



Plate 1: Pattern for embroidery or lace (deed on reverse). Ink on parchment. Probably New England, before 1719. Length: 18½ in., width: 9 in.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John P. Remensnyder.
MFA 63.1569.



Plate 2: Detail showing acknowledgment of the deed, from a pattern for embroidery or lace (see *Plate 1*).

Plate 3: Border, Venetian point lace. Italian, 18th century. Length: 18 in., width: 4½ in.
Bequest of Mrs. Arthur Croft.
MFA 01.6326.



Notes on a Pattern for Needlework

by *LISA COOK TERRACE*

THE Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has been very fortunate in receiving from Mr. and Mrs. John P. Remensnyder a gift of the utmost importance to the history of New England needlework. Made before 1720, possibly in Boston, it is a pattern drawn in ink on parchment and intended for use in making lace, or for embroidery in white cotton or linen threads, or colored crewels or silks (Pl. 1). To the best of our knowledge it is unique: no other needlework pattern dating from the first half of the 18th century, and located in New England, is known to have survived.

The pattern was drawn on the obverse of a sheet of parchment bearing on the reverse the text of a deed of sale of land made by Stephen Dudley of Exeter to "John Procter of Boston in the County of Suffolk in New England, Scrivener," written in Boston and dated March 23, 1719/20. The acknowledgment of the deed, also dated March 23, 1719/20, appears on the obverse of the parchment. One end of the pattern was erased to make space for the text of the acknowledgment (Pl. 2). Under ultra-violet light, traces of the eradicated pattern are visible; therefore, we conclude that the pattern antedates the deed.

Although there were several John Procters in Boston in the early part of the century, the John Procter of our deed must have been John Procter, schoolmaster, who was born in 1703 and who died in 1757. He is the only John Procter recorded in Boston in the first half of the 18th century whose profession, schoolmaster, would indicate a scrivener's training. His parents were Rachel and Richard Procter, shopkeeper, and when Richard died in 1719/20, he left an estate of property plus 929 pounds, 6 shillings, 2 pence to his wife, daughter, and son, John. John's portion was the whole of the estate minus 10 pounds and minus his father's houses and shop. He was certainly financially able to buy the land in Exeter from Stephen Dudley for 10 pounds in 1719/20. On October 16, 1722, he was given permission by the Selectmen of Boston "to keep a school to teach Writing and Cyphering." He must have been successful as a teacher for in 1730 the Boston Selectmen chose him to be master of the famous North Writing School, a post he held until 1743.

We know from other sources that needlework was sometimes taught at schools mastered by scribes, and it does not seem unlikely that scribes may have supplied their own renderings of needlework patterns either for use in their own schools or for use in other schools. George Brownell, schoolmaster in Boston from 1713 until his death in 1738, advertises the teaching of “. . . Writing, Cyphering, . . . Also English and French Quilting, Embroidery, Flourishing, Plain Work, Marking in several sorts of Stiches and Several other works. . . .” In 1751, while George Suckling taught young gentlemen “English, Writing and Arithmetick,” Bridget Suckling taught young ladies “plain work, Dresden, Point (or lace) Work for Child Bed Linnen, Crosstitch, and all other sorts of Needle Work.”

Here we might also consider the problem of Mr. Procter’s apprenticeship. He would have had to have been apprenticed to someone before he would have been qualified to open his own school in 1722. Who was his master? George Brownell was a well-known writing master as early as 1713, and since the Procter family was prominent, it is reasonable to suppose that son John would have been apprenticed to one of the more famous Boston scribes such as Mr. Brownell. Procter’s connection with needlework could possibly be through the Brownells, since Mrs. Brownell taught needlework in her husband’s school. The possibility cannot be overlooked that either Mr. or Mrs. Brownell could have given Procter the piece of parchment with the design already on it for him to use as practice or reference or simply as an extra piece of parchment, and that John Procter had nothing to do with the drawing of the pattern.

However, not only do we know of 18th-century scribes whose work was connected with needlework: the 17th-century Londoner, Thomas Trevelyon, who was already 68 in 1616, filled his *Commonplace Book*, written in 1608, and his *Chronicle*, written in 1616, with designs for embroidery as well as for gardens and furniture. John L. Nevinson, the English scholar, after studying Trevelyon’s manuscripts at the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1962, came to the conclusion that Trevelyon was a scribe, perhaps even a writing master, although this has yet to be established by contemporary records. There can be no doubt that there is a close, if elusive, relationship between scribes and renderings of decorative motifs. Thus, it is possible, although we do not know whether John Procter had any direct connection with the teaching of needlework, that he drew our pattern and that he intended it for use in making lace or embroidery.

Although at first examination we assumed that the pattern was intended for embroidery, the argument that this pattern is for lace seems to be convincing. We do not know of existing embroideries which are like the pattern



Plate 4: Pattern for lace, partly worked. Ink on parchment.
European, probably Italian, 18th century.
Length: 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., width: 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.
Gift of J. W. Paige. MFA 83.178



Plate 5: Border, Milanese bobbin lace. Italian, early 18th century.
Length: 23 in., width: 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.
Bequest of Mrs. Arthur Croft. MFA 01.6313 a

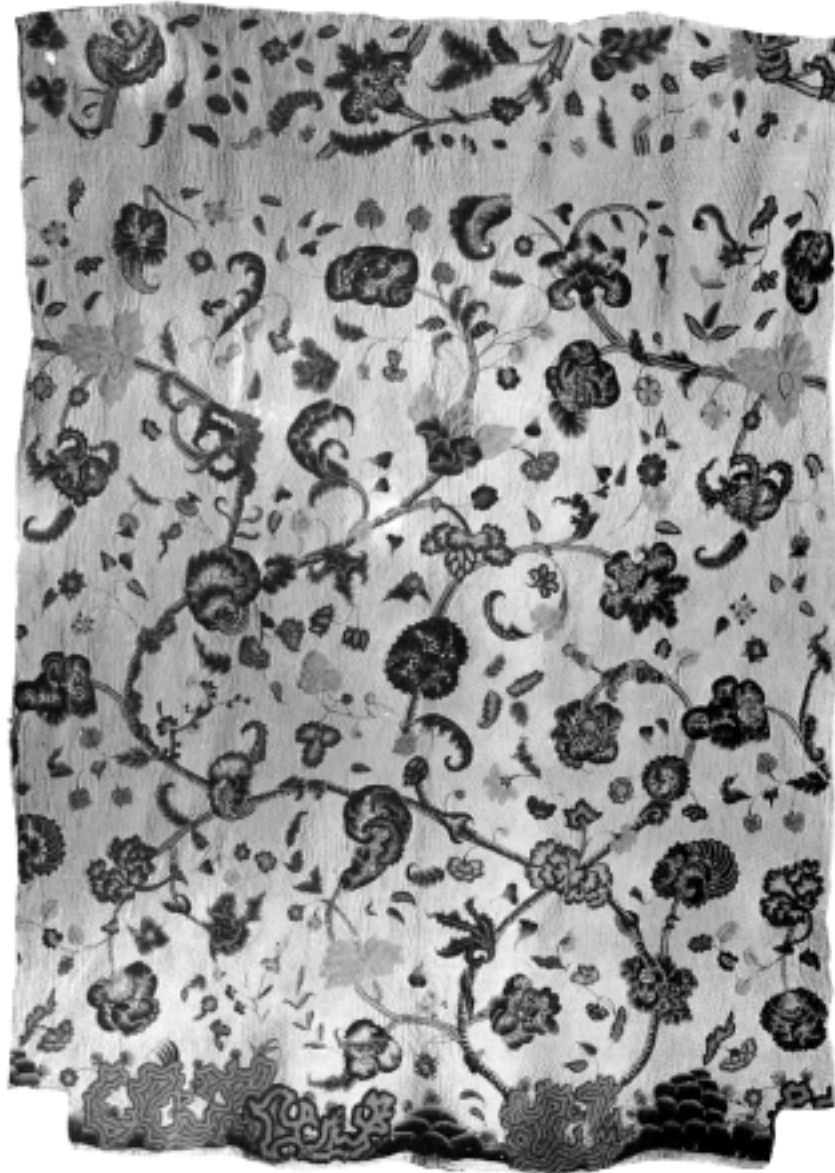


Plate 6: Quilted bed cover (made up from part of a set of embroidered bed hangings). Crewels on linen-and-cotton fabric. Boston, Massachusetts, about 1714. Length: 79 in., width: 56 in. Gift of Mrs. Joseph Avery Manning. MFA 31.694

in the organization of the design elements; however, it is very much like the organization of floral motifs in certain laces (Pl. 3). When one compares this pattern with 17th-century Italian rose point lace patterns drawn on parchment, one recognizes a certain crudity about the New England pattern, while at the same time recognizing the great similarities in not only the shapes of the motifs but especially in the treatment of the fillings. The markings, or "shorthand," which indicate to the needlewoman the kinds of stitches and filling to use, are the same as the markings in a European lace pattern in the Museum's collection (Pl. 4). However, these same markings can be understood equally well as embroidery stitches. The fact that the pattern is on parchment rather than paper further indicates that the design may have been intended for use in making lace. Other known surviving point lace patterns are rendered on parchment, a material strong enough to hold the outlining threads in place as the lace-maker worked her needle over and around them. We know that simple lace-making was taught in schools teaching other domestic needlework. This pattern would easily lend itself as a design for tape lace which would be a simple and fast way to imitate elaborate point lace. The pattern also could be used to render bobbin lace (Pl. 5).

The conception of a continuous flowering vine indicates that the pattern was planned for a long narrow unit suitable either for lace work or embroidery. Because of the size of the pattern, which measures 9 ins. by 18½ ins., and because of the scale of its motifs, we conclude that it is a pattern for a collar or flounce of lace or an embroidered petticoat border or other furnishing embroidery. Our pattern is drawn in a very controlled manner, and indeed, the design could have been traced from another pattern or from an actual piece of lace.

Each curve and twist of the leaves and flowers turns in on itself and back to the vine creating a closed and confined space, unlike the freer and more flamboyant needlework of the last half of the 18th century. If we assume that John Procter rendered our pattern and that he intended it for use in making embroidery, we can find no stylistic reasons to doubt a possible date of 1715 to 1719. Although the organization of the motifs is atypical for embroideries of the period, the drawing of the motifs with their rounded and closed petals and leaves recalls certain early 18th-century English and New England embroideries (Pl. 6). If Procter intended the design to be a lace pattern, we can also substantiate a date of 1715 to 1719. There are numbers of existing portraits showing lace collars and whisks with designs very similar to ours dating from the last quarter of the 17th century. The lace collar worn by John Freke in the portrait of this Boston attorney and merchant resembles our pattern. It has not been possible to locate portraits illustrating similar

laces dating from the first quarter of the 18th century. However, this does not rule out a date of 1715–1719 for the needlework pattern. The first quarter of the 18th century was a transition period for laces: there was a change then from the more controlled and open patterns of the 17th century to the more flamboyant and densely designed ones of the 18th century. Certainly if our pattern was produced by John Procter, it was done so at the end of the period of fashion for this kind of lace design. The parchment shows no needle holes, indicating that it was not used and probably was considered dispensable in 1719/20 when the deed was written. It is also possible that the pattern, drawn on very heavy parchment, was never intended to be used and that young Procter traced it simply for practice or for his own amusement from a piece of lace that had come into his hands.

Despite the many problems and possibilities for the place of origin, attribution, and dating of our pattern, its importance should not be underestimated: it is the only surviving pattern for needlework known to have existed in New England in the early 18th century.