



Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

Newsletter

October 2019

A Visit to St Kilda (and Soay sheep) – June 2019

The morning of 27th June saw a very early start for me; I needed to be up on deck and looking at the horizon to accommodate the rather 'lumpy' sea that is the Atlantic ocean!



Cold and misty..... Very gradually, around 5.00am, a vague outline of a tiny grey lump on the horizon was seen – the first glimpse of the archipelago of St Kilda.

This group of islands is 40 miles west from the most western of the Outer Hebrides. Until 1930 it contained an isolated community of just 43 people (1927 census) down from 180 people in 17th Century, who carded, span, and wove the wool from the Soay sheep of the islands. They lived by some basic agriculture, but mostly in using the sea birds to their fullest – for feathers (to sell to the mainland), the eggs, the oil from the birds for lamps, as well as the meat.

The main island of Hirta has, a little way away, some enormous lumps of rock rising out from the ocean – the Stacs. It was here that the St Kildans would go to live for a couple of weeks climbing the rocks, collecting eggs, and birds, until one of their boats came to pick them up with all their booty. These days the Stacs house hundreds of thousands of birds, and are part of the World Heritage site that is St Kilda. There are numerous research projects going on around that teeming birdlife.



We were lucky with the weather, and were actually able to land on the island (we know that many are not able to land due to the wind and sea conditions). We had a talk from one of the National Trust for Scotland rangers who lives on the main island – they are the only inhabitants now (apart from the Ministry of Defence looking for rockets). They each have specialist research areas and projects: wildlife and archaeology – and stay for about 6 month stints, alongside one or two others who assist in the various tasks needed.

The Soay sheep are now left entirely to themselves, and are

abundant. They roam throughout the islands, their fleece dropping off them in the summer. The St Kildans never needed to shear them, but pulled fleece off them, for turning into yarn for knitting or weaving. As you can see, the sheep are mostly dark in colour with some sandy shades apparent especially in the lambs. I managed to pick up a few pieces of fleece from the ground, and save them to bring to the Guild meeting.

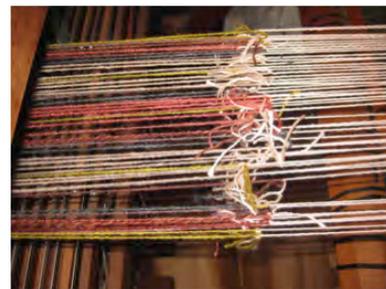
It was a fascinating visit – we were so fortunate, and the sun even came out in the afternoon. The culture and history of St Kilda is really interesting, and can easily be found out via the internet or some wonderful books.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Kilda,_Scotland

Jenny Butler

Using a precious yarn for warp without waste

If you have a precious/expensive yarn that you want to use for a warp, then you need to minimise the amount of wastage. I'm always amazed how a few inches of waste on each warp thread multiplies up to yards over the whole warp [e.g. 6 inches (15cm) x 300 threads = 50 yards (45m)]. Instead you could use a similar weight yarn, to tie onto the beams and then tie that yarn onto the precious warp ends, thus making this "dummy" warp the waste. An efficient way to do this is to cut one length of dummy warp for every 2 warp ends, fold in half and half hitch to the warping rod. At the front beam, make the dummy long enough so that you can close up the warp before you get to the precious yarn. At the back beam it needs to be long enough to be able to weave right to the end of the precious yarn (your knots need to be able to go through the heddles).



A good knot for these ties : Make a 6 out of the yarn coming from the loom having the loose end on top of the 6. The yarn being tied on is the "rabbit." The rabbit comes up the hole, around the tree (the yarn from the loom) and back down the hole. Grasp both ends of the "rabbit" yarn in one hand and both ends from the loom in the other and pull. And you have a knot that will not come loose. NB Make sure you are tying the correct ends together before pulling!!

Liz Mitchell

Sustainably produced yarns and fibres

Following reports published recently about synthetic microfibres from our clothing being released into the water when they are washed, I thought you might find the following about sustainably produced non-synthetic fibres and yarns of interest.

As we all know British wool fibre and yarns are the best (especially those from small producers)! They can be sourced closed to home and I'm sure that is what most of us use. If, however, you want to use another fibre/yarn, then the range is enormous but many contain synthetic fibres or their production pollutes the environment or they have travelled half way round the world to reach us.

Sustainable yarns include:

- Linen from Europe, especially Sweden where their production process is environmentally friendly
- Organic cotton, this is only grown where cotton occurs naturally and so doesn't need the high input of water and pesticides that most cotton gets.
- Tencel is produced in a closed loop system unlike other viscose yarns, which should be avoided as the process is very polluting and energy intensive.
- Naturally produced bamboo and other plants spun from stem fibres; avoid viscose bamboo, etc.
- Silk (note that mulberry silk is reeled from cocoons boiled with the moth inside. Most wild silk is spun from cocoons collected after the moth has emerged).

Suppliers of these yarns include My Fine Weaving and William Hall.

My Project

Since becoming the proud owner of a Baby Wolf loom last year, I have had in mind weaving a rug for my sitting room. At one of our meetings, someone brought along odds and ends of yarns free to a good home, among them were several different greens which I thought looked good together and now form the base of my rug. For some time I have liked the look of the Norwegian weaving *krokbragd* (crooked path) which is a colourful, tightly packed weft-faced weave. It is woven on 3 shafts in a pointed twill. Three picks (ie rows) of weaving result in one line of pattern, but by using a different colour for at least two of these picks, this enables the weaver to create an enormous variety of patterns. I decided to keep it quite simple with a blocky design of two colours at a time, but changing these colours every 15 picks. However, after doing this for several inches, I succumbed to the temptation to do something different, so breaking up the original design several times, and



particularly in the middle section.

As the actual weaving is very straight forward, all the planning comes in the colour choice and I could spend many minutes at each colour change trying to decide which to use next, this was particularly troublesome towards the end of the rug as I was running out of yarn of the base colours. I used a mixture of yarns, much of which I spun and dyed specially, but initially I erroneously thought I needed a chunky yarn and so a lot was really too thick and needed to be packed down with a fork as the reed wasn't heavy enough. This sort of weaving is very slow going, though I

did get faster towards the end, probably because I was desperate to get the rug off the loom and finished before our meeting.

I discovered one fundamental error made though. I had put on a thick selvedge plus a floating selvedge, unfortunately the floating selvedge became slack quite early on and so I weighted it - but the weight was too heavy and so the sides of the rug are tighter than the middles - I'm sure it will be fine once its been walked on for a bit!

Liz Mitchell

The Electric Eel Wheel Nano

I ordered the Electric Eel Wheel Nano (which many of you will have seen at the September meeting) in a lovely purple colour last December. The projected arrival was August and it arrived just before my birthday. I had been watching the website and tracking its journey from China to the USA which was quite exciting. Although I had to pay import duty and the post office for handling it, it was still only about £100.



There were lots of helpful tips about how to make it run better and quieter some of which I tried which worked. I can take it anywhere with me as it is so small and very light. A search on Amazon found a very neat little bag (for nappies or food) with two compartments which was perfect for transporting it. A gap for putting a phone lead was perfect for attaching the battery lead and a small switch (also from Amazon) completed the kit. I also swapped the yarn holders for £2 worth of switch so that I could turn it on and off easily. There is a mains lead and charger included. The Nano is so small it will sit on your hand and I found window stickers really useful to lift it up to keep the motor cool and a mat from Aldis for dog treats works well to stabilise the whole set up. Beads were added to the tension band to look pretty and make it easier to hold without it slipping. Recently new bobbins have been designed for Halloween in black and bright orange with bats and witches hats but I think I will wait for the Xmas ones to be produced. A site called Thingiverse has patterns for all sorts of extras that can be 3D printed. There are also some splendid YouTube videos by Turtlepie Vampy McPurry who is very knowledgeable about all things Nano and she is in the UK which is a break from the American ones. I added a cardboard washer as well but adding one each end of the bobbin didn't work at all, this was supposed to cut the noise level but my husband had already fiddled with the placement of the carriage in the slots and that seems to have made it run much quieter and better.



I have now spun two lots of fleece and plied them on the Ladybug. I can honestly say I have never spun that fine before and once I had got the speed and the tension right it was easy to do. I have used my yarn in a woven shawl made on the Brinkley loom and am very pleased with the result.

Caroline Goss

Meeting Reports

June 2019: Fleece Sale plus a talk "All about the angora rabbit". We had a busy meeting this month, with Sarah and Chris from Wychwood Spinners selling Fleece in the morning in the Hall Car Park. There was a tantalising range of fleece available from samples to full size, all of their usual excellent quality. I was very excited to be able to buy a fleece which came from a named sheep for the very first time and I am looking forward to working with Kennie once the weather finally improves and I can get him washed!! In the afternoon we had Lesley Hordon from Skyrack Angoras who gave us a fascinating talk on the history of the Angora Rabbit. Her historical knowledge was impressive, and she then gave us a practical demonstration of how to spin the fleece using a wheel or a spindle.

Chris McLean

July 2019: Guild Day Out and talk "Nettles as Yarn" (Allan Brown).

Once again we all went out to Diana Bird's farm in the lovely countryside on the borders of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Unfortunately the weather wasn't as good as previous years but we made use of her enormous barn



right next to the house. Allan took some of us off into the fields to pick nettles (ouch!), though tough gloves made it easier. We then rubbed off the leaves and most of stings on the stems. (Nettle



stings are on the leaves and stems and act like hypodermic needles, injecting histamine and other chemicals to produce the stinging sensation.) We used unretted stems, though Allan usually retts his in a similar manner to flax. The process proved to need a good bit of effort for very little result. From a small handful of stems we ended up with only a few fibres for spinning. Allan also explained more about the process and accompanied that with lovely samples of nettle fabric. It was a very interesting and thoroughly enjoyable day with loads of lovely cakes courtesy of Diana. If anyone would like to see and feel nettle fabric, I have a sample with me.

Since the meeting, I noticed in the press that the sustainable clothing fashion pioneers, Vin + Omi, have teamed up with Prince Charles for a new venture in which every garment in their collection for London Fashion Week will be made from nettles from Highgrove estate. Previously they had been using cow parsley for fibre - interesting! vinandomi.com/eco-innovation/4594289755

September 2019: An introduction to natural dyeing (Judy Hardman) The excellent Judy Hardman, a long time spinner and weaver and author of the book *Natural Dyes*, told us some of the history of dyeing with natural plants and then talked to us about the colours that she achieves from plants in her garden. She highlighted the variation with comparison of what colours she

achieved when she lived in the chalky area of Hampshire, with the colours she now achieves whilst living in Limestone area of Derbyshire.

Chris McLean

September 2019: Workshop Natural Dyeing. This was an amazing workshop and I'm just sorry that not everyone could take part. Judy brought everything we needed from Baby Burco



boilers, gas cannisters, through pre-mordanted wool skeins to the dye stuff. She talked us through the entire process and then we started putting dye plants into the water, sometimes having to keep a wary eye on temperatures as for a couple of colours these were important. We dyed with a range of plants, mostly from Judy's garden including coreopsis, dyer's greenweed, logwood (now sadly endangered and will be

prohibited soon), chamomile, onion, black hollyhock, weld and madder. After everything had been dyed, we then started an indigo bath and used this for over-dyeing. We also used the modifiers iron, tin and copper on some of the skeins. The range of colours we obtained was incredible, probably the most vivid I have seen from natural dyeing. In addition to learning about the processes, I also learnt the importance of careful mordanting (Judy preferred to do this herself before the workshop). We took home with us a wonderful record of our efforts that I will bring to our next meeting.



Liz Michell

What do NM yarn numbers mean?

The first thing to say about nm numbers (2/28NM, 3/10NM and so on) found on manufactured yarns is that if you find them difficult to understand, they really are not as complicated as they look!

So what do they mean? Well the number before the "/" is how many strands the yarn has, the number after the "/" is how many meters you can get from each gram of each strand. So a 2/28NM yarn has 2 strands, each one giving 28 meters per gram. When you put two strands together, the weight per meter doubles ... put another way when you double a strand the meters per gram halves. The same principle applies to more than two strands, so the rule is that to get the total meters per gram for a multi strand yarn you divided the number after the "/" by the number before it. So a 2/28NM yarn gives 14 meters per gram (28 divided by 2), whilst a 4/7NM yarn gives 1.75 meters per gram (7 divided by 4 = 1.75). What sometimes seems a bit odd about this resulting number is that the lower the number the thicker the yarn... a 2/28NM yarn will give 8 times as many meters from say 50g as a 4/7NM yarn.

To convert grams/metre to yards/pound, multiply the NM number by 500. For example, 2/28 x 500 = about 7,000 yards/pound.

Courtesy of Colourmart

Mats for Bell Ringers

Last year I had an interesting commission for St John the Baptist Church in Burford. The bell ringers have mats on the floor of the Ringing Chamber to protect the bell ropes from the floor. After some 70 years they were wearing out. John Collect got in touch with me (thanks to Lyn Wymer) to ask if I could weave four replacements.



He left me to choose the colours so I decided to use red or blue for the main colour and grey and beige for the patterns. I wove the first one in twill as it produced a thicker mat but the downside was that it took about twice as long as weaving plain. I

decided to weave the other three in plain weave so I could finish the four in a reasonable time.

Finishing the mats took a long time. I twisted the warp thread to make a corded fringe and then had to knot each thread as the linen warp I had used untwisted very easily. (I would be grateful for advice from other rug weavers about where to get a good linen warp) I very much doubt mine will last 70 years!!



I completed two of the rugs by about last October and took them over to John. I wanted to see the bells being rung so having finished the last two, I took them over one Sunday in February and went up to the bell chamber to see the bells being rung between the two Sunday services. It is quite a climb up to the Bell Chamber. I was amazed by twin sisters who were at least 10 years older than me who were able to ascend much quicker than me.

Angela Pawlyn

Mordant choices for yellow natural dyes

In the 1980s a scientific study was undertaken in the USA of light fastness of natural yellow dyes using different mordants (digitalcommons.unl.edu/textiles_facpub/7) to assist museums in their fabric conservation. Among the plants used that are common to us were marigold, coreopsis, mullein, poplar, golden rod, onion and dock while tumeric was used as a control. The mordants were alum, chrome, copper, iron and tin. The fabric was 100% wool.

Overall, it was found that the plant dyes did not determine light fastness nor did length of exposure to light. However, the choice of mordant had a significant effect. Sadly, for us, alum and tin were the worst performing; all plant dyes used with an alum or tin mordant faded badly in light even at low levels for short times. Chrome mordanted fabric was the most light fast, with iron and copper in between, though none were particularly good. It seems that yellow dyes are never particularly light fast: on the scale of light fastness used by the investigation, L1 to L9, most yellow dyes were below L5, as were all the natural yellows we use.

This study only applied to yellow plant dyes and these results may not be replicated if these are overdyed, eg with indigo, or if they have been modified with iron or copper.

Sheep Breed Study

Our guild's study of Oxford Down fleece, which we started earlier in the summer is going well and we have already had a couple of write ups for the Oxford Down book so far, please keep them coming in. There may still be fleece available if you want to take part, the closing date for your write-up is December, so plenty of time.

Dates for your diary:

OGWSD Programme 2018/2019

2019

Oct 19th HAGD Fair Isle, Steeking and Cable Knitting : Linda Whiter/Chris Maclean

Nov 16th Talk 'The History and development of sewing machines' : Paul Verney.

Nov 17th Tablet Weaving Workshop (basic tablet weaving techniques using both threaded-in and woven patterns) : Anne Hughes

Dec 21st Xmas Meeting

2020

Jan 18th Talk on textile conservation : Alison Lister

Feb 15th HAGD Beyond a Granny Square : Louise Summer-Matthews

Other Events

- Hampshire WSD Guild Exhibition, Silk Mill, Whitchurch, RG28 7AL. 30 November - 5 January 2020.
- Flax, Fibres and Plant Dyes, Rochester Art Gallery, ME1 1LX 4 October - 4 January 2020.
- African Textiles, Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London WC1OH 0XG. 10 October -14 December 2019

A useful source of craft courses:

www.craftcourses.com/categories/spinning-weaving-dyeing

Committee (until AGM)

Chairman	Vacant
Treasurer	Kate Prinsep
Secretary	Jacqueline Smee
Membership Sec.	Jenny Butler
Outside events	Chris Crowley
Members	Louise Summers-Matthews Pauline Travis Sue Clegg

Other responsibilities

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

Notes from the Editor: Thank you to all my lovely contributors who helped out with this issue but I am in still in need of items for future issues. Please keep your eyes and ears open for interesting pieces from any source and also please write up anything you've been doing related to our crafts. E-mail to newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk or give me your copy at a Guild meeting.

To catch up on events between newsletters, check programme etc, visit our website www.oxfordwsd.org.uk or Facebook.