

# Bobbin-Lace-art - 10/4/01

"Making 16th Century Bobbin Lace" by Mistress Francesca la Curiosa. These are the updated class notes from the class she taught at Pennsic 30.

NOTE: See also the files: lace-msg, knitting-msg, p-knitting-bib, naalbinding-msg, sprang-msg, weaving-msg, p-x-stitch-art, linen-msg.

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Thank you,  
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## **Making 16<sup>th</sup> Century Bobbin Lace** **(the very basics to get you started and by no means complete!)** a handout by Mistress Francesca la Curiosa, m.k.a. Muir Dean 919-462-8853 (before 10 p.m.) or [muirdean@mindspring.com](mailto:muirdean@mindspring.com)

Remember – You make lace to look good. There are no extant explanations of how to work the prickings from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Use your own judgement! Forget right and wrong. They tend to scare people too much! This is only a beginning into lace making. Warning – lace making is addictive and there are many financial pitfalls associated with this craft ☺ !!!

### **What you need:**

- Pillow - a surface on which to work; see description of the possibilities
- Pricking - a pattern to follow; these would have been made of leather or parchment in the 1500's and the lines would not have been drawn on them; there would be only a pattern of tiny holes!
- Bobbins - the "sticks" or "bones" on which you wind your thread - 2 pair per braid
- Thread - In the 1500's this would have meant linen or silk; cotton was rarer and harder to spin fine enough for lace with its short fibers
- Pins - these secure your threads to the pattern while you work the lace – by tradition and no other reason they are brass – stainless steel does the job just as well but doesn't turn color the way the brass ones do
- Scissors – nice sharp ones that are fine enough to get down very close and cut cleanly. A fine pair of embroidery scissors is a big plus.

### **Accessory possibilities (helpful tools, suggestions, luxuries):**

Pricker – a tool with which to prepare your pricking (Use of this tool results in fewer bent pins especially if you work with the brass ones!)

Beeswax – to make your pricker glide more smoothly (no off color remarks please!)

Pin cushion – one that pins to your pillow is very helpful as there is less fumbling for the pins whilst working

Bobbin winder – luxury! – When there are many bobbins to wind this device is coveted.

Cover Cloth – to keep your work clean between times you work your lace; they are also useful when you are working on a pattern that loops back on itself; you can cover the pins you've already placed, and your threads won't get caught on them.

### **Making a Pricking:**

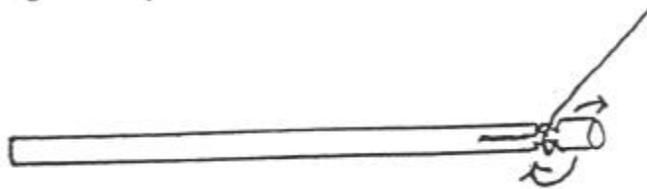
In the 1500s a pricking would have been made of leather, cherished and not shared. There would have been holes in the leather but no lines drawn between them. Alternatively they could have been made of parchment. I have not the patience to make such a pricking for each student. I photocopy the pricking onto cardstock or white paper. If the copy is on plain paper I back it with a piece of a manila folder and cover the whole with clear contact paper. A blue tinted contact paper is also available through the vendors, but I'd rather spend the money on new bobbins or tools.

You prepare a pricking by piercing holes in all the places the lines cross (and therefore where the braids cross) and on the side away from the braid line of all the small circles (which is where the picots will be.) It is best to do this on a surface other than your pillow as pricking on the pillow makes the holes a bit less stable.

**Winding Bobbins:**

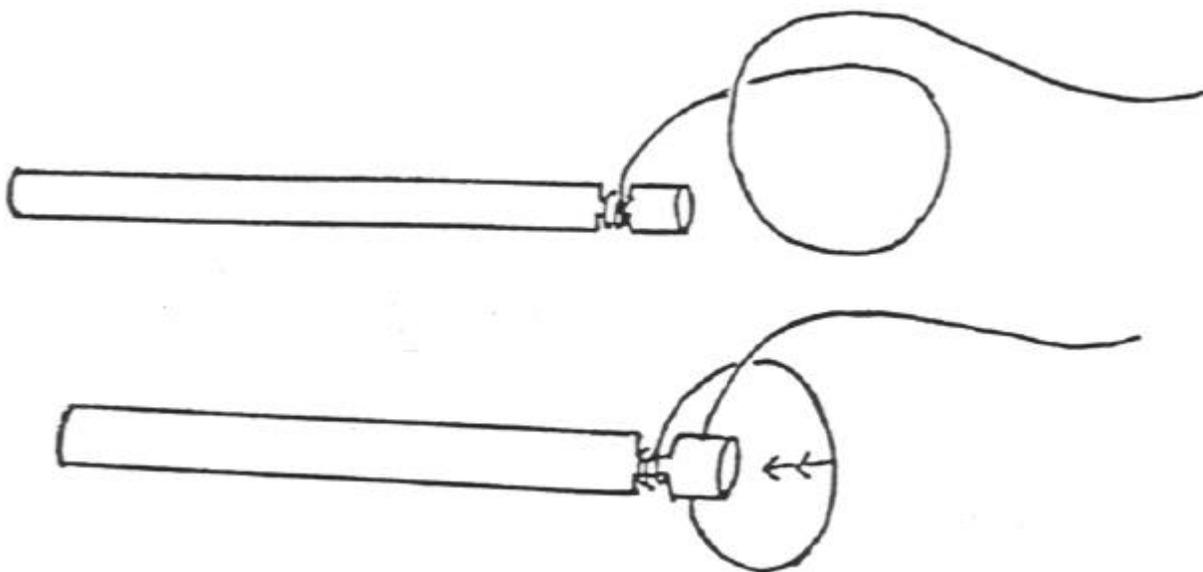
Bobbins should always be wound in the same direction. I wind mine by holding the bobbin in my left hand, holding the thread in place along the shaft with my thumb and wrapping with my right hand from the underside over the top. I always do it this way. When you mix directions you spend more time trying to figure out how to get more thread off of the bobbin than is necessary. It significantly increases the frustration level!

To secure your  
once you've  
on it, you must  
There are  
so here is the  
with the thread



and slip that loop over the head of the bobbin with the tail end caught to the bobbin with the loop. Demonstration several times was the only way I learned this. If your thread is tending to slip, then a double wrap of the knot is useful.

thread to the bobbin  
wound enough thread  
make a lace knot.  
several "lace knots"  
first one. Make a loop  
in your right hand

**Dressing your pillow:**

This means getting your pillow ready to make lace. Pin the pricking to your pillow pushing these pins all the way into the pillow so they will not get in the way of your lace making.

Set pins in the beginning holes of your pricking, 2 pairs for each braid (4 bobbins), 4 pair for each 2 braids, etc.

Hang the bobbins on the pins. Try to remember to interlock the threads at this point so that they remain secure and open when the pin is removed.

**Starting a pricking:**

Braid each 2 pair to the first place it crosses another braid or where there is a picot. Don't forget that if you have more than one braid starting at a pin you must make sure the strings cross so then

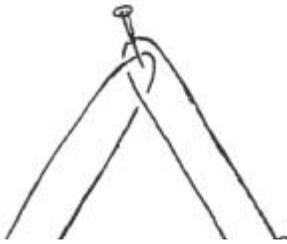
will stay connected once the pin is removed. (This can be done with 4 pair as well. Think of each of these bobbins as a pair.)

**What is braiding:**

Start by thinking of each of the bobbins in a braid as numbered 1,2,3,4 with 1 being on the left and counting across in the same direction that you read. A braid is a series of stitches called “cross” and “twist” repeated until the braid is the correct length which is judged by sight. The bobbins are always 1,2,3,4 in relation to one another, but they change their number after each stitch. For example, in a cross the #2 bobbin becomes #3 and #3 becomes #2.

**Cross:**

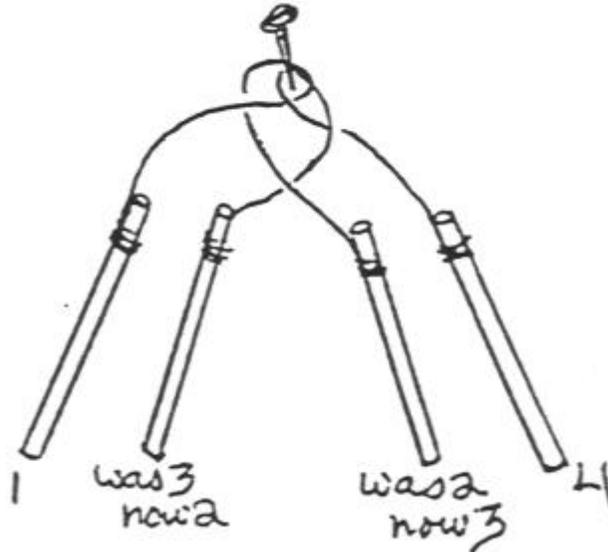
Place bobbin 2 and readjust to cross and for you do not need crosses will want to make it lie flat.



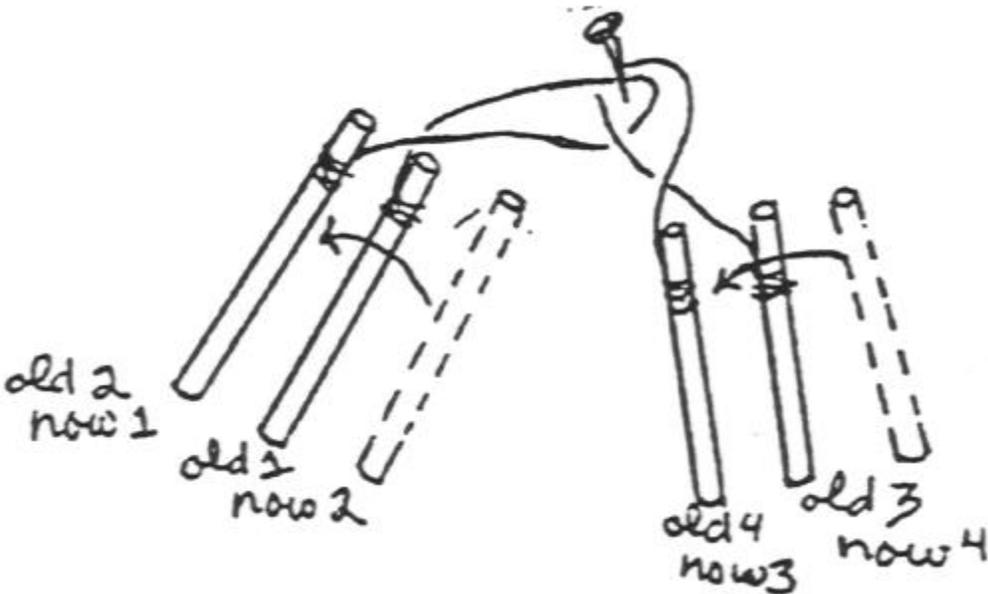
over bobbin 3 (to the right) even spacing. For your first those immediately after a pin, to tighten. However after following a twist you tighten the braid to

**Twist:**

Place bobbin 4 place bobbin 2 readjust to want to end with a cross as around the pin when the pin is preference: tighten at this idea as this is thread than difficult to



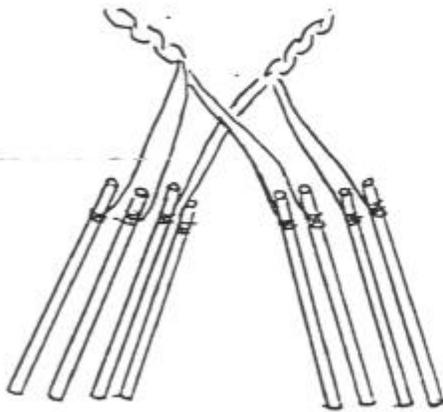
over bobbin 3, and over bobbin 1 and even spacing. You your braid before a pin this will make the hole a crisp one and fuller removed. Personal Although you can point, it is not a good more abrasive to the after a cross and more make the braid lie flat.



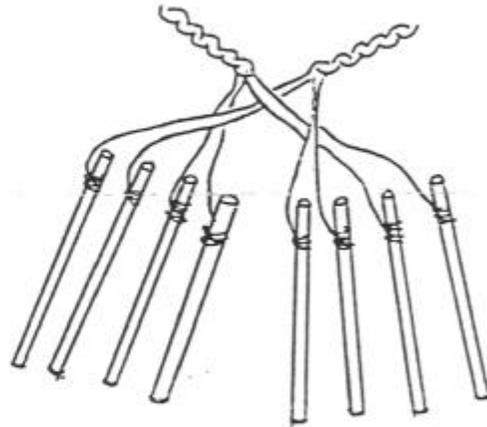
**Four pair cross (or crossing another braid):**

When 2 braids meet and cross, you are faced with 8 rather than 4 pair. Treat each pair of bobbins as a single, numbered 1,2,3 and 4. Cross the 2 pair over the 3 pair to the right. Twist the 4 pair over the 3 pair and the 2 pair over the 1 pair. Place a pin in the hole where the braids cross. Cross the 2 pair over the 3 pair to close the pin. Continue each braid individually as you started before.

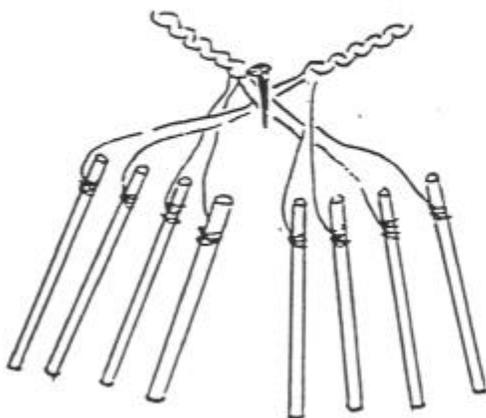
Cross



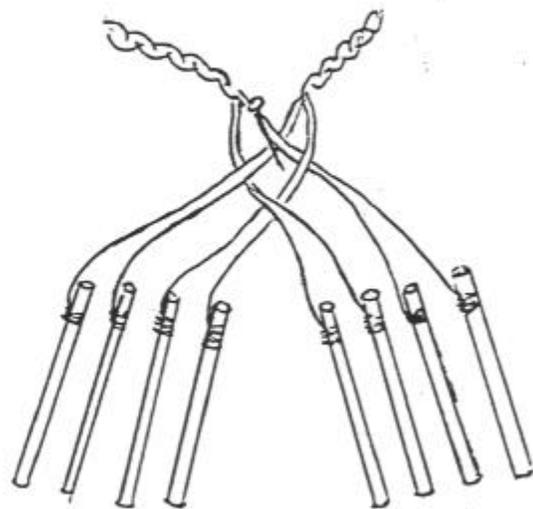
Twist



Pin



Cross

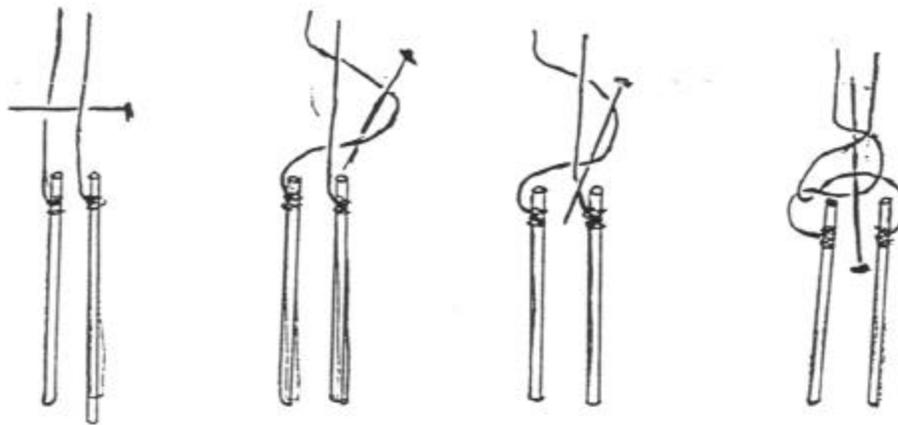


**The Picot:**

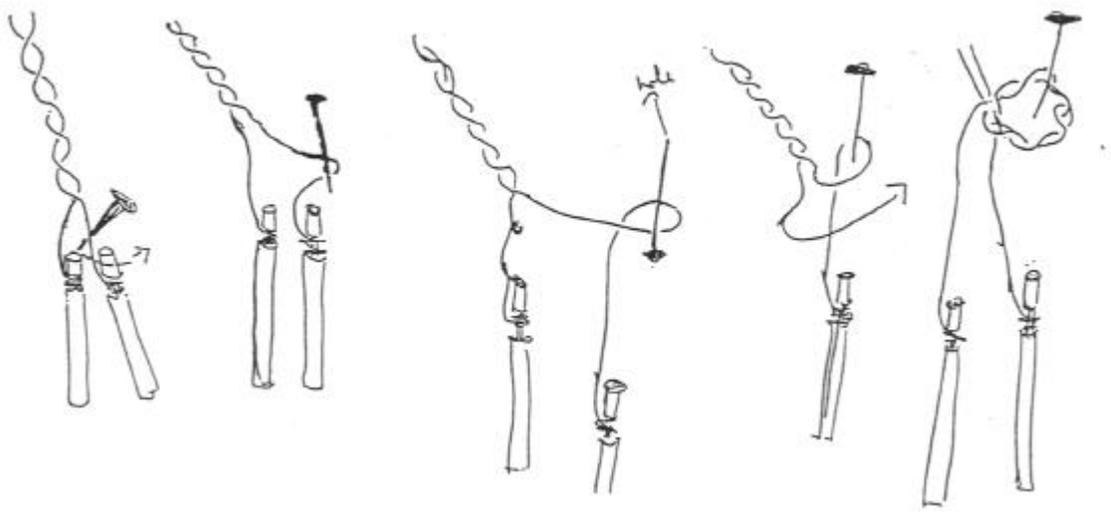
For either picot you use one pair of bobbins on the side of the braid which will have the picot. (A picot is a small loop that decorates the braid and makes it more fussy ☺)

**The single thread picot:**

For a heavier thread (up to about 50/2) one thread around the picot is plenty. Using a pin in one hand and the pair of bobbins in the other, take the point of the pin under the thread on the outside and over the thread on the inside. Pull the far thread under the closer one. Take the point of the pin which now has a loop of thread on it over the head of the close bobbin and down between the pair of bobbins. (This is below triangle of thread created from the first step.) Flip (slowly at first) the pin head towards you and the point away from you until the point comes up between the threads above your triangle and put the point of the pin the hole for the picot. This requires practice for most people as the movement and dexterity of the stitch is a bit awkward.

**The double thread picot (for thinner threads):**

For finer thread you will want 2 threads forming the picot around the pin. Begin by twisting the pair of bobbins on the side of the lace closes to the picot 6 times. Take a pin's point under the thread closest to the picot and move the point down and over the top of the bobbin who's thread you are manipulating so there is now a loop of thread on the pin. Place the pin in the hole. DO NOT TIGHTEN. Pick up the other bobbin in this twisted pair and move it around the pin in the same direction, allowing the twist to follow it so that you now have 2 twisted threads around the bobbin. Tighten it down and twist 2 more times. Continue with the braid.



### Ending your lace:

Another lace knot. This is basically a square knot. You use each pair of bobbins as one and tie left over right and then right over left. Cut the threads off close.

You can also just make long braids and tie them in a single knot.

I confess to using fray check on my end knots for my own sanity and lack of bravery. There are many ways to do this, I am sure, but this is what I've done in my 4+ years of making lace.

### When you break a thread:

Do not panic. This does happen. Also if you do long tapes of the lace, your bobbins will run out. Just wind or have wound a bobbin. Knot the end of the thread to a pin place in the pillow (not the pricking) and run the thread along the path it would be taking and continue working. If it is a bobbin that has run out of thread, tie the new bobbin to the old one for an inch or so to make the lace stronger before throwing the old bobbin out of the work.

### Pillows:

For my classes I make pillows out of 1" insulation board cut into 18" squares, glued into a 2" thickness (to make sure the pins can be pushed all the way in and not come out the other side) and covered with cloth which I pin on. This should get you through until you become hooked. The next step up are the ethofoam cookie pillows, because they are light and I like to take my pillows with me. My favorite stand is a drum stand as it folds to nothing and travels well. Of course I have a plethora of other sorts that stay at home and I never have just one project going. Traditional pillows would have been stuffed with chopped straw or layered wool. The only picture I've found of a 1500's pillow is the block print on the cover of the New Model Book. (see copy in handout). Bolster or ball shaped pillows were a probably shape for pillows as well. Block pillows are a very useful form of pillow but a much later invention.

Cookie Pillow: Round and flat like a pizza only a bit domed to allow the bobbins weight to keep the tension on the thread. These come in sizes from 12" to 24" + in diameter. 20" is a good size if you're getting your first pillow.

**Bolster** – just like a bolster pillow you'd find on a bed or a couch, long and round like a tube, some of them are actually hollow. The lace is usually yardage (long strips of lace like trim) and the pattern wrapped around the pillow allows you to take the pins from the back and use them again as you move down the pattern. The lace then comes off of the back and is usually caught in a pocket or wrapped around a lace tidy (stick with either pin holes to keep it from rolling off, or ribbon or elastic to keep it secure.)

**Block pillow** – a pillow whose center comes out in blocks allowing you to move the direction you are working, or distance from the lace to the edge of the pillow, making room for bobbins. (Most useful if you want to own only one pillow. Beggar's Lace has an ethofoam one you cover yourself which isn't too pricey as lace things go.)

**Roller pillow** – a pillow with a roller at the back or in the center on which you work yardage, some of the rollers are conical to make curved yardage. There are lots of variations of this type depending on the origin of the pillow.

### **Bobbins:**

I like bobbins that have a separate place to put your lace knot so that the thread does not bind into the rest of the wound thread. I don't enjoy spending time fussing with releasing more thread. I'd rather be making lace. Klot bobbins, the ones in the kits, are such bobbins. Otherwise the bobbins with a separate notch in which to tie your lace knot are Midlands or English bobbins or a much later invention, some of the square bobbins. Midlands bobbins generally have spangles (a ring of beads) at the end and are quite thin. Continental bobbins are the ones that have a wider base of wood and generally do not have a separation for the lace knot. Each requires a different hand posture. Each have evolved for a different kind of lace. Traditionalists use the correct bobbin for the type of lace they are making.

### **A Short List of Source Technique Books:**

From the 1500's:

*Le Pompe 1559 Patterns for Venetian Bobbin Lace.* by Santina M. Levey and Patricia C. Payne Bedford, England: Ruth Bean, 1983. ISBN 0-903585-16-2

(Unfortunately currently out of print)

*The New Model Book* republished as *Fascinating Bobbin Lace, Patterns from the first book of bobbin lace to be printed.* by Clair Burchard. Stuttgart: Haupy, 1986. ISBN 3-258-03610-1

(wait until you're sure you're hooked - \$75 or more)

Modern Technique books: (I have seen both of these at Borders Bookstores and

Barnes and Nobles from time to time so they can be ordered from your local store.)

*The Torchon Lace Workbook* by Bridget Cook New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. ISBN 0-312-02119-4 (~ \$20)

*Practical Skills in Bobbin Lace* by Bridget M. Cook New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987. ISBN 0-486-24461-1

### **Modern Lace Groups:**

International Old Lacers, Inc. (IOLI)

Box 554

Flanders, New Jersey, 07836.

USA

Membership: 3<sup>rd</sup> class \$19.00, 1<sup>st</sup> class \$27.50 (1999)

<http://members.aol.com/iolinc/ioli.html>

**Internet cites (there are bunches of these, but you can get there from here):**

<http://www.arachne.com> – started by a member of Arachne’s Web in the East Kingdom, but really deals with all sorts of laces, not just pre-1600

<http://www.laceguild.demon.co.uk/> (the UK’s Lace Guild)

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**My Favorite Vendors (with totally subjective suggestions)**

These are by no means the only or the best or the most qualified lace vendors. They are the ones I like to do business with. There are many of them and each has its advantages.

**Vendor****A sampling of what they offer**

Kathy Kirchner  
790 University Place  
Grosse Point, MI 27962  
kathkirchner@earthlink.net

313-881-4674

Fun stuff!! Painted bobbins, good hard straw pillows, pillow stands, colorful threads (cotton mostly), etc.

Lacy Susan  
Susan Wenzel  
4569 Rincon Place  
Dumfries, VA 22026-1045  
lacysusan5@aol.com

(703) 580-1114

Ethofoam pillows, bobbins, books, thread  
She pretty much has a bit of it all!

M&M Lace  
Maureen Benda  
321 Evian Way  
Peachtree City, GA 30269  
M&Mlace@aol.com

good prices on attractive bobbins,  
wonderful spangles (the ring of beads  
on the midlands/English bobbins);  
great accessory tools!

Van Sciver Bobbin Lace  
Holly Van Sciver  
130 Cascadill Park  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
[vsblace@baka.com](mailto:vsblace@baka.com)

607-277-0498

Holly is a traditionalist. She carries a marvelous assortment of books and is a grand teacher. Carries Santina Levy’s Lace: a History.

For full listings from these folks, write or call for catalogues except Maureen. She doesn’t do a catalogue, so you’ll just have to talk to her. Not a hardship☺.

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