

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

# *Threads*



*June 2017*

## **Members of the Committee 2017/18**

<b>Chair</b>	Lesley Ottewell
<b>Vice-Chair</b>	Hilary Hedderick
<b>Secretary</b>	Mary Hicks
<b>Treasurer</b>	Cate Barnett
<b>Publicity Officer</b>	Asela Ali
<b>Programme Secretary</b>	Sue Prior
<b>Committee Member</b>	Chris Lane

### **Guild Website**

**[www.westessexeasthertsweebly.com](http://www.westessexeasthertsweebly.com)**

## Guild Programme 2017

Saturday 8 July  10.00 a.m.-4.00 p.m.  Bucklers Hall Farm, Perry Green, Much Hadham SG10 6EA	Dyeing Workshop  “The Dartmoor Dye Project”- a Guild project for 2018
Saturday 12 August  10.00-4.00 p.m.  St Peters, Roydon	Spin and Chat
Saturday 9 September  10.00 a.m.-4.00 p.m.  Village Hall, Bell Lane, Widford SG12 8SH	Saori Weaving with Kim Morgan

We look forward to seeing you soon



## **March meeting: Silk cap spinning**

Our March Saturday meeting was held in a new venue at Roydon, and was attended by several newcomers. One new face was in fact a founder member of the guild who has returned to us since we are now meeting in her own village. All of us were fascinated by the prospect of spinning from 'silk caps', which has always been a mystery to me.

Lesley explained that to prepare silk cocoons for spinning, they are first dipped into hot water to kill off the grubs, then opened out over either 4 pegs, to make a 'hankie', or a hat shape to make 'caps'. The opened out cocoons are stretched out in many layers so each cap might have twenty or so layers. The caps Lesley brought for us to learn with were white but Michelle and Chris brought some hankies dyed in beautiful delicate blues and greens. The first step was to separate out a circular edge section of the layered cap and pre-draft the layered strands to create enough movement between them to be able to spin the silk. We had all prepared our hands for working with the silk by scrubbing them with soap and salt, but it was amazing how even our smooth hands caught the fine fibres. Once this pre-drafting was done we had a go at spinning them into a variety of thicknesses, but the fibres could be blended at this stage with wool or other fibres. It was amazing to see how this soft cloud of fibre could be spun incredibly fine but was still so strong. Thanks to Lesley for opening up the mystery of silk spinning and for such a stimulating learning experience.

**By Kathryn Ehrich**

## **Remember that video?**



### **THE IAC BRITISH INTERNATIONAL AMATEUR FILM COMPETITION 2017**

#### **Judges' Comments**

Title: **Spinning a Yarn**

Number: 12004, Award: **2 - Stars**

This colourful film about wool has a good title "Spinning a Yarn" and during the first few minutes we learned all about the intricacies of spinning, carding and weaving. The storyline was fairly good, the picture quality was excellent. There were some lovely shots of the garden and of the spinning wheel.

However, there were many unnecessary shots which weren't relevant. It would have been nice to have the opinions of other members of the group speaking directly to the camera. The choice of background music was poor, it was bland and soporific. The voice-over was of rather poor quality to match the nice pictures and the balance between the background music and the narration was badly mixed. The credits at the end were a bit long for such a short film. Also the group all talking at once at the end was a bit garbled. It was felt the 'welcome to our group' should have been at the start of the film and not at the end.

The film was quite interesting to watch but could have been much shorter, conveying the same information. Thank you for showing us this film. We hope to see more of your work in the future.

Alistair Biggar LACI on behalf of: Judging Panel: Howard – Smith AACI, Fran Haydon, Alistair Biggar LACI

## The Dartmoor Dye Day



Our July meeting will take place at Sue Prior's farm on Saturday 8th July at Bucklers Hall Farm, Perry Green, Much Hadham, Herts SG10 6EA

Known as the Dartmoor Dye Project, it is a group activity, which emanated from Ashford in New Zealand. It is designed to give 48 different shades, tints and tones. Some piles of colour will be evenly dyed; some will be twotone.

It's a great colour exercise for a group but we need to be well organised beforehand. We will provide the materials and have organised the equipment for the day apart from gloves for everyone.

Each stage will produce 16 colours so 3 stages will give 48 colours.

The method is outlined below to give you an idea of how the day should pan out.

### First dip

1. Divide fleece evenly into 3 equal lots (of 1.3 kg) Put 2 piles aside.

2. Divide the first of these lots into 4 bags (ready to put into each of the 4 pots).
3. Into each pot of warm water add 1/2 cup vinegar, 3 tblsp salt, 1 cup (250 mls) dye (one colour only to each pot) so that there is a blue pot, a red pot, a yellow pot and a jade pot.
4. Add 1 of the bags of wool to each pot. Bring to a low simmer and simmer gently for 25 minutes. Squeeze as much liquid out as possible back into the dyebath, remove the wool and rinse it well.
5. Divide the fleece from each pot into 4. Save 1 as clear colour. Put the other 3 small piles of each into the other 3 pots. (The blue wool goes into red, yellow and jade, other wool colours distributed similarly ) Bring to simmer, simmer 20 mins. Remove all wool, rinse and dry

### **Second dip**

1. Replenish dye baths (now getting a bit soupy) by adding 1/2 cup vinegar and 1/2 cup dye to each pot to maintain the red, blue, yellow and jade dye baths.
2. Use the second batch of new fleece. Divide into 4 parts. Repeat steps 3, 4 and 5 above.

### **Third dip**

1. Replenish dye baths as before. It's all quite soupy now!
2. Using the third batch of new fleece, divide into 4 parts. Repeat steps 3, 4 and 5.

### **Finally**

Lay out all fleece to dry.

Now arrange all samples on the sheet in shades and tints of the various colours, with all the primaries and secondaries.

We would like everyone to be involved in how the dyed wool is to be used. Therefore we will bring the whole batch to the August meeting. We thought it could be used for next year's guild challenge and invite everyone to suggest a theme.

## And now for something completely different!

### Taking the piss:

In medieval times, there were laws governing how people dressed according to social or financial class (known as "Sumptuary Laws"). They all basically meant "you're not important enough to wear that". One of those laws forbade anyone but royalty from wearing the colour purple. Yup, King Edward III wanted to make sure his noble family would stand out in a crowd.



Now, that might seem like a selfish or stuck up law, and not weird... Until you learn about the dyeing process of the times. In old Ed's time, purple fiber was probably still being dyed with snail snot. A few hundred years later, people got tired of milking snails and discovered a plant-based alternative. Woad produced a nice, bright, bluish-purple hue... Especially when **stale urine** was added as a mordant.

(source:  *Dyed in the Wool; A.J.R. Pomeroy*)



Although urine had been used for centuries when fulling cloth, fuller's earth had thankfully been discovered by Queen Lizzy's time. The countryside might have smelled a bit better as a result, but the nobles's purple threads were still providing the piss-poor with a pot to piss in.

*Royalty was getting mor-dant they bargained for!*

**DON'T FORGET YOU CAN CLICK ON THE BLUE  
UNDERLINED LINKS IN THE ELECTRONIC MAGAZINE.**



## At the AGM

Asela and I attended the Association AGM in London on 22 April as Delegate and Observer. This is my recollection of the day.

The AGM has, historically, been held in London every other year, with the alternate years attached to a Conference in a regional centre. It's held in Conway Hall, a rather nice old-fashioned brick building in tranquil, leafy Red Lion Square, a few yards north of High Holborn. (Conway Hall is the home of the Ethical Society, which began as a dissident congregation in 1787 in rebellion against the doctrine of eternal hell.)

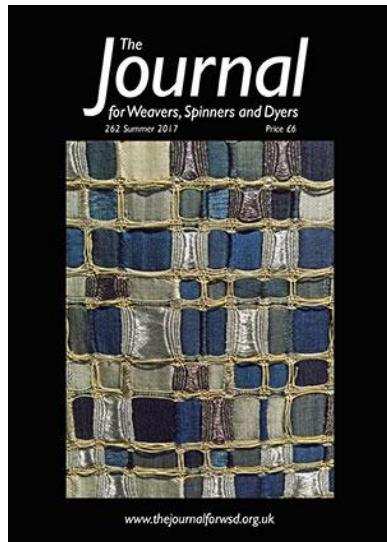
We were greeted with coffee and biscuits, and the meeting started promptly at 11.00. Steve Kennett, outgoing Acting-Chairman, introduced our President, Jenny Balfour-Paul who gave an enthusiastic, spirited address about her current interests and work on behalf of the Association. She mentioned a recent visit to Vancouver where she had spent time at the Maiwa Foundation ([maiwa.com](http://maiwa.com) - well worth a look at the associated on-line shop!), a non-profit organisation dedicated to education and the relief of poverty for traditional artisans and their families, and also Sutra Textiles Studies, another non-profit organisation in Kolkata.,

Jenny has also been involved with Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh. Apparently there is an upsurge in interest among students wanting to learn about natural dyes and fibres and tutors simply don't have the knowledge to teach them. She mentioned wonderful courses run by Justine Aldersey-Williams at The Wild Dyery ([thewilddyery.com](http://thewilddyery.com)).

As a Trustee of the Royal Geographical Society, Jenny now sees the massive amount of work, all of the massive amount of

paperwork, which is handled by the officers of the Society, all of whom are *paid employees*. She concluded by saying that the General Purposes Committee of the Association (the GPC) have to deal with a similar amount of work, and all of them are *unpaid volunteers!*

Chairman's, Treasurer's and Secretary's Reports had been circulated in advance and were adopted. Sarah, Hon. Sec., said she had received apologies from 31 Guilds and that 52 Delegates were present. She didn't say so but this actually means that out of the 114 Guilds in the Association, 31 didn't bother to reply at all! Incidentally, there are now six non-UK Guilds.



Gretchen Roth, retiring from the Journal Editorial Committee, outlined some problems with the on-line version of *The Journal*, distributed through FlippingBook. She mentioned the need for more articles on spinning and said that in 2018 they would be concentrating on colour and hoped to run a Guild Highlights feature. The bottom line was: please encourage members to **BUY THE JOURNAL!**

Heather Seddon gave an update on the Certificate of Achievement which continues to evolve. She encouraged people to try it as, even if they didn't complete the course, people had said they got a lot out of it.

Steve Kennett spoke about the Foundation Certificate which came into being three years ago, and on which he has been working more or less alone. More volunteers are needed to

deal with all the enquiries. So far, six people have completed the course, and 20 are doing it at the moment.

There were comments from the floor that people didn't know anything about the CoA or Foundation Certificate and it was generally agreed that Guilds needed to do more in publicising these initiatives to their members. Secretaries were asked to make sure their members knew about, and were able to access, the Web Information Point (WIP).

The 2016 Exhibition at Killerton had been a tremendous success both for the Association and The National Trust. This bodes well for possibly using other NT properties in the future but it is worth bearing in mind that, apparently, the different NT regions do not talk to each other at all!

Sarah Williams reported that the long-term future of the Association Library, to be renamed The Stuart Groom Memorial Library, has been secured thanks to a Diss Guild member who has offered to house it and make it available. The exact process for lending has not yet been worked out.

There was lively discussion after lunch regarding the possibility of an on-line discussion forum (mostly in favour), revamping the Conference (mixed views) and the suggestion for a novice section in the National Exhibition (mostly against). The views put forward will be duly considered by the GPC, but I'll be writing for another month if I try to set them all out!

All in all, an interesting day. My take home message was that the members of the GPC do an awful lot of unpaid work on our behalf, and that Secretaries aren't passing on information to their members (not guilty, I hope).

## Just one thread

Way back when I joined the guild we had a workshop with Sue MacNiven in which she told us about the World's Longest Thread Competition. The thread with which she'd won was mind bogglingly fine and light and I was entranced by the idea of hand-spinning such a thing - and of course knew I never would. But the idea of trying began to creep up on me, and somewhere along the line it became a decision that I would have a go.



I find control of the thread is easier on the drop spindle, and I had some lovely fine alpaca and the Rob Dunster 12g spindle that Hilary gave me for my 50th, so I decided I'd enter into the two spindle categories - alpaca and wool. I was given some beautiful Bowmont fibre by Jenifer Midgely for the wool category and proceeded to spin my two fibres - I found I could only do short bursts and still keep it fine, because spinning a strong fine

yarn really needs a lot of concentration - especially with the alpaca - it took a long time. Then I had to ply it. Plying fine yarn with quite a bit of twist on drop spindles is supremely challenging - if you spin slower than the yarn comes to you, then the yarn wraps back on itself and snaggles and snarls and gets into an unholy pickle. On the other hand if you go to fast it breaks. In the end I wound it onto a couple of bobbins from my wheel and plied off the lazy kate on that - the weight of the bobbins was just enough to give some control and reduce the overall sweariness of the operation. I still feel that I need more practise with this.

Eventually I had two samples - which weren't particularly long - but I'd put a lot of work into them, so in October last year I sent them off anyway - and then forgot about them.

Early in April a package dropped through my door from Australia - I was a tad flummoxed because I hadn't ordered anything, and couldn't think why anyone would send me something out of the blue. When I opened it I found the contents of the picture above. I nearly fell over when I saw the second place notes. But it felt quite fitting when I went online and found that first place in the spindle spun alpaca category went to Sue MacNiven. I also found that there were only two entries, so I also came last! However it just goes to show that it's always worth entering.

I also noticed online that there was a possibility of group entry - we could as a guild enter samples and compete for the largest group entry. I would definitely say have a go - in the end it's about what you learn in the process more than where you come in the competition. It is surprising how satisfying it is just to complete a sample. And it's clear that the 'never say never' lesson is still being learned here.

**By Michele Turner**

## April meeting: Fastenings

I have a horror of buttonholes in knitwear and as I am predominantly a knitter, that is quite a problem for me. However, I love buttons and there are some beautiful ones from specialist suppliers. But, they can be so expensive.

I therefore have taken to shawl pins in a big way but they are not always the right answer for everything so I have kept my eyes out for other ideas.

I have been collecting large broken seashells such as limpets and whelks where a pin could be placed through the gap. As to the pin, I have some broken needles from my collection of interchangeable circular ones. They are far too nice to throw away. I have also used cable needles and I really like the modern ones with the kink.

Kilt pins and stitch holders can also be given a new use.

That still brings us back to my problem with buttonholes. I have seen some interesting ideas for making buttons.

Dorset buttons are a very traditional fastening but with some colourful threads such as embroidery silks and a few beads, they can make such an attractive feature on a garment.



Fabric buttons can be made over a former such as a metal washer or a curtain ring. All you need is slightly larger circle of fabric to fold over to the other side and decorate as shown in the photo.

Fimo polymer clay can be used to make some colourful and decorative buttons. It is a very versatile medium with stripes and swirls made by rolling and folding the Fimo. Further decoration can be added by pressing patterns into the clay.



Back to buttonholes. I-knit edgings can be added to both knitted and woven garments. It is so easy to create a buttonhole as you can see from the photo.

Finally, we have frogging, which brought about a flurry of emails as to what it was. You can make these from commercial or handmade cord or from a narrow band of macrame.



This example shows a Turk's Head button but you can use different ones to suit the garment.

This is an area where we can experiment and have fun. Beautiful handmade items deserve unusual and interesting fastenings.

## Knitting is Good for You!



While everyone is out looking for new ways to be healthy, you may already have a healthy habit right at your fingertips — literally. While knitting may not be considered a contact sport, there are plenty of reasons you should consider adding knitting (or more of it) to your daily routine.

If you already are a knitter, even a beginner, you're probably aware of the therapeutic side of this craft: It simply soothes you to grab those needles and yarn and start creating something from scratch. However, knitting is even more beneficial than it would appear, and we've gathered some of those benefits below:

**1. Knitting relieves stress.** Forget yoga or jogging, grab some yarn and knitting needles and get to work. [Listener](#) reports that 73 percent of people who knitted three times a week (or more) felt less stress and were able to organize their thoughts better.

**2. Knitting relieves symptoms of depression.** Knitting stimulates the brain and can help relieve symptoms of depression. A study actually discovered that 81 percent of knitters felt happier when they were done with their knitting sessions

**3. Knitting helps slow cognitive diseases.** The Washington Post reports that neurological activity produced by hobbies such as knitting actually reduced the effects of some diseases and slowed cognitive decline.

**4. Knitting improves motor function.** Using knitting needles could help improve motor function for patients with Parkinson's disease. This is likely tied to strengthened muscles and muscle memory associated with knitting skills.

**5. Knitting eases anxiety.** According to the [Listener](#), the rhythmic nature of knitting helps your body produce serotonin (a body chemical associated with calmness and happiness). Additionally, using two hands requires your brain to focus entirely on the job at hand so you can't think or worry about anything else.

**6. Knitting can help with weight problems and eating disorders.** One 2009 University study found that women who knitted could turn their attention away from eating and weight loss, so it can be very helpful for anorexia patients. It might also help people who want to lose weight: Since it keeps you busy, you don't have the time and you're not bored enough to keep munching.

**7. Knitting could boost your memory.** [Psychology Today](#) reports that moving your eyes from side to side for 30 seconds at a time every day can boost your memory, and knitting definitely requires some serious eye movement!

**8. Knitting is therapeutic for mothers of premature babies.** Some hospitals encourage new mothers to try knitting a hat for their premature babies. The act of knitting helps relieve stress, and it keeps mum's hands occupied. This is particularly helpful for mothers who can't hold their little ones for several weeks. But it even helps fathers. A father of a premature daughter said that "learning how to knit preemie hats gave me a sense of purpose during a time that I felt very helpless. It's a hobby that I've stuck with, and it continues to help me cope with stress at work, provide a sense of order in hectic days, and

allows my brain time to solve problems." Knitting can also help to cope with other types of health crises.

**9. Knitting produced a sense of pride.** Whether you struggle with depression, anxiety or addiction, working on a knitting project is a great way to feel a sense of accomplishment. Watching a project take shape in your hands in a great way to boost confidence. Journalist Jane E. Brody describes knitting as "replacing stress and anxiety with the satisfaction of creation."

**10. Knitting boosts brain power.** Knitting requires concentration and focus. You also need to follow a pattern as you work. More exercise is good for every part of your body, including your brain.

**11. Knitting helps your heart to stay healthy.** Brody explains that knitting (and crocheting!) help reduce your blood pressure and heart rate, as well as levels of cortisol, a harmful hormone that has to do with stress.

**12. Knitting may help to quit smoking.** Basically, knitting makes it very difficult for you to smoke while crafting. Even if it's not magical, when it comes to quitting smoking, nothing is, so it may be the boost you need.

Experts warn that while knitting is great emotionally, you should take breaks every 20 to 30 minutes. Stretch, look around and move the rest of your body to relieve sore muscles and get your blood flowing again.

## 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.

\*\*\*

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

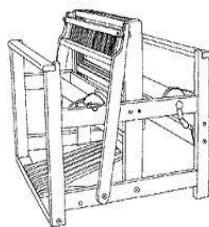
\*\*\*

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

\*\*\*

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.