This could lead to new focuses being created which placed emphasis on different areas of the bigger picture. This selection process might, however, give rise to distortions in the way that the wider structure was understood. Which laces might be cut and which could not was one of many pieces of knowledge which were once commonplace but have now been largely lost. This lack of tacit knowledge created lacunae within the reading ability of non-specialist curators and audiences.

The importance of background to the reading of *Tracks* was in many ways comparable to the background information which could be provided on an object label. Museum labels might be revelatory, mystifying or ignored but the use of the label as an interpretive device could add weight to the direction given by curatorial selection. *Reading objects* made the point that the object did not change but through the choice of wording on labels the viewer's relationship with, and understanding of, the object might be subtly altered or even changed completely. This practice once again stressed that different people might seek different information from a single archive and this could lead to significantly varied readings of that archive.

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<sup>46</sup> Most bobbin lace by contrast would usually begin to unravel if motifs were cut away from the larger construction.

## **7. Case Study I**

### **7.1 Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery Lace Collection**

### **7.2 Hidden Histories**

### **7.3 Summary**

## 7.1 Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery Lace Collection

### Introduction

This case study considers the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (BMAG) lace collection as an example of the effects of contingency on the creation of gaps and absences in museum archives and how these lacunae may affect the reading of museum objects. The lace collection was made up of both physical artefacts and documents recording certain areas of their histories. According to Eastop (2000:22) 'textiles can be shown to have multiple and competing histories'. It was the lacunae in the form of the hidden sections of these multiple histories that this research sought to uncover. This was approached through the study of the physical artefacts and records, and the identification of lacunae in the archive. The impact of these lacunae on the understanding of the cultural significance of the lace in the Museum's collections was then assessed. Lace can be said to be a particularly apt choice of textile for this research as it is inextricably linked with lacunae - gaps, absences, voids - lacunae are the essence of the fabric, they give lace its distinctive identity.

At the time of the study BMAG was one of the largest local authority funded museum services in Britain,<sup>47</sup> holding in excess of 1,000,000 objects across a range of collections (BMAG, 2009:8).

'The collections of Art, Science & Industry, Birmingham History, Numismatics and the Pinto collection of Treen are all designated by the Department of Culture, Media & Sport as collections of national importance and significance' (BMAG, 2009:15).

The lace collection formed a discrete collection within the larger Textile collection, which was a part of the Applied Art collection.

The BMAG lace collection was chosen for this case study for a number of

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<sup>47</sup> Birmingham Museums & Art Galley became part of the independent Birmingham Museums Trust in 2012.

reasons. The lace collection was under researched in Museum terms and the case study would provide documented in-depth research. The documented analysis of the collection and its potential significance would be made available for future users including curators, researchers and the wider public. The lace collection allowed the research hypotheses to be tested by challenging the status of archives as a reliably solid foundation of historical accuracy and by considering how lacunae within the archive might create a biased view of the past.

The research addressed the ways in which gaps in museum archives might affect the reading of objects. Researching across the Museum's holdings offered the opportunity to identify, uncover and bring together objects and textiles which represented a broader spectrum of lace history than was currently covered in the lace collection. The narrative hidden within the archive was filtered through time and mediation. The case study considered how the reinterpretation of an archive might reinvigorate it and the dissemination of the research brought the collection to the attention of a wider audience.

The case study identified gaps and absences, drew together hints and clues from the archives and combined these with information from specialist sources to facilitate new readings of lace in the Museum. Consideration was given to whose histories had been told and whose histories had been concealed and alternative lace histories were researched and revealed. This included consideration of the darker underside of the manufacture and trade of lace, such as the working conditions of those engaged in both the hand and machine manufacture of lace and the illegal side of its trade through smuggling and theft.

According to their collecting policy BMAG's collections:

'have a long-term purpose in the education and inspiration of the Museum's users. In addition to serving current audiences, BMAG has a duty to preserve the collections for future generations, and to manage and develop the collections to ensure their value, validity and use in future society' (BMAG, 2009:18).



This case study addressed education through the dissemination of a new reading of the collection and inspiration by setting the collections in different contexts. The lace collection's value was enhanced by repositioning it beyond the realms of a merely decorative textile. Validity was addressed through rereading in relation to social issues, such as child labour, and potential for future use expanded through increased public and academic awareness of the collection and its availability for study.

### **Scope of the research**

In order to fully understand the context of the BMAG lace collection as it stood at the time of the research it was necessary to consider how the Museum and its collections came into being. A brief outline of the establishment of the Museum is provided as Appendix I. The broader historical significance of lace is briefly discussed in Appendix II. Consideration of the reasons why a lace collection existed at BMAG paved the way for a deeper analysis of the index cards and the lace itself. The identification of gaps and absences within the collection was based on the differentiation between gaps and absences in which Cooke (2008:25) described gaps as the missing pieces in a collection, asserting that: 'the gap is capable of fulfilment'. A document or artefact that is known to be missing can be sought in order to fill a gap. Absences, by contrast, he considered to be: 'something we may not even be looking for – in fact may not even be aware of' (ibid.).

The research addressed the way in which the lace in the BMAG collection was largely associated with the upper classes rather than through the history of those lower down the social order. The accuracy of the traditional museum interpretation of lace was questioned in the light of gaps and absences that were identified within the lace collection and through the application of specialist knowledge of the medium. Alternative interpretations were proposed, highlighting the histories of those whose lives were touched by lace but who were not usually represented in the Museum's interpretation of its lace collections.

Historical collections of lace have been widely studied by lacemakers interested in the technical details of its fabrication.<sup>48</sup> This case study was not generally concerned with the technical aspects of the lacemaking techniques represented in the collection, nor did it seek to make aesthetic judgements on the quality of workmanship or design of the lace. The scientific investigation of the materials, whilst potentially revealing much interesting information, was not covered. These could be seen as valid, and potentially fruitful, areas of research but fell beyond the remit of this study. Although there was much lace of European manufacture in the collection, this case study primarily focused on the hidden histories of lace in England.

### **Background to the BMAG lace collection**

One of the great strengths of BMAG was its diverse range of artefacts; this was in part a result of its early policy which aimed ‘to collect skilfully designed or artistically fine objects which would be of assistance to the Birmingham artisan’ (Davies, 1985:27). This could be seen as being at odds with the modern remit of acquisitions forming specific collection groups. As with many provincial museums the early collections were established by wealthy local patrons and so reflect their interests. Local industrialists, and their families, donated many high quality pieces to the Museum; from paintings and furniture to glass and lace. These pieces could be read as reflections of the donors taste as well as their philanthropic intentions. Later donations reflected the changing interests of society with a greater focus on social history and the donation/acceptance of more everyday objects. The Museum now has a collecting policy and is seeking to become more socially inclusive in its collections with a focus on collecting from locally relevant artists and ethnic minorities (BMAG, 2009:6).

Hill (1993) described the formation of archives as a process of sedimentation, in which files and filing cabinets formed the substrate onto which the papers circulating in an office were deposited for archiving. Those papers that slipped through the system and failed to be added to the archives (for whatever reason)

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<sup>48</sup> A selected list of UK lace collections is provided as Appendix III.

formed the gaps and absences. This analogy was also true for the lace collection at BMAG but here, due to the absence of a lace collecting policy and the collection being formed largely of unsolicited donations, it was entirely a matter of contingency as to which pieces of lace, and what information, were deposited and which slipped through the net leaving an incomplete picture for future users to interpret.

Birmingham had no tradition of lacemaking, by either hand or machine, and the Museum has never had a lace collecting policy, thus the lace collection was regarded as an accidental collection. The accession books showed that early acquisitions depended largely on the whims of wealthy benefactors.<sup>49</sup> The contents of the collection was thus influenced by the contingency of what appealed to these benefactors and what was available to them, they did not seek out specific pieces to create a representative collection but chose pieces that offered good designs or had personal significance. The 14 pairs of lappets<sup>50</sup> purchased in 1890 would have been seen as embodying excellence of design and thus offering inspiration to the local artisans. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century donations turned towards social history with the inclusion of artefacts with local provenance in terms of the wearer or domestic manufacture. It was in this period that much equipment associated with the hand manufacture of lace came into the collection, despite the regions lack of tradition in this industry.

### **The lace collection**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century lace has come to be widely viewed as a somewhat frivolous, purely decorative, fabric of little significance beyond fashion. However its history is as complex as its structure, being bound up with social status, the creation of fortunes and exploitation of workers. Handmade lace was part of a culture of excess; a luxury commodity that revealed the wealth and status of the wearer and produced highly specialised patterns of consumption. The survival of old

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<sup>49</sup> These benefactors were keen to demonstrate their good taste and philanthropic generosity with donations of fine specimen pieces as well as family heirlooms.

<sup>50</sup> Accession numbers 1890M1-14.

lace could be dependent on many factors, including its preservation and conservation in museum collections.

Although the BMAG lace collection was not assembled as a technical reference collection it was catalogued as such, with the index cards divided according to primary techniques and their subdivisions: bobbin lace and its subdivisions, needlelace and its subdivisions, machine made laces, worked nets etc. The taxonomic divisions used within the lace collection would suit researchers wishing to investigate the intricacies of specific lacemaking techniques but would be of little help to anyone wishing to research the historic development of, for instance, lace edged handkerchiefs. Similarly these divisions would be of little assistance to anyone researching changes in the way in which lace was worn or its social significance.

The documentation for the lace collection consisted of a card index, backed up by individual entries in the accession registers, and a small group of files containing background material. The original documentation was kept at BMAG whilst the physical lace was stored at the Museum Collection Centre (MCC). Documentation of all of the Museum's holdings was held on computer via Minisis, a whole collection management system, which allowed cross collection searches and could accommodate large quantities of technical details and research information.

The BMAG lace collection was identified through a drawer of index cards (both typed and hand written) which comprised 615 index cards relating to lace and 24 relating to lacemaking equipment. A number of the cards contained details of more than one item. Such multiples brought the total of items of lace in the lace collection to approximately 700, and with the addition of the lacemaking equipment the collection totalled in excess of 1,000 items. Many of the cards in the lace collection were marked with a D or the word Duplicate indicating that the primary index card was held under its Social History Industrial Classification

(SHIC) category, this was taken as further proof that the lace collection was indeed an accidental collection.<sup>51</sup>

### **Gaps and absences**

In order to consider how the lacunae in the museum archive impacted upon the understanding of lace in the museum, it was first necessary to identify the lacunae which might be of relevance to the research. The BMAG lace collection was not a technical reference collection and therefore not expected to have a comprehensive coverage of all lacemaking techniques, i.e. no Jesurum or Hollie Point. No attempt had previously been made to identify or fill these gaps and any such gaps did not form a part of this study. Tatting, crochet and knitted laces did not form a part of the lace collection despite being regarded as lace in lacemaking circles and conforming to Earnshaw's (1982:91) definition of lace as a 'textile patterned with holes which are created by the manipulation of threads'. These techniques were grouped together to form their own, separate, section of index cards. This was considered to be a major gap in the lace collection as it had been defined by the Museum's taxonomy.

The research was primarily informed by the information on the index cards; what had been recorded, what had been omitted and in both cases why. The examination of the lace collection began with an analysis of the index cards, starting with the taxonomies on the cards themselves. The headings were a record of what those who established the cataloguing system thought to be important things to record. Although they did vary a little over the years they had a fairly standard format, in order to be used with everything from aircraft engines to stuffed animals.

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<sup>51</sup> The index for the costume collection was classified according to the SHIC system, which is used for all history collections, this takes the International Council on Museums (ICOM) costume classification system and breaks it down into four categories; community, domestic, personal and working life. The women's clothing that had been viewed at the MCC appeared in 'Personal Life' sections 3.0-3.99 and included items made entirely of lace, such as veils which were classified as women's 'accessories worn – head' (3.3371), non-functional items of lace such as edgings and flounces were classified as women's 'miscellaneous costume accessories - accessories used in the making and adjusting of clothing' (3.3382).

The headings were:

Inventory/Accession Number

Received Date

Source

Insurance £

Location

Section

Sub-section

Object

Country

Maker

Designer



Factory

Date or Period

Marks

Material

Technique



Size

Description

An initial assessment of the information contained on the cards of the lace collection indicated that one of the most obvious gaps was the lack of information about the Maker/Designer/Factory. This was recognised as being in keeping with the nature of commercial lace manufacture whether by hand or machine - highly skilled but anonymous. Where a name for the maker or designer did exist it was usually associated with lace made as a hobby. If Birmingham had had a tradition of lacemaking it would perhaps have been relevant to try to trace some of the anonymous workers but under the circumstances it was not felt to be appropriate to the research. The source, by contrast, was often well recorded especially when the item was presented by a local worthy.

Part of the value of an object to a researcher is encoded in its provenance, not merely where it came from in terms of its donor but also where and from whom

they obtained the item. Real social value is added if there is information as to who wore it, when, where and why. Where it existed such provenance was, for the most part, sketchy on the index cards but was sometimes a little better in the accession registers. This lack of social background reflected the priorities of those who established the Museum and its collections in the late 1800s. More recent acquisitions often had much richer background details, but with social history donations this could bring its own problems as family folklore might not always be a reliable source of provenance.

The information on the index cards was also available through the Minisis computer system which should have made it easier to search. However, as with any computerised system, the results were heavily reliant on the data that was input on to the system. Every item of information that was transferred from the index cards to the computer records was given equal weighting in terms of reliability. By contrast, curators and researchers were aware of which handwriting on the index cards was more reliable and which was less so. The information on the index cards was written in good faith but in the past was rarely subjected to the rigorous interrogation or authentication expected today.

Visual inspection of some items in the lace collection indicated that not all of the information on the index cards was reliable. One example of a questionable description on an index card was: 'Child's shirt c.1602-1603, Linen, hemstitched and edged with needlepoint lace (Reticella)' (BMAG, 1933).<sup>52</sup> That it was a child's shirt made from linen and hemstitched was not in dispute but I identified the lace as an early plaited bobbin lace. This was confirmed by Gilian Dye who put the date at 1600-1620.<sup>53</sup> Inspection of the lace by experts with greater knowledge than those who originally assessed a piece could also lead to changes in the information recorded on index cards. One index card<sup>54</sup> clearly demonstrated this point. The original typed description read: 'Strip, Brussels, c.1900, Bobbin Lace' followed by its size and a description of the design. At a

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<sup>52</sup> Accession number 1933M496.

<sup>53</sup> It was my speculation that the original, erroneous, identification was the result of dubious salesmanship as the piece was noted as 'reputed to have been worn by Charles I' (BMAG, 1933) hence the date of c.1602-1603 which would undoubtedly have enhanced its financial value and saleability.

<sup>54</sup> Accession number 1933M497.

later date Brussels had been crossed out and Honiton added by hand, with 'Unusual trellis ground' added to the description of the design. This was subsequently amended on the advice of experts. Honiton was crossed out and a note added: 'Definitely not Honiton Valenciennes de Gand (Ghent) Lace Guild visit 2001' (BMAG, 1933a). Valenciennes de Gand is a little known bobbin lace produced for a relatively short period and is visually very similar to Honiton, in this case it was the 'Unusual trellis ground' that signalled the true origin.

The lace index contained approximately 200 cards with UA accession numbers (i.e. UA101), these items were found without their original accession numbers attached when the textile collection was moved from the store rooms at BMAG to the new MCC in 2005. The items were allocated new accession numbers after the move. These new numbers were recorded on the computer inventory but had often not been added to the index cards. The contingency of the lacunae created by the misplacement of small labels could have significant implications. New factual details such as technique, date and materials could be assigned. However, any item which had been assigned a new number had lost any original provenance details relating to acquisition, wearer, maker or significant occasions of its use which could be of vital importance to a future researcher. Whilst it should, in theory, be possible to reunite the items with their original index cards, the time and technical knowledge required for such an undertaking would be enormous and offer numerous opportunities for error.

### **Hidden lace**

As a consequence of the way in which BMAG's collections were catalogued there were many more items of lace, and lace related artefacts, in the Museum's holdings than appeared in the lace collection. The case study sought to address this situation by raising the awareness of lace within the Museum and extending the scope of the recognised lace collection to include artefacts from across the Museum holdings. Cross catalogue computer searches should have addressed the difficulties associated with taxonomic classifications but evidence suggested that the descriptions of many items were not sufficiently detailed for comprehensively reliable data to be retrieved.



Visual inspection of garments at the MCC revealed that much of the lace on costume did not appear in the lace collection. There were examples of lacemaking equipment in the lace collection but the Pinto collection of Treen and the Taylor trunk, which both contained large quantities of lacemaking equipment, were part of the social history collection and these objects did not appear in the lace collection. Lace also appeared in other BMAG holdings in secondary forms such as paintings, medals and books. These secondary examples helped to put the lace into context with dateable evidence of who wore it and the social strata of the wearer. An example of this was the painting *Lady Mason, Wife of Sir Josiah Mason* (Pratt, 1883)<sup>55</sup> in which Lady Mason was depicted wearing a Bedfordshire lace collar of similar design to a collar in the collection.<sup>56</sup> The painting was dated 1883 which helped to give an appropriate date for the collar.

The lace in the paintings rarely appeared as part of the catalogue description and was thus largely invisible within the Museum records. Visual inspection of the collections identified depictions of lace in Topographical Prints, Coins and Medals, Ceramics and Sculpture. One example of sculpture depicting lace which would appear on a computer search was *Dead Canary on a Lace Handkerchief* (Kendall, 1837)<sup>57</sup> but the majority of examples were on busts and, like the lace in paintings, invisible through the records. Examples of lace that was invisible in the records also occurred in less obvious sections of the Museum holdings such as on musical automatons.

One gap that exists in all archives and textile collections is the body corporeal; this is especially relevant in the case of lace which frequently does not reveal an obvious function or method of wearing. The Museum's paintings and their associated histories offered clues to the way that lace was worn, the nature of the wearers and the social value of lace but rarely any information on how it was acquired or what became of the lace after the portrait date.

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<sup>55</sup> Accession number 1900P172.

<sup>56</sup> Accession number 2005.1875.

<sup>57</sup> Accession number 1955M3.

The costume collection was largely composed of special items, such as wedding dresses and heirloom lace. More ordinary clothing was less often kept, usually being handed down, worn and remodelled until it was no longer fit for wearing and then sold as rags for paper making. The lack of these ordinary items created a gap within the collection which could affect how it was read. Where they did exist, minor objects relating to daily life gave a fuller picture. It was noted that however full and rich a collection might be, future users always bring their own experiences, knowledge and agenda to the reading of an archive. It was also seen as important to remember that what is evident when looking back on an event, or information, may be quite different to how it was seen at the time of archiving.

In an attempt to identify some of the lace and related artefacts from across the Museum's holdings that did not appear in the lace collection a complex search of the computer records was undertaken looking for lace in either title or description fields.<sup>58</sup> This produced approximately 3,000 results, of which analysis showed that approximately 2,000 were bobbins or related equipment. The removal of these and a number of red-herrings (Japanese Armour, boots, lacerators etc.) brought the number closer to the 700 in the lace index. However a number of lace collection items did not appear on the computer list, for example only 2 lace items were listed as acquired in 1890 whereas the lace index had 14 lappets acquired in 1890. This specific case was a question of assumed knowledge. The lappets were primarily indexed under Women's Headwear and identified by the style of the lace, producing descriptions such as: 'Mechlin Lappets, c.1740, joined, linen, 1000 x 85mm' (BMAG, 1890) in which the word lace had been deemed unnecessary. At the time of their accessioning anyone involved with the textile collection would have known that the term 'Mechlin lappets' referred to lappets made in a particular style of lace. This was a good example of the contingency of what was included in the lace collection and what had escaped through the voids created unintentionally during cataloguing.

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<sup>58</sup> Carried out by BMAG Documents Manager Lucy Blakeman.

## 7.2 Hidden Histories

One strand of the research questioned the accuracy of the traditional interpretation of the lace in the BMAG collections as a symbol of social status. This reading was largely based on the Museum's numerous paintings of influential and wealthy people wearing lace. These portraits also held clues to the influence of local civic pride and wealth on the contents of the BMAG collections. The lace in the portraits underlined the social position of those who wore lace as opposed to those who made it.

The hidden histories of those involved in the lace trade was considered in this research in order to redress the lack of information held by the Museum on those who made and traded in the lace in its collection. These gaps might have been the result of information having never been recorded, or of donations from collectors who might have recorded the sources of their lace at the time of acquisition but where this information had subsequently become lost. Lace was a unit of currency, or trade, for many people; makers, dealers, merchants, smugglers and thieves but their interaction with identifiable pieces of lace was not often recorded. It was the contention of this research that the consideration of lace in the wider context could alter the understanding of its historical significance across a broad range of society.

### **Lace in paintings**

A tour of the BMAG galleries revealed numerous paintings that testified to the accuracy of the traditional museum interpretation of lace; royalty, statesmen, military men, scholars, their wives and children were all portrayed wearing the fashionable lace of the period. Notable occasions or elevation of status, such as the time of inheritance or marriage, were often celebrated by the commissioning of a portrait and the commissioned artist understood that he was required to show not only a good likeness of the sitter but also to record their wealth and status through the accurate rendering of their clothes and accessories.

The lace in the Museum's portraits was used to address the gap in the collection relating to men's lace. There was very little lace in the collection recorded as having been worn by men. Without other evidence of the cause of this lack it could have been assumed that men wore little lace or that the lace which was worn by men did not survive well. The large number of paintings in the Museum's collection that depicted men wearing lace indicated not only that lace was widely worn by men but also that men were as influenced by fashion as women.<sup>59</sup>

The Museum's paintings, to some extent, filled another gap in the archive in that they gave an insight into the ways in which lace was worn. In museum displays lace is usually either shown as part of a costume, or displayed on a plain background of a contrasting colour so that the design of the lace is clear to see. The painting *Work* (Madox Brown, 1863)<sup>60</sup> included the depiction of a lace shawl worn over a printed fabric; this was not a way in which it would be likely to be shown in a modern museum display.

### **Handmade lace**

The production of handmade lace was reliant on a hierarchical system of dealers who controlled the supply of patterns and materials to the workforce and who sold the finished product to the consumer. The profit that was to be made in the bobbin lace trade relied on the skill of anonymous workers to transform simple thread into finished articles that were worth a great deal more than the cost of their materials and labour combined. It also required the employment of skilled designers to produce the patterns on which the lacemakers worked and a raft of other hidden suppliers such as bobbin and pin manufacturers – lace was a means of earning a living for a wide range of people.

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<sup>59</sup> The portrait *Sir Thomas Holte (1571-1624), 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet of Aston Hall, Birmingham* (British School, c.1600-1625) showed him wearing the latest fashions. The ruff of Elizabethan times had been replaced by a standing collar edged with fine Italian lace, this style was in fashion from 1605-15 and indicated to all who saw the painting at the time that Holte was in touch with the fashion changes at Court in London. The collar and cuffs would have required starching, and thus the portrait also indicated that he could afford to keep servants adept in the highly skilled arts of laundering and starching this delicate fabric. Accession number 1885P3184.

<sup>60</sup> Accession number 1927P349.

The popular image associated with lacemaking is that of the happy cottage worker sitting in the sun pleasantly passing the day making lace. The reality could be quite different and a journal article from 1775 exposed the attitudes of those who could afford to purchase handmade lace toward the hidden poor who so often made the lace. In the article the proprietors of a London lace 'Manufactory' employing 300 girls described the benefits of their endeavours:

'The employing of female infants, especially those of the poor, from five years old and upwards, will introduce an early familiar habit of industry among the most indigent of the community, and lay a foundation for preserving them from those dangers and misfortunes to which, - from their sex and situations, - they are so peculiarly exposed' (Bryant and Co., 1775:122).

The authors went on to comment: 'Her Most Gracious Majesty, their Royal Highnesses the Princesses, and Princess Amelia, with numbers of the Nobility, have condescended to visit the manufactory, and expressed their approbation of the undertaking' (Bryant and Co., 1775:124). These comments reflected the attitudes of the period and offer a stark reminder of the way in which attitudes to social issues might change with the passage of time. What was considered right and proper in the 1700s might be seen as unacceptable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In a similar vein a paper of delicate Honiton lace sprigs <sup>61</sup> gave little clue to the lives of the women and children who made such lace, often working long hours for a pittance. Their plight during lean times was summed up by Mrs Caroline Hayman, <sup>62</sup> a lace manufacturer in Otterton, Devon, who gave evidence to John White for the 1863 Royal Commission on Children's Employment:

'I am the principal lace manufacturer here, and take the work of from 30 to 40 girls and young women, chiefly between the ages of 6 and 20. They bring in a piece of lace as soon as they have done it, every day and sometimes twice a day, - it may be as little as a couple of pennyworth, -

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<sup>61</sup> An example would be Accession number 2005.3878.1.

<sup>62</sup> Mrs Hayman, like many manufacturers, operated on the truck system where the workers would be paid in goods from her shop rather than in cash which they could spend in less expensive shops.

and beg you to take it, that they may get something to eat' (Hayman 1862-3, cited in White, 1863:254).

If considered in terms of a few tiny sprigs of Honiton lace being traded for a frugal meal the relative value of a Honiton lace handkerchief<sup>63</sup> comprising hundreds of such sprigs would take on a significantly different meaning.

Lace Schools were common in all lacemaking areas and in Northamptonshire, in the 1820's, it was noted that a local lace school worked from 6am to 6pm in summer and from 8am to 8pm in winter, taking half an hour each for breakfast and tea and an hour for lunch. The girls aged 8 and upwards, thus worked ten hours a day Monday to Friday, on Saturday they only worked until lunchtime with Sunday off for church (Roberts c.1875, cited in: Palliser, 1911:390). Mrs Roberts recalled that 'the girls had to stick ten pins a minute, or six hundred an hour; and if at the end of the day they were five pins behind they had to stay another hour' (ibid.). Although called a school, this was a commercial venture and the girls had to earn their wages. There was a vast void between the situation of the young lacemakers and that of the girl in the Museum's portrait *Fanny, Daughter of James Beale* (British School, c.1810-1820)<sup>64</sup> who wore lace trimmings on her dress and pantaloons.

In 1863 John White reported for a Royal Commission on the working conditions of children and young persons employed in the lace trade other than in factories. In his summary he commented that:

'The employment is often made more injurious to the eyesight by the scantiness of the light in which they work, or by its being transmitted through bottles of water. The younger the lace-makers are, the more of them work within the same supply of light, 8 or even 12 sometimes working round one dip candle' (White, 1863:185).

Working by candle light was unavoidable in the winter and was made worse by the additional demands of fashion for black lace<sup>65</sup> during these months.

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<sup>63</sup> For example Accession number 2005.1177.

<sup>64</sup> Accession number 1938P9.

<sup>65</sup> Such as the black Bucks Point flounce accession number 1929M508.

By the very nature of its manufacture – a cottage industry of anonymous women and girls paid on a piece-work system – it is almost impossible to attribute a piece of handmade lace to a specific maker. This lack of information on the artisans who made the lace in the collection was seen as forming a major gap in the archive. This could be said to show that the information held on the lace in the collection produced a view of lace that was biased towards the consumer rather than the producer. The application of specialist knowledge was used to draw out information from the material archive which was used to begin to redress this bias.

Local philanthropist Mrs WA Cadbury privately amassed a large collection of lacemakers equipment; her daughter later donated these items to the Museum. Any records Mrs Cadbury might have kept of the sources of the equipment had not survived but a specialist's reading of a lacemaker's pillow provided an insight into the situation and interests of the former owner. This offered an opportunity to tell another side to the story of lace – that of one of its makers.

The pillow<sup>66</sup> from Mrs Cadbury's collection was not typical of those used in the East Midlands but the presence of Bucks Point lace and spangled bobbins led to the assumption that the worker and pillow were from this broad area. Research indicated that the presence of a bone bobbin inscribed JOHN BUNYAN<sup>67</sup> would imply that the pillow was in use in the late 1800s as these bobbins commemorated the erecting of a statue to Bunyan in Bedford in 1874 (Springett, 1997:46). To the informed eye the other bobbins that remained attached to the work also offered a variety of insights into the situation of the lacemaker. In particular, the green dyed, bone, mother and babe bobbin<sup>68</sup> showed that there had sometimes been money to spare for the purchase of luxury bobbins. This bobbin still had its gold tinsel intact which indicated that it had seen relatively little use. The application of specialist knowledge showed that this lacemaker was not loyal to a single bobbin maker, no doubt adding to their collection as money and availability allowed.

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<sup>66</sup> Accession number 1977F302.5.

<sup>67</sup> Accession number 1977F302.702.

<sup>68</sup> Accession number 1977F302.690.

Whilst not regarded as a part of the lace collection, the Pinto collection of Treen contained a large number of lace bobbins. Pinto was interested in the wood from which they were made and how it was worked rather than the social history of the bobbins. The bobbins could however offer a specialist clues to the lives of those who worked with them. Most bobbins preserved in museum collections were lathe turned, usually by professionals who supplied shops, which sold to lacemakers, some bobbin makers also travelled in local rural areas selling their bobbins at fairs.

When times were good lacemakers often purchased inscribed bobbins that gave hints as to their interests and there were a number of these in the collection. A bone bobbin inscribed with the phrase I LONG TO WED <sup>69</sup> was typical of many that reflected the young lacemakers' desires and which might provide a point of connection for museum visitors. Other inscriptions reflected more serious moments in the lacemakers' lives by commemorating births and deaths. Whilst the inscription THOMAS GEORGE DIED NOVEM 8 1832, <sup>70</sup> was a poignant memorial it offered no clue as to Thomas's age or relationship to the unnamed lacemaker who used the bobbin and so produced another tantalising gap in the archive. A few bobbins were traced back to their maker, if not to their user. One example was the bone, beaded, mother and babe bobbin <sup>71</sup> which was identified as having been made by David Haskins (born 1819) of Leighton Buzzard (Springett, 1997:39). This bobbin would have been expensive and showed little sign of wear possibly indicating that it was not in daily use.

It is not widely understood that spangles, usually formed of a ring of glass beads, were originally added to the bottom of East Midlands lace bobbins to increase their weight and help to improve the lacemaker's tension. The most common beads were glass square-cuts which were often made by the local blacksmith; another link in the usually unacknowledged lace supply chain. As with bobbins, some spangles also offered glimpses into the lives of lacemakers.

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<sup>69</sup> Accession number 1965T4589.1.

<sup>70</sup> Accession number 1960A37.10.

<sup>71</sup> Accession number 1965T5765.1. According to lace folklore a lacemaker never used a mother and babe bobbin until she had safely carried her first child. One interesting technical point to note on this example was that the babe was also of turned bone but this had been dyed a bright turquoise colour.



A bone bobbin <sup>72</sup> inscribed with the name JANNE had two sea shells forming the spangle. Only those with an understanding of the limited movements of 20<sup>th</sup> century lacemakers would be aware that East Midlands lacemakers were highly unlikely to have ever seen the sea. It could only be a matter of speculation as to whether the shells might have been brought home as a gift by a seafaring relative or purchased from a travelling salesman at a local fair. One plain bone bobbin <sup>73</sup> carried a spangle of glass beads and a General Service button (1902-52), stamped on the back: 'Smith & Wright Limited, Birmingham'. Whilst this formed a highly tenuous link back to Birmingham industry it also hinted at a caring relationship between an anonymous lacemaker and an unknown soldier – a lost connection, the tale which will sadly never be told.

### **Machine made lace**

BMAG holds many fine examples of machine made lace but none of these gave any clue to the history of their making or the international importance of this industry. Research highlighted the existence within the Museum's holdings of the 1<sup>st</sup> hank of machine spun cotton thread. In 1866 Mrs Silvester donated 'The first hank of Cotton spun by machinery' <sup>74</sup> which was spun in Birmingham in 1741. The machine did not take off and it was another two decades before mechanical spinning became common. This hank of thread had no reason to be included in the lace collection and yet it could be said that the introduction of machine spun thread was vital to the development of machine made lace. <sup>75</sup>

The numerous examples of machine made lace in the Museum's collections were not usually considered as evidence of industrial innovation. According to Brooks (2000:1) textiles 'bear witness to the energy of the technological developments that led to the Industrial Revolution, driven initially by innovation in textile manufacturing'. This was certainly the case with machine made lace. Youmans (1876:541) noted that in the later 1700s the idea of a bobbin lace

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<sup>72</sup> Accession number 1960A37.9.

<sup>73</sup> Accession number 1960A37.28.

<sup>74</sup> Accession number 1887F964.

<sup>75</sup> Machine spun thread was stronger than hand spun and could tolerate the greater strains placed on it by machine production.

machine was regarded as so visionary that it was classed with perpetual motion. After studying bobbin lacemakers at work John Heathcoat invented the bobbin-net machine. Between 1805 and 1808 he perfected and patented his first machine which could make a plain traversed and twisted net <sup>76</sup> three inches (7.5cm) wide. It was pronounced by Lord Lyndhurst (c.1805-8, cited in: Youmans, 1876:541) 'the most extraordinary machine ever invented'. Heathcoat almost immediately made improvements and patented a series of new machines which made wider nets. According to Youmans (1876:542): 'this industry is said to surpass all others in the complex ingenuity of its machinery'. The connection to lace as an innovative product of the industrial revolution was largely lost when it became primarily considered as a decorative textile.

Initially the machines made only plain net and any pattern was added by hand but in 1837 the Jacquard system was applied to the bobbin-net machines enabling them to copy some of the patterns of handmade laces. Further improvements meant that even Chantilly lace could be produced on machines although to begin with the heavier outlines still had to be added by hand. The researcher's specialist knowledge was required to tell the difference between hand and machine outlining but close study of the Museum's blonde machine made stole <sup>77</sup> identified it as an excellent example of hand run outlines.

High quality handmade lace had only been available to the upper echelons of society who could afford the cost; the advent of machine made lace brought the cost of apparently fine lace within the reach of a less affluent clientele. The market was also buoyed by the Victorians love of novelty and innovation which meant that they were keen to be seen wearing the latest machine made fashions, especially if they were cheaper than the handmade laces which were considered old fashioned. In 1851 the Jury of the Great Exhibition noted 'the admirable imitations of the beautiful black lace of Caen and Chantilly, the patterns of which are most correctly copied, while the difference in price is 75 per cent' (Royal Commissioners, 1851:465). The difference in price and speed

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<sup>76</sup> This was the first machine made net to resemble the hexagonal net of bobbin lace.

<sup>77</sup> Accession number 2005.1666.

of production had a disastrous effect on the handmade lace industry but employment in the lace factories boomed.<sup>78</sup>

The manufacturing of machine made lace was still a labour intensive industry with much hand work to be done in the finishing departments before the lace was fit for sale to the retailers. This area of lace production is little studied and forms a major gap in the understanding of machine made lace in museum collections. In addition to those employed in the actual production of the lace Felkin (1867) mentioned 15,000 brown net menders who repaired flaws in the net before it left the factory and 'not much fewer than 40,000 children employed by mistresses' in external warehouses and private rooms to finish the lace. The 1861 Lace Factories Act afforded a measure of protection to children in factories but many finishers, especially clippers, worked outside the factories and were only casually employed. John White's evidence for the 1863 Royal Commission on Children's Employment included notes on their working conditions detailing the payment for clipping as '½d. a thousand clips, a clip being two snips with the scissors, one at each end of the threads which have to be removed' (Bricquot 1862-3, cited in White, 1863:221). The consideration of such information led to the conclusion that in the case of machine made lace the notion of 'machine made' might perhaps be seen as a little misleading. A black shawl, such as 1936M488, is usually shown in museum displays as a marvel of design with no mention made of the human toil involved in the finished product.

The BMAG lace collection contained many fine examples of high quality machine made lace but there was also a vast amount of very mundane machine made lace that existed un-noticed within the wider collections.<sup>79</sup> The ubiquity

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<sup>78</sup> Lace machines were large, heavy, technically complex and controlled by men. Writing in 1867 textile historian William Felkin indicated that in Nottingham in 1865 there were 10,300 men and youths at work in 130 large factories and in 'lesser machine shops'. This number included 3,500 first-class Levers' hands who were the most highly paid workers earning 35 shillings a week, on average, to attain which they worked alternative shifts of four and five hours each, during the eighteen hours of the factory day. In addition he considered there to be 4,200 boys clearing, winding and threading bobbins who earned 5 shillings and 500 women filling bobbins and overlooking each taking home 12 shillings.

<sup>79</sup> A good example would be the machine made lace trim on the skirts of the dolls in the Musical Dancing Dolls Automaton. Accession number 1963S1709.00036.

with which machine made lace came to be associated meant that its presence on non textile objects was frequently not noted in accession registers or on index cards. This situation has led to large amounts of lace becoming invisible within the Museum's records and could be said to lead to a biased view of the historical significance of machine made lace to a wide section of society.

### **Traders - legal and otherwise**

Whilst there was little evidence of such in the lace collection, the social and financial relevance of lace extended far beyond those immediately involved in its manufacture, sale and wearing. By looking at the broader picture and considering lace as an item of commercial value to be traded at many levels its wider relevance became evident.

Lace dealers <sup>80</sup> controlled the lacemakers, selling patterns and threads to the lacemakers and later buying the completed lace from them, the lace was then sold to merchants or directly to wealthy purchasers. One of the earliest records of lacemaking activities in Devon was on the brass tomb plaque of James Rodge, a Honiton lace dealer, which read:

Here lieth ye body of James Rodge of Honinton in ye county of Devonshire (Bonelace siller hath given unto the poore of Honinton pishe the benefit of 100L for ever) who deceased ye 27 of July AD 1617 Remember the poore' (Allhallows Museum Honiton, c.1617).

That, in 1617, James Rodge could afford to leave £100 for the benefit of the parish poor was an indication of the fortune that could be amassed through the sale of lace even at this early date. However, as Brown (2000:8) pointed out, the success of the merchants and dealers 'rested on the appetite of the well-to-do purchaser on the one side and, on the other, the desperate need for family income in the lace districts' and by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century competition from machines was taking a heavy toll on the handmade lace industry.

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<sup>80</sup> The use of the terms Dealer, Merchant and Retailer have varied over the centuries, for the sake of clarity this research has used Dealer for the person who purchased the lace from the lacemakers and Merchant for the person (or company) who purchased the lace from the Dealer to sell on to the customer. Retailer has only been used where the term is quoted.

BMAG's lace collection records contained correspondence, dated 1934, from lace merchants P. Steinmann & Co, of Piccadilly,<sup>81</sup> to Mrs WA Cadbury relating to four specimen pieces of lace which Mrs Cadbury went on to purchase specifically for donation to the Museum.<sup>82</sup> The history of the pieces was reported as: 'a French Manufacturer of Finest quality real laces, had his workers make these pieces just for the love of having specimens of the finest quality ever to be made . . . All of these specimens have taken many prizes in France' (Steinmann, 1934). Steinmann's description of the Point de Gaze flounce<sup>83</sup> noted that:

'There certainly never has been a finer piece of Pt de Gaze made both in regard to workmanship and design. . . .It is very rare to get narrow laces anything like this quality, but in this width it is unheard of. No Museum has such a specimen that we know of. It is unique of its make' (ibid.).

Whilst not disputing Steinmann's history or description of the lace, it was interesting to see how a merchant sold lace to a wealthy patron. At the time there was no Trade Descriptions Act and provenance had more to do with the merchant's reputation than what would today be considered factual evidence.

The Museum's records only rarely linked named sellers to items of lace and the inclusion of the sales price was even scarcer. One example which was noted was a collar of Brussels bobbin lace<sup>84</sup> made in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was purchased by the Works of Art Suspense Account 'for £5 from Miss Elgon, Lace Merchant, Milsom St, Bath' (BMAG, 1905). It was interesting to note that the Museum was not only purchasing lace in 1905 but that it was antique lace from a merchant in Bath rather than London.

Even when the original value of the lace was available it was difficult to establish the relative value of the lace in current terms but the fact that it was at various times the subject of sumptuary laws and prohibition orders gave clues

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<sup>81</sup> P. Steinmann & Co of Piccadilly, London, were founded in 1865 and dealt in fine laces, embroideries, lingerie and baby clothes. (Royal Academy Illustrated, 1921)

<sup>82</sup> Correspondence accession number 2011.0060.

<sup>83</sup> Accession number 1935M40.

<sup>84</sup> Accession number 1905M1083.

to its desirability.<sup>85</sup> In 1662 Charles II banned the importation of Flemish lace. One method employed to circumvent the law was to re-name a style of lace made in the Brussels area of Flanders as Point d'Angleterre and pass it off as being of English manufacture. A pair of lappets<sup>86</sup> (c.1740-50) in the collection offered an example of this style of lace which continued to be produced for over a century. The appetites of the wealthy were always catered for by someone lower down the social scale and those who traded in lace did not always do so legally. Prohibited lace was smuggled for many years.

Lace was also a common target of thieves and pick-pockets who saw it as a small, lightweight, unit of currency that could easily be turned into ready cash. There were a number of handkerchiefs edged with Brussels lace in the Museum collection that gave little indication of their original worth. Some measure of this could be gained from the punishment meted out to those caught stealing such items. The records of the Old Bailey showed that in 1746 Jane Mackenzie was indicted for stealing a Brussels lace handkerchief, found guilty and sentenced to whipping (Old Bailey, 1746). Looking at this from a 21<sup>st</sup> century moral standpoint the punishment seemed barbaric but whipping, along with branding, was a common punishment for the period.<sup>87</sup> Such shifts in moral sensibilities offered an example of how time might affect the way in which the information carried in archives was interpreted.

Almost 100 years later the 1842 case of Edward Gifford and Sarah Ann Hunt highlighted lace as the target of more successful thieves who had stolen a trunk of lace and sold their illicit merchandise on to the next link in the chain:

'EDWARD GIFFORD and SARAH ANN HUNT were again indicted for feloniously receiving, on the 28th of February, 8 lace shawls, value 13l.; 26 lappets, value 8l.; 19 berthes, value 8l.; 81 capes, value 21l.; 83 cambric caps, value 35l.; 11 lace dresses, value 29l.; 27 falls, Value 10l.;

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<sup>85</sup> These restrictions were designed to control expenditure on, and use of, imported lace. They were issued from the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), but had little effect as Elizabeth and her court were exempt. Charles I and II also place restrictions on imports of lace in order to protect English workers (or perhaps more importantly their employers) and attempts to control the importation of lace continued throughout the reign of George III with increasing levels of duty being applied (Earnshaw, 1982:85).

<sup>86</sup> Accession number 1890M13.

<sup>87</sup> Such punishments were often carried out as a public spectacle to act as a deterrent to others.

28 veils, value 19l.; 12 collars, value 4l.; 38 scarfs, value 30l.; and 10 muslin collars, value 4l.; the goods of Samuel Lambert; well knowing them to have been stolen; against the statute, &c.’ (Old Bailey, 1842). Gifford (aged 33) pleaded guilty and Hunt (aged 27) was found guilty, resulting in their each being sentenced to transportation for 14 years. To be worth such a risk the lace must have offered significant reward to the successful thief and to those who sold-on the stolen items.

The records of this case not only threw light on the severity of the punishment but also detailed aspects of the lace trade which might not otherwise have survived. These details included the quantities and varieties of lace sent by London manufacturers and dealers to merchants in provincial towns and cities such as Birmingham. The proceedings of the trial included the following testimony from Frederick Herbert Hemming:

‘I am agent to Samuel Lambert, a lace-manufacturer . . . In February last I packed up a quantity of lace to go to the country—I delivered it to Beale, a porter, to take to the Swan-with-Two-Necks—I can swear to a great part of these things found, as being part of them . . . This lace of ours I have examined—it is worth about 80l., [£80] and is in pieces, such as we should sell to the retail dealers’ (Hemming, 1842 cited in: Old Bailey, 1842).

It was interesting to note that BMAG held examples of all of the items mentioned in the indictment, suggesting that it was not an unusual shipment.

## **Donations**

The index cards and accession records often carried details of the Museum’s source of the lace, especially when it was a donation from a local philanthropist. The information was, however, often incomplete with the name of the donor being recorded but the person to whom the lace had originally belonged remaining unnamed. One index card<sup>88</sup> gave technical details of a machine made lace shawl, the donors full name and address, and a glimpse into the

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<sup>88</sup> Accession number 1986M01.

shawls past: 'Probably worn by the great grandmother of donor who lived in W. Midlands' but the wearer remaining unnamed created a gap in the records (BMAG, 1986). One good example of background information was recorded on the index card for a wedding veil,<sup>89</sup> of embroidered machine made net, which was recorded as having been 'worn by mother of former owner, Miss Beatrice M. Walker at her wedding, & the opening of the Great Exhibition 1851' (BMAG, 1937). Ideally details of the mother's name, who she married and the date of the wedding might also have been recorded. Perhaps more elusively, it would have been wonderful to know how she came to be at the Great Exhibition.

Alderman Byng Kenrick<sup>90</sup> appeared to be a regular donor, particularly in relation to items of lace 'found in large [also small] Steinmann box'. Rather more interestingly for this study, following the names on the index cards gave clues to family relationships. Alderman Byng Kenrick donated a veil and chemise, from Miss Beale's trousseau. Research showed that Miss Norah Beale (1874-1961) became Mrs Byng Kenrick in 1906 (Wall, 2009). Mrs Byng Kenrick donated a blouse with collar and cuffs of needlepoint lace,<sup>91</sup> worn by Mrs H.F. Osler<sup>92</sup> who research revealed to have been her aunt (ibid.).

During discussion of an impending visit to the MCC, curator Sylvia Crawley mentioned the existence of a large trunk which had come to be known within the Museum as the Taylor (or Lace) Trunk. The object history records noted that the trunk contained lace pillows, parchments, pins, threads, lace, and 750-800 lace bobbins.<sup>93</sup> The records also showed that the trunk and its contents were donated by Mrs Hannah Taylor. Close scrutiny of Mrs Taylor's handwritten letters revealed the contents of the trunk to be a collection of lacemaking equipment amassed by her mother Mrs WA Cadbury, a connection which had become lost in the archive.

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<sup>89</sup> Accession number 1937M1285.

<sup>90</sup> Byng Kenrick; 1872-1962. Mayor of Birmingham 1928-9.

<sup>91</sup> Accession number 1951M19.

<sup>92</sup> The Osler family were Birmingham glass manufacturers who also donated many artefacts to the museum collections.

<sup>93</sup> Despite its contents being entirely lace related the trunk and its contents were not in the lace collection, instead being a part of the social history collection. This taxonomic classification was probably made on the basis of the contents being 'tools of the trade' and therefore relating more particularly to the history of the worker rather than the textile they produced.



## 7.3 Summary

The BMAG case study challenged assumptions about the historical positioning of lace in the museum. The traditional view of lace as a signifier of social status was shown to be fully justified but to be only one of a number of ways in which lace could be understood. The research identified gaps and absences in the Museum's holdings of lace and related objects and put forward alternative interpretations which might be associated with this material. In part this was achieved through the application of specialist knowledge in the discussion of the often darker underside of the conditions of the manufacture and trading of lace.

Research indicated that the contingency which had played a large part its formation meant that the lace collection could be understood as an accidental archive. This same contingency also contributed to the level of lacunae found within the archive. In addition, many of the lacunae were noted as being associated with notions of worth and value; with what was and was not considered to be important by those who created the BMAG collections. This was also the case with the information which was supplied and recorded in relation to the objects in the collections. These historical value judgements contributed to the biases which were observed within the archive and which could be said to offer a one-sided view of the past. The research highlighted changing attitudes to artefacts that reflect the way in which an archive may be read differently in the future to at the time of collection and classification.

Numerous gaps were identified within the collection and many, which were associated with a loss of specialist knowledge, were filled. One of the unexpected outcomes of the research was the identification of some of the lace which existed in the Museum's collections but which did not appear in the recognised category of the lace collection. These absences were due to a number of reasons including taxonomic placement and loss of specialist knowledge. However, perception of importance once again played its part, often making lace on non-textile objects invisible to computer searches.

## 8. Insertion IV – *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*

### Introduction

My research at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (BMAG) addressed the ways in which the lacunae in the archive might be used to challenge the meaning of objects. The research also considered the relationship between these lacunae and the established reading of the archive as a solid foundation of historical accuracy. As an expression of the findings of this research I curated a display of material from the BMAG archives as an insertion<sup>94</sup> within the Museum. The insertion created a narrative structure which formed connections around identified gaps in the archive. This could be understood as creative curatorial practice<sup>95</sup> with Hooper-Greenhill (1994:40) noting that ‘in museum exhibitions there is frequently a subjective element – the exhibition can be, and has been, seen as an act of expression on the part of the curator’. The insertion, *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*, embodied the public presentation of my, personal and subjective, reading of the hidden histories within the BMAG archive and as such constituted a substantial area of practice.<sup>96</sup>

Contemporary lace practice is inextricably linked with lacunae – voids, gaps, absences – it is the lacunae that give lace its distinctive identity but these lacunae are usually made visible by connecting threads. The traditional bobbin lacemaker’s skill lies in effectively drawing together and interlinking many individual threads to form a coherent whole around the voids which are the essence of the fabric. In *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* I brought expert knowledge to play on the Museum collections by seeking out the gaps in

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<sup>94</sup> The term insertion is borrowed from traditional lacemaking where it is generally taken to mean a band of lace used to join two sections of plain fabric. Here the term can be read as relating to the insertion of my personal, subjective, readings of the BMAG lace collection (and the gaps in the archive) into the Museum’s usual interpretive structure.

<sup>95</sup> Curating has moved beyond its traditional role as knowledgeable keeper of collections. It can now also be understood as an active verb. Curating as a discipline, and as a critical field, is concerned with the ways in which objects are contextualised and meanings are constructed.

<sup>96</sup> *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. Bridge Gallery, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, 29.10.2011 – 20.05.2012. Figures 25 & 26 show gallery views of the insertion.

information, drawing together hints and clues from the archives and adding information from specialist sources to give form to the voids. The resulting connections were presented not as a traditional piece of textile but as the material of an insertion within the fabric of the Museum. *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* could be viewed as expanding the boundaries of contemporary lace practice; whilst the work was made manifest through the display of physical objects it was the narrative connections which formed the conceptual essence of the insertion.

The insertion was not about what Walsh (1992:35) described as the aura of the object or ‘the auratic display, where the “beauty” or aesthetic quality of the object is intentionally the predominant characteristic of the display’. The focus was, instead, on revealing the lacunae in the archive and highlighting the potential of objects to form multiple connections. The exhibits were chosen to relate to the research, rather than as technically or artistically exceptional pieces, and questioned the conventional museum reading of historic lace as a symbol of social status. By uncovering the socio-economic conditions in which lace was produced, traded and worn – which often sat in contrast to the aesthetic qualities of the finished textile and its depiction on wealthy owners – the lace collection was reinterpreted for a broad audience.

Ault (2007:32) regards exhibitions (and by my inference, insertions) as ‘crucial junctions within which art and artefacts are made accessible to the audiences, and particular narratives, histories, and ideas are activated’ and asserts that they are powerful vehicles for ‘assigning or opening up meanings’. The curation of this insertion provided the opportunity to present examples from the lace collection, including handmade bobbin and needle lace and high quality machine made lace, together with tools of the trade and contextualising material such as paintings and letters. The objects in the display were presented as discrete groupings in order to create thematic narratives which allowed traditional museum readings to be challenged. They also revealed some of the complex meanings hidden behind the highly decorative appearance of this delicate textile.

The insertion title, *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*, was chosen to tie in with the major exhibition *Lost in Lace: New approaches by UK and international artists*.<sup>97</sup> The insertion provided an historic contextualisation of lace for the contemporary works in the exhibition. Presenting the insertion and exhibition in tandem enabled visitors to make connections between historic lace and contemporary art practice and to connect concepts and ideas which represented links between lace history and the approach of contemporary artists to textiles as a source of inspiration. The target audience for the insertion was primarily those visiting *Lost in Lace: New approaches by UK and international artists*, who were regarded as conceptually, contextually and visually highly literate. Encompassing the deeper, and often darker, social significance of lace was intended to stimulate this audience.

The Bridge Gallery, which housed the insertion, formed part of the main visitor route on arrival in the Museum and thus attracted regular Museum visitors as well as those specifically visiting *Lost in Lace: New approaches by UK and international artists*. The importance of the Museum's core visiting audience was addressed through the presentation of ethical considerations, such as child labour and working conditions, and social relevance provided in the form of local provenance. It was felt that the display of classic pieces from the Museum's historic lace collection would also draw lacemakers from across the country.<sup>98</sup>

### **Constructing contexts**

It has been widely acknowledged that objects can have multiple meanings (McClung Fleming, 1982; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Eastop, 2000; Kavanagh, 2000) with Porter (1988:111) stating that 'within any classification system, a

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<sup>97</sup> *Lost in Lace: New approaches by UK and international artists* was the first of the Crafts Council's Fifty:Fifty Programme in partnership with BMAG and was developed in association with the University for the Creative Arts. This major exhibition of works by contemporary international artists and designers, inspired by the language of lace, was staged in Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery's Gas Hall, 29.10.2011 – 19.02.2012.

<sup>98</sup> The insertion was not aimed specifically at lacemakers but it was publicised to this audience through articles in *Lace* magazine. Direct experience and reported feed-back indicate that the insertion and main exhibition were visited by numerous lacemakers including at least two former chairmen of the Lace Guild.

single object may have more than one place. Thus every manufactured object can be viewed as an article of production or as an article of consumption or use'. As curator of this insertion I had a duty of care to ensure that the contexts into which I placed the artefacts were appropriate to their known histories as well as to the alternatives which I was promoting. Wilson (2007:195) makes the observation that:

'the viewpoint adopted by the curator both reflects on how the products of a certain activity can take their place within an evolving sense of history, but more directly also impacts on the ways in which history is itself dealt with, understood and presented'.

My decisions on what to include and what to exclude and in repositioning objects in alternative contexts, in order to draw out previously hidden connections, could profoundly influence the way in which the viewer perceived the significance of an object. The production of these new contextual associations and the attendant revealing of hidden connections challenged the understanding of a range of objects from across the Museum's collections.

Seeking the lacunae, and previously unconsidered connections, at BMAG afforded me the rare opportunity to range widely within the Museum archives ignoring taxonomies and collection boundaries. Adamson (2011:16) described this research process within a museum as offering the opportunity to 'free-associate in response to its holdings'. Objects were considered from a wide range of collecting areas including Musical Instruments, Ceramics, Sculpture and Toys.

The primary exhibits were examples of lace drawn from the textile collection which spanned a four hundred year period of history. The display included objects from across the Museum's collection including paintings, Treen and personal correspondence. These had not previously been shown in the context of a textile collection because of the way museum collections are categorised, housed and displayed. The combinations demonstrated the potential of cross-collection research in the formation of new interconnected relationships.

Placing objects into cases can be said to separate them from their surroundings and can re or de contextualise them. In this insertion the groupings allowed specific narratives to be promoted. Whilst each group or narrative could be read in isolation there were many cross-connecting links which could also be followed. Many of these connections were highlighted in the text panels which introduced each group but it was the role of the labels to make these connections tangible with more detailed information.<sup>99</sup>

In *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* non textile objects such as letters, tools and paintings were included to enhance the broader contexts within which the lace was set. The traditional reading of lace as a symbol of social standing was evidenced through its presence in portraits of the nobility and the wealthy. The inclusion of these examples not only offered a context for the period specific uses of lace in dress (gender, age, class etc.) but also afforded excellent illustrative material for the viewer not familiar with historic costume.

The initial process of selecting objects for the insertion began at the Museum with a detailed examination of the lace collection index cards and object history files. This was augmented with research into other collections held by the Museum and external researches to fill identified gaps and expand connections. The major phase of the selection of objects for display was undertaken at the Museum Collection Centre (MCC). The physical objects were assessed and compared for suitability before the filtering for final selection took place. An initial 'Long List' was drawn up and considered in consultation with the Museum's exhibition management team and conservation department. These discussions included how the proposed objects might be framed and mounted, which items would require conservation and if they could be exposed to the light levels in the gallery.<sup>100</sup> The final exhibit list was then drawn up, the location of the objects identified and the conservation, mounting, framing and case requirements provided to the relevant departments. I then wrote the initial draft

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<sup>99</sup> The role of the label is discussed in Insertion III – Tracing the Thread.

<sup>100</sup> I am particularly indebted to Judith Hubbard, a trained textile conservation volunteer who worked on many of the lace exhibits for the insertion. I am also grateful to the Textile Society for their Museum Award which covered the cost of professional conservation and mounting of some of the more fragile lace specimens.

of the introductory panels and exhibit labels,<sup>101</sup> with the help of some specialist costume input from Zelina Garland.<sup>102</sup> These were mediated by the Education Department to ensure that they met the appropriate Museum guidelines.

Not being tied to the technical or aesthetic qualities of the objects engendered a more personal, subjective, approach to the selection process. This was influenced by many aspects of the material history of the objects and an eye for the, normally untold, stories that they might reveal. Working in an empathetic manner I continued to extrapolate connections amongst my chosen objects and, through alternative readings, used historical objects to raise contemporary issues such as gender bias, child labour and factory working conditions in the textile trade.

### **Making connections**

Within the objects chosen for display in the insertion there were many connections that could be made but nine groupings were identified as the focus of specific narratives. Each of the following groups formed the subject title for a group of exhibits and an accompanying introductory panel: Design and Industry, Domestic Lace, Ecclesiastical Lace, Innovation, Lace and Children, Lace-making in Bedfordshire, Trade and Smuggling, The Lace Collector and The Value of Lace.

Connecting objects to some of the gaps identified in the archive allowed the exploration of histories which were not addressed within the archive or which could be expanded beyond their current position. One such group was the Bedfordshire lacemaking equipment, received from a single donor, which was well documented and included mention of the donor having started lacemaking at the age of six. Unfortunately the documentation offered no details of the realities of length of working day or speed of work. A note was made of how much the buyer paid for lace from a particular pricking but there was no extant example of the lace, how long it took to make or whether this was good or bad

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<sup>101</sup> The text from the introductory panels and exhibit labels forms Appendix V.

<sup>102</sup> Textile specialist and Head of Exhibitions at BMAG.

rate of pay for the period. A reconstruction, using equivalent skills, offered a deeper insight into how the lace might have appeared visually, the number of bobbins and thickness of thread required and the time taken to make a single repeat of the lace. It could not however give any sense of the socio-economic conditions experienced by the lacemaker.

At its most basic level the MCC could be seen as a place where objects were stored in an organised manner in a stable environment. It could also be said to be more than that; it was a place for the storage of objects which, by virtue of their presence, were deemed to be chosen, special, significant and valuable. These objects had often been elevated to this level by the contingency of personal judgements on their worth and the associated decision to donate them to the Museum.

In a number of cases it was the provenance (as indicated on the index cards) which drew me to investigate the objects themselves. One such instance was the appearance on index cards of the phrase: 'Purchased from Steinmann & Co'. Researching this company name eventually led me to the letters and rubbing associated with the four specimen pieces purchased by Mrs WA Cadbury, from Steinmann & Co, specifically for donation to the BMAG collection.<sup>103</sup> The letters drew attention to the demise of the handmade lace trade as they revealed that the specimens were made for a French lace firm who went bankrupt because, as Steinmann's (1934) letter put it: 'people no longer bought good real laces'. This was undoubtedly an indication that, in their eyes, the French firm was put out of business by the ascent of the machine made lace industry.

My attention was also caught by a handkerchief edged with Brussels application lace<sup>104</sup> which offered the opportunity to engage local interest as it was donated by Councillor Martineau, the fifth generation (father to son) of his family to become Mayor, or Lord Mayor, of Birmingham. At the same time it

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<sup>103</sup> This correspondence also offered a rare glimpse into the formality of written communication between dealer and client as well as methods of transmitting visual information in 1935 which differed so markedly from today's instant messaging and digital imaging.

<sup>104</sup> Accession number 1981M613.



demonstrated, through the use of machine made net, one way in which the handmade lace industry adapted to the encroachment of the machine made lace trade.<sup>105</sup>



Figure 23: Corner of a Brussels application lace handkerchief donated to the Museum by Councillor Martineau, who later became Lord Mayor of Birmingham. BMAG, 2011

In his 2011 exhibition *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, at the British Museum, artist-curator Grayson Perry (2011:178) asked ‘how much of our awe in front of a great historical artefact is in its inherent beauty and how much of it is to do with its auspicious provenance?’ Perry’s question held a distinct resonance for me. One item which I had singled out at an early stage as being

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<sup>105</sup> Machine made lace was quicker and cheaper to produce than handmade lace. Mounting handmade lace motifs onto machine made net was considerably faster than joining the motifs with handmade net. Whilst this made it cheaper to produce it was still not as cheap as machine made lace.

of special significance was the Child's Shirt <sup>106</sup> 'Reputed to have been worn by Charles I'. The date range for the lace was correct to period <sup>107</sup> but tantalisingly there was no provenance associated with the reputed royal connection. The piece did however offer a number of interesting possibilities for connections and narratives as it was one of the earliest pieces in the lace collection and it was a male garment. The Museum also had a fine portrait of the adult Charles I and his family (van Leemput, 1643) <sup>108</sup> wearing lace which could be used to set this apparently simple garment in the context of wealth and royal privilege.

Although each group formed an independent and coherent unit there were a number of hidden connections including addressing the gender biases which might be associated with lace in a museum setting. The Lace Collector considered four specimen pieces of lace and the background to their donation to the Museum by Mrs WA Cadbury. That Mrs Cadbury also donated the Child's Shirt, <sup>109</sup> Alb Flounce, <sup>110</sup> Oval medallion <sup>111</sup> and Tape-lace in progress <sup>112</sup> offered a hint as to the extent of her influence within the insertion and the collections. By contrast although most of the lace on display and in the collections was worn by women, a closer inspection of the cabinets and labels revealed that only the group Design and Industry lacked some form of immediate link to men. The mapping of some of these hidden connections is discussed in Appendix IV – Undercurrents.

The Bridge Gallery, in which the insertion was situated, was a transitional space within the Museum and just as there was a continual ebb and flow of visitors through the gallery so the meanings of objects could be seen as being transitory

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<sup>106</sup> Accession number 1933M496.

<sup>107</sup> The lace was confirmed as an early style of plaited bobbin lace not Reticella (needlelace) as stated on the index card.

<sup>108</sup> *Charles I and his family* by Remi van Leemput. 1643. Copy of the 1632 Van Dyck portrait of *Charles I and Queen Henrietta with their two eldest children*. Van Dyck had depicted the king as a ruler, leader and devoted family man; the portrait also recorded the style of dress that was fashionable at Court in 1632. As would have been normal in aristocratic families the royal children, like their parents, are wearing lace. The young Prince of Wales, who had not yet been 'breeched', stands at his father's knee wearing cuffs and collar of lace whilst the infant Princess Mary is held by their mother. Bequest by Sir Theophilus Biddulph (1970P264).

<sup>109</sup> Accession number 1933M496.

<sup>110</sup> Accession number 1928M408.

<sup>111</sup> Accession number 1931M699.

<sup>112</sup> Accession number 1977F302.750.

and in flux. Meanings are influenced by the curator's choices, context in which they are situated and tacit knowledge of the viewer. One example of this transitory nature of meaning was the group of lappets<sup>113</sup> which could be variously read as a means of earning a living for the lacemakers, of making a profit for the dealers and a display of taste, status and wealth for the original wearers.<sup>114</sup> The lappets were purchased by the Museum as examples of good European design to be made available for study by Birmingham artisans with the intention of improving their aesthetic judgement. Within the insertion the lappets were grouped by lace technique and arranged chronologically to show the stylistic development of the lace. Like many museum objects these delicate items convey a multiplicity of meanings.



Figure 24: Valenciennes lace lappets purchased by the Museum as examples of good European design. BMAG, 2011

<sup>113</sup> A group of six lappets from the set of 14 pairs purchased by the museum in 1890.

<sup>114</sup> Three of these lappets are shown in Figure 24.

## **Text**

The introductory panels and labels were used to offer readings of the objects on display that differed from those usually promoted by large provincial museums, thereby encouraging the audience to question assumptions about lace and its historic social relevance. Sorensen (1989:70) suggests that in museum displays the balance between the object and text can lean in one of two directions, either 'the concern is with the tangible thing and the supportive word, or alternatively, the primary word and the illustrative thing'. In *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* the intention was for the tangible artefacts to be supported by insightful text.

At the time of the insertion BMAG's labelling policy for objects in cabinets was to provide a numerical indicator beside each object and corresponding labels in the form of A4 information sheets beside each cabinet or group of works. Although this meant that visitors had to actively seek out information on the objects it also offered greater scope for personal interpretation for those who did not wish to do so. It was gratifying to observe, on a number of occasions, that visitors were reading both the panels and the labels.

## **Summary**

The curation of the insertion *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* addressed the ways in which alternative readings of lace in the Museum collection could be brought to the attention of the visiting public. The insertion sought to redress the bias of the normal association of lace with the wealthy consumer. Although this association is justified it offers an unbalanced view as it does not consider those involved with the lace trade in the lower reaches of society. By revealing hidden histories and considering the value of lace in different ways the insertion aimed to raise awareness of the historic importance of lace throughout society.



Figure 25: *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. Gallery view. BMAG, 2011



Figure 26: *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. Gallery view. BMAG, 2011

## **9. Case Study II**

### **9.1 The Legal Deposit Registers of the International Centre for Lace and Fashion, Calais**

### **9.2 Material Archive**

### **9.3 Summary**

## 9.1 The Legal Deposit Registers of the International Centre for Lace and Fashion, Calais

### Introduction

This case study considers the impact of gaps and absences on the understanding of a material archive. Specifically, the registres du dépôt légal (legal deposit registers) of the Conseil Des Prud'hommes <sup>115</sup> held at the International Centre for Lace and Fashion in Calais (CIDM). <sup>116</sup> The research was supported by the Crysalis Project <sup>117</sup> which also funded the digitisation of all 253 legal deposit registers. For the Centre, <sup>118</sup> having a digital version of the registers not only safeguards the physical preservation of the originals but allows much wider access to their contents.

CIDM opened in 2009 in a former lace factory which had been refurbished and extended. The Centre houses museum quality displays of lace and its social and economic history. The Centre also showcases contemporary lace and its use by artists, fashion designers and industry professionals through temporary exhibitions, workshops and lectures. CIDM maintain a resources centre and archive of which the legal deposit registers are an important but under-utilised aspect.

A wide ranging exploration of the material archive and associated documentation was undertaken to gain an understanding of the historical, technical, cultural and political significance of the legal deposit registers. The

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<sup>115</sup> The Conseil Des Prud'hommes was instigated as a committee to rule on disputes between lace workers and their employers.

<sup>116</sup> Cité internationale de la dentelle et de la mode de Calais.

<sup>117</sup> An 'Interreg IVA 2 Seas' Project which aimed to boost the economic revival of textiles in the participating regions. Project partners were: UCA, CIDM, Plymouth College of Art and TIO3 Textiles Open Innovation Centre in Belgium. (CIDM, s.d.a).

<sup>118</sup> Whilst referred to as a Centre, CIDM can be understood as a museum due to the quality of its collections and policies under which it operates. It should not be confused with the Museum of Fine Art which held the Lace Collection prior to the opening of CIDM.

research sought to identify lacunae within the wider archive to assess how these might affect the understanding of the contents of the legal deposit registers.

The case study provided an opportunity for in-depth research into a highly organised, chronologically arranged, archive which had been created in response to the specific legal and industrial concern of copyright protection. Although he offers no specific evidence of the practice, Nix (1997:203) comments that prior to the opening of the Nottingham School of Design in 1844 'the prevailing practice for merchants and manufacturers had been to visit London where they selected patterns from amongst French articles and had them copied for their own articles'. For the Calais manufacturers registering a design in the legal deposit registers might not have offered protection against English copying but it would have deterred other French manufacturers from producing direct copies.

The lack of text within the registers meant that they could be best understood as a material archive. The deposits in the registers represented only the lace which the manufacturers chose to copyright and made no reference to the circumstances of its manufacture. The narrow focus of the documentation meant that the narrative hidden within the archive was not seen as offering a full history of lacemaking in Calais. Sykas (2005:8) says of the surviving textile pattern books of North West England that 'they represent hundreds of companies, thousands of lives, dozens of designers and colourists, and millions of pounds worth of trade touching every continent'. He could equally well have been describing the legal deposit registers held at CIDM.<sup>119</sup> This case study provided the opportunity to consider which histories were and were not being told by the archive and thus expose some of the biases created by the lacunae. The case study was reliant on the researcher's specialist knowledge of how to read the lace as both a manufactured and a social product. This knowledge which was once commonplace in Calais is now largely lost.

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<sup>119</sup> Although the colourists would only have been relevant to the later registers.



### **The importance of the CIDM legal deposit registers**

CIDM (s.d.b) describe the legal deposit registers as ‘one of the striking living memories of the Calais lace industry’. They also stress their importance as a record of the social and industrial history of Calais:

‘This last-surviving remnant is a microcosm in itself: the fruit of a collective effort (from the sketch artist to the mender via the racker) at a precise moment in time; what’s more it has its place in a particular genealogy: belonging to entrepreneurs and all the men and women whom Calais lace has to thank for its reputation’ (ibid.).

CIDM also note that ‘this is usually the last cut to remain: clothes, lingerie or furnishings that have not necessarily been kept’ (ibid.). Although the deposits gave no indication as to their intended use they were an irreplaceable body of evidence. They attested to the production of not only the spectacular pieces, so often preserved in museum collections, but also to the more ordinary, everyday, nets and edgings. These are easily overlooked today but were highly important at the time.

The legal deposit registers could be viewed as a product attesting to the ideology of value. The items in the registers were there because the manufacturer considered them to be of sufficient value to pay for the protection of their copyright. Sykas (2005:70) notes that the textile manufacturers of North West England took protection of their designs very seriously; ‘by registering every pattern produced, a company could avoid signalling to competitors which designs it judged would become best sellers’. There was no way of telling if this was also the case with the lace manufacturers of Calais but it does offer an interesting insight into the importance attached to the protection of designs.

The registers provided an immaculate source of provenance through which the emergence of technical and design innovations could be traced. In addition they offered a unique insight into which styles of lace were being produced at the same time and who was manufacturing them; who were the major innovators and who followed their lead.

### **Scope of the research**

The historical background to the establishment of Calais as a centre of machine made lace was considered in order to set the legal deposit registers within their social, political and economic contexts. A number of legal deposit registers were investigated to gain a feel for the range of material that was contained in the registers. The first register was studied in depth as a material archive. This register covered important technical and social changes and informed the core observations of this research.

Although consulted, the wider archival holdings of CIDM were not central to the remit of this case study. An awareness of the current lace manufacturing situation in Calais added to the appreciation of some of the historical, and continuing, difficulties surrounding design copyright in the lace industry. Current copyright laws in France are complex and stringent and include much retrospective legislation. These laws lie beyond the scope of this study but have had a significant impact on the ways in which CIDM might utilise their archival material.

### **Introduction of lace machines to Calais**

As was noted in the BMAG case study Heathcoat invented the bobbin-net machine, between 1805 and 1808. The development of this, and subsequent machines, was considered so important in England that the export of the machines and men who knew how to operate them was prohibited.<sup>120</sup>

The English Luddite riots (1811-16) combined with the end of the Napoleonic Wars were thought to have been behind the decision of Nottingham lace men Robert Webster and Samuel Clark to take the risk of smuggling their machines and know-how in to France in 1816 (Kelly, s.d.). At approximately three feet wide the machines were not difficult to disassemble and ship as a series of separate packages. The machines were reassembled in the district of St Pierre, outside the city walls of Calais, and the French lacemaking industry established

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<sup>120</sup> A brief introduction to the development of lace machines forms Appendix VI.

in this area. According to Kelly (1998:57), in the wake of the success of these first machines 'by the end of 1820 there were 14 manufacturers in Calais who owned 32 machines employing 52 lacemakers'.<sup>121</sup> The number of Englishmen in Calais expanded along with the number of lace machines as they were keen to keep the secrets of the trade in English hands. The first machines taken to Calais were likely to have been variations on Heathcoat's Old Loughborough, although Earnshaw (1986:101) noted that:

'soon after its invention, the Pusher too was caught up in this illicit trade. In spite of the penalty of deportation (to Australia) if discovered, a 36-inch wide Pusher/Traverse Warp hybrid was set up in Calais and its manufacture of nets established in a formal ceremony before the Mayor, in 1819'.

A report in the *Mechanic's Magazine* of 1824 provided some interesting insights into the situation regarding the illicit importation of English lace machines into France:

'Recently a great many lace machines have been Introduced from England, and put up, chiefly at Calais, Douay, St. Quentin, Rouen, and Paris; in the very neighbourhood of Calais there is an immense number of Englishmen employed in that trade; these machines, though prohibited to be exported from England, are easily procured. The cost of smuggling them over is from 30 to 40 per cent. . . . In France, however, they cannot make a lace machine under £500, while at Nottingham it costs only £250 or £300' (Alexander, 1824:75).

According to Earnshaw (1986:74) a Nottingham manufacturer by the name of 'Ferguson was instrumental in setting up Calais' first lace machine, purchased in England, and legitimately exported c.1824'. By 1828 the industry had expanded to encompass 65 factories and 170 machines in Calais itself with the St Pierre area boasting 207 machines. In all 4,000 people were said to be employed in the lace trade in the area (Kelly, 1998:64).

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<sup>121</sup> Both the manufacturers and lacemakers were English but the net was put out to French needlewomen to embellish.

### **CIDM archive and legal deposit registers**

The holdings at CIDM covered a wide range of objects and text based material. In addition to the vast lace machines used for demonstrations they held tools of the trade, books and magazines on lace and its manufacture as well as thousands of items of costume and pieces of lace. Most importantly for this study CIDM cared for a large collection of historic sample books, including the legal deposit registers. All of the major manufacturing companies would have kept sample books of their own products and most also maintained an archive of sketches, photographs and samples of fashion ideas and lace, including handmade laces. It was not uncommon for these archives to contain lace from other manufacturing areas such as Nottingham, England and St Gall, Switzerland. These industrial archives help to contextualise objects in the Centre's collection but this was not their original function or focus. They were concerned with assisting the manufacturers to produce commercially successful designs in keeping with the latest trends from Paris fashion houses.<sup>122</sup> Although these archives and sample books were not formally a part of the research remit their presence highlighted an opportunity for much future research.

The legal deposit registers were established in 1838 by the Minister of Commerce in Calais in an attempt to deal with the problem of illegal copying of lace designs and the costs of accompanying litigation. Their use continued through to 1931. The CIDM legal deposit registers could be understood as the Calais equivalent, for lace, of the British Board of Trade Design Representations and Registers<sup>123</sup> held at The National Archive at Kew. The legal deposit registers predominantly contained samples of machine made lace, glued to the pages in chronological order of receipt from the manufacturer. There were also a smaller number of design sketches and drawings of machine parts and similar technical innovations in the construction of lace. The

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<sup>122</sup> Calais School of Art was also actively training lace designers between 1841 and 1945.

<sup>123</sup> Established in 1839. The physical representations of the design being copyrighted were held in separate volumes to the text details of the registrations.

manufacturer paid a small fee to protect their copyright for a set number of years.<sup>124</sup>

The CIDM legal deposit registers were not a full archive of all lace designs of the period that they covered; rather they were a very specific record of technical and design developments which the Calais manufacturers considered important enough to pay for the legal protection of. Smaller manufacturers, who in the earlier years of the registers often worked in their own homes on hand powered machines, may not have had the funds to develop new designs or to pay the deposit fee. The registers offered a snapshot of lace production at a given period, heavily mediated by the lace manufacturers' perception of the future worth of the designs. The manufacturers' decisions on what not to copyright brought about some of the gaps that were identified in this archive but larger voids were formed by the loss of tacit knowledge and understanding of how to read the technical aspects of the deposits.

It was interesting to note that in the same year that the legal deposit registers were established (1838) Nottingham lace manufacturer Ferguson was said to have 'fled to France, seeking escape not only from a chaotic industrial situation but from the pressure of industrial espionage which made it impossible for him to keep his discoveries from spies' (Earnshaw, 1986:74). Stories of secrets in the lace trade in Nottingham were said to have still persisted in the 1950s with workers and owners alike being reluctant to divulge trade knowledge (Murray, 2013).

The legal deposit registers were set up to protect copyright and any manufacturer could pay a small fee to inspect the registers to ensure that copyrights were not being infringed. The knowledge of how to read the technical aspects of a piece of lace are now largely lost. However, this researcher postulated that it might have been possible for unscrupulous manufacturers to use the registers to gain knowledge of how innovative new laces were being

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<sup>124</sup> Copyright was purchased for three, five or ten years depending on the fee or the period of the deposit. At certain periods there was also the possibility to purchase copyright in perpetuity.

produced. As samples were often deposited unfinished,<sup>125</sup> with their lacers and support threads in place, it would have been possible for an experienced designer or manufacturer to discover the secrets of their fabrication.



Figure 27: Lace samples with lacers and support threads intact



Figure 28: Lace samples with lacers and support threads partially removed

The above images of partially finished samples, as they might have been deposited and with some of the lacers and support threads removed, are included to illustrate the difference between a piece of lace as it left the factory and the same piece after the withdrawing processes had been applied. The presence of the support threads would have told other manufacturers how certain elements of this design were achieved in production.<sup>126</sup>

The archive of legal deposit registers was made up of 253 volumes. Over the 93 years of their production the size and format of the registers varied a little but the principle of provenance remained constant with deposits being sequentially numbered according to the date that they were received into the registration office. The number of items in each register varied according to the size of the lace samples but averaged approximately 400 deposits per register.<sup>127</sup> In addition to physical lace samples some deposits were in the form of drawings, cyanotypes and, in the later volumes, a few photographs.

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<sup>125</sup> Finishing processes included washing, bleaching, dyeing, clipping and the removal of lacers and support threads.

<sup>126</sup> The edge picots being an obvious example in this case.

<sup>127</sup> The number of items per deposit varied from one to over 100.

The first register <sup>128</sup> covered the nine year period 7<sup>th</sup> November 1838 to 20<sup>th</sup> August 1857 and recorded deposits up to number 445. It contained nearly 2,000 items. The time period covered by any particular register was dependent on the buoyancy, or otherwise, of lace production and upon the size and number of samples being deposited. <sup>129</sup> Some highly productive years were spread across more than one volume; register number 94 <sup>130</sup> covered only the three month period from 27<sup>th</sup> June 1899 to 26<sup>th</sup> September 1899 but included many large samples. Some discrepancy was noted in the chronology of the registers at this period; one example being register number 99 <sup>131</sup> which began on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1898 and ended on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1900 but did not include most of 1899, the entries for which appeared to be in earlier registers.

The registers held very little text based information about the deposit and so, despite being in book form, were considered as a material archive. In the first register the earliest deposits were accompanied by a brief written testimony from the depositor. Thereafter the standard format changed to each set of manufacturer's deposits being marked with a small label at the left hand side of the page bearing the deposit number and name of the depositor, at the right hand side of the page this was matched by a small label with the deposit date. The sample(s) were glued to the page between and below these labels. Towards the end of the 1800s the information system changed to index pages at the front of the register with columns for: Deposit number, Date of deposit, Number assigned by the manufacturer, Name of manufacturer, Number of samples in the deposit, Number of years for which the copyright was registered and Page number within the register. In these registers a single label at the top left of each deposit stated the register number, page number and deposit number.

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<sup>128</sup> Inventory number 2008.0.1.

<sup>129</sup> A wide flounce might be folded to fit within a double page spread whilst multiple narrow edgings could be fitted onto a single page. Similarly a single deposit might contain only one small sample or dozens of samples of varying sizes.

<sup>130</sup> Inventory number 2008.0.138.

<sup>131</sup> Inventory number 2008.0.143.

## 9.2 Material Archive

### Re-reading the registers

The legal deposit registers reflected the interests of a very specific group of people: the lace manufacturers of Calais. They contained only those samples, and associated material, that the manufacturers were willing to pay to have legally protected against fraudulent copying. This research offered alternative readings of the archive and its contents, looking beyond its original purpose and considering what other narratives might be uncovered within the identified lacunae.

Lace production in Calais involved far more people than the names in the register might suggest. Lace was a means of earning a living for many people including suppliers, designers, mechanics, twist-hands, bobbin winders and numerous hands employed in the finishing trades. These, often highly skilled, workers were essential to the production of lace but received no mention in the registers. The history of these workers was apparently missing from the registers. The legal deposit registers were usually seen as documenting design innovation, the technical developments of machines and threads and changes in fashion. However, they lacked the accompanying social history of those who worked in the trade and purchased the lace. In this sense the narrative which frames our understanding of objects was missing from the registers.

The registers did not necessarily reflect all of the styles of lace that were being produced in Calais at any given time. Plain net was produced in Calais continually through until approximately 1860 (Earnshaw, 1986:74). New innovations in this product were comparatively rare, and so plain net was not often seen in the legal deposit registers. Plain net was in great demand both as the base for other laces<sup>132</sup> and for use in narrow ruffles on garments and accessories.

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<sup>132</sup> Plain net came to be used as the base for some traditional laces such as Honiton and Brussels appliqué and also for new embroidered laces such as Carrickmacross and Limerick.



There was a perception among the Nottingham manufacturers that English made net was being smuggled into Calais and re-exported as French net. This was refuted by the French. In 1824 the *Mechanic's Magazine* carried a report on the subject:

‘ . . . asked them why they established themselves in Calais, in preference to any town in the interior of France; and to several of them he remarked that the customs and government looked upon them as smugglers, because being so near the coast they could have their goods [plain net] from Nottingham, and while they manufactured two pieces with one of their looms, might stamp fifty pieces (smuggled) as made by them. But they made a very fair observation - "It is not for that; it is because we are obliged to smuggle the yarn; we cannot get any yarn in France to do well for making lace; and being here near the coast, we can get yarn in the night." Has seen several of them at a stand for want of yarn' (Alexander, 1824:75).

A sense of the importance of plain net can be gained from the number of lace machines operating in Calais in 1855. Of the 606 machines at work Earnshaw (1986:94) noted that 67 were Circulars making plain net.

The drawings and lace samples in the legal deposit registers were not likely to be a comprehensive record of all of the lace designs that were produced in Calais. Manufacturers often held a reserve of sketched designs which were not drafted or put into production. Each sample in the registers was a testament to the importance that the manufacturers attached to the development and introduction of new designs. The cost of developing new designs included not only the production of a drawing for the design but also the technically complex drafting process and the investment in new Jacquard cards. Perhaps most costly of all would have been the time that the machine was out of production for rethreading and trialling new designs and threads. These background processes were only represented in the registers by occasional deposits of design sketches and pattern drafts.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Details of well documented background processes appear in Appendix VII – Battle of Britain Lace Panels.

The lace in the legal deposit registers did not represent the usual life-cycle of the object. These were production samples and as such were unused and little handled. As the lace was never used and there were no specific indications of its intended use,<sup>134</sup> it lacked this wider context. There was no indication of the market for which the lace was intended; domestic, British, European or American. Within the lifespan of the registers machine made lace became an item which was traded around the world but there was no indication within the registers of the numerous people involved in the sale and distribution trades.<sup>135</sup>

Many samples in the registers were unfinished and not in the state in which they would have been sold to the public. Once taken off the machines the lace was washed to remove the graphite which was used to lubricate the machines and which inevitably got onto the lace. Within the registers consulted for this research no samples were found which had not been washed but this important stage in the finishing process would have been invisible to anyone who was unaware of the silver/grey hue of white lace straight from the loom. Other finishing trades which were represented in the registers but which required specialist knowledge to identify included; stretching, dying, clipping, drawing, scalloping and embellishing.

It was interesting to note that in some instances the lace had been glued into the register with the reverse side of the lace uppermost. The reversals were only visible to someone with a good working knowledge of the specifics of the lace. Such errors might have been the result of haste, pressure of work or lack of understanding of the product on the part of the clerk involved.

The legal deposit registers offered unimpeachable provenance of the date of manufacture of the samples. They also confirmed the name of the manufacturer who had claimed legal title to the design but there was very rarely any indication of who actually designed the lace. In the early years of machine made lace, as

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<sup>134</sup> Today Calais predominantly produces lace for the luxury lingerie market which has very specific design requirements.

<sup>135</sup> In 1835, Nottingham lace manufacturers Vickers & Hine 'apparently had depots in New York, Melbourne (Australia), and Lima (Peru)' (Mason, 1994:149). It could be assumed that Calais based manufacturers were also likely to be trading around the world.

evidenced in the first legal deposit register, it was normal for designers to attempt to imitate the most fashionable styles of handmade laces.

In most deposits the style of the lace was not stated, but where it was, the traditional name of the handmade lace was used i.e. Valenciennes or Chantilly. The machine made version was never referred to as imitation Valenciennes or imitation Chantilly. The ability to visually read lace and know the difference between hand and machine made laces was widespread in the 1800s but is now largely lost. An example of this knowledge is drawn from Tolstoy's (1873) novel *Anna Karenina*: 'Two maidservants walking along the platform turned their heads, staring at her and making some remarks about her dress. "Real," they said of the lace she was wearing'. This passage showed that not only would the maidservants have known the difference between imitation (machine made) and real (handmade) laces but also that Tolstoy was aware of this.

Over 60 years later Middleton wrote two articles titled *Imitations of Hand-Made Lace by Machinery*. He offered numerous illustrated examples including 'machine made imitations of the following needle-point laces; Gros point de Venise . . . Point d'Argentan, Point de France' (Middleton, 1938:8). In the second article he illustrated a 'knitted imitation of Chantilly lace' and commented that 'an outstanding piece is the imitation of Point Plat de Venise' which was made on a Swiss lace machine (Middleton, 1939:15-16). In both articles Middleton stressed the point that machine made lace had imitated many varieties of handmade lace. He did not, however, go on to make the equally valid point that machine lace manufacturers were by this time employing top quality designers who produced highly innovative and complex designs.

Specialist thread suppliers were a key link in the production chain but there was rarely mention of the thread from which the lace in the registers was made. This was most probably due to it being tacit knowledge among those in the lace industry at the time.<sup>136</sup> This formed another area of knowledge which has been

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<sup>136</sup> Initially machine made lace was only manufactured in cotton as machine spun cotton was the only thread strong enough to stand up to the strains imposed by lace machines. Silk was introduced at a later date.

largely lost today. Where mention of the thread was made it most often accompanied the introduction of a new type of thread such as silk or art silk.<sup>137</sup>

### **The first legal deposit register**

A major aspect of the research undertaken at CIDM was to look in depth at the first legal deposit register.<sup>138</sup> This was considered as a material archive with a view to discovering what could and could not be learned from its contents. The nineteen year period covered by these deposits saw many advances in the technical abilities of lace machines and also witnessed great social and political upheavals. The deposits in this register stood testament to the technical and design innovations but the gaps in the deposits were also shown to reflect the effects of events occurring in the wider world. Some of the most significant deposits, and gaps, are considered in this chapter.

Although the register purported to begin at number one, the first deposit was in fact number 11 and deposits numbered sequentially from this with occasional unexplained gaps in the numbering. The first 17 entries in the register were accompanied by brief statements in which the manufacturer who was making the deposit claimed legal title to the design(s). These statements often included the type of machine on which the lace was manufactured which could be invaluable to industrial historians. Lace produced on a Warp Frame machine might be easily identified by a practiced eye, the differences between lace produced on Bobbin-net, Circular, Pusher and Leavers machines would be much more difficult, if not in some cases impossible, to discern.

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<sup>137</sup> Artificial silk, or rayon, was often known by the more aesthetically pleasing name of Art Silk.

<sup>138</sup> The register (inventory number 2008.0.1) was a hard bound volume 36.5cm high by 26cm wide and 7.5cm deep with blue pages onto which the samples were glued. The spine of the register stated that it was the Conseil des Prud'hommes de Calais / Dessins Déposés - 1 Série – 1 à 445, with a circular white sticker carrying the additional date information; 7 Nov. 1838 ou 20 Aout 1857 - 1.



Figure 29: The first deposits in the first legal deposit register. Image ©CIDM

The first deposit in the register was made up of three similar samples of lace.<sup>139</sup> The accompanying signed statement by the manufacturer, Laberquery, included the legal structure under which the copyright was being claimed and the fact that it was cotton lace but made no mention of the type of machine on which it was produced:

‘The undersigned manufacturer of tulle, and cotton lace, in St Pierre-les-Calais wanting to enjoy the property-rights . . . On this day is deposited at the Registry of the Commercial Court of Calais, and thus at the archives of the Council of Prud’homme three samples of cotton lace from his factory whose space and distribution of mesh of various form & size together with the weaving of a different size of thread form the design, are of his invention’ (Laberquery, 1838).

<sup>139</sup> Two physical samples of lace and one blueprint.

The lace was formed of a basic hexagonal mesh which indicated that it was manufactured on some form of bobbin-net machine. In 1823 Nottingham lace manufacturer Ferguson had 'initiated a simple patterning process, which resulted in a design of large circular spaces known as bullet-holes' (Earnshaw, 1986:74). In 1824 Ferguson had moved his production to Calais where the technique would no doubt soon have been copied. By 1829 the Pusher machine had also been adapted to make bullet-hole net (ibid.). The samples were three variations on the same basic design, each one slightly deeper than the last. The difference in design was introduced through greater depth of net and in the third case an extra row of the pattern formed of thicker thread. Such variations on a theme were, and still are, a common way of extending the potential of a lace design.

Deposit number 12 was not registered until 29<sup>th</sup> September 1839, a full ten months after the first deposit. The reason for this lengthy gap could not be determined from the register. The sample was in the form of two strips of lace joined by lacers. The manufacturer, William Cobb, stated that the lace was fabricated on a Leavers machine and the lace was described as 'tulle-carré avec guimpe et pois'<sup>140</sup> (Cobb, 1839). This was square or, as it is more usually described, diamond net with areas of cloth and peas. Although, to the modern eye, this may not appear to be a spectacular piece of lace to a lace historian it was extremely interesting to see an example of the patterning that was being achieved at this date.<sup>141</sup>

Deposit number 13 was made on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1839 by James Wragg. This was in the form of a blueprint which showed joined strips of lace described as net with bands of guipure, fabricated on a Warp machine.

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<sup>140</sup> The French machine lace term *guimpe*, meaning cloth area, initially caused the researcher some confusion as in bobbin lace *gimp* means thick outlining thread.

<sup>141</sup> The Jacquard system had been successful adapted for some bobbin-net machines as early as 1837 but was not applied to Pusher machines until 1839 (Earnshaw, 1986:91,100).



Figure 30: Deposits 18, 19 and 20.  
Image ©CIDM

Deposits 18, 19 and 20 were all made by M. Jacquette and Walter Sneath.<sup>142</sup> The deposits were entered into the register on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1<sup>st</sup> June and 15<sup>th</sup> July 1840 respectively. All three deposits were fancy nets stated to be fabricated on the Circular machine. Number 18 was a square mesh with double spotted tallies. Number 19, described as tulle Gothique, was a technically highly advanced piece. The third sample was an openwork mesh constructed in blocks of tallies and was again highly advanced technically.

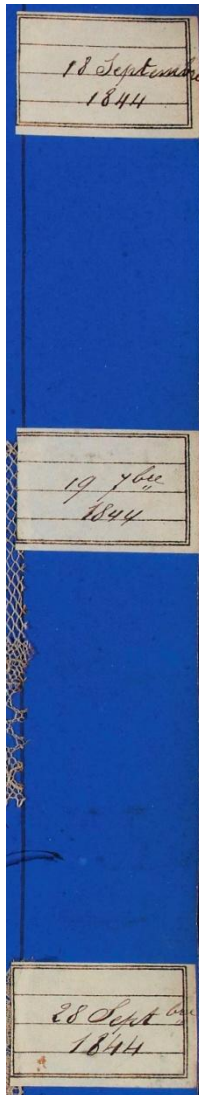
The final deposit to be accompanied by a written statement was from Thomas Boot<sup>143</sup> on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1842. This deposit<sup>144</sup> comprised three samples of warp knitted net with figured ground. Most interestingly each piece was formed with a different net base, the finest of which offered a good approximation of an open

<sup>142</sup> Walter Sneath was likely to have been part of the Sneath family from Nottingham. In 1831 William Sneath of Nottingham had patented a method of making small tally type spots in net (Earnshaw, 1986:90).

<sup>143</sup> In the registers this was written as Tho<sup>s</sup> Boot.

<sup>144</sup> Deposit number 27.

needlelace net ground. Although warp knitted lace lost favour, as it was unstable unless stiffened, the machines were the forerunners of the Raschels machines which in turn developed into the Jacquardtronic machines which produce the vast majority of the lace made today.



From deposit 28 onwards a new system of data recording was introduced. This dispensed with the written statements and consisted simply of a small label at the top left hand side of each deposit bearing the deposit number and depositor's name and a second label at the top right hand side of the deposit stating the date. The date label for deposit number 38 demonstrated a form of numeric shorthand which was sometimes used on these labels. The label stated that the sample was 'déposé le 28 8<sup>bre</sup> 1842'. This was not, as might be supposed, a deposit made on 28<sup>th</sup> August, which is the eighth month of the year, but on 28<sup>th</sup> October as recorded in full on the deposited blueprint of the lace. Investigation of further examples revealed the logic of the chronology to be:

7<sup>bre</sup> = September

8<sup>bre</sup> = October

9<sup>bre</sup> = November

X<sup>bre</sup> or 10<sup>bre</sup> = December.

Figure 31: Numeric shorthand in the first legal deposit register.  
18 Septembre 1844 / 19 7<sup>bre</sup> 1844 / 28 Sept<sup>bre</sup> 1844

The most notable technical improvement to follow on from the attachment of Jacquard apparatus to lace machines was Joseph Wragg's 1841 invention of a technique for putting in the liner (thick outlining thread) on the Leavers machine (Earnshaw, 1986:140). Improvements to this technique allowed the liners to be carried from one part of the work to another without being incorporated, the unworked threads being called floats. As with many such technical advances, the adding of liners by machine threw many hand-workers in the finishing trades



out of a job. However the later improvements which allowed floats to be formed introduced the new trade of clipping to which the workers were likely to have turned their hands. Although at the time the deposits were made the existence of such trades would have been tacit knowledge in lace producing areas, today it is only through the application of highly specialised knowledge of such trades that they can be observed in the registers.

Figure 32 demonstrates the wide variety of deposits which might occur on a double page spread of the registers. On this spread two samples of plain net and a narrow edging appeared above the first evidence of floats. The page also carried examples of more complex patterning. However, perhaps the most interesting deposit was that by Webster & F<sup>res</sup> on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1846,<sup>145</sup> which was a drawing of a rocker for a steam engine. This entry would appear to indicate that the company was using steam to power its machinery at this date.

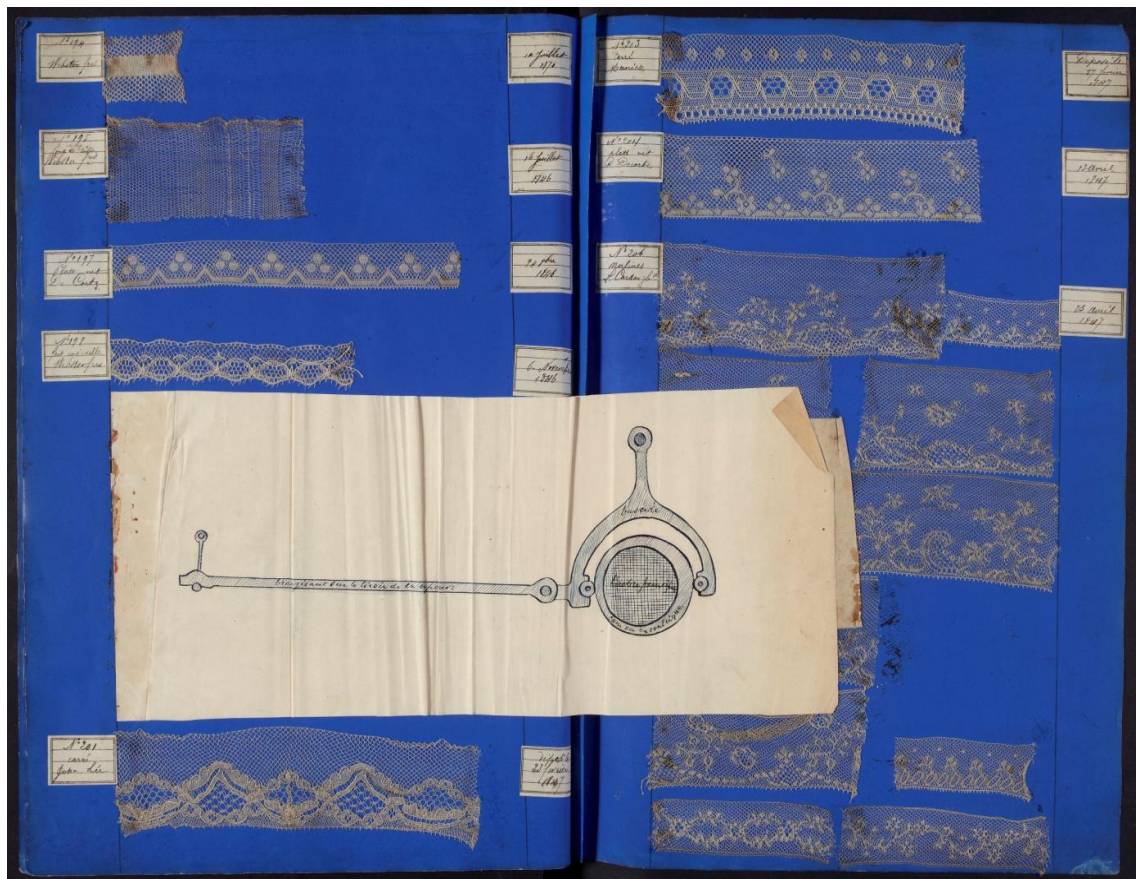


Figure 32: Mixed deposits including examples of plain net, floral lace and a technical drawing. Image ©CIDM

<sup>145</sup> Deposit number 199.

The introduction of steam power to lace machines in about 1840 meant that mechanical lacemaking gradually moved from individual dwellings or small manufactories into large factories, often on a sub-letting basis. The former Boulart factory, which now houses the International Centre for Lace and Fashion, was run on this basis in order to share the cost of the expensive steam machinery. Except for the above mentioned deposit by Webster & F<sup>res</sup> there was no way of discerning the use, or otherwise, of steam power from the lace in the register. It was however interesting to note that in 1845 the manufacturers Farrands Frères, Pearson, Webster Père & Fils and J. Wragg were all listed<sup>146</sup> as vapeur indicating that they were using steam power (Caron, 1997:133-135).

Although deposit number 198 on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1846 clearly showed floats and thus liners incorporated by machine, ten months later deposit 215<sup>147</sup> by Cardon C<sup>ie</sup> contained a sample of lace that had clearly been partly outlined by hand.<sup>148</sup> This is the black and brown sample at the bottom left of Figure 33 (over-page). The fact that other samples of a similar style were not outlined suggested that although outlining by hand was slower than by machine the capital investment that was required might have led to some manufacturers continuing with hand outlining rather than buying new machinery. The manufacturer might equally have continued with an arrangement whereby the lace was sold in its brown state to a dealer who handled the finishing and embellishing processes. There could also be the possibility that lace labelled as hand finished might have commanded a higher price. Once again, although common knowledge at the time of the deposit, today it is only through the application of specialist knowledge that the difference between hand and machine run outlines can be discerned.

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<sup>146</sup> Saint-Pierre-Lès-Calais Liste nominative des fabricants de tulle et apprêteurs. [List of lace manufacturers and finishers in the Saint Pierre district of Calais].

<sup>147</sup> Dated 17<sup>th</sup> September 1847.

<sup>148</sup> Similar partial outlining of samples by hand also occurred two months later in deposit 218 by the same manufacturer.

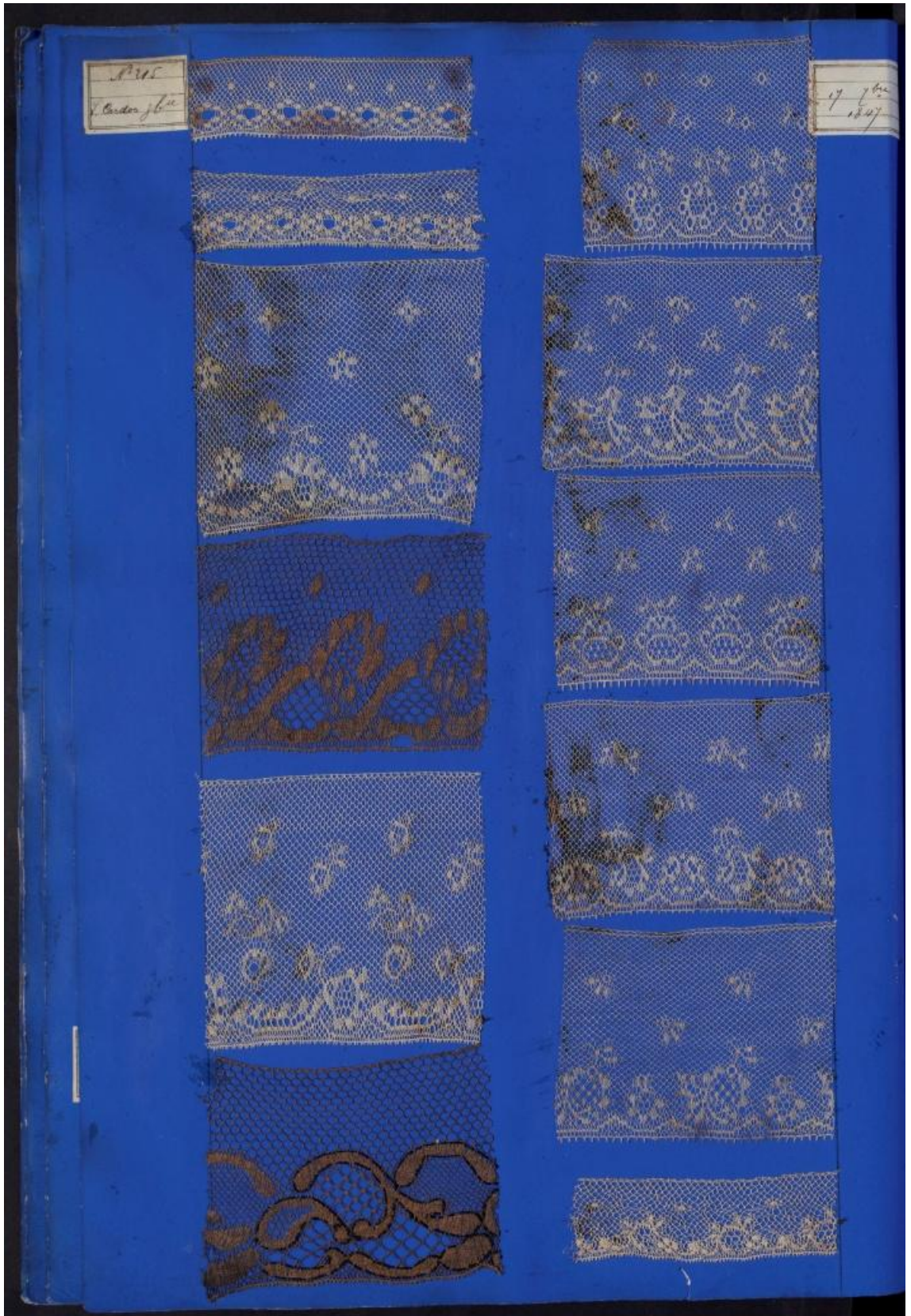


Figure 33: Sample bottom left shows partially completed outlining added by hand rather than machine. Image ©CIDM

Deposit number 236, on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1848, by Mallet F<sup>res</sup> was made up of seven variations on a fancy net fabric. There were to be no further deposits for over a year. The reason for this lapse could not be discerned from the registers. History books however showed that this was the time of the second French Revolution which began in February 1848. Kelly (s.d.) summarised the effect of the revolution thus:

‘The Revolution of 1848 was not particularly bloody by other standards but it brought France to a complete standstill . . . In some areas of France, British workers were actively menaced, but in Calais and Saint-Pierre the atmosphere was simply one of despair. The lace factories were closed and their English owners returned to England to wait for better times’.

The problems faced by the English workers in Calais were compounded by the depression in England which meant that if they had managed to return to their home parishes they would have been condemned to life in the Poorhouse. Kelly’s (1998) research centred on a group of one hundred and fourteen English families in Calais who, in March 1848, petitioned the British Government to arrange for them to emigrate to Australia where they might start a new life. This gap in the chronology of the registers concealed a highly important social narrative thread but the desperate situation of the English workers in Calais was entirely invisible in the registers as was any indication of the number of workers involved in the lace trade. The social and technical strands of the history of lace in Calais were closely interwoven but the social strand was only represented in the legal deposit registers by the names of the manufacturers making deposits. The names of those who worked in the industry were absent from the registers.

A single deposit of two samples was registered in April 1849<sup>149</sup> and then nothing further until August 1850. Deposits number 243 to 247 inclusive were all by manufacturers with English names,<sup>150</sup> it was not possible to say whether these were manufacturers who had remained in France during the period of

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<sup>149</sup> Deposit number 239, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1849. This represented a gap in the consecutive numbering from the previous deposit (number 236) but there was no physical gap in the register.

<sup>150</sup> Deposit number 243 on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1850 by J. Wragg, deposit number 244 on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1850 by Forest, deposit number 245 on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1850 and deposit number 246 on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1850 by Forest and deposit number 247 on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1850 by Robert Maxton.

unrest or if they were the first to return to Calais when the political situation became more favourable to their endeavours. One hint as to the situation of English manufactures in Calais came from the will of 'Robert Webster of Saint Pierre les Calais in France, Lace Manufacturer' (The National Archives, 1852) which was witnessed in London on 25th November 1852. Webster bequeathed to his wife all of his household effects and an annuity of £120, the rest of his estate to be divided equally between his sons William and John Michael. What was of particular relevance was Webster's specification that this should include the 'residue of my estate and effects whatsoever and wheresoever and as well in England as in France' (ibid.). This would appear to indicate that Webster maintained business interests or property in both countries at this point and that these had provided him with a substantial income. There was no way of telling from the legal deposit registers if Robert Webster maintained factories in England and France at the same time. It would be interesting to further this area of research by comparing the names, and dates, of manufacturers who registered lace designs in the legal deposit registers in Calais with those who did so in the Board of Trade registers in England.

Between 12<sup>th</sup> October and 16<sup>th</sup> December 1850 J. Forest registered a total of 67 samples in three deposits. The regularity of deposits remained erratic for some time after the revolution but after the flurry of deposits from manufacturers with English names in late 1850 the deposits of the next few years were entirely by French named manufacturers. The reason for this could not be ascertained from the registers.

Only two deposits were recorded in 1851. This could be seen as a sign of the continuing downturn in production after the revolution. By contrast, in the same year the quality of output by the British machine lace industry was being lauded at the Great Exhibition in London (Royal Commissioners, 1851).

The spring of 1852 saw an upsurge in deposits, followed by a single deposit in November and then nothing more until June 1853. The label on deposit number 257, made on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1853 by Champailler Fils, bore the simple word soie – indicating that these samples of Blonde lace were made of silk. There was no

other indication of the breakthrough in design, material and technique that this deposit of 116 samples encompassed. This deposit was the first indication of silk lace being manufactured in Calais. From their inception designs for machine made laces had focussed on copying whichever handmade laces were in fashion at the time. It was therefore interesting to note that whilst handmade Blonde was smuggled into England in large quantities in 1837<sup>151</sup> it was not until 1853 that the manufacturers of Calais registered a machine made version. It was the researcher's speculation that during the downturn in trade, rather than have their machines lying, idle some manufacturers might have used the slack period to develop new lace designs and trial new threads.

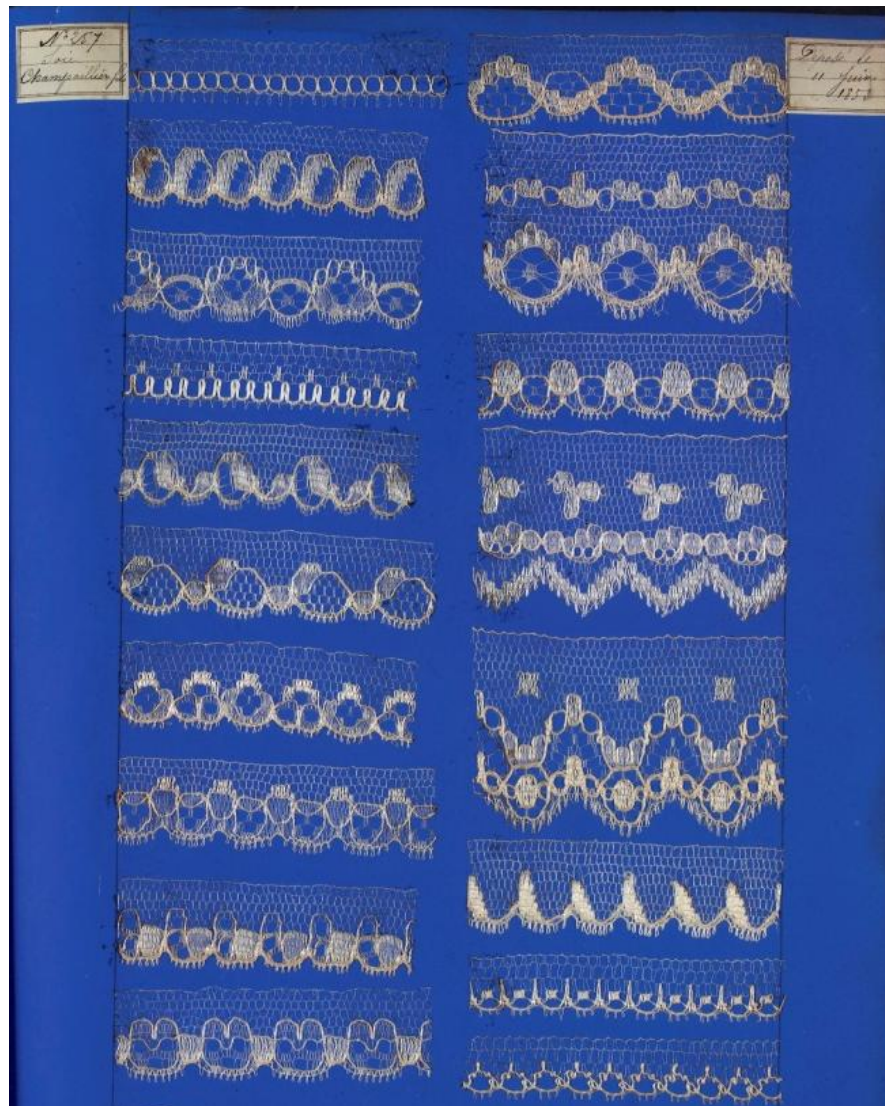


Figure 34: First deposit of silk Blonde lace. Image ©CIDM

<sup>151</sup> According to The Spectator newspaper, in 1837 a woman was charged with attempting to smuggle 1,228 ells of French blond lace from Calais into England (The Spectator, 1837).

Deposit number 275, by John West and Company on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1854, was made up of three samples of Valenciennes lace. The first of these carried Imperial Eagles standing on tripartite swags which bore the initials L N III, the swags were separated by crowns. The ground was diamond Valenciennes net and the scalloped edge was fully picoted, the supporting hexagonal mesh of the scalloped edge remained intact as was normal with such samples.<sup>152</sup> The legal deposit register offered no indication as to the background to this outstanding design. Other documentation in the Centre's holdings revealed that the lace was designed to commemorate the visit to Calais of Emperor Louis Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie.<sup>153</sup>



Figure 35: Lace edging commemorating the visit to Calais of Emperor Louis Napoleon III.  
Image ©CIDM

Registered designs continued to be predominantly edgings and insertions of Valenciennes, Lille and Blonde. On 20<sup>th</sup> April 1855 Mallet F<sup>res</sup> introduced neuville Blonde galloons.<sup>154</sup> Although these first attempts at shaped pieces of lace needed improvements, refinements to the concept were soon deposited on a regular basis. A measure of the successful reinstatement of the Calais lace industry after the revolution might be gained from Earnshaw (1986:94) noting a figure in excess of 600 for the number of lace machines operating in Calais in 1855.

It was not possible to tell from the registers whether or not any of the Calais lace manufacturers had exhibited lace at the 1855 Exposition Universelle in

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<sup>152</sup> The surplus area of supporting net that filled the indented area between the scallops would be cut away by hand as part of the finishing process.

<sup>153</sup> Research indicated that Napoleon was known to be interested in industrial innovation and was reported to have visited Heathcoat's lace factory in Paris in 1849 (Earnshaw, 1986:74).

<sup>154</sup> Deposit number 330.

Paris. However, it does not seem to be beyond the bounds of possibility that they might have visited the exhibition, which ran from May to November, or have sent designers to see what was being exhibited. The exhibition could certainly have been the trigger for the shift towards producing ever wider Chantilly laces, which began in 1856, for which the Pusher machines were particularly famous. By this date both edgings and shaped pieces were being fabricated and some edgings were registered in both black and white colourways.

Deposit number 391 of 10<sup>th</sup> November 1856 by Joseph Topham, recorded as Dentelle Chantilly, was the first of an increasingly large number of samples in which part of the internal patterning of the lace was cut away by hand to indicate how the same piece of lace might be adapted in the finishing process to create two apparently different laces. These examples highlighted the importance of the finishing trades; the largely ignored but essential processes that lace underwent after being removed from the loom.

In her podcast on the Board of Trade Design Representations and Registers (BoTDRR), Eastop (2011) made the essential point that 'different people have different views about what is significant' in the collection. The legal deposit registers at CIDM bore out many of the comments that Eastop went on to make about the requirements of different users. She noted that 'for historians what mattered about this collection [BoTDRR] is the fact that it's the primary source for historical information'. The legal deposit registers are also a primary source of information with impeccable provenance despite their having little text based contents. Eastop observed that the BoTDRR 'collection is also important for art historians and historians of design'. The legal deposit registers would offer them not only a primary visual source of change within a specified industry but also provenance of dates for these changes. In addition, the legal deposit registers offer artists and designers a wonderful range of stylistic variations. A single page spread might contain geometric, floral and abstract designs in a variety of threads, textures and colours. The contingency of the arrangement of the samples might also provide inspiration for artists and designers.



## 9.3 Summary

The CIDM case study centred on in-depth research into a single volume from the Centre's collection of legal deposit registers. These registers formed a highly organised and chronologically arranged archive which had originally represented the specific legal and industrial concern of copyright protection. The first legal deposit register was considered as a material archive. This was deemed to be the most appropriate approach as there was very little text within any of the legal deposit registers.

The research sought to uncover the hidden histories that were present but not obviously visible in the archive and thus challenge the accuracy of the archive as a solid foundation of historical knowledge. The research was reliant on specialist knowledge of how to read lace as both a manufactured and a social product. This included political and social history, costume history and advanced levels of knowledge relating to the production of both hand and machine made lace. Within the time span of the research it became increasingly evident that the knowledge of how to read lace, which was once common-place, is now lost beyond subject specialists. This loss was seen as forming a major absence associated with the archive.

The research positioned the register outside its original context, as an instrument of copyright protection and showed, through the consideration of the hidden histories, that it could be used to illustrate a series of different historical truths.

As a result of work undertaken on this case study the researcher was invited to be part of the team designing a new lace to be fabricated on one of the lace machines at CIDM. The development of the new lace design for CIDM is discussed in Insertion V – New Leavers Lace Design.

## 10. Insertion V – New Leavers Lace Design

### Introduction

I was invited to collaborate on the development of a new lace design to be manufactured on an historic Leavers lace machine at the International Centre for Lace and Fashion, Calais (CIDM). Loom number 7, for which the lace was to be designed, was built by John Jardine, (maker and patentee) in Nottingham circa 1907-08. The Centre's vast <sup>155</sup> lace machines could be seen as an anachronism from the past but I took the position that they were capable of vitality and vivacity if reanimated through contemporary design and materials. The notion of reinvigorating these historic machines with a contemporary design held deep resonances with my research into the archives where the legal deposit registers evidenced the lace industry's innovations in design, materials and technology. Being a co-designer of this lace provided an opportunity for me to mediate an artistic bridge between my research and a product which would leave a lasting legacy within the Centre and beyond.

CIDM were unable to make full use of the lace that their machines produced due to copyright restrictions and were therefore seeking a new design which they could use more freely. One of CIDM's aims was to raise awareness of the qualities of Leavers lace <sup>156</sup> in the fashion industry and amongst the general public. This understanding of lace was once common in Calais and in the wider areas of the textile trades that used lace. It can be said that there are now few consumers who understand the difference between laces produced on different types of machine. The production of a contemporary lace design was also intended to help to transmit the significance and relevance of the historic lace industry to a new generation of designers and consumers.

The design of the new lace was funded through the Crystals Project as part of its remit to promote knowledge exchange and to foster design and innovation in

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<sup>155</sup> Loom 7 is approximately 10 metres long by 3 metres high.

<sup>156</sup> As opposed to Raschels or Jacquardtronic lace.

the textile trades. It seemed particularly appropriate that this should be an Anglo-French exchange as it was English manufacturers who had originally brought mechanical lacemaking to Calais. Lace has been made on machines in Calais for almost 200 years and throughout its history a major watchword of the industry has been secrecy. The legal deposit registers originated as a response to the endemic problem of illegal copying in the textiles trade which was noted as an ongoing problem. The underlying tradition of secrecy rendered the knowledge exchanges of this project all the more remarkable.

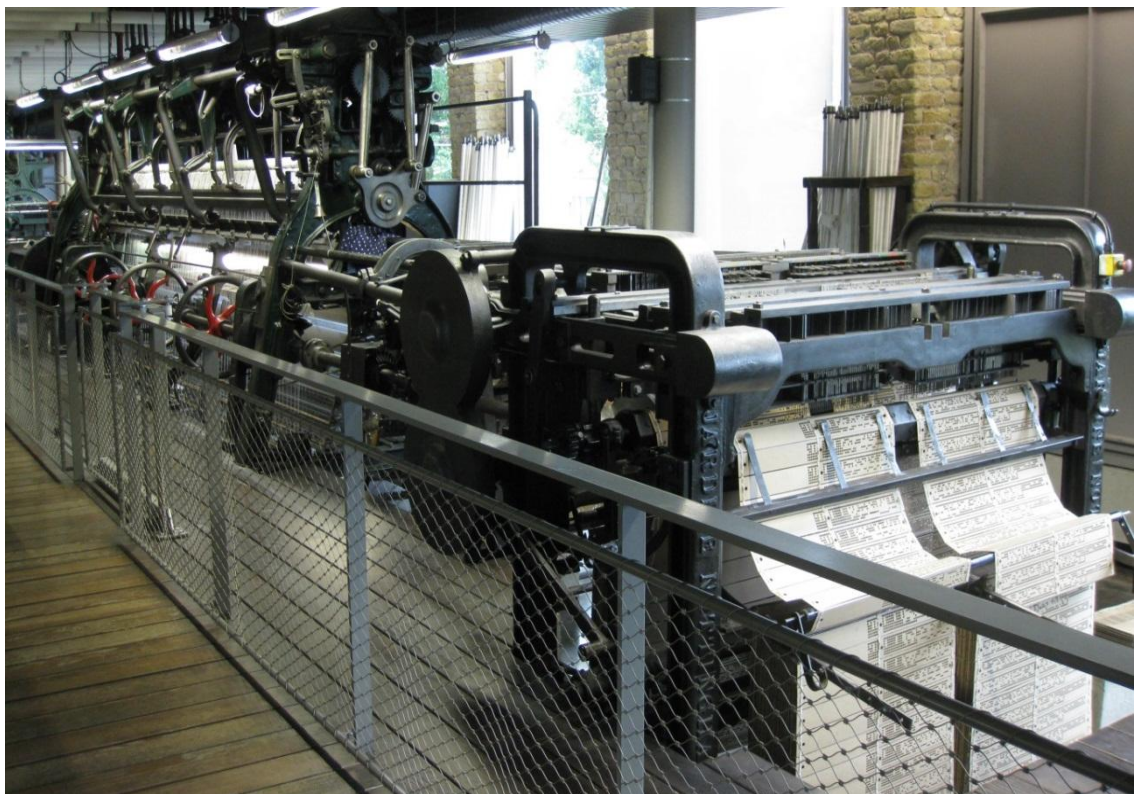


Figure 36: CIDM Leavers lace machine - loom number 7

The process of creating a new lace design and bringing it into production on the machine required the input of numerous skilled artists and craftsmen. My role was to collaborate with local dessinateur Frederic Rumigny to originate the design concept and produce the design sketches. My knowledge of designing lace had been developed through handmade lace; I had no experience of designing for machine made lace of any form. In order to produce viable sketches for the new design it was imperative that I understood the highly complex technicalities of how a Leavers lace machine operated and what the

technical possibilities and limitations of this specific machine were.<sup>157</sup> To facilitate this, tulliste Gilles Lavie took me behind the barriers in the machine room so that I could get a really close look at the way the bobbins and threads moved. I was also introduced to the highly relevant specifics of how far each weft thread could travel in a sideways direction.

### **Design brief**

No formal brief had been drawn up for the new design. Discussions with the Centre's staff identified their key areas of usage as promotion,<sup>158</sup> technical education<sup>159</sup> and textile workshops.<sup>160</sup> It was felt that the design should be contemporary, innovative and non floral. As the new lace could not be used commercially<sup>161</sup> we would be able to take more risks with the design and threads than the local manufacturers who sold their lace on the open market.

The Centre requested an all-over design for lace fabric with the option to add a scalloped edging. In discussion with the tullistes the number and qualities of threads were considered. The standard threads used on loom 7 were polyester for background and net areas and polyamide for motifs. Threads for machine made lace were an area beyond my expertise but it was interesting to hear the possibility of including innovative threads being discussed. Rumigny was keen to continue the industry tradition of introducing innovative new threads by investigating the possibility of using a new un-spun thread and exploring the

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<sup>157</sup> The specialised technical aspects of machine made laces are not discussed in this thesis.

<sup>158</sup> Images of the new lace to become part of the Centre's corporate image including its use on information sheets, gift bags and industry typical 3 fold information packs. Samples to be available for the public.

<sup>159</sup> CIDM intended to provide educational support to local industry by explaining, to the buying public, the technical characteristics of Leavers laces and raising awareness of what makes Leavers lace special and what Leavers lace machines could do that Raschel or Jacquardtronic machines could not. They also intended to provide technical support to the Calais Leavers lace industry through design innovation, sampling threads and testing the strength of finished laces.

<sup>160</sup> The new lace would be used in education workshops where the Centre was particularly keen to engage the interest of teenagers to encourage their interest in the local industry. It was considered that a geometric or abstract design would appeal to this audience more than a floral design.

<sup>161</sup> As a public body CIDM could not make a profit. This apparently excluded the possibility of selling the lace in the Centre's shop even to help to finance the purchase of thread to make more lace or to finance the design and implementation of new patterns.

potential of a metal-plastic thread <sup>162</sup> was also discussed. White threads would be used for production and the lace dyed in the finishing process. Up to three colours could be utilised in the dye process but as different materials absorb dye differently one dye-bath could also produce multiple hues. <sup>163</sup>

## **Design origins**

The current Calais lace industry was primarily geared towards producing delicate floral lace for high-end lingerie. Our intention was to create something different with a more contemporary feel; a lace which might appeal to young people, particularly fashion students.

I was aware that the registers from the 1890s through to the early 1930s were rich in geometric designs but was conscious that the Centre had said that they did not want the archives to be the direct inspiration for the new lace. Rumigny, however, was keen that we should examine some of the lace archives at the Centre in order to consider our priorities for the design. One of the archives which we viewed was a volume from manufacturers Merlen, Bodart et Ball. <sup>164</sup> We were both drawn to samples of the design titled *Les Sirènes*. <sup>165</sup> Although a technically complex lace, the success of the design for *Les Sirènes* relied on a few core elements which, whilst being elegant in their simplicity, were emphasised in bold threads. Rumigny highlighted the importance of the movement of the two swimmers at the centre of the design whilst I was drawn to the arcing lines radiating away from them. I felt that the geometry of these might be of more relevance to a contemporary design. The pattern had different elements that appealed to different people, a point which was noted and applied

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<sup>162</sup> The plastic element would become transparent when heated in the finishing process thus offering the possibility of two different effects from the same piece of lace. This thread would not take dye and was slightly thicker than usual which imposed certain constraints on its use within the design.

<sup>163</sup> This had to be thought through in the design process if the properties of the threads were to be exploited fully at the dye stage.

<sup>164</sup> Most manufacturers kept their own Registre d'échantillons containing samples of the lace that they produced. Merlen, Bodart and Ball's Livre No 3 (1926/1927/1928) included many Art Deco designs.

<sup>165</sup> Example in black, reference number 4743/25.

to our design. That we were both drawn to the movement within the design was also an important point which was taken into consideration.

In order to produce a solid foundation on which to begin the design process I looked for a concept that would both tie in with my research at the Centre and address the gap in knowledge relating to the qualities of Leavers lace. Reviewing my images from the CIDM archives, and wider Centre environment, revealed the lace machines themselves to be a core element which I wanted to explore further. Observing audience reactions to demonstrations of the machines had shown me that these produced a high level of interest from visitors who knew nothing about the technicalities of the lace or how the machines worked. As the machines were the beating heart of the Centre I wanted to enshrine their presence in the design which we produced.

The physicality of the machines made its impression in many ways; their solidity sat in stark contrast to the visual delicacy of the web that they wove and at close quarters the sound of the machine working was an assault on the ears. The pervasive low rumble that could be heard throughout the building whenever the machines were demonstrated particularly interested me. The sound of the machines was widely overlooked and so could be said to form a lacunae within the Centre's frame of reference. I had also become aware that there was an absence of sound in the archive.<sup>166</sup> This almost reverential silence was ruptured hourly by the sound of a loom reverberating down through the fabric of the building. I decided that the sound of the machines could be incorporated in the design through digital recording and visualisation programmes which would translate the sound into linear patterns. By using an oscilloscope style visualisation I hoped to attain patterns not dissimilar to those of a heart rate monitor screen thus incorporating the notion of the machine as the beating heart of the Centre and of the lace itself. My intention was that these rhythmic forms would add the sense of movement to the lace that Rumigny and I had found so compelling in *Les Sirènes*. The sound-waves would link the lace back to both its point of manufacture and to the history encapsulated in the Centre.

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<sup>166</sup> Except for the quiet turning of pages or occasional careful unpacking of archive boxes.

In addition to the sound I was interested in the essential nature of the Jacquard cards <sup>167</sup> in which the holes might be seen as relating to the gaps which I had been searching for in the archives. The cards could also be seen as having a relationship with my tradition of handmade bobbin lace in which the pattern is delineated by the holes in a pricking. The physical presence of the machines was understood as important to the Centre but the function of the Jacquard cards was widely overlooked by the public, except where they were noted as being like computer punch cards. As with the sound-waves, a link to Jacquard cards would tie the lace back to its manufacturing process whilst at the same time hinting at the essential nature of holes in lace.



Figure 37: Jacquard cards for Leavers lace

The machine made lace industry had a tradition of technical innovation, in the machines themselves, the introduction of new threads and the creation of technical drafts which allowed new styles of lace to be produced. <sup>168</sup> It was important to show that whilst Leavers machines created excellent imitations of handmade lace they could also lead the way in innovation and design. Loom 7 was equipped with a double Jacquard system which allowed extra grounds to

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<sup>167</sup> To drastically over simplify the system – it could be said that the machine made the net and the Jacquard system applied the pattern.

<sup>168</sup> Such as Blonde machine made lace which first appeared in the legal deposit registers as deposit number 257 on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1853, deposited by Champaillier Fils. This was also the first time that silk thread appeared in the registers.

be incorporated into the pattern. This was felt to be an area in which the complexity of patterning achievable with Leavers lace could be demonstrated. I had been attracted to an irregular ground, known as craquele, which I had seen in the samples in the archives, and which was specific to machine made lace. I loved the idea of having something so irregular, almost random, made by machine. I was particularly drawn to the way that this ground would appear to be an area of randomness within the formality of the surrounding design in much the same way as there was an apparent randomness to the individual samples within the formality of the legal deposit registers. I suggested that this ground should be incorporated into our design if possible.

The Centre was keen that the new design should in some way relate to my training in handmade bobbin lace.<sup>169</sup> In traditional bobbin lace my speciality was Bedfordshire lace, a guipure lace with often intricate grounds of plaits, picots and leaf shaped tallies. On being shown samples of my traditional work Rumigny recognised Bedfordshire lace as being similar to the machine made grounds known collectively as Point d'Irlande and offered to design a new ground in this style. Few people would be aware of them but I was fascinated by the subtle differences between the design for this new machine lace ground and the way that it would have been designed for a bobbin lacemaker to work.

### **Design process**

The practicalities of the design were discussed with the tullistes and a sketch size of 25cm wide by approximately 20cm high was agreed.<sup>170</sup> This would allow for the addition of a 10cm deep scallop to be used with the main panel if required. Rumigny and I decided on an irregular scallop in keeping with the contemporary design. It was agreed that the design was to be based on my original concept of a combination of sound waves from the machines, the Jacquard cards and the two styles of grounds which had been discussed.

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<sup>169</sup> I had been explaining that there had been a constant rotation of copying in historic laces; originally machine lace imitated the handmade laces but eventually the machine lace manufacturers were employing the best designers and so the handmade industry copied the machine made laces.

<sup>170</sup> The design repeated 16 times across the machine to create an all-over fabric.



For me the next stages in the process were to purchase a set of old Jacquard cards from the Centre's shop and to take digital recordings of loom number 7 whilst it was being demonstrated. I then processed the recordings to produce oscilloscope style visualisations of the sound waves. It was interesting to observe the difference between the harsh, metallic, sounds made by the machine and the softer, more rounded, sound of tulleiste Gilles Lavie explaining the manufacturing process.

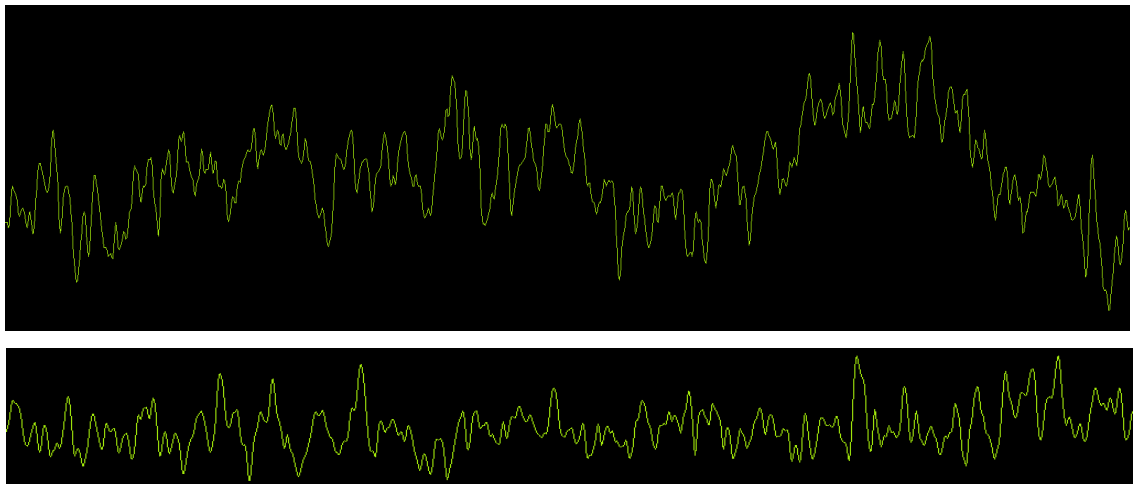


Figure 38: Digital sound-wave visualisations of loom number 7 at work

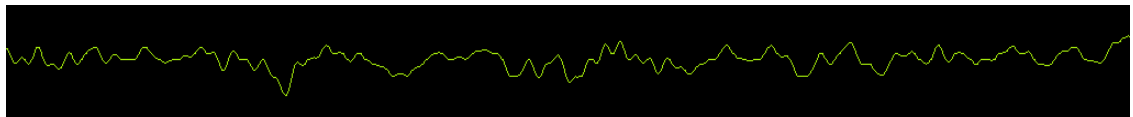


Figure 39: Digital sound-wave visualisations of Gilles Lavie explaining the workings of loom number 7

My personal preference had always been to sketch initial designs the traditional way, with pencils and tracing paper. Rumigny's practice was to further develop his pencil and pen sketches with CAD. A number of design sketches flowed back and forth between us before the next design meeting.<sup>171</sup> At this meeting Rumigny's latest version of the design was chosen for use, with a few modifications. This design had developed from one of my sketches and I was delighted with his improvements.

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<sup>171</sup> For technical reasons it was necessary for the sound-wave zigzags and Jacquard cards of the lace to run vertically on the loom rather than horizontally as in the original sound-waves and working Jacquard cards.



Figure 40: Progression of sketches for final design – Baxter above, Rumigny right

It was agreed that the zigzags (from the sound waves of the lace machine) would be the most dominant section of the design. Commenting on Rumigny's sketch, the Centre said that they would have preferred the zigzag to overlap the edges of the Jacquard card elements further so that the vertical lines were less obvious and there was less plain net.<sup>172</sup> My sketch had not included these intervening areas of plain net but I considered them to be a valuable design feature as some of these areas could be cut away, by hand, allowing background colours to show through uninterrupted.<sup>173</sup> The holes from the

<sup>172</sup> Plain net was represented by the pale grey areas of Rumigny's design, above right.

<sup>173</sup> The potential to cut Leavers lace without it unravelling is an important aspect of the material.

Jacquard translated into holes in an area of cloth; again these holes would allow background colours to show through clearly. The density of this cloth would make a huge difference to the appearance of the finished lace in terms of which section was most dominant. The panels which alternated with the Jacquards contained two grounds; craquele and a complex form of Point d'Irlande designed by Rumigny.

The main problem with the design at this stage was that some of the zigzag angles would have necessitated the use of float threads. These would then have required clipping. Float threads run over the upper surface of the lace and would have spoilt its visual appearance on the loom. Although this would not be of relevance in a commercial situation it was felt to be important that the new lace looked as good on the loom as off. Rumigny agreed to adjust the design to avoid this.<sup>174</sup> It was also decided that the edging on the current design should be extended to exaggerate its asymmetry. Rumigny roughed out several sketches for edgings and the most angular of these was chosen.<sup>175</sup> The edging could be utilised in a variety of configurations with and without the main fabric repeat.

The bobbin and supporting background threads for the new lace were very fine polyester with up to three additional types of thread used for emphasis. Thread trials were undertaken by the tullistes, using an existing pattern, on a small sampling machine.<sup>176</sup> Three potential accent threads were tested. Option 1 was a silver Lurex thread<sup>177</sup> which worked well and gave the lace a firm feel. Option 2 was a plastic optical translucent material wrapped around a fine metal core. Unfortunately the outer layer shredded in the machine and so it was discounted at this stage.<sup>178</sup> Option 3 was a new untwisted thread which produced a matt but highly raised effect within the design. This thread was technically innovative within the lace industry and would assist CIDM's aim of demonstrating to the

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<sup>174</sup> Clipping was also an area of finishing costs that the Centre was keen to avoid.

<sup>175</sup> I was particularly pleased to see the inclusion of the locator holes from the ends of the Jacquard cards which emphasised the fact that the design was based on real a Jacquard card.

<sup>176</sup> The existence of this machine was largely unknown to the non-production staff.

<sup>177</sup> Plastic Lurex strip on a polyester core thread.

<sup>178</sup> Rumigny would have liked to use this for the Jacquard area so that heat treatment could have made it almost disappear leaving the zigzag to apparently stand alone. It was hoped that further trials with the actual pattern might reveal a way of utilising this thread.

local manufacturers that the Centre could be of significant technical assistance to them. It was agreed that the initial emphasis was for the zigzag to be dominant (if possible using the untwisted, matt thread), the grounds to be intermediate (utilising option 1 silver Lurex thread) and the Jacquard cards to be inferior (using a medium weight viscose/polyamide thread).



Figure 41: Untwisted, matt thread trialled for potential use in the new lace design

### **From design to product**

Rumigny produced a colour coded version of the final design for the draftsman to work from.<sup>179</sup> His instructions to the draftsman included his idea that the heavy threads of the zigzags were only to be caught down where they turned.

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<sup>179</sup> This took the form of one fabric pattern repeat with an edging at both top and bottom using the industry standard colour coding.

This meant that these threads floated over the main working of the lace and so produced a more raised effect. This was a very different use of the float technique to its more common application of moving accent threads from one area where they were required to the next without incorporating them into the lace. Apart from being a visually attractive design element this raised area demonstrated one of the specificities of Leavers lace – that of having a front and back surface. The next step was for the draftsman to create a technical draft which plotted the pathway of each of the accent threads in the design. <sup>180</sup>

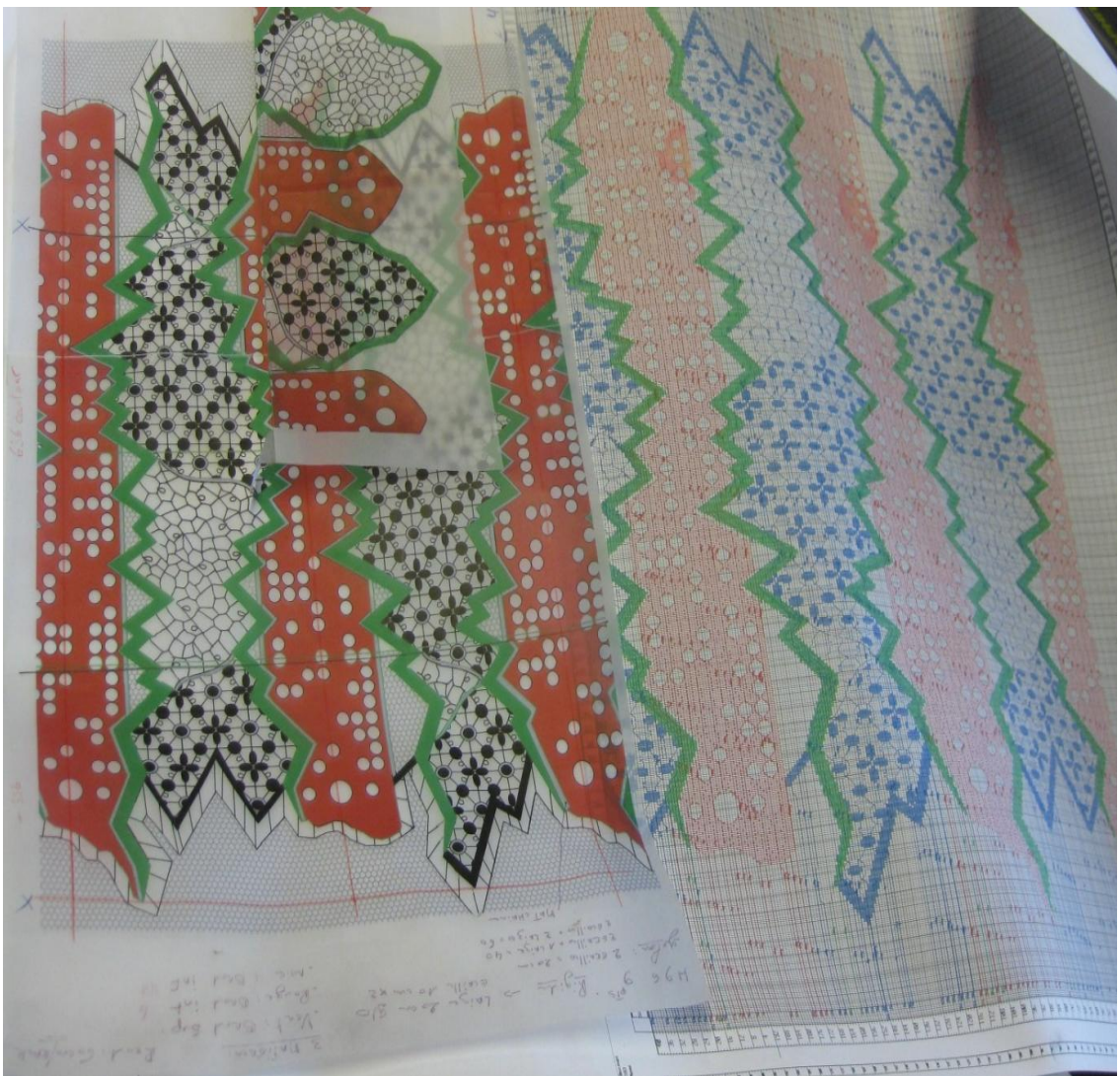


Figure 42: Final pattern draft (left) and technical draft indicating main threadpaths (right)

<sup>180</sup> A different draft was used for the fine supporting threads. There were a total of 382 threads per repeat.

The accent threads used in the grounds and Jacquard areas were carried from one area of use to the next at the back of the zigzags – a testament to the skills of the draftsman and to Rumigny’s decision to raise the main threads. Once the threadpaths were mapped the draft was turned into a series of numeric codes from which the Jacquards cards were punched. The loom was then threaded, Jacquard cards attached and the first trial run of the new lace begun.



Figure 43: New lace design in production on loom number 7. CIDM, 2014

### **Colour**

The lace was fabricated in white threads. The silver-grey colouration of the lace in production was due to the graphite used to lubricate the machine which inevitably rubbed off onto the lace. The graphite was normally removed in the finishing processes.<sup>181</sup> It was agreed that the first production batch of the lace should be white and the next black. This offered the greatest contrast in the appearance of the lace. The white lace was at its most delicate when shown on

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<sup>181</sup> Interestingly even the unclipped samples in the registers had had the graphite removed.

a white or pastel background but its impact was dramatically enhanced by the use of richly coloured backgrounds. The black lace gave greater immediate visual impact and it was interesting to observe how the Jacquard bands appeared to take on more visual weight when dyed black. Rumigny's introduction of the silver threads to the grounds was an excellent example of a master designer at work. In the white lace the silver subtly highlighted these complex areas of the design but when the lace was dyed black then the silver really stood out.

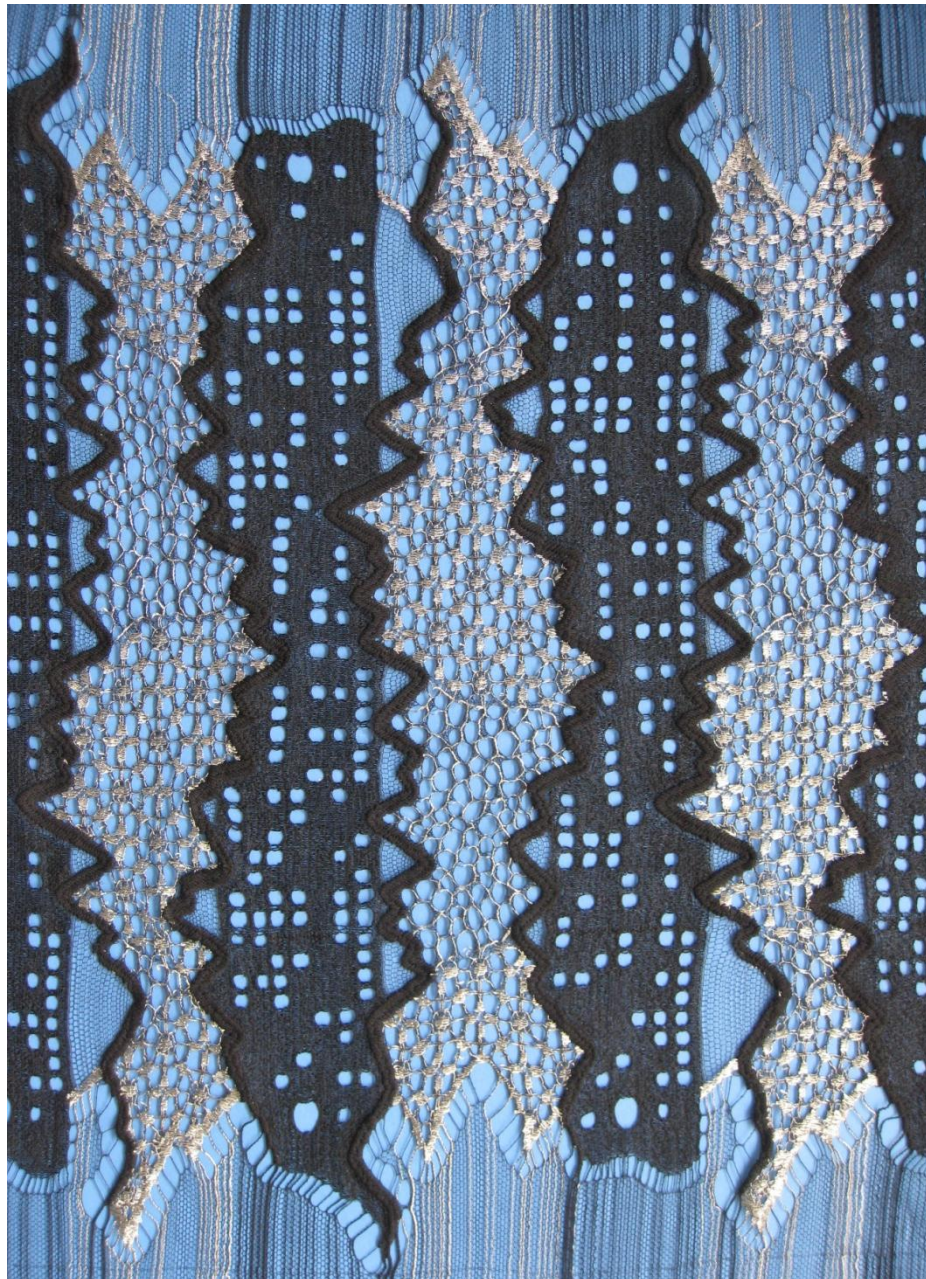


Figure 44: The lace dyed black, shown against a blue background similar to that of the pages in the legal deposit registers

To demonstrate the way in which the appearance of lace was altered by dyeing two handling samples were each immersed in single colour dye-baths. The resulting samples illustrated the way in which the threads reacted differently to cold and hot water dyes. <sup>182</sup>



Figure 45: Dye trials on handling samples

It was intended that a wider range of colours would be introduced into the range, possibly based on the coloured windows of the Centre. Whilst textile industries were known to be acutely aware of the impact of colour on sales, it was felt that the multiple colour experiments on the new lace would help the Centre to introduce students to the importance of this aspect of lace design.

### **Potential**

For CIDM one of the most important factors in the development of this new design was its potential for educational impact on students, designers and local manufacturers. Developing a contemporary pattern and then changing the configuration of the Jacquard cards and the combinations of threads was intended to demonstrate the way in which relatively minor changes created

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<sup>182</sup> This was where Rumigny's understanding of the potential offered by differing thread properties paid greatest dividends.



significant variations in the product in both visual and tactile terms. Once the machine was set up the tullistes could run the design with a chosen set of threads for as long as required. The same pattern could then be run with the same threads in a different order, or with different threads, to produce laces with quite different appearances and tactile qualities. These experimental changes could easily be accommodated by the Centre and were therefore seen as a useful tool for teaching design and potentially also for the local lace industry.

The lace also had much potential for future educational projects beyond the Centre's immediate environs. Design projects and competitions based on the lace could be exhibited at CIDM. The fashion, textile, design and marketing departments across UCA could offer opportunities for future projects based on the new lace. The first cross-channel project with the new lace was instigated when CIDM approached London based fashion house Boudicca<sup>183</sup> to produce an exhibit for the closing event of the Crysalis Project (Figure 46). Rumigny and I met with the Boudicca team and introduced them to the concepts behind the lace. This enabled them to build links to the lace's origins into their reactive installation *Lace Sound Dress* (Boudicca, 2014).<sup>184</sup> I was particularly keen to see Anglo-French links being promoted to link back into the history of machine made lace in Calais which began with the importation of machinery and workers from England.

Within my own practice, repetition had always been a core component and I was keen to consider ways in which this might be paired with motion in future work. I also envisaged future exploration of the potential of incorporating different sounds from the archive, and materials, within contemporary lace practice. The potential of machine made lace in contemporary practice was an area which was under considered and which I would like to incorporate into future projects. All of these avenues were seen as being suited to transdisciplinary collaborative projects.

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<sup>183</sup> Boudicca had previously been involved with the Crysalis Project with an exhibition of their work and Master Classes at Plymouth College of Art. As Zowie Broach of Boudicca had just been appointed Head of Fashion at the Royal College of Art her enthusiasm for the new lace could lead to new links being forged with the RCA.

<sup>184</sup> This included using my original sound recordings of loom 7 at work and recordings of it producing the new lace.

## Summary

This collaborative project allowed me to insert my conceptual ideas and English lacemaking heritage into a French industrial and museological context. Drawing on my awareness of the CIDM legal deposit registers engendered a continuation of spirit of place and industry as innovation, design excellence and high quality material output have always been cornerstones of the Calais lace industry. These references across time informed a contemporary design which addressed gaps in knowledge and enriched the visitors' experience as well as offering inspiration to future designers. At CIDM it was possible to take risks with both the design and the threads because the Centre was not constrained by the commercial requirements of industry.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> In a commercial situation innovation and trialling would require taking a machine and operative out of the production chain which could be costly, especially if the experiments were not successful.



Figure 46: *Lace Sound Dress*. Reactive installation by Boudicca. TIO3, 2014

## 11. Conclusion

‘ . . . archive fever has done its work’.

(Maddock, 2015)

### Overview

The archive is widely understood to be an ordered keeper of factual truth but ‘textiles can be shown to have multiple and competing histories’ (Eastop, 2000:22). The research questioned the possibility of challenging the conventional reading of lace in archives by considering the impact of the lacunae in the archives. The lacunae were expected to reveal multiple histories of lace, including some which might have created biases in the existing understanding of lace. The research was undertaken through contemporary lace practice in combination with two case studies.

At the outset of the research it was impossible to know if suitable lacunae would be found within the archives. Cooke’s (2008:25) description of an absence as being ‘something we may not even be looking for – in fact may not even be aware of’ became a key concept in this element of the research. Not knowing that something was absent until it was shown to be so could be seen as one of the most challenging aspects of the research; it was also one of the most rewarding.

The subjectivity of the researcher’s interests, and agenda, was noted as a major factor in practice as well as in the interpretation of the objects and data of the case studies. The scholarly rigour shown in acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher was a reflection of the standard of transparency of documentation exercised throughout the thesis.

The researcher being open to the possibilities offered by contingency and intuitive deduction was seen as important as these produced unforeseeable opportunities and often fruitful research avenues. Chance remarks and questions were fertile ground for bringing together unexpected information and connections and fed into the knowledge pool in serendipitous ways. Acting on instinct and following up seemingly tenuous links were key activities and intuitive leaps of faith were frequently productive. The time and space to mentally free-associate was an important element in recognising the relevance of apparently minor details within a larger framework. At the same time, attention to fine detail was as integral to the research process as the lacemaker's ability to effectively draw together many individual threads to form a coherent whole.

Numerous gaps and absences only became apparent through the application of specialist knowledge. Although already a specialist in many areas of lace this research required the deepening and refinement of the researcher's knowledge base and the acquisition of new skills in certain areas.

At the core of the contemporary lace practice was the understanding of lace as a system of linking materials which gave form to the lacunae which were the essence of the fabric. The stance was taken that the connecting material and the void were inextricably interlinked and that each was informed by the other. Hill's (1993) notion of sedimentation proved particularly relevant to the working methods adopted for the practice *Arkheion* and *Reading shadows* which could be understood as a metaphor for the formation of the archive. It was noted that archives provide a mediated and nuanced image of the past and this notion was explored through the practice *Mediation*, *Tracks* and *Reading objects*. In these pieces the unseen hand of the mediator was considered as an influence on the interpretation of lace in museums.

It was by considering the potential influence of the lacunae in archives that new understandings of the lace in the case studies were revealed. This research centred on the interpretation of historic lace as a material object; not only as a

fabric which conveyed status but also as a product which was manufactured, traded and worn and which drove innovation.

Within the case studies it was often necessary to read between the lines; to look for what had not been recorded or collected and perhaps more importantly to ask why it was not present. The research exposed biases within the archives which challenged the established reading of the archive as a solid foundation of historical accuracy. Through its readings of the lacunae within the archive the research uncovered previously unknown connections, some of which challenged the conventional reading of lace in museums. This in turn led to the highlighting of alternative understandings of the meanings of lace.

In the BMAG case study the Museum's holdings of lace, and lace related artefacts, were explored with a view to identifying the gaps and absences, and to facilitate new readings of this historic textile. Researching across the Museum's holdings identified and brought together artefacts, information and textiles which represented a broader spectrum of lace history than was recorded in the lace collection index.

As with any museum object the reading of Birmingham's lace was influenced by the context in which it was situated. The conditions of its manufacture, trade and consumption were considered as well as the circumstances by which the items came into the Museum's possession. This application of specialist knowledge challenged assumptions about the historical relevance of lace and helped to redress the bias in the Museum's traditional view of lace as a symbol of social status. In-depth research was documented and a number of gaps identified and filled.

The curation of the insertion *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* was the public expression of some of the findings of the research at BMAG. My roles as researcher, subject specialist, curator and practitioner allowed me to interrogate the lacunae in the archive and to respond to my discoveries. This included the consideration of issues such as class, gender and changing morality. The insertion offered alternative narratives and histories for artefacts, from the lace

collection and beyond, by positioning them in new contextual situations which additionally invited the viewer to add their own connections and interpretations. The physical groupings of the objects, their labels and the accompanying text panels all carried the weight of authority traditionally conferred on anything displayed in a museum. However, as Hooper-Greenhill (1992:197) points out, 'the values and priorities that are taken for granted in museums today are not the same as the values and priorities that were important in the past'. The readings which I produced might not be in accord with the original meaning of the object nor could it be claimed that they reflected the intentions of the people who donated the objects to the Museum; they were in fact highly personal, subjective, interpretations of the objects based on my specialist knowledge and partisan interests.

The CIDM case study considered the Centre's first legal deposit register as a source of historical information relating to the manufacturing of machine made lace in Calais. The legal deposit registers were instigated as a method of legally proving lace manufacturers' copyright claims and were intended to avert litigation on such matters. The legal deposit registers could thus be viewed as a product attesting to an ideology of value. They were highly mediated records focusing on the date of the copyright deposit, the name of the manufacturer who made the deposit and a sample of the item for which the copyright was claimed. The limited text that they contained rendered treating the registers as a material archive the most appropriate approach.

The research provided the opportunity to look at which histories were not being told by the archive and explore the significance of lace production in the wider Calais community. Much of the case study was concerned with reading between the lines in that it focussed on histories that were not actually recorded in the words of the register but were contained in the samples and in the chronological gaps between the deposits. That which was not recorded was as important in the interpretation of the archive as that which was present. The contents of the legal deposit register were, quite literally, fragments of a much wider history to which this case study sought to trace the threads of connecting ideas, contexts and histories.

The physical legal deposit register could be understood as a picture book. This however would do it a disservice; the register held deeper levels of information for a viewer who had the knowledge to interpret what was set before them. It was noted that all of the technical and design innovations evidenced in the register relied on the skills of an unacknowledged workforce. By recognising this it could be shown that the register concealed a deep layer of hidden information.

As a result of the research at CIDM I was invited to be part of a team which was brought together to create a new lace design to be manufactured on an historic Leavers lace machine at the Centre. My role was to collaborate with local dessinateur Frederic Rumigny to originate the design concept and produce design sketches. My primary concept for the design was to set up a mutually responsive dialogue between the machine and the lace it produced and to draw out some of the ways in which the normally hidden mechanisms might come to be associated with their output.

Within my research at CIDM one major gap was my lack of the French language. One of the main effects of this was that many discussions relating to the new design were mediated through an interpreter and it was necessary to ensure that the correct message was relayed.<sup>186</sup> Visual exchanges of information with diagrams were frequent and effective and this aspect of the process was seen as forming a parallel with the primarily visual information in the legal deposit registers and with the way in which lace was understood by the non specialist observer and consumer.

### **Original contribution to knowledge**

The research for this thesis has demonstrated ways in which new insights into selected archives can be elucidated by interlinking research through case studies and contemporary lace practice.

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<sup>186</sup> Amongst other things I learnt to say 'machine made lace' rather than my usual 'machine lace' which tended to become 'lace machine' when translated.



The application of the specialist skills and knowledge of an experienced lacemaker brought a unique and original understanding to all aspects of this research. It was acknowledged that other artists and practitioners had referenced both lace and archives in their work but few, if any, had considered the archive through the medium of contemporary lace. The practice illuminated the archival research by giving form to the voids and manifesting previously hidden connections. The practice also produced new contextual and conceptual ways of looking at lace in archives.

At BMAG the research revealed that contingency had been a major agency acting on the contents of the lace collection.<sup>187</sup> Contingency was also shown to have played its part in what was known about the artefacts.<sup>188</sup> The research demonstrated that the meaning attributed to artefacts had been influenced by the hierarchical privileging of information within the archive, and particularly on the index cards, where the interests of the founders and wealthy patrons continued to exert their influence.

Lace is the materialisation of time, skill and labour, whether it is made by hand or machine, it is not only a carrier of artistic labour but also of information and meaning to those with the knowledge to interpret its complexities. Whilst the traditional museum interpretation of lace as a signifier of social status was shown to be fully justified, the case study revealed that lace was not merely an expensive decorative fabric.

Considering lace as a unit of currency that was traded at many levels of society demonstrated the breadth of its influence. A complex web of exchange mechanisms existed in the trading of lace; from the Honiton lacemaker selling a few sprigs of lace to buy a meal, through the dealers and merchants to the final, often wealthy, consumer. These links were rarely visible in the Museum archives but the research offered an insight into the relative values assigned to

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<sup>187</sup> Through both the historic absence of a lace collecting policy and the wide range of unsolicited donations.

<sup>188</sup> This included the lack of original provenance provided with some donations, decisions as to what should appear on the records and assumed knowledge rendering the use of the word lace unnecessary.

lace as it rose from humble threads to luxury commodity and museum specimen.

There is a widespread perception of bobbin lacemaking as a pleasant pastime that brought a little added income to rural families but the research demonstrated that this image was often far from the truth. The lacemakers, usually women and girls, were often highly skilled but lacemaking was widely associated with the poor and child labour was common. As anonymous lacemakers could rarely be associated with specific items of lace their story formed a large gap in the Museum archives which affected the understanding of the wider significance and value of lace. The research demonstrated that this significance extended to the wider community through those who supported the lace trade in secondary roles such as the bobbin makers. The interpretations of a lace pillow and its associated bobbins added details to the understanding of the lives and interests of the lacemakers despite these tools being rarely viewed as having any great significance beyond their decorative appearance.

Machine made lace also required skilled workers but in the factories it was men who were the skilled hands and historic documents were used to show that the best were well paid. These records showed that this main workforce was supplemented by many more hands in the finishing trades, again child labour was common. Without evidence of the hidden histories of the lace finishers the archives were shown to present a biased view of machine made lace as being a product that came directly from machine to distributor without hours of toil by ancillary workers.

The research also highlighted changing attitudes to artefacts that reflected the way in which an archive might be read differently with the passage of time. An example of this was the later 20<sup>th</sup> century perception of machine made lace as being inferior to handmade lace. Contemporary reports were used to demonstrate that the Victorians prized the novelty and ingenuity of this most delicate product of the Industrial Revolution. This attitude was noted by Youmans (1876:543) when writing about lace: 'the writer was recently assured .

. . that no hand-made ground could compare in beauty and perfection of workmanship with some of the exquisite grounds now made by machinery’.

The illicit side of the trade in lace has been romanticised through popular fiction, such as Kipling’s *Smugglers Song* and Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*. These works introduced a large sector of the public to the notion that lace was once an item on the smugglers most lucrative list; a matter rarely alluded to in museum texts. That lace was a regular target of thieves is less widely known, but well documented. Transcripts from the Old Bailey were cited as evidence of crimes relating to lace and the associated punishments. A thief being willing to risk transportation to Australia for stealing a length of lace could be seen as a more graphic demonstration of its worth than an original price of 10 shillings.

The application of specialist knowledge led to a number of significant discoveries including the identification of an example of early (c.1600-20) plaited bobbin lace.<sup>189</sup> A square of 19<sup>th</sup> century needlelace depicting the Lamb of God on four sides<sup>190</sup> was identified as a Burse, or Chalice Veil, with an edging of plaited bobbin lace dating from the early 1600s. The technical reasons underlying the reversed positions of the figures in a lace medallion depicting the Holy Trinity were illuminated.<sup>191</sup> The Museum’s lace bobbins had only been researched as items of Treen, the new research added significantly to knowledge of these objects. This included deciphering a number of spiral inscriptions such as; MY:DEAR:IF:YOU:LOVE:ME:MAKE:ME:YOUR:BRIDE,<sup>192</sup> revealing the previously unknown existence of a rare Cow in Calf bobbin<sup>193</sup> and the identification of the work of a number of named bobbin makers.

Detailed examination of existing, but un-researched, documentation repositioned the Taylor Trunk and its contents. Despite being catalogued as part of the Social History collection this trunk contained lacemaking equipment. The research revealed that Mrs Hannah Taylor, who donated the trunk and its

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<sup>189</sup> Accession number 1933M496. Previously thought to be Reticella needlelace.

<sup>190</sup> Accession number 1949M126.

<sup>191</sup> Accession number 1931M699. The image was drafted correctly but this form of ‘raised’ lace is worked face down, in this case resulting in the reversal of the image in the finished item.

<sup>192</sup> Accession number 1977F302.296.

<sup>193</sup> Accession number 1977F302.541.

contents, was the daughter of Mrs WA Cadbury, a major donor of lace to the Museum. Close scrutiny of the correspondence associated with this donation revealed that the equipment had been part of Mrs Cadbury's private collection of lace related material.<sup>194</sup>

The insertion *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* gave tangible form to a series of histories which would not have been obvious from the traditional approach to reading a lace archive. The insertion demonstrated how the context of a collection could be influenced by archivists and curators through their choice of what to record, where to place artefacts taxonomically, what to exhibit (and what to exhibit it with) and what information to privilege in exhibitions. The decisions on what to include in the insertion were the product of the agenda of this research; to demonstrate the multiplicity of meanings which could be associated with historic lace in a museum setting.

In undertaking the research for this insertion I was afforded the privilege of ranging widely across the Museum's holdings ignoring taxonomies and collection boundaries. The resultant selection of objects demonstrated the potential of cross-collection research in the formation of new interconnected relationships. Repositioning objects in alternative contexts, in order to draw out previously hidden connections, was intended to influence the way in which the viewer perceived the significance of these objects. One aspect of this was the use of non-textile items to draw out new understandings of lace.

By considering the importance of lace across a wide social spectrum the insertion demonstrated that it had value at many levels of society. To the workers who fabricated the lace it was a means of earning a living. To the dealers, both male and female, who traded in lace it was a source of income and often of wealth. To the consumer it conveyed their taste, wealth and social status. The more conceptually aware members of the audience might have been conscious of undercurrents of Marxist theory, including the reading of manufactured objects as tokens of commodity exchange, and the suppression

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<sup>194</sup> Disappointingly the whereabouts of Mrs Cadbury's private collection of lace remained unknown.

of the history of one class through the promotion of another. The use of historical objects to raise contemporary issues such as gender bias, child labour and factory working conditions in the textile trade demonstrated that lace could be thought provoking as well as visually beautiful.

At CIDM the research clearly demonstrated that whilst on the surface the legal deposit register told only the story of the manufacturers who paid to have their products registered; this was not the only history that it contained. To look beyond its immediate contents and offer a fuller presentation of the relevance and importance of the legal deposit register required a trained interpreter with detailed knowledge of lace production and an understanding of the wider lace trade as well as fashion and social history. With the application of specialist knowledge the register revealed hidden histories which evidenced different truths about its contents and relevance.

The legal deposit register did not represent the usual life-cycle of the lace it contained and thus many of the narratives which frame our understanding of objects were missing. However, attention was drawn to the presence of the more ordinary, everyday, nets and edgings. These unremarkable pieces were highly important production items at the time but rarely survive in museum collections.

The register was shown to hold material evidence of not only the ingenuity of the designers and technicians but also of the existence of more hands who were involved in the lace trade. For those unaware of finishing techniques, such as clipping and scalloping, many of the samples might appear untidy or ill-conceived but to the specialist eye these same samples offered a wealth of information.

The research demonstrated that the information held in the register could be shown to be riddled with lacunae. Some of the identified lacunae were brought about by the manufacturers' decisions on what not to copyright; examples of background processes such as pattern sketching and drafting occurred only rarely in the register. Larger voids were shown to be formed by the loss of tacit

knowledge and understanding of how to read the technical aspects of the deposits. Evidence of the existence of finishing trades was widespread throughout the register but required specialist knowledge to identify. Similarly the lack of text within the register meant that breakthroughs in design, material and technique were not necessarily easy to spot. Some of the gaps in the chronology of the register were shown to conceal important social narrative threads such as the effects of revolution.

The collaborative project to design a new lace to be manufactured on an historic loom at CIDM allowed me to insert my conceptual ideas and English lacemaking heritage into a French industrial and museological context. Drawing on experience of the legal deposit registers and wider holdings at CIDM engendered a continuation of spirit of place and industry; innovation, design excellence and high quality material output have always been cornerstones of the Calais lace industry. These references across time informed a contemporary design which was intended to address gaps in knowledge and to enrich the visitors' experience as well as inspiring future designers.

I chose to make the machine itself the core element of the new design. The physical size, weight and solidity, the speed of movement and almost overwhelming sound of the machines sat in stark contrast to the lightness and visual delicacy of the lace they produced. The Jacquard cards were another hidden but essential element of lace production. Although frequently referenced by local architects the cards were rarely evidenced in lace designs. I felt that incorporating some aspect of the cards in the design would redress this absence. The parallels and differences between handmade and machine made laces were referenced through the utilisation of Bedfordshire/Point d'Irlande and craquele lace grounds.

It could be said that only those who had knowledge of the design and manufacturing processes could read the full significance of the finished lace but this would omit many other potential understandings. It was fascinating to discover that whilst my eye was drawn to the grounds in the finished lace my co-designer, Rumigny, focused on the Jacquard areas. Fashion house

Boudicca, by contrast, homed in on the zigzags and related them back to the sounds from which this part of the design had originated. I suspect that the different areas of interest stemmed from our differing backgrounds in handmade lace, machine made lace and fine art. The variations in potential readings of the new lace at CIDM were dependent on the technical or tacit knowledge of the viewer in much the same way as my reading of the registers had applied different areas of knowledge to their interpretation.

This collaborative project demonstrated a high level of knowledge transfer through the rich dialogue between artists and material, tulliste and machine,<sup>195</sup> heritage and innovation. In a trade renowned for its secrecy the international co-operation and knowledge exchange engendered in this project was a remarkable achievement.

### **Dissemination**

The dissemination of the research engaged a new audience with both the wider issues which could be addressed through historic lace and the potential of contemporary lace as an artistic medium and research process. Elements of the exploratory practice were exhibited in a number of venues including Artworks, Milton Keynes,<sup>196</sup> and the Crypt Gallery, St Pancras Church, London.<sup>197</sup>

The staging of the insertion *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* within the gallery space of BMAG fulfilled the aim of situating a new study of specialist archives in the public arena and stimulating public engagement with the reinterpretation of the past. The insertion formed part of a programme around the theme of lace in the Museum which attracted in excess of 40,000 visitors (Earthen Lamp, 2012). In his report to the Textile Society, for their Museum Award 2011, BMAG Exhibitions Manager Andy Horn (2012-13:81) remarked that 'the response to *Concealed and Revealed* was very positive and generated a huge amount of visitor interest'. The interest level was evidenced in a survey

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<sup>195</sup> Lacemaking on a Leavers machine may be seen as a union of art and technology but it is heavily reliant on the tacit knowledge of the tullistes to keep the machines running smoothly.

<sup>196</sup> *Framing Space*, Artworks, Milton Keynes 2012.

<sup>197</sup> *Fabric of Memory*, Crypt Gallery, St Pancras Church, London 2013

of museum visitors and Horn noted that a proportion 'came specifically to see *Concealed and Revealed*, which equates to around 3,600 people'. He went on to comment that it 'was seen by approximately 185,000 visitors so reached a much wider demographic than those already with a specific interest in lace and textiles'.

As a part of the Museum education programme there were numerous lace related talks and guided tours. The 'tours all began in *Concealed and Revealed* with a discussion of the histories of lace. This represented 768 individuals, many of whom were textile and art students' (Horn, 2012-13:81). Amongst the tours was one which the researcher led for members of the Textile Society. This enabled the transmission of some of the more detailed aspects of the research to a knowledgeable audience.

The concept behind the insertion was outlined in an essay for the publication *Lost in Lace: Transparent Boundaries* (Millar, 2011a) which accompanied the exhibition *Lost in Lace: New approaches by UK and international artists*.

The new lace which was designed for CIDM is on permanent display within the Centre.<sup>198</sup> When loom 7 is being demonstrated, and the new lace is actually being made, it can be said to be enriching the visitors' experience of CIDM. The accompanying commentary by the tulliste also adds to the visitors' understanding of the qualities of Leavers lace. The Centre uses samples and images of the lace in their publicity material, including Press Releases, thus broadening the general awareness of the design.

As the lace design was part funded by the Crysalis Project, samples of the new lace were sent to all of the partner institutions. These reference samples offered the opportunity to bring the potential of contemporary lace designs to the attention of an international body of students and tutors over a prolonged period. Further evidence of international collaborative initiatives in the form of the *Lace Sound Dress* by Boudicca also brought the new lace to a wider

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<sup>198</sup> The indicated route around the Centre's exhibits takes visitors past the loom on which the lace is made and on which it is always visible.



audience. This reactive installation was first exhibited at TIO3 in Ronse, Belgium, and then returned to CIDM for future exhibition.

The researcher gave presentations on the development of the new lace at the *Crysalis Closing Event* in Ronse<sup>199</sup> and at the international conference *CREA-Zone: Coloured District* in Kortrijk, Belgium.<sup>200</sup>

Knowledge gained from the case studies and practice was incorporated into a number of other conference presentations including *Lace and the Museum* at the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh,<sup>201</sup> and *Lace: the transgressive thread* at the University for the Creative Arts, Farnham.<sup>202</sup> A paper was also delivered to the symposium *The Art of Lace: Historic and Contemporary Materials, Techniques and Display*.<sup>203</sup>

## Legacy

In addition to many discrete individual new contributions to knowledge this research produced lasting legacies for both of the case study institutions and in personal practice.

At BMAG this was primarily through the reinterpretation of its important lace collection. It also broadened the Museum's understanding of the importance and breadth of their holdings that relate to lace and resulted in an increased awareness of lace amongst the Museum staff and volunteers. This widening of awareness was evidenced in the response to the researcher's request to view the portrait of Lady Mason<sup>204</sup> which resulted in the rediscovery of its whereabouts.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Paper: Knowledge Transfer in practice. 27<sup>th</sup> September 2014.

<sup>200</sup> Paper: An Innovative lace design. 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

<sup>201</sup> Paper: Reading between the lines. 9<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

<sup>202</sup> Paper: The hidden hand. 16<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

<sup>203</sup> Paper: Lace at the Edge: What is Lace? Waddesdon Manor. 13<sup>th</sup> September 2014.

<sup>204</sup> Accession number 1900P172.

<sup>205</sup> The portrait had been listed as 'missing' on the Minisis inventory. Enquiries amongst the wider staff base revealed that it was thought to be hanging in a Local Authority Care Home. The portrait was returned to the museum for the display and the inventory updated.

The research revealed that lace existed in many areas of the Museum's holdings and not only in historic textiles; this revelation held implications for the future reconsideration of other collections held by the Museum. By repositioning certain paintings, and artefacts from the Pinto collection of Treen, within a textile context the research demonstrated the possibilities of broadening the appeal of established pieces by recontextualising them within new conceptual frameworks with which they had not previously been associated. The methodological strategy of cross collection research was adopted by curator Sylvia Crawley when researching basketry related objects and materials for a presentation to the AGM of the Basketmakers' Association in 2011.<sup>206</sup> It was hoped that this would pave the way for curators and researchers to undertake further work across the Museum's collections.

The Museum benefited from the in-depth documentation of the research analysis and findings such as the importance of the Point de Gaze rubbing and associated correspondence. It was hoped that external funding would become available to allow more of the research findings to be added to the Museum's computer records. Additionally it was hoped that funding would be found for the photography of some of the lace in order for it to be included on the Museum's website which would make it available to the wider public.

Curating the insertion, *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*, constituted a major breakthrough in practice; presenting lace as forming conceptual rather than material links. The insertion situated this new study of a specialist archive in the public arena, bringing the collection to the attention of a wide audience. Verbal feedback, both direct and reported, indicated that it also enhanced the experience of many viewers who also visited the major contemporary exhibition *Lost in Lace: New approaches by UK and international artists*. This should encourage further displays of historic material as contextual reference points for contemporary exhibitions within the Museum.

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<sup>206</sup> This was a direct result of experiencing the way in which her colleagues from other departments had responded favourably to my enquiries about lace and the, often, unexpected connections which this had revealed.

The CIDM case study broadened the Centre's awareness of the legal deposit registers and underlined the importance and versatility of this area of their archival holdings. The first register was shown to hold far more information than that which was written on the pages and the methodology of treating the register as a material archive could be applied to other registers and to the manufacturers' folios in the collection.

The application of specialist knowledge led to the legal deposit registers being reconsidered as a source of technical knowledge, social history and design inspiration. The broader understanding of the registers enabled the Centre to promote the registers as a reference point for artists and designers as well as being an impeccable source of historical provenance. The Centre also benefitted from the research through the associated access to funding which enabled the digitisation of all 253 legal deposit registers. Having a digital version of the registers available for study not only safeguarded the physical preservation of the registers but allowed much wider access to their contents.

Through this case study the researcher's knowledge of machine made lace was expanded and fine-tuned to an advanced level. This offers great potential for future research as this is an area of textiles which is under researched and in which expertise is sadly lacking.

The collaborative practice undertaken at CIDM produced a contemporary design for lace which the Centre could use more freely than the lace which was already being produced. Documentation of the design origination was added to the Centre's archive and can be referenced on request. The new lace provided CIDM with a tool which could be used to educate the Centre's visitors about the specific qualities of Leavers lace and the continuing importance of the local lace industry. The lace could also be used for educational purposes with students at many levels of study both within the Centre and beyond.

An unexpected outcome of this project was the impact that my working methods had on professional lace designer Frederic Rumigny who expressed his delight

at being introduced to the idea of taking design inspiration from less obvious sources such as sound, movement and smell.<sup>207</sup>

As a result of these projects the legal deposit registers and Leavers lace machines at CIDM were no longer seen as purely historical artefacts but as objects capable of inspiring a new generation of designers, including those from disciplines outside lace design. The results of the project clearly demonstrated the value of transferable knowledge and fostered a new area of international collaboration which has continued beyond the timeframe of the research.

As a result of the positive responses to dissemination of our research, fellow doctoral research student, Carol Quarini and I founded the Lace Research Network. For its launch in May 2014 we organised the inaugural international conference, *Lace: the transgressive thread*, and the accompanying exhibition *In Air Cut Works by Piper Shepard*. These were the first outputs of the newly established International Textile Research Centre at UCA.<sup>208</sup> We were invited to co-edit a special edition of the Journal of Modern Craft to showcase selected papers from the conference.<sup>209</sup>

### **Further Research**

Within both of the case studies and in practice many potential avenues of research were identified and decisions were taken regarding which threads were followed and which were set aside for potential future research. The methodologies used in the case studies could be applied to many other lace archives in museums and in private collections. There is also much scope for further research in both of the case study institutions.

At BMAG it would be particularly interesting to consider the influence of female donors on the contents of the Museum's holdings and how their influence varied

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<sup>207</sup> Rumigny indicated that the project had opened his eyes to new design sources which he would not previously have considered.

<sup>208</sup> The International Textile Research Centre, led by Professor Lesley Millar, includes the Anglo Japanese Textile Research Centre, the Lace Research Network and the Textile Research Forum.

<sup>209</sup> Anticipated publication date: Spring 2016.

over time. This would further demonstrate the value of cross-collection research within the museum. Another area with much potential for further exploration at BMAG would be the investigation of the unrecorded presence of lace. Lace on costume was not always recorded and, during the research for this case study, the presence of lace was noted in unexpected areas at the MCC. This research would incorporate depictions of lace in paintings, drawings and prints as well as on sculpture, coins, medals and ceramics. The machine made lace in the BMAG collections is an under researched and undervalued resource which would benefit from the application of an experienced eye. BMAG has a huge collection of lace bobbins from many different points of origin. The significance of this collection as a source of historical information has been largely overlooked and it would make a good subject for further research. Of particular note would be the background to the bobbin inscribed JUMP ABOUT JEM CROW which offers the tantalising prospect of potential links to the civil rights movement in America.

The practice *Networks* mapped some of the alternative connections which could have been made with the objects displayed in the insertion *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. It might prove enlightening to also consider the taxonomical classifications from which the exhibits were drawn, when they were last on display<sup>210</sup> and which appeared in the Museum's on-line catalogue. All of these themes would make visible alternative stories that could be told with objects in the Museum's holdings. The methodology used for this practice could be applied to other collections and to other museums.

In identifying lacunae within the legal deposit registers at CIDM this research also identified a number of possible avenues that might be built upon for future research within their collections. The history of individual companies could provide interesting links. One example would be the Champailler Company, who patented figured nets in 1834 and might be the same firm who introduced Blonde silk lace in 1853. The 1852 will of Robert Webster, of Calais, provided evidence of international links in the lace manufacturing trade. It would be

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<sup>210</sup> At BMAG or its associated institutions including Think Tank, Council Offices and other linked museum venues such as Aston Hall.

particularly interesting to investigate whether this was the same Robert Webster who had been instrumental in bringing lace machinery to Calais in 1816. It would also be fascinating to research whether or not the son, John, who was mentioned in the will was the John Webster of Nottingham who gave evidence to the White Report in 1862-3.

A comparative study of entries in the Calais legal deposit registers and the Board of Trade registers at Kew might illuminate wider cross-channel relations within the lace industry. Robert Maxton of Calais registered lace designs <sup>211</sup> with the Board of Trade, in London, in 1862 as did Williams and Maxton of Nottingham <sup>212</sup> in 1863. Designs for lace were also registered with the Board of Trade by Jane Maxton of Calais <sup>213</sup> in 1866 and further research might establish both family and commercial links as Maxton was a name which appeared frequently in the legal deposit register. Research into the registration of patents in England and France might also prove to be illuminating with regard to the level of international copyright concerns.

One of the major lacunae identified in the legal deposit registers was the relative lack of plain net. Research into the plain net trade, and the uses to which such net was put, would offer insights into a major aspect of the Calais lace industry. Although there was little evidence of this product in the legal deposit registers other documentation and artefacts in the Centre's holdings might offer greater insights into its importance to the region. This is an area of research which could be expanded to cover a wide range of international lace and costume collections and which could build greater links with industry.

As a result of work undertaken in designing the new lace for CIDM the researcher was invited to be involved in the creation of further designs for lace to be fabricated on their historic lace machines. This offered the opportunity for the further expanding of the researcher's technical knowledge and industrial links. Although not a project which the researcher would be directly involved

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<sup>211</sup> For example design number 153568 (The National Archives, 1862).

<sup>212</sup> For example design number 167062 (The National Archives, 1863).

<sup>213</sup> For example design number 199248 (The National Archives, 1866).

with, it would be interesting to see if CIDM might be encouraged to undertake oral history recordings of the stories of former workers in the lace trade in a similar manner to those being taken by researchers at Nottingham Trent University.

### **Final thought**

I had never considered my memory to be particularly retentive but this research has proved otherwise. I have come to realise that it is an active archive – an ever growing repository for large quantities of highly specialised information which is stored for potential future reference. The retrieval of this information simply requires the application of suitable stimuli. As with the archives of the case studies some of the most interesting information has not presented itself immediately, it has taken time to come to the surface. What I have recalled has often been a notion of familiarity or connectedness rather than facts or figures. I do, however, have an eye for detail and a willingness to chase down facts and figures from other sources. Perhaps, in relation to this research, my greatest gifts have been the capacity to recognise potential connections and the patience to allow the links time in which to manifest themselves clearly.

## Glossary

**Alb flounce** – flounce of lace attached to the lower edge of a priest's alb (short white linen robe).

**Bedfordshire lace** – bobbin lace made in the East Midlands lacemaking districts from the early 1850s. Distinguishable by its plaits, 'leaves' (or wheatears) and cloth stitch trails. Later also name for this style of lace produced by machine.

**Blonde** – a distinctive style of bobbin lace with a particularly light and airy ground contrasting with motifs of floss (untwisted) thread. Traditionally made with silk thread for its lustrous sheen. Later also name for this style of lace made by machine. Machine made version introduced use of rayon or 'Art Silk' when this became cheaper. Blonde lace was also produced, in smaller quantities, in black.

**Blonde** – as a colour term refers to creamy golden lace, not white or ecru.

**Bobbin winder** – hand operated device for winding thread onto bobbins quickly, cleanly and evenly.

**Bonelace** – early term for bobbin lace.

**Brides or bars** – common to both bobbin and needlelaces, these are the 'legs' that link areas or motifs in the design. They can be plain or heavily embellished with picots.

**Brown net** – machine made net as it leaves the machine, before mending, embellishing, clipping or stiffening.

**Brussels lace** – lace made in the Brussels area. Can be bobbin lace, bobbin and needlelace mixed or bobbin lace applied to machine-made net. Later also name for this style of lace produced by machine.

**Brussels application lace** – bobbin made motifs applied to machine made net. Made in the Brussels area.

**Bucks Point** – bobbin lace made in the East Midlands lacemaking districts. A point ground lace similar to Lille.

**Bullet-holes** – enlarged holes in machine made net.

**Burse or Chalice veil** – ecclesiastical covers for the sacrament in the Christian church. Often richly embellished with embroidery or lace as a mark of honour.

**Buyer (lace buyer)** – the majority of English bobbin lace was produced as a cottage industry. The buyer would visit the lacemakers, on behalf of the dealer, to purchase completed pieces of lace. The visits were usually weekly but would have been less frequent in more rural areas.

**Chantilly lace** – bobbin lace made in the Chantilly and Caen regions of France. Usually silk thread, predominantly black but also some blonde. Later also name for this style of lace made by machine.

**Chemise** – loose fitting woman's undergarment covering the upper part of the body. With or without sleeves. Finer versions have edgings and insertions of lace.

**Chip carved bobbin** – domestically carved lace bobbin, reputedly often given as love tokens.

**Church Window bobbin** – lace bobbin in which sections of the shank have been hollowed out to form windows. The 'bars' of the windows are often elaborately carved. Usually chip carved. Said to be based on the windows of Olney church (Springett, 1997).



**Clipping** – finishing process for machine made lace. Originally removal by hand, with fine scissors, of surplus threads left floating between patterned areas of machine made lace. Machine clipping was introduced in the 1950s.

**Contemporary lace** – this research began with the premise that contemporary lace does not require the use of specific techniques or stitch patterns but can be a pattern of constructed voids, random or geometric as the subject requires, fabricated in whatever medium is most appropriate.

**Cow in Calf bobbin** – bobbin that contains a hidden miniature bobbin attached to the base part of the bobbin when it is pulled apart.

**Craquele** – irregular ground, or net, specific to machine made lace. Cracqleur is an alternative spelling.

**Crochet** – form of lace make with a hook. Most notable historic style being Irish Crochet, a heavily padded form most popular during the Edwardian era.

**Dealer (lace dealer)** – the lace dealer controlled the designs, often commissioning them or employing a designer. The dealer put out the patterns to the lacemakers, and sold them the threads with which to work the patterns. The dealer purchased the completed lace from the maker and sold it on to the merchants or consumers. The use of the terms Dealer, Merchant and Retailer have varied over the centuries, for the sake of clarity this research has used Dealer for the person who purchased the lace from the lacemakers and Merchant for the person (or company) who purchased the lace from the dealer to sell on to the customer. Retailer has only been used where the term is quoted. It was the dealers who made the greatest profits in the lace trade.

**Dessinateur** – designer/sketcher.

**Digital Library** – online resource being produced as part of the Crystals project.

**Double cloth** – Double cloth is a form of woven textile in which two layers of fabric are interlinked.

**Double Jacquard** – loom number 7 at CIDM is equipped with a double Jacquard system which allows more complex grounds to be produced within the lace.

**Draftsman** – the technician who takes a lace pattern design, or sketch, and plots the route of each thread. A highly skilled tradesman who also adjusts the design to take account of width-wise shrinkage when the lace is taken off the tension of the loom.

**East Midlands** – lace making district encompassing Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire.

**Finishing** – umbrella term for the trades associated with machine made lace once it has been removed from the loom. Processes include mending, washing, bleaching, dyeing, separating of strips, scalloping and preparing for sale. May also include the further embellishment of designs by hand or machine.

**Flemish lace** – Flanders is an historic region of Europe, now divided between France and Belgium. A major area for the production of both bobbin and needle laces from the 17th onwards. Brussels, Mechlin and Valenciennes are among the laces made in this area.

**Floats** – floats are formed in machine made lace where thicker outlining threads lay above the surface of the lace without being worked. This method allows the threads to move from one area where they are incorporated to the next without interfering with the pattern. Float threads are removed in the clipping process.

**Galloon** – strip of lace designed with scallops along both edges.

**Gimp** – thicker thread used to outline motifs or form pattern within net. In Chantilly laces it is usually formed from multiple strands of the main working thread.

**Gros point de Venise** – needlelace made in the Venice area of Italy. Highly ornamented and heavily padded outlines to motifs. Also known as Venetian Gros Point. Later also name for this style of lace produced by machine.

**Guimpe** – French machine made lace term meaning cloth area. Not to be confused with gimp in bobbin lace.

**Hollie Point** – English needlelace produced in the 1700s, often found on baby clothes.

**Honiton** – lacemaking district in southern Devon, named after the town of Honiton from where regular transport was available to the markets of Bath and London.

**Honiton lace** – bobbin lace. A part-lace in which different workers made different motifs (sprigs) of the lace; the motifs were then joined together by other workers to form the completed lace design. The part-lace system allowed larger pieces of lace to be manufactured more rapidly than continuous laces which were made by a single worker. Later bobbin lace mounted onto machine made net.

**Jacquard cards** – the system of punched cards which control the formation of the pattern on a lace machine. A hole indicates that the thread does not move from its natural position, solid areas indicate how far to the right a thread is to be moved. Each pair of cards controls the thread movements for a single row of lace.

**Jacquardtronic** – modern lace machine, highly automated and computer controlled. Most cheap, fashion, lace is now produced on Jacquardtronic machines.

**Jesurum** – multi-coloured silk bobbin lace produced by M. Jesurum et Cie, in the Venice region of Italy, from the 1870s.

**Joined lappets** – when the fashion for lappets hanging from either side of the back of a cap changed the two part of the lappets were joined to make a single long strip.

**Knitted lace** – most famously hand knitted Shetland lace shawls. Also early machine made net made on the warp-frame knitting machine.

**Lace** – ‘A textile patterned with holes which are created by the manipulation of threads.’ (Earnshaw, 1982).

**Lace pillow** – ‘cushion’ on which bobbin lace was made and onto which the pattern/pricking was pinned. Traditionally constructed of calico fabric heavily stuffed with barley straw, which needed to be firm enough to support the pins that held the thread in place while the work was being tensioned. Note: Lace pillows come in a variety of shapes and sizes and were also used by some needlelace makers.

**Lacer** – thread used in machine made lace to join strips of lace whilst they are being manufactured, allowing multiple strips of the same pattern to be produced at the same time across the width of the machine. The lacer is withdrawn as part of the finishing process. Also known as Draw thread in British manufacturing.

**Lappets** – pairs of lace streamers originally attached to the back of a lace cap but later worn across the head falling over the ears at the sides. Could be worn hanging down or pinned up on top of the cap depending on the time of day or fashion of the era. Continued to be worn at Court, where there were strict rules governing their length according to social hierarchy, long after they went out of general fashion.

**Leavers lace machine/loom** – the Leavers machine was invented by John Lever c.1813, in the Nottingham area of England. (Earnshaw, 1986:107) The machines were adapted for use with the Jacquard system from 1834. Although all of the original patents were in the name of Lever the adaptation to Leaver is thought to have originated in France in the mid 1800s. The ‘a’ was officially adopted by the trade

association as a result of the recommendations of the Lace Working Party of 1946. (Earnshaw, 1986:108) No new Leavers looms are being produced, the last one was made in 1960. Spare parts are difficult to obtain but can sometimes be sourced from America.

**Lille** – traditionally bobbin lace with hexagonal net, named after the area in which it was originally produced. Similar to Bucks Point in UK. Later also name for this style of lace produced by machine.

**Liner** – thicker thread used to outline motif in machine made lace. Can be added by hand or machine depending on period. Equivalent of gimp in bobbin lace.

**Machine made lace** – machine made lace includes; Bobbin-net, Leavers, Pusher, Raschel and similar machine made laces based on twisted threads. Also included in machine made lace are machine embroidered nets such as Schiffli and Cornelly lace. Swiss, Chemical and Burnt-out laces, which are created by machine embroidery onto a fabric background which is later removed with chemicals or heat, are also included. For the sake of clarity within this case study knitted laces produced on the warp or stocking frame are not being included in this category.

**Machine threading** – process by which threads are manually assigned to their correct positions on the lace machine.

**Mechlin** – Flemish bobbin lace noted for its silky gimp outlining thread and fine hexagonal ground. Later also name for this style of lace made by machine.

**Merchant (lace merchant)** – lace merchants were the middlemen between the dealer and the consumer, mostly trading from shops in large towns and cities. The use of the terms Dealer, Merchant and Retailer have varied over the centuries, for the sake of clarity this research has used Dealer for the person who purchased the lace from the lacemakers and Merchant for the person (or company) who purchased the lace from the dealer to sell on to the consumer. Retailer has only been used where the term is quoted.

**Mother and babe bobbin** – lace bobbin in which a section of the shank has been hollowed out and a miniature, or ‘baby’, bobbin inserted.

**Needlelace / Needlepoint lace** – lace worked with needle and thread. Primarily worked in detached button-hole stitch on laid thread outlines. Outlines may be highly raised and ornamented depending on the style of lace.

**Outlining thread** – thicker thread used to outline motifs or form patterns within the net. Also a technical specificity of the Leavers lace machine.

**Peas** – cloth stitch spots in machine made lace.

**Picot** – small decorative loop at edge of lace or on guipure bar. Hand or machine made.

**Plain net** – machine made net with no patterning. Can be hexagonal or diamond shaped mesh.

**Point d’Argentan** – needlelace made in the Argentan region of France. Similar in style to Venetian needlelaces. Later also name for this style of lace produced by machine.

**Point d’Angleterre** – originally the name applied to Brussels bobbin lace in an attempt to circumvent regulations banning the importation of foreign laces after 1662.

**Point d’Irlande** – name given to machine made imitations of Irish Crochet lace.

**Point de France** – late 17th to early 18th century needlelace similar in style to Venetian needlelaces. Forerunner of Alençon and Argentan needlelace. Later also name for this style of lace produced by machine.

**Point de Gaze** – needlepoint lace made in the Brussels area most usually with very light reseau but older examples may have guipure ground. Good examples often have raised, layered, petals on flowers such as roses. Later also name for this style of lace made by machine.

**Point de Paris** – bobbin lace similar to Lille but with different, more open, mesh. This style of net ground is also referred to as wire ground and kat stitch. Later also name for this style of lace made by machine.

**Point Plat de Venise** – needlepoint lace made in the Venice area of Italy. Plat indicates that this is a ‘flat’ lace without raised ornamentation. Later also name for this style of lace produced by machine.

**Pricking** – design of pricked, or punched, holes indicating the placement of support pins in the bobbin lacemaking process. Prickings frequently carry markings indicating the form of stitch pattern to be used in certain areas. Traditionally made of parchment, later of glazed card. May give indication of number of bobbins to be used and occasionally the dealer’s name.

**Raschels** – lace machine developed from the Warp Frame knitting machine. Raschels lace can be distinguished from Leavers lace by the chain stitches visible on the reverse of the Raschels lace.

**Reticella** – lace formed by the removal of areas of threads from fabric, decoratively working over the remaining threads with buttonhole stitches and infilling parts of the remaining gaps with decorative stitching.

**Rubbing** – method of copying relief images such as lace, prickings or church brasses.

**Spangle** – ring of, usually glass, beads attached to the bottom of East Midlands lace bobbins to add weight and assist with tensioning the threads.

**Sprigs** – individual design motifs most usually associated with Honiton bobbin lace. Many lacemakers would produce different sprigs which would then be assembled into a larger item of lace.

**Square-cuts** – glass beads frequently used in spangles. Often made by the village blacksmith, the patterning on the sides being created by shaping the glass with flat metal files.

**Support threads** – threads used in machine made lace to support otherwise unattached threads such as picots and turning stitched. Support threads are removed in the finishing process either by withdrawing or heat based treatment.

**Swiss lace** – machine-made lace produced by embroidering onto muslin which is then dissolved away with chemicals – hence the alternative names of chemical or burnt-out lace.

**Tally** – small block of solid weaving. Hand or machine made.

**Tape lace** – machine made tapes tacked onto a glazed linen pattern, joined with needlelace stitches and removed from backing when completed. Still made commercially in India and China producing wedding fans, parasols etc.

**Tatting** – a form of knotted lace made with one or more shuttles.

**Technical draft** – process of drafting where each thread will move to in each row of the design. Technical drafts are worked at seven times actual scale and the pattern distorted width ways to account for shrinkage when the lace is removed from tension. The technical drafter may make changes to the original sketch to accommodate a smoother flow of the threads or to compensate for areas which appear under or over filled when the design is seen at the larger scale.

**Threading** – process by which threads are manually assigned to their correct positions on the lace machine.

**Triple cloth** – a form of woven textile in which three layers of fabric are interlinked.

**Tulliste** – tullistes operate the lace machines. 'Tulliste' in French, 'racker' or 'twisthand' in UK. Tullistes were traditionally paid by the 'rack' – a rack is a production unit meaning 1920 motions (swings) of the carriages. One rack can be 15-90cm of lace. Looms usually work at 4 racks per hour.

**Valenciennes** – bobbin lace named after the area in which it was originally produced. Stylistically most often associated with diamond net. Later also name for this style of lace made by machine.

**Valenciennes de Gand (Ghent)** – a form of bobbin lace. A part lace, with similarities to Honiton or Brussels but identified by its different grounds. Only made for a short period.

**Venetian Gros Point** – needlelace made in the Venice area of Italy. Highly ornamented and heavily padded outlines to motifs. Also known as Gros Point de Venise. Later also name for this style of lace produced by machine.

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## Appendix I – Establishment of Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

In the mid-1800s Birmingham was a large town whose prosperity relied heavily on small manufacturing businesses. The move to establish a Museum began in the 1840s and was coupled with one to establish a public Art Gallery and the history of the two is heavily intertwined. It was argued that:

‘the artisans at work in Birmingham were denied access to good examples of Industrial Art without which they could not fairly be expected to improve their designs. . . An Industrial Museum was needed in which examples of art objects could be displayed to give inspiration to the artisan’ (Davies, 1985:12).

Despite being passed in 1850 the Free Libraries and Museums Act was not adopted by Birmingham until 1860 and the first move was the establishment of a Library. Funding for the establishment of the Art Gallery and Museum gave rise to much debate but eventually the Free Libraries and Industrial Museum Committee agreed to the provision of a museum to house objects which might be instructive to the main industries of Birmingham.

It was local industrialists and philanthropists who financed the purchase of the collections. Mayor Joseph Chamberlain offered £1,000 ‘to be expended . . . in the purchase of objects of Industrial Art’ (Chamberlain, 1875 cited in: Davies, 1985:18). This was followed by an offer from Richard Tangye, of Tangye Brothers Engineers, of £5,000 for purchases and another £5,000, for investment, if the first was matched by other donations (Davies, 1985:21). Additional donations exceeded the required level and in 1881 an Art Gallery Purchase Committee was formed to select objects for the collections. Their purchases reflected the original argument that the local artisans required good examples of art to act as inspiration for their designs. Purchases by this committee were supplemented by objects which had been donated (from as early as the 1860s) in anticipation of the eventual provision of a museum in which to display them.

The Art Gallery (as BMAG was originally known) opened in 1885. Founded on the philanthropic generosity and civic pride of local manufacturers, the museum adopted



the motto: By the gains of Industry we promote Art. The motto was inscribed on the memorial stone in the entrance hall. Snape (2010:23) observed that:

‘its primary purpose was not to disseminate high culture as a set of alternative and superior values to those of industrial manufacture but to contribute to commerce and wealth creation through providing access to applied knowledge and objects of industrial art’.

The first dedicated Textile Gallery at BMAG opened in 1933 (Davies, 1985:64), in the former Casts Gallery. Parts of the collection were redisplayed in 1951 in the newly refurbished Industrial Gallery (Davies, 1985:87). The Costume Gallery closed in 1995 since when and there has been no gallery dedicated to textile display.<sup>214</sup> Lace can be seen in many paintings on display in the Museum’s galleries although it is rarely mentioned in the accompanying descriptions and may require a practiced eye to locate.

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<sup>214</sup> Textiles are often included in other displays such as the exhibition relating to Cardinal Newman which was mounted to mark Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Birmingham in 2010.

## Appendix II – The Significance of Lace

The traditional museum interpretation of lace as a symbol of social status is linked to that of expensive costume as statement of conspicuous waste. Veblen (1899:170) states that 'our apparel is always in evidence and affords an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at the first glance.' He goes on to comment:

'If, in addition to showing that the wearer can afford to consume freely and uneconomically, it can also be shown in the same stroke that he or she is not under the necessity of earning a livelihood, the evidence of social worth is enhanced in a very considerable degree. Our dress, therefore, in order to serve its purpose effectually, should not only be expensive, but it should also make plain to all observers that the wearer is not engaged in any kind of productive labour' (ibid.).

Traditionally the wearing of lace fully engaged with these notions in terms of expense of purchase, impracticality for anything beyond decorative purposes and the wealth to be able to afford servants skilled in the laundry and care of lace.

The survival of lace is dependent on many factors<sup>215</sup> and it should be noted that the costume and lace in the BMAG collection does not represent dress as it was worn on a daily basis by a cross-section of British society. As Arnold (2000:44) explains: 'gifts of used clothing were not unusual in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'. Items of clothing were passed on to servants, or those lower down the social scale, when considered too worn or unfashionable for use by the original owner. These eventually passed into the used clothes market and were ultimately sold as rags for papermaking (Steedman, 2001:130). Lace, however, was a luxury fabric that was carefully removed from clothing for specialist laundering and was handed down through successive generations as family heirlooms; much of it was remodelled as fashions changed. Levey (2000:83) states that 'trimmings, particularly those made of valuable metal thread, are likely to have been carefully removed and reused, certainly during the seventeenth century and again in the later nineteenth century when there was a similar taste for ornamentation'. Thus a 17th century edging may well appear on a 19th

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<sup>215</sup> Katia Johansen, Curator/conservator for the Royal Danish Collections, Copenhagen, reported one unusual example of the survival of lace. This was a decision by King Christian IV of Denmark: 'at battle on board a Danish ship in 1644, he wore a lace collar and cuffs, preserved today because he was wounded, the garments bloodied, and he chose to preserve them for posterity as relics' (Johansen, 2000: 62).

century garment and great care needs to be taken in dating both the garment and lace to avoid a false reading of either. An example of this was a needlelace Point de France collar,<sup>216</sup> made in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century but remade, 'possibly 19<sup>th</sup> century', by joining 'at least four sections' cut from a larger piece of lace (BMAG, 2005). Another area requiring careful investigation to avoid a false reading of dates was the 19<sup>th</sup> century practice of copying 17<sup>th</sup> century lace designs. This was exemplified by a pair of cravat ends,<sup>217</sup> with bobbin lace figures playing musical instruments on a needlelace ground. An almost identical cravat end was described by Simeon (1979:131) as:

'an amusing copy of a late seventeenth century Point de France cravat end, carried out in fine Brussels bobbin lace called Rosaline, with a needlepoint reseau of Point de Gaze type and some needlepoint fillings and tiny rings in relief. The figures are a moderately close copy, but the surrounding ornament only just recalls the style of its distant ancestor'.

Lace was made throughout Europe with the most sought after styles changing with fashion. In England the production of handmade lace gave employment to thousands of women and children in the East Midlands and Devon (Honiton) lace districts from as early as the 1500s to the demise of the industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Machine made lace originated in England, with Heathcoat's invention of the Bobbin Net machine c.1805. Records show that in its heyday this industry gave employment to many thousands of workers in the Nottingham factories. The Victorians valued the novelty of machine made lace and 'for the first 30 or so years of the nineteenth century real lace and embroidered nets shared the market; they were not yet regarded as rival fabrics nor was machine-made "lace" seen as inferior' (Levey, 1983:87). The speed of production of machine made lace brought its cost within the reach of many, but at Court fine handmade lace continued to rule. However, only those with the right knowledge could tell the difference between hand and machine made lace. In July 1847 The Ladies Cabinet magazine commented on London fashion that:

'black lace shawls are coming very much into request; they are large, of very fine ground, and rich pattern; consequently, if real, they are very expensive, but in truth our imitation lace is now carried to such a degree of perfection, that it is only a connoisseur in lace that can distinguish the imitation from the real'.

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<sup>216</sup> Accession number 2005.1181.

<sup>217</sup> Accession number 1934M400a&b.

## Appendix III – Selected UK Lace Collections

If this research had been carried out at a museum in a traditional bobbin lacemaking area such as Devon (Honiton lace) or the East Midlands (Bucks Point and Bedfordshire laces) the results might have been very different. The Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) at Exeter in Devon, for example, has been collecting costume and textile since the 1860s. The collection includes a 'large collection of lace samples assembled by Frances Bury Palliser for study' (RAMM, s.d.) which was donated to the museum in 1869. Another early gift was the collection of lace, samples and patterns of Charlotte Treadwin who was a successful a local lace manufacturer. Mrs Treadwin's lace and her business activities were well documented and formed the basis of recent in-depth research by lacemaker Carol McFadzean.

The following museums or institutions have significant collections of historic lace:

Allhallows Museum, Honiton  
Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham  
Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Birmingham  
Bowes Museum (Blackborne Collection), Barnard Gate  
Bucks County Museum, Aylesbury  
Burrell Collection, Glasgow  
Cowper & Newton Museum, Olney  
Fan Museum, Greenwich  
Fashion Museum, Bath  
Gawthorpe Textiles Collection, Burnley  
Higgins Art Gallery & Museum, Bedford  
Historic Royal Palaces, London  
Lace Guild Museum, Stourbridge  
Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter  
National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh  
Nottingham City Museums & Galleries, Nottingham  
Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham  
Manchester Art Gallery: Gallery of Costume (Platt Hall), Manchester  
Royal School of Needlework, London  
Salisbury Museum, Salisbury  
The Wilson, Cheltenham  
Victoria & Albert Museum, London  
Waddesdon Manor, Nr Aylesbury  
Wade Costume Collection (Snowhill), Berrington Hall, Hertfordshire  
Wardown Park Museum, Luton

## Appendix IV – Undercurrents

The insertion *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* used the grouping of lace and related objects to address a series of themes. These positioned the lace outside its usual understanding, within the Museum, as a decorative fabric indicative of social status. The themes of the groups were introduced in text wall panels and expanded, where possible, in individual object labels.

Curators make considered decisions as to which stories should be told when they contextualise museum objects by placing them in displays with other objects. However, these groupings can also form a barrier to the formation of connections with other objects in the same exhibition space. It is these underlying, and undocumented, themes which are explored in the practice series *Networks*. The works highlight the breadth of interpretations possible within museum displays which can extend beyond what is openly stated on text panels and labels.

*Networks* uses mapping techniques to articulate some of the hidden connections that exist beyond the boundaries of the themes in *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. The groups of themes within the layout of the insertion are indicated in below.

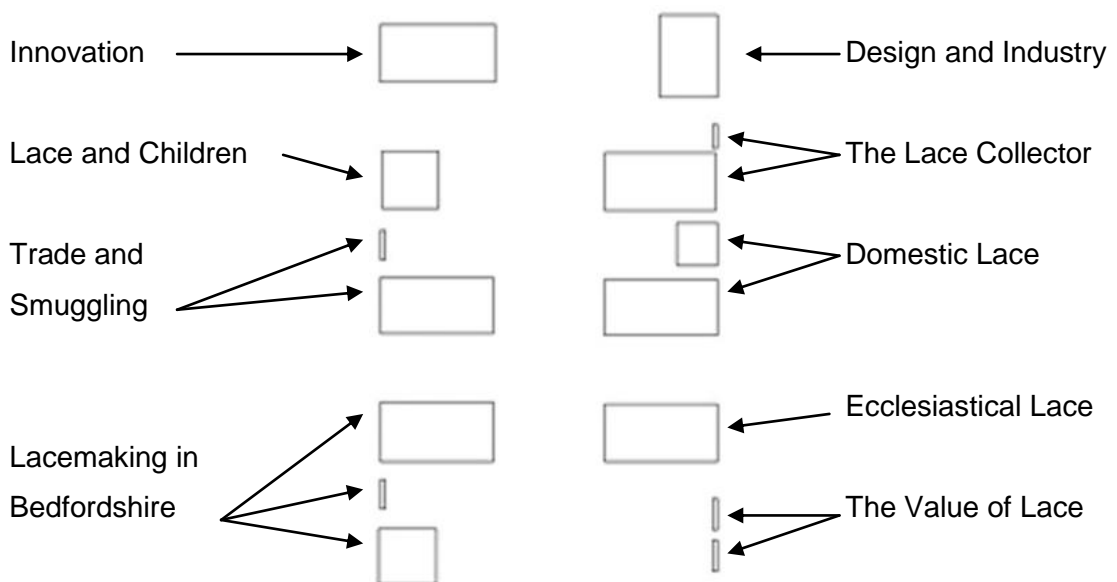


Figure 47: *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. Gallery layout and thematic groupings

It can be said that curators make meaning through the context in which they place objects. *Networks* offers a series of alternative connections which could have been made with the objects displayed in *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. The *Networks* pieces aim to highlight the way that a curator may resituate objects to create a specific version of history. Some of the groupings explored in *Networks* are intended to expose potential biases in the way that history is portrayed, particularly in the privileging of the history of one group rather than another.

By demonstrating the hidden presence of a different set of themes *Networks* emphasises that mine was not the only agenda which could have been promoted. It was also observed that an audience might make its own connections and that these might be at odds with my chosen agenda. The museum visitor is no longer seen as a passive spectator and the British Museum (Alsop, 2012) actively engaged with audience tracking in certain galleries to ascertain what routes visitors took and thus gain a clue to their interests and what, potentially unforeseen, connections they might be making.

The ways in which the objects relate to one another across the wider field of the insertion is established by tracing the relationships between a range of variables, groups and sub groups. These connections necessitate thinking about the archive, and objects, from a different standpoint in order to perceive alternative meanings.

Grey and Malins (2004:146) describe a network as ‘a collection of “nodes” (points) connected by “links” (lines)’, thus highlighting the network’s potential to connect one object with another or multiple others.<sup>218</sup> In *Networks* the multiplicity of connective relationships is made visible by linking each object, within a designated theme, to every other object within that theme to produce a linear map of their interconnectedness.

The working method is demonstrated in Figures 48 and 49. In Figure 48 the methods and sources of acquisition of the objects are shown plotted within the gallery layout. The sets of networks formed by these methods and sources of acquisition are then added (Figure 49). These networks offer evidence of the influence, within the selected objects, of donors in comparison with the purchases made by the Museum as an institution. Within this illustration Mrs WA Cadbury’s donations are mapped in red, donations from other sources in blue and Museum purchases in black. In the fully

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<sup>218</sup> A network can also be understood as the links/lines that connect one lacuna with another or multiple others.

realised *Networks* pieces the mappings are shown without their contextualising framework of cabinets or object positions.

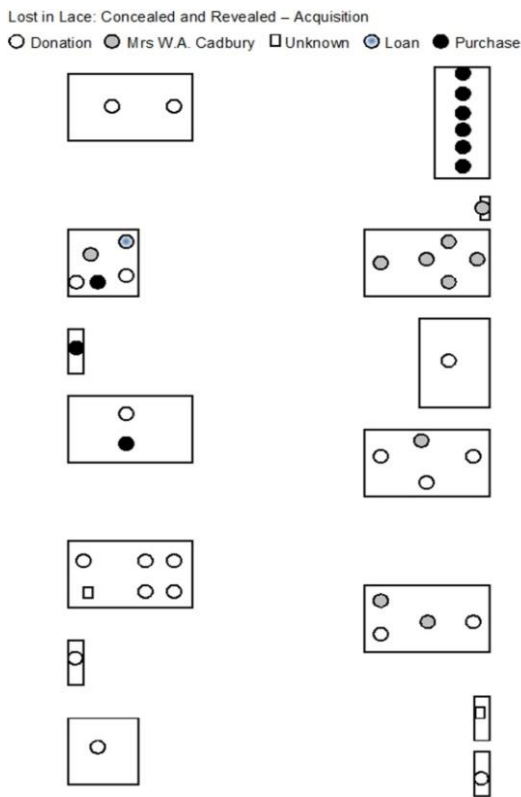


Figure 48: Methods of acquisition by item

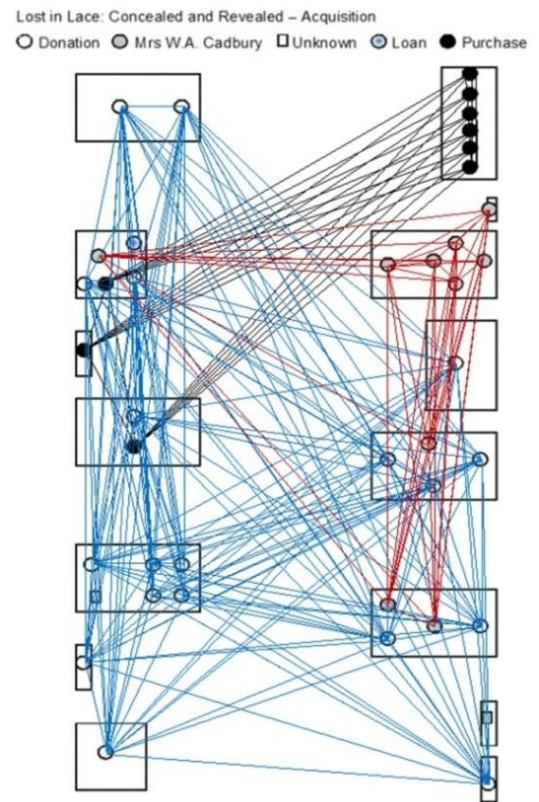


Figure 49: Methods of acquisition networks

The series *Networks* identifies a new series of themes which form hidden connecting strands within the insertion *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. These include objects associated with women, objects associated with men,<sup>219</sup> construction techniques,<sup>220</sup> place of manufacture<sup>221</sup> and the original intended purpose of the lace.<sup>222</sup>

The *Networks* for Bobbin lace objects, Needlelace objects, Male connections and Female connections are shown overleaf.

<sup>219</sup> Some objects had both male and female connections.

<sup>220</sup> Broadly categorised as bobbin lace, needlelace, other hand made techniques and machine made lace.

<sup>221</sup> Britain or Europe in the first instance with the potential for more defined geographical locations to follow.

<sup>222</sup> Clothing, accessory, furnishing, other.

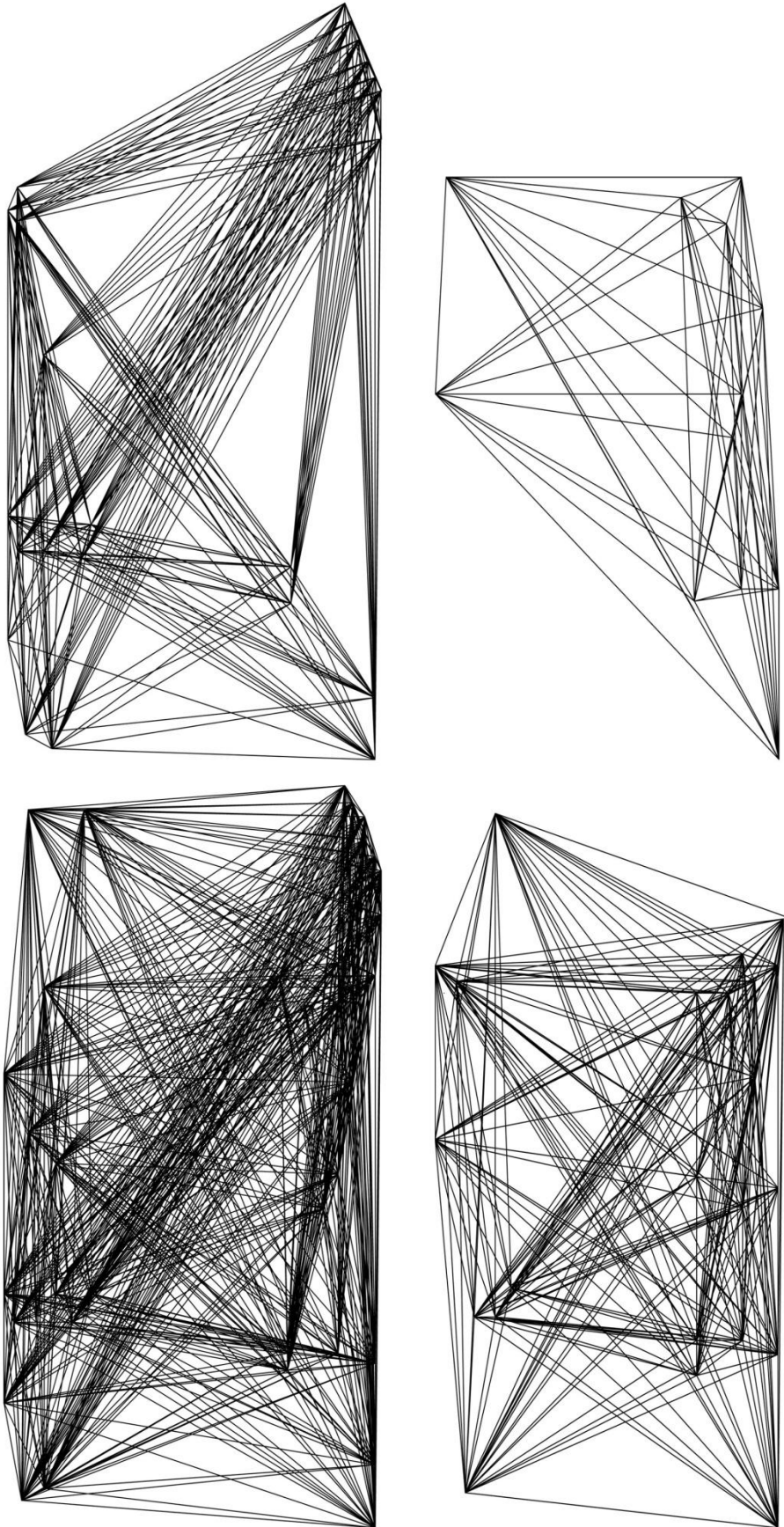


Figure 50: *Networks*. Clockwise from top left: Bobbin lace objects, Needlelace objects, Male connections, Female connections



## Summary

*Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* was the story that I chose to weave around the BMAG lace collection and reflected my agenda of promoting the understanding of the broader influence of lace. The series *Networks* made manifest a selection of potential multiple connections and alternative stories that could have been elucidated with the same group of objects.

The practice in the series *Networks* visually recorded the unstated relationships within a selected group of displayed objects. In doing so the works demonstrated that there were interrelationships between the objects which extended beyond their immediate display groupings in *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed*. Creating pathways that connected the often disparate parts of the greater whole that was the insertion could be seen as analogous with making unexpected links across the maze-like interconnected labyrinth of the archive.

## **Appendix V – *Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed* Information Panels and Object Labels**

The information panels are shown in boxes and the associated object labels are numbered as they were displayed.

### **Lost in Lace: Concealed and Revealed**

Lace: 'A textile patterned with holes which are created by the manipulation of threads.' - P Earnshaw

This display provides an historical context for the major Gas Hall exhibition *Lost in Lace: New approaches by UK and international artists*, in which artists respond to the cultural histories, material and aesthetic qualities of lace.

Lace is much more than the sum of its parts. For over three centuries the wealthy spent vast amounts of money purchasing fashionable lace, and its manufacture was a source of livelihood for thousands of workers. This display looks at lace as an item of trade that touched the lives of people at many levels of society.

Selected from Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery's collection, the range of items on display offer an insight into the hidden history of lace and those who made, wore and traded in this most luxurious of fabrics.

Lost in Lace: Concealed and revealed was curated by research student Gail Baxter and supported by The Textile Society

## **Design and Industry**

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery's collection was established on a wave of enthusiasm from local industrialists and philanthropists. They believed that Birmingham's artisans lacked access to high quality examples of art and design and needed support.

Many benefactors donated objects and collections to establish a free museum, and provided the money for a 'Purchase Fund' to buy 'objects of historic interest, of artistic quality, and of practical suggestiveness'.

In 1890 the Museum purchased 14 pairs of European lace lappets to act as design inspiration for local jewellers and engravers. People working in the English handmade lace industry often complained that it lacked the good designs necessary to compete with European laces. The links between design, industry and commerce were well known. Early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century France and Flanders had profited from exporting fine textiles with patterns drafted by students of their design academies. Later, trained artists were employed to draw designs for the larger machine made lace manufacturers.

## **Lappets**

This group of lappets shows how the design of Mechlin and Valenciennes lace developed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Lappets were long streamers worn by fashionable women as part of their head-dresses from the 17<sup>th</sup> until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were looped up for everyday wear but hung loose at court, as their length indicated the social status of the wearer, and the Queen always wore the longest. As fashions changed many pairs of lappets were joined together to make a single lappet, a metre or more in length, like those on display here.

### **1. Lappets**

Flanders, 1730s

Mechlin bobbin lace

These lappets are made from continuous bobbin lace with a hexagonal mesh ground. The patterns are outlined with silky gimp thread. The pattern units, including leaves and

floral motifs are symmetrically mirrored across their width. The edges are gently scalloped, with rounded ends.

## **2. Lappets**

Flanders, about 1740

Mechlin bobbin lace

These lappets have a flowing, asymmetric design of flowers and leaves filled with a wide variety of stitches. Their edges are gently scalloped, with flattened ends.

## **3. Lappets**

Flanders, about 1765-75

Mechlin bobbin lace

These lappets have an asymmetric running design of flowers and leaves outlined with a heavy gimp thread. The design is much lighter than the pieces made earlier, with larger areas of open ground. The floral motifs with large triple stamens are probably passion flowers.

## **4. Lappets**

Valenciennes, France, 1700-50

Valenciennes bobbin lace

These lappets are made from continuous bobbin lace. The patterns are outlined by fine holes rather than gimp thread. The deeply scalloped edges are further scalloped by the complex design of meandering arabesques of leaves and exotic flowers. The flattened end is composed of shallow scallops. This piece is of particularly fine thread.

## **5. Lappets**

Valenciennes, France, 1750s-60s

Valenciennes bobbin lace

The gently scalloped edges of the lappets are formed from alternating swags and flowers, surrounding a more open design including branched floral motifs of carnations and daisies. The ends have a central scallop above which sits an urn with flowers and fruit.

## **6. Lappets**

Valenciennes, France, 1780-90

Valenciennes bobbin lace

This piece shows Valenciennes lace with its characteristic diamond ground and at its most open. The barely scalloped borders of multiple leaves and a few flowers break into the large area of ground, which contains a central row of simple sprays of flowers and leaves. The ends are rounded and slightly scalloped.

All purchased, 1890

[1890M6, 5, 1, 10, 14, 7]

### **Innovation**

The Industrial Revolution was driven by innovation, particularly in the textile industries. The introduction of machine-spun cotton thread, which was stronger than handspun, was very important to the development of mechanisation.

In 1738, Lewis Paul and John Wyatt of Birmingham patented a spinning machine, but it was not adopted commercially. Twenty years later, mechanical spinning became common using the 'spinning jenny' invented by James Hargreaves.

The production of strong, cheap, machine-spun cotton thread put hand-spinners out of work, but gave employment to thousands of workers in the cotton weaving mills and eventually in the machine lace factories that emerged in the 1800s.

### **7. Hank of cotton thread**

Birmingham, 1741

Machine-spun cotton

In 1738 Lewis Paul and John Wyatt of Birmingham patented a spinning machine which used rollers to create a very even cotton thread. In 1741 they set up a machine which was powered by two asses in the Upper Priory, near Old Square to demonstrate spinning 'with out hands'.

Presented by Mrs Sylvester, 1866

[1887F964]

## 8. Woman's Jacket

Switzerland, about 1912

Machine made lace

The donor's mother wore this jacket in about 1912. It is made of machine made Swiss lace in the style of handmade Gros Point de Venise needlelace.

Swiss lace is also known as 'chemical' or 'burned out' lace. The technique involves machine-embroidery on muslin fabric. The muslin is later dissolved or burnt away to leave the embroidered lace patterns. It could not have developed without the invention of machine-spun cotton threads, which were stronger than handmade ones.

Presented by Mrs Hilda Smith, 1988

[1988M184]

### **The Lace Collector**

Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century lace has changed from being worn as a status symbol to collectable antique. Mrs WA Cadbury, wife of William Cadbury the chocolate maker, donated many of the fine pieces of lace to the Museum's collection in the 1930s.

The Cadbury family were Quakers, who like many other non-conformist families in Birmingham were keen to promote the education of the working classes by providing library and museum facilities.

Mrs Cadbury also had a personal collection of lace. Both men and women have actively collected lace for its own beauty, rather than to use. In 1818 Lady Morgan added to her collection whilst travelling in Europe. From the mid-1850s London Lace Merchants Anthony and Arthur Blackborne built up a collection of antique lace, and in 1902 the lace collection of Sir WR Drake was sold at Christie's. In 2011 a machine made lace panel depicting the Battle of Britain sold at auction in Birmingham for over £5,000.

## **9. Letter to Mrs Cadbury from P. Steinmann & Co., Lace Dealers**

1934

This letter is about these four pieces of French lace that Mrs Cadbury purchased from a lace dealer in London, specifically to give to Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery. The writer emphasises their history and quality:

'All of these specimens have taken many prizes in France, and have been held by the Family as specimen pieces, but unfortunately the Firm came on bad times. People no longer bought good real laces as they used to do and eventually the Firm became bankrupt . . . the Gaze flouncing would be worth £300 per yard, if there had been more of it made.'

Presented by Mrs WA Cadbury, 1935

[2011.0060]

## **10. Rubbing of a Point de Gaze lace flounce**

1934, Heelball wax on paper

Before photocopiers and widespread photography, the simplest way to create a detailed image of how a piece of lace looked was to take a rubbing of it with a hard coloured wax known as heelball. The dealer P Steinmann & Co. sent this rubbing of the Point de Gaze flounce to Mrs Cadbury when they were trying to sell the piece to her, so that she could see the quality of the design.

Presented by Mrs WA Cadbury, 1935

[1935M40.2]

## **11. Flounce made by French workers as a specimen piece for a French lace manufacturer**

France, early 20<sup>th</sup> century

Point de Gaze needlelace

This is the lace from which the wax rubbing was taken. The architectural character of the framework gives the design a Gothic feel. This piece is unusual in its blending of earlier and later styles of the Point de Gaze technique. It combines the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century style of 'brides' or bars, with the later 19<sup>th</sup> century net ground or 'reseau'. This feature makes it more appealing to a collector.

This piece was taken as the starting point for a new art work by Piper Shepard, which is on display in the 'Lost in Lace' exhibition in the Gas Hall.

Purchased from P. Steinmann & Co, 185-6 Piccadilly, London and presented by Mrs WA Cadbury, 1935

[1935M40.1]

## **12. Flounce made by French workers as a specimen piece for a French lace manufacturer**

France, early 20<sup>th</sup> century

Point de Gaze needlelace

The bouquets of foliage and flowers are highly characteristic of this style of lace although they lack the additional layers of rose petals associated with the best quality specimens of Point de Gaze.

This piece would have been made by a group of workers, each specialising in a different element of the pattern. This method made the completion of a large piece much faster and allowed the workers to be paid more frequently.

Purchased from P. Steinmann & Co, 185-6 Piccadilly, London and presented by Mrs WA Cadbury, 1935

[1935M41]

## **13. Edging**

France, early 20<sup>th</sup> century

Burano needlelace

Burano is an Italian island near Venice, which is famous for its needlelace. The French workers who made this piece used designs and stitches from Burano lace. It is entirely made of button-hole stitches, using extra twists and variations in spacing to create the different densities in the fabric. The most cloth-like areas are worked at 32 stitches to the centimetre, which required extremely fine needles and even finer thread.

Purchased from P. Steinmann & Co, 185-6 Piccadilly, London and presented by Mrs WA Cadbury, 1935

[1935M42]

## **14. Flounce made as a specimen piece for a French lace manufacturer**

France, early 20<sup>th</sup> century

Chantilly bobbin lace

This stunning piece showcases the skills of the designer and lace makers. The shading of the larger petals and lack of outlining threads on the upper areas of the cow parsley, known as 'Queen Anne's lace', produces a light and airy effect. The apparently thicker outlining threads are in fact multiple strands of the thread used for the rest of the lace.



A fragment of this lace was analysed as part of a new art work by Kathleen Rogers, which is on display in the 'Lost in Lace' exhibition in the Gas Hall.

Purchased from P. Steinmann & Co, 185-6 Piccadilly, London and presented by Mrs WA Cadbury, 1935

[1935M43]

### **Lace and Children**

While the children of the wealthy wore lace like their parents, the children of the poor were taught to make lace. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century historian Thomas Fuller wrote that children working in the lace industry were able to support themselves, which saved them from becoming a burden on the parish. He observed that many 'lame' children could earn a living from lacemaking, but did not recognise the physical damage caused by sitting hunched over a lace pillow all day.

Most lacemaking was undertaken in rural villages but two factories employing over 300 girls were established in London in 1775. Although run as a business not a charity, the owners were keen to point out the 'benefits' of employing children:

'The employing of female infants, especially those of the poor, from five years old and upwards, will introduce an early familiar habit of industry among the most indigent of the community, and lay a foundation for preserving them from those dangers and misfortunes to which . . . they are so peculiarly exposed'. - Annual Register

The Nobility and Gentry were encouraged to visit the factories and express their approval by purchasing lace and recommending the establishment to others.

### **15. Remi van Leemput (1607-1675)**

Charles I and his family, 1643

Photographic reproduction of oil painting

Leemput produced this version of the portrait of Charles I and Queen Henrietta with their two eldest children eleven years after the original was painted by Van Dyck in 1632.

Van Dyck had depicted the king as a ruler, leader and devoted family man and recorded the style of dress that was fashionable at Court at the time. The royal children, like their parents, are wearing lace, which would have been common amongst the aristocracy. The young Prince of Wales, who had not yet been 'breeched' so was still wearing a dress, stands at his father's knee wearing cuffs and collar of lace whilst their mother holds the infant Princess Mary.

The original painting is on display at Aston Hall, bequeathed by Sir Theophilus Biddulph, (1969)  
[1970P264]

### **16. Child's shirt**

Possibly England, about 1600

Linen with plaited bobbin lace trim

This garment is over 400 years old. It may have survived so long because Charles I is said to have worn it. For centuries there was a thriving market in second hand clothes. The original owner's social duty was to pass it on to someone lower down the social order, to wear or sell the different parts to generate income. Even rags were sold to make paper, but this shirt remained in good condition, with its valuable lace still attached.

Presented by Mrs WA Cadbury, 1933  
[1933M496]

### **17. Infant's mittens**

England, 17<sup>th</sup> century

Linen with needlelace cuffs made in Europe

Small children's hands go naturally to their mouths and these delicate mittens must have been sucked on many occasions. They would have needed to be washed frequently, for which the lace would have been carefully removed and laundered separately.

The mittens are handsewn in fabric handwoven from handspun linen thread. The needlelace is also made from handspun linen thread. Unusually, the dense 'cloth' areas of the lace are made from woven fabric, the raised cord outlines appear to be a

later addition. The origin of the lace is probably European as little needlelace was made in England.

On loan from a private collection

[2005.3751]

### **18. Child's cap**

Europe, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Bobbin lace trimmings

This small cap is made from segments of cream, brown, green and silver brocade with an acorn and oak leaf-style pattern, decorated and edged with silver bobbin lace.

Silver and gold lace is usually constructed from a linen core thread wrapped with a very thin, narrow, layer of flat gold or silver 'ribbon'. A thicker 'ribbon' of silver has been used as a decorative 'gimp' in the edging of this piece. Relatively little gold or silver lace survives as it was often melted-down to release the bullion content when it went out of fashion or in times of financial hardship.

Presented by Richard Hancock from the collection of Lord Grantly, 1942

[1942M116]

### **19. Bobbin for making lace**

Southern Europe, 1500-1550

Turned and carved boxwood

This turned and carved boxwood bobbin is one of a set of three in Birmingham's collection, each carved differently. They were probably made in France, Spain or Italy.

The quality of the workmanship indicates that they were made by a highly skilled craftsman. Its size and weight suggest that this bobbin was used for gold or silver thread lace work similar to that on the child's cap.

Purchased 1965

[1965T741.1]

## **Domestic Lace**

By the 1840s, machines could make complex, patterned lace and soon only an expert could tell the difference between handmade and machine made lace.

However, lower production costs of machine made lace meant that more people could afford to buy it. Eventually, lace became popular for domestic use, from curtains to bedspreads, tablecloths and shelf edgings. As well as producing readymade lace by the yard machines also made plain nets and decorative tapes, or braids, which a skilled needlewoman could use to make imitations of more expensive laces.

Making these needlerun and tape laces as a suitable occupation for ladies' leisure time was promoted by magazines such as 'Weldon's Popular Needlework', which carried patterns and instructions for projects:

'According to the braid and thread selected, these laces may be made of fairy-like fineness or of massive elegance – general results being dainty enough for the gown of a bride or sumptuous enough for the adornment of an altar'. - Butterick publication, 1895

## **20. Frank Taylor Lockwood (1890-1961)**

Sketchbook, 15 Dalston Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham

1960, Watercolour and pencil

This drawing of the artist's house shows that lace curtains were not simply for show at the front windows but were also hung at the back of the house overlooking the garden. Art was both profession and relaxation for Lockwood who worked at Cadbury's for 25 years. He became manager of the Sales and Advertising studio and often sketched on his way home from work as well as at weekends. This sketchbook was created after his retirement in 1958. His paintings and sketches of suburban and country scenes created a unique pictorial and social record.

Presented by Arthur Lockwood and Jean Barnsby, 1995

[1995V573.47]

### **21. Frank Taylor Lockwood (1890-1961)**

Sketchbook, 15 Dalston Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham

1944, Watercolour

This domestic scene in the artist's own house shows that by the 1940s lace had become mundane enough to be used in the kitchen, subjected to moisture and cooking smells. Painted towards the end of the Second World War, the picture is testament to his wife Dorothy's efforts to maintain an orderly home throughout the disruption.

Lockwood's diaries tell of his sadness at the felling of mature trees, the skies becoming littered with barrage balloons, and the realities of living through nightly air raids. During this period lace curtain machines were used to manufacture mosquito netting for troops in tropical climates.

Presented by Arthur Lockwood and Jean Barnsby, 1995

[1995V38]

### **22. Half-curtain**

Birmingham, England, 1830s

Needlerun lace - hand embroidery on machine made net

This is one of a pair of half-curtains made by Mrs Josebury of Handsworth, Birmingham, to a design drawn by her husband. The earliest machine-made bobbinet had no patterning. This was added to the plain net by darning or needle-running by hand, which gave employment to many women and girls. This form of lacemaking also became a popular outlet for the creativity of middle-class women who passed much of their leisure time embroidering items to enhance their homes.

[1915M107.1]

### **23. Tape lace in progress**

England, 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century

Machine-made tape, needlelace filling stitches

Machine made tapes were used as the basis for much domestically created lace.

Patterns and instructions were published in popular ladies magazines and the patterns and materials could also be purchased from haberdashers or by post.

The tape used could be plain or fancy and came in many widths. In the Edwardian era whole garments were made in tape lace and it is still produced commercially today.

Variations of this type of lace are known by many names including Battenburg, Princess, Branscombe and Honiton Point.

Presented by Mrs Hannah Taylor, collection of Mrs WA Cadbury, 1977

[1977F302.750]

## 24. Wedding dress

England, 1878

Grey ribbed silk with tape lace trimmings

Miss Agnes Henrietta Jefferies made the tape lace for this dress in which she married Rev. Edward Hawkes in 1879. It is possible that she also made lace for the church when, in 1888, he became the first Curate in Charge of St Johns Church, Broadstone in Dorset.

The use of grey fabric for this dress suggests that she may have been in 'half-mourning' for a relative at the time. Brides had to observe strict rules around mourning dress throughout the Victorian period. These specify which types of fabrics should be worn, and how long for, which depended on the relationship of the wearer to the deceased. 'Half-mourning' was the last of four phases in which fashionable styles could be worn but in muted colours. A range of subtle greys and mauves became popular.

Presented by Miss D Hawkes, 1932

[1932M256]

### Trade and Smuggling

Importing lace into England has been restricted many times in order to try and control who wore it, and the amount of money being spent on lace made in other countries. However, if fashion favoured lace made in Brussels, France or Italy then wealthy people demanded to buy it. To avoid bans and heavy import duties, lace joined brandy and tobacco as a lucrative item on the smugglers' list.

The illicit side of the lace trade has been romanticised through popular fiction, such as Kipling's 'Smugglers Song' and Defoe's 'Moll Flanders'. There are also extraordinary records of many inventive ways of concealing lace, from using hidden compartments in suitcases to making lapdogs wear false skins padded out with fine lace.

One way of getting lace into the country was in the coffins of British subjects who had died abroad. Coffins were made large enough to accommodate both the body and large quantities of lace. One report says that when the body of Bishop Atterbury was brought home from Paris in 1731, his coffin concealed £6,000 worth of lace.

## **25. Allan Ramsay (1713-1784)**

Portrait of Mrs Mary Martin, 1761

Oil on canvas

Mary Martin was married in 1726 to Admiral William Martin of Hemingstone, Suffolk and had been a widow for five years when Ramsay painted her portrait.

Her widow's cap is tied under her chin with black lace; she has white lace ruffles at her neckline, a black lace shawl and three layers of lace sleeve ruffles. The mood of the portrait, and the quantity of handmade lace on her clothing and accessories suggest that Mrs Martin was enjoying the financial security and independence of her widowhood.

European laces such as Brussels were fashionable at this time and were frequently smuggled to avoid heavy import duties. In 'Memoirs of a Smuggler' Jack Rattenbury recalls stuffing a goose with lace, instead of sage and onion, to get it past the customs men.

Purchased from Leggatt Brothers, 1957

[1957P27]

## **26. Edging**

Brussels, mid 18<sup>th</sup> century

Brussels bobbin lace

Brussels lace was famous for the fineness of the handspun linen threads from which it was made. The best quality thread was reputed to have been spun in darkened cellars to ensure that the air was moist enough for this delicate work. It is no longer possible to spin such fine linen threads as the old strains of the flax plant have died out.

This piece depicting numerous hounds, a huntsman chasing a boar, Diana with her bow, and a wounded stag is possibly a sleeve flounce similar to the ones in the portrait of Mrs Mary Martin in the portrait on display.

Presented by a member of the National Council of Women, 1925

[1925M135]

## **27. Lappets**

Alençon, France, about 1750-60

Alençon needlelace

In 1665 the French government awarded a grant for the development of the lace industry in Alençon, a town in Normandy. This was intended to reduce the imports of expensive Italian laces on which Alençon lace was originally based. 8,000 people were making a living from lacemaking in the Alençon area by 1670.

Alençon lace was widely worn at the court of Louis XV and although lace became unpopular in France during the revolution (1789-99), exports to England and Holland helped the industry to survive. After a slump in the early 1800s the industry recovered with about 12,000 lacemakers in the area by 1855.

Purchased, 1890

[1890M12]

### **Ecclesiastical Lace**

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards the Catholic Church in Western Europe used large quantities of lace. Vestments, altar cloths and clothing for statues of saints were all trimmed with lace of the highest quality.

In European countries, cultured ladies in convents made much of the best lace, particularly needlelace. The vast amount of time that they invested in the making of fine lace was considered to be time spent honouring God, or the Saint to whom the church was dedicated. The convents also taught local women and girls to make lace, which was lower quality and intended for commercial sale.

Historically, the power of the Catholic Church in Europe has been reflected in the richness of its vestments. Fashionable laces also found their way into Church hands through gifts from pious nobles. Because these gifts had not been made specifically for church use they lacked the religious visual symbolism that characterises much ecclesiastical lace.

### **28. Estella Canziani (1887-1911)**

Procession of San Domenico

Abruzzi, Italy, 1913, Watercolour

Estella Canziani travelled extensively in Europe and recorded many scenes of women wearing folk costume, including lace. She wrote and illustrated 'Costume, Traditions and Songs of Savoy' including one painting of a girl making lace.



The priest at the head of this procession is wearing a long sleeved linen robe called an alb with a lace flounce. Canziani also described the festival and its rituals, which she found strange:

'The festival in S. Domenico is concerned with some of the oldest traditions in the Abruzzi. The serpari, who are said to be the descendants of Circe, and who handle serpents with impunity, make this procession weird and most barbaric.'

Presented by Estella Canziani, 1931

[1931P968.582]

### **29. Flounce, probably from an alb**

Italian, second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

Gros Point de Venise needlelace

This flounce was found behind the wainscot of an old house, which was formerly in monastic possession, in Cheshunt, Hertfordshire. It is likely that this piece was deliberately hidden during a period of religious conflict and was probably the flounce of an alb, a long-sleeved linen robe worn by priests.

Most Church lace of this period was made by in convents by nuns, who dedicated their time-consuming labour to the glory of God. The design has Baroque motifs, which vary in quality, coming from curling stems and some of the joining bars are elaborately decorated with picots.

Presented by Mrs WA Cadbury, 1928

[1928M408]

### **30. Medallion depicting the Holy Trinity**

Dutch, 17<sup>th</sup> century

Bobbin lace

This medallion depicts the Christian Holy Trinity. God the Father and Christ the Son are shown with a dove representing the Holy Spirit. The triumphant cross and orb represent Christ's reign over the world.

Christ is usually seated at the right hand of God, but in this piece they are the other way around - God with crown and full beard, and Christ with short beard and no crown. This is probably due to the way in which the lace was made. The pattern was drawn the correct way around, but this style of 'raised' bobbin lace is worked face down on the pillow, resulting in the image being reversed when it is removed.

Presented by Mrs WA Cadbury, 1931

[1931M699]

### **31. Square depicting the Lamb of God**

England, 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries

Needlelace square with bobbin lace border

The church used pictorial symbolism to communicate the Christian message to the congregation who, like lacemakers, were mostly illiterate.

This square is made of needlepoint lace with bobbin lace edging. The needlelace was possibly made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in imitation of 17<sup>th</sup> century lace, whilst the bobbin lace is 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century, and of a finer thread. It was probably made for religious purposes. In Christian symbolism the lamb represents Jesus as the 'Lamb of God' or Agnus Dei. When shown standing with a banner, as in this piece, the lamb represents the risen Christ triumphant over death.

Presented by Mrs Wyndham Clarke, 1949

[1949M126]

#### **Lacemaking in Bedfordshire**

This equipment belonged to a lacemaker based in Bedfordshire who began to learn lacemaking at the age of six. The wives and children of agricultural labourers made lace to supplement their meagre family earnings. Sometimes this became their main source of income. Census records show lacemakers aged between seven and 75 years old. Some as young as 5 years old were sent to lace schools, where they would work for eight to ten hours a day.

Traditionally, lacemakers in the East Midlands made 'Bucks Point' – a light airy lace with a hexagonal net ground. After the Great Exhibition in 1851, a new 'Bedfordshire' lace was designed to meet the fashionable demand for heavier laces. Many Bedfordshire designs were based on Maltese lace, which was made from cream or black silk, but the Bedfordshire lace was more open, and made from cotton or linen. It is a testament to the adaptability of these lacemakers that they could change so successfully. At the time it was noted that it was the workers' skill rather than the cost of material that created the value in lace.

An advantage of this new lace was that it took some time before machines were able to produce copies of the style, and so the Bedfordshire workers enjoyed a period of relative prosperity. Their lace was in demand in England and also exported in large quantities.

### **32. Lace pillow**

England, early 19<sup>th</sup> century

Torchon bobbin lace, unfinished

This lacemaking equipment belonged to a Bedfordshire lacemaker, who was born in 1800. She began to work on this pillow when she was seven years old, and it has been used by two generations since. The patchwork cover was her first piece of machine work. The cover on the front of the pillow is called the 'worker', that on the back is the 'hinder cloth' and the narrow one which is pulled out to cover the strip of lace is called the 'draughter'. On either side of the pillow are pockets for spare bobbins.

This piece of lace required 50 bobbins to make, but only ten of the bone ones remain attached. From left to right:

### **33. Spliced wood and bone**

Inscribed William

**Bone**

Inscribed Edward

**Bone**

Grooved turned decoration

**Bone**

Inscribed Mary

**Bone**

Inscribed Mary

**Bone**

Inscribed Ann

**Bone**

Originally bound with wire and beads, the grooves in the sides held the tiny beads in vertical lines

**Bone**

Broken, only head and neck remaining

**Bone**

Inscribed Joseph

**Bone**

Turned and decorated

Presented through Councillor Miss ML Wilson, 1937

[1937M849, 102, 110, 111, 103, 107, 105, 112, 109, 101]

### **34. Bobbin winder**

England, Bedfordshire, 1819

Oak, mahogany, beech

White lace thread was handled as little as possible, as keeping it clean was of vital importance to lacemakers who would be paid less for the lace if it was not in perfect condition. Using a bobbin winder made the process of winding thread onto bobbins much faster and also meant that the thread had less contact with their fingers. The lacemaker's husband made her this winder when they married in 1819.

Presented through Councillor Miss ML Wilson, 1937

[1937M850]

### **35. Lacemaker's box**

Bedfordshire, England, early 19<sup>th</sup> century

Oak

This box was used by the lacemaker for storing pieces of completed lace until the lace buyer visited. When lace was in demand the buyer would visit villages once a week. In more rural areas the lacemaker might take the lace to a middleman for payment. One of the reasons for storing lace in the box was to keep it clean. In winter, lacemakers often used a 'Dicky' pot filled with hot cinders from the fire to keep themselves warm rather than sit by an open fire which might cause dirty smuts on the lace.

Presented through Councillor Miss ML Wilson, 1937

[1937M906]

### **36. Pattern for Bedfordshire bobbin lace edging**

Bedfordshire, England

Pricked parchment

This was the pattern for the first piece of lace made by the donor at the age of six. The pieces of fabric on the ends of the pattern were used to pin it firmly to the pillow. The position of the pin holes has become distorted from years of use. The lacemaker decided whether to make plaited bars or woven tallies where straight lines were marked on the pattern – plaited bars were much quicker to work!

Presented through Councillor Miss ML Wilson, 1937

[1937M907.1]

### **37. Sample**

Bedfordshire, England, about 1906

Bedfordshire Bobbin lace

This lace sample was the first piece made by the donor using the pricked pattern, when she was six years old.

From as young as five years old children in lacemaking areas attended Lace Schools. At first they had to pay to be taught the 'mysteries' of lacemaking, but they were soon able to earn enough money to help support their families. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century very few lacemakers learnt how to read or write, but they learnt to count from the lace 'tells' that they sang while working. *One, two, buckle my shoe* was a common 'tell'.

Presented through Councillor Miss ML Wilson, 1937

[1937M850.2]

### **38. Pattern for bobbin lace edging**

This pattern is for an edging of Bucks Point bobbin lace, for which the lace buyer paid 7/9 per yard, which is approximately 40 pence per metre today. The pieces of fabric on the ends of the pattern were used to pin it firmly to the pillow. The straight side (footside) was to the right and the scalloped side (headside) to the left. The directions for working the gimp (heavier outlining thread) are marked on the pattern. Each repeat takes about an hour to work.

Presented through Councillor Miss ML Wilson, 1937

[1937M907.2]

### **Bobbins**

Handcarved wooden bobbins were often made by husbands or given as gifts by young lacemakers' admirers. Some villages had bobbin makers, but they were mostly purchased at fairs or markets. Fancy bobbins were expensive and only purchased when there was money to spare for luxuries. They often commemorate special occasions or loved ones. The beaded spangles might also carry personal mementoes like a dress or uniform button.

### **39. Bobbin**

England, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Wooden with inlaid metal bands, pricked with the name Susan, with glass spangle.

The spangle of glass beads adds weight to the bobbin, which helps the lacemaker to maintain an even tension. The clear and rose-coloured beads are 'square cut' and

were sometimes made by the local blacksmith who shaped the hot glass with flat files, leaving this characteristic pattern.

#### **40. Bobbin**

England, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Bone inscribed with 'Lads never love to lasses at once', with glass spangle

This inscription hints at a young woman having been hurt by an unfaithful sweetheart and is typical of the type of inscriptions relating to love and marriage found on many lace bobbins. It was probably made by Jesse Compton of Deanshanger in Buckinghamshire.

#### **41. Bobbin**

England, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Bone and wood inscribed with Fred/rick, with glass spangle

This bobbin is made from spliced bone and wood with a form of pinned joint which suggests that the bobbin had lost its head and been repaired. The spangle is formed of glass beads including 'square cuts' and two rich blue faceted beads with a blue, shanked button as the bottom bead.

#### **42. Bobbin**

England, 1835

Bone inscribed with 'Elizabeth Davis Aged 11 1835', with glass spangle

The maker of this bobbin has been identified as Jesse Compton (1793-1857) of Deanshanger. He inscribed his '5's with a missing top bar, as did his son James (1824-1889). It is most likely that these bobbins were both made by Jesse as the head and tail are more characteristic of his work.

#### **43. Bobbin**

England, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Bone inscribed with 'Bless my/Emma', with bead spangles

This was probably made by William (Bobbin) Brown of Cranfield, Buckinghamshire.

The way in which the spangle is attached to the bobbin appears to have been altered.

#### **44. Bobbin**

England, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Bone inscribed with 'Mary/Dorson', with glass spangle

This bobbin is quite worn. The spangle is made up of six glass 'square cut' beads with a 'Serpents eye' bottom bead so called because the coloured trail is said to be a serpent and the coloured spots of glass its eyes.

#### **45. Bobbin**

England, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Bone inscribed 'My Dear/Mother', with glass spangle

The turning and lettering are typical of the bobbin maker William (Bobbin) Brown, (1793-1872) of Cranfield, Buckinghamshire. Brown's Y's and R's are particularly characteristic, as is his use of red for infilling all of the lettering. The spangle is a mix of 'square cut' and round glass beads with a black, faceted, bottom bead.

All presented through Councillor Miss ML Wilson, 1937

[1937M849.16, 60, 93, 84, 70, 79, 63]

#### **46. Jonathan Pratt (1835-1911)**

Portrait of Lady Mason

1883, Oil on canvas

Lady Mason was married to Sir Josiah Mason, a Birmingham pen manufacturer and generous benefactor to the city. She was a widow by the time that this portrait was painted. She is shown wearing a collar and cap made from Bedfordshire bobbin lace, which reflects the fashion for heavier laces at this period. The collar is edged with circles containing 'spiders' bordered by cloth stitch leaves similar to those in the collar. Collars were often held in place by a brooch at the neck edge.

Presented by Miss Julia Smith, 1900

[1900P172]

#### **47. Collar**

Bedfordshire, England, about 1890

Bedfordshire bobbin lace

This Bedfordshire lace collar has been designed to display the largest portion of the lace at the front, with only a narrow band of lace extending around the back of the neck. The outer edging of plaited bars and picots is known as '9 pin' and comes in many different forms. Bedfordshire lace dealer and designer, Thomas Lester, was said to employ lacemakers in almost every village and in some villages almost every household, within a 10 mile circle of Bedford. He purchased lace weekly and paid in cash to maintain the best workers.

[2005.1875]

#### **48. Cap with lappets**

Bedfordshire, England, about 1850-1900

Bedfordshire bobbin lace

This type of semi-circular cap was usually worn flat on the top of the head with the long lappets, or streamers, hanging at the back. The three small 'feathers' would have hung over the large bun of hair that was a popular style at this period. The lappets could hang loose down the wearers back, be brought forward to hang to the front of the shoulders or be folded up on top of the cap according to the time of day.

Presented by Mrs Evelyn Anderson, 1960

[1960M43]

#### **The Value of Lace**

Lace was an item of value to many people including the maker, dealer, wearer and thief. Making lace could be a vital source of income:

'I am the principal lace manufacturer here, and take the work of from 30 to 40 girls and young women, chiefly between the ages of 6 and 20. They bring in a piece of lace as soon as they have done it . . . and beg you to take it, that they may get something to eat.'

Mrs C Hayman, Devon lace manufacturer

If a few tiny sprigs of lace could be traded for a frugal meal, the value of a handkerchief made from dozens of them takes on a significantly different meaning.

By contrast, thieves saw lace as a lightweight, easily portable target. On 5<sup>th</sup> December 1746 Jane Mackenzie was charged with 'stealing a Brussels Lace Handkerchief from her Mistress'. She was noted to be of generally good character but was found guilty and sentenced to whipping. This was intended to physically punish the offender, shame her publicly, and deter others from committing similar crimes. To be worth such a risk, stealing lace must have offered significant rewards to the successful thief.



#### **49. Handkerchief**

Honiton area of Devon, England, late 19<sup>th</sup> century

Honiton bobbin lace edging

Honiton is a 'part lace' in which different workers made different parts, or 'sprigs', of lace, which were then joined together to make a larger piece. This handkerchief contains at least 400 sprigs. By the 1860s, when the fashion was for heavier laces, the Honiton workers struggled to make a living and it could take a whole days work to earn enough money for a simple meal. Many lacemakers worked on the 'truck system' and were paid in goods from their employers shop rather than cash which they could spend in cheaper shops.

[2005.1177]

#### **50. Handkerchief**

Brussels, Late 19<sup>th</sup> century

Brussels application lace edging

Brussels application lace is made from handmade bobbin lace motifs applied to machine made net. It was developed partly as a response to changing fashions but also as a way to speed up production and compete with machine made lace.

There is a long tradition of local people donating items to the Museum and Art Gallery. Councillor Martineau, who donated this handkerchief, was the fifth successive generation, father to son, of the same family to become Mayor (or Lord Mayor) of Birmingham.

Presented by Councillor AD Martineau, 1981

[1981M613]

## Appendix VI – Lace Machines and their Introduction to Calais

The development of machine made lace has a complex history involving a wide variety of machinery, with numerous attendant patents and law suits, and industrial espionage on an international scale. The following brief account of the early developments in machine made lace is taken from Earnshaw's *Lace Machines and Machine Laces* (1986).

The making of lace on machines originated in the Nottingham area of England. The earliest machine made laces were produced on a knitting machine known as the Stocking Frame. The earliest attempt at producing a lace effect on these machines was in 1764 with the production of eyelet holes. In 1768 the machines were adapted to make a finer, more open net which could be made in silk or a silk and cotton mix. The net made by these, and the later Pin machines, was unstable and needed to be finished with starch, or a similar product, to maintain its openness. In 1804 further patents were lodged for improvements which allowed the newer Warp Frame machines to produce patterned nets which imitated handmade laces (Earnshaw, 1986:33). Jacquard apparatus was adapted for use with Warp Frame machines around 1823-4.

By 1808 John Heathcoat had invented a machine<sup>223</sup> to make twisted (rather than knitted) net in imitation of the net of handmade bobbin lace and machines of this nature were broadly known as Twist-net machines. In 1809 he patented<sup>224</sup> an improved version, known as the Old Loughborough after its place of manufacture. This machine was hand powered and made plain net approximately 3 inches wide in cotton thread.<sup>225</sup> Twist-net machines also became known as Bobbinet or Plain Net machines, being called the Métier Bobin or Métier Circulaire à Tulle Uni in French. Patterning was initially added to the plain net by hand.

The modification of the Bobbinet machine which became known as the Pusher is generally regarded as having been invented in 1812 by Samuel Clark and James Mart

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<sup>223</sup> Patent number 3151.

<sup>224</sup> Patent number 3216.

<sup>225</sup> Handmade lace was often made of linen thread. The linen thread was hand-spun and not strong enough for use in lace machines.

of Nottingham (Earnshaw, 1986:101). Pusher machines were also known as Transverse Warp machines in their early days and it is by observation of the threadpaths created by this technique that lace produced on these machines can be identified. The lace was high quality but production was slow. John Levers invented the highly successful variation on the Bobbinet machine which became known as the Leavers<sup>226</sup> machine around 1813-1814. In France Leavers machines became known as Métier Leaver or Métier Jacquard. Improvements to the Bobbinet machine also produced the Circular machine, patented in 1824 by William Morley<sup>227</sup> (Earnshaw, 1986:72).

The significance of these lace machines is underscored by the fact that the British Government placed strict bans on the export of such machinery and those who knew how to operate it. To protect these industrial secrets heavy penalties were in place and 'by 1818 the penalty for exporting lace machinery had been increased to a fine of £500' (Earnshaw, 1986:72). The English Luddite riots of 1811-16 had resulted in Heathcoat moving his manufacturing base from Nottingham to Tiverton in Devon where in 1816 he began to use water to power his machines (Earnshaw, 1986:73).

The first Twist-net machines were smuggled into Calais in 1816 but lace machines were not legitimately exported to France until around 1824.

Once lacemaking was established in Calais, and the English trade restrictions lifted, the most important advance to be applied to the lace machines was the adaptation, in the late 1830s, of the Jacquard system. Earnshaw (1986:70) noted that 'the application of the Jacquard to the Leavers machine meant they were able to make infinite designs and the fabric had the appearance of "true" hand made bobbin lace'.

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<sup>226</sup> The name of the machines was standardised under the spelling Leavers.

<sup>227</sup> Patent number 4921.

## Appendix VII – Battle of Britain Lace Panels

One extremely rare example of well documented details pertaining to the production of a new piece of lace was the information relating to the Battle of Britain Lace Panels. These panels were produced between 1942 and 1946.<sup>228</sup> Each panel is 1.62 metres wide by 4.5 metres long. At the top of the panel the place of manufacture was boldly stated as Nottingham, England. In smaller lettering above these words, in the centre of the panel, was the name of the manufacturer: Dobson & Browne Ltd. Harry Cross, who took two years to design the piece, was also named as were J.W. Herod, who began the drafting and W.R. Jackson who completed the task.<sup>229</sup> The design process was recorded as taking two years to complete and the drafting 15 months.



Figure 51: Name of designer included at top left of panel



Figure 52: Names of draughtsmen included at top right of panel

<sup>228</sup> Thirty eight panels were reputed to have been made. Each panel was 16 metres long by 2 metres wide and depicted scenes from the bombing of London and various types of aircraft in battle as well as the badges of the various Allied Air Forces involved. A similar style of panel, from 1851, depicting scenes from the life of Joan of Arc was displayed at CIDM.

<sup>229</sup> The drafting was begun by J.W. Herod who died before the work was finished. W.R. Jackson completed the drafting of the design.

As these panels were such special pieces further background details were also recorded thus bearing witness to more of the hidden hands at work in the production of machine made lace. These included the name of the Jacquard card puncher, Alf Webster, who punched 40,000 cards which were destroyed once the panels were completed. To a trained eye it would have been obvious what sort of machine the panels were produced on, but at the time it was thought to be important to record that the panels were manufactured on lace curtain machine made by Swift & Wass & Co. Ltd. of Nottingham in about 1880. The thread for the panels was cotton and, although this was not recorded at the time, it was calculated that approximately 4,200 threads would have been required per panel (Rowe, 2001).

The panels are rich in visual symbolism. The image below, of a reflection in a church window, shows the level of subtle detailing which could be achieved on a lace curtain machine.



Figure 53: Battle of Britain Lace Panel (detail)



Figure 54:  
Battle of Britain Lace Panel.  
Nottingham Castle Museum, 2012