

ART. VIII.—*Knitting-Sticks.*

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*Read at Carlisle, April 26th, 1917.*

THE thirty-six knitting-sticks hereunder noted, twenty-eight of which are illustrated, were all seen in or near to Gosforth, though many owe their origin to distant parts of the county, or even beyond its boundary. They form a good series, dating from the middle of the eighteenth century to the present day, and differing much in shape, size, and ornamentation. The dates given are as far back as each specimen can be traced, but some may be earlier. Chancellor Ferguson (these *Transactions*, O.S., vi, 92), mentions a stick dated 1722. The drawings are all on the same scale, except No. 10, which is  $\frac{2}{3}$  the scale of the others.

Sticks were worn stuck in the belt or apron-string, on the right-hand side, to support in the hole at the end one of the short knitting-needles then in use. This was the free needle on which the row was to be knitted. It would be impossible to knit with the stick on the other side. Many are notched, grooved, or slotted to catch the apron-string, No. 12 having four grooves. The slot was on the outer face. When work was over, hollow bone caps connected by elastic were slipped over the ends of the needles to save the knitting bag (No. 23).

There are four main varieties of sticks—the carved, the dagger-shaped, the heart-shaped, and the turned. The heart-shaped sticks do not occur in the district. Being very small and their use not very apparent, they would be easily lost; also they were copied in tin, and finally degenerated into the quilted quill still in use pinned to the dress of the knitter (No. 16).

No. 1, one of the oldest, stands by itself. A straight square rod of dark oak, slightly hollowed on one side and having a diagonal slot on the opposite. The lady who lent it to me averred that it belonged to her great-great-grandmother, Anne Robinson of Brougham, which puts it back to 1770 at least. It may be older, for it looks like the patriarch of its kind.

The hollow leads on to the carved series, all more or less curved to fit the figure, though No. 2, perhaps by mistake, is curved the wrong way. In four specimens the wood at the top has been laboriously chipped away to form a cage containing a loose ball. One of these has metal round the top (3) and Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8, have deep slots adapted more for a waist-belt than an apron-string. Waists were worn high then, 1775-1789. The inner concave face has as a rule little carving but the others are highly ornamented, mostly with a multitude of triangles, nicks and crosses, though No. 7 has hearts, flowers and birds. Nos. 5 and 7 are dated. Often the initials of the lady owner appear, and no wonder, for there is first-hand evidence that they were carved at nights by sweethearts, and that there was great emulation among the young ladies as to who should possess the nicest stick. No. 9 is modern, carved in 1882, and very like a viper.

The curved shanks lead to the dagger-shaped sticks, curved, hollowed, notched or grooved, the top generally turned, though sometimes carved to imitate turning. Some are perfectly plain, but the increased surface inviting ornament, we find rows of triangles, flowers, initials either incised or let in, the full name of the lady and sometimes the date of the year, or even, as in No. 16, the day. No. 26 has been decorated with paint instead of carving, and No. 14 is still in use.

Oak is the usual material, but occasionally beech or mahogany were used.

The decoration is archaic in the sense of being primitive,

but cannot be said to originate from or be a survival of Scandinavian or Jacobean carving. There is nothing dragonesque, no interlacing, no seventeenth-century pattern; in fact the designs are quaint and simple, exactly those which would first occur to a beginner—triangles, hearts, crosses, flowers and birds. Fashion in style no doubt prevailed locally, as certain sticks closely resemble each other.

The straight series, turned in a lathe are, of various woods, ash and the beautiful laburnum being frequently used. Some have a ring of bone or metal at the top, No. 27 having two rings of metal connected by diagonal straight pieces, all let in round the upper part. They vary from 5 to  $9\frac{1}{4}$  inches in length, and date from about 1800 to the present day, ending with No. 29 from the pencil works at Keswick. Dagger-shaped sticks vary from  $11\frac{1}{4}$  inches to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Roughly speaking, carved sticks are eighteenth century, turned specimens nineteenth, and dagger-shaped first half of nineteenth, but there is some overlapping.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

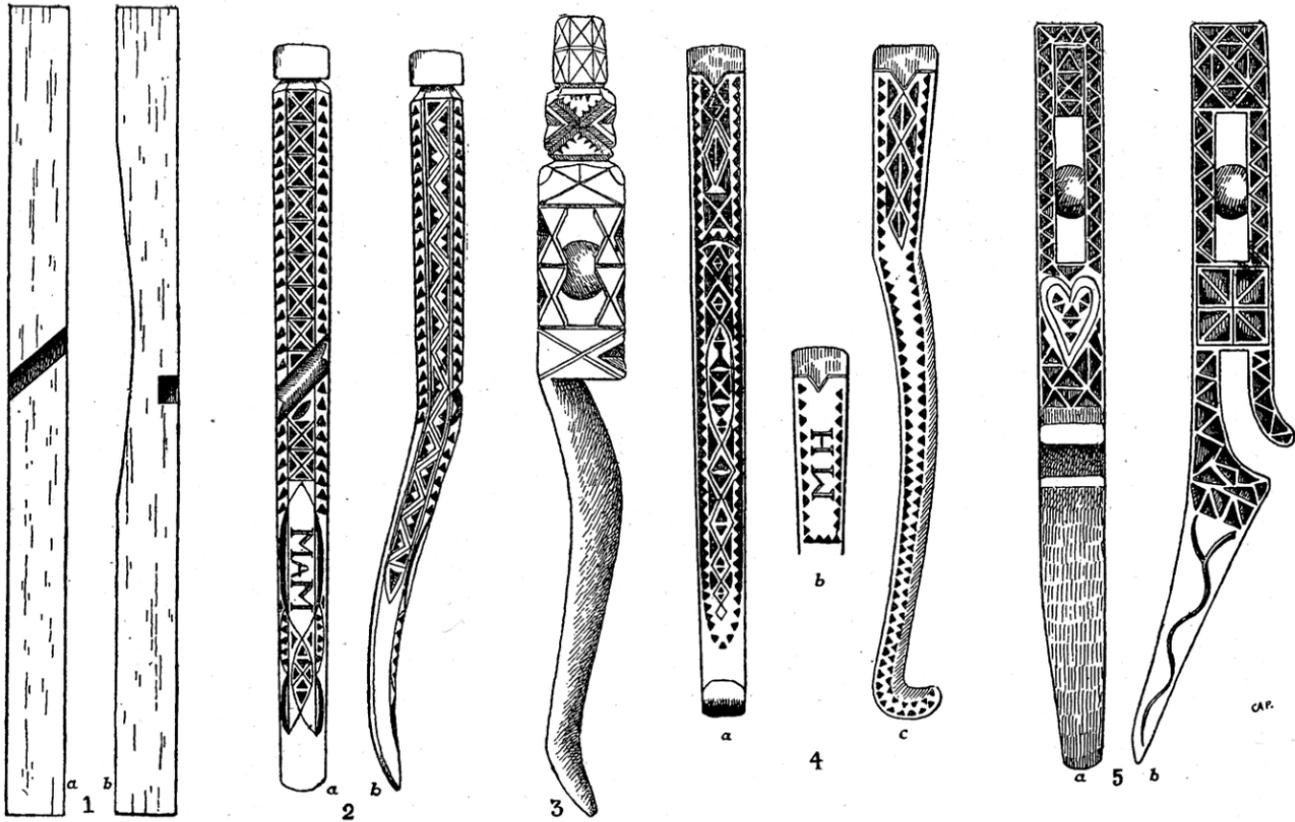
No. 1.—Dark oak, 8 inches. Square section, 1770 or earlier. Clifton Moor, Penrith; originally *Brougham*; seen at Seascale.

No. 2.—Oak,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Over 200 triangles. Convex face plain and slot for string on concave face, so that the curve does not fit the figure. Incised M.M. with an A scratched in between later. Mary Millican, née Watson, of *Alston* had it given her about 1800. Now at Bowbridge, Gosforth.

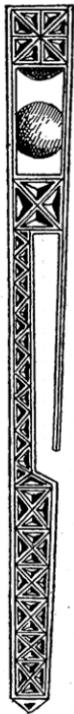
No. 3.—Dark oak, 8 inches. Top octagon, body square. On concave of curved shank, M.T. (Thompson). About 1780. *Calderbridge*; now at Parknook, Gosforth.

No. 4.—Oak,  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Metal round top. On inner face M.H. Given to Mary Hall, formerly Mary Martin, about 1820, by an old lady named Hunter of *Alston*, who dated it 1775. The M.H. put on later. Now at Bowbridge, Gosforth.

No. 5.—Beech,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Dated 1789. Carved by William Bibby. Hollowstones, *Eskdale*.

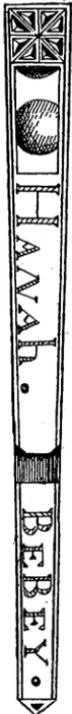


KNITTING STICKS.



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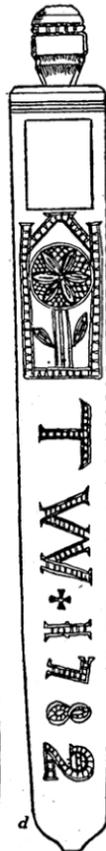
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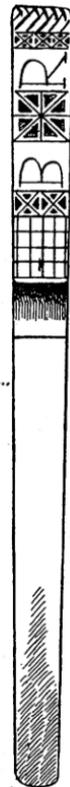


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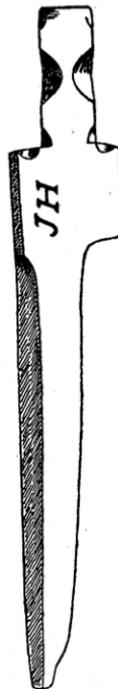


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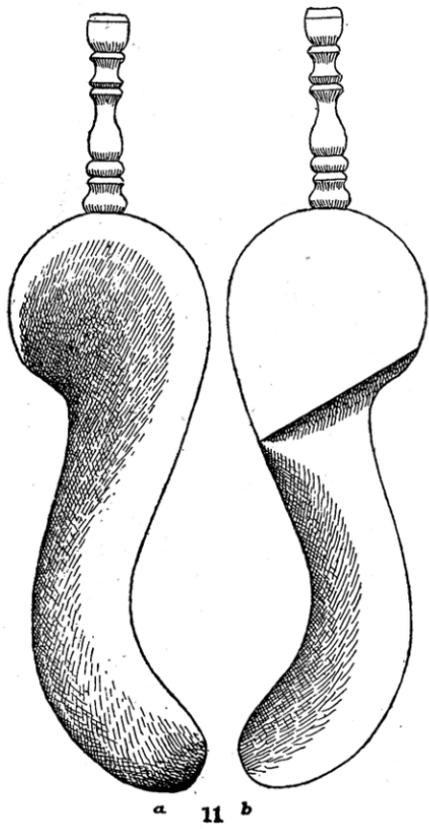


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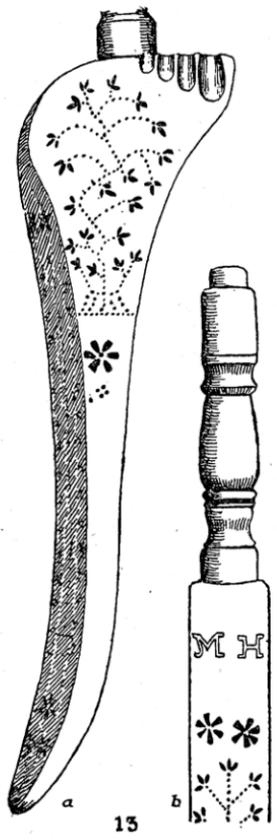
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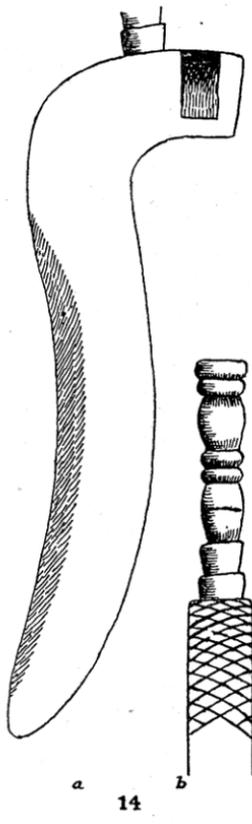
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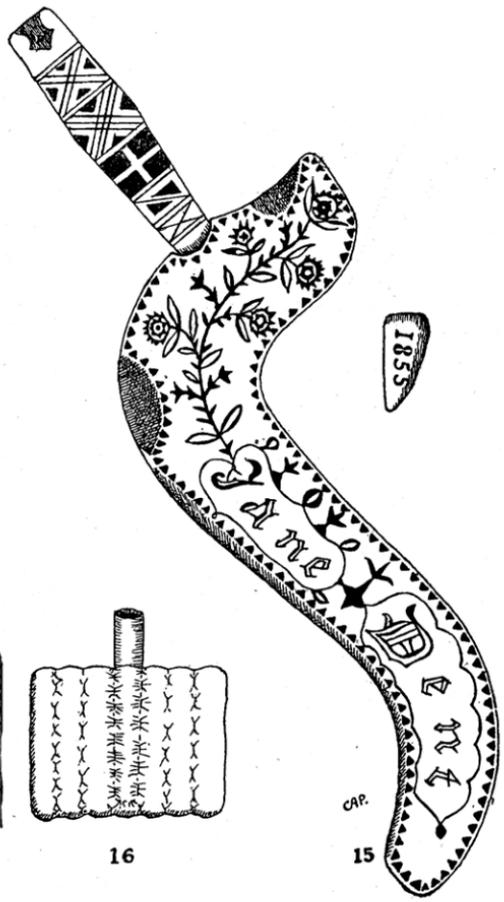
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KNITTING STICKS.





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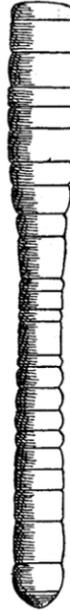


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### KNITTING STICKS

No. 6.—Dark oak, 7 inches. Carved by Joseph Bibby of Wasdale for his sister Hannah, about 1825. Good work. Hollowstones, *Eskdale*.

No. 7.—Oak,  $8\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Has been mended and the ball lost. On concave face T.W. (Tamar Wilson), 1782. *Calderbridge*, now at Parknook.

No. 8.—Oak, 8 inches. Carved for Betty Roger of Gillbank. About 1810-20. Randal How, *Eskdale*. Pattern marked on concave side but not carved.

No. 9.—Beech,  $7\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Square section, top carved all round. Body serpentine with plain sides. Carved by Joseph W. Nixon, 1882. Bowbridge, *Gosforth*.

No. 10.—Oak,  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Two small notches. Very rude. Bridge End, Santon Bridge, Irton.

No. 11.—Mahogany,  $11\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Turned top. Grooved on flat side diagonally. One of a pair. Greendale, Netherwasdale, formerly *Witherslack*.

No. 12.—Mahogany, 11 inches. Quite flat on one face, only slightly hollowed on the other. No groove. Greendale, formerly *Witherslack* (not illustrated).

No. 13.—Oak,  $10\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Four grooves. On concave back 5 stars and floral pattern, on shoulder M.H. in brass let in. About 1820. Clifton Moor, *Penrith*; seen at Seascale.

No. 14.—Oak, 10 inches. Top carved not turned. Square notch. Still in use. Belonged to Mary Mallinson of Newby Foot, *Morland*, about 1830. Now at Seascale.

No. 15.—Oak,  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Top a separate piece with metal on upper end. Blade flattish, two notches. Dated 1855. *Baldersdale*, Yorks., now at Santon Bridge.

No. 16.—The quilted quill still in use.

No. 17.—Oak, 9 inches. Very flat and like the last. Dated 1860. *Baldersdale*, Yorks., now at Santon Bridge.

No. 18.—Oak,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches. About 1820. Row, *Gosforth*, believed to have come from *Ennerdale*. Now at Parknook.

No. 19.—Oak,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches. (Same as Fig. 18).

No. 20.—Oak, 11 inches. On flatter side, groove and A.H., *Ulpha*.

No. 21.—Mahogany,  $8\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Stripes of what has once been paint. Randal How, *Eskdale*.

No. 22.—Oak, 9 inches, has been longer. Very plain. Windsor, *Netherwasdale*.

No. 23.—Bone caps for knitting needles.

No. 24.—Blackish wood, perhaps stained, 5 inches. Windsor, *Netherwasdale*.

No. 25.—Laburnum,  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Bone top. Hollinhead, *Eskdale*.

No. 26.—Dark red wood,  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches, has been longer. Circle of brass round top. 1850 or earlier. *Gosforth*, now at Parknook.

No. 27.—Ash, 8 inches. Pieces of metal let in round the top. About 1840. Whineray, *Gosforth*, now at Parknook.

No. 28.—Mahogany, 6 inches. Belonged to Elizabeth Herbert of Mealbank, *Gosforth*, about 1820; now at Parknook.

No. 29.—Cedar,  $7\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Present day, *Keswick* pencil works.

No. 30.—Ash, 7 inches. About 1780. Green Lodge, *Eskdale*.

No. 31.—Oak,  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Foot acorn shaped. Blengside, *Gosforth*, now at Parknook.

No. 32.—Oak, 8 inches. Very like 28, *Eskdale* (not illustrated).

No. 33.—Laburnum, 7 inches. Like the last but with circular bone top. Sword House, *Eskdale* (not illustrated).

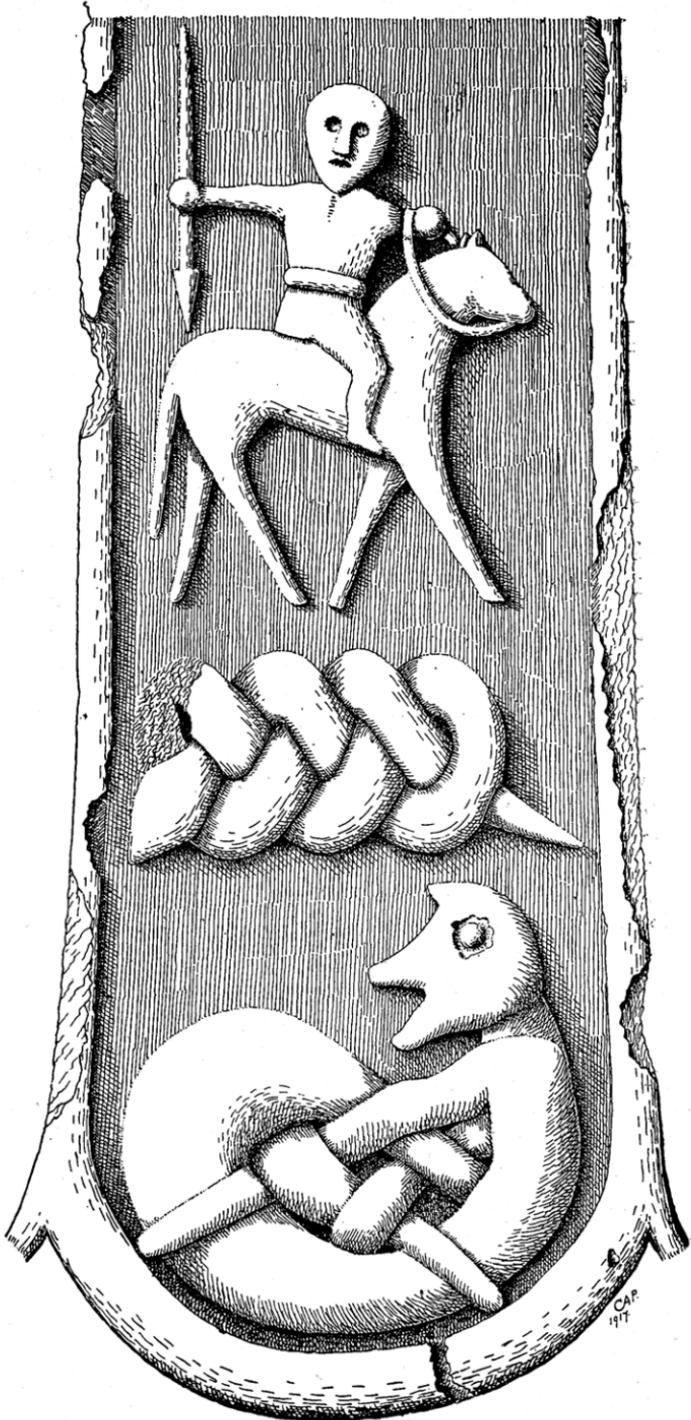
No. 34.—Ash,  $9\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Much the same but longer. Yew-tree, *Netherwasdale*, formerly *Caldbeck* (not illustrated).

No. 35.—Ash,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Like 26. Turned by Joseph Millican of *Alston*, about 1846. Now at Bowbridge, *Gosforth* (not illustrated).

No. 36.—Mahogany,  $6\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Heavy brass top. Somewhat like 26. *Haworth*, Yorks. About 1835.

No. 37.—Beech, 6 inches. Turned in rolls the whole length. *Haworth*, Yorks.

No. 38.—Oak,  $6\frac{1}{4}$  inches. *Haworth*, Yorks.; the last three seen at Seascale.



1. THE LOWER PART OF THE SOUTH FACE,  
GOSFORTH CROSS.