

An
Introduction
to
Bedfordshire Lace



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The Lace Guild

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Introduction

Bedfordshire lace was developed in the middle of the nineteenth century, partly in reaction to the ever increasing threat of machine-made lace, and partly in response to contemporary fashion which favoured bolder laces. It was also made in Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, the other counties of the East Midlands lacemaking area. Similar laces, all of them inspired by earlier seventeenth century laces, were being developed all over Europe, and they are often referred to as 'guipure' laces, which indicated that the pattern motifs were joined by bars of plaited thread rather than a net ground. Patterns and techniques from other countries are known to have been brought to the East Midlands, and as a result it is often difficult to be sure where some patterns, particularly the simpler geometric ones, originated. However, the more intricate Bedfordshire floral patterns with features retained from the earlier Bucks Point lace and borrowings from other laces, particularly Honiton, are known to have come from local designers. Thomas Lester of Bedford is probably the best known of these designers; the collection of his lace in the Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford, is unique.

In this book the basic techniques of Bedfordshire lace are introduced in a series of patterns, some traditional, others designed recently. This is not a book for complete beginners to lacemaking — readers are expected to know the basics and be familiar with winding bobbins, making prickings and working cloth stitch, half stitch etc.

Step-by-step instructions are given for the first six patterns, while, for the remainder, detail is given where needed. It is best to work through the patterns in order — a short sample is enough — to ensure that no techniques required for the later patterns are missed.

Equipment and materials

Pillow: Any flat or gently rounded pillow, either straw-filled or of polystyrene, is suitable. A roller pillow is useful for edgings.

Bobbins: Between 4 and 22 pairs are needed for patterns 1–13, 30 to 50 pairs for the final patterns; spangled bobbins are traditional but not essential.

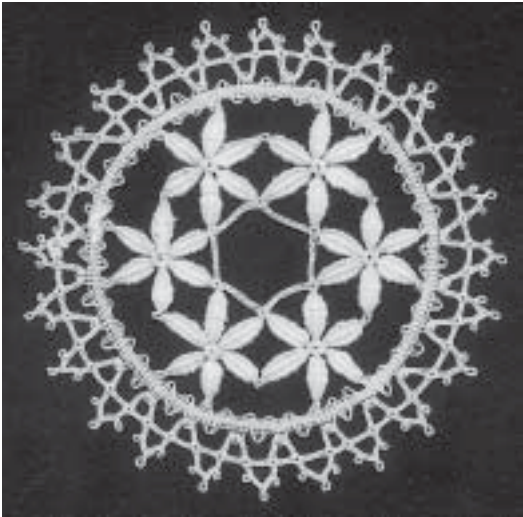
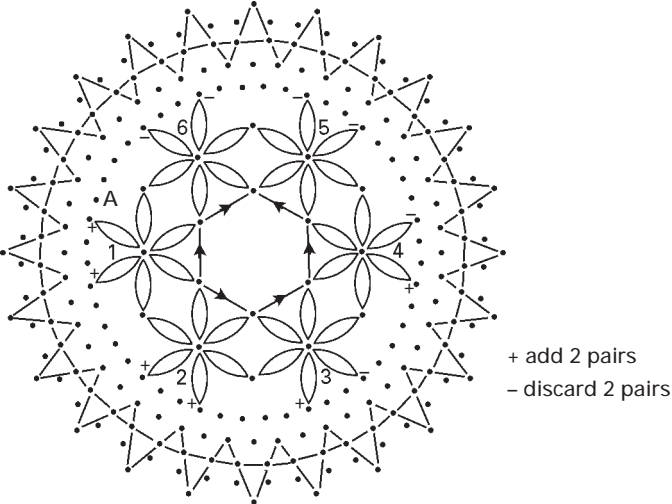
Pins: Fine pins (0.55 × 26 mm) in either brass or stainless steel.

Thread: Madeira Tanne 30 or 50 were used for the samples but similar threads can be substituted.

Pricking card, pricker, cover cloths etc.

Pattern 7: Flower coaster

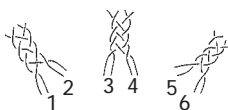
Technique introduced
Six-pair crossing



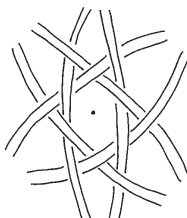
Sample worked with 22 pairs Madeira Tanne 30

Six-pair crossing

This is used where three plaits or tallies meet and cross. Treat each pair as a single thread, number their *positions* 1–6 from the left, and work as follows:

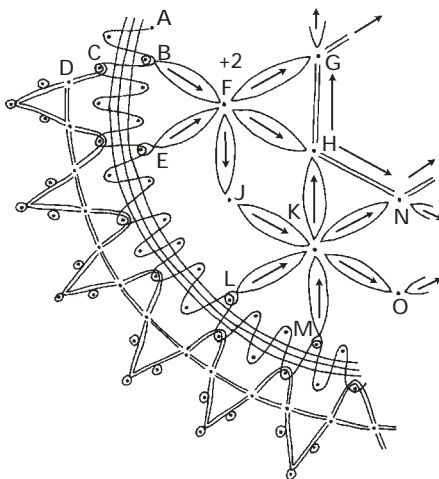


1. Take 2 over 3 and 4 over 5
2. Take 4 over 3
3. Take 2 over 3 and 4 over 5
4. Take 2 over 1 and 6 over 5
5. Take 2 over 3 and 4 over 5
6. Pin at centre
7. Take 4 over 3
8. Take 2 over 3 and 4 over 5



Working the pattern

Start the trail with the worker on *A* and 3 passive pairs on a support pin. Add pairs for the first tally at *B*, and pairs for the nine-pin edge at *C* and *D*. After adding pairs at *E*, work the first flower; make tallies from *B* and *E* to *F*; hang 2 pairs inside each other on a support pin above *F*; work a six-pair crossing, remove the support pin. Complete the flower with tallies to *G*, *H* and *J*. Work the tally from *J* to *K*. Continue trail and nine-pin, adding pairs at *L* and *M* for the next flower. After completing the flower, work a windmill crossing at *H*, plait to *G* and *N*, work windmill crossings. Two tally pairs are added to the trail for the third flower — the other tallies come from *N* and *O*. After the third flower take two pairs into the trail (discard threads to make room for them). Add the last two pairs to the trail for the fourth flower. Complete all the flowers, then continue the trail and nine-pin. Take two pairs from the fourth flower and four each from the fifth and sixth into the trail, sew in the last two pairs from the sixth flower at *F*. Join trail and nine-pin (see p. 12).



Arrows show direction of working