



Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

Newsletter

January 2017

British Textiles from 3000 years ago

Archaeologists from the University of Cambridge have made remarkable discoveries about everyday life in the late Bronze Age during the excavation of ancient circular wooden houses at Must Farm, a clay quarry in Cambridgeshire. The site is a Bronze age stilted village of several round houses which were burnt down, probably deliberately but certainly very suddenly and catastrophically. The people appear to have fled, leaving food in bowls, clothing neatly folded on shelves and all their possessions behind. The houses then collapsed into the fen below and were rapidly covered and preserved by silt so are remarkably well preserved.

Among the finds were more than 100 fragments of textile, processed fibre and textile yarn; these have cast light on the stages of textile production at that time and helped

structure," said Dr. Margarita Gleba, Division of Archaeology, University of Cambridge. "All the textiles appear to have been made from plant fibers. The people used cultivated species, such



as flax, as well as wild plants, such as nettle and perhaps trees, to obtain raw materials. Flax provided the finest fibers and was used to weave fine linen fabrics on a loom. The linen textiles found at Must Farm are among the finest from Bronze Age Europe. Wild fibers appear to have been used for coarser fabrics made in a different technique, known as twining."

There is evidence that the bark of the lime tree and a nettle specific to the Fens were also used. The nettle was non-stinging and produced a lustrous fine thread.



archaeologists reveal the richness of life in the Bronze Age. The textile and fibre finds include hanks of prepared fibre, thread wound on wooden sticks or into balls, and finished fabrics of various qualities. Some is of superfine quality, with threads just 1/10 of a millimetre in diameter and some fabrics with 28 threads per centimetre, fine even by modern standards. Most of the superfine textiles were made of linen, and hundreds of flax seeds have been found, some of which had been stored in containers. Some of the fabrics had been folded in up to 10 layers. These may have been large garments, potentially up to 3 metres square – capes, cloaks, or household drapes. Another technique found at Must Farm is twining which ranges from quite coarse, possibly floor or wall linings, to some with finer stitching and a curved shape. Twining can be employed in many ways – for clothing, matting, containers, etc. Also, a knotted net with quite a big mesh was found; this might have been a lightweight container, something that held fodder, or a fishing net. Timber fragments with delicate carpentry may be the remains of looms, and fired clay loom weights have been found.

"The outstanding level of preservation means that we can use methods, such as scanning electron microscopy which magnifies more than 10,000 times, to look in detail at the fiber content and



Beautiful centre pieces created by Irene for Christmas lunch. They were raffled at the end of the meal and £40 raised for UNICEF. Thank you Irene!

Spindles in all their glory

The variation in spindles from around the world has not just come about from an aesthetic preference. These designs reflect the great variety in spinning techniques, available fibres and the desired end product. They range from being able to produce the finest gossamer lace right through to coarse heavy duty yarns.

There are two basic categories of modern hand spindles: drop and supported. All have a vertical shaft and are weighted, this can be a whorl of either wood or other material or it can be a thickened area of the shaft. The whorl's weight and shaft length help determine the momentum and ultimately the yarn's gauge.

Drop spindles are dropped after rotation has started to swing from the yarn, this allows a greater length of yarn to be spun before winding on. Also, the person spinning can move about whilst spinning but there are limits to the size and weight of these spindles. There is also variation within the type: they can be high-whorl, low-whorl, or centre-whorl. A high-whorl spindle has its whorl very close to the top of the shaft which allows the spindle to spin very fast and produce finer yarns. A hook is placed on the top of the shaft to secure the developing yarn, and the newly spun yarn is wound around the shaft underneath the whorl in a conical shape called a "cop". In a low-whorl spindle, the whorl sits near the bottom of the shaft, which makes it spin slower, but more steadily, and longer. The newly spun yarn is wound around the shaft just above the whorl. Centre-whorl spindles are an amalgam of the two and the cop is usually built above the whorl.

Supported spindles are high-whorl and have a longer shaft, the base of which rests while rotating on the spinner's thigh, on the ground, on a table/stool, or even in a small ceramic or wooden bowl. Supported spindles come in a great variety of lengths ranging from the 75cm Navajo spindle, down to the tiniest Orenburg spindle ~20 cm used for spinning gossamer lace yarns. Importantly, supported spindles give good control over how thick or thin to draft and how much twist enters the yarn as there is no fighting with gravity which you can get with drop spindles. This type of spindle type gives the spinner the ability to spin a wide range of yarns.

Here are a few examples of hand spindles from around the world to show the variety out there. Most of these are being made commercially and many come with wonderfully decorated whorls.

Akha spindle – a small supported spindle used by the Akha people in Southeast Asia. It is a short spindle with a large centre-whorl disc, supported by the hand of the spinner during drafting of cotton fibre, but during the adding of extra twist to stabilize the yarn, the spindle is dropped to rest on the yarn. There is an interesting article about spinning in Thailand's Akha tribe at spindling.com/AkhaSpindle.html.



The High-Whorl Lap Spindle. Iceland holds a spinning secret for creating soft handspun yarn with hand spindles – the high whorl lap spindle. This is a supported spindle with a whorl and a hook on the top and a long shaft like other supported spindles. However the spun yarn is wrapped around the lower end of the spindle. Here, the roving is pre-drafted before being spun into yarn. The separation between the drafting and spinning creates a softer yarn. Since it is a supported spindle, the yarn is less strained, which also makes the yarn soft.



African bead whorl spindle. These are short shafted spindles which are supported in a small lap bowl. The whorl is usually made of stone or clay and beautifully decorated and carved. Traditionally, they were used to spin cotton but can be used with most fibres. They have a fast spin and can make excellent fine yarns.



Navajo Spinning – This is a long supported spindle of up to 75cm length with a large heavy whorl positioned near the bottom of the shaft. The spinner can sit on the floor or in a chair with the bottom part of the shaft resting on the ground and the top part on the thigh. The spindle is rolled up the thigh allowing it to twirl, then sliding it down and rolling it up again, as the yarn twists off the tip of the spindle. After the spun yarn reaches arm's length it is wound and stored onto the shaft just above the whorl. The one-handed long draw technique is a common way to spin on the Navajo spindle. Therefore, the fibre must be carefully prepared so that the drafting will flow smoothly.



Russian spindles are ideal for very thin singles as, with all supported spindles, the yarn doesn't resist the weight of the spindle. The spindle doesn't have a whorl as such but is shaped from one piece of wood with the bottom of the shaft being the heaviest part. Traditionally, these spindles were only supported in a bowl in the Orenburg region and elsewhere the upper part of the shaft, on which the yarn is stored and which tapers to a very pointed top, gently rests on the fingers or the palm whilst spinning.

Turkish spindle This is a variant on the bottom whorl drop spindle. Here the whorl is made of two pieces which slide into each other and are secured by the shaft, forming a cross around which the cop is wound. The parts which form the cross can easily be disassembled for removal of the cop. Forming the cop in this way results in a ball of yarn ready to use or to ply without further winding. This spindle comes in a variety of weights and shapes for spinning a range of yarns.



Tibetan style drop spindles typically have spin times in excess of 30 seconds depending on whorl size, usually 3-5cm diameter and hollowed out. The shaft is relatively thin, which helps to increase the whorl to shaft weight ratio and improve spin time, and it has a thin flicking tip, which again helps to provide a relatively fast spin.



The thing that has amazed me most while researching this article is that, although these spindles are basically just functional, they are all treated as objects of beauty - exquisitely made and finely decorated.

Liz Mitchell



Meeting Reports

October 2016: HAGD: RIGID HEDDLE TAPESTRY WEAVING with Angela Pawlyn

Members had an opportunity to try warp faced weaving on rigid heddle looms which Angela had already warped. This was an interesting and rewarding HAGD, introducing many to a new form of weaving.



November 2016: "ROMANIAN TEXTILES" - a talk by Alison Daykin about her trip to the North West region of Romania.

Alison loves textiles and wanted to visit an Eastern European country with a rich textile heritage. She travelled by train, through the Carpathian Mountains to Maramures in mountainous, forested Northern Romania – an area noted for its beautiful carved and painted wooden churches which are distinguished by pointed steeples, high roofs and frescoed interiors and are a very important part of village life in this very rural area. The thatched roof houses also have intricately carved gates. Maramures is a very poor area of Romania and centuries old traditions are still part of daily lives, most families own or part own a beast - animals are still working animals in this very rural, mainly self-sufficient part of Romania.

The village has a large communal washing machine created from the local stream, nowadays used for washing heavy duty items such as rugs. Also, a felting mill which fulled coarsely woven fabric for winter clothing by hammering it, and a flour mill, both of which are driven by water from the stream. The guide's elderly mother showed Alison the local plants used for dyeing – Romanian Crocus, Elder and Buckthorn with copper sulphate as the mordant. Dyeing and spinning wool and flax are summer activities. Weaving is usually done in the winter. Spindles are common and used for spinning with sticks for distaffs, hemp is used for the warps for weaving. Weaving patterns are created from memory and are symbolic, usually of bats, deer, flowers and trees. Each row is woven one after the other often on handmade looms, using handmade reeds and heddles. The quality of the weaving varied.



Photo courtesy Sarah Allen

Alison saw examples of traditional, regional embroidery – mainly cross stitch and drawn thread work. The examples of traditional lace were stunningly beautiful and she showed us photos of several examples of both lace and the traditional equipment used to create it.

This was an interesting journey through a remote part of Romania where traditional skills are very much still in use today.

Jacqueline Smee

Workshop "SPINNING FUN AND FUNKY ART YARNS" with Alison Daykin

I attended the workshop with my wheel and some fleece. The main thing was to learn how to put lumps into the yarn where you wanted them and not by accident as usual. Re-learning this was quite hard to do after trying to spin a nice consistent yarn for so long. There was a technique we were required to learn about how to get the right amount of spin to secure the lump as well.

We were shown how to make beehive beads as well as boucle yarn which was quite complicated!



It was exciting to see that she had used the art yarn in the warp for weaving to make a plain piece more interesting. I had used art yarn in the weft but not the warp, so this will be my next experimental weaving piece.

We had all taken a packed lunch but most of us didn't want to spend too long eating as we were keen to get on and experiment with what we had learnt.

I went away ready to practice my beehive technique and have been doing so ever since. I think I am finally getting the rhythm of it now but I have still some way to go before it is perfect.

The multicoloured batts make it fun to do and I enjoy mixing the fibres and colours so I have control from start to finish.

Caroline Goss



Photo courtesy Sarah Allen

Photo courtesy Sarah Allen

December 2016: CHRISTMAS PARTY. We all had a jolly time at the OGWSD Christmas meeting. Everyone was in festive mood and the atmosphere was jolly. Janet led a "God's eye" weaving activity and I organised a lino printing activity with metallic paints. Mostly people were happy to chat and spin and the mood was very relaxed and friendly.

As usual the Chairman's Challenge had inspired many varied and beautiful creations. It's amazing how different they all were considering they all were based on 3 colours only, black, red and white. Well done all who contributed.



Wonderful display of work for Chairman's Challenge 2016.

At lunchtime we enjoyed a bring and share sumptuous Christmas feast. This was followed by an Oxfordshire quiz which started off quite friendly and ended up quite competitive!!! All in all it was a lovely day shared with friends.

Thanks to all who helped organise, prepare food, wash up and help tidy up at the end. If I have forgotten anyone else, I'm sorry.

I am writing this on New Years Day, so a big Happy New Year to you all and all those you love. XX Helen.

Helen Richardson

Wytham Wood Project: This has unfortunately not come to anything as they already have too many projects. However, as so many of you were interested in this project to reflect a particular landscape using our core skills, I would like to suggest that we approach either the Botanic Gardens or Waterperry Gardens. Please let me know if this is something we should pursue and which you would prefer.

Liz Mitchell

The Journal for Weavers, Spinners and Dyers

I volunteered to join the Journal Editorial Committee last year, having previously been on it from 2006 to 2011. The Journal is the publication of the Association of Guilds of WSD* and is produced by volunteers with a designer who receives a small honorarium.

The aims include providing:

- an interesting and informative magazine for those involved in the crafts;
- an opportunity for the exchange of ideas; and
- instructive articles to encourage wider experimentation.

Since rejoining the Committee as dye editor, I have been aiming to commission more instructive articles. I am pleased that there will be one on growing dye plants in the Spring Issue and I have more in the pipeline. Your ideas would be very welcome.

I have some spare copies of recent issues and they are also available in the Guild library. I would particularly welcome feedback from Guild members who are relatively new to our crafts. The Committee have drawn up a list of ideas to encourage more subscribers and it would be very useful to have your thoughts. For example, we are aiming to have more short articles – do you think it is a good idea?

You can download sample articles from the Journal Website.

www.thejournalforwsd.org.uk. A new Website which will hopefully be more encouraging to new subscribers is currently under construction.

You can subscribe through the Guild at £16 a year (4 issues) or individually at £18.

Last year, I circulated a list for subscribers to rank different sections of one of the issues. I am planning to draw up a list for each issue in future with so that people can put ticks under “very interesting”, “some interest” and “no interest” on a master copy during meetings.

Angela Pawlyn.



*Around eighty guilds including Oxford are affiliated to the Association. The Association arranges an Exhibition, a Summer School and a Conference every two years. Guild Members can also follow a Certificate of Achievement in the main areas of the three crafts. These activities are managed by a General Purposes Committee. We pay an affiliation fee for each member (£4). This covers the cost of insurance for guild activities.

Dates for your diary:

OGWSD Programme 2016/2017

21st January 2017 - HAGD: “Finishings” Set a skein, block an item, finish your weaving.

18th/19th February 2017: Talk by Jill Shepherd followed by a workshop with Jill on the Sunday - “Crimp between your fingers”.

18th March 2017 Show of Work, A G M, Afternoon Tea

22nd April (a change to the usual April timing due to Easter): Have-a-go Day - 3D Knitting with Janet Farnsworth

20th May: Stash Sale + afternoon event TBC

17th June: Fleece Day

15th July: Talk by Rod Owen “Peruvian braids”

Other meetings 2016

July 29th-30th 2017: Fibre-East, Redborne School and Community College, Flitwick Rd, Amptill, Bedford MK45 2NU www.fibre-east.co.uk

August 13th-20th 2017: AGWSD Summer School. Brochure online www.wsd.org.uk or email summerschool@wsd.org.uk.

August 26th-27th 2017: South West Wool Fest, Exeter University, Devon

Notes from the Editor:

If you are as intrigued as I am by the story on the front page you may also be interested to read about 3,000 year old woollen trousers found in China (www.thevintagenews.com/2016/06/11/the-oldest-known-trousers-are-3000-years-old-amazingly-preserve/2). Also, on our Facebook pages is a link to ancient woollen jumpers found in Norway.

Once again, may I remind you that I need items for the Newsletter. I am running out of ideas and the Newsletter will not survive unless I have some input from our members. It doesn't need to be much, perhaps a paragraph about your current project(s) and a photo, or something you've read or heard, or you can send in your problems (guild based ones only, please!) and ask for help from other members. I can't do the Newsletter alone and do need your input.

As before, if you have something to include but don't want to write the piece yourself, let me know and I will help you. To catch up on events between newsletters, check programme, or read our blog, visit the Guild web site www.oxfordwsd.org.uk. This newsletter and some earlier ones in full colour are available there.

Copy: Items for the next newsletter MUST reach me before **6th April 2017**.

E-mail to newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk or give me your copy at a Guild meeting.

Committee

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Treasurer	Janet Farnsworth
Secretary	Lyn Wymer
Membership Sec.	Jenny Butler/Linda Whiter
Programme Sec.	
Website	Anne Hughes
Members	Jane Rouse, Jacqueline Smee

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