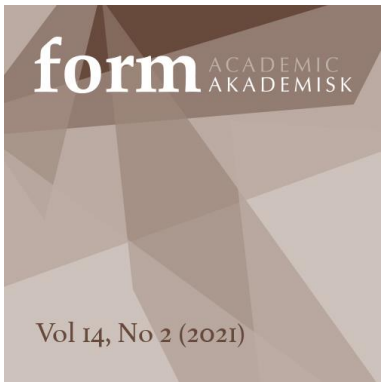

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Heritage and Conservation of Nottingham Lace through Collaboration

Developing partnerships through museums, community, industry and education

ABSTRACT
Nottingham is both the birthplace and the global centre of the machine-made lace industry and is home to the Nationally Designated collection of machine-made lace and machinery. In 2017 Lace Unravelled was launched with the aim to conserve the collection and connect with local 'industry mentors' to learn more about its objects. This led to wider collaborations and the exhibition 'Lace Unarchived', held at Nottingham Trent University intended to reveal the legacy of the art school, established in 1843, and its impact on the generations of lace designers it educated. This paper proposes to explore the project's achievements, what it revealed, and what it has meant for the interpretation and understanding of the collection, and wider understanding of 'Nottingham Lace'.

Keywords:
Lace, Nottingham, industry, heritage, conservation

INTRODUCTION: The rise of Nottingham Lace manufacturing

Lace making as a machine manufacturing process has been significant to Nottingham since the mid 18th century, having developed from a 16th century invention, the stocking frame, invented by William Lee in Nottinghamshire in 1589. The stocking frame, a knitting machine, was adapted and enhanced and eventually in 1760 was able to create a net fabric. This 'point net' was then hand embellished by circa 75,000 hand embroiderers from across the region, known as 'runners' (Mason, 2013 p.14). Other

processes were developed during this period of rapid technological entrepreneurial activity and 'knitted lace' and later 'warp knitting' were methods which became one type of lace manufacture in the region until its demise in the middle of the 19th century. However, developments continued to explore methods for recreating the twisting of thread to replicate the processes involved in hand made lace, eventually this was successful and 'Nottingham Lace', as it became known, was born. Nottingham lace was in reality made across the region of the East Midlands in the UK but was so called to identify its unique qualities as a manufacturing process based on the twisting of thread, as opposed to the knitted variation which interloops threads (or in warp knitting uses the loop and the warp (knit and weave) together) or indeed the embroidered variation on a net base or cut away from a backing cloth such as Broderie Anglaise or Venetian Gros Point. The key developments in defining a specific fabric called Nottingham Lace were John Heathcoat's work in Loughborough, Leicestershire in 1808 whereby a net was created by twisting threads, followed by John Leaver's developments in 1813 in Nottingham with what was known as the Leavers Lace machine. This was followed sometime later in 1846 by the Curtain Lace Machine (Mason, 2013). As Mason (2010 p.7) notes, the focus of the growing industry was 'from about 1760 to about 1845, constructing machines to produce mechanically imitations of the hand-made lace net grounds'. These technological innovations meant that for around a century and a half Nottingham became the global centre of the machine-made lace industry.

FIGURE 1. 'The Clipping Room' at Birkin & Co, Nottingham 1914, from object ref NCMG 2005-121/5(1) (photo by kind permission Nottingham City Museums)

Industrialisation was expanding towns and cities across the north and the midlands of the UK during the 19th century. Production of lace was expanding rapidly in the region, so much so that in the mid 19th century 'hundreds of mechanics' were attracted into the Nottingham area to work (Mason, 2010) and

at its height, in the early 20th century, the industry employed around 60,000 people (Mason, 2013) and was selling approximately £5 million of lace (equating to £600 million today (Bank of England, 2020)) (Mason, 2014). This focus on innovation in technology does not appear to have been matched by its approach to design and Nottingham was dependent on imported fabrics from France which they adapted and modified. Roles for designers began to appear slowly, and in 1828 there were eight listed in Nottingham (Jones, 1993). Interest and a growing awareness of the significance of design to the commercial process is evident in that it was possible to register for copyright with the English Board of Trade from 1839 and a 'classification' for lace as separate from other textile manufactures was required (Eastop, 2011). Eventually a registration office dedicated to the industry opened in Nottingham (Coles et al, 2020).

A Governmental Select Committee was established in the mid 1830s to address the concern over the loss of overseas markets despite the technical excellence of British products and concluded that investment in British design education was required to enable British products to prosper at home and abroad. Therefore during the rapid expansion of this industry the simultaneous emergence of design education in the city also grew. The Mechanics Institutes had been running drawing classes since 1837 and in 1843 the Government School of Design in Nottingham was formed, followed by a purpose-built art school in 1865 (Figure 2). The school was established with support from across the manufacturing classes and civic dignitaries of the town who emphasised the School should focus on 'excellence and taste with regard particularly to patterns for the fabrication of lace and hosiery' (Jones, 1993 p.13). The relationship between the school and the lace industry at this time is evident through the donations, support and its governance, the first President was Richard Birkin, prominent manufacturer in the city (Jones, 1993) (Figure 1).

FIGURE 2. Purpose built Nottingham School of Design 'Waverley Building' (circa 1865) now part of Nottingham Trent University School of Art and Design

It is also significant that the relationship between the Castle Museum and the Art School was formed during this period of the industry's expansion. The idea for the project was driven forward by town councilors and prominent figures in the lace trade, but, importantly, this was with the encouragement of Sir Henry Cole (Secretary to the Department of Science and Art, and first director of the South

Kensington Museum, now V&A). The local paper reported in 1872 that Nottingham had been chosen 'as the locality of the first provincial exhibition of this kind in the Kingdom, on account of the high position attained by our School of Art' the first publicly owned art museum outside of London and that lace should form a significant part of the exhibits (Jones, 1993 p.45). The idea was to showcase lace made in the city and to be a permanent home for displays of art to inspire designers in the lace industry. Nottingham Castle was chosen as the site for the new museum, a building which, at the time, stood in ruins following the Reform Bill riots of 1831. Local architect Thomas Chambers Hine was appointed to rescue the burned-out shell of the ducal mansion at the Castle. The Midland Counties Art Museum was opened by Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales, on Wednesday 3 July 1878. The Museum began to collect lace from this moment onwards, and by 1892/3, a dedicated lace gallery had been added to the Museum's displays.

Despite the rapid growth of the machine-made lace industry during the 19th century to its height around 1907 with 60,000 workers, it began to suffer from a lack of interest from consumers. The changing role of women from the period of the 1st world war had impacted upon dress styles, and democratisation through machine-made lace had made a once exclusive luxury commodity affordable, but ultimately created market saturation and therefore affected desire. By 1924 the workforce had reduced to 17,000 (Mason, 2010). However, cultural and political changes also affected the hand made lace industry and the Manchester Guardian reported in 1925 the closure of a Court lace makers, reporting that it was 'destroyed by the fall of thrones, the changes of fashion, the distribution of wealth, new industrial conditions and the compulsory education system' (Guardian Archive, 2020).

From this point onwards the lace industry went into steady, but permanent decline. Now, in 2020, we find that there is only one business left in England, based in the East Midlands, manufacturing Nottingham Lace and employing a small team of highly skilled and knowledgeable people (Briggs-Goode and Donovan, 2017).

Rehabilitation

The aforementioned Nottingham Castle Museum expanded to become Nottingham City Museums and Galleries (NCMG), and the lace collection grew to include lace clothing and interior products, lace designs and drawings, machines and related items, over 100 lace sample books and some unique ephemera such as menus. It also included gifts from across the globe including from the Emperor of Russia and from nations known for their hand made laces – France, Crete, Italy, Belgium, amongst others (Edgar, 2013). Alongside this, a collection of lace machinery was evolving. Mostly acquired from manufacturers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it has been displayed at the Industrial Museum at Wollaton Hall since 1971.

The first curator post for textiles and lace began in 1960, and this led to an increased interest level in donations to the collection. Between 1976 and 2003, the collection was stored, and a small proportion of it displayed, at the Museum of Costume and Textiles (opened in 1976), located near Nottingham Castle. The Curator during this time was Jeremy Farrell, and his extensive knowledge of the collection gained great recognition from national and local specialist groups (such as The Lace Guild and Nottinghamshire Bobbin Lace Society). He was keenly missed when he died suddenly in the early 2000s, leaving the collection 'orphaned' without the expertise he had honed over the years. In addition to this, concerns about the building's structure, environment and accessibility meant that the Museum had to close forcing the collection to be relocated to Newstead Abbey in 2010. Newstead Abbey is a country house set in landscaped gardens and parkland some 11.5 miles outside Nottingham and is best known as the ancestral home of the Romantic poet Lord Byron. The Abbey, while creating challenges to touristic pursuits of those visiting the city to see lace heritage, provides much improved storage for the collection. However, few opportunities for long-term display, but it is in this context that NCMG devised an action plan to:

- Enhance understanding of the collections through peer review and collaborative research.
- Develop significantly better public access to the stored collection at Newstead Abbey.
- Raise awareness of the quality and significance of the collection, including applications for Arts Council UK, Designated status.

- Maximise the potential to share/exchange knowledge about the collection with specialists and audiences.

The implementation of this plan led to a peer/external review of the entire collection in 2011/12. This highlighted its particular strengths and confirmed that the lace-related collections are emphatically of national importance. The relocation and peer review were followed by a period of 'settling in', during which NCMG developed and tested behind-the-scenes tours of the collection for special interest groups, Fashion and Textiles students from NTU and the general public. Evaluation of this programme demonstrated the high level of interest in the collection and demand for talks, workshops and study days. The question remained: how to breathe new life into it. (This led to the successful application to Arts Council England in 2014 for Designation of the Lace and Lace Machinery collections and this award significantly elevates the value of the collection to a National level).

Resurgence

It is in this context, of a city once home to a global textile industry, through collaboration between NCMG and NTU that we began to ask questions how this heritage can be celebrated, recognised and valued both within the city and beyond. The lace industry's decline and eventual collapse in the late 20th century left communities not only bereft of their livelihood but also their identities as industrial citizens within a cohesive society.

There was evidence of 'ambient heritage' (Samuels, 1994) in Nottingham – Caruso St John architects used a pattern from Nottingham City Museums' collection for the exterior of the Nottingham Contemporary Art gallery (2009). But largely the lace industry was ignored by the city that it was once such a vital part of. A key issue among citizens of Nottingham, and specifically those industrial citizens of the former lace industry (Strangleman, 2011) is the lack of a museum dedicated to it that both celebrates the impact it had as a world leading industry and offers displays of its artefacts and achievements. Moreover, the presence of a major working museum in Calais exacerbates this issue. The town of Calais has important links to Nottingham and is itself historically significant to the story of the Nottingham Lace industry. Nottingham lace machines were smuggled to Calais at the beginning of the 20th century and therefore the fact that the French have seen fit to celebrate their heritage seems only to aggravate the disappointment and resentment felt by those communities.

While we (NTU or Nottingham City Museums) could not fill this cultural vacuum, during 2012/13 we collaborated as a partnership to develop a season of events to celebrate the region's heritage called *lace:here:now* (Figure 3). The season ran across the city using key cultural spaces as venues to engage the public with both the 'tangible' heritage of this industry (historical artefacts) as well as contemporary art and design to demonstrate the continued inspirational impact that the material culture has on practice. The season intended to offer a range of opportunities to explore lace – its history, its impact on the city through economic, social and cultural contexts: the opportunity to interact with lace artefacts through exhibitions and the opening of archives. It aimed to engage in dialogue with those who worked in the industry; consider the impact of the industry on the architecture of the city through exhibitions of artworks inspired by this rich industrial heritage and film screenings of archive footage of the city and its lace industry. This included a premiere of the film *The Lacemakers: The forgotten story of English Lace* directed by Edward Jarvis, talks by lace historians and an academic symposium hosted at NTU. NTU exhibited their collection as well as both student and staff responses to it. NCMG held a significant exhibition entitled *Laceworks* and invited six contemporary artists to respond to their lace collection. To date, this exhibition had recorded the largest number of visitors in their history. This season of events received national and regional press and publicity which led to the commissioning of a publication focused on lace heritage and the events of the season itself. The visitor numbers across the season were impressive and were noted by the cultural centres across the city and added to the burgeoning enthusiasm that the city should more powerfully recognise the importance of this heritage.

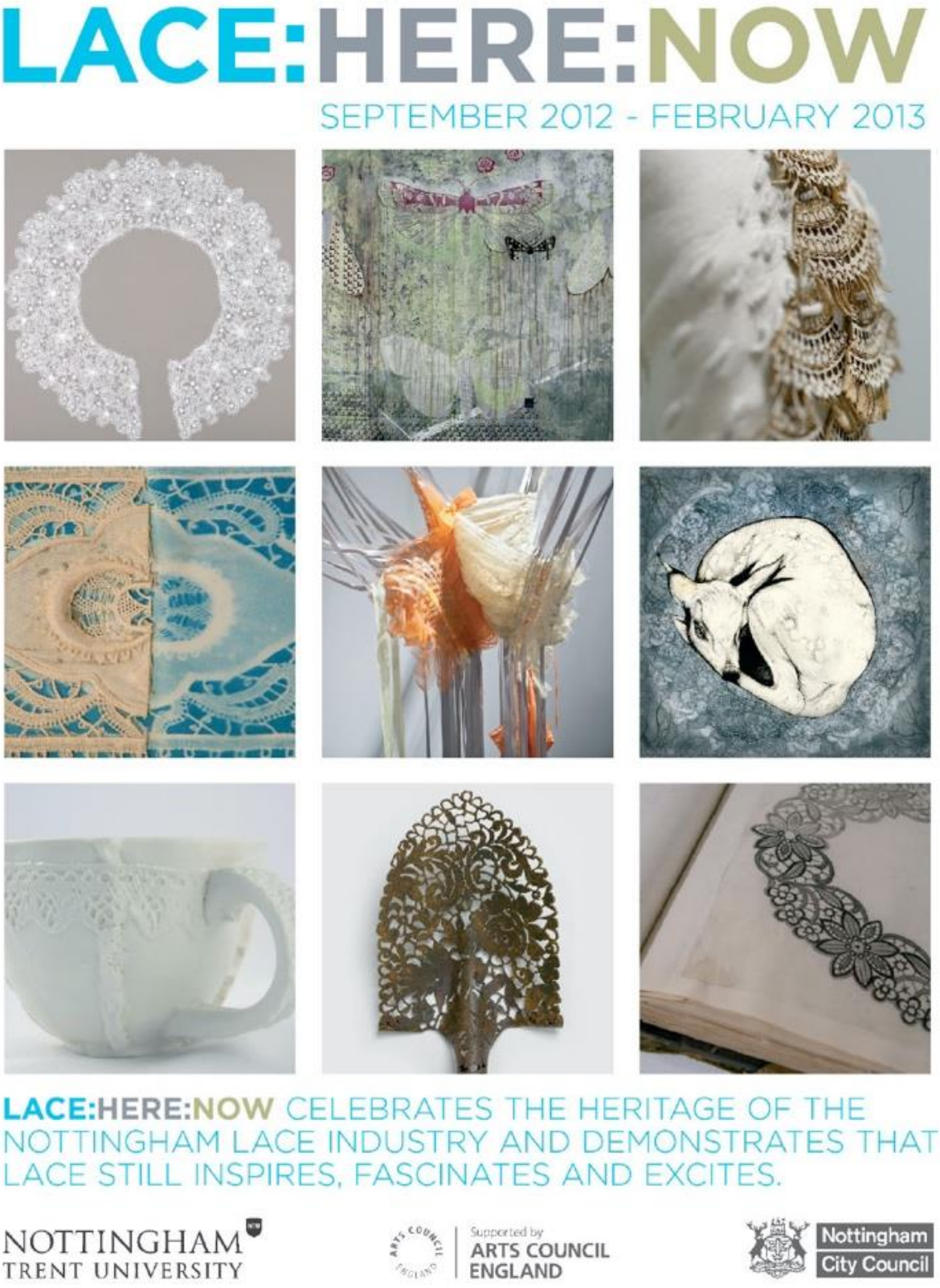


FIGURE 3. Leaflet/poster publicising the *lace:here:now* events season

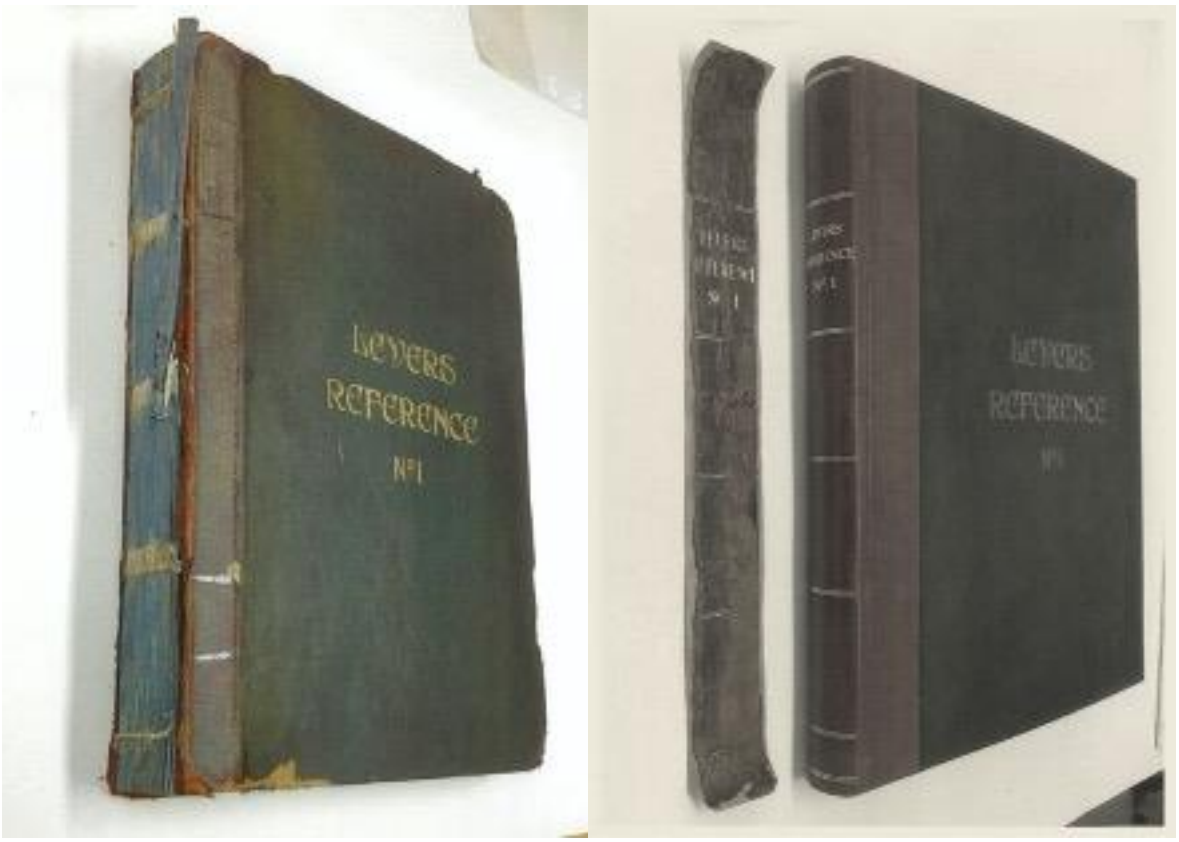
Evolution

Through the lace collection being awarded Arts Council England Designation Development Funding, NCMG were awarded funding for an eighteen-month research and development programme called Lace Unravelled. The outcomes were:

- 36 research visits from lace industry specialists/mentors who shared their knowledge of items in the collection;
- Conservation of the most important lace sample books in the collection;
- Creation of 4 short films;
- 2 Lace Roadshows promoted to local people, resulting in 136 items donated to the collection;
- A two-day international symposium;
- 2 exhibitions of contemporary art responding to lace history at Wollaton Hall and Newstead Abbey.

It was necessary to identify a number of 'industry mentors' to enable us to gather valuable knowledge to enrich the understanding of the collection. These were mostly already known to the curators, through previous lace-related events or the mentors themselves contacting the museum as ambassadors for Nottingham lace. Other mentors became known through these first contacts' networks. The mentors were asked to participate in one or a series of interviews in which they examined parts of the collection and contributed verbal explanations/additional information about the objects' use and origins. It was important that we used a clear method for gathering this research and we employed an oral history approach in conducting and recording our interviews. Objects were identified by the curators using the object database descriptions and peer review information and matched with the mentors according to their known specialisms (this became more honed as interviews progressed).

The mentors' information was particularly valuable with the lace sample books, as knowledge of these was limited and a number of the books were to be conserved as part of the project. Around 30 of the 100+ sample books in the collection were eventually chosen to go to the Nottinghamshire Archives Conservation Team for conversation and care (Figures 4 & 5). Criteria included relevance/importance of company (if known), condition/risk of deterioration, and importance of contents (this was based on object database information, e.g. identifying those containing key pieces of early or experimental lace). The project team worked closely with the conservators to formulate treatment plans for each one. This was because not only were the books in different states of repair, but also they did not consist of the same materials – some have rows of textile samples on the pages, others have a sample and a photograph of a model wearing the finished outfit, one has watercolour paintings of the outfit and a sample on the opposite page. Discovery of previously unknown information in the industry mentor sessions helped to understand the books, to influence the choices for conservation, and also informed the conservation treatment plans, including ethical decision making. For example, it was through these interviews that it was learned how Twisthands (the craftspeople who worked the lace machines) would use the books to reference designs, their hands covered in black lead (used to lubricate the machines) leaving marks on the pages. Previously it had been thought that the books were only used by salespeople or office staff. As the marks became known to be part of the object's 'story', this new knowledge saved important 'information' from being cleaned away as part of the conservation process.



FIGURES 4 & 5. Lace sample book before and after conservation (photo by kind permission Nottingham City Museums)

It must be acknowledged that, whilst an important source, the interviews with 'industry mentors' should be subject to the same analytical rigour as all other sources of information. Quarini (2020) notes in her investigations into the Battle of Britain lace panel that the lace industry was sometimes inclined to exaggerate some of its claims. As members of that industry, we should remember that 'mentors' may also make claims or recall events with a particular bias. Nevertheless, we would argue that the interviews do have value, whilst acknowledging their 'subjectivity and multiple perspectives' (Botticello & Fisher, 2020) they remain useful accounts of a rapidly disappearing world.

Owners of the last remaining Leavers Lace factory in England, John and Sheila Mason, were shown a small, 'scrap' book from the collection (Figure 6). Filled with pieces of lace and hand written notes, it was not a lace sample book in the traditional sense (as those described above), but a 'cut book'. Little was known about the book, but the object was imbued with meaning as John and Sheila looked through it with joy, describing it as the 'most complete cut book that they had ever seen'. They went on to describe how the Twisthands used a cut book to record their technical achievements and problem-solving for their own personal reference, compiling it over their working life. Growing up in the business, John recalled an anecdote relating to his own time working on the machines. He explained that Twisthands would have spent long hours on it (probably in the evening after work) and were particularly secretive about their cut books, keeping them about their person at all times, which is the reason that most are pocket-sized. This interview suggested crucial background to an object which may otherwise have been thought to be a simple scrap-book and gave an insight into the working practices of the craftsman, from those who had both observed and carried out those practices.

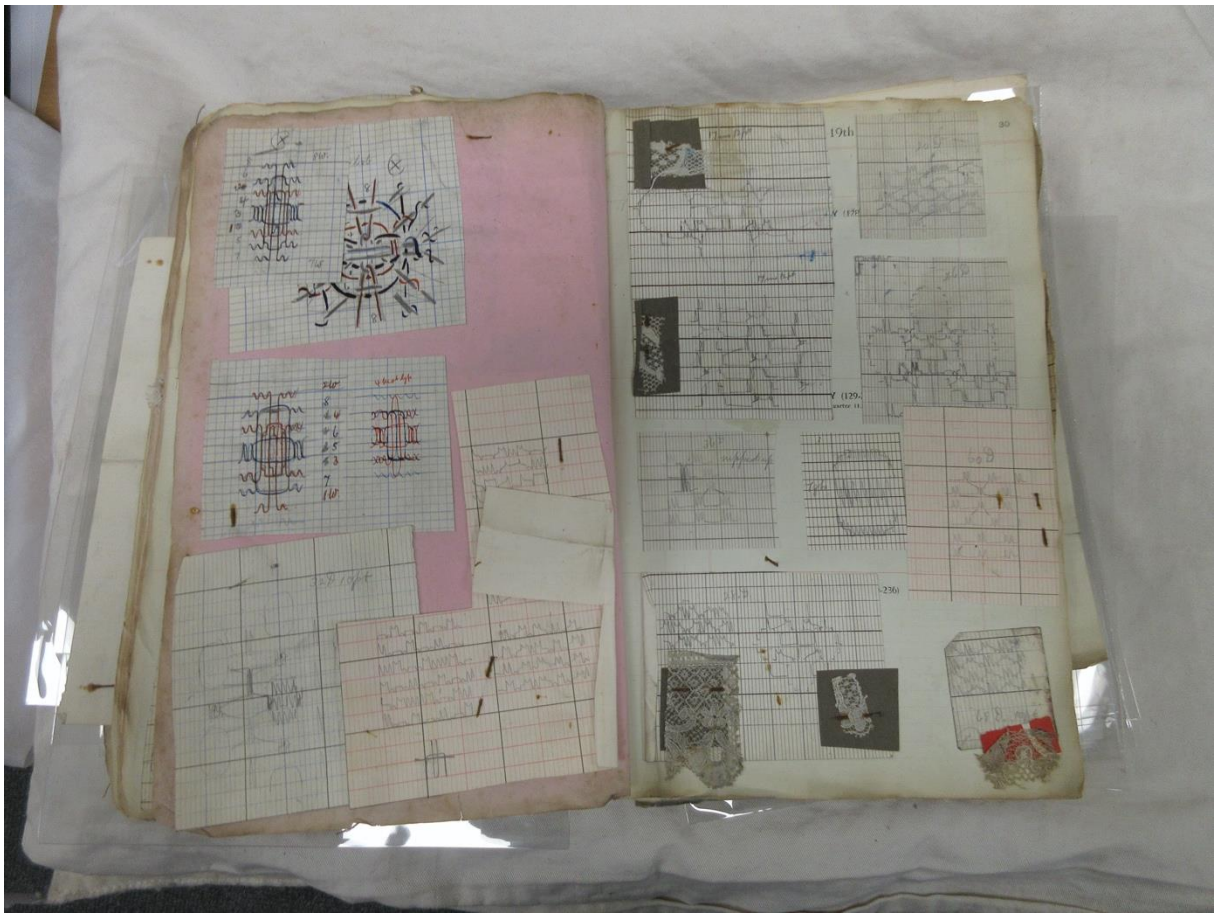


FIGURE 6. The 'Cut Book' as described above. Object ref NIM_1972-2 pages 100-101 (photo by kind permission Nottingham City Museums)

The Lace Unravelled project sought not only to preserve tangible objects, but also the intangible heritage connected with the Lace Industry, such as the skills used in operating the machines, creating the patterns and all the related processes such as mending and finishing. As Fisher and Botticello (2018) assert, 'Knowledge and skill are not bound within an individual but are distributed among social actors, material objects and locales'. This is demonstrated through the project's link-up with an industry mentor in a local lace draughting company. The skills involved in designing and draughting a lace pattern were investigated through the interview process, as Neil Thorpe, the owner states 'This technique, this heritage, is all part of the legacy of Nottingham Lace' (Nottingham City Museums, 2018). The company, owned and operated by a veteran of the lace industry, has a close relationship with local Universities running fashion and textile courses. It soon became clear through the interviewing process that explaining the skills involved in lace draughting to new students presented some challenges. As the project outcomes included the production of four films, it was clear that this was an opportunity for one of these films (on YouTube: Lace Unravelled - Lace Draughting Film)

Providing clear explanations with film of the different stages of the process, the film was able to show the generations of lace draughter at work, as company owner and 'up and coming' employee. The film highlighted the parts of the process that were previously done on paper, where computers are now involved. 'What's the end result? A binary code. The design is represented by a series of numbers. Over the years this has been on a card or a cassette, now it's an electronic file' (Nottingham City Museums, 2018). It also provided the chance to express the draughter's personal pride in their work. 'each person in our team has their own style or hand… and this means the final lace is completely unique and quite personal' (Nottingham City Museums, 2018). This is something we can only hear from the craftsperson, as it is a part of the story that is not communicated through the lace or machines in isolation, demonstrating that 'distribution' of knowledge and skill (Fisher & Botticello, 2018).

Throughout the project we were keen to be responsive to opportunities as they emerged and an industry mentor suggested that we ran roadshows to engage the community, and this led to other contacts for the project and attendees for the symposium. Two 'roadshow events' were set up, advertised to the public and venues were selected for their location's association with the lace industry. The goal was 'to capture stories, objects and information/knowledge regarding the Nottingham Lace Industry' from the communities who worked within the lace industry. The advertising material positioned the events in the form of a challenge to current and former lace workers to share their knowledge (Figure 7). A set of questions was used, of which one was 'how would you like to see lace commemorated in Nottingham?'. It always elicited responses that indicated a feeling that lace had been almost 'forgotten' in the City. This suggests that the keenly felt sense of loss/lack of suitable acknowledgement by the Council/City may have been amongst the motivations to attend but it was also clear that generations who didn't work within the industry carry the nostalgia, heritage and pride with them of their parents and grandparents working life, as Bornat (2019) observes 'the distance which sometimes stretches between generations'.

The roadshows, while not initially part of the project plan, can be seen as an example of the project's evolution. The events injected a wider engagement from the public, and introduced a sense of collaborative working between staff, mentors, volunteers, textile workers (former and current) and their families.

FIGURE 7. Leaflet publicising the first Lace Unravelled 'roadshow'

Lace Unravelled culminated in a two-day international symposium, which brought together curators, lace industry experts, academics and artists from the UK, France and Australia to share knowledge about lace and lace making, within the historical context of Nottingham's lace heritage. Delegates had the opportunity to engage in talks, demonstrations, artists' interventions at Wollaton Hall and Newstead Abbey, tours to see *Lace Unveiled,* and the *Lace Unarchived* exhibition at NTU. As Jeffries notes:

> Nottingham was at the forefront of lace machinery as noted in the Lace Unravelled symposium held at Nottingham City Museum and Galleries and Newstead Abbey, on 15 and 16 March 2018 led by Deborah Dean. The symposium and exhibition were part of a connected set of events in the city to celebrate the legacy of Lace, building on a previous festival of lace in the city in 2012/13 called *lace:here:now*, co-curated by Briggs-Goode and Dean. As part of the symposium, delegates witnessed a restored Leavers machine being started up for the first time in fifty years at the nearby industrial museum. (Jeffries, 2019)

A launch event was held at the private view of *Lace Unarchived* at NTU (Figure 8) which sought to bring together contemporary lace practice alongside samples of textile heritage from its historic teaching collection of machine-made lace. The exhibition was also connected to the 175th anniversary of the School of Art and Design in the city. As Jeffries states what:

> grips the artist-designer-researcher and historian when archive collections are made visible. When made highly visible, as in Lace Unarchived, there is another trembling excitement as the Gallery was awash with lace, color and technical vibrancy, which offer the future of design some exciting possibilities. (Jeffries, 2019)

FIGURE 8. Lace Unarchived exhibition 2018, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham Trent University (Photo credit Julian Lister)

The first day investigated the history of lace, still evident in the built environment, archives and museum collections of Nottingham. There was also an opportunity to view the lace machines working as part of the industrial museum at Wollaton Hall, the renovation of which had been funded as part of this project. It also invited consideration of how lace has helped to shape a sense of place. Day two explored how lace continues to be significant to artists, designers and makers, whether through an interest in the use

of lace fabric, reinterpretations of patterns and processes, or its application to smart textiles. The extent to which historical lace inspires diverse contemporary creative practices has been a continuous thread throughout the process of rehabilitating and evolving civic/local perceptions of Nottingham lace.

Artists have an important role to play in the 'unlocking' of our historical lace archive and collections - they are creative explorers, bringing new and different perspectives to the ways in which we might navigate and understand historical material. As part of *Laceworks,* an exhibition at Nottingham Castle for *lace:here:now* in 2012-13, Lucy Brown made new work following research visits to the Museum's collection. She became interested in photographs of women lace workers, which typically show women sitting close together, each checking and mending flaws in the lace. She was struck by how this activity remained virtually the same over the years, even though the style of the women's clothes changed. She also began to see the lace as 'a physical point of connection between the women, their hands moving thread and fabric, heads bent, skirts touching' (Dean, 2013 p.74) From this she created the installation *The Secrets We Keep from Ourselves*, 2012 (hand-dyed Nottingham Leavers lace (manufactured by Douglas Gill), ribbon, vintage garments sourced from charity shops, eBay and the artist's own wardrobe), represented in Lord Byron's derelict Dressing Room at Newstead Abbey and this was exhibited in *Lace Unveiled* as part of the symposium. The artist Shane Waltener made two new works for Newstead Abbey. In the Edward III bedroom, used by the explorer Dr David Livingstone during his visits to Newstead in the 19th century, Waltener wove a three-dimensional web between the uprights of the sombre 'four poster' bed. The cloud of threads hovered above the bedcovers like a spectral presence. Outdoors, Waltener made a woven canopy of threads, stretched between rows of yew trees that line the route to a medieval fishpond (Figure 9). In contrast to the open landscape around Newstead, Waltener described this piece as 'more of an interior space, one open for contemplation, study, reflection: activities to which the Augustine Monks (who built the pond) would have dedicated their time.'

Quarini states in reviewing *Lace Unarchived* but with reference to the whole symposium:

> By combining archival artifacts with the contemporary it skillfully produces an exhibition of interest to historians, design and fashion students, artists, innovators, and the general public. *Lace Unarchived* is a timely reminder of how artifacts concealed within the archive can not only reveal the historical aspects of the lace industry but also be catalysts for creativity and innovation. (Quarini, 2019 p.279)

FIGURE 9. Shane Waltener's *Score for Newstead Abbey*, 2018, one of the works commissioned for the *Lace Unveiled* exhibition (Copyright Shane Waltener and Nottingham City Museums)

Future

Both Nottingham City Museums and Galleries and Nottingham Trent University have worked independently on a number of projects but crucially they have shared resources and knowledge to progress projects and ideas and have collaborated to enrich and enhance opportunities to create stronger impact. There have been a number of Research Council funded projects such as *Understanding Complex Structures; the conservation, display and interpretation of lace and natural objects* which saw NTU lead a series of workshops in 2009 (with Nottingham City Museums, Victoria & Albert Museum, Natural History Museum) and initiated the relationship between Briggs-Goode and Dean alongside other colleagues from both institutions. Another was *Interlace; thinking on textiles through social and cross-disciplinary dialogue*, a textile 'gathering' created by curator Yasmin Canvin for Nottingham Castle and recently, *Bummock – The Lace Archive*, an exhibition and symposium led by NTU artists Danica Maier with Andrew Bracey.

While *lace:here:now* developed thinking and approaches to Lace Unravelled, this in turn influenced a new project. The notion of a more collaborative, 'democratised' project (Abrams, 2010) was developed into Textile Tales, an 18-month oral history project concerned with the textile heritage of the East Midlands and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2019. The funding bid was able to claim that 'there is clear demand among former textile workers to engage with their heritage, to make contact with other workers, to pass on their knowledge and to share their stories' with evidence from the roadshows that NCMG had developed. This project, led by NTU, and in which NCMG became a partner, along with three other museums, universities and businesses from across the East Midlands, gathered over 55 oral history recordings using the 'roadshow' model. This time, volunteers or 'citizen historians' were trained to collect the oral histories, embodying the ideas of 'empowerment' that Abrams discusses (Abrams, 2010). That project is now in its concluding phase and the oral histories will be kept in perpetuity at East Midlands Oral History Archive, a permanent marker of the testimonies of workers in the East Midlands.

The most significant contribution to the future is about to be launched to the public in January 2021 with the development of a new Lace Gallery at Nottingham Castle as part of the £30 million Transformation Project for the whole site. Alongside this is further ACE Designation Development funding for Global Lace, a project to develop the lace and lace making collection. The goals are to:

- Research the international aspect the industry in the 19th century, in partnership with the University of Nottingham;
- Redevelop one of the galleries at Nottingham Industrial Museum to showcase the lace machinery collection, through the eyes of the people who worked with it, improving access and interpretation, both physical and virtual;
- Use social media platforms to co-select an interactive online exhibition which becomes a physical reality in a temporary exhibition at Newstead Abbey. A digital walkthough of the exhibition will be created to provide a long-term online legacy
- Global Lace will conclude with a Study Day.

CONCLUSION

Throughout our journey to date, the spark created when people from different specialisms convene to talk about Nottingham Lace has informed our plans for the future. In terms of our work with artists and practitioners, we have created the conditions for exploration, interrogation and unexpected or serendipitous encounters, which enable us to see through their eyes - and vice versa. These are the ingredients for genuinely new insights into the historical material, which may or may not lead the artist/designer to make new work - but nevertheless leave behind the trace of an idea, an exchange of perspective for future development. The next step might be how we open up this journey to a wider audience, including museum visitors. We owe much of what we have been able to build this future work on to those visionaries of the past who invested in Nottingham's creativity in the 19th century and we hope that while the context is different, we have continued to offer innovative and creative thinking into the future.

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