

Glossary of Back Types

(Shanks and other Means of Attachment)

[Return to Back Types Page](#)

Legend - This list of shanks and back types was compiled from a review of all the references listed at the bottom of this page. Except for the "Other Back Types" section, all items are based on the 2011-2012 Blue Book including relevant invoked references (1995 National Button Bulletin, 1967 Classification of Black Glass Buttons, 2003 Pearl and Shell Buttons Classification, 2002 Classification of Clear and Colored Glass Buttons, 2005 Celluloid Buttons, and The NBS Synthetic Polymers Handbook (undated). Except for Pig Tail and Thread Shank, back types #1 through #62 are identified in the Blue Book and/or the May 1995 National Button Bulletin. The blue and green font color ties the source document and the related comments. Comment entries other than from the primary sources are identified with by a footnote. Comments in red are the editor's. The comments are short contractions, phrases, or key works from the source document. They are not intended to stand alone. Wherever there is a question, the viewer should consult the source document. Comments and corrections are welcome and should be directed to price6@comcast.net

	Name	Source	Comments	Location of example on back types page
1	A-Type	95 NBB-2	hand drawn wire brazed to one piece flat metal buttons with unbent tips	Metal
2	Alpha shank	BB 24-5 / 95NBB-3	wire eye shank attached to body by soldering or welding /full name for A-Type	Metal
3	Antiquarian	95NBB-1	same as staple - Early term used where glass "squeezed up" between "U" shank wires ¹	Glass
4	Applied	BB 1-3.2 / BB-p71 95NBB-4	applied celluloid shanks on one-piece 30s / Glued-on shanks shank as separate piece applied with adhesive/cemented together/mostly plastic	Ceramic/Glass/Celluloid Other
5	Bird cage	BB 3-1.1 / 95NBB-43	inserted self shank (complex construction) /metal mostly on French Uniforms	Ceramic / Metal/Other
6	Box	BB 7-1.1 (4-way) 95NBB5/19/40 (2&4 way)	hollow metal cube with 4 openings embedded in glass -Also called square shank ¹ box like in shape/always hollow	Glass/Other
7	Brazed	95NBB-6	brass loop "brazed" to brass or copper button using "hard solder"- e.g. one piece gilts	Metal
8	Bridge	95NBB-7	metal bar extends across groove-examples in BG & VI	Glass and VI
9	Canvas	95NBB-8	tuft of cloth/canvas puffed out thru hole in metal button back	Fabric
10	Cast	95NBB-9	shank part of any metal button that was made by pouring metal into a mold	Metal
11	Cased	BB 5-4	entire back is covered with fabric as well as the front for woven fabric cover buttons	Fabric
12	Cat-gut	95NBB-10	on 18th century wood-back or bone-back buttons with cat-gut -Also called gut-loop ¹	Other
13	Claw	BB 7-7.9 / 95NBB-11	typical Victorian shank ⁴ name sometimes heard for the rosette shank pedal shaped shank plate carrying a loop shank - number of pedels is always four ³	Glass
14	Clutchette	95NBB-12	pinch clamp device fits over sharp pin on back - Consensus Opinion - This is not a button	
15	Cone	BB 23-3.1 / BB 10-13.1 BB (p.69) / 95NBB-13	metal or glass buttons with metal loop embeded in cone-shaped buildup/cone self shank on French Tights/glass with cone shanks molded for buttons and hat pins/cone shaped hump with hole (shows self shank)/like Tombac ¹	Glass/Metal/Other
16	Darned	95NBB-14	pad of closely interlaced string (instead of four strands) on 18th century wood-back	Fabric
17	Double	BB 23-3 / 95NBB-15	button vs. trim/ two shanks on the same button/found on extra large or heavy buttons	Glass/Metal
18	Dresden	95NBB-16	porcelain button that is hollow with 4 openings - believed to be Meissen manufacture	Ceramic
19	Eye	95NBB-17	another name for loop shank - usage rare	See 29 (loop)
20	Flexible	95NBB-18	another name for a canvas or padback shank	See 32 (Pad back)
21	Four-way	95NBB-19	Any shank with 4 openings placed so that thread sews on in a crisscross	Glass/Other
22	Gathered	BB 5-4 BB 24-3.2	fabric cover is pleated or gathered and drawn tight in center back/Same as "Overlapped" Passementerie may have gathered fabric or worked thread backs	Fabric

23	Glove	95NBB-20	arched strip is inserted in cutout on back of button - found only on glove buttons	Metal
24	Hollow Back	BB 24-1	18th century ceramics - Also called primitive type ¹ - (varient found in BG with metal back)	Ceramic/Glass/Metal
25	Hump	BB 7-7.9	2-way hump is typical shank for Victorian -no definition in BB or NBB	Glass
26	Inserted	BB 3-1.1	Ceramic - made of 2 or 3 pieces - inserted back piece forms shank - includes bird cage	Ceramic
27	Integral (cast)	BB 24-5	shank and body are cast in one piece	Metal
28	Key	BB page 73, Popper/ BB 7-4.13/95NBB-21	small flat key shaped plate with two embedded prongs corrects C&CG Handbook as ok for paperweights/only on Poppers-not corrected in BB	Glass
29	Loop	BB 3-1.2/BB 7-1.2 BB 23-6.8/95NBB-22	ceramic plain & plate and loop/rosette plate supports a loop shank/elongated for waistcoat a very broad term covering all metal ring-style shanks	All Materials
30	Nail-head	BB 9-3	only cited under horn - no definition in BB - same as pin shank except larger ²	No example/not defined
31	Omega	95NBB-23	like Alpha but ends of shank bend outward for better attachment (common on Jacksonians)	Metal
32	Pad back	BB 23-3.4/95NBB-24	canvas-like cloth protrudes through center hole in metal back same as canvas or flexible	Metal/Fabric/Other
33	Parallel Wire	BB 24-8	repoussè with metal disc back with single, crossed, or two parallel wire shanks...	See cat gut shank
34	Pigtail	C&CG Handbook ³	a wire shank with only one end of the loop embedded ¹	Glass (by definition)
35	Pin-shank	BB(various)/95NBB-25	numerous citations of pin shank - not defined/ wire with head on top/loop on back	Ceramic/Glass/Other
36	Plastic Back	BB 5-0	plastic backs/shanks replacing metal backs in some modern fabric buttons	Fabric
37	Plate and Loop	BB 3-1.2/95NBB-26	refers to loop mounted on plate that is attached to button/ to stabilize shank and/or strengthen button	Ceramic/Glass/Other
38	Popper	95NBB-27	found only on Popper buttons -Not consistent with current BB that allows for paper weights	Glass
39	Ring Shank	BB 10-13.1/95NBB-28	brazed two piece mechanical make-up/ Same as loop but with perfect circle	Metal
40	Riveted	BB 25-6.1.1	overall button with rigid shank, resembling stud but permanently attached to fabric	Metal
41	Rosette	BB 23-3.2/95NBB-29	6 petal shaped plate with loop shank/ only on glass/like notched plate- BB more specific	Glass
42	Self	BB 3-1 95NBB-30/95NBB-44/45	china-molded self-shank or "inserted self-shank" or metal shank same material and integral part of body/self shank used on West German glass buttons	Glass/Metal/Fabric/Other
43	Sew-through	BB 23-3.3	includes whistles, igloos and some dorsets -2, 3, 4, 5, 6, holes	All Materials
44	Slip	95NBB-31	shank designed to be loose/uniform use - not overall buttons that became loose from wear	Metal
45	Split/Circumflex	95NBB-32	short metal band pulled up from base - same as circumflex & split V also called cut-out ¹	Metal
46	Staple	95NBB-33	wire in shape of staple/ends embedded/name used only for charm string to limitation ³	Glass/Fabric/Other
47	String-back	95NBB-34	heavy thread (versus gut) lacing that makes shank for 18th century wood-backs	Other
48	Swaged	95NBB-35	shank plate fits under the surface of the button into undercut groove	Shell
49	Swirlback	BB 7-1.4	cord-like winding off of the glass around the shank-wire and "plate and loop" are acceptable	Glass
50	Thread Shank	Black Glass Handbook ⁴	two types-metal bound like threadbacks and sewn that resemble 18th century cord shanks	Fabric
51	Threadback	BB 23-3.4/95NBB-36	threads crisscross on back/ back containing a disk completely enwrapped in thread	Glass/Metal/Fabric/Other
52	Tombac	95NBB-37	wire shank embedded in a mound on body - any shank attached to metal button by embedding	Metal
53	Tunnel	BB 3-1.3.2/95NBB-38	used in description for sew through igloos/ hole through the body/no special projections	Ceramic/Glass/Other
54	Turret	95NBB-39	metal cylinder/one end capped/other end embedded/2 or 4 pierced holes/mostly VI	VI
55	Wedge	BB 24-5/95NBB-41	cast wedge shape drilled hole/cast wedge shape-rounded top-center cut out -or handwrought*	Metal
56	Whistle	BB (p.58)/23-3.3.1	Defined as a specific back type but also as a specific type of sew through	Glass/Other
57	Wire	BB 7-1.4/BB 24-5 95NBB-42	swirlbacks - most have wire shank / placed in mold before pouring metal-embedde "wire shank" almost always means charm string glass button	Glass/Metal
58	Wire Eye/Alpha	BB 24.5	same as alpha - soldered/welded to body	See Alpha

59	Wobble	BB 25-6	overall - wobble button - no definition in BB	Metal
60	Worked	BB 5-1	extension of the top of worked covers on fabric buttons	Fabric
61	Worked Threads	BB 24-3.2/BB 24-8	passementerie back / Repousse-series of holes near edge for thread-"Worded Thread back"	Fabric
62	Wound	BB 5-2	wound (not worked)	Fabric

Other Back Types/Means of Attachment (sources other than BB and 1995 NBE)

63	American Wire Eye	Ruth E. Watson	like Sanders shank except shank wire is loose in the shell	
64	Leather	Dorothy Foster Brown	woven leather buttons with made-in shanks of leather	Other
65	Pitch 7-6.7	Dorothy Foster Brown	glass reinforced and shank attached with pitch type material on very old glass button	Other
66	Sanders	Luscomb	earliest metal loop shank in fabric button - shank firmly afixed (c.a. 1815)	
67	Steel cup	Dorothy Foster Brown	steel back shaped like a cup with integral steel shank	See loop

Back types and shanks for synthetic polymers can be found in the National [Button Society Section 9A Synthetic Polymer Handbook](#)

[Click here to see synthetic polymer back type chart](#)

Notes:

1. Comments from Sally C. Luscomb reference
2. Comments are from Dorothy Foster Brown reference
3. Comments are from Clear and Colored Glass Handbook
4. Comments are from Black Glass Handbook

References

- (1) Worksheet compiled by Jeanne H. Talbert - date unknown
- (2) Dorothy Foster Brown - Button Parade (pages 264 - 267) - 1968, Lightner Publishing Corporation
- (3) Ruth Watson – Just Buttons (pages 589-597) - July, 1972.
- (4) National Button Society Blue Book - Official NBS Classification and Competition Guidelines - 2011-2012
- (5) Button Basics - Jane Ford Adams - National Button Bulletin, May 1995 (Reprint of 1959 Adams article)
- (6) A Complete Classification - Clear and Colored Glass Buttons, Jane Ford Adams - National Button Society
- (7) Warren K. Tice - Dating Buttons, 2003, Warren K. Tice, Publisher
- (8) Guidelines for Collecting China Buttons - National Button Society - 1994
- (9) Classification of Black Glass Button - National Button Society - 1967
- (10) Its All About Celluloid Buttons - Monica Walker
- (11) National Button Society Section 9-A Synthetic Polymers Handbook (Howells, MacFarlane, Deal, Smith) - No Date
- (12) Sally C. Luscomb - The Collector's Encyclopedia of Buttons, 6th edition - 2006, Schiffer Publishing Ltd.