



# Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

## Newsletter

July 2018

### Grow Your Own - Clothes!

Can you now throw away your spinning wheels, looms and knitting needles? Well hardly. Among the displays in the recently opened exhibition 'Fashioned from Nature' [1] at the V & A is a dress gown from the roots of grasses. It looks great but it must have been very tedious to train the grass. [see the picture]

The exhibition is about the way we have used natural materials to make clothes and fashion accessories, and have been inspired by plants and animals in their decoration. It delights in pointing out how destructive, polluting and downright nasty fabric production and 'fashion' can be. The problems with dyes and mordants, water pollution and habitat destruction pinpointed will be well known to most of you so I won't elaborate.



But the exhibition also brings to our attention the past [hopefully] exploitation of animals as fashion accessories - humming birds as ear rings, albatross skins as muffs, fox skins complete with heads and claws as scarves, and beetles as embroidery decoration. [3] I found this section very nasty. But it does raise the whole question of killing things. Where to draw the line? Fine for food but not for adornment? As an omnivore with a silk dressing gown, I would not dare comment.

For me however, the most interesting feature of the exhibition was the very small section devoted to new ideas. The grass root cloth produced by Diana Scherer is a really over-the-top idea, an interesting but hardly a practical way of making cloth in any quantity - and she has problems getting all the soil out!

Among the other innovations a couple by 'Bolt Threads', were on show. These were said to be less polluting in their making than traditional materials, one is a leather-like material made from mushroom mycelium and the other a spider-silk-like thread made from a bio-engineered protein using yeast, sugar etc. Both have been used by Stella McCartney. Will any of this catch on? We will see.

David Nutt

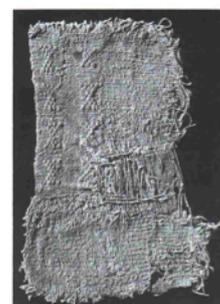
[1] The exhibition will be open until 27 January 2019.

[2] The V&A Magazine of Spring 2018 has an interesting article on Diana Scherer and the exhibition.

[3] At least using ostrich feathers does not involve killing the bird!

### A Brief History of Cotton

Cotton was being grown, spun, and woven into cloth in Pakistan in 3000 BC. About the same time, people in Egypt were also making and wearing cotton clothes. <http://library.thinkquest.org/5443/history.html>. The piece of cotton fabric (left) from 2300 BC was found in Peru. It shows a combination of weaving and twining

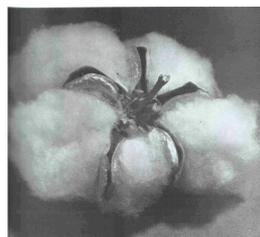


Reproduced from "The Book of Looms" by Eric Broudy, University Press of New England 1979 (ISBN 087451 649 8)

Arab merchants brought cotton cloth to Europe about 800 AD. Fustian, a fabric woven with a cotton weft on a linen warp, led the European market in early medieval period.

When Columbus first discovered America in 1492, he found cotton growing in the Bahamas.

Cotton has been used in Britain since medieval times, but, until it was imported in large quantities from America from the later 18<sup>th</sup> Century, it was either expensive or of poor quality.



Reproduced from "The Craft of Handspinning" by Eileen Chadwick (Batsford 1980 (ISBN 0 7134 1912 4))

The quality of cotton depends on the fibre length (as in wool, it is known as staple). The length is about 5cm for Sea Island Cotton and 2cm for Indian and Chinese varieties. Long and short varieties are grown in America.

The picture (right) shows the seed of a cotton plant. The fibres surround the seed case of the fruit of the plant.

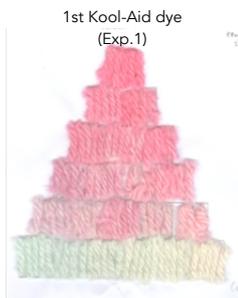
Angela Pawlyn

**Editorial Addition:** Different species of cotton plants produce fibres with a range of different characteristics including colour. The most common naturally coloured cotton is green and brown but many other colours can be found, including red and purple! Originally, all cotton would have probably been coloured, but the staple length of coloured cotton is too short to be processed in industrial machines in factories. White fibres are longer and soon became the dominant colour grown for industrial production. Coloured fibres are still grown, but on a very small scale; they have an advantage over white as they are naturally pest-resistant and don't need dyeing. The fibre colour changes as it goes from harvest to finished product: spun cotton is boiled to set the twist which deepens the colour, and it continues to deepen with use.

## Dyeing A Colour Triangle

Dyeing a colour triangle is something that I would never aim to do on my own. It needs 21 samples and who would dye 21 samples only to get a reference card when you can have so much fun sloshing dye randomly into dye pots. However once you have a colour triangle for a specific dye it is much easier to work out how much of which colours you need to get a specific colour. You can also understand the dye much better too.

So I was keen to do one with the Guild. We started off dyeing with Kool Aid: Cherry, Blue Raspberry and lemonade, I added one sachet of powder to just under a pint of water, much stronger than you would make up a drink. My explanations of what we were doing were so poor no-one really



saw the point, and there was a certain mystification about my demand for accurate measuring, However a few kind souls started and then more arrived and we got our 21 samples.

We learnt that the cherry dye was so much stronger than the blue raspberry or lemonade that all the samples that contained cherry dye at any concentration came out pink. Useful to know but slightly disappointing.



Next we used synthetic dyes: Ciba Geigy Red, yellow and violet. These solutions were much more concentrated than the Kool Aid, 10gms of dye to 500 millilitres of water and the depth of shade was correspondingly dark.

You can see that some samples were measured wrongly and those samples are much paler than the rest. This triangle would have been more interesting with lighter samples but still gives a lot of information about the colours that can be achieved by mixing dyes.

Most people had had enough of dyeing by then, 42 samples is a lot but I wanted to try another Kool Aid triangle using much more blue and yellow dye and fortunately there were still people to help.

This time we used the original amount of the cherry dye but 10 times as much blue and yellow as we had used before. This time we got a balanced triangle, which would be useful for choosing dyes to get a specific colour. It also shows that if you are using Kool Aid dyes and you want a colour other than pink or red you need to buy much more blue and yellow dye. I chose Blue Raspberry and Lemonade as my primary colours because most of the other colours/flavours seemed to contain red dye. I assume that red is less toxic than the other colours and is therefore a good one to use for coloured drinks for children. Other dyes do not have extraordinarily strong reds.

I hope every who took part enjoyed the exercise, I certainly did and I am really grateful to those people who took the concept and carried it through. If anyone would like to complete another triangle please email me so I remember to bring the dyed yarns to the September meeting.

Ciba-Geigy Synthetic dye master (Exp. 3)



## Are you interested in nålbinding?

I am very keen to promote nålbinding to ensure that this lovely versatile craft is shared and enjoyed by future generations. I believe that there are so many benefits from becoming a nålbinder and I want to share this with you.

Learning any new craft is not always easy. We need constant support to help us to progress to a point where the actions become 'natural' and we understand what is happening as we take the first steps. Practice becomes essential! Once we have passed this early stage in learning, we can then grow to a level where creativity begins. And that is when enjoyment and the realisation that we are masters of this process, become reality. It is very exciting!

To help you to achieve the level where you feel confident to work independently, I have compiled a list of resources below:

### Books:

Nålbinding What in the World is That? - History and technique of an almost forgotten handicraft. Author - Ulrike Claßen Büttnr. ISBN 978-3-7347-7905-3. There is another edition of this book which is also available, that teaches the stitches. If bought as an ebook it comes in colour, and the paper copy is only in black and white. - ISBN 978-3-7392-6952-8

Nålebinding - Marianne Overby - ISBN 978-8-7714-5910-4 Written in Danish/English. The translation is poor but legible. Marianne met up with Egon H Hansen's daughter and showed her some of her work. She then found out that Egon had researched Nålebinding and other crafts, for Moesgaard Prehistoric Museum, Aarhus, Denmark and had written a book. She gained permission to use the records and 'usable' English translation. Egon Hansen developed the Hansen's Code which was used to record the method of learning the stitches.

There are other books available, but not so many in English or with translation.

### Websites:

When searching the internet for websites, please remember that there are many different spellings for Nålbinding!

[en.neulakintaat.fi](http://en.neulakintaat.fi) - This has and remains the most informative website for me. It is compiled by Sanna-Marie Pihlajapiha. This has to be your first stop for clear instructions. From her homepage you will find numerous links to her videos which include: History, Hansen's notation- how to decipher, step by step guide for beginners, index of stitches, outline patterns and many more. There is also a guide for left-handers. The videos are in Finnish and English. Some of the older ones are just with music, however very clear to follow. You can also find a link to the print off sheets for the Finnish stitch, with diagrams.

[www.regia.org](http://www.regia.org) - article on Naalbinding

[www.shelaghlewins.com](http://www.shelaghlewins.com) - construction of socks

[www.artfulacorn.ca](http://www.artfulacorn.ca) - useful starting sheets

**Facebook groups:** Nålbinding - closed group (the most helpful and supportive group that I have found), United States of Nalbinding - closed, Naalbinding/Nadelbinding - closed German group

**Note:** closed group means that you have to ask to join. In many ways they're better as the comments do not clog up your friends newsfeed pages. These groups are monitored and have a set code of behaviour.

**Pinterest:** A great resource for ideas and discovering links to websites and books.

Janet Farnsworth

Pauline Shelley

## Felted slippers workshop

Recently, I went on a one-day slipper/boot felting course run by Sarah Waters ([sarahwaterstextiles.com](http://sarahwaterstextiles.com)). It was held in the New Forest at Woodgreen, between Ringwood and Salisbury. The hall where the class was held is painted with beautiful murals from the 1930s and was well worth a visit in itself. The workshop was full on all day and we all had a pair of felted boots at the end. A short break for lunch enabled us to see the splendid felted wall hangings in the local shop which were made by Sarah with a group of felters. I thought the workshop was amazing value at £65 including all the materials and a supply of filtered coffee or tea and biscuits (we took our own lunch).

I am keen to improve on the technique so will be making some more boots and slippers soon. She also does hats and other things so I am watching what will be coming up soon. I asked if she travels to do workshops and she said she does so we could maybe approach her for the guild as I am sure she would do a talk with a workshop the next day.



Caroline Goss

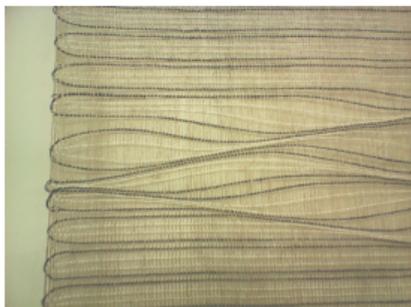
PS. Ed and I stayed at a lovely B&B called Little Acorns. There were badgers, deer and owls in their garden! The B&B is £70 for a night and that is the same all year round.

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## Peter Collingwood Exhibition

Inspired by David's piece in the last Newsletter, I went to see the Peter Collingwood Exhibition "Woven:Unwoven" which is currently on at the Crafts Study Centre, University For The Creative Arts in Farnham ([csc.uca.ac.uk/new-events/2018/1/2/peter-collingwood-wovenunwoven](http://csc.uca.ac.uk/new-events/2018/1/2/peter-collingwood-wovenunwoven)). The exhibition includes a wonderful video of Peter at his loom and talking about his weaving and inspirations. The major part of the exhibition is his own collection of woven artefacts from around the world including such unusual items as fishing floats from Norway and beautifully patterned and decorated camel neckpieces (gorbandh). Of his own work, there is a large selection of samples for rugs exploring fibres and weaves and several large pieces from later.

My favourite was one of his Anglefells which were the beginning of his move away from more traditional weaves. By using contrasting colours in the weft and altering the beat on some picks, he could draw a pattern in the fabric. Following on from these he produced his famous macrogauzes, large interplays of different fibres including metal, often in 3D, and usually commissioned for large prestigious buildings around the world.



There is still time to catch the exhibition, it finishes on 11th August.

Liz Mitchell

## Meeting Reports

**21st April 2018: Nålbinding** *Pauline Shelley*. Pauline gave a very interesting talk about nålbinding, its origins, uses and techniques in the morning. This was followed by a have-a-go session in the afternoon. We were all very surprised at the wonderful articles Pauline had on display and enjoyed having a go at this very ancient craft. Pauline is very keen to promote this lovely craft and has produced a list of resources for us to encourage beginners to the craft (see separate article elsewhere in this Newsletter). Pauline has also written lovely articles about the history and about present-day nålbinding which I shall include in future editions of the Newsletter.

**19th May 2018: 'UK Traditional Sheep Breeds: a brief history and their fleeces'** *Shaun Smith, Harcourt Rare Breeds*. Shaun gave a super talk on the various breeds of sheep in our British islands. We were fortunate it was a beautiful day and we all encamped outside surrounded by bags of the fleeces as Shaun talked us through the history of their arrival in this country, handing round samples of each breed. The earliest of Shaun's samples, the primitive breeds, were the Hebridean from the West coast of Scotland with double layered fleeces (for spinning and felting), the North Ronaldsay seaweed eaters with tough fleeces, and the long-tailed Portland with red fleeces of young lamb and soft fleeces. In the Middle Ages, and possibly earlier, sheep were imported from the continent and crossed with these primitive breeds to give Herdwicks, Welsh Mountain, Derbyshire Gritstone and Ryland (named for the rye fields they were grazed on). At this time few fleeces were white and so the Ryland's coloured and white fleeces were in demand and commanded high prices: Cistercians used this fleece - coloured for the monks' habits but white for their abbots'; Ryland fleece was also used for the Woolsack. So far these were mostly short-staple fleeces, though some longer staple breeds (Roman in origin) had been introduced from the continent. Interbreeding and selection, through the work of some farmers in and around Leicestershire, especially Robert Bakewell, helped to spread variety among the sheep flocks throughout the country. This led to most of the breeds we now know and enjoy for their wonderful fleeces. Shaun also brought a few of the more recent imports: Jacob, Texel (a Dutch Leicester Longwool) and Zwarble (essentially a milk sheep). It was a lovely handling the fleece while Shaun talked about them and I think several were handled with envy!

**June 2018: Jamboree.** Unfortunately, I wasn't able to attend this meeting and don't have a report, though Janet Farnsworth has written an interesting piece about the dyeing a colour triangle on page 2.

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## IF

If you can wind a warp  
And never miss the cross.  
If you can thread the heddles one by one  
And never suffer loss,  
If you can reed the threads  
And never miss a dent.  
And smilingly repeat your pattern  
And never once resent  
An interruption or a muttered curse  
From workers by your side,  
If you can start to weave  
And find the threads you thought were tied  
Are loose; if you can cheerfully retrace  
Your steps and do it all again,  
Then call yourself a weaver, friend;  
Your patience has no end.

Mabel. E. Fells

## Association's Biennial Conference 2018

In May Janet Farnsworth and I attended the Association's Conference in Milton Keynes. Location, accommodation and meals were first class and it was great meeting members from around the country but the definite stars of the show were the talks. All were easily accessible to non-academics and all very interesting. First up on the Friday evening were two archaeologists, Mark Knight and Susanna Harris, who have been working in the Fenlands on the site of a 3,000 year old stilt village which had burnt down, then collapsed into the water and silted up, preserving the interior of the homes. These interiors are giving us a wonderful insight into everyday lives of their occupants. Among the finds was a significant amount of textiles and evidence of weaving and spinning. Unfortunately, the conditions at the site are acidic, so only plant fibres have survived. Susanna and her team are working to find out what plants had been used and their source. Mark and Susanna's enthusiasm was so infectious and we kept them up well into the night with our questions. On Saturday Dinah Eastop told us about The Board of Trade Design Register, 1839-1991 - a vast collection of storage boxes containing huge amounts of garments and fabric samples, all patented and in need of cataloguing. Items had been numbered originally, but unfortunately numbering had started at 1 several times, so no-one knows how many items there are actually in the collection. Next came Anna Buruma who gave a fascinating talk on the history of

Liberty and their wonderful archive of design. The conference was rounded off on Sunday morning firstly by Isabella Whitworth's talk about a chance discovery of shellfish purple dyeing in the early 20th century. Purple shellfish dyeing had ceased in the 15th century and the techniques lost but somehow been rediscovered by a dyer, Charles Bedford. Our final talk was from John Miners about the history of John Boyd Textiles. We were all surprised to learn that horsehair was still being used in weaving and John told how the company had continued to flourish through a chance encounter with a young designer who saw the advantages of these textiles. The company has an amazing archive of all their patterns and are able to reproduce all of them! Apparently horses can grow up to 6 tails during their life and most now come from Mongolia; where once a child pulled out each individual hair from a bunch to pass to the weaver, this is now mechanised.

In addition to these talks, Alain Rouveure gave an entertaining after-dinner talk about his work in Nepal with carpet weavers. There was also an amazing display of work for Certificates of Achievement, showing the high standards required for the certificates. Very inspirational.

We both thoroughly enjoyed our weekend and I'm looking forward to the next one.

Liz Mitchell

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### Dates for your diary:

#### OGWSD Programme 2017/2018

**15th September 2018: Textiles Tell Stories - Claire Blackburn.** Claire, a Guild member and professional textile artist, will give a short talk about her work and practice, with particular reference to her use of textiles to record stories and narratives. We will take a look at some of the projects she has been involved with and the relevant skills and materials used, which include knitting, needle-felting, hand-dyeing, embroidery, photography and stitch. There will be a range of samples, images and work for the audience to explore and talk about.

**20th October 2018: Introduction to Tapestry Weaving – Have-a-Go Day with Jill Carey.** Using basic small frames we will explore the main techniques of tapestry weaving. Then we can look at ideas for simple designs and the fun and freedom of creating something more complicated or just crazy!

**November 2018:** to be confirmed

**December 2018:** to be confirmed

### Other Events

#### 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.thehandmadefair.com/hampton-court](http://www.thehandmadefair.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/).

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### Committee

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Chairman        | Helen Richardson                               |
| Treasurer       | Kate Prinsep                                   |
| Secretary       | Jacqueline Smee                                |
| Membership Sec. | Jenny Butler/Linda Whiter                      |
| Programme Sec.  |  |
| Members         | Jane Rouse, Claire Blackburn, Janet Farnsworth |

### Other responsibilities

|                           |                              |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Sales Table               | Kate Prinsep / Caroline Goss |
| Guild Equipment Librarian | Anne Hughes                  |
| Newsletter Editor         | Linda Whiter                 |
| Website                   | Liz Mitchell                 |
|                           | Anne Hughes                  |

**Notes from the Editor:** Thanks to everyone who has sent me items for inclusion. Please keep them coming.

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 **9th October 2018**. E-mail to [newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk) or give me your copy at a Guild meeting.