

Member Lecture – 12 October 2023

Pins and needles! a social history
Alison Warren, WEA tutor

Questions answered post-lecture

Q1 What is the origin of the name 'bodkin' for a thick needle?

A bodkin seems to have been – as some people in the chat pointed out – a dagger before it became a word for a specific type of needle. Hamlet's "bare bodkin" is an unsheathed dagger rather than a needle. I think the shapes are similar.

Bodkin needles are specifically for inserting tape or ribbon especially into waistbands and they often have two eyes.



Q2 When did paper clips start to be used?

Thanks for this question. There's a whole other lecture in this one. First patent was in 1867 in America but the 3-bend paperclip as we know was created by a British company – Gem Manufacturing. There's no patent so there's a guess of around 1870.

And if you want to know what Norwegians used paper clips for in World War II you'll have to ask me back!

Useful links and resources for further reading

Book

Threads of Life: A History of the World Through the Eye of a Needle – Clare Hunter (2019 Hodder & Stoughton Ltd)

Sewing needles reveal the roots of fashion – sapiens.org

Forthcoming WEA courses by Alison Warren

Coming next year – keep an eye out on the WEA website at www.wea.org.uk.

Important cooks and their cookbooks - Spring 2024

A history of individual foodstuffs – Summer 2024