



Oxford Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

Newsletter September 2026

From the Chair

This Newsletter comes out a month later than usual because Angela, the Editor, has been out of action having injured her ankle. It contains more than average, covering the months back to April, when we had strange things like 'drizzle', 'fog' and 'light rain'. This bumper edition brings home how busy and productive we are as a Guild, with HAGDs, outside events, speakers and workshops, creating bunting for the AGWSD National Exhibition, and attending the AGWSD conference. Thank you to everyone who has organised, contributed and turned up to support, and thank you to the Committee, without whose enthusiasm and hard work these wonderful activities could not have happened.

The theme of the last few months has been the weather – ridiculously hot and ridiculously dry. It's been a problem for anyone who works with yarns. Sweaty fingers and hot fleece are not a recommended pairing for spinning, weaving and all yarny activities with the possible exception of felting. We've been suffering, the grass has been suffering, and the sheep have been suffering. But there's always an upside. The weather has been perfect for washing all that fleece that's been hanging around since the wet spring – I've been drawing on Sarah Allen's excellent article on washing fleece in the July 2023 newsletter. I use an organic, biodegradable soap so that all the washing water can go straight onto the wilting garden. The heat is good for quick-drying dye projects, and what about sun printing and solar dyeing? Hot weather is also a good opportunity to pick up small, lightweight projects, as discussed by Kate Gardener, also in the July 2023 newsletter.

However you have coped with the extreme weather, I hope you have been able to find ways to cool down and keep crafting, and have been enjoying the August break. I look forward to seeing you all in September.

Sally C

Recent events

April meeting

Nicole DeRushie took us on an epic journey through time all the way from three ply spruce roots wrapped around the handle of a small tool, by our Neanderthal cousins 50,000 years ago in France, through the bog bodies of Denmark to Must Farm in England, a crannog dwelling which burnt down within a year of building in 950BC.



With copious illustrations, some beautiful reconstructions and an engaging style she showed us how experimental archaeology can open a window into the lives and practices of people who left no written records and fill in some of the gaps that artefacts alone cannot. Ancient textiles rarely survive but the amount we can learn from them when they do is astonishing, from the 1cm ball of incredibly fine spliced linen thread at Must Farm, indicating a high level of textile craft, to the string skirt on Egtved Girl, 1370 BC, that appears somewhat revealing at first sight, and maybe a little impractical, but which experiment shows is much more suited to dancing than walking or sitting.



*Twined String Skirt.
1370 BC*



*Bone Sewing Kit
100 BC - 100 AD"*

Was she a dancer and was her being buried in this an indication that "dancer" was a defined role in her culture? The quality of the twining and band woven waistband suggests it was not just a casual make, either way. Her tunic was a clever 3D garment common to many locations in northern Europe at the time and indicates perhaps an appreciation for the time and effort that goes into producing fabric because no part of the cloth is wasted. It's so well designed that Balenciaga used the pattern to make a coat in 1961, which has been the basis for many a designer collection ever since and is rarely off the catwalks. I wonder what she would have thought, maybe she'd have shown the models a thing or two.

By the time Huddersfield woman was buried 1000yrs later, the Iron Age had set in and the weather had turned colder, evidenced by more fitted garments, heavier weaves and layers. Underclothes of linen or nettle barely survived but her twill wool

skirt was made to measure on the loom and was sufficiently high quality that when she was found by accident, a thorough C19th wash and line-dry didn't seem to do it any harm, though what it did to the blood pressure of archaeologists who arrived a few weeks later is not recorded.



*Copper Belt Ornament
5" Diameter. 1370 BC*



*Small Basket - Lime
Bast and Supported
Looping*

Dyeing was discussed and one interesting point is that the north European Bronze Age fabrics all seem to have been their natural colour, despite evident trade links with the Middle East, where dyeing was already a large affair, suggesting that this was also a deliberate cultural choice because the quality of both garments and fabrics would suggest that they were not mere subsistence garments and they could have taken the time, effort or exchange goods to colour them had they so chosen. By the Iron Age, dyeing was in full swing in the north but unfortunately that changeover period is also marked by a brief preference for cremation burials so we can only speculate at the moment, unless something turns up out of the ground, as to how and why these changes occurred. For disciplines that deal with the ancient past, both archaeology and experimental archaeology are lively and exciting fields.



She had copies of her book for sale,
Nicole DeRushie, Bog
Fashion Book - ISBN
9789198105698
A copy was bought for
the Guild library

Centre for Textile Research, Copenhagen website -
<https://ctr.hum.ku.dk/>

Free resources and accessible reports on current
and past experimental projects.

<https://www.exarc.org/>

<https://groundedhistory.com/>

Tamara CL

May meeting

Chris Seers gave us a very entertaining talk about Alpacas, from how she came to have a herd of them to the joys of spinning the fibre. She said her husband did the mucky stuff and she did the fluffy stuff, it's not clear which was the most fun.



The fibre doesn't have scales so it tends to be silkier than wool, it takes dye better giving a clearer more crystalline colour. It also doesn't get greasy, although it gets very dusty as they are fond of rolling in the dust. The great thing is to pick out the finer fibres and card them with wool, which is stronger and more elastic. They make the woollen yarn better in every way: lighter, smoother, silkier, warmer, and lovely subtle effects occur when both wool and alpaca is dyed with the same shade, as the two fibres come out of the dyebath slightly different.

We also watched her sorting bags of fleece. The body structure had gone because the fleece had just been blindly thrown into bags but she showed us how to sort by feel. The coarser fibres feel much less soft than the finer ones and by the end we felt empowered to do it ourselves. Not to mention the fun of handling large amounts of fleece under expert guidance.



Altogether a fun and informative day. Thank you, Chris.

Janet F

Flax Workshop June 13th

Flaxland is a 2000acre farm, run by Simon and Ann Cooper as a commercial and educational project, near Stroud in Gloucestershire.

www.flaxland.co.uk

They kindly came to Stanton St John for a day to give us a broad introduction to the history, working, uses and benefits of flax fibre.

We started the day with prepared fibre, learning how to properly dress a distaff and spin from it with both drop spindles and wheels



Dressing the distaff

After a fascinating talk on the history and future of flax, including the fact that nearly all of it is grown in Belgium, we learnt how to use a “flax break” to break up the outer layer of the stems, then scutch to remove the resulting bits, and hackle to remove short fibres and line up remaining long ones for the best quality linen yarn. The remaining tow has also been spun traditionally for twine etc.



The fibres are easy to find by hand



Using a flax break. Hackle on top and scutching knife on table

In modern commercial operations, however, the long flax fibres are chopped to fit into machines designed for cotton, and the tow is usually mixed in as well, resulting in a much shorter-lived fabric than traditional methods. In today's world, it is not enough just to ask what the fibre is and where it comes from but also how it has been treated.



Just a small part of the magnificent display

Tamara C L

June Meeting



The Show and Tell featured the Flax Workshop.

Sarah A helped several members to warp up rigid heddle looms by the direct method. This method is straight forward and all that is needed is a warping post and a threading hook.

Angela P bought some of her looms warped up for weft faced weaving. (*Threading every third hole and slot of the old type of reeds gives a spacing of about 5 threads a cm*) Alex and Talia, who came as visitors, both wove lovely samples.

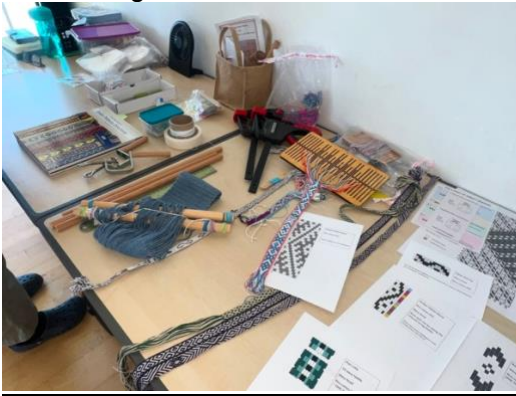


July Meeting

Anne Hughes led a Have-A-Go Day.



She prepared a dozen or so warps for weaving using a variety of warp-faced techniques. These were plain bands woven with mini heddles, simple pick-up with string heddles, Baltic-style weaving done three ways - on a standard heddle, on a pattern heddle, and with string heddles, and Andean Pebble Weave worked with five sets of string heddles. She also did a quick demonstration of tablet weaving.



Anne provided F-clamps to attach the warp to as they have long posts. As these are a bit dangerous, she had made some clamp covers – these are knitted and based on one of Jean Greenhowe's free patterns.

(www.jeangreenhowe.com/patterns.html).



*Andean Pebble Weave
woven by Anne*



Dominica L wove on a warp using a simple pick-up with string heddles. She writes: This made it easy to get weaving and to follow the pattern charts that Anne had prepared. It was fun to get results so quickly and i am grateful to her for setting things up in this way.



The above photo shows the weaving done by Amanda H using the Baltic pick-up technique using string heddles.



After the meeting she wove these designs using the same technique.

Association of Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers National Conference 2026

– *A recommendation by Isabella Raeburn*

"Why on earth would you want to attend a conference and AGM – and pay for the pleasure?" I hear you say. Well, this year Sally (Chair), Karin (Secretary) and I (curious Guild member) decided we would find out. I had no real idea what to expect. My only previous experiences of conferences were with work, and they were a mixed bag. I decided to sign up on the basis that it wasn't too far (Loughborough), was in a hotel with a swimming pool and spa, and might give me some inspiration – at worst it would be a weekend away with no cooking or washing up and a chance for a swim.



It was a truly wonderful weekend. We had excellent and thought-provoking talks from six

different speakers. Their subjects ranged from Leicester Longwool sheep and wool to the use of enzymes in sustainable dye and textile technology of the future, with some industrial textile history, a once-famous 19th-century embroiderer (Mary Linwood) and personal weaving practice in between. Meals were great (and seemed to be never more than two hours apart – the diet needs to restart!). The pool was lovely.



We had a chance to see work by spinners and weavers who had completed their Certificate of Achievement (and what an achievement it was – phenomenal stuff) as well as a graduate showcase by Loughborough University textile students, who were delightful to chat to and extremely reassuring about the future of our craft.

But perhaps the most inspiring part was meeting fellow guild members from around the country and hearing what they are doing. We were told about the Online Guild (a mere £20 a year, including *The Journal*, and a source of untold riches in terms of workshops and other resources yet to be explored). Who knew? You perhaps... We heard about the joys and struggles others experience with their work and came away with all sorts of ideas. Such lovely people, and such fascinating conversations.

Next year will be the Summer School – which I certainly hope to attend based on how much I enjoyed the conference. Roll on 2028 to be inspired at the next AGWSD conference (and perhaps have another swim and too much cake!).

Outdoor Events

Hill End 6 June (Ffennell Festival)

Another good day. However, it was rather wet, so our display and activities were a bit more limited than usual. We set up the display in the wooden gazebo. Also, in the wooden gazebo Janet F demonstrated spinning with Sandie E and Anne H was working on her pin loom.

Sarah W was in the guild gazebo with Isabella R, Karin P and Pauline S showing the normal crowds of children how to weave on cardboard looms or do simple friendship bracelets.



Bloxham Steam Fair 27th June



Another good day. The Vikings were lovely when not fighting and had a great display of natural dyes.



Rebecca W and Liz R

Yet more mats completed on cardboard looms



Kelmscott. 25th July and 14th August

Kelmscott Manor are in the midst of a major conservation project of their 17th century Flemish Tapestries that depict the Biblical story of Samson and have clothed the walls of the Tapestry Room at the Manor for about 350 years. As part of the project, they are running a programme of public engagement to help bring the tapestries to life and create more understanding of the processes behind the making of the tapestries. Chris Seers attended a dye workshop at the Manor and suggested that the Learning and Outreach Manager contact the Guild so that we could provide demonstrations and displays of our crafts and we agreed to go along for two visits over the Summer on 25th July and 14th August. They also have a wonderful exhibition of the work of a contemporary weaver - Chrissie Freeth.

We had two fabulous days and they made us very welcome and we had lots of interest.



In July, Liz M and Janet F were outside under the Guild gazebo





In July Isabella R, Pauline S and Karin P were in the learning barn. Karin was encouraging visitors to weave on a tapestry she had designed based on those recently restored in the house



During both visits, Sandie E and Richard E were under the Kelmscott gazebo chatting to visitors about Sandie's felted sheep and the big wheel.

Sarah W was showing children and their parents weaving on cardboard looms, the rigid heddle loom and a four shaft loom. Sally C was showing people spinning on a spindle.



In August, Tamara C-L Helen A, Sarah W and Sally C were in the Gazebo with Janet F who took this photo.

Chris S and Liz R had a wonderful display of naturally dyed yarns in the Learning Barn. Chris has spent some time creating "William Morris" colours – i.e. colours that Williams Morris used in his designs and these were displayed alongside the tapestry which Karin P is creating – also in naturally dyed colours based on the faded tapestries in the tapestry room.



Chris also had some interesting wools on display.



Liz's table was in front of some of the lovely tapestries.

I think we all enjoyed our visits to Kelmscott. We all were treated to free tours of the house (which is very interesting) and were able to enjoy the facilities of the garden, café and shop, in between demonstrating to the public.

We are going to be at the following events:

31st August – Rollright Stones

20th September – Combe Mill

24th October – Harcourt Arboretum ("Wild Weaving")

Please contact Sarah W if you would like to join us at the Combe Mill or Harcourt

Lime Bast Workshop

In May, we spent a glorious day at a workshop run by Chiz Harwood and Sally Pointer at Chiz's Froe Wood in the Forest of Dean. It was a group of just 8, plus Sally's partner and an elderly lurcher.

In the morning, we learnt about the benefits of coppicing and helped harvest some five year-old lime stems. We had great fun stripping off the bark, preparing it for retting in large bundles and then dumping it in a shaded pond. (The Pond of Doom)

After lunch and chatting around a lovely camp fire with an ever-boiling kettle, Sally taught us cordage and net-making (I can still hear Chiz mumbling "string!" loudly under his breath!) to those who hadn't been on her courses, and gave us a masterclass in three-ply, and supported looping.

We retrieved, washed and graded some lime bast that had already been in the pond for a few weeks

Chiz made the fatal mistake of showing us how to make a shrink pot out of some of the offcuts of lime. For the next hour the woods echoed with the sound of 11 people bashing bits of wood together, with the occasional exclamation of surprise as, suddenly, the centre slid out, leaving just a perfect ring of bark! A slice of that central piece was then wedged back in it and the new pots were stuffed with sawdust, ready to dry for a few weeks



By the end of the day, we all had arms full of lime bast, bundles of string, our lovely pots, and Chiz and Sally's new book to remind us what we learnt. A fabulous day and a privilege to spend time in this well-managed woodland, which produces more crops than one can list, whilst also being one of the most biodiverse patches we've been to. The birdsong itself is worth the visit.

One thing I have learnt since, is not to ret in a bin full of water next to the patio doors – there's a reason why the Pond of Doom is a long way from the encampment!

Tamara CL& Helen A

Show and Tell

April

Sally C's socks - Knitted from single ply Hebridean fleece. Comfortable, warm and moisture-wicking - perfect for long hikes.



Sarah W's Tea towels made with 16/2 cotton in warp and 12/1 linen (which she purchased at the stash sale in January) in the weft



Margaret V decided to make this jacket after taking advice from guild members telling her that she needed a project as a distraction from her husband's illness. Little did she know that it would be a total distraction and a nightmare.

She explains: I started by sorting out my stash of fleeces and found this lovely Shetland, which I bought from Woolfest in Cumbria many moons ago. The fleece came from Island Farm on

Shetland. It had a fibre length of 90mm and diameter of 29-31 micrometres (0.029-0.031mm). It had been supplied as rovings of 4m/100g with a diameter of 1 inch. It washed up beautifully and spinning was a dream. So far so good.

I found an Aran pattern for double knitting yarn was relatively easy to follow, but after finishing the front panels I realised that I had knitted my normal size but having lost so much weight during this period it will end being too big. Not deterred I finished the back and sleeves in my new size, thinking that I could adjust the front with buttons. My last task was the collar, when my nightmare began. I think I must have knitted this at least five times, no mean feat with 179 stitches on circular needles for one side. Very quickly I came to the realisation that the mathematics of this pattern did not work, I even tried different size needles and alternative yarns such as alpaca and cotton. I had by now exhausted all ideas. At the point of ditching the project, I showed the unfinished jacket to guild member, Ruth P. Her wise comments were "patterns are often wrong and if there is an error in one part of the pattern then the whole garment will be wrong, so it must be abandoned. Alternatively rely on your own skill and have the confidence to correct it."

As I was reluctant to bin the jacket after all this effort, I started to look for alternative solutions. Ruth suggested crocheting the collar as it would lie flat. I had little knowledge of crocheting apart from a guild workshop on 'Tunisian crochet' years ago. I decided to accept the challenge. Carole T reminded me of the techniques of Tunisian crochet. Thankfully the crochet collar was a perfect solution and the jacket is now complete. The toggles were made from Red Deer antlers (naturally shredded).

May

Isabella R's Shadow Weave



Shadow weave fabric based on a Janet Phillips design (*Exploring Woven Fabrics*, p184). She writes "White linen yarn, indigo-dyed cotton (commercially dyed, and not very happily, as it kept rubbing off on my hands and clothes!), pink cotton. This was an exercise in what not to do."

I muddled up my cm and inches, so what was meant to be for cushion covers is too big. I ran out of blue - because of my maths issues - so had to ply some finer blue yarn for the weft. And there was the issue with blue dye. I soaked the final piece in 'Rit' to fix the dye and then machine washed, so it is more colour fast. I still need to decide what it is to become!"

July

Sarah A's Playing with Natural Dyes

She writes: It started with:

"Oh no the Dark Knight buddleia heads are out and drooping over the path"

We have a shared right of way with number of houses and on part of the no man's land, we have gradually planted some nice bushes including a buddleia. This particular variety produces a lovely green colour with its fresh blooming flower heads. Therefore, when some became available and being in the way, I could not miss the opportunity to cut some heads to dye with. I popped the heads into a dye pot with water and heated them up. I strained the dye, added some Alum to the dye pot and then found some random wool which I wetted and put in first pot of the day!



The pinks were a mixture of weak cochineal and walnut

I had to dive into my garage to get the equipment out. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I discovered some other plant stuffs to dye with. There were now two pots on the go, one with buddleia and one with onion skins. I then added some madder root harvested a good few years ago from my garden, this led to several, especially in the case of onion skins, dye dips over the day.

I dyed fleeces of several different breeds As well as used bits left over from a projects or demos. Alum was used in all the dye pots except for the first onion skin dip. Fleece was always wetted out first to allow better dye uptake. I was not very scientific in my process but the general rule of thumb for harvested natural plant dye is 100gm plant to 100gm wool, depending on the shade you want. Lastly, this morphed into day two with the last of the plant dyes. I also used up some acid dyes on some spare wool !!!!!!!

Janet F's square jumper. It is a Kaffe Fassett overlapping squares pattern and the yarn is a badly shorn, very short staple fleece in these lovely browns. I think there was more than one fleece in the bag.



This year the Guild rallied behind the project of submitting lengths of bunting flags to be exhibited in the Open Section of the Association National Exhibition 2026. The flags reflect the wonderful skills and creativity of our group, and our bunting will be displayed alongside a range of inspiring work from Guilds around the country from 1st to 29th October at the Rose Paterson Gallery, Weston Park, Shropshire. These flags were on the Show and Tell table in July.

Programme

September 19th Guild

Have-A-Go Day:
Helen A and Tamara CL
Tiny Baskets with
Garden Gathered
Materials



September 26th Workshop

Indigo "Pay and Play" with Helen A and Tamara CL

October 10th Workshop

Sally Pointer Introduction to prehistoric textiles she weaves her talk through the activities which include braided belts and cordage and the use of plant fibres, bone needles, foraged hackles, flint knives.

October 17th Guild

Report and Show and Tell on September and October workshops.

November 21st Guild

Talk by the Outside Dyers

Dr Romilly Swann and Flow Stone will talk about their Shetland x Gotland sheep who graze the biodiverse chalk grassland and community orchard at the Hardwick estate, alongside their journey with natural dyeing.

December 19th Guild

Christmas Lunch and **Chair's Challenge!**

Although I had several ideas floating around for my first Chair's Challenge, they were all abandoned when Carole and Bob pitched the irresistible concept of NAME BADGES.

Your Challenge is to design and make a name badge for yourself. There are a few guidelines.

- It must be legible to the average member of the Guild at a distance that means they don't have to invade your personal space to read it when you are wearing it, so think about your font, your colour contrasts and the size of the object - something the size of a credit card would be about right.
- It doesn't have to be a badge – you might choose to make a name necklace, clip, lanyard, pin or anything else but it should be easy to take on and off.
- Most importantly, of course, it must demonstrate at least one of our core skills - weaving, spinning or dyeing. Your name tag might be woven or braided, it might be made from dyed materials, or it might be made from fibres you have spun yourself. As long as it ticks one of these boxes, it could be felted, crocheted, knitted or any other method of making that you choose.

Bring your creation to the meeting to display on the Chair's Challenge table with a brief note about it – what inspired your design, any difficulties you encountered, and even what thoughts working on a core aspect of your identity brought to mind. I'm really looking forward to seeing your work.

Of course, this is a Challenge, *not* a competition, so have fun, celebrate any 'imperfections' or 'mistakes', and enjoy making a name for yourself!

Committee

Sally Crawford - Chair

Karin Pigott - Secretary

Mike Foster - Treasurer

Liz Roberts - Membership Secretary

Anne Hughes – Library, Website

Angela Pawlyn - Newsletter Editor

Tamara Cartwright-Loebl - Programme Secretary

Helen Allen - Programme Secretary

Sarah Williams – Outside Events

Other responsibilities

Lyn Wymer - Equipment

Emma Pilley and Helen Allen -Sales Table

Janet Farnsworth - Outside Events

From the Editor.

Many thanks for the contributions to this newsletter. I am sorry that it is late. The next edition will also cover four months and be ready in January. The normal schedule should then be resumed.

Having not been able to come in July, I was very interested to find out how many variations of back-strap weaving Anne had provided for members to experiment with.

Please volunteer to provide descriptions of Talks, Have-A-Go Days and Workshops.

I will include Show and Tell items, if I receive the photo with the accompanying description in typed form. Please either email to newsletter@oxfordwsd.org.uk or put them on the Guild's What's App page

The deadline for next issue is 1st January. No need to wait until then to send me input.