



# Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

## Newsletter

January 2018

### The Story of Cochineal

For more than a century now, inexpensive synthetic dyes have been used to create every colour on the colour wheel, and the world has forgotten the message of power and wealth that intense colour once conveyed. Red was the most coveted of colours because of its rarity and this linked it to power and made good red dye almost priceless.

Of the substances that create reddish dyes, none are as bright or as colourfast as cochineal. Cochineal had been used by the Aztecs and Mayans to produce an intense red for their fabrics for centuries before the Spanish conquistadores arrived in Mexico. But, soon after their arrival, the Spanish merchants started buying and shipping the dye back to Spain from where it was sold at vast profit to the rest of Europe. Within a few years, cochineal was second only to silver as Spain's most valuable New World commodity. This was only possible because Spain maintained complete secrecy over the source of the dye. Just as the Chinese guarded the secret of porcelain and silk for centuries, the Spanish kept this secret and so maintained their stranglehold on Europe's most valuable dye. For three centuries, the English, French, and Dutch resorted to espionage, piracy, bribery, and theft to learn the secret of this fabulous dye and break Spain's monopoly, to no avail.



*A native of Central America  
collecting cochineal insects  
from a cactus to make red dye*

Outside of Spain and Mexico no-one knew cochineal was derived from little bugs. The Spanish prohibited the export of live cochineal from Mexico, censored information about it, and forbade anyone to go to Mexico without a permit, which they would not grant to foreigners. Eventually through the use of the first microscopes in the late 17th century, careful examination revealed the cochineal bits were really "females whose body is full of eggs."

The cochineal bug (*Dactylopius coccus*) is a scale insect that has an unusual life cycle. The female lives her life in one spot on a prickly pear (*Opuntia nopal*) where she buries her mouth in the cactus pad and starts sucking. She will live, breed, and die on that spot. Not much bigger than a pinhead, a bug that never moves makes an easy target for predators, so the female is protected by carminic acid, offensive to her predators but a vibrant red colourant. Over the centuries, the Mayans had selectively bred the cochineal bug to become larger than the wild variety and therefore produce more carminic acid. To make the dye the bugs

were brushed off the cactus, boiled to remove the waxy coating and then dried in the sun; it took 70,000 bugs to produce 1lb dye.

Even after the secret was uncovered, Spain still held the controlling rein of production as cochineal bugs are very susceptible to less than optimal conditions and only produce well in Spanish Mexico and a few other countries with similar conditions. The eventual loss of this trade to chemical dyes led to the downfall of several economies.

Overall, Europeans remained dependent upon Spain for their favourite red dye for an amazing three hundred years.

Liz Mitchell

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### Worsted vs Woolen

To anyone new to spinning, the terms worsted and woolen are those most often cited as causing confusion. Put simply, worsted and woolen yarns are produced using different methods of both fibre preparation and spinning and result in very different yarns.

#### Characteristics

- Worsted yarn is durable, with a compact & smooth surface and less prone to pilling. It has good stitch definition. The overall appearance is a lustrous, hard and strong yarn. As air is not trapped during spinning worsted, it is not as warm as woolen.
- Woolen is almost the opposite: it is less durable, weaker and has a matte, lofty and fluffier appearance, it pills quite easily but is much warmer due to air being trapped during spinning.

#### Fibre preparation

- Worsted spinning requires fibres to be combed, so they are aligned and the short fibres removed.
- Fibres for woolen spinning are carded into rolags or batts so that the individual fibres criss-cross allowing air to be trapped.

#### Spinning method

- Worsted is spun with a short forward draw. The twist is not allowed to enter drafting triangle, the forward hand pinches fibres, slides forward to draft, slides back to smooth the fibres as twist enters.
- Woolen is spun with a long-draw method. Here, the twist is allowed to enter the fibres as the active hand draws it back to arm's length, the spun yarn is then allowed to wind onto the spool and the next section of fibre drawn out.

Linda Whiter

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## Courage, and the enjoyment of the unexpected

Reading an old 2013 edition of 'Hand Woven', I was struck by a final page article in the magazine by Elizabeth Hill. Elizabeth Hill talked about Anni Albers (a designer working mostly in textiles 1940's – 1980's) and her concepts of courage in producing work. "Courage is an important factor in any creative effort. It can be most active when knowledge, in too early a stage, does not narrow the vision" (Albers). She is talking here about beginners in any creative process, and Elizabeth Hill argues that we are all beginners over and over again as we start new projects, use new yarns or fleeces or looms or designs. This speaks to me as a 'newbie' (to use the modern parlance!) as I feel inept and ignorant at most things to do with weaving and yarns.

**Essentially the message is - if you wait to know all there is to know, you will never get started.....**

So there's something good about jumping in and trying things out, not worrying quite how it will turn out, and learning from (and maybe loving) the unexpected results ("*barbaric beauty*"; Albers).

In any creative process, but particularly for beginners, thinking you can imagine your final end product and what it will look like is quite difficult. I can try, and plan, and imagine..... but I am equally likely to have something that may just turn out completely different to that initial image and plan in my mind – through mistakes, something unexpected happening with the yarn, colour combinations not 'right', .... The list is endless. If we catch that 'oh dear' or 'oh no' feeling early in the work, we can stand back and think how to change or improve things as we go. Or we might just go with it and see what it's like at the end. It is why, at the moment in my very early fledgling processes, I like the 'free flow' of weaving with different yarns and textiles and seeing how things go.... and seeing how things turn out, rather than thinking I can do some lovely smooth, even, plain weave or a complicated pattern.

Elizabeth Hill urges us to go with that serendipity, saying that we might just stumble upon something beautiful.

### References

Danilowitz, B. (Ed.) (2000). Anni Albers : Selected writings on design. London. University Press of New England.

Hill, E. (2013). Serendipity and /or ignorance is bliss. Hand Woven.

Jenny Butler

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## 'Leaf rubbing'

Just before the summer holidays, I discovered the Derwent, Inktense pencils and Inktense blocks. What was so appealing to me was that they can be used to paint or draw on fabric and they become permanent with the addition of water or a fabric medium.

So I purchased some and set about experimenting in various



ways. The pencils are ideal for finer detail on cotton calico which has been pre-washed and ironed. Any natural, absorbent fabric works for drawing or painting designs onto.

Then, I thought of leaf rubbing, using the Inktense blocks. So I found some leaves that were heavily veined, lay them, face down

onto a firm flat surface with the calico over the top and began rubbing the side of the crayon, gently across the fabric. The impression of the veins was transferred onto the fabric! This process is similar to the brass rubbing we used to do in churches, many years ago.

Further experimentation revealed more interesting and beautiful results when I used many different colours on each leaf.

After the leaves were completed, I sprayed the fabric lightly with water and the magic then happened! The colours instantly became intense and vibrant. There was some bleeding of colour, but that added to the effect. Using fabric medium, painted on, replaces water and prevents bleeding.

I would like to use the results as a base for embroidery or beading.

I have become hooked!

Pauline Shelley

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## 3D knitting

Back in the summer we had great fun when Janet Farnsworth showed how to do 3D knitting. I promised at the time that I would include Janet's crib sheet she handed out on the day. Here it is.

Editor

*Useful skills:* Knitting with double-ended needles, ability to pick up stitches, increase and decrease stitches, make an I-cord

*Rough guide:* Start with a small (5cm a side) square or other shape such as a triangle with stitches picked up on double pointed needles on each side. If you want a rounded shape increase the number of stitches in the first few rows. Build up the sides by knitting round and round increasing or decreasing if desired. If you want your shape to taper in, like a jam jar, decrease round the top until the neck is the right size. Cast off when your shape is the right size, possibly using a fancy stitch such as picot stitch

To accentuate features in your shape apply some texture, I used an I-cord and was amazed at the effect. However columns of purl in a knit surface, rows or columns of slip stitch, using a thicker yarn in places, all help make an interesting shape.

Janet Farnsworth

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## Burial in Wool Acts

By the mid 17th century, wool was a major product of England, amounting to nearly 50% of her economy. This trade was so important to the country that in 1667 (reinforced in 1678) Charles II passed the Burial in Wool Act "For the encouragement of the woollen manufactures of this kingdom and prevention of the exportation of the monies thereof, for the buying and importation of linen." These Acts decreed that all bodies must be buried in sheep's wool alone and coffins must also be lined in wool, the only exception to this was for those who died from the Plague. The penalty for non-compliance was a hefty £5, however this fine was to be used to the benefit of the poor of the parish by providing "a stock or work house for the setting them to work". In addition, a sworn affidavit had to be provided within 8 days of the burial, swearing that the burial had complied with the Act. These Acts were not repealed until 1814 although they had fallen into disuse much earlier.

Forward to the early 21st century and one of the UKs leading textile mills, Hainsworth, has taken the concept of these 17th century Acts and brought them to the modern day. They now sell handmade woollen coffins, each using three British wool fleeces.

## Meeting Reports

**September 2017: Silk Day** *Angela Pawlyn*. During the morning Angela showed us how to make "paper" from silk cocoon strippings using the natural gum in the silk. Several thin cross layers of the silk were laid out on a J-cloth, this was then decorated with flower petals, leaves, small lengths of yarns etc. held in place with another thin layer of the silk. It was then



sprayed with water, covered with a cloth and dry ironed. This allowed the natural gum to dissolve and then re-set, gluing all the layers together. We achieved some lovely, delicate results that festooned the radiators and windowsills for the rest of the day.

In the afternoon, Angela gave an informative talk about silk. It was interesting to hear how the different types available are produced and to be able to handle a variety of these in her sample packs which contained reeled and spun silk yarns, types of silk available for spinning and various silk fabrics (taffeta, organza, crepe satin). I'm always amazed at the strength and range of this fibre. After the talk we were able to have a go at spinning samples of degummed cocoons and silk caps. Apart from the silk sticking to any rough patches of skin on our fingers, it was surprisingly easy to spin quite finely on a drop spindle. I've been a bit wary of using silk but am now looking forward to incorporating it in my work.

**October 2017: A History of Witney Blankets** Keith Crawford gave an interesting talk on the processes, the history and the people of this famous local industry. Keith is a descendant of the Early blanket-making family, and worked for the company from 1976 to 1990. He has also more recently been involved in Witney's historic Blanket Hall becoming a blanket heritage centre open to the public. In his talk, Keith covered all the basic processes for fleece, spinning, weaving during the times from cottage to industrialised blanket making, as well as the history of Witney blankets and the Early family. There was also a marvellous stash sale with lots of goodies to tempt everyone.

**November 2017: Needle felting HAGD** with *Cath Smith and Caroline Goss*. This was a wonderfully entertaining Have-a-Go-Day. Cath and Caroline were well prepared with everything we needed to make

either a badger or sheep brooch. Under Cath's expert tuition and Caroline's eagle eyes, we stabbed fibre into the background felt to make the animal body - a good way to get rid of frustration. It was surprising how much the fibre could be



compacted and just when you think you'll never get it to look like anything, it suddenly comes together; then we gradually built up the faces by needle felting more fibre in strategic places on the body until lo and behold, there was our animal. To inspire us, Cath had brought along a beautiful bird she had felted, it was quite exquisite and awesome. At the end of the session we had a lovely array of sheep and badgers, all recognisable too!

**December 2017: Christmas Party** Our final meeting of 2017 was our lovely Christmas shared lunch where we all brought a contribution and enjoyed some super food as well as each other's company. It was lovely to have such a big turn out, especially after the heavy snow earlier in the week and the frozen state of the car park - all arrived without mishap.

We also had a show-and-tell from the Tour du Fleece which Chris Seers and Sarah Allan arranged again this summer to coincide with the Tour of Britain cycle ride. They had sourced fleece from the various areas the tour went through and the idea was to spin each one as the cyclists completed that leg of the tour. It was interesting to see how the same fleece behaved for different spinners and that each spinner preferred a different fleece, in fact sometimes one person's favourite was another's least liked! Everyone who took part agreed that it was an excellent way to try out unfamiliar fleeces. During the day there was a Chair's Challenge display. The range of items reflecting the chosen Christmas song "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire..." was amazing and ranged from a beautifully knitted lacy shawl echoing the colours of fire to an exquisite doll representing frost and snow and an intricate musical box with the lyrics stitched onto tape which wound forward as the music was played. Before lunch we also had an opportunity to try out Pauline's Inkense watercolor pencils (see details of this process elsewhere in the Newsletter).

Unfortunately my camera didn't work properly and my photos are unusable. If anyone has photos of this meeting, please let me have them and I can include them in another edition. (Editor)

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## Our rebooted Ravelry Group

Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers Ravelry group has been rebooted (link through [oxfordwsd.org.uk/contact-us/](http://oxfordwsd.org.uk/contact-us/) and sign in with your own Ravelry login or search Ravelry groups for OGWSD).

It would be great to get the discussions going again so please feel free to start a thread on anything textile related. Let me know if there's anything we can add to the information there.

All previous topics have been archived, nothing deleted, and a big thank you to the previous admins and mods for all the work they did.

Anne Hughes

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## By-products of the post-industrial revolution textile industry

- Rotary lawnmower: the inspiration for this came from the machinery that cropped cloth for snooker tables.
  - Automotive industry in UK. In 19th century Coventry, the textile workforce was skilled at building and maintaining looms, especially making the various metal components. When the weaving industry collapsed, entrepreneurs were attracted to the town by the large skill base which they employed for the manufacture of bicycles, motorbikes and ultimately cars.
  - Computer science: The revolutionary Jacquard machine, developed in the early 1800s, used a punch card mechanism to operate the loom and is credited as the basis of modern computer science.
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## Dates for your diary:

### OGWSD Programme 2017/2018

**20th Jan 2018:** 'Threads of the Indus' *Seher Mirza* - A talk about a project with a group of women in Pakistan that led to unique jewellery created from the collaboration of their design and craft skills.

**17th/18th Feb 2018: Saturday** - A talk by *Debbie Tomkies of DT Craft & Design*

**Sunday - Workshop** 'An introduction to Dyeing' with *Debbie Tomkies*. Suitable for beginner to expert, the workshop begins with making sample cards to develop skills in immersion dyeing, hue/saturation and colour blending. All participants will take home sample cards with recipes and samples of all the colours produced. The day then moves into practising a range of dyeing techniques, such as dip-dyeing, handpainting, simple self-striping and low-water immersion. Bring along your own pictures, colour swatches and other items to have a go at colour-matching and creating colour schemes.

**17th March 2018: AGM plus Show of Work** and afternoon tea

**21st April 2018: Nalebinding** - a talk plus have-a-go day with *Pauline Shelley*. Pauline will give a short talk explaining what Nalebinding is and its history. She will explain how she discovered Nalebinding, and what it is that attracted her to it. Participants in the workshop will be able to have a go at the Finnish 2+2 stitch, and the very ancient Coptic Tarim stitch, which closely resembles stocking stitch. Participants will be able to start off, then make a long single piece and join it to form a spiral. How to decrease and increase will also be taught, just as with crochet. There will be needles to purchase at £5 each at the end of the day. All the wool will be provided. A fact sheet of information will be made available, with contact groups and websites that will provide all the best tutorials for further support.

**19th May 2018: 'UK Traditional Sheep Breeds: a brief history and their fleeces'** *Shaun Smith, Harcourt Rare Breeds*. A talk and handling session, taking us through the key features and uses for each type of fleece. Shaun is very well-known to the Guild, as he has been a key supporter of our annual Fleece Day, sourcing and supplying a range of fleeces.

### Other Events

#### February 2018

•Unravel :16-18 February , Farnham Maltings, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 7QR. [craft.farnhammaltings.com/portfolio/unravel-festival-knitting/](http://craft.farnhammaltings.com/portfolio/unravel-festival-knitting/).

#### March 2018

•The Spring Knitting and Stitching Show : 1-4 March , Olympia London, Hammersmith Road, London, W14 8UX. [www.theknittingandstitchingshow.com/spring/](http://www.theknittingandstitchingshow.com/spring/).

•Edinburgh Yarn Festival : 15-17 March , Edinburgh Corn Exchange, 11 New Market Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1RJ. [www.edinyarnfest.com/](http://www.edinyarnfest.com/).

### April 2018

• Fashioned from Nature : starting 21 April at V & A Museum. Exhibition to explore complex relationship between fashion and nature from 1600 to the present day. ([www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/fashioned-from-nature](http://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/fashioned-from-nature))

•Spring into Wool : 7-8 April . The Grammar School at Leeds, Alwoodley Gates, Harrogate Road, Leeds, LS17 9NA. [www.springintowool.co.uk/index.htm](http://www.springintowool.co.uk/index.htm).

•Wonderwool Wales : 28-29 April . Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, Powys, LD2 3SY. [www.wonderwoolwales.co.uk/en](http://www.wonderwoolwales.co.uk/en).

### May 2018

•The Handmade Fair, Ragley : 11-13 May . Ragley Hall, Alcester, Warwickshire, B49 5NJ. [www.thehandmadeair.com/ragley/](http://www.thehandmadeair.com/ragley/).

•Wool @ Junction 13 : 12-13 May . Lower Drayton Farm, Penkridge, Staffordshire, ST19 5RE. [wool-j13.uk/](http://wool-j13.uk/).

### June 2018

•Leeds Wool Festival : 2 June . Leeds Industrial Museum, Armley Mills, Canal Road, Armley, Leeds, LS12 2QF. [www.leeds.gov.uk/Museumsandgalleries/pages/armleymills/Wool-Festival.aspx](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/Museumsandgalleries/pages/armleymills/Wool-Festival.aspx).

•Woolfest : 22-23 June . Mitchell's Lakeland Livestock Centre, Cockermonth, Cumbria, CA13 0QQ. [www.woolfest.co.uk/](http://www.woolfest.co.uk/).

### July 2018

•Pomfest : dates to be confirmed. Studio Spaces, 110 Pennington Street, London, E1W 2BB. [www.pompomag.com/pomfest-presents-one-week-go/](http://www.pompomag.com/pomfest-presents-one-week-go/).

•Yarningham : 14-15 July . Uffculme Centre, Queensbridge Road, Birmingham, B13 8QY. [www.stitchesandhos.co.uk/yarningham/4591459403](http://www.stitchesandhos.co.uk/yarningham/4591459403).

•Fibre East : 28-29 July . Redborne School and Community College, Ampthill, Bedford, MK45 2NU. [www.fibre-east.co.uk/](http://www.fibre-east.co.uk/).

### August 2018

•The British Wool Show : 10-11 August . York Auction Centre, Murton Lane, Murton, York, YO19 5GF. [britishwool.net/](http://britishwool.net/).

### September 2018

•The Great London Yarn Crawl : dates to be confirmed. Various venues, London. [www.yarninthecity.com/glyc-2016/](http://www.yarninthecity.com/glyc-2016/).

•Southern Wool Show : 1 September . Newbury Racecourse, Berkshire, RG14 7PN. [www.southernwoolshow.co.uk/index.htm](http://www.southernwoolshow.co.uk/index.htm).

•Wool is the Festival : 1 September . Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln.

•Perth Festival of Yarn : 8-9 September . Dewars Centre, Glover Street, Perth, PH2 0TH, Scotland. [perthfestivalofyarn.uk/](http://perthfestivalofyarn.uk/).

•The Handmade Fair, Hampton Court : 14-16 September . Hampton Court Palace, Surrey, KT8 9AU. [www.thehandmadeair.com/hampton-court](http://www.thehandmadeair.com/hampton-court).

•Yarndale : 29-30 September . Skipton Auction Mart, Gargrave Road, Skipton, Yorkshire, BD23 1UD. [yarndale.co.uk/](http://yarndale.co.uk/).

•Shetland Wool Week : 22 September – 30 September . Various venues, Shetland, Scotland. [www.shetlandwoolweek.com/](http://www.shetlandwoolweek.com/).

### November 2018

•Yarnporium : 2-3 November . London. [www.yarninthecity.com/about-the-yarnporium/](http://www.yarninthecity.com/about-the-yarnporium/).

### Committee

Chairman	Helen Richardson
Treasurer	Janet Farnsworth
Secretary	Jacqueline Smee
Membership Sec.	Jenny Butler/Linda Whiter
Programme Sec.	
Website	Anne Hughes
Members	Jane Rouse, Claire Blackburn

### Other responsibilities

Sales Table	Rosie Wyatt/ Caroline Goss
Guild Equipment	Anne Hughes
Librarian	Linda Whiter
Newsletter Editor	Liz Mitchell

**Notes from the Editor:** Thanks to everyone who has sent me items for inclusion. I am now running out of ideas and need some new articles/ideas. Please help me.

To catch up on events between newsletters, check programme etc, visit our web site [www.oxfordwsd.org.uk](http://www.oxfordwsd.org.uk) or Facebook. Copy: Items for the next newsletter must reach me before **2nd April 2018**.

E-mail to [newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk) or give me your copy at a Guild meeting.