

VICTORIAN CRAZY QUILT PIN CUSHION EAC-2011-15-DLR



SIZE:

- Approximately 19 X 19 cm and 6 cm in depth.

DESCRIPTION:

- Crazy quilt, Victorian pin cushion dating about WWI (possibly done by a soldier for his sweetheart).
 - Symmetrical in design with a centre square that appears to be a cigarette silk with a floral and berry design, below the this is a petal shape that has 'WITH MY BEST LOVE' machine embroidered on it.
 - Beads (red, clear, and green) and outline the shapes and all beads are attached with a straight pin through the bead.
- Large amber, blue and green beads accent some areas.
 - A wine-coloured ribbon with a fringe divides the back from the front and this has a row of white, clear and black beads along it. Many of these beads are missing.
 - The back is plain and is wine-coloured velvet.

MATERIALS:

- Ground satin and velvet.
- Beads.
- Probably stuffed with sawdust.

HISTORY: Donated by Doreen Larson Riedel of Ottawa, Ontario.

CONDITION: Good to very good especially when you realize that all the beads are attached with a straight sticking straight into the stuffing. The main damage is the loss of beads around the edge.

TREATMENT: Store in acid-free conditions in a box of its own.



Back of the pincushion

By ReBecca Paterson

Queen Victoria has been given credit for introducing the craft of producing pincushions to send to soldiers and sailors serving away from home. Often called "Sweetheart Pincushions," they were also made by soldiers and sailors from the Boer War and WW1. It is indicated that kits were produced containing all the materials needed to make the cushion. The soldier or sailor who was homesick or recovering from injuries would have something to keep his hands busy with plus a token to express his feelings for a wife or girlfriend. The cushions were meant to be a decorative art for the home, not so much as a tool for the sewing box. Due to the rarity of existing cushions, it may be that not all were treasured. There is some thought the cushion may also have been made for commercial trade.

The cushions were made of heavy materials, cotton, canvas, or velvet, and were normally sewn on a sewing machine and firmly stuffed with sand or sawdust so the pins would not fall out. On top of the cushion a design would have been outlined using steel pins, glass beads, and sequins, and sometimes embroidered with threads. Over time the pins would have rusted and deteriorated fibres, likely also being a cause for the rarity of existing cushions. Besides woven silk ribbons for decoration it was common to use a decorative paper / cloth called cigarette silk. Cigarette silks were included in packs of cigarettes as an advertising practise in the late 19th century to the very early 20th century. Some of the silks were paper whereas others were paper-backed cloth. The unique feature of the silks were the pictures that were printed or painted on them. They were similar to trading cards and collected in sets of flowers, animals,

people, objects, flags, and – during the wars – military insignias. Women collected the silks to use them in quilts and needlework. Many of the pincushions in collections today have silks showing regiments, battalions, and ships' insignias. The love poems and other inscriptions on the smaller ribbons were either woven fibers or paper. Other items to be found on the pincushions were snippets of photos of people and places plus hand embroidery on cloth that were attached in the same way as the other decorations, using straight pins and beads. In some cases, outline designs were embroidered directly onto the cushions. The general size of the cushions was between 17 cm to 20 cm in height and width. The common shape was a heart but occasionally squares or stars were used.

The Victorian pincushion in the EAC Heritage collection was donated by Doreen Lawson Riedal from Ottawa. It is 19 cm x 19 cm x 6 cm and is in fairly good condition with very little distortion to the embellishments and trim. There are a few pins and beads missing and the trim along the top edge is tattered. There are two noticeable ribbons secured on the cushion. Both are finely woven; this may have been done on the Stevengraph loom. The Stevengraph, invented by British Thomas Stevens who patented it in 1864, is a loom to weave silk into finely woven pictures and inscriptions that were used for wall hangings, pictorial bookmarks, illuminated ribbons, badges, and accessories. One weaving company, J.J. Cash (established in 1836), was well known for the work that it produced using the Stevengraph and, by changing with the times, they still produce ribbons, name tapes, and badges into the 21st century. The centre ribbon, in a similar style as other Cash designs, has finely woven flowers in a dark red, green leaves, and light mauve berries. *(There is also some fine printing at the left-hand corner obscured by pins and beads that reads in part "ore happy be".)* Considering the possible age of the cushion the colour is still very bright. The second ribbon, also woven, states "With my best love". The cushion front is made of twill with layers of twill and velvet and the back is velvet. The edge is trimmed with a ribbon and may have had lace at one time. The whole cushion may be stuffed with sawdust. This cushion does show pin marks on the center ribbon indicating it was not just decorative art but was used to hold pins or needles.

It is difficult to date the EAC pincushion but due to the higher end materials that were used, the design, and the lack of any reference to the military or a war, it is possible that it was made for commercial trade after WW1. The trend of making these Sweetheart Cushions all but vanished by the 1920s.

Researching the history of the Sweetheart Pincushion was bit of a challenge. A search through a number of books about embroidery, needle art, and weaving come up empty. A Google search on the Internet showed a few websites and

blogs that had bits and pieces of information. A search on Pinterest shows a lot of images with many of the cushions for sale on Ebay or Esty and in museum collections. This research was only on the British cushions as there is an American version that is slightly different.

References:

Disclaimer – I have no way of proving the reliability of the above information as all came from the following sites.

Blog – Janet Haigh

<https://janethaigh.wordpress.com/2011/10/20/mending-hearts-at-heart-space/>

Blog -The Knitting Needle and the Damage Done

<http://theknittingneedleandthedamagedone.blogspot.ca/2013/04/queen-victorias-royal-example.html>

Blog- The Vault- Historical Treasures, Oddities and Delights

http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_vault/2013/09/11/sweetheart_pincushions_british_soldiers_turned_to_embroidery_during_wwi.html

Blog - Lily in the Labyrinth

<http://www.lilyinthelabyrinth.co.uk/2013/01/learn-with-lily-ww1-sweetheart.html>

Website- Imperial War Museum

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30083766>

Website - Through our hands magazine –issue 2 & 4 article by Helen Cobby

<http://www.throughourhands.co.uk/magazine/>

Website- Stevengraph

<http://stevengraphs.com/worwar1pos.html>