



Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

Newsletter

April 2018

Liz Allen

My dear friend, Guild member Liz Allen died on 1st February 2018. Although she died far too young (she had promised me she would live until at least 100) she packed a huge amount into her life. Her most important role was as mother to her son Sam, who is a fine young man.

Liz and I were friends for nearly 40 years. We first met when Liz was a Radio 2 newsreader and announcer (as was my husband), having moved to London from local radio in Yorkshire. Our mutual Yorkshire roots were an immediate bond. Liz started writing novels in the 70s – I remember typing a second draft for her whilst I was pregnant and wondering where she got her ideas from. I later found out that many of the themes and stories were from her own life. Before moving into radio she had worked on the QE2, doing many trips between Southampton and New York - a source for one book alone! She had several novels and 'How to...' books published over the years.

For a while Liz ran a shop called Body and Soul selling things such as crystals, books and tarot cards; she was a white witch. She read the tarot for quite a few years and taught others how to do it.

Liz got her first spinning wheel as a gift from a friend who had found it in her grandmother's attic. She didn't do much with it for a while, but once she got going there was no stopping her! She got me involved along the way and was always encouraging me onwards and upwards with the craft interests we shared. The only time in all the years we were friends that we came close to falling out was when Liz tried to teach me to crochet – I just couldn't get it, and she couldn't see why I couldn't!

Amongst her other accomplishments were playing and teaching bridge, designing knitting patterns for hand and machine knitting, playing several musical instruments, painting and drawing and being a wonderful friend.

Sue Clegg

Editor's note: Liz's son has very generously donated some of her craft books and equipment to the Guild for sale (see Jacqueline Smees's email on 28 March and on our Sales Table).



More Textile Art

A double take - was that a Peter Collingwood 'Macrogauze'? It turned out not to be, but you could be forgiven for the misattribution. On show at the Tate Modern at the moment are three works by the American textile artist Lenore TAWNEY [1907 - 2007]. They are roughly contemporary with the Collingwood works, the 1960s and put Peter's work into perspective - who influenced who?

Peter's works are rightly called gauzes. They may be big but they are finely woven. Lenore's are very big and use threads of much more substance - even coarse. I can find only one Collingwood in the major London collections - at the V&A, There are eight Tawney's in Tate Modern. Collingwood is a 'weaver', Tawney is a 'textile artist'. Why the differentiation?

Here are two Tawney's: in the foreground is a close-up of 'The Queen' a work of 1962 in linen and bamboo and behind it 'The King' also of 1962. The label for the later says: *'Tawney used open-warp weaving techniques to create her large free-hanging works. Here the warp [or vertical threads] are divided into two equal black and natural sections to create symmetry.'*



David Nutt

Note: You will find more about the Tate Collection on its web site and also lots about both Peter Collingwood and Lenore Tawney there too.

Shuttle and Stick Tidy



Here is a practical and clever way to keep weaving sticks, large shed sticks and shuttles neat and tidy – and an accompanying smaller box for shuttles currently in use.

I used to have everything spread out on a table nearby – but a clever husband provided this wonderful Christmas present for me.

And below, here they are in use by the loom – all ready to get going!

Jenny Butler



Embrace your warp

As everyone who weaves knows, a good warp is a necessity, but an evil necessity to many. Really, how could anybody devise such a procedure - fraught with traps and hurdles, encumbered by hundreds of incredibly long, tangly threads. But with a little patience, a good guide (see the internet for some useful videos) and plenty of uninterrupted time it is possible to dress your loom well without anxiety!

There are really only two ways to get your warp onto the loom: starting from the front or starting from the back, although both, of course, come with confusing variations unfortunately. Remember what your aim is - getting warp onto loom with threads in the right order and all evenly tensioned and tied off. So the bare bones of warping come down to:

1. Measure the warp keeping threads in order
2. Attach the warp to the back beam
3. Wind the warp onto the beam with even tension
4. Thread the heddles
5. Sley the reed
6. Attach warp to front beam

For back-to-front warping use the order above but for front-to-back the order will be 1,5,4,2,3,6. The really difficult (and important) bit is keeping the threads securely in order as you move from warping board to loom and for threading/sleying. For this you will need a few tricks/aids: put a cross(es) in the threads when measuring and plenty of ties in the warp to secure the cross for moving, make a manageable chain of the warp, place lease (long narrow) sticks either side of the cross for when you untie at the loom, use a raddle to spread the warp to required width (back-to-front only, the reed does this in front-to-back). By keeping the threads in a good order, winding on with an even (not necessarily tight) tension becomes much easier, keep each turn of warp separated with thick paper or similar.

Which method to choose: generally if you have a short warp of few threads per cm front-to-back can be quicker, for some looms easier and great if you are warping multiple colours of undetermined order, but each thread will suffer more abrasion overall. For long warps, many threads per cm, sticky or slippery yarn or colours in a pre-determined order then back-to-front is the one to choose. But, do try both and see which you prefer. For rigid heddle looms, the direct method is very straight forward but does not necessarily give a good even-tensioned warp, especially for wider warps, so it is worth trying indirect methods.

Finally, let me urge you fainted-hearted weavers who hate their

warps to take warping to the heart of your weaving. If you can stop seeing it as a necessary evil, relax and work methodically, you might even begin to enjoy it, after all, without a good warp, you are not being a good friend to your lovely weft yarns.

Remember, sadly, the old adage "practice makes perfect".

Liz Mitchell

Did you know?

- The V & A have an on-line archive of vintage knitting patterns. Download them for free at vam.ac.uk/content/articles/0-9/1940s-knitting-patterns.
- Vintage Patterns Wiki has released more than 83,500 pre-1992 out of print sewing patterns for all to use. Its a browsable collection from an 1895 boys' Reefer Suit to the latest trends in the early 1990s. vintagepatterns.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page.
- In the 19th century, time taken for warping has been recorded as follows: for an apron with 814 threads, at 24 threads per inch, the weaver took seven hours and ten minutes to dress the loom.
- Navajo blankets often have areas of uneven weaving resulting from inclusion of objects from local wildlife, eg animal hairs, shavings from claws and granules of corn, which act as amulets to warn off harm.
- Clams, in particular Pinna *nobilis*, secrete filaments that can be spun into sea silk which shines like gold in the sunlight. It was the finest fabric known to Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, but today there is only one person who can still harvest and spin it.
- Knitting was initially a male-only occupation. In fact, when the very first knitting union was established in Paris in 1527, no women were allowed.

What does "textile" mean

A search for the origins of the word "textile" revealed roots in *text*, from the Latin *textus*, for texture, structure, content, literally a thing woven, and in *texere*, to weave, construct, compose. This feels like a circular argument that makes a resonant intuitive sense, that whether an artist uses fiber or words, the creative result is woven language. Canadian poet Robert Bringhurst, in "The Elements of Typographic Style," explains it this way: "An ancient metaphor: thought is a thread, and the raconteur is a spinner of yarns – but the true storyteller, the poet, is a weaver. The scribes made this old and audible abstraction into a new and visible fact. After long practice, their work took on such an even, flexible texture [so] that they called the written page a *textus*, which means cloth."

www.windrewindweave.com/

Meeting Reports

January 2018: Seher Mirza gave a very interesting talk "Threads of the Indus" on her work with rural women in Pakistan. Her PhD project at Royal College of Arts had introduced her to these skilled needlewomen whose work was mostly domestic. In Pakistan, there has been a lack of value placed on traditional craft in recent times. Most urban exporters and manufacturers have focused their energy on mechanised methods of production. In a country where crafts are embedded in culture, tradition and the identity of the artisan, little is being done to

sustain these traditional crafts. Consequently, artisans feel their skill is not worth much, and fewer younger women are carrying on these age-old traditions. Young women are also uninspired and less motivated to make traditional designs that have changed little with time. This has affected the quality of work, which is poorer with less attention to detail compared to previous generations. Seher's project aimed to sustain traditional textile craft in Pakistan by valuing their work and generating income for them. With the help of an NGO she set up a small company as an outlet for the women's work. Now the women have adapted their needle skills to making exquisitely embroidered jewelry using cotton, mirrors, locally produced metal threads and beads. Each item is the result of collaboration between artisans and designers within Pakistan and aimed at high quality fashion and textile accessories for the Western market. These are sold via Seher's company website, giving these women much needed financial independence.

February 2018: We had a wonderful meeting with Debbie Tomkies (DT Craft & Design) and her husband, Pete. They brought along a wonderful range of their products, including their dyeing packs which are perfect for new dyers as they include everything needed, so no searching for strange ingredients or finding you have a missing one half-way through the process. Debbie, who has been an avid collector of antique books, patterns and samples of all things to do with fabric, also brought along some of her treasures for us to see. My favourite was a book outlining various dyeing processes in the 18th century. Debbie's very interesting talk introduced us to the history and development of fabric dyeing. I'm always amazed that in the past, when the everyday processes of living took time and effort, fabrics were dyed and patterned; a way of individualising items and brightening lives, perhaps. The talk also made me wonder how many people over eons of dyeing had died from their attempts to get lasting colour from the natural world.

On the Sunday, Debbie and Pete ran a very successful workshop 'An introduction to Dyeing'. They outlined the processes involved and the interactions of the various chemicals used. Sample cards were made using a variety of dyeing techniques. Then everyone had a go at a range of the techniques, such as dip-dyeing, handpainting, simple self-stripping and low-water immersion, colour-matching (see photo for wonderful results) and creating colour schemes.

March 2018: Once again this year we had a superb display of members' work, all very inspiring, and lovely cakes. At the **AGM**, Kate Prinsep was voted onto the Committee as Treasurer; Janet Farnsworth was thanked for her work over the past three years, she will continue as a member of the Committee. It was agreed that Jacqueline Smee will help with the role of Programme

Secretary, overseen by the committee. Members were happy with the programme content but additional workshops would be welcome. There was discussion about a possible move to larger premises. The cost will be double but it was agreed that this was worthwhile for more space. It was also agreed that the increase to membership fee that was voted for in 2016 would be implemented to help cover the cost. Rosie Wyatt has given up her role on the Sales Table, was thanked for all her work over the past many years and will be replaced by Kate Prinsep.

Indigo

Compared with the story of cochineal in the last issue, indigo has a very complicated history. Not only is its name of a very confused origin but, it is produced from a variety of plants using different methods and rituals. It is generally thought that the name indigo comes from the Latin *indicum* (or the Greek *indikon*) meaning product of India but it goes much further back in time. The other name for this beautiful blue is anil which is still used in the Mediterranean and Middle East. This word may be from the ancient Arabic *an-nil* meaning two rivers (ie the Blue and White Niles), and to confuse further, *nili* in Sanskrit means an indigo plant! According to a Dutch academic¹, this name might indicate that this magical blue dye was named to honour local deities, as was the custom then. So, if over time *An-* becomes *In-* and is added to *dios* or similar name for god (*diego* is Spanish for god) is that the origin of the word indigo?

The dye was certainly used for the borders of Egyptian linen mummy cloths from around 2400 BC. However, the earliest examples of indigo probably comes from the Bronze Age Indus Valley civilization (3300-1300 BC); excavations in the area found both indigofera seeds and remnants of cloth dyed blue. Finally, in South America the species *Indigofera suffruticosa* is named Anil.

Plants carrying the pre-cursor pigment, indigotin are found around the world in diverse plant families. The most commonly used are the many species in the Indigofera family that prefer tropical climates, though woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) with its more northerly range and dyer's knotweed (*Polygonum tinctorum*) are also used. Despite the complication of extracting the dye, the beautiful colour of indigo is still highly prized throughout the world from the Tuaregs of the Sahara, to Dong people in China and in Chiapas and Oaxaca, Mexico and, of course, not forgetting our blue denim jeans.

¹Marijke Eken, 2012 ©

Liz Mitchell

Freya Jones

Freya, a Bucks Guild member, has opened a shop on the outskirts of Aylesbury. She sells weaving, spinning and dyeing equipment, fleece, fibre, yarns, dyes and runs some workshops. The shop is colourful, as you would expect, and a comfortable place to browse. Her shop is a welcome addition this side of the county. The shop is situated amongst a small collection of arty shops at Layby Farm (which I have always called the Goat Farm), Old Risborough Road, Stoke Mandeville, HP22 5XJ. Phone: 07496033156. freyajones.com.

Fashion & Textile Museum Exhibition: The Secret Life of Scissors - 9 February–6 May 20



If you are in London, this might make a quirky visit. This display explores the complex multiple lives of scissors; everyday objects, universal tools but also ambiguous 'things', surrounded by superstition, myth and symbolism. From antiquity to modern times, scissors have remained irreplaceable and indispensable tools that also reveal an intimate human bond; their worn surfaces bearing witness to lives lived. The Secret Life of Scissors explores these different narratives in a sequence of themes: life and death, fairy tales, crime, punk and more, constantly mirroring the double-edged nature of this familiar yet mysterious object. Fashion & Textile Museum, 83 Bermondsey Street, London SE1 3XF. T: 020 7407 8664. www.ftmlondon.org.

Dates for your diary:

OGWSD Programme 2017/2018

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.

16th June 2018: Details to be confirmed

21st July 2018: Details to be confirmed

Other Events

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)

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

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

May 2018

•The Handmade Fair, Ragley : 11-13 May . Ragley Hall, Alcester, Warwickshire, B49 5NJ. www.thehandmadefair.com/ragley/.

•Wool @ Junction 13 : 12-13 May . Lower Drayton Farm, Penkridge, Staffordshire, ST19 5RE. 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.

•Woolfest : 22-23 June . Mitchell's Lakeland Livestock Centre, Cockermouth, Cumbria, CA13 0QQ. 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/.

•Yarningham : 14-15 July . Uffculme Centre, Queensbridge Road, Birmingham, B13 8QY. 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/.

August 2018

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

September 2018

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

•Southern Wool Show : 1 September . Newbury Racecourse, Berkshire, RG14 7PN. 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/.

•The Handmade Fair, Hampton Court : 14-16 September . Hampton Court Palace, Surrey, KT8 9AU. www.thehandmadefair.com/hampton-court.

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

•Shetland Wool Week : 22 September – 30 September . Various venues, Shetland, Scotland. www.shetlandwoolweek.com/.

November 2018

•Yarnporium : 2-3 November . London. www.yarninthecity.com/about-the-yarnporium/.

Committee

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

Other responsibilities

Sales Table	Kate Prinsep / Caroline Goss
Guild Equipment Librarian	Anne Hughes 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 or Facebook. Copy: Items for the next newsletter must reach me before **9th July 2018**.

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