

Newsletter No. 83

Mid-Herts Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers January – April 2017

www.spinweavechat.wordpress.com

From the Editors

Once again we have an inspiring set of articles from our members for you to read. Our first workshop of the year was the natural dyeing workshop with Michele Turner. Some fantastic dye samples were produced. Sadly, our next workshop, drop spindling with Carol and Pete Leonard, had to be cancelled. Tricia came to the rescue and organised a Four Corners day which was extremely successful. Our roving reporter Priscilla, has reported on her visits to another couple of museums. Tanja set us a challenge to discover what her coat was made from and Sheila Blackie stepped up. Ruth made an interesting discovery much closer to home – read on. Gudrun tells all about how she used some flour sacks to make a beautiful table cloth. Rosemary is now making progress by fulfilling a long-held ambition to weave. We now have a brand-new website, please check it out. Many thanks to Maureen for setting it up and to Sonya for all her work on the old website. Unfortunately, on a sad note – two of our former members Jenny Davidson and Jessie Reddish passed away recently. For those of you who remember them there are some lovely photographs included with their obituaries. We would like to end on a happier note to remind members that we have some interesting topics lined up for our remaining speaker evenings. Thank you to all our contributors, please keep the articles coming.

Rosemary Suswillo and Rita Owen

Natural Dyeing Workshop - Michele Turner. Saturday 18th February 2017

"Patience is a virtue in natural dyeing". This is what Michele Turner said as she started by taking us through the process of solar dyeing at the beginning of the workshop.



She encouraged us to experiment (within carefully explained health and safety guidelines of course) but not to expect consistency of results. This element of the unexpected is all part of the fun she explained. It was indeed fun as all day long we dipped and were dazzled by results from a variety of mordants and natural dye ingredients.

We were each given 15 x 10g skeins of yarn. We tied these as 3 sets of five skeins. In each set of 5 one was mordanted with alum, one chrome, one copper, one iron and one tin.



One after the other, dye baths were prepared using firstly weld, then logwood and finally brazilwood. As each bath was heated and the dye extracted, it was strained before our samples were wetted and introduced. As expected the variety of mordants produced samples of many hues. The variously mordanted weld dyed samples produced shades of bright yellow through to deep mustard; the logwood yielded shades of black, grey, purple and deep blue and brazilwood gave bright and pale pinks and mauves.

Those of us who made up solar dye jars with alum mordant in tap water still await our results, if we have stayed patient! We selected our own dyestuff and brought fibre with us. I used madder and daffodil flowers. I have been watching a lovely burnt orange appear on my windowsill in a jar with yarn submerged.

Some yarn was alum mordanted during the day. We all took some home for experimentation of our own.



Michelle was an excellent and patient teacher. The day was unhurried and relaxed. Natural dyeing does require patience for good results and because of this we had space during the day to reflect, question and wonder.

Well done Michele for leading us, and Rita for organising the day.

Louise Edwards

Tanja's Coat – What's it made of?

I'm sure that we have all seen Tanja arriving at meetings wearing a lovely cosy brown "teddy bear" coat and admired it. Tanja inherited the coat from her sister Katja, who purchased it in New Zealand and had owned it for more than 20 years. When visiting Katja in Holland, Tanja saw that the coat was on a pile of clothing destined for a charity shop and liberated it, as it was chilly at the time of her visit.

Chatting with Tanja at the open workshop in January, she asked what I thought the coat was made from. Was it of natural or manmade fibre? We looked at it, felt it, discussed it and checked the label. The name on the label was "Hensel und Mortensen" and showed that it had been made from something called "Cashgora". What on earth is that? Neither of us knew anything about Cashgora and equally had never heard of it. The best way of finding information is, of course, a search on the internet. Insert the word Cashgora in the search engine and naturally you get lots of results. The following article* gave us all the information and so without any editing this is **Cashgora**.



"There have been many innovations in fibre production in recent decades. There has been new material invented like spandex. Also, there has been new commercial production of animal-protein fibres like Cashgora.

Cashgora is a goat that is a cross between a cashmere goat and an angora goat. What really makes this unusual is that Cashgora goats really aren't an established goat variety and are created by breeders crossing the two goat varieties. What makes these goats so rare is that not all Cashgora goats that are bred are able to create commercial-grade Cashgora. Instead, each goat has to be evaluated for its hair, which makes this not very practical for most breeders. Hence, Cashgora is relatively rare.

The texture of Cashgora is somewhere between angora, as it is kinda fluffy, cashmere as it does have very soft fibres in it and depending on how it is milled, it can also have rather stiff hairs mixed in. The texture will depend on the processing of the fibres and the individual quality of the fibres that the goats are able to produce.

Cashgora is used like wool and cashmere would be. Cashgora looks like wool or cashmere but it is something else entirely! It has a great look, is durable and considered a luxury natural fibre".

*<http://shoulderacheandthecloset.blogspot.co.uk/2008/10/cashgora-what-on-earth.html>

Tanya Dragt & Sheila Blackie

The Courtauld Gallery, Somerset House

I visited the Courtauld Gallery recently to look at a painting for my Open University course. Having enjoyed watching the BBC series 'Life in Squares' a couple of years ago, I was also pleased to find the Bloomsbury Art and Design display, located in Room 15. Among the artworks on display was a rug designed by Duncan Grant in 1913 or later, having a wool, jute or hemp warp.



The display information notes that Grant's bold geometric design borrows liberally from African textiles, examples of which were sold at the Omega Workshops. These workshops signalled a break with mainstream Edwardian culture by creating a range of objects for the home, from rugs and linens to ceramics, furniture and clothing – all boldly coloured and patterned with dynamic abstract designs. The rug was originally designed for the Omega's Post-Impressionist room at the Ideal Home Exhibition in 1913 and was probably made at the Royal Wilton Carpet Factory.

Incidentally, Wilton was my father's home town and I can remember being taken on Wilton Carpet Factory tours as a child.

<http://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery>

<http://courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/what-on/exhibitions-displays/archive/beyond-bloomsbury-designs-of-the-omega-workshops-1913-19>

Priscilla Simmons

The Freud Museum, London

A fascinating afternoon was spent at the Freud Museum in London on a very cold February day. Before going, I hadn't really considered that there would be anything to write about for the Newsletter, which was very silly, as Sigmund Freud's study and consulting room is filled with a most interesting collection of Oriental rugs and carpets, books, pictures and antiquities from Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Orient.

The famous rug that covers the psychoanalytic couch was woven by one of the tribes of the Qašqā'ī Confederacy whose territories range through the west of Iran. It is thought that Freud obtained part of his collection from his brother-in-law, who was an importer of carpets. Vienna is close to the western-most boundary of the Ottoman Empire and this would have facilitated the trade in Oriental carpets. Altogether, the atmosphere created, is not like a surgery at all but almost another world, away from the usual cares of everyday life.



The study was preserved by Anna Freud after her father's death and she remained in the house, continuing her psychoanalytic child psychology work. Anna Freud believed that it was essential to balance intellectual pursuits with physical activity and she found weaving a relaxing (!) and practical pastime, keeping a large loom in her bedroom and at her holiday cottage in Walberswick, Suffolk. The photograph shows her working at her loom, and the shuttles are from the same loom. The crocheted scarf is one of many items that she made to raise funds for the Hampstead Clinic that she had set up, originally in response to the social and emotional upheaval faced by the children of wartime Europe.

<https://www.freud.org.uk/>

<https://www.freud.org.uk/about/collections/rugs/>

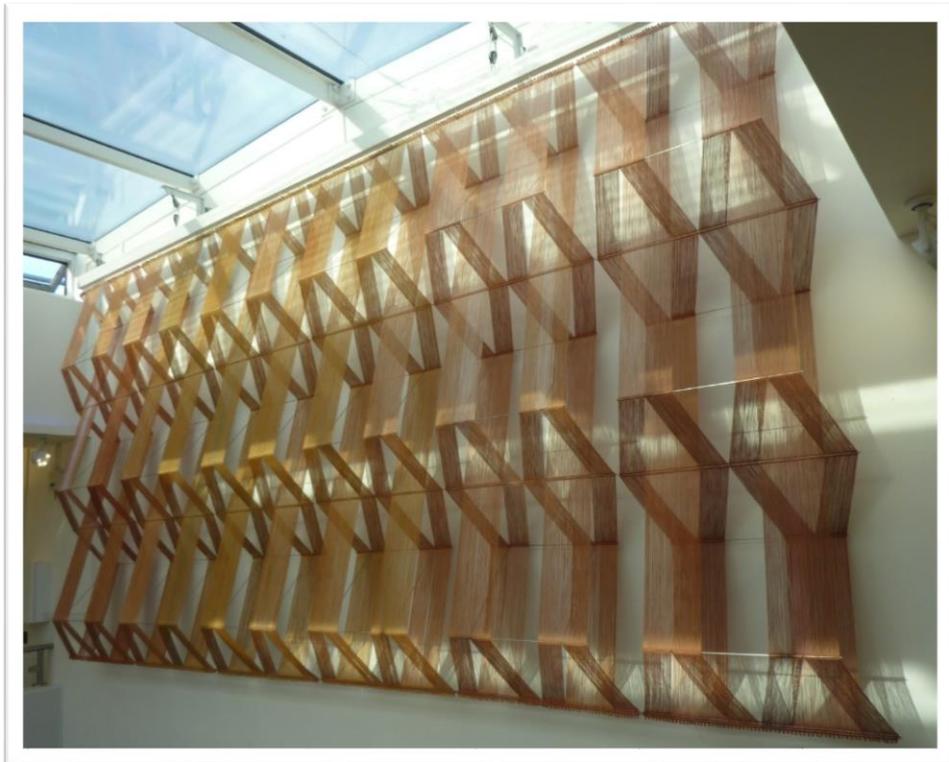
<http://www.annafreud.org/about-us/our-history/>

Priscilla Simmons



The 3D Macrogauze in WGC Library

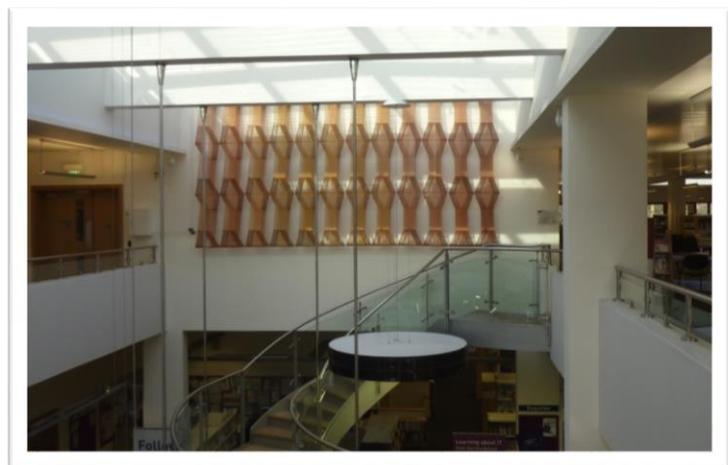
Macrogauze is the name Peter Collingwood gave to his 3D woven creations, one of which hangs in the Welwyn Garden City Library.



Peter Collingwood OBE (1922 – 2008) was the most celebrated British artist weaver of his generation. He was the first Fellow of the Digswell Arts Trust in 1957 where he had a workshop and accommodation. Here he developed his innovative macrogauze weavings. When the WGC Library moved to the purpose-built premises in Campus West, Peter was commissioned to create a wall-hanging for the new building. The 3D macrogauze, a monumental and beautiful hanging, was installed for the Library's official opening in 1974. It measures approximately 4 metres by 2 metres. This hanging is made from linen thread and steel rods.



Peter Collingwood was a wonderful teacher and author. His best-known books are *The Techniques of Rugmaking* 1969, (the bible for rugmakers ever since), *The Techniques of Tablet Weaving* and *The Techniques of Ply-Split Braiding*. I attended one of his workshops on ply-split braiding about 20 years ago which he based on the methods used by nomadic tribes in North West India and Pakistan to make girths and straps for their camels. Ply-splitting involves threading weft cords through the warp cords to make flexible comfortable straps for the animals.



The 3D macrogauze was fully restored and rehung to commemorate the refurbishment of the library in 2013. It now hangs in all its glory on the wall in the spiral stairwell facing the entrance.

Next time you are passing, call into the library and marvel at the splendour of this wonderful work of art.

Ruth Waters

Getting to know the Mid-Herts Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers

I did weaving and needlecraft at school and decided to take it up again after retirement. Thus, I had very little experience and was unsure how to get back to my youth. I heard about the Guild from Hilary Tyrrell but was a little nervous at my first Spin, Weave and Chat evening. I need not have worried and was surprised how friendly everyone was and by the various activities: a lady with three sacks of Alpaca wool came also for the first time. She wanted to spin it and then knit a pullover. It appeared she found the carding difficult. I have never seen her again, but then I am also not a regular attender.

At my next meeting, I was introduced to an inkle loom and our present Chair helped me and another lady to use it. She almost warped it up for us and I managed to start doing some weaving before the evening had finished. That year I made Christmas cards with small bits of inkle loom weaving. Soon afterwards I attended a workshop on inkle looms and use it frequently, experimenting with patterns and colours.

Stephanie helped me to warp the rigid heddle loom for my first sampler and thus introduced me to bigger projects. She also was the leader for a tapestry workshop which I really enjoyed. All this is just to mention how wide ranging and helpful the activities in the Guild are.

One of my finished projects

My daughter was given handwoven linen flour sacks, two of the sacks had the name of the owner embroidered on them. Those two she kept, the other sacks were used for dyeing. You might ask what is a flour sack? In the olden days grain was taken to the mill for milling and the flour was then sent back to the owner. These sacks had to be very densely woven not to lose the important contents.

I decided I would make a tablecloth out of the two named sacks and cut them up to the size of our table. Actually, all the linen was used. To connect the material, I used inkle loom strips in white and red, as the name of the owner was embroidered in red. The strips were then attached to the linen in herringbone stitch. The outside I crocheted. I wanted to do it all manually, not using a machine as the sacks had been handwoven.

History of the owner of the sacks

The owner of the sacks was not a farmer. In the old days in rural mountainous areas, where I come from in Germany, wives looked after the small subsistence farms whilst the husbands earned a living outside. Hermann Lenz was a tanner and travelled worldwide to sell tanning machines. He happened to be in Russia when the first world war broke out and was then interned and had to help a Russian family with their farming. When the opportunity arose, he decided to run away and walked all the way via Scandinavia to the centre of Germany some 40 kilometres north of Frankfurt. A romantic story, it might have been embellished over time!

To keep the story of the owner of the flour sacks and the way of life in former times alive, I decided to make the tablecloth.

I would like to thank the Members of the Guild for their encouragement and help in applying some of the skills I was introduced to.

The table



The tablecloth in our kitchen just after finishing to see what it would look like. On the chair, just visible, is a woven cushion in dark colours.

Gudrun Lawlor

New Website

I'm sure most of you are by now well aware that the Guild has a new web address:

www.spinweavechat.wordpress.com

Due to work pressures Sonya was no longer able to manage the website, but we do owe her our sincere gratitude for everything she did over the years on our behalf. Valiantly Maureen has stepped into the breach and has set up a new site for our Guild. Please use, get to know and enjoy it.

Inventive Weaving on a Little Loom by Syne Mitchell

Storey Publishing 2015

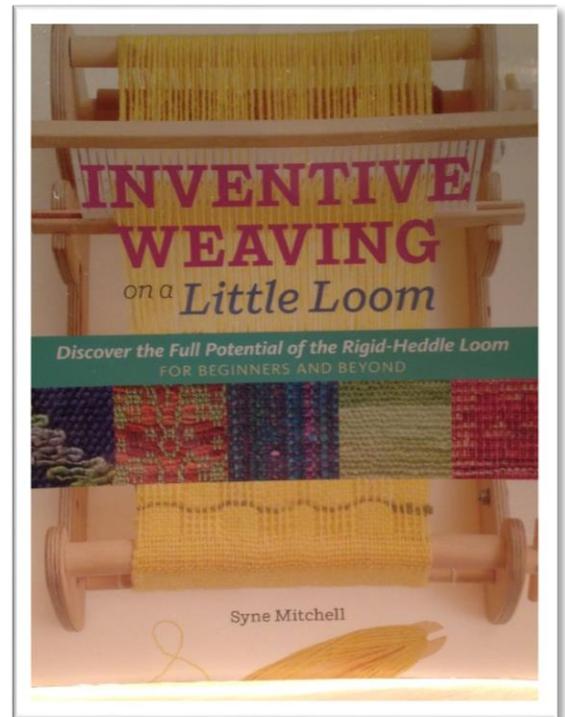
ISBN 978-1-60342-972-6

A new book in our Guild library comes with the subtitle “Discover the Full Potential of the Rigid-Heddle Loom for Beginners and Beyond”.

As a complete novice, I recently had the good fortune to have two ‘master classes’ in weaving from Margaret Hopkins and Tricia Fraser. Although this book doesn’t offer quite the degree of comfort and security as Margaret and Tricia’s tutelage does, it certainly comes a close second. It explains the principles of weaving and is immensely useful when things go wrong, which inevitably happens fairly frequently.

The principles and projects in this book seem to be equally applicable to other types of loom. Each section is abundantly and beautifully illustrated with photographs supported by uncomplicated text. The author begins with first principles describing the loom along with the necessary ancillary equipment and suitable materials required. She takes the reader systematically through basic skills from winding the warp, dressing the loom, weaving and finishing the fabric. Each new subject introduced, covers additional handy tips and even addresses problems which may be encountered specifically at that stage of the process. I loved the little points of interest e.g. ‘Dog on the Loom’, “a weaverly term for a project that is just too horrible to continue with”!

Colour theory and its application in weaving is described in some detail. From my short journey as a weaver I have come to appreciate how one is surprised by the unexpected results from associations of different colours when woven into cloth. To apply the basic weaving and colour skills learnt in the first part of the book, the author details projects to explore the versatility of the loom employing the use of different techniques and materials.



There are patterns along with detailed instructions for a wealth of tantalising projects utilising a wide range of fibres. Some of the projects described are adventurous and even extend into the use of multiple heddles. I read open mouthed at what is achievable on a rigid heddle loom.

The author ends with a useful Appendix packed with information ranging from loom maintenance to the maintenance of the weaver’s own body! Some of the terms in the Glossary hark back to a bygone era evoking somewhat physical and even brutal images such as ‘beat’, ‘throw’ and despite its different spelling, ‘sley’. They conjure up a very different image of weaving from the skilled, genteel and artistic but unashamedly complicated craft that I’m learning about!

It is certainly an inspirational and informative read and well worth while having it by your side.

Rosemary Suswillo

Obituaries

Jenny Davidson

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death of Jenny on February 5th 2017, after many years of suffering with Parkinson's Disease. In the last two or three years of her life, the disease became increasingly debilitating, but all credit to her husband Tom, for caring for her and helping her with the daily struggle of living. That struggle has now ended.

I can't remember exactly when I first met Tom and Jenny – sometime during the late 1980s or early 1990s, before she joined the Spinning Guild. Before moving to Welwyn, they lived in Suffolk and ran a smallholding consisting of both dairy and angora goats. They were members of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST), and when they moved to this area, they became active members of the local RBST group. I first met them at one of the agricultural events the group attended – at Toddington Manor, I believe.

At some point in the 1990s Jenny joined the Spinning Guild, and became an active member, bringing her spinning wheel (and Tom!) to the various events the group attended. She always showed great patience with children, letting them "practise" on her wheel. She then cheerfully untangled everything before the next child came along. She continued with her membership of the RBST, also bringing her wheel to various agricultural shows. Tom came to these events, helping on the sales stand. I always enjoyed these shows, and Tom and Jenny were such good company. They were so willing to help in any capacity, and one year when I was going away for a few days and couldn't find anyone to milk my goats, she and Tom came all the way over from Welwyn to Harpenden every day to milk.



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Jenny spinning blended exotic fibres.
February 2010

The day following a private cremation, a memorial service was held for her at St Mary's Church, Welwyn and the church was packed with friends and relatives. Several members of the Spinning Guild, both past and present, were there and the service was a fitting way to say goodbye to a very dear friend. Thank you, Jenny, for your friendship to us all. Rest in peace.

Christine Ward



Jenny



Hilary with Jenny

Braiding Workshop. February 2006



Gill Lewis Exhibition.

L-R Ruth Waters, Hilary Tyrrell, Stephanie Edwards, Margaret Hopkins, Jean Brownlee and Jenny Davidson

Photographs courtesy of Stephanie Edwards

Jessie Reddish

Last month I lost yet another of my old Guild friends. Jessie was introduced to the Guild by her friend Gill Lewis, who had known her for a number of years.

She was an active Member for many years, until age and health problems caused her to retire. Jessie was 93 years of age when she died at the beginning of March.

In her earlier years, she was a prolific potter until arthritis caused her to give it up, because dealing with cold wet clay was not good for her. She decided textiles would be a warmer option. She took to spinning and weaving like a duck to water with her sense of colour and proportion making her tapestry weaving a pleasure to look at.

I will remember Jessie with great pleasure when I look back on old friendships.

Margaret Hopkins



Guild party hosted by Jessie, July 1994

L-R Dora Thompson, Jessie Reddish, Frances and Tony Tompson, Gill Lewis, Madeleine Tomkinson

Photograph courtesy of Ruth Waters

Four-Corners Workshop Saturday 18th March 2017

Sadly, due to illness in their family, Carol and Pete Leonard had to cancel the Drop Spindling workshop, scheduled for 18th. March. After a few unsuccessful frantic phone calls trying to book someone else, Tricia bravely took on the mantle of organising a Four-Corners Workshop.

It just goes to show how skilled and generous some of our Guild Members are, as five agreed to run the workshop.

Stephanie set up a peaceful but incredibly productive corner instructing Kumihimo braiding using Marudai.

Margaret guided people in weaving a 'Bird's Eye' pattern on a 4-shaft loom and by choosing our own coloured yarns, we could each weave a piece of unique cloth to make our own lavender bag or needle case.

Maureen supervised drop spindling, where by using carded Shetland fleece we spun and plied yarn.

Tricia instructed us in how to create her invention of cute peg loom Shetland sheep. Using Shetland fleece she showed us how to incorporate our own length of spun yarn to become the core and tail of our sheep. By the end of the day, between us we had a flock!

Louise generously shared her techniques of how she is creating felted bunting for the summer shows. She showed us how to make patterns and cut the Fair Isle squares that had been knitted by Guild Members and felted in a washing machine.

The following comments from the participating Members speak for themselves and illustrate what a successful and enjoyable day it was for everyone.



Maureen and Claire drop spindling

“Lovely to try different crafts and in a nice easy going atmosphere, with no pressure that you have to do it in a certain amount of time. It’s been very nice!”

Claire Milsom

“An amazingly varied day with so many activities going on. The ‘Four Corners’ meant that everyone could work in small groups, as they rotated around the activities – so we were all focused all the time and very busy. It was also a very sociable day, with lots of chat and sharing of ideas”.

Maureen Loomes

“We should do this more often and we need to know what expertise others have in the Guild. A great way to learn new things in a relaxed, fun environment”.

Rita Owen

“I learnt several new techniques: to ply on a drop spindle, needle felting and about felting in a washing machine. Something for everyone, well worth coming!”

Ruth Waters

“Everyone was incredibly well behaved. I really enjoyed playing with the felted pieces, it was like being a child!”

Tricia Fraser



Tricia, Ruth and Rita peg looming sheep

“Good fun! I possibly need to do more preparation in advance and may have needed more samples, labels, etc. Three Marudai were necessary and it all worked very well. Many people would like to spend the whole day making Kumihimo braids”.

Stephanie Edwards

“Kumihimo was so stimulating, I was really ready for lunch after 2 hours! I loved the possibilities this started sparking off in my mind. Stephanie is such a good teacher. I learn this sort of thing best by doing but Steph was there to sort things out when I got stuck. I could easily do this for a couple of days”.

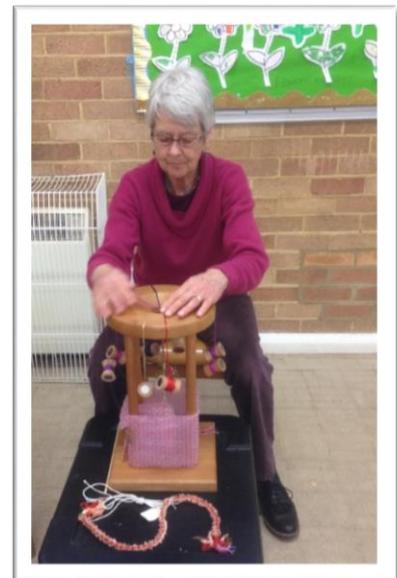
Kathryn Ehrich



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Stephanie instructing Kathryn in Kumihimo braiding



Stephanie with Priscilla, Kathryn and Susan



Susan

“I thought that it was great to be able to have a taste of all the different activities. Very enjoyable”
Priscilla Simmons

“A good day with a chance to do a variety of things. Good to spend as much time as we wanted on a particular activity. A chance to learn new skills and develop others. A friendly day”. **Susan Drummond**

“A thoroughly enjoyable day with a lovely convivial atmosphere. I learnt so much. It was great fun and we even got to go home with our own Shetland sheep! Very many thanks and congratulations to all the kind and skilled Members who shared so much on the day”.
Rosemary Suswillo



“Members were really quick learners. It was great fun doing it with other people and getting a different view of things. You become more inventive; Ruth made a sleeveless tunic. Rita thought her piece wouldn’t work but it did, it’s great. Talking one to one with people made it a really lovely day”. **Louise Edwards**

“It’s been a good day and everyone’s enjoyed it. It gives confidence if people can have a taste of each craft”. **Margaret Hopkins**

Margaret teaching Louise “I’m an expert at weaving now!”



The end results of our day’s labour

And Finally,

Don’t forget our feathered friends and to put out any scraps of fleece or yarn for them to use in their nests. For the last few years I have wrapped wooden poles with fleece for the birds to pull at, but this year I put my offerings in a caged bird feeder. They plundered it!

I told Louise and she tried it out, this is her response:
 “Delight that I have just seen a sparrow make off with some of my offerings.”

Rosemary Suswillo



Forthcoming Events

April

Wonderwool Wales. Sat 23rd & Sun 24th April 2017.
Royal Welsh Showground, Llanelwedd, Builth Wells. LD2 3SY Wales

May

Living Crafts. Thurs 4th May – Sun 7th May 2017.
Hatfield House, Hatfield. AL9 5NQ

Hertfordshire County Show. 27th & 28th May 2017.
Herts County Show Ground, Dunstable Road, St. Albans. AL3 7PT

June

World Textile Day Central, Sat 3rd June 2017.
King's Sutton Millennium Memorial Hall, Oxfordshire.
<http://www.worldtextileday.co.uk/index.php>

RBST Fleece sale. Sun 4th June 2017. 10:00 - 15:00hrs.
RBST HQ, Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth. CV8 2LG

July

Fibre East. Sat 29th & Sun 30th Jul 2017. Sat 10:00 – 17:00hrs. Sun 10:00 – 16:30hrs.
Redborne School, Flitwick Road, Ampthill. MK45 2NU
www.fibre-east.co.uk/

*Newsletter printing: January, April, July, and October – Please email Guild Secretary your articles by **20th of the month** preceding printing. Any photos you include should not be embedded in the article but sent separately in JPEG format otherwise it makes editing very difficult. Captions for your photos can be listed at the end of your article. Also, it would be helpful if you leave your document in an editable format with Arial as the font.*