



# Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

## Newsletter October 2023

### From the Chair

I love this time of year when the trees begin to change colour. The autumn colours are my favourites and the slight chill in the morning air makes me glad that I can look forward to wearing my favourite jumpers again.

Since the last Newsletter, we have said a final farewell to one of our members. Pat passed away in August at the age of 95. She was a member of OGWSD for about 20 years and regularly attended meetings, although she preferred Stanton St John to Beckley.

The July and September meetings were Have-a-Go days. These give us the opportunity to learn new skills from each other and to appreciate that we belong to a wonderful Guild. I want to pass on my thanks again to Amanda for sharing her skills and knowledge of wool combing, and to Anne for sharing her passion for bobbin lacemaking.

The Guild is a wonderful community of talented and creative individuals who are willing to share their passion with others. Long may it continue.

At the moment we are in period of uncertainty. As you know, we are looking for a temporary Treasurer as Kaye was unable to continue. Please consider taking on the role, at least until the AGM in March. We will also be looking for a new Secretary at that time, when Mel will stand down, and a new Membership Secretary to take over from Amanda. Without people in these key roles OGWSD will have to close, and I'm certain that none of us want that to happen.

### My Memories of Pat Lewis

Members will have been very sad to hear that we have lost Pat Lewis, a dear member of our guild. My memories of Pat are of a gentle soul who had a smile for everyone who might have gone but will



never be forgotten

Pat was a member of the guild for at least 18 years and in the early days a very active and interested member. She may not have taken a leading roll but you would always

find her in kitchen helping out or giving a hand where she was needed at guild meetings and events

Pat was interested in new and different crafts and would always have a go for the experience, if she liked it she would do more of it, if not it got parked. She was a lovely spinner who loved trying new fibres and was happy to share skills from her preferred field.



At meetings she and I would love to catch up on what we were both currently working on discussing pros and cons, as I am sure she did with many of you. Though in later years it was less, she would keep trying new fibres or ways she could adapt to her evolving abilities. Pat would always have time for my daughter Bethan too, giving her all the encouragement to follow her interests and pursuits in our crafts. After Bethan moved on in life she always wanted to know news about her.

Pat was one of those genuinely lovely people in life that didn't want a fanfare but was an ambassador of her spinning skills and knowledge and love of life.

Sarah Allan

### Recent events

#### HAGD in July

Members had a go at wool combing and using a blending hackle under the guidance of Amanda Henriques

A blending hackle is a tool for blending potentially quite large quantities of fibre into a roving to be spun. **Amanda explains:**

You need to start with fibres that are already in a "ready-to-spin" state, i.e. combed locks, tops or roving. Simply clamp the hackle to your workbench and load it up with your chosen mix; any fibres can be used, plant or animal based, and then pull them off from one end of the hackle, working your way along and back again through a diz. You might want



to repeat the process, to blend the fibres more finely. I often find that silks have a way of clumping together and need some persuasion to blend in with other fibres. It is fun to blend different colours and see what results. You could weigh the different amounts of each

fibre used in each loading if you want to be sure to get the same blend each time, for a larger project. Mine tend to be a bit more random and experimental!

A word of warning. The blending hackle is a potentially dangerous piece of kit. Do keep the wooden cover on it at all times except of course when you are loading it up. Never leave it without its cover on. Not even while you go for a quick coffee!

### HAGD in September

#### - Bobbin Lace with Anne Hughes

Having had a little go it seems to me that bobbin lace is both logical and slightly befuddling all at the same time! I found I could do left to right without too much problem, but going back the other way weirdly threw my brain into confusion! Once your hands have learnt the repetitive movements, slowly but surely a delicate looking but surprisingly strong little miracle is produced.

It was clear that Anne had done a lot of preparation in order for the HAGD to run smoothly, she led this complex craft with skill and patience, having worked out patterns for participants to create both fish and chips. The finished results were absolutely beautiful, and everyone was thrilled with what they had managed to create; a full day workshop may be on the horizon to let people explore this beautiful craft more deeply.



Sandie was on hand to help anyone who wanted to dip in to have a go on a communal sampler,

Anne had also brought in a lovely display of all her beautiful samples of lace and bobbins, put together in the days when she taught regular workshops. I feel very lucky to be a member of a guild that has so much skill and experience, with

people who are willing to share their knowledge.

Pippa Purnell

### **Outside events 2023**

I took over outside events at the last AGM and since then we have done three events, which isn't very many for the public face of the Guild but we hope for more next year. The team at any event varies according to availability. This year Sarah Allan, Tim Chapman, Sandie and Richard Edwards, Mike Foster, Liz Mitchell, Sarah Williams and I attended. If you would like to join us for one or more event please get in touch, you don't need to be expert at anything, just enthusiastic.



The first was the Ffennel Festival at Hill End. Sandie and I thought it would be fun to dress up in an approximation of nineteenth century dress and take the great wheel.

We discovered that it takes more concentration than a modern wheel and it was impossible to talk and spin, let alone letting the kids have a turn. The Ffennel Festival is aimed at families and attracts a lot of small kids who were happy just to turn the wheel, but unfortunately, even that put the wheel out



of alignment so we contented ourselves with spinning and talking about Sandie's lovely collection of needle-felted sheep. Several people wanted to

buy one and were aghast at how long they took, although we all agreed their quality showed.



Our next event was that perennial favourite: the Wychwood Forest Fair in June. We had a bigger team this time, and the gazebo. As well as the great wheel

there were two modern wheels and a demonstration of weaving. The gazebo was decorated with hand spun skeins, handwoven scarves, a wonderful hand spun, hand dyed handknitted jumper and needle felted sheep. There was a lot of interest, in everything and several old friends dropped in as well. I think we all got seduced by at least one stall, I don't know how many fruit trees Tim bought and someone bought a walking stick. It was a lovely day and I think we all had fun.

The last event this year was a Steaming Sunday at Combe Mill, there were five of us, two spinners, a weaver and two people caring for the great wheel. Although there was a lot of interest there were fewer people who wanted to have a go and several people who were fascinated by the great wheel. Sarah was amazing she always sounded enthusiastic, even when she was holding forth about double weaving for the tenth time. We were given a lovely big space and spread out our samples over the walls and tables. Unfortunately, mid-afternoon it started to rain and we had to hurriedly move things away from the sides as the edges of the marquee were flowing with water. Nothing was damaged and people still came to be enthralled by our stuff.

We were also invited to the Charlbury Riverside Music Festival, but didn't go as the notice was short and the instructions unclear. Maybe next year!

Janet Farnsworth

### **The Nettle Dress: a film based on friendship and time.**



This write up is of a screening at the Ultimate Picture Place in Oxford, followed by a live question and answer session with Dylan Howlett, the film maker and director.

I want to say Allun and Dylan Howitt met at school, but it may have been later at

university. In any case they have been friends for a long time, both with an interest in activism. Throughout his working life Allan has been a baker, a gardener, a graphic designer and has run an allotment; Dylan has been a film maker and a director.



In Dylan's words the film began following the thread of an idea of Allan's while walking his dog and really noticing the ubiquitous nature of the stinging nettle inhabiting wild places and waste ground, there was no thought

of where the idea might lead or of what the end product might be. The idea was can I make a thread using nettles? Can I make cloth from the thread? Can I make clothing from the cloth?

It became a meditation on creativity and craft, with 2 friends meeting up to discuss the processes along the way and with an idea to film the journey. As Dylan said it was the journey that was the interesting part, there is a meditative tone and pace to the film and one can feel the passing of time

while watching it. Whatever the film turned out to be cinema release was always the goal, Dylan would film Allan at his house in Brighton while at the same time having conversations with him. After each filming session they would watch the footage together and talk about it, 2 old friends each doing their craft, with Dylan editing as he went. It was a conversation that happened over 7 years.

The information Allan managed to find about how to process nettles for fibre at that time was limited and disparate, he has since set up the Facebook group Nettle for Textiles, currently running with 28,000 plus members where you can now find information about all things nettles. Allan's nettles were all gathered from one location, Lime Kiln Wood, near Sussex University, apparently a scraggly scrappy section of woods, the perfect growing conditions for nettles. They were dew retted, carded and spun on a drop spindle over many years. Allan had already begun his exploration of nettles when his father became ill, sitting spinning his thread on a drop spindle at his father's bedside during his last few weeks, and then spinning again though his wife's last month when she was diagnosed with a stage 4 tumour and given 4 weeks to live. Dylan's father had also died during this time, their joint experience informed the film and the questions asked, and they came to realization of what the film was about: grief.

Through the gift of slow film making (Dylan's words) we see 25 meters of fabric emerge, with Allan teaching himself the skills needed, apart from some evening classes in pattern making when it came for the actual construction of the dress. The fabric was beetled by hand with a stone to soften it, as well as boiled with wood ash; it was hand stitched with waxed linen thread, hand-spun by Allan, with the pattern being based on an old Viking dress pattern. When asked if he felt bereft at the end of the process Allan apparently had said that he wasn't, that seeing his daughter Una wearing it for the photoshoot in Lime Kiln Woods was absolutely magical, the dress is tied to place and is the ultimate in sustainability, when eventually it turns to rags it will be returned to the woods to rot away into the ground.

In the meantime, Allan wants the dress to be touched and to be worn as an every-day dress for every day jobs such as tending the allotment. Dylan actually had the dress with him at the end of the film in Oxford, you can imagine the excitement of the audience, it definitely got thoroughly touched that evening! It feels soft and tough, not unlike linen but also not the same.

If you can't make it to a live screening (highly recommended) it can be seen online on 29<sup>th</sup> October tickets £16.25 from, available to pre-order now <https://linktr.ee/nettledressfilm>.

Pippa Purnell

## Show and tell

Sarah displayed the results of dyeing with Buddleia at the July meeting.



The lovely things on the show and tell tables in September



## Buying rug yarn

I have been buying both cotton for warping and rug wool from Airedale Yarns but they have now closed. Yarn on Cone sells a wide range of rug wool. However, I have become worried about the Axminster rug wool which contains 20% nylon. Whilst pure nylon yarn will not decay it will stay in one piece, whereas the nylon in the rug wool will be left in small pieces which is worse for the environment. Yarn on Cone describe the yarn as on their website but have confirmed it contains nylon by email. They stock Chunky Shetland which is pure wool. It is 8wpi compared to 13wpi for Axminster. That would not be a problem for me as I use Axminster double but it will not be hard wearing.

*Searching for alternative sources, I read that George Weil - Fibrecrafts is for sale.*

Angela

## Programme

**18<sup>th</sup> November - Guild HAGD with Angela Pawlyn,**  
Weft faced weaving on rigid heddle looms.

Weft faced weaving is used for tapestries and rugs. The warp is spaced so that the weft completely covers it. I use four threads per inch (4epi) when weaving rugs on a four-shaft loom and aim for the same when setting up a frame for tapestry weaving.

I will bring six of my old-style rigid heddle looms set up for weft faced weaving as well as one or two of the guild ones. These old looms have a reed with 7 heddles an inch which gives 14epi if every heddle and slot are threaded. When the looms were donated to me for teaching, I quickly decided that threading every third heddle and slot was a good idea. At this spacing (4.66epi) wefts such as rug wool completely cover the warp. This allows people to choose any colour for the weft. (Not to mention it is three times quicker to thread up the loom!!)

If a thinner weft is used it packs down more and so it takes longer. With a thicker weft it is difficult to cover the warp. When weaving rugs on a 4-shaft loom, I find it best to use rug wool double because of the slightly greater spacing of the warp and also because it is easier to beat harder.



I will bring some rug wool and also lots of thinner wool which gives good results when used double. Of course, you can also use your own. Two contrasting colours are good if you would like to try some patterns like those in this picture

***If you want to bring your own loom ready threaded -***

Modern rigid heddle looms are normally sold with a 7.5 dpi reed. (This gives the number of threads if every heddle and slot is threaded) Further reeds are normally available at 5dpi, 10dpi and 12.5

dpi. Unfortunately, the 7.5 dpi spacing is the least convenient for weft faced weaving.

A 12.5dpi reed with every third heddle and slot threaded or a 5dpi reed with every heddle and slot threaded would give very similar results to the old reeds. I have a 9dpi reed and have woven a sampler using every third heddle and slot to give a spacing of 3epi. I needed to use rug wool double. A 10dpi reed would give a spacing of 3.33epi so again would need a thick weft. If you only have a 7.5dpi reed you could thread every second heddle and slot to give 3.75 epi but the warp will not be spaced evenly. This will make it more difficult to beat. Perhaps you could use a fork to beat it every few rows. The cotton I normally use for the warp is approximately 28 wraps at inch. It does not need to be as thin as that though.

Please email me at [newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk) if you have any questions.

### 16<sup>th</sup> December – Guild Christmas lunch and Chair's Challenge 2023

I always start with good intentions but somehow life gets in the way and I don't have a finished piece in time for the exhibition. On the other hand, the fact that I have started the challenge does get me thinking about creating something that I wouldn't have previously considered so even if it's not finished, I have challenged myself to be more creative.

This year's challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to create something inspired by the theme of Holidays. I may have come up with this on a tropical beach watching the sun go down with a G&T but I hope you will be inspired to think about what Holidays might mean for you.

You must use at least one of our core skills: spinning, weaving and dyeing. Other than that it is up to you, as long as you can link it to the theme.

A few suggestions:

- Create something inspired by a holiday – a stunning sunset, a beautiful view, a memorable experience
- Create something for a holiday – a Christmas gift, a bag for your holiday
- Make use of something you acquired on holiday – that yarn you just had to buy, that fibre that was too good to leave behind .....
- Your creation does not need to be finished, a work in progress or an ideas board would also be fantastic!

Your piece should be accompanied by a short note with your name and what inspired your work. It's also good to hear about any challenges that you have encountered and how they have been overcome, or not. Maybe someone else will be able to come up with an answer.

Finally, enjoy the challenge and share your talents with everyone at the exhibition.

### 20<sup>th</sup> January Guild

De-Stash Sale.

It is back ladies and gentlemen

Declutter your cupboards and suitcases, boxes and selves. We can take any craft items including equipment but and this is a big BUT everything must be packaged where needs be, no loose balls or it gets messy, clearly labelled with price and seller's full name.

When you price your items two things come into play

1. If you don't want to take it home reasonably price it.
2. The guild as usual takes 12% commission.

Sarah Allan

### Outside Events

11<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> October

Voices in Cloth

[Old Fire Station Gallery Exhibitions  
\(henleytowncouncil.gov.uk\)](http://henleytowncouncil.gov.uk)

3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> November

Abingdon Craft Fair

Until 28<sup>th</sup> November

Earth Threads - woven tapestries by members of the British Tapestry Group

Whitchurch,

<https://whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk/>

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

### Committee

Kate Gardener - Chair

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

Outside Events – Janet Farnsworth

Newsletter Editor - Angela Pawlyn

### From the Editor.

Many thanks for the contributions to this newsletter. The deadline for next issue is 6<sup>th</sup> January. No need to wait until then to send me input. Please email to [newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk).