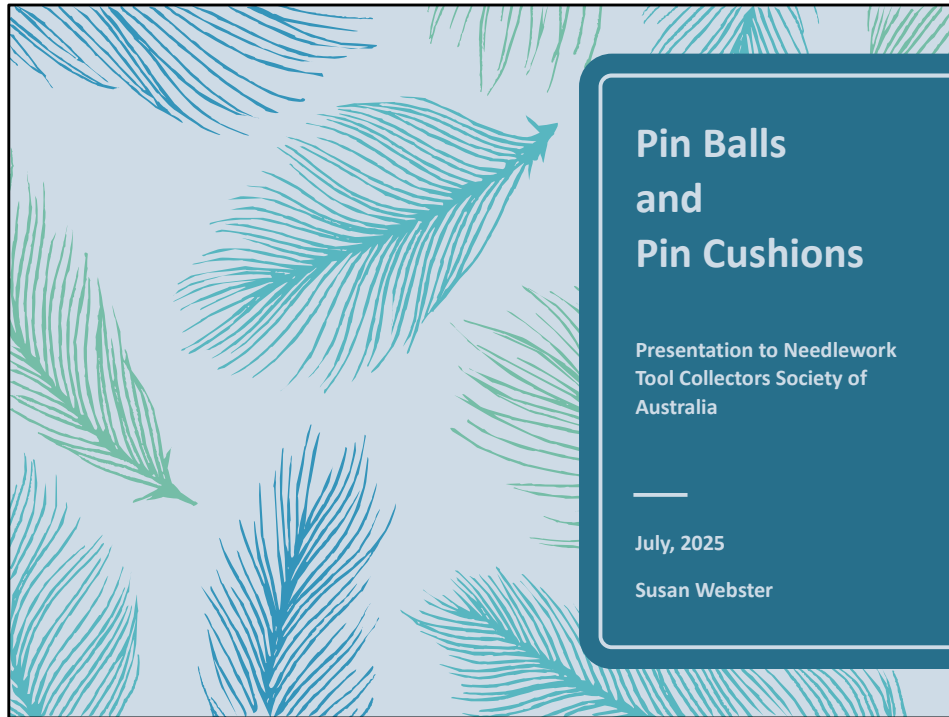




I am not really going to talk about pin cushions.

Lydia and I thought people might have pin cushions and like to bring them and talk about them.

So I will leave the pin cushion discussion to our members.

Those who visited my home in April might be wondering why they didn't see these pinballs then – the answer is that June and I decided to withhold them at that time – otherwise there would be nothing special see today.

2

Glenn Close at the height of her beauty and her acting abilities – in *Dangerous Liaisons*, 1988



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

I am foregoing my usual references to my knitting tools collection – I am sure you are all well briefed on that.

The item attached to Glenn Close's waist is probably a spherical reticule or purse, but its round shape just said "pin ball" to me.

I was watching *Dangerous Liaisons* for the first time a few months ago – spotted the pin ball/purse, so put the film on pause and took the shot with my mobile.

You can see the PAUSE mark on the upper left.

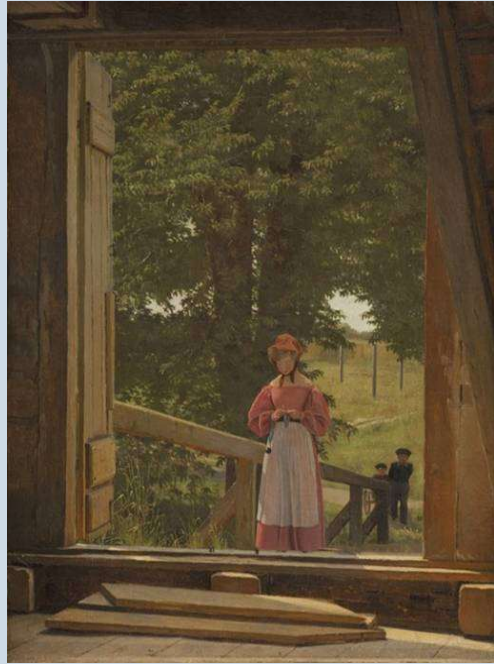
The drama is set in the late 18th century, but chatelaines, pin balls and other tools hanging off the waist started at least 100 years earlier, in the later 17th century.

3

Value of pins before mechanisation in the mid-19th century – some phrases set the scene

- Pin money
- A needle (or pin) in a haystack
- See a pin and pick it up – all the day you'll have good luck
- See a pin and let it lay – bad luck you'll have all day

Pin Balls and Pin Cushions



View from the Loft of the Grain Store at the Bakery in the Citadel of Copenhagen
Christen Købke - Danish painter, who is in the National Gallery in London – not sure if this painting is in the National Gallery, but it is available online as a print.

A lovely Danish painting.

In the Middle Ages, pins were vital adjuncts to a lady's (or gentleman's) wardrobe, as sleeves were usually detached, and fabric was cut as seldom as possible, so that it could be re-folded and re-shaped to accommodate new fashions.

Merriem Webster - Pins are useful: they keep your hat on, and your clothes fastened. Before mass production, pins were also extremely costly. The allowance that a 16th century husband had to provide his wife was therefore called 'pin money' in English law.12 Apr 2016

So, if you had pins, you needed something to keep them in OR on – hence pin boxes or pin cushions.

4

Where did pin balls come from ?



Two mid-17th century English pin cushions or pin balls with other accoutrements. The pin ball on the left still shows some nap on the original velvet – shown in Cummins and Taunton.

Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

There are a few other items of this timeframe, during the 17th century. Note the encasing or holders for such pin cushions were the work of a white smith or, perhaps, a goldsmith. Not sure if the owner or the smith placed the cushion in the silver frame.

5

Two 17th Century Chatelaines attached to a silver girdle

Such chatelaines were worn as part of the costume of the Bride of Whitsun, an old, Dutch folk celebration – shown in Sullivan, pp 36-39.



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions



Long drops on Dutch chatelaines make it easier to use the tools.

The pinball on the left appears to be velvet or strong fabric. This chatelaine dates from 1669.

On the right chatelaine, the round object appears to be a purse.

The silver girdle (belt) was made at the end of the 17th century by Thomas Sibrand Hicht in Dokkum, Friesland

6

What is a Pin Disc



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions



Crocheted silk pin disc with beading

About 1800 – rare CROCHETED and beaded in fine silk. Note pink and white beaded edges, and the not very impressive beige ribbon around the middle.

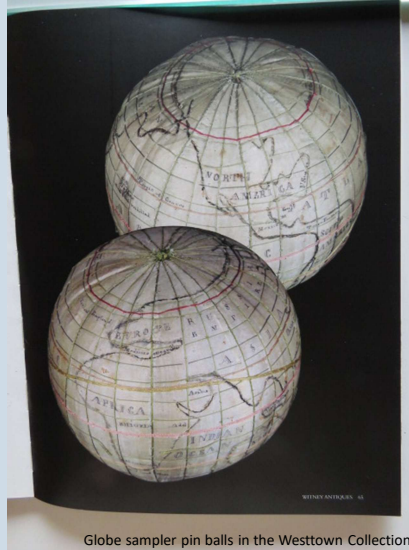
CC 3405 – from Carolyn Meacham Note the mothings on the right-side picture

Pin discs were two thin plates – wood, cardboard, horn, paper – which were covered in fabric and stuffed as a sandwich – with ribbon or braid concealing the join. Here the ribbon is a bit miserable looking.

7

What encouraged the creation of pin balls?

- Education of middle and upper class girls, including in needlework, from the 18th/19th centuries



Globe sampler pin balls in the Westtown Collection

Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

These globes are part of the body of work undertaken by students at Quaker girls schools, starting from the early 18th century, and including many types of needlework. Quaker schools were also often attended by non-Quaker children, as parents then as now looked for the very best schools to which to entrust their children. The Quaker school movement also moved from England to North America. And of course, there were many other non-Quaker schools. But these Quaker schools, particularly the Awkworth school outside London provided a large body of needlework and other hand made items. Much research has been published by the Whitney Antiques circle in books and catalogues, particularly about samplers created at their school.

Generally, most pin balls and pin disks and pin cushions were worked or embroidered on the flat before make up. But these terrestrial or celestial globes – there are eight of them in the collection and more still held in the surrounding area – are embroidered onto the sphere.

Regardless of the lack of detail, the construction of the globes was an achievement in itself. Eight pieces of shaped linen had to be drawn to the correct shape, cut and sewn together to produce an even sphere when stuffed. Silk of eight similar shapes had to be cut for the outer covering, marked with geographical or astronomical details, stitched to the linen sphere, and then embroidered.

8

What else encouraged the creation of pin balls?

- Education of middle and upper class girls, including needlework, from the 18th/19th centuries
- Social gift giving became increasingly popular from the 17th century on, as well as a growth in sentimentality



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

This pin ball is probably a gift but possibly was made to be kept as a reminder of a dear one. As we know from samplers, acknowledgement of the shortness of life or of death itself was a part of normal life in pre-20th century society.

This pin ball has the join of the two halves covered by a silver girdle with a chain to affix it to a waist clip or chatelaine. The lower shot shows a rather elaborate girdle of unpolished silver – but the chain and the fastenings are quite crude. Is the chain original to the piece? We don't know.

This pin ball is here today.

9

What else encouraged the creation of pin balls?

- Education of middle and upper class girls, including needlework, from the 18th/19th centuries
- Social gift giving became increasingly popular from the 17th century on
- Growth of travel and souvenirs



Silk knitted pinball 'AF' Bristol 1775
(possibly a relation of the Trump Family)
★ © Ackworth School Estates Limited

Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

Was this pin ball a souvenir? Or, a gift from one who had travelled?

10

What else encouraged the creation of pin balls?

- Education of middle and upper class girls, including needlework, from the 18th/19th centuries
- Social gift giving became increasingly popular from the 17th century on
- Growth of travel and souvenirs
- Increase importance of charity bazaars – women made items to sell for charity as “good works”



Bleasdales Winter Sewing Sale catalogue
Wednesday, 18 June 2025 10am
www.bit.ly/?SewingSaleJune2025

Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

The charity bazaar and the creation/selling of good works to aid the deserving poor grew along with the middle class in England, North America and Australia. This is a page from the Bleasdales June 2025 catalogue. All these pin balls and discs came from one un-named collector. The “Token of Respect” pin balls and pin discs were a well known genre of work of the Ackworth school, with Witney Antiques quoting one student as saying she would make some pin balls over the break to earn some money. Whether this money was for herself or for the school’s charity work is not known.

Fundraising, Flirtation, and Fancywork Shiel, Annette 1998 Good social analysis of 19th c social activities in Australia. Usually such events were headed by a man or a male committee, but the actual work of creating and running the event was carried out by women – a great outlet for their organising or managerial skills.

11

Hand made = from the heart

Great variety in the items which a young person could make – other handiwork included



A beaded purse

Pin Balls and Pin Cushions



An embroidered egg



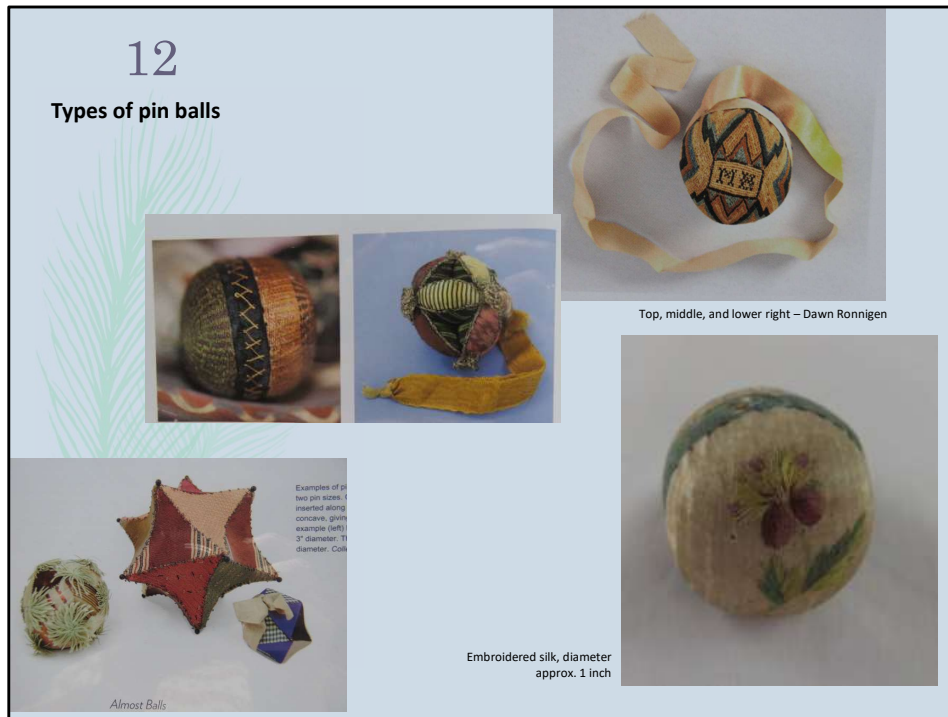
Valentines made from feathers

I brought in a few other items of handiwork and craft which a young lady might create for a friend or loved one– or even for herself.

- Cut paperwork x two
- I've also brought today – still on the needles – an unfinished glove and an unfinished reticule – mainly to show off the needles, but the handiwork is mind-blowing too.

12

Types of pin balls



Three photos from Dawn Ronnigen. The lower right pinball is one inch in diameter, with exquisite embroidery. The silk of the encircling ribbon is perishing. Here today.

13

Pin Ball Sizes

Very small
to about 3-
4 inches in
diameter

From the Jan Moule
collection



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

This collection belongs to our Sydney member Jan Moule, who kindly sent me this photo of her work. The green pin disk on the left was her first, using the Knit Pro needles

The Knit Pro needles are a size 1.0 mm and were used to make the green and white disc. That was Jan's first creation in this genre. The needles on the right are sized at 0.8 mm and these were used for the pinballs. There are approximately 27 stitches per inch. You can see this gauge on the pin balls here today.

I have brought similar sized needles today, with live knitting still on them – not for a pin ball. I am flabbergasted that those tiny needles cost \$15.25

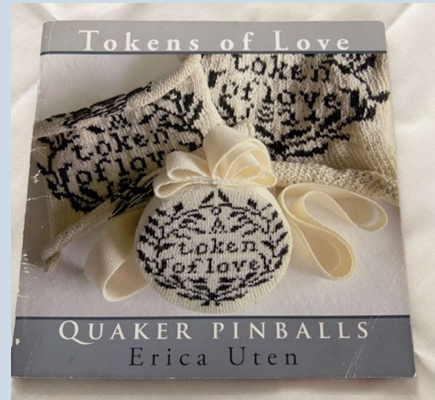
The reticule is starting to fray, where a bug has had nibble.

14

How to Make a Pin Ball

Many books and videos and internet sources give instructions on how to make a pin ball.

This is the book Jan Moule has used.



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

From Jan Moule

As we saw earlier, the Quaker schools and institutions have kept items and instructions in their archives, and keen stitchers and researchers have compiled several sources.

Pages within this book give step by step instructions on how to create your pin ball.

15

How to Make a Pin Ball



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

From Tokens of Love

Note figures 1 and 2 show calculating the size of the pin ball based on the diameter of the needlework. Figure 3 – here the creator is recording details of the date and the object. Figure 4 shows preparation for drawing the fabric piece and stuffing into a tight hemisphere. Figure 7 shows attaching the encircling ribbon.

16

How to Make a Pin Ball

Embroidery pieces ready to be made into pin balls



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

From Dawn Ronnigen

“Embroidery pieces ready to be made into pin balls. The linen examples on the left still hold the basting lines marking where to stitch. The brown cotton ground on the right is embroidered with silk flowers. It has been trimmed in preparation for” drawing the circle into a hemisphere.

17

How to Make a Pin Ball

1



2



3



4



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

Kozykitty.blogspot.com/search/label/pinball

This set of photos shows the transformation from two flat pieces of knitted fabric into the three-dimensional pin ball.

In Figure 2, notice that a round cardboard disc has been inserted above the stuffing and that the edges of the fabric have been drawn over the disc.

In this case a silver girdle has been applied – in fact, working backwards, the diameter of the silver ring determines the size of the pin ball which determines the size and amount of the knitting or stitching.

18

How to Make a Pin Ball

The “spider’s web” pin ball is made by

- Creating and stuffing a fabric pin ball
- Then setting vertical spokes, dividing the pin ball into sections
- Then winding yarn or thread around spokes



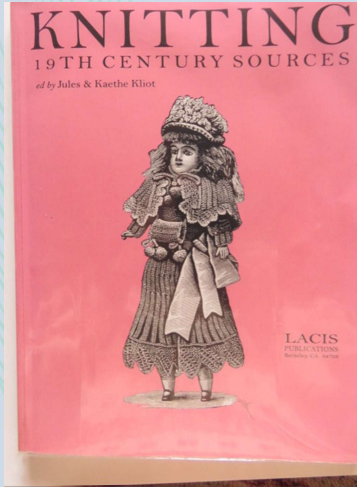
Pin Balls and Pin Cushions

Top photo – not the most flattering photo of the object – but clearly showing the vertical spokes around which the yarn or thread has been wound – as well as the ribbon covering the join of the two halves and the decorative stitching to help hold the ribbon on and give unity to the whole object. In some cases such as this one, with my own pin balls, I have used shots that show up the workings or even the damage or imperfections.

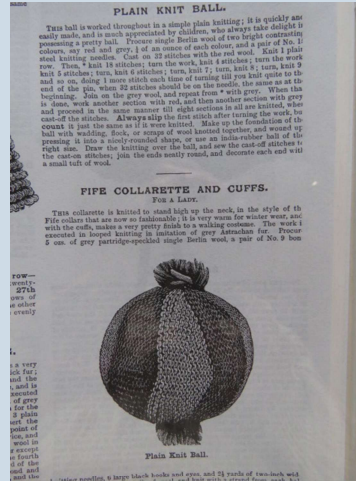
The lower photo shows the pin ball from the top and gives a good idea of the visual effect of this type of pin ball. I don't buy many of these because I do not like the aesthetics.

19

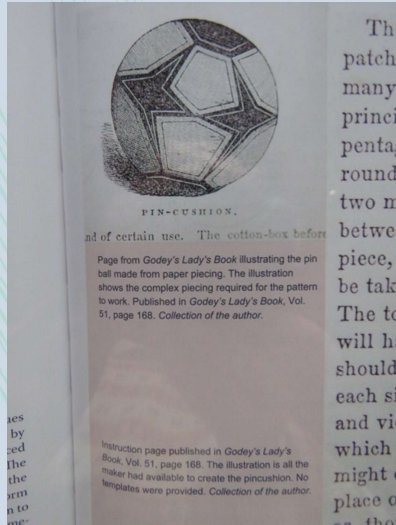
How to make a pin ball



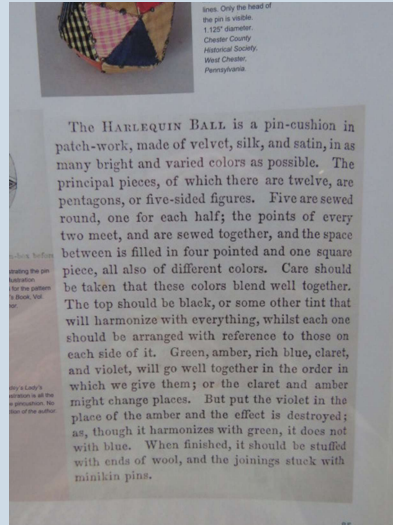
Pin Balls and Pin Cushions



This knitted pin ball is made by creating eight wedges to sew together. Knitting short rows creates the shape.



Pin Balls and Pin Cushions



Shown in Dawn Ronnegin

These instructions for making a harlequin pin ball are reproduced from *Godey's Lady's Book* in the Dawn Ronnigen's *Antique American Needlework Tools*

21

What are Pin Balls Stuffed with?

Well, almost anything –

- Lambs wool or other fibre
- Crushed nut shells
- Horsehair
- Pumice or emery



Emery – from Nyrella Taunton collection

Sources

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- 18th Century Pin Pillow MINI Sew Along on Youtube
- <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/VUG-y2r7HrA>
- Plus many, many more relevant sites – just watch out for pinball machines

Personal Communications

- Robert Bleasdale, June, 2025
- Jan Moule, July, 2025
- June Rivett, June, 2025
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24

The End

Thank you especially to

June Rivett – for advice and information and ideas

Pin Balls and Pin Cushions