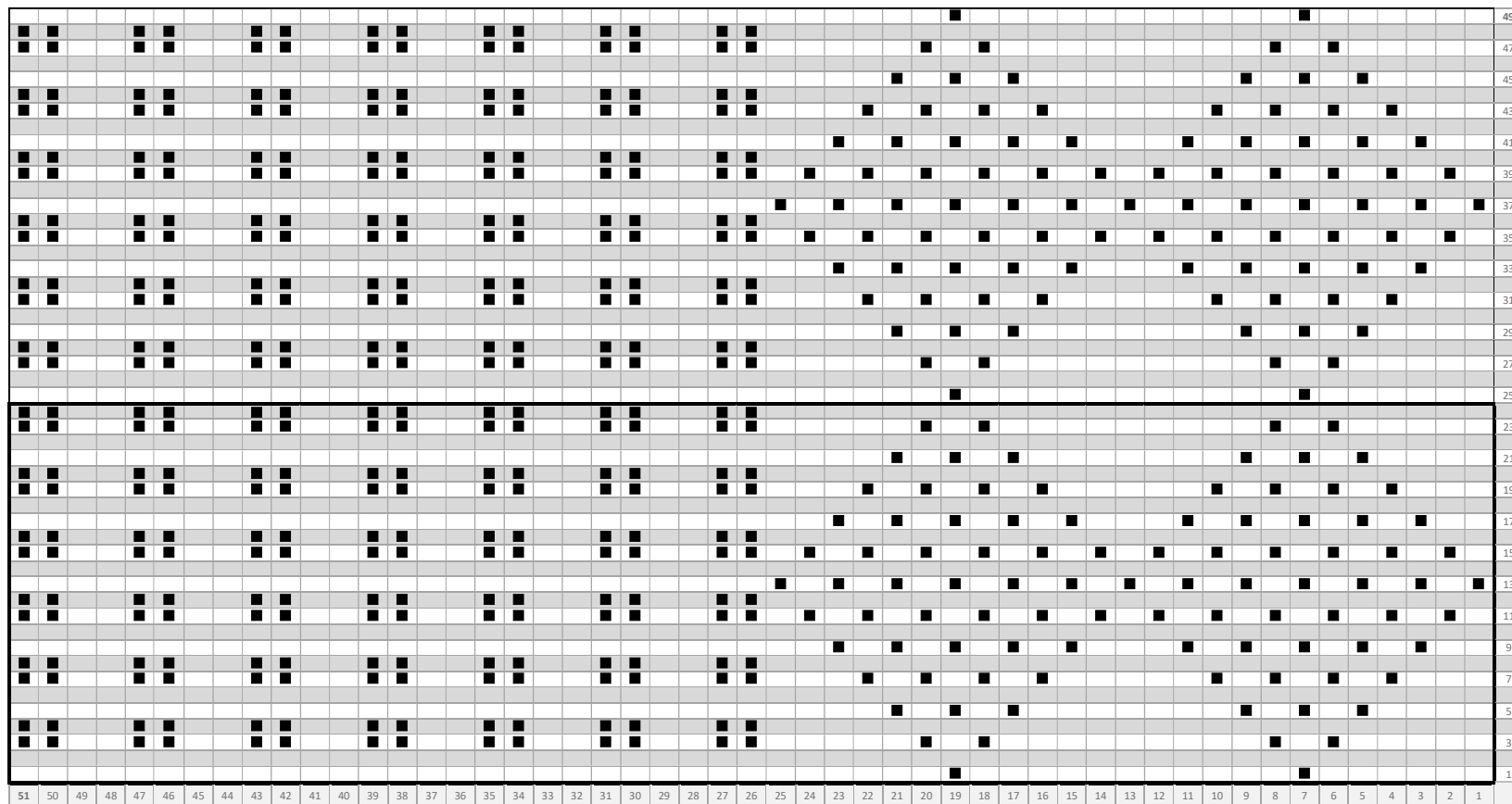


GP101 Alfred Brown's double meshes and Betty Martin gansey

Great Yarmouth pre-1950



Betty Martin



Meshes

■ = purl stitch on the right side (knit stitch on the wrong side)

Photo: LOWMS : 200341

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A. BROWN

1950

This pattern is unusual for Great Yarmouth (or Lowestoft), where there is a dearth of variety and creativity and where most 'local' fishermen wore plain ganseys or purchased commercial ganseys from marine outfitters. The pattern comes from a small, cropped photo in a mount, labelled "A. Brown 1950" and known to be Alfred Brown. A record of a crew list found in the online database of the Royal Museums Greenwich (<https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/object/rmgc-object-651924>) includes an Alfred Brown, rank of fisherman, aged 34, sailing from Lowestoft in 1915 aboard the Beacon Star (built 1911, Official Number 132942) and I believe this is the same man. So, he was one of the more senior crew at that time and born about 1881. Here (left) he is aged about 69. The gansey has a whiff of Scottish influence, being quite finely knitted, with a vertical pattern of two motifs (double meshes and Betty Martin), the yoke stopping half-way down. In this respect it is not unlike a Sheringham gansey (where there is also a Scottish influence amongst the indigenous knitters) but their columns tend to be more like one inch wide ABABA, whereas this is more like 2.3 inches wide. The motifs are the same as a recorded Sheringham gansey (GP90) except they are twice as wide – a broad column of Betty Martin and double column of meshes as opposed to single.

It appears to be very dark wool. Perhaps it was knitted by a Scottish Herring Lassie as there were plenty willing to do one for money. He would be able to afford the best quality gansey as apparently, he became a skipper and won East Anglian fisheries highest accolade - the Prunier Trophy – in 1950, for the greatest landing of herring in any year at either Great Yarmouth or Lowestoft (the prize was awarded 1936-1966.

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Estimate of size and tension

From what we can see there are alternating panels of Betty Martin and double meshes (or double diamonds). There appears to be space for up to 9 across the front and 9 at the back, with Betty Martin in the centre. If it was a 42-inch chest, the columns would be 2.3 inches wide, which is the same as the width of his mouth. From the photo, especially the Betty Martin, we can count 26 stitches per panel and the double meshes are about the same width, so 25 sts.

10 panels of Betty Martin x 26 sts = 260

8 panels of meshes x 25 sts = 200

False seams = 4

464 sts (116 ribs in the welt)

The tension would be 11 spi, which is as fine as Sheringham ganseys. Is this a clue to its origin?

How can you count the stitches?

The photograph at first sight is rather fuzzy and you can't count the stitches, but Betty Martin comes to the rescue! This favourite pattern of professional knitters is a known pattern (see above) and the grid lines are always two stitches wide. In our example it is possible to count 6 pale vertical columns. From experience we know that these pale ones are the plain stitches corresponding to columns 28 and 29, 32 and 33 etc. in the chart above. So, there are $6 \times 2 = 12$ stitches in plain columns and $7 \times 2 = 14$ stitches in dark columns with the purl steps in them, making a total width of 26 Betty Martin stitches. The double meshes are measured to be the same width, as close as we can tell. The meshes are not a wide lozenge shape but an almost equal-sided diamond. This tells us that there are plain rows between the purls without us being able to see them and this is what we see in another example, GP90 and in other East Coast and Scottish designs.

From these basic scales of the elements, we can build up the size of the gansey (in stitches) and my making a judicious guess at the size of the man we can get a very good idea of the tension. In this case it turns out to be 11 spi, so it appears to be either a very fine Scottish gansey or a Sheringham one. My gut feeling is it is Scottish, made by one of the Herring Lassies who came to Yarmouth (and Lowestoft) every autumn for The Herring Season.

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