

## Free Information Note No.7

### *Lace Pins*

#### *Part 1*

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Via snail mail            Lace Resources International  
                                  PO Box 465  
                                  Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039  
                                  Australia

# Lace Pins

## Part 1

### 1. About pins

Pins are manufactured from either brass or steel. Brass pins may be gilt plated or they may be nickel-plated. Gilt plated brass pins are a bright golden yellow, whilst nickel plated brass pins will be silver grey. Steel pins may be manufactured from mild steel that has been plated to prevent rusting, tempered and hardened steel or from stainless steel. Pins boxes usually carry descriptors such as “Yellow” Brass, “White” Brass, “Stainless” Steel, Steel Pins or Plated Steel.

Most lacemakers prefer to use brass pins and this is largely because, in the past, the plating on steel pins was less reliable than it is today and those pins rusted. After relying for many years on having brass pins for our craft, these are now becoming more and more difficult to obtain in the range of sizes needed and we must consider other options.

Pins in a range of sizes suitable for lacemaking are now available in plated mild steel stainless steel and tempered and hardened steel. Stainless steel pins do not rust under any circumstances. Given the improvement in manufacturing techniques between early last Century and now, I am of the opinion that plated steel may be substituted where necessary providing lace is not left on the pillow for long periods of time. Bearing in mind, however, that any pin may begin to deteriorate if left in a damp or acid pillow for months and months on end. Salt air can also have a detrimental effect on steel and brass pins and lacemakers living in coastal areas should be aware of this.

Brass pins, if maltreated or salt affected, will develop spots of corrosion called verdigris, and steel pins may develop rust spots. Both forms of corrosion cause a thickening of the pin where the metal has been affected. If the pin is in a piece of lace, this thickened area of the pin can cause damage to the lace as the pin is removed. Staining of thread may also occur; green from verdigris and red-brown from rust. In cases of extreme corrosion, the heads of the pins must be cut off and, after lifting off the lace, pliers must be employed to effect removal of the corroded pins from the pricking and pillow.

For many, many years, brass pins have been produced specifically for use in lace making. They were available in a range of lengths from very short (Lills) to very long (Bucks Point and braid laces) and in a range of diameters from 0.50mm (approximately 0.02-decimal inch) to 0.75mm (approximately 0.03-decimal inch) and in some European countries 0.08mm which is a very thick pin.

The different types of pin are suited to different forms of bobbin lace according to the size of the grid, closeness of the pinholes and/or technical method of working. Most pins suitable for lacemaking are manufactured in Europe. Two brand names are PRYM and BOHIN. NEWWEY pins are no longer available.

## 2. Purchasing brass or steel pins

Brand is of little importance so long as the pins are manufactured to the highest standard of smoothness and meet the length and diameter requirements needed for the specific types of lace we are making. Pins should never have rough ends on the points and there should never be bent pins in a box or container. If you purchase pins that have burred ends, send them back to the supplier and ask for a replacement. If the next box has the same problem, return them again and ask for a refund or a substitute brand. Burred pins are useless and damage our lace, and in this day and age there is no excuse for poor quality control.

Pins come in cardboard or plastic containers and may be small or large. The cardboard boxes usually hold brass pins and may be small, holding 25g/1oz or larger 100g/4oz capacity boxes. Each box should have printed on one end both a NET quantity and a pin size, accompanied by the word *Yellow*, or *White*. Yellow brass pins are gilt plated, white brass pins are nickel plated. Boxed pins are not available from standard retail outlets, only from specialist suppliers of lacemaking equipment and materials.

Brass pins also come in round, clear plastic containers with opaque lids, as do stainless steel pins. Other steel pins are packaged in rectangular, clear plastic boxes, some small and others large. The quantities are usually 15g, 20g, or 25g (1oz) then 100g (4oz).

## 3. Pin size to lace type/thread size

Pins are available in a range of sizes and the following is a ***rough guide*** referring mainly to the English laces because I do not know which European laces are worked with particular types or size of pin. There is an approximate conversion from metric to inches at the end of this section. The first number is the length and the number following the decimal point is the diameter.

If you work over a polystyrene or styrofoam pillow, you will need to use small diameter pins to reduce damage to the pillow.

- The finest pins I know of are 17x0.25mm. I am not certain, but I understand they are called Duchess Pins.
- The shortest pins I know of are brass Lills, in sizes 14x0.55mm and 14x0.6mm. The very short length makes them suitable for the finer braid laces and fine sectional laces but the 0.55mm diameter is the upper limit for those types of laces if worked in very fine thread. The 0.6mm diameter is at the bottom of the medium pin range.
- If the size given is 25 or 26x0.50mm or 26x0.53mm, the pins are suited to Honiton lace and similarly fine laces where extra fine cotton thread is used (120/2 to 180/2+). They are also suitable for fine Milanese, fine Bucks Point, and the very fine Floral Beds, although they are shorter than would previously have been used for either Bucks and Beds.
- If the size is 25 or 26x0.55mm, they are suitable for cotton threads of numbers 60/2 and upward. These pins are suitable for mid-weight Bucks Point lace, and very fine Beds or Torchon lace.

- The long, medium weight pin 30x0.6mm is a useful pin for Torchon, Cluny and Beds./Maltese worked with cotton thread in the range 40/2 to 60/2, silk thread 80/3 to 100/3 or linen thread in the range 80/2 to 120/2.
- Another useful brass pin is a 26x0.7mm. Slightly shorter than the pin we previously called a 'Torchon Pin' but about the same thickness, and it is a very nice size to use for cotton threads in sizes 20 to 40 (2 or 3ply) and linen threads in sizes 80/2 to 50/2.
- A long and heavy pin is the 32x.75mm. This pin is best suited to linen thread in the range 40/2 to 60/2, heavy cotton threads or the lower number silks.
- An even heavier pin is a 40x0.8mm. This is a very long pin and is the thickest I know of. I understand this pin is sold for Bloemwerk.

#### 4. Approximate weight and length conversion from metric to decimal-inch:

25 grams approximates to 1oz.

26mm approximates to 1 inch

0.50mm approximates to 0.020 of an inch and is equal to *American Wire Gauge 24*

0.60mm approximates to 0.024 of an inch

0.75mm approximates to 0.030 of an inch

1.00mm approximates to 0.040 of an inch

The following conversions from metric to fractions of an inch have been included because pin size is related to thread size, and thread size is dependant upon pinhole spacing and/or the size of graph paper used to plot the patterns.

#### Graph papers/grids

##### Metric to inch fraction

5.00mm squared graph paper approximates to 1/5-inch

4.00mm " " " " 1/6-inch

2.00mm " " " " 1/12-inch

1.00mm " " " " 1/16-inch

##### Inch fraction to metric

1/4-inch squared graph paper approximates to 6.00mm use 2mm graph paper

1/8-inch " " " 3.00mm use 1mm graph paper

1/10-inch " " " 2.50mm use 5mm or 2mm paper

1/12-inch " " " 2.00mm use 2mm graph paper

1/14-inch " " " 1.50mm use 1mm graph paper

1/16-inch " " " 1.00mm use 1mm or 2mm paper

## 5. Caring for your pins

Brass pins, whether plain or plated, will not rust. Yellow brass pins, however, will discolour over time, changing from bright yellow to dull brown. This change in colour is a result of the brass reacting to acidity in your skin, as well as impurities (salts and acids) in the air and possibly, the materials used to make your lace pillow. The discolouration will not affect your lace.

Brass is not a hard metal and brass pins will bend if too much pressure is applied when pushing the pin into the pricking or the pillow. Throw away bent pins as there is absolutely no sense in keeping them. Do not use your brass lace pins for any purpose other than lacemaking.

If either a hook or some roughness becomes apparent at the point of the pin, as happens after a time, either throw the pin away or remove the roughness using emery paper. Buy the smoothest grade of emery paper you can find and gently rub the side of the point over the surface of the paper to remove the hook/roughness on the end. If the hook is too extreme, throw the pin away.

Steel pins are much stronger than brass pins and stainless steel is stronger than plated mild steel. Steel pins will not obviously be affected by the acidity of your skin, and are less likely than brass to react quickly to salty air or pollution. Steel pins however, may be badly affected by damp, with or without additional salt or acidity.

Do not leave your lace pillow where it may become damp and do not leave any lace on a pillow you intend to store away for months. If you put your lace pillow into any type of polythene/plastic bag, make sure there are air holes to allow the escape of condensation.

Parts 2a '*Handling Pins*' and 2b '*Lifting Pins*' are provided as Support Notes for ***Torchon Basics***, stage 1 of the Torchon Lace course for distance learning.

