



# Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

## Newsletter

October 2016

### GUILD OUTSIDE EVENTS 2016

The Oxford Guild has been involved in quite a few outside events this year. This has included both individual members and larger groups of members representing our Guild in our core skills. Before I talk about a few of the larger events I would like to thank each and every one of those members who spared their free time to support these events. If it wasn't for you, the public would not be aware of these fabulous crafts.

#### BBOWT – Nature in Oxford

This was our first major outside event of the year. The Guild had been approached by BBOWT (Bucks, Berks & Oxon Wildlife Trust) to take part in their event held in Oxford on the green in front of the Natural History Museum on Saturday 4th June. We were there to promote the connection between the two groups with the love of sheep and, for us consequently, fleece.

If you are not aware, BBOWT use native breeds of sheep to graze their conservation meadows around the three counties. They have Speckle Faced Beulah, Hebridean and Shetland sheep breeds of which the fleeces are sold at our Festival of Fibre in June. As these sheep are not generally put into lamb and are grazed on these herb and wildflower rich meadows their fleeces are beautiful especially for such hardy breeds and lucky for us.

At the event the public could have a go at drum carding and spinning washed Beulah fleece or have a go at weaving on a small rigid heddle loom or smaller frames. We had so much interest from the public old or young, and being that it was Oxford, had



Over 40 people, mainly children, helped make this 1.6 metre scarf at the Oxford Nature Festival, held on 4th June 2016. (Jonathan Hill).

international visitors as well. There were so many other things people could do, the whole event was very interactive and I definitely feel the Guild contributed to this. We let the public know about the sheep whose fleece they were spinning from and they could go and see the sheep, all be it metal ones, grazing a strip of meadow just across the way from us, so the connection came full circle.

#### BBOWT – Countryfile Life

The second event, and following the success of Nature in Oxford, we were asked again to accompany BBOWT on their stand at the 4 day Countryfile Live at Blenheim Palace over the 4-7th August. This again was a completely new adventure for them and consequently us. With a bit of to-ing and fro-ing the Guild opted to participate in a 2-hour public-involved demonstration on a similar scale to the Oxford event.

This time, depending on the members taking part, the public could either drum card, spin on a drop spindle or wheel, weave on a peg loom or small rigid heddle or make friendship bracelets with a cord winder. We had a wonderful time interacting with the visitors and



enjoyed seeing the interest shown by the children who loved having a go on everything that was available. The members who helped all enjoyed themselves and there have been various suggestions how we can improve our participation next year. We all benefitted from a day ticket to the show so that we could spend the whole day at the event, enjoying the wonderful sights and taste of the fair all for just two hours, albeit tiring, work - not bad!

One of our members had a very special encounter on the day, helping Adam Henson (BBC's very own farmer) learn to spin.

#### Wychwood Forest Fair

Wychwood Forest Fair is one of the events we have had in the diary for quite a few years; in fact I would hesitate to say we have been taking part for the last 8 years. We followed the format we had done this summer in the other events, using more of the fleeces left over from BBOWT, of drum carding, spinning and weaving whether it was interactive or demonstrating.

This is usually our most successful event when it comes to connecting with the public in our local area, unlike Countryfile where the public came from all areas of the country and even abroad. Wychwood is our home ground and the public is more likely to follow through with enquires to the guild and come and see us at Stanton St John. Despite a wet start, a lovely day and lovely company as all the events have been.

Sarah Allan

## Weaving: the World of Ancient Mayan Women - Part II

### Origins and Heritage of Mayan Weaving

According to Mayan mythology, Ix Chel was the patron of weaving. Ix Chel is a complex goddess with multiple facets, concerned with healing, midwifery, sexuality, herbalism, weaving, and nature. As the young Moon Goddess, she is shown sitting in the moon holding a rabbit, symbol of fertility and abundance. As Earth Goddess she wears a snake headdress symbolizing her mastery of earth wisdom and powers, and pours water on earth to nourish and heal. As Grandmother Ix Mukane she appears elderly, wears the snake headdress and pours water or weaves, symbolizing transformation of earth energies and alignment with cycles of time.

As the Cosmic Weaver, Ix Chel is depicted sitting with the backstrap loom, one end tied to a tree and the other around her waist. She weaves with the shuttle in her left hand. Today, Mayan women in the highlands weave fine textiles in exactly the same way. These looms can be carried easily and set up at home or in the fields. Many types of fabric are woven on these looms, and every woman makes her uniquely-designed huipil, the traditional dress still worn in these regions. The design of the huipil expresses cultural identity and artistic skill; each woman weaves her own history and philosophy of the universe into the garment. One huipil may take several months to weave, depending on the complexity of the design.

The traditional backstrap loom is simple, using various parallel sticks between which the warp thread are stretched. The main sticks include the front and back beam rods which provide the backbone for weaving. The front rod attaches to a pole and the back rod attaches to the weaver's waist by means of a leather backstrap. The other sticks include a shed roll, a string heddle rod and a rigid rod. The batten is used to beat the weft threads into the warp and the shuttle, which carries the weft thread through the sheds. Cords are used to tie the loom to a pole or tree and to tie the backstrap to the loom.

Mayans have been weaving for over two thousand years. In the early 1500's when Spanish conquistadores arrived, they encountered incredibly beautiful weavings. Although there have been many changes in types of threads and designs over the centuries, the basic backstrap loom has changed little. In Guatemala and highlands Chiapas, Mexico, weaving is an integral part of a Maya woman's daily life and is an important responsibility she passes on from generation to generation. When a baby girl is 3 weeks old, the midwife bathes her in the temascal (Maya sweat lodge). The girl's mother gives the midwife her baby daughter's weaving instruments, all miniature in size, including strands of thread, a tiny weaving loom, scissors, basket and needle. The midwife opens the newborn's hands and passes each instrument over them, praying that the baby girl will become a proficient weaver, and maintain the ancient weaving art traditions as her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother did.

Contemporary Mayan women continue the tradition of fine weaving in the lovely fabrics of Chiapas and Guatemala. The ancient art of backstrap weaving is still thriving and an entire



industry has developed around weaving and textiles. Numerous collectives and individuals produce shawls, spreads, bags and clothing that have become sought-after by visitors from around the world.

Read more: <http://www.ancient-origins.net/ancient-places-americas/weaving-world-ancient-mayan-women-001976#ixzz3rryg0Fq7>

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### Braids as ART

Over the years I have been collecting examples of baskets and textiles in pictures. More recently I have turned my attention to examples of craft techniques being used in 'art works'.

On a recent visit to the new extension to the Tate Modern I came across an openwork hanging structure which proved to be made of braids.



The piece 'Pavilion Suspended in a Room' 2005, is by Cristina Iglesias. The information panel says 'on closer inspection, letters and words can be discerned.' - an extract from A C Clarke's 'Rendezvous with Rama'. I did not find it! But the construction was interesting to walk through and helped fill one of the vast spaces.

As for the building, this is not a critique of the current 'art' scene so I won't go into that, but the view from the top is rather good.

David Nutt

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### The Annual Chair's Challenge

This year's challenge will use the colours Black, Red and White. You are asked to make a scarf and it must display, wholly or in part, one of the guild's core skills: weaving, spinning or dyeing. Please do not add in any other colours; however, you can mix and blend the 3 colours together to create shades and tones. Other than that, it's down to you. It could be rectangular, square, circular, frilly, a cowl, or a dickey for fitting under a coat. It can be made for an adult, child or even your favourite pet.

Nervous about joining in our challenge, then join forces with someone and create a joint project. Nothing to stop a group of you getting together and making a scarf for the BFG!

More details and some suggestions are on our website [oxfordwsd.org.uk](http://oxfordwsd.org.uk)

Jackie Green

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### All Things Weaving Word Puzzle Solution

These are the words you should have found: APRON, BALANCED, BASKET, BATTEN, BEAM, BOBBIN, DENT, DOBBY, EVEN, FELL, HEDDLE, LOOM, RADDLE, SELVEDGE, SETT, SHAFT, SHED, SHUTTLE, TREADLE, WARP, WEAVING, WEFT

(Sorry I couldn't find a way of showing you where the words are on the matrix - Editor)

## Meeting Reports

**July 2016:** WILD WEAVING - Once again thank you to Diana Bird who welcomed us to her farm in the stunning countryside on the Bucks/Oxon border. It



was a wonderful day and we all had a go at weaving using scraps of fabric, plants and whatever else took our fancy. Unfortunately, using undried plant material meant our endeavours were very ethereal - but they were beautiful while they lasted and luckily for us there are some photos to record them. This was my first go at wild weaving and while enjoyable it was also frustrating; grasses and small twigs want

to go their own way and not mine so everything kept becoming unwoven - not what I intended. Several of our members had better luck (or more experience/skill/imagination!) and produced some interesting work.

**September 2016:** BOTANICAL DYEING - HAGD. Our have-a-go day conjured up some super magic. Carole, Lyn and Mary Ann, with the help of Sarah, set up a "cooking" area and provided all the materials we needed to make a piece of cloth imprinted with images of leaves. We had a wide selection of leaves to choose from and the most popular choice was definitely eucalyptus; this proved to be a wise choice too. The leaves were laid out on one half of a piece of cloth (linen, cotton or wool) that had been soaked in soya milk, dried and then moistened with vinegar and water. The cloth was then folded over, wrapped around a rod of iron or copper and tied tightly with string. The next step was to steam or boil the bundles to allow everything to react. Then



came the magic part, the opening of the bundles. It was interesting to see which leaves gave the best results: eucalyptus produced a wonderful bright orange, while maple gave a lovely sharp brown image but the oak leaves disappointed on my piece where they were hardly visible. You also got images of the string ties, especially on the cotton, where it left a very sharp print adding to the overall composition and making the material appear to be quilted.

It was a very fascinating HAGD and I'm sure many of us will be trying this at home very soon.

Liz Mitchell

## Did you know?

Like agriculture, textiles have been a fundamental part of human life since the dawn of civilization. Fragments of cotton articles dated from 5000 BC have been excavated in Mexico and Pakistan. According to Chinese tradition, the history of silk begins in the 27th century BC. The oldest wool textile, found in Denmark, dates from 1500 BC, and the oldest wool carpet, from Siberia, from 500 BC. Fibres such as jute and coir have been cultivated since antiquity.

While the methods used to make fabrics have changed greatly since then, their functions have changed very little: today, most natural fibres are still used to make clothing and containers and to insulate, soften and decorate our living spaces. Increasingly, however, traditional textiles are being used for industrial purposes as well as in components of composite materials, in medical implants, and geo- and agro-textiles.

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## Tour of British Fleece

The Tour of British Fleece, inspired by the Tour of Britain Cycle Ride, was instigated by members of Ravelry in 2015. The idea of the tour is to spin some fleece each day from a sheep breed representative of the area in Britain that the cyclists are travelling through.

On holiday in Cumbria, we met some lovely spinning ladies at a small bi-annual fibre show known as "Wool on The Wall" at Greenhead on Hadrian's Wall. The ladies had a beautiful display of sheep breeds they had spun as an example for the tour and it inspired us to have a go and create packs so that other members of the guild could also participate, encouraging spinners to try fibre they would probably never get their hands on or even consider having a go at.

The pack was made up of 25g of 7 different fleeces, either carded or combed, from the coarsest Greyfaced Dartmoor fleece to the softest Romney fleece. I was unable to spin on the specified days but I did catch up at the end of the following week and I have 7 very interesting and different skeins of fibre. The Greyfaced is like string and would be best used for heavy duty types of weaving, with some of the other breeds being useful in several areas of crafting. My favourite was the Beulah (Speckle Faced); it is a lovely bouncy fibre and I will definitely be spinning more of this nice white fibre.

The members who took part have given their different points of view on the fibres and I found these so interesting to read (see all the comments on our website). As you can see all come from the exercise with such different experiences as we are all used to our own default choice of spinning fibre and were out of our normal comfort zones!

Sarah Allan

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**British Breeds Spinning and Taster Day:** Following the interest in the above, we (Pop-Up Hand Spinners) are having a *British Breeds Spinning and Taster Day* at Stanton Guild House, Stanton, Near Broadway WR12 7NE on the 6th November from 10am - 4pm. Come and experience the atmosphere in this beautiful venue which has a past heritage of spinning and weaving. For £15 you have five 10gram sample packs of different breeds from the choice available with tea, coffee and cake included. For more information contact Sarah Allan (sarahgoat1066@yahoo.com)

## Trip to Cumbria including Farfield Mill.

In July, Sarah, Lyn, Chris and I made our annual trip up to Bassenthwaite to chill out, have time to be and do our 'own thing'. On the way up we stopped at Caldbeck to visit Wool Clip, the shop run by the ladies who organise Woolfest. The shop is well worth a visit, very interesting with lovely articles from balls of



hand spun wool to wonderful jumpers, rugs, felted items, beautifully woven scarves and shawls, just to wet your appetite and, talking about appetite, the cafe attached has wonderful food just the right thing to set you on your way for the remainder of the

journey. At this stage I have to mention our trip into Cockermouth to collect stores and mooch around the town. I was looking for iron as Lyn had an article by Alice Fox on making and Eco printing a small book. What did we need? Saucepan with a sieve to steam the books, linen, needle and thread - easy, a charity shop did for these, and nails - iron nails. Where do we find a shop to provide us with rusty nails! Look no further, Cockermouth has the most fabulous ironmongers, just as they used to be, where I could buy iron nails by the ounce and small iron rods, I was in seventh heaven. Another must if you are up that way, it also has a museum at the back of the shop. Oh, and by the way, the books didn't come out badly either.

In the middle of the week, we visited Farfield Mill and Heritage Centre at Sedbergh. We had made a brief visit last year on our way home but needed more time to look around. It has four floors, one a cafe, one a Museum, one where people can rent space to do their own craft (these must be accessible for the public to view) and the top floor is devoted to weavers, spinners, dyers, lace makers and, if I remember correctly, embroiderers. Sarah had made an appointment for us to spend the day with the ladies who weave and spin. They made us so welcome. Chris was very interested in the Great Wheel and had a session under the watchful eyes of Carole. Lyn wove a scarf on a 2-shaft floor loom using pedals for the first time guided by Evelyn. Sarah, whilst waiting for a go on the loom warped up for Krokbragt which I was on, mended a wheel and also spun on the great wheel as well as an Ashford. I was very lucky, Susan showed me how to do Krokbragt weaving, this is done on 3 shafts and then Carole, who was the organiser, brought in a small Dobby loom for me to have a go on. On our Guild library shelf there is a book called Reproducing the Kendal Pattern Book, A Window on 18th Century Weaving. This was researched by Alison Ongley and the Lancs & Lakes GWSD, published by them and a copy sent to each guild throughout the country. We all had a wonderful time enjoying lunch together and swapping stories about our experiences and love of our craft.

Carole Thorpe

## Dates for your diary:

### OGWSD Programme 2016/2017

**19th November 2016** – Talk by Alison Daykin "Romanian Textiles" followed by

**20th November 2016** – Workshop with Alison Daykin - Spinning Fun and Funky Art Yarns. Learn how various techniques and irregularities at different stages in processing can influence the look and handle of the yarn. Participants will be encouraged to be daring, to break the rules and experiment, in areas such as carding, colour blending and plying. Suitable for all abilities. Application form available at October meeting and on our website.

**17th December 2016** – Christmas Meeting: Chair's Challenge Display of work and Christmas Shared Lunch

**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

November 2nd: talk on Sheila Paine, traveller, writer, photographer with a passion for embroidered textiles ([www.oatg.org.uk/programme.htm](http://www.oatg.org.uk/programme.htm))

November 5th: Annual Textile Fair, Compton Verney, Warwickshire CV35 9HZ

November 6th British Breeds Spinning & Taster Day, Stanton ([sarahgoat1066@yahoo.com](mailto:sarahgoat1066@yahoo.com))

November 9-13th: Theo Wright. Exhibition of handwoven textiles, Craft Centre Gallery, 3-35 St John Square, London EC1M 4DS

November 16th: Jenny Balfour Paul "Deeper than Indigo: Tracing Thomas Machell, Forgotten Explorer" ([www.prm.ox.ac.uk/friends-museum-events-programme](http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/friends-museum-events-programme))

November 26th-27th: International Feltmakers Ass. Reading Exhibition, Village Hall, Sonning Common ([www.feltmakers.com](http://www.feltmakers.com))

August 13th-20th 2017: AGWSD Summer School. Brochure online [www.wsd.org.uk](http://www.wsd.org.uk) or email [summerschool@wsd.org.uk](mailto:summerschool@wsd.org.uk).

## Notes from the Editor:

Once again, please, please, please send me items for inclusion. 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](http://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 January 2017**. E-mail to [newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk) or give me your copy at a Guild meeting.