

West Essex & East Herts Guild of  
Spinners, Weavers and Dyers

# Threads



December 2018

## Members of the Committee 2018/19

Chair	Lesley Ottewell
Vice-Chair	Hilary Hedderick
Secretary	Claire Platais Nina Hedderick
Treasurer	Cate Barnett
Publicity Officer	Deb Cunningham
Programme Secretary	Sue Prior
Committee Members	Audrey McNeill Hazel Mead

## Guild Website

[www.westsexeasthertswsd.weebly.com](http://www.westsexeasthertswsd.weebly.com)

## Social Media



@weehgswd



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## Eco Dyeing with Michele Turner

The warm summer sunshine was already in evidence as we arrived at Bucklers Hall Farm for our eagerly awaited dye day. The chairs had already been arranged beneath the trees for protection. Michele, as ever so well organised, had prepared a wet area in the shade of a small barn. She had packaged up a range of silk and cotton samples plus some scarves for those brave souls, who were planning a project as well.

For the first time, I encountered home-made mordants:

Alum: aluminium foil immersed in a 50/50 mix of water and white vinegar for 3 weeks.

Iron: rusty nails in the 50/50 mix of water and white vinegar for a year.

Copper: a piece of copper pipe in the 50/50 mix of water and white vinegar for a year.

The mordant was then diluted for use.



We each had four samples of either silk or cotton or both.

### Sample 1.

Silk with no mordant, Cotton with alum mordant

The wet sample was laid out and dried onion skins were placed on one half of the cloth. The fabric was folded in half and rolled tightly round a short piece of broomstick and then simmered for an hour.

Result: a mirror image print of oranges and golds where the onion skins had been. The crinkled surfaces of the onion skins had imparted a texture to the fabric. The silk was much brighter than the cotton.



### Sample 2.

Leaves of different plants were pre-soaked in the iron mordant. They were then placed on the wet, unmordanted fabric, folded, rolled and simmered as before.

Result: The leaves gave a grey/purple to the fabric

Sample 3:

Both the cotton and silk were iron mordanted.

The dry leaves were placed on the wet fabric, folded rolled and simmered as before.

Result: The fabric was opened to reveal mirror images of the leaves in a dark purple/black colour. The prints were very clear and it was possible to see the veins as well as the shape. The edges of the leaves appeared as tiny dots of colour.



Sample 4.

Both the cotton and the silk were copper mordanted.

Dry leaves were placed on the wet fabric as before and the process was repeated.

Result. The silk showed some colour but the cotton sample had poor results.

Project 1: I then used method 3 on a narrow silk scarf, using fresh rose, blackberry and raspberry leaves along the length of the scarf.

Result: The leaves were printed in extraordinary detail with a slightly different effect from the top and undersides of the leaves. In future, I would place the leaves alternately up and down to get a good balanced pattern.

Kathryn then dipped her scarf in the copper mordant as an afterbath, which caused the dyed areas to turn a yellow/green colour.

Project 2. Finally, I alum mordanted a silk scarf and then dyed it with madder. After it was rinsed out and redipped in the alum mordant, I placed oxalis leaves on one side, then folded, rolled and simmered it for an hour.

Result: The oxalic acid in the leaves had discharged the madder from the contact areas and I was left with a line of perfect leaf shapes. In hindsight, it would have been better on a smoother silk. Mine was too open a weave and some of the pattern was lost.



What a great day this was. The weather was perfect, the company was great and Michele is such a good tutor.

*Lesley Ottewell*

## Shetland Wool Week 2018

I can't remember when I first heard about Shetland Wool Week but each year when I saw reports on various media, it became more and more enticing. It also seemed fraught with difficulties because you need to book your flights and accommodation months before the programme is made available, just before bookings open in May. What if none of the workshops, talks or tours appeal? As it happened, I was encouraged to go for it by Frankie, a friend from Cambridge guild who had worked out the logistics for me and her daughter, Katie. I spent hours researching the tutors, the venues and the bus/ferry services and then had a frantic time online trying to get my chosen workshops before they sold out. I was lucky and got into most of them which resulted in a wonderful 8 days, busy with workshops and talks. The weather was far better than I expected and, although it did rain, I missed most of the showers whilst in classes but enjoyed the magnificent rainbows when I stepped outside!

On my first day I had to be at the bus station by 7.30 to get to the ferry for Whalsay where I spent the morning learning how to knit fair isle using a knitting belt. This was one of my favourite classes. Others included sorting, combing and spinning a Shetland fleece, another on blending coloured fleece and spinning for fair isle, spindle spinning on Bressay and weaving on Yell. I saw Oliver Henry doing his famous wool sorting demo, bought an extra fine moorit fleece from the shop, visited the Shetland Textile Museum and spent several hours in the main Museum. This is where



*Fair Isle Class*

you could spend hours chatting and knitting in The Hub, exploring the museum exhibits or leafing through out-of-print books in the archives. In the evenings there were several interesting talks held in the auditorium at the museum. Frankie was teaching Peruvian knitting on two days and had an interview with the Fruity Knitting podcasters on the Friday morning so she didn't do so many workshops. On the Saturday morning, Frankie, Katie and I braved the wind and rain to visit the ram sale where Frankie bought two prize fleeces. We then went on to the Makers' Market where there were no end of tempting stalls selling woollen goods, yarn, fibres and delicious chocolate decorated with Fair Isle patterns.



*Fair Isle Samples at the Textile Museum*

All the Shetlanders really embrace Wool Week and are so welcoming and keen to please. It was lovely being a part of a community (permanent and temporary) who are so passionate about wool and the associated crafts. Everywhere you went you would see people wearing this year's Wool Week hat, knitted in their own choice of colours. It was easy to find someone to talk to, sit and knit with and generally feel part of the event. The world map in The Hub showed just how far the participants had travelled – from Tasmania, Hawaii, New Zealand, USA, Canada and Scandinavia – all over the world. I loved watching others knit and the Norwegians and Shetlanders, in particular, were so fast – their fingers making minimal movements to knit fair isle and lace. They took their knitting everywhere with them so they could whip it out at the earliest opportunity to get a few more rows done. Not only were

their knitting techniques fascinating, but more often than not, these knitters were dressed in the most unusual, beautiful handknits, often designed by themselves. I found it all so inspiring.



*Hand Knitted Fence*

In hindsight, there were one or two classes which, although enjoyable, didn't teach me much and, instead, I probably should have booked onto one of the tours of the island. I saw a fair bit of Shetland but didn't get the chance to visit the beauty spots on the coast. I didn't worry too much as I hoped that one day, I would persuade my husband to return with me when we could hire a car and see more of these beautiful islands.

*Sue Prior*

## Dementia Darnings

I always try to visit the Exhibitions at the Knitting and Stitching Show and usually find something, which draws my attention.

This year it was a series of 'drawings' of old ladies. On closer examination, I realized that they were of one lady, the mother of the artist, Jenni Dutton, and that they were stitched not drawn at all.



Each portrait in the series was a reproduction of a photo of her mother, starting when she was a girl. The earlier ones were in black and white but those of the older version were in colour. Each stitch was about one cm in length and looked like a fine pencil line. I took a close-up photo to show the quality of the technique.

As well as a remarkable technical achievement, these images showed great sensitivity and revealed the close relationship between mother and daughter.

They were very poignant, particularly those of the old lady's final years.

If you get a chance to see them, do take it. This was stitchwork at its finest.

*Lesley Ottewell*



## Natural Dye Day 3 October 2018

Seven enthusiastic dyers met at Hilary's home to try out some woad she had prepared and other dye stuffs. We anticipated a fun day of playing with colour because Hilary and Michele are dab hands at setting everything up and getting us organised. We all tried to keep track of the various combinations of natural dye stocks and the five mordants (alum, chrome, copper, iron and tin), but as the day progressed we just enjoyed trying things out and the excitement of seeing all the colours appearing. The natural dyes we used were avocado stones and skins, annato, elderberries, woad, indigo, logwood, turmeric, spinach and oak gall.



Annato produced a fantastic bright yellow, and the logwood gave us some beautiful blues, greys and purple showing the variety of colours produced by using different mordants. Using the indigo bath, Anne managed to transform a ball of yarn from a rose pink (nice but not what she wanted) into a lovely indigo blue; Michele upcycled an old cotton and lace tissue box cover to use for jean patches; and Yasmin created a tie dye effect silk scarf. It was interesting to compare the

woad with the indigo and appreciate the completely different blues. As an extra treat, another stunningly beautiful bit of colour appeared on one of Hilary's flowering succulents in the greenhouse. To round off a perfect day, we all enjoyed our shared lunch with new tastes to try and good company. Many thanks to Hilary and Michele, and to everyone for contributing to our 'Grand Day Out', as Grommit would say!

*Kathryn Ehrich*

## Show and Tell 2018

At our November meeting most members brought along some of their work completed this year. Here is just a sample of the amazing diversity and talent displayed.



Irena was a part of the dedicated group of people who crafted more than 15,000 poppies for the display at Hertford Castle which marked the centenary of the end of World War One.

More than 170 miles of yarn was used in the installation. The group – the now not-so-secret “The Secret Society of Hertford Crafters” - also made wreaths including one for each of the WW1 graves in Hertfordshire.

Sue Prior brought a blanket that was woven double width on a floor loom. She dyed the grey and two shades of pink with chemical dyes and made several samples to find a pleasing pattern that she could weave on four shafts. She also brought a tablet cover that she made using a knitting belt and three needles, after her fair isle knitting class in Shetland.



Two members brought rugs: the first is that made by Sue Pulham using the WeaveKnitIt technique (woven diagonally on pin looms). This used up a variety of older handspun yarns for the woven squares and then Sue knitted borders to bring it all together.





Teri brought two rugs: the first came about as a result of being given four sheep fleeces from a friend who lives in Cornwall. Teri believes they are Jacobs and hopes to meet the sheep at her next visit. Teri cleaned, washed, carded and wove the fleece into a rug on a pegloom.

All of these techniques were new to her. Quite a stunning achievement!

Teri also brought a twined memory rug made from the clothing of her much loved niece Nicola who passed away recently. Although it was sometimes hard working with fabrics which reminded her so much of Nikki, and still retained her perfume despite laundering, it is lovely to know that the clothes which portrayed her personality so well are now giving pleasure and comfort in the homes of those who love her.





Karen made this beautiful scarf, knitted from a pattern “Caswell” by Janet Cullen.

She also brought a delightful advent calendar and some of her own beads made into a necklace.



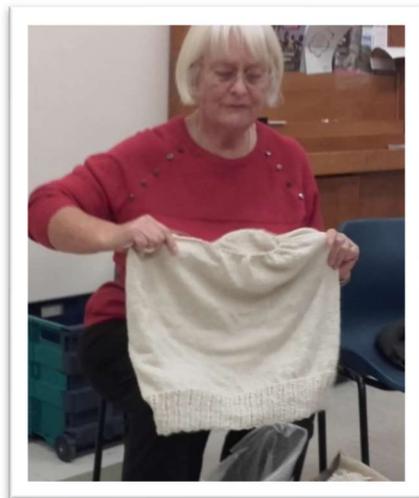
Claire made this hat from handspun using a Martina Behm pattern with very interesting construction called “Blunk the Hat”



Lesley brought this wonderful jumper made for her husband from a mix of colours bought from Wingham Wools. Some of the money was to go to Lavenham Church after the lead was stolen from its roof. The yarn was spun as finely as possible as her husband does not like chunky jumpers. The design is Lesley's own with a pattern of garter stitch stripes on a plain surface.

Lesley also brought a natural-coloured cashmere and silk jumper. The fibre had lurked in her stash as the fibre blend had a very short staple.

The design is again Lesley's own: knitted in 3/3 rib with eyelets in the plain stitches, which made the welt spiral slightly. The rest is plain with raglan shoulders, where she added eyelets to make a feature of the shaping. The polo collar is also knitted in the 3/3rib pattern.





Lesley wove this fabric from a collection of blue and turquoise hand spun yarns and used a 32" rigid heddle loom. Some of the singles were plied with fine commercial yarns to vary the shades. These were used for the warp, which was

made up of a regular set of even width stripes of random shades. The weft was built up from changing bands of random widths. The 4 metre long fabric will be made up into a casual coat.

Hilary showed a sumptuous scarf knitted from her hand spun Samoyed dog fur and some hand-made books where the front and back internal covers were made from hand-marbled papers.



Audrey recently treated herself to a Saori Loom. She said “I've not yet bought the extra harnesses, but am having fun doing saori weaving and finding uses for some of the clown barf textured yarn that isn't much use for crochet, but appears to make excellent highlights in weaving. The blue piece was my first attempt, followed by the green, which were both handspun from batts (Spin City and Lovespool respectively), The last two pieces were handspun from silk bricks. I now need to finish them off properly and find a use for them.”



Also shown in the above picture are some of the dyed pieces brought by Michele who has been experimenting with techniques involving intentionally blending dyes within a tie-dyed piece.

Chris brought some beautiful mittens (shown here with Claire’s hat, a shawl by Sue Pulham and some handspun by Deb).



She also brought a device that had us all puzzled – “Speed Weve” - billed as “Lancashire’s Smallest Loom”. Subsequent research has revealed this to be a means of darning socks!



*Deb Cunningham*

## Threads

If you would like to contribute to the next edition of Threads or would like to add some information to our website, please contact us through the contact page on the website.

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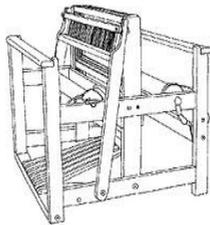
Lead Workshops will need to be booked through our Treasurer and paid for in advance.

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If you would like to propose a speaker or workshop or would like us to come and demonstrate, please contact our Programme Secretary.

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To borrow equipment from the Guild please contact a member of the committee.



Monthly meetings in Roydon village.

Please see website for up to date details.