

John Planta Spinning-Wheel — Jane Austen House & Museum

In 2012 a spinning-wheel by John Planta of Fulneck, Leeds was found in the Hampshire Archives. This had originally been discovered in a skip and donated to Jane Austen House and Museum. It was in a very poor condition and in need of restoration. Soon afterwards the museum asked me to restore it. Jane Austen was never a spinner and more recently, just before the Covid 19 pandemic, the museum had decided it was not suited to the museum collection. Valerie and I were approached to see if we could suggest a museum or place where it might be appropriate for it to go. We recommended that it should go back home to the Moravian Settlement at Fulneck, near Leeds, which was where John Planta was a member of that community. Nothing has happened for two years, but just recently we have been advised by the Jane Austen Collections Manager that the wheel has now been donated and returned to the Moravian Settlement.

The wheel is very different in style to a traditional bobbin/flyer spinning-wheel, and is like a piece of Sheraton-style furniture with fine tapered legs as on a Pembroke table, with the spinning mechanism at the top. On a traditional cottage spinning-wheel as spun fibre is collected onto the bobbin, it is moved by hand from hook to hook along the 'U' shaped flyer to fill the bobbin. The John Planta wheel however has what is known as a John Ante's worm-and-wheel cam mechanism, which moves the bobbin back and forth under the flyer as you treadle the wheel. This is similar to the way a bobbin is filled on a sewing machine, and



enables you to spin continuously, without you having to stop intermittently as on a traditional wheel. To collect spun fibre onto the bobbin, the latter must rotate either faster or slower than the 'U' shaped flyer. On the Planta wheel the cam bar which moves back and forth as you treadle has two small leather-faced fingers at the end which press lightly onto the end of the bobbin. By adjusting the small screw spindle with the ivory knob on the cam bar, you can control how much slower you want the bobbin to run than the flyer, and so the spinner is able to regulate the degree of twist in the spun fibre. The worm and wheel cam mechanism on this wheel is 120:1. The Planta wheel dates from c. 1780. The framework at the top is quarter-sawn oak, mahogany veneered with ebony stringing, and the wheel rim is brass. There is a drawer in the table, at the back of which was the John Planta trade label. Also found in the drawer were John Planta's '*Directions for Using Mr Ante's Improved Line Wheel*'. To enable you to spin flax there is a distaff on the left on which the flax is dressed. To make this work the distaff has to be raised somewhat higher than the bobbin orifice, and so an additional spindle was made so this could be done.

Valerie & David Bryant

left The restored spinning wheel by John Planta of Fulbeck.
Photo David Bryant

below The 'John Ante's worm-and-wheel' cam mechanism.
Photo David Bryant

