



Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

Newsletter April 2023

AGM (March meeting)

Sue Clegg was warmly thanked for her three and a half years as Chair. Kate Gardener (formerly Prinsep) was elected to take her place

Kaye Davis, Mel Odell, Pippa Purnell, Amanda Henriques, Pauline Travis and Anne Hughes were re-elected to continue in their current roles.

Mel has kindly agreed to continue in her role as Secretary for an extra year. This will give continuity to the committee, with only one officer changing each year.

A new constitution was approved. It is a little shorter and simpler than the previous one, which had been in place for around 10 years. The new constitution is based on a framework from the AWS&D, and includes the new timing of the AGM. It allows us flexibility to grow whilst retaining the best of the past.

From the Chair

This is the start of my time as Chair and, I have to confess, I'm a bit nervous. Sue has kept us together as a Guild through a really tricky time, and that's a tough act to follow. Thank you, Sue, for everything.

I would also like to thank Chris Cowley for her time on the committee. The role of External Events Co-ordinator has been taken on by Janet Farnsworth. I look forward to seeing where the Guild is represented over the next months and years.

I joined the Guild in 2017 after visiting Lyn Wymer's studio to buy an extra bobbin for my recently acquired first spinning wheel. I had no idea at that time that I would become Treasurer and, now, Chair. Nor did I think that I would ever have more than one wheel.

Lyn encouraged me to go along to a Guild meeting at Stanton St. John and find out more. Not long after that I bought my first fleece from Sarah Allan, did a lot more spinning and eventually managed to produce enough yarn that was good enough to make into something wearable.

I've been a knitter since I was very small and I wanted to learn to spin from about the age of 15. It took me a long time to get there but now I can't imagine not been able to do it. Since joining the Guild, I've also ventured into the world of weaving on a rigid heddle loom and become

completely obsessed with the pin loom. I have to confess that I'm not really into dyeing but I do love to play with coloured fluff.

The Guild is a great place to learn new skills from visiting teachers, but there is just as much to be learned from each other. I am in awe of all of your talents and creativity. I'm very proud to be part of a group that is so willing to share expertise and encourage others to grow and learn. I'm looking forward to seeing what we can all achieve over the next months and years.

Kate Gardener

Recent meetings

We were able to enjoy a shared Christmas meal in **December** for the first time in three years. Many thanks to Pauline Travis for arranging such an excellent spread

In **January** we had a busy De stash sale organised by Sarah Allan and Kate Gardener £106.86 was made for the Guild.

I did much of the research for my talk in **February** on "Some Ten Thousand Years of Textiles" for an exhibition at the Museum in Wantage back in 2006. One of the statements in the display was "*There is no evidence of linen being used in England before Roman times*". Since then, amazing discoveries have been made of linen being produced on an industrial scale at Must Farm, east of Peterborough. The buildings which were on stilts above water caught fire. Scorching of the fibres before they were immersed in water helped to preserve them. Do search for information on-line.

In preparation for this talk, I also did some research into non-woven textiles. I was pleased to have Pauline Shelley's input on Nålebinding which goes back as far as 6000BC. It appears that knitting and crochet were not invented until much more recently. I am not available for her HAGD in May, so look forward to having a go later.

Angela Pawlyn



Close up of a mitten made by Pauline using the Nålebinding technique on the show of work display at the February Guild meeting.

A random selection from the show and tell tables in February and March



Left Pippa Purnell's tie-dyed indigo with stitching.
Right Anne Addyman's Saori Weaving



Amanda Henriques' Tablet Weaving



Jenny Butler's Sofa Throw

Choosing and Sorting a Fleece

It is that time of year when we know the lambs are being born all over the country to their ewe Mums, who might be a rare breed or a commercial, a mountain breed or a lowland. For me it is the sign that shearing is not far away and this year's crop of woolly fleeces will soon be ready to delve my hands into.

For any spinner or fibre artisan there are several things that must be considered before choosing and purchasing a fleece. It is important that the fibre is sound for the use you want it for, if not you will be disappointed. But! Before we go any further, I will say here and now that a lot of my purchases have been on the oooooo ahhhhh factor when I touch a fleece not necessarily because I went with a plan in the first place, I/you will not be able to help being sucked in by a lovely fleece or two or three and plans go sideways.

Firstly, choosing a sound fleece is not as hard as you think. What I am about to say goes for most fibre types, except double coated breeds as there is an under down and a longer guard fibre that like cashmere will separate.

When you decide to buy your fleece at a show or direct from a breeder/farmer always ask to see the fleece properly. If you cannot lay it out and examine the whole fleece pull out some staples (lock) from the bag, pinch one end between a finger and thumb then the other end between digits on the other hand and give it a tug. If it twangs and stays in one piece it is fine but if the fleece pulls apart the staple it is unsound/tender and not good for much, especially spinning. Also, if possible, have a good look in the top to make sure there is not too much vegetable matter (VM), as this can make a lovely fleece harder to process

If you go to any of the wool fairs or events around the country most fleeces sold on stands by breeders should (I hope) be sorted or they have facilities for you to check. Note that you may not be able to do a full sort at a farm or show, by this I mean disregarding out sorts which I will explain in stage two. Price will always determine if you are willing to take a punt on a fleece. Expensive does not always mean sound so do double check, cost is down to either the rarity of the breed or the type i.e. long wools tend to be more expensive as they are generally heavier fleeces.

Secondly, once you have chosen your lovely fleece you will then want to sort it. If you can, do this on a sunny day outside in the garden (though my lounge has been used for sorting many a time). You will need an old sheet or ground cover of some form so the fleece does not pick up any new uninvited dirt or vegetation, plus a couple of bags to put the different sections (out sorts) in so you can keep track. Lastly a pen, and if necessary sticky white labels, so you can mark the bags so you know in future what is what.

Lay out your sheet and place the fleece in the centre of it and unroll it. A fleece is usually presented inside out, so when you unroll it you will get the outside facing up, inside on clean sheet. Front end of the sheep always unrolls first, hopefully if you are lucky it unrolls from a long piece first (the neck), like the photo below. From here the fleece will roll out but will be folded in three. Unfold each side to reveal the whole fleece. If you find a dirty clump in the middle of the fleece at this point it is the belly and is the first to go on discard pile.

Therefore, the neck is now a tail and the rear of the fleece is the other end. You should immediately be able to see some differences in the fleece. The rear end typically is dirty and has more VM in, plus the wool tends to be coarser. Head for the rear where you



should remove all nasty dung or soiled fleece and any really coarse wool you really don't want to process. Then work your way down both outer sides of the fleece removing all unwanted wool that does not feel good to you or has too much VM or dirt in. It is not worth your time saving any of this.



Next you will want to remove any coloured fleece from farmer's marks and any areas you find that are felted or have copious amounts of VM in.



Unfortunately, this can include parts of the soft neck as it is the closest part to the mouth thus hedges and hay racks.

Then give the fleece a good shake as there can be



second cuts and you really do not want to get these into the spinning. They come from the shearing where a shearer takes a second swipe with his blade to remove more

fleece and get closer to the skin. Discard!

Once you have really removed all the undesirables you can start to discover which parts of the fleece are of use. Here you can be as selective as you like but to start with I would separate the coarser from the fine wool. The finer part usually works from the neck down the sides of the fleece and this can be used for clothing or nicer projects. The coarse fluff can be used for harder use projects like rugs. In the sorting process you can lose up to a third of the fleece to dirt and other

issues, but like the Lleyn fleece I have used here I was very lucky and retained more fleece than waste.



Image from Woolclip



Place wool to keep in your bags with breed (Lleyn in this case) and type (best, 2nds) and compost, ditch the undesirable. You are now ready to wash your fleece when you are ready.

Note: - This is a basic guide to sorting fleece without getting too complicated with breed types and a few other anomalies that can occur. If there are questions, I am happy to answer at a meeting.

Sarah Allan

Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930 - 2017)

There is still time to see the amazing Magdalena Abakanowicz retrospective at Tate Modern (open until 21 May 2023). For those unfamiliar with her work, she is a Polish artist who graduated from the Academy of Plastic Arts in Warsaw in 1954. Censorship and restrictions of the arts in Poland eased in the mid 1950s and opportunities for 'craft' or 'folk art' were particularly well supported through the state sponsored Association of Polish Artists.

Her early work includes huge, flat, textured tapestries of amazing beauty, but it is her enormous three dimensional sculptures - a 'fibrous forest' created in the 1960s and 1970s that brought her to

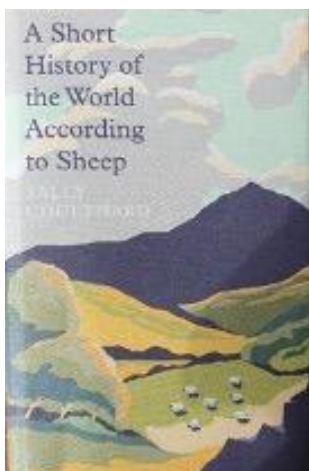
the attention of the international art world. So unique and original were these works that they defied classification and came to be known as 'Aberkans.' Frustrated at being labelled a fibre-artist (something I have to say I'd be delighted to be called!) Aberkanowicz began using other materials in the 1980s and towards the end of her career used whole trees and worked outdoors.



All of her work is based on, inspired by and reflects the natural world. Though some of the large Abakans reflect female form and there is a strong, feminist vibrancy to her work, the primary influence throughout her life were the beautiful Polish forests around the aristocratic home she grew up in. This is one of the most original and inspiring exhibitions I have ever visited, a real 'must see'. For more pictures see the Guild's WhatsApp group. (see page 5) Tim Chapman

A Short History of The World According To Sheep by Sally Coulthard, Published by Head of Zeus. 2020

This book, first recommended to me by Pat Lewis during one of our "lockdown" chats, is a delightful adventure through history and around the world. It explores the way that sheep and pretty much everything to do with them, have: *"...fed us, clothed us, changed our diet and language, helped us to win wars, decorated our homes, allowed us to create artistic treasures and financed the conquest of large swathes of the earth."*



I have cheated by copying that from inside the dustjacket but I could not sum up the contents of this book any better myself.

The narrative is most engaging, written in a light-hearted tone, yet packed with history, facts, science, myths and more modern anecdotes. I don't think that you even need to be actively engaged in any fleece

related activity to enjoy this book. I particularly liked the chapter "Mr and Mrs Bo Peep", which is all about shepherds and shepherding. But the whole thing is a delight, and has some lovely woodcut (I think) illustrations by Nathan Burton.

Amanda Henriques

Programme
15th April Guild

Ellen Moore, who graduated in July 2019 from Brighton in 'Textile Design with Business Studies', will talk about her experimental weaving with plastics, how we can use plastic for wearing creatively and how to make crafts more sustainable.



She plans to arrive in the morning and so will be available to talk weaving with anyone who is interested.

See Ellen's Instagram: www.instagram.com/moorewoven

20th May Guild

HAGD with Janet Farnsworth Visible Mending and Embellishments: 'Make unique items from your dull, old or damaged clothes.'

Pauline Shelly will also run a Nålbinding have-a-go at the same time, but has said that she can only take 2 people max at any one time. Generously she has also said that she is happy to help anyone during any guild meeting who doesn't manage to have a go in May.

17th June – Guild. Talk by Delia Salter
Textile Narratives from a Northern Land: Iceland.



She is an experimental knitter and also does felting and natural dyeing. She is currently in residence in Blönduós at the Icelandic Textiles

Centre for a month and is posting regularly about it on her Instagram account. [deliasalter](https://www.instagram.com/deliasalter)

25th June - Workshop with Janet Farnsworth and David Knight: at Diana Bird's Chilton Grounds Farm. Carve your own spindle and then spin with it, Attendees will make at least one drop spindle; Learn whittling skills that you can apply to other projects from David, an experienced bodger, cost for members is £45. Contact



programme@oxfordwsd.org.uk to book a place, £45 pp. Currently under booked, this workshop will very shortly be offered to non-guild members so book your place now!

15th July – Guild: HAGD with Amanda Henriques, wool combing and using a blending hackle.

30th July - Workshop, Stanton St John

Workshop with Alison Ellen: knitting with overspun singles. Knitting with unbalanced yarn causes the stitches to slant in one direction, usually thought of as a problem but it can be put to great use in designing. Alison will set some basic exercises to start people off, and then will explore the possibilities to see what effects can be created. Alison will begin with a short talk using her own experiments as the focus. Contact programme@oxfordwsd.org.uk to book a place, £50 pp. Currently under booked, this workshop will very shortly be offered to non-guild members so book your place now!

16th September - Guild HAGD with Anne Hughes, bobbin lace.

21st -22nd October - Guild Talk and Workshop

Debbie Tomkies will talk to the guild about how to create a dyeing record and to how experiment with dye. This will be followed by a workshop run by her on Speckle Dyeing on the Sunday at Stanton St John Village hall. Cost to follow.

12th November - Workshop, venue to be booked

James Perry 'Long Draw James' will run a workshop on woollen preparation and long draw spinning. More details and cost to follow.

18th November - Guild HAGD with Angela Pawlyn, weft faced weaving on rigid heddle looms.

16th December - Guild

Christmas lunch and Chair's Challenge

We have agreed to holding workshops on a different Sunday than the weekend of the guild meeting, unless the outside person is giving both a talk and workshop.

The show and tell table at guild meetings is proving very popular, thank you so much to everyone who has brought items in, please continue to do so, even if work is ongoing, It's great to see work in progress. It's been so interesting to see projects that members have made and to be able to discuss it with them, the range of skills covered by our guild is incredible! Items that don't fall into the subjects of spinning weaving or dyeing are also very welcome.

Outside Events

22nd-23rd April
Wonderwool Wales

Until 21 May
Explore a Forest of Woven Sculptures
by Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz.
Tate Gallery, London

6th May
World Textile Day
King's Sutton, Oxfordshire
Celebrate Coronation Day with textiles

6th -29th May
Oxfordshire Artweeks
Go to www.artweeks.org and search Textiles.

Until 11th June
KUMIHIMO: Japanese Silk Braiding by Domyo
Japan House, London, W8 5SA

29-30th July
Summer Wool Festival
Amphill, [Summer Wool Festival](#)

2nd-3rd September
Southern Wool Show
Newbury Racecourse
<https://www.southernwoolshow.co.uk>

Further details and information on wider events can be found on Journal Website [Diary \(journalwsd.org.uk\)](#)

There has been lots of information about outside events on the Guild's WhatsApp Group. If you want to be included in the group email Kate on chair@oxfordwsd.org.uk

Committee

Kate Gardener - Chair
Kaye Davis - Treasurer
Mel Odell - Secretary
Pippa Purnell - Programme Secretary
Amanda Henriques - Membership Secretary
Pauline Travis - Catering
Anne Hughes - Library and Website

Other responsibilities

Sales Table - Sarah Allan
Newsletter Editor - Angela Pawlyn
External Events Co-ordinator - Janet Farnsworth
Guild Equipment - Anne Hughes

From the Editor.

The deadline for next issue is 6th July
No need to wait until then to send me input.
Please email to newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk.