

of lace-making; three separate towns, in their day—Blandford, Sherborne, and Lyme Regis—disputing the palm of excellence for their productions.

Of Blandford the earliest mention we find is in Owen's "Magna Britannia" of 1720, where he states: "The manufacture of this town was heretofore 'band-strings,' which were once risen to a great price, but now times hath brought both bands themselves and their strings out of use, and so the inhabitants have turned their hands to making straw works and bone lace, which perhaps may come to nothing, if the fickle humour of fashionmongers take to wearing Flanders lace."

Only four years later, Defoe writes of Blandford:—"This city is chiefly famous for making the finest bone lace in England, and where they showed us some so exquisitely fine as I think I never saw better in Flanders, France, or Italy, and which, they said, they rated above 30*l.* sterling a yard; but it is most certain that they make exceeding rich lace in this county, such as no part of England can equal." In the edition of 1762, Defoe adds, "This was the state and trade of the town when I was there in my first journey; but on June 4, 1731, the whole town, except twenty-six houses, was consumed by fire, together with the church."

Postlethwayt,³ Hutchins,⁴ Lysons, and Knight ("Imperial Cyclopædia"), all tell the same story. Peuchet cites the Blandford laces as "comparables à celles qu'on fait en Flandre (excepté Bruxelles), en France et même dans les États de Venise;" and Anderson mentions Blandford as "a well-built town, surpassing all England in fine lace." More reliance is to be placed on the two last-named authorities than the former, who have evidently copied Defoe without troubling themselves to inquire more deeply into the matter.

It is generally supposed that the trade gradually declined after the great fire of 1731, when it was replaced by the manufacture of buttons, and no record of its former existence can be found among the present inhabitants of the place.⁵

³ "At Bland, on the Stour, between Salisbury and Dorchester, they made the finest lace in England, valued at 30*l.* per yard."—*Universal Dict. of Trade and Commerce*, 1774.

⁴ "Much bone lace was made here, and the finest point in England, equal, if not superior, to that of Flanders, and valued

at 30*l.* per yard, till the beginning of this century."—*Hutchins' Hist. of the County of Dorset*, 2nd edit. 1796.

⁵ What this celebrated point was, we cannot ascertain. Two samplers sent to us as Blandford point were of geometric pattern, resembling the sampler, Coloured Plate I, p. 19.