

# BACK TO BASICS

## PRICKINGS PART 2

SUSAN ROBERTS

I've had some interesting feedback on the first article in the Back to Basics series, and from this it is clear that it did make people stop and think. This feedback included Claire's Lace letting me know that they sell broken needles for prickers and Brenda Paternoster suggesting what pricking card might also be used for:

'In the late 1960s I worked in a Ministry of Defence laboratory testing papers and boards and we often tested something called glazed board which I'm sure was identical to the pricking card we use now. I believe that MoD used it as packaging for ammunition and for shot-gun cartridges. It's a pity I didn't make lace then; anything left after all the testing was done was just disposed of so I could have had a free supply of pricking card! Since then I have been told that glazed board is also used for printed circuits as it has good electrical insulation properties.'

In the last issue of Lace I looked at the equipment for pricking and preparing your pricking. In this issue I'll cover pricking the pin holes, checking your pricking, marking up a traditional pricking and piecing prickings together.

### Pricking the pin holes

When you make lace your pins should be upright and uniform; yes you might slope the outside pins slightly but I believe that having your pins straight can help to stop the lace rising. As the card helps hold the pins you should have an even pricking too. When I'm pricking I don't look down on the pricking and pricker but from the front (if you look down it is unlikely you will be able to see the small black dot you are trying to prick as the pricker gets nearer. It goes without saying that you need to prick through the centre of the dot; you need to prick at a speed that allows you to do this accurately, it really isn't worth rushing. I don't prick in one movement, I move to the centre of the dot, checking that I am in the centre, then push through the card. If you use one movement you probably aren't going to be centre on the dots. When I'm checking I'm at the centre I don't need to move my pricker from side to side to check I'm positioned in such a way that I can see the dot, that the needle of my pricker is over the centre and that my pricker is vertical. If you aren't pricking vertically you will end up making the holes larger (a slanting cross section of a needle is larger than the area cut straight through the needle). I prick in rows and around features, so I will prick a section of trail and then do the ground around it, I will prick a cloth diamond and then the ground around it. I will prick a diagonal row of ground – including roseground where I will prick a block of four

pins then move to the next diagonal block of four pins. Being methodical means that you are less likely to miss some of the dots.

Pricking is a very repetitive action and you are probably doing a lot of staring. Remember to give your eyes a break every so often and to blink (my eyes get very dry if I'm pricking a large piece and when they are dry I don't see as well). Also put the pricker down and stretch your hand on a regular basis. If you are pricking a large pattern don't do it all in one go.

### Checking your pricking

No matter how hard you try not to you will almost certainly miss the odd dot as you prick. If you are using a traditional pricking it can be very difficult to add pin holes accurately afterwards and you could miss whole rows. Although pricking will remove most of the ink for a black dot on your pricking board it is quite difficult to see so the easiest way to check your pricking is to hold it up to a light and see if you can still see any black dots. Follow the lines of the features and grounds, are the dots all there? If you are doing this with a traditional pricking you need to be very careful as you need the card and pattern to stay together as they were on your pricking board. Don't try and remove the drawing pins that were fastening everything to your board out of the pricking but lift everything in one go off the board. Because of the drawing pins you need to do this very carefully as you don't want them slipping out. If I am doing a large pricking I will check as I go, so I will prick a section then check it by holding it up to the light. It is harder to see remaining black dots when using blue film but you just have to look a bit harder. You are looking for breaks in the rows of light that shouldn't be there. On modern prickings I will also turn the pricking over as a further step as sometimes missing holes seem to stand out more.

### Marking up a traditional pricking

Depending on the complexity of a pattern this can be a hard job to get right; it is so easy to make a mistake. You need to transfer the lines shown on your pattern to your pricking. Personally I don't transfer all the lines – I don't need the weaving lines for blocks for instance, I might add a mark at the start of what will be the early blocks to tell me which way to start weaving but I won't draw the lines on for all the weaving lines. This is my personal preference as I find that once I've done a few repeats I know which way to go and don't need the marking. The rest of the lines I do transfer across with no short cuts. You need to look very carefully at

your pattern and work out where the markings are in relation to other features of the pattern. Some will be much clearer than others. Find the same point on your pricking and start copying from one to another to draw the lines of your pattern on to the pricking. Work slowly and continuously check against the pattern. If you feel confident enough, use your indelible pen right from the start, if not use a pencil and when you are happy ink over the line. If you do use a pencil when you have finished you should rub out the pencil lines. If you have drawn with a pencil for any amount of time you will no doubt have found how easily your hands pick up the lead. If your hands can pick it up so can your threads, hence rubbing out the lines before you start – being careful to sweep away the rubbings that come off.

### **Piecing prickings together**

If I have a pricking that I need to cut to fit on my pillow I will cut it in such a way that I can match it easily afterwards using the same principle that used to be used in clothing patterns of cutting a notch at the edge. So I start cutting at an angle until I get near to where the pins will go and then cut across the holes – it doesn't really matter where on the pricking just cut straight across (and straight), then when you get across to the other side again cut a diagonal. The pieces can then be matched easily when you need to.

The more common piecing of prickings is top to bottom and this is more complicated to do. First study your pattern and check if all features repeat at the same point. Normally they will but occasionally there is a different repeat. I've found this in garter patterns where the centre holes for the ribbon don't always repeat at the same pattern length. One garter my students often want to work repeats every three fans on the outside! I'm sure some of you will have come across the same pattern as it appeared in an old issue of *Lace*. Using a paper copy of your pricking look for a feature that will be easy to spot on the pricking. I have found that the only way I can match a pattern without lots of extra cutting is to cut through the centre of a horizontal row of pin holes, I mark this on my paper copy at either end of the paper pattern. I then do a test cut and wrap the pricking around my hand to check the ends do actually match. When I know I've got it right I then identify the same points on my pricking and cut through the pin holes. If I've cut the pricking in to two pieces I then check that the match is there. It's not nearly as easy to cut notches here so once I have got a match I mark the prickings in two places across the join so that I can use this as my match. Doing this without bobbins on the pillow is so much easier so it really is worth taking the time to get it right at the start.