

REVIEWS - COMPTES RENDUS

Spinning Wheels, Spinners and Spinning, Patricia Baines.
London, B.T. Batsford, 1977. 252p., illus.
ISBN 0-7134-0821-9. £7.50
Reviewed by Judy Keenlyside.

One's immediate impression upon reading through a book such as this is one of pleasure -- the pleasure of digestion, of chewing through the depth and breadth of details, ideas, and descriptions. Upon reaching the final page the lasting impression is one of immeasurable respect for the hours of research and writing which the author must have devoted to this work. This scholarly treatise uses every possible source in assembling data on spinning, spinning wheels, and spinners in Europe since the advent there of the wheel-driven spindle: first-hand inspection of the artifacts of spinning; early paintings, drawings, and engravings of spinning, spinners, and their effects; original or primary documents on spinning and textile concerns; early records and comparative descriptions of the conditions, methods, preferences, organization, and results of spinning in various regions of Europe; previous studies of wheels and spinning; folklore, oral traditions, and linguistic evidence; and the author's own practical knowledge of spinning.

The information which Patricia Baines can extract from an illustration is a lesson for everyone. A woman pictured at a spinning wheel becomes a mine of data for the author who examines not only the wheel, its orientation, height, setting, and accessories but also the arrangement, appearance, and location of the unspun fibre, the spinster, her clothes, her chair, her position, the way she holds her arms, turns her body, and uses her hands and feet. Baines's talent for pulling together such a variety of data from illustrations reflects the strongest feature of her study -- her ability to observe and

reconstruct a composite of artifact, fibre, and spinning technique when attempting to establish a temporal, regional, or situational framework. Throughout the book there is a continuing and implicit assumption that the artifact -- the spinning wheel -- is merely a material manifestation of the process of hand spinning on a wheel. As a machine the spinning wheel was and is part of a complex of tools; it has an operator -- the spinner, a manufacturer -- the spinning wheel maker, something to operate on -- the fibre, and something to produce -- the final yarn. This yarn is produced under domestic or industrial conditions and, being a primary product, has a final destiny which involves secondary (domestic or industrial) manufacture such as knitting, weaving, netting, lacemaking, etc. All these considerations are incorporated in the book. As Baines states in the preface:

In writing this book I have attempted to give some indication of the evolution of the spinning wheel, some of the differences in its design, something of the people who used them, and some of the techniques that have been used. The history of the spinning wheel is closely linked to the various textile industries in which its efficiency as a work tool was of first importance. However, it has been no less valuable in domestic life, and both spheres have contributed to its evolution, the two often interdependent.

By virtue of the book's theme, cross-referencing, and careful use of myriad sources the author has attempted to portray the spinning wheel in context. In tracing the origins of European spinning wheels, the author emphasizes the evolution of a process. How a wheel was used, for what purposes, and by whom are details recognized as having a history of regional and cultural variation as great and as important as the wheel itself.

Quite apart from the basic thrust of the study, Baines must also be complimented on her finely honed abilities in morphological description, always a problem area for anyone

writing in material history. The clarity and precision of the author's descriptions of the shapes, parts, composition, and appearance of individual (and usually unique) spinning wheels, distaffs, or what-have-you, are beyond criticism. At several points the written description precedes an accompanying illustration; each time I was astonished to find that the image conjured up in my mind by Baines's careful prose matched almost exactly the black and white image on the following page.

In the event that this book may be gaining a reputation for perfection, it is necessary to note some errors. On pages 130 and 131 two plates are mislabelled; figure 50 actually refers to the photograph on page 130 and figure 49 to the photo in the upper, left-hand corner of page 131. Also, alas, there is a typesetting error in which line 10 should be line 13, 11 should be 14, 12 should be 15, 13 should be 10, 14 should be 11, and 15 should be 12. These particular lines focus on a doubled band drive flyer wheel and its mechanism for drawing in the twisted yarn. The point is made that the greater the difference in circumference between the bobbin and spindle whorls, the greater the strength of draw-in. Though the author uses the term ratio in this context she relies on absolute figures in her examples, stating, for instance, that a difference of 1.3 centimetres would give a slow draw-in whereas a difference of 7.5 centimetres would give a strong draw-in. It would have been more accurate and more meaningful to have expressed this difference in relative terms and emphasized the two speeds (i.e., circumferences) as a ratio.

One point of organization which I question is the inclusion of the Picardie wheel as one of five principal types of flyer spinning wheels. Essentially Baines's typology is based on a combination of two traits: first, the wheel's arrangement of essential parts (wheel and flyer mechanism), of which there are basically two forms -- a vertical or a horizontal orientation, and secondly the construction of the frame (legs, supports, and other parts exclusive of wheel and flyer mechanism), of which

there are also basically two forms -- a frame or a stock (base) construction. These traits combine to give four main categories: horizontal spinning wheel with stock, horizontal spinning wheel with frame, vertical spinning wheel with base, and vertical spinning wheel with frame. Since these four were not formulated with data derived from the flyer mechanism itself, the categories could be equally well applied to spindle wheels* (which lack flyers) or even to bobbin winders or other non-spinning, wheel-driven machines. The three different types of flyer drive (outlined earlier in the book), along with other details of the wheel such as tensioning and treadling, are referred to within the confines of these four main categories. Only the Picardie wheel is isolated for special treatment. Actually it is a horizontal spinning wheel with stock and one expects to find it discussed in this category. In addition, the mechanics of its flyer drive falls within Baines's three-point classification system. (The Picardie has bobbin drag; the other two drives are flyer drag and doubled band drive.) The only point of departure from other flyer wheels is that the Picardie wheel does not incorporate the flyer mechanism between the two maidens (spindle supports) but outside them. However, one expects this singular and interesting characteristic to be discussed as an important feature of a wheel that otherwise fits into the author's classification system. The creation of a special, fifth category for the Picardie wheel strains an otherwise workable and inspired system.

The final chapter of the book -- a how-to-spin section -- is followed by appendices on sheep breeds and on choosing and sorting wool. This section might be considered by some readers as a separate theme and indeed these last forty-six pages could well stand on their own.

In sum, the student of spinning and spinning wheel history is treated to a book crammed cover to cover with well-documented

* This, however, is not done in Baines's study.

and well-organized detail. Those wishing to make instant diagnoses of specific wheels may be disappointed at the organization of the detail, but such is obviously not the goal of the publication. While any attempt to reduce or abbreviate the information in this study would be almost sacrilegious, a sampling of pertinent information includes the following points. We learn, among much else, that the earliest known representation of a spinning wheel is a hand-turned, rimless wheel from China dating from 1270, and that rimless spindle wheels, common also to India, are not unknown in Europe, specimens being noted from such places as Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, and Scandinavia. Hoop rim spindle wheels on legs have been recorded pictorially from the early 1300s in Germany and England. Hand-turned flyer wheels have been known from at least 1480 (doubled band drive type) in Germany, while Dutch and Flemish examples of the bobbin drag Picardie wheel are depicted as early as 1513. The author finds no direct evidence for the addition of a treadle to the spinning wheel prior to the seventeenth century and notes that the earliest known treadle flyer wheel, dating from 1604, is a vertical frame type. She thinks spindle wheels may have arrived in Europe associated with spinning cotton and silk but were very soon adapted for wool. Flyer wheels appear to have been used for wool and flax equally. (Early illustrations leave no doubt that wool is being used though in some countries flax came to be more closely associated with flyer wheels.) The author makes the interesting speculation that self-winding flyer and bobbin mechanisms -- particularly the flyer drag system -- may have been influenced by Italian silk-throwing machines which employed similar principles at a very early date. In spite of the long history of wheels in Europe the author believes that "the majority of spinning wheels still in existence date from not earlier than the second half of the eighteenth century and mostly from the nineteenth century."

The association of certain wheel types and spinning methods with specific areas of Europe is of particular interest to Canadian trying to trace the evolution and diffusion of spinning technologies in this country. The scope and methodology of Baines's study and the scrutiny and integration of the artifactual as well as the documentary material make this a worthwhile example for any curator or student of material history.

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Now You're Logging. Bus Griffiths. Madeira Park, B.C., Harbour Publishing, 1978. 124p., illus. Cloth ISBN 0-920080-40-5, \$15.95. Paper ISBN 0-920080-38-3, \$10.95.
Reviewed by Robert Griffin.

Recently a number of books and papers have been published on British Columbia's forest industry. Most of these efforts are mediocre and of little value to the serious researcher studying British Columbia's forest history. Now You're Logging is an exception, an enjoyable story of the past glory of truck logging when all a logger needed to dream about was cutting a "forest full of trees." Bus Griffiths was a logger who loved working in the woods; it was a work he learned and remembers well. His delightful drawings portray not some strange imaginative tale but rather a part of the life he and his friends lived during the 1930s. The story, initially written in the 1940s as a comic book, is based on a high rigger Griffiths knew. This man possessed the qualities of daring and adventure personified in the book's two central characters, Al Richards and Art Donnegan.

The story opens with Al and his friend Red starting work at a logging operation where Al is trained in the mysteries of logging. Following a shutdown, caused by the injury of two bosses, Al and Red go on a fishing trip during which Al not only finds his