

# **HISTORICAL STEAM REPRESENTATIONS ON A HONITON LACE-MAKING BOBBINS.**

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*This is a contribution to the East Devon and Downton lace bobbin project.*

## **Introduction:**

It always makes me wonder why the East Devon (Honiton) bobbins frequently depict maritime pictures and representation but "never" agricultural depictions? After all, Devon has a rich agricultural history as well as its nautical history.

Possibly the best "guess" that I can make in an area where we have no factual knowledge, (we know nothing about where bobbins were made and or decorated!) is that there was a lace bobbin making centre in or around these coastal villages and their topics represent the interests of the lacemakers in that area. Having made that statement there is one fascinating exception to that lack of agricultural objects. It is the existence of what is probably an agricultural steam engine.

## **The Steam Engine.**

I have had this image in my digital collection for many years as I took the photo from May Wakeley's collection when I first came to England after getting bitten by the Lace bobbin history bug! That visit was at least 20 years ago. To really know what it actually is, I have spent countless hours looking at images on the internet and searching books in the library and again, -a guess- I think it is an early steam traction engine that used its power to run stationary agricultural machinery. It could also be a steam tractor, but it lacks the large back wheel that was part of even the early machines.

To my modern eye, my first guess is that it is a steam "car", but for the life of me, I have failed to find a picture that makes me change my mind from the agricultural use of this machine.

Have a look at it, and if you or any of your friends are experts and truly know its use, please drop me a line.

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Much can be speculated regarding this bobbin. the 1870 date coincides with the opening of the Exeter GWR terminal. i have searched the books, asked questions on the net and i get no clear answer. I have had learned replies that suggest a "train engine" an "agricultural pump".or "agricultural machine, harvester or the such like.



As the East Devon bobbins are nautical or nature decorated, I think its links to agriculture are in order.. It was a great find

A steam engine. Could the initials VAN mean that it is actually a steam-powered van? I have no idea!

As they say on TV these days, "this discussion on the steam engine above is an excellent segway to our next topic".

### **A Railway Scene.**

Before I show this next bobbin image I have to tell you that this image comprises three different views of the same bobbin. I appear to have taken this picture from a collection of a person whose initials are SP, and I apologise for not remembering the name of this kind and generous person.

With the commencement of the East Devon and Downton lace bobbin project, I began to look seriously at my collection of bobbins from this area. I have started by trying to categorise the styles of decoration and whilst I have a starting set of genres, there is clearly a lot more work to be done. When I came to the following three pictures I discovered that I have never made any effort to prepare them for viewing as part of my collection. So this time I started to look deeper (not just a man look!! Smile) and I saw this picture first.



One of the three original bobbins.

Oh, thought I, a series of circles alongside a ladder! That might fit into one of my artistic genres as I have quite a collection of simple or perhaps crude artistic carved bobbins. But I looked closer and decided that there was more to these pictures than a set of circles.



The second original picture

This did not give me any more confidence that this was a primitive style of decoration, say circles and a ladder, but I opened the next image.

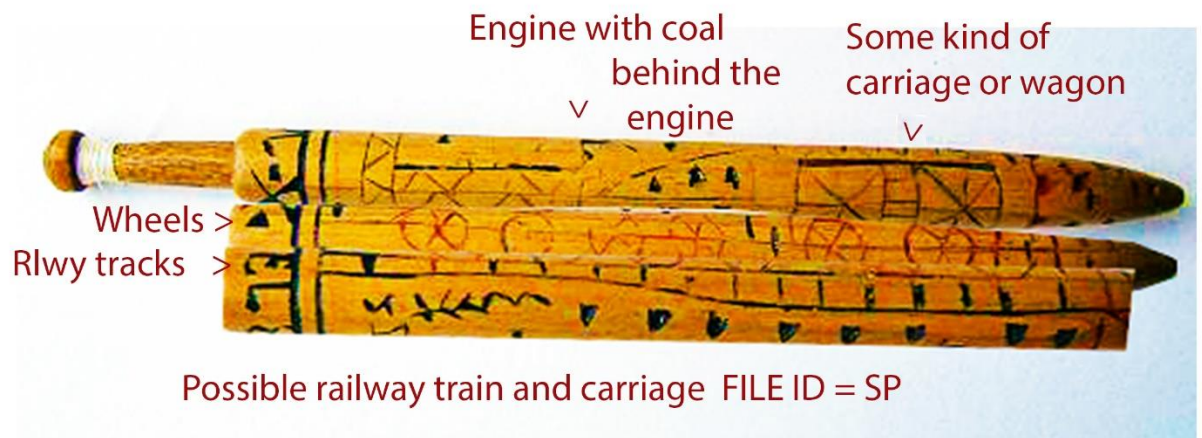


Image three which really got my creative juices excited

Just what scene it was that I was imagining was still very fuzzy, but I knew it was something different and exciting.

I do my image creation in Photoshop, so I loaded up all three images into that programme and began to join them together in what looked to be the correct positions.

This is the result of this exercise which I have annotated as I was expecting to show this to friends and had to explain it to them. So now, you are all my friends!



So this is the scene as I see it at this stage. It is a railway steam engine on its tracks including the sleepers.

The sleepers are depicted in a manner that indicates an attempt at perspective!

Side on, the engine has 4 wheels and the wagon 2 wheels. (i.e. 8 and 4 wheels)

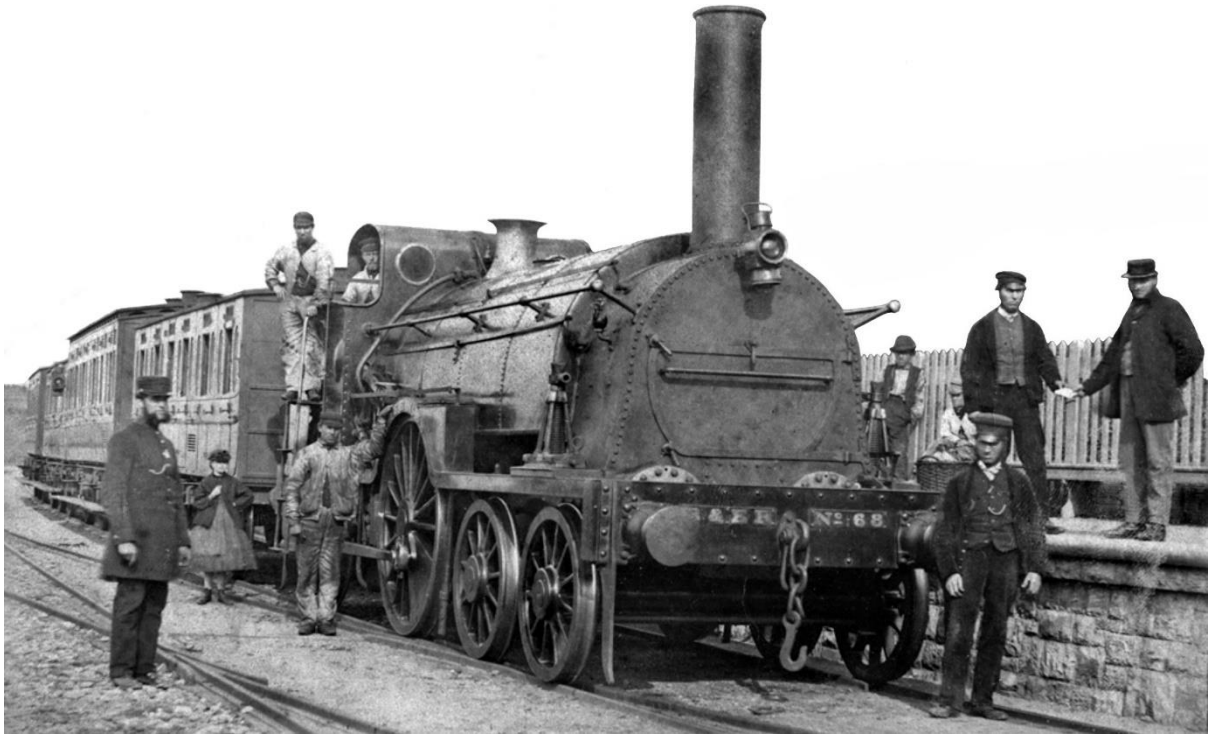
The engine has its coal tender behind it (I remember them well being brought up in the stem age) Perhaps the bobbin carver wants us to see a depiction of coal in the tender? See the black triangles?

Do I see a small (warn) depiction of a drivers cab before the coal tender?

I do see a ladder going up the middle of the wagon. What could be the reason for that?

There is no date on this bobbin, but the Exeter railway started around 1844, but my researches show no style of train like this related to the opening of St Davids Station.

Here is a picture of an 1870 train that was used on the Great Western Railway and plied to Exeter.



GWR Train about 1874.

I have searched until my eyes were watering to find a similar picture of a real train that relates to that of the bobbin image and failed. That does not mean it is not a railway train, it just means that this is an artists impression of the train he or she saw passing by or saw at the station. Very few bobbin illustrations are accurate representations of the objects carved.

After my pulse returned somewhat to normal I began to look again at the carving and decided that I had to complete the circumference and thus the drawing, and when I did this it dawned on me that the final part of the picture was probably the smoke coming out of the engine!

SMOKE ??



Possible railway train and carriage FILE ID = SP

I think it is meant to be smoke, but you must make your own decision.

### **Conclusion.**

Thank you for coming on this journey of discovery with me. You have learned that I am a typical man and never really "look", (at least deeply), at stuff! However, I am a guy who is champing at the bit to tell you all what wonderful tools these lace bobbins are and particularly when it comes to local history. East Devon bobbins have sailors at a party, virtuous girls (Faith Hope and Charity) Man-of-War ships and Jane Austins "ASP"; and now they even have their own **railway train.**