

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

Threads



June 2018

Members of the Committee 2017/18

Chair	Lesley Ottewell
Vice-Chair	Hilary Hedderick
Secretary	Mary Hicks
Treasurer	Cate Barnett
Publicity Officer	Asela Ali
Programme Secretary	Sue Prior
Committee Members	Audrey McNeill Hazel Mead

Guild Website

www.westessexeasthertswsd.weebly.com

On Saturday 12th April, we were treated to a talk on the Scottish Islands by three of our own members. Chris started the evening telling us how an archaeology trip to Orkney led her and her partner, Mick, to visit North Ronaldsay where her love affair began with the indigenous seaweed eating sheep. Three years later whilst staying in Lewis, Chris bought a drop spindle and learned to spin. In August 2017 she and Mick flew from Kirkwall in an 8 seater plane to spend 6 days at the North Ronaldsay Sheep Festival which brings together volunteers from all walks of life to help rebuild the 13 mile long 6' high wall which surrounds the island. This wall, built in 1832, restricted the sheep to the shoreline so that the 500 crofters could graze their cattle and grow enough crops inland to keep them in food all year round. The wall now keeps the 3000 plus North Ronaldsay sheep from mixing with other breeds on the island.

The rebuilding used to be done by crofters but there are no longer enough of them to keep up the arduous task. Some of the stones are huge, making it a hard day's work for the visitors but there was NR mutton on the menu every night to help keep up their strength! We learned how the North Ronaldsay's strange diet has altered their digestive system over the years so that the breed can no longer tolerate copper. When the sheep are moved onto grassland for lambing and shearing or to new homes elsewhere, they need a copper binding lick.

Chris was taught how to shear the sheep by 81 year old Maurice using the traditional method of laying the sheep on the ground, binding their legs, and using hand shears. The wool is sent to Yorkshire to be scoured and then back to the mini mill on the island where the double coated fleeces are dehaired and made into rovings or batts and then into yarn or pre-felt. There are several shops in Kirkwall selling knitwear made from North Ronaldsay wool. Chris had lots of impressive samples of her own – skeins of handspun wool and knitted items, including a beautiful blanket showing the various different natural colours of the North Ronaldsays and featuring rows of little sheep. Chris is justifiably smitten with these rare breed, primitive sheep and is looking forward to her own flock lambing later in the month.

We then moved onto Michele and Audrey's experiences of the 2017 Shetland Wool Week. It was very interesting to hear first-hand how one goes about attending this event when flights and/or ferries and accommodation have to be booked way in advance of the week's programme being revealed. Having checked out the booklet listing last year's workshops and events, it seems there is no likelihood of not finding enough to keep you amused – it is more a question of going online at the crucial moment when the booking opens to get onto the most popular courses. There are two “hubs” on the island where you can meet others, enjoy free tea and coffee and keep up to date on all that is happening.



During the week there are opportunities to visit Jamieson's factory (popular, sells out quickly) and to learn how the Shetland wool is sorted. Fair isle knitting is everywhere from the Wool Week classes, to the shops and the museum but weaving is also on the timetable. We heard about some of the businesses on the island including Burra Bears which are made from old Fair Isle knitwear and Neilanell – a modern knitwear designer. It seems that everywhere you go there are spending opportunities - Michele mentioned that she came home with a super fine Shetland fleece which she didn't need but couldn't resist. Apart from the textile related classes and visits, Michele and Audrey had time to explore the island which was stunningly beautiful, especially on fine days.

They found Minns beach particularly amazing with white sand, seals and lots of interesting birdlife. It was pointed out that Shetland is a very windy island and when it rains, the rain is horizontal!

Audrey and Michele also recommended the prehistoric settlement of Jarlshof, Quendale Water Mill and Croft House Museum. The latter's traditional croft building with its thick walls and small windows made it obvious why the fine spinning had to be done outside where there was plenty of light.



<http://www.shetlandheritageassociation.com/members/south-mainland/the-croft-house-museum>

After Wool Week finished, Michele and Bill moved further north to Unst to enjoy the prize they won for a holiday there and the opportunity to savour the local gin! The others in the group had other plans for their journeys home but it seems a good time was had by all. As I am going to SWW myself this year, I gathered no end of tips from Audrey and Michele which I know will be very helpful in getting the best from my time there.

Sue Prior

Moving forward...

We have started blogging all articles on our website and have set up Twitter and Instagram accounts. We (Publicity officers) will post about our outside activities and guild meetings, plus any interesting articles published on the website. So if you use Twitter or Instagram please follow:



Our Twitter account is: **@WEEHGSWD**



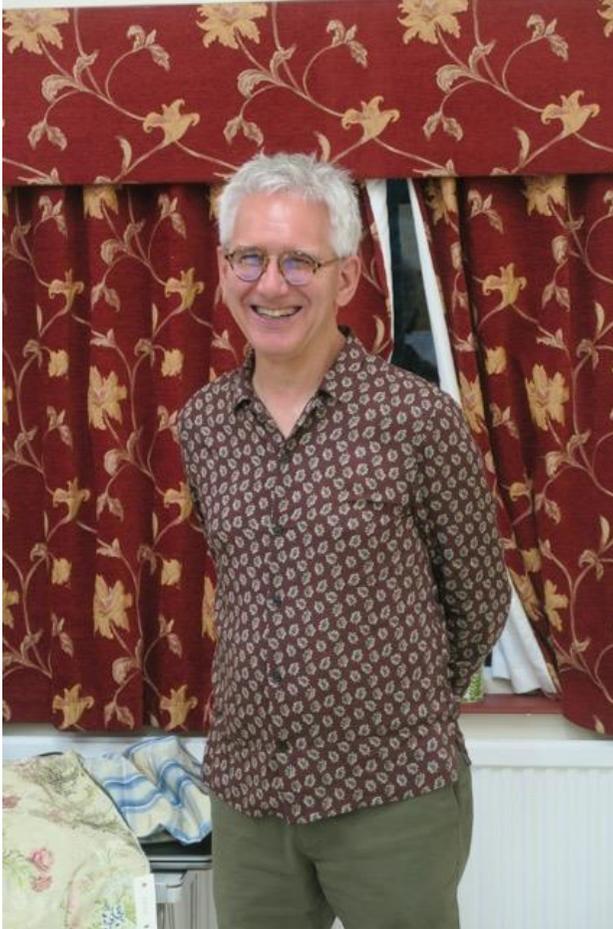
Our Instagram account is: **WEEHGSWD**

Feel free to re-tweet / re-gram any of the guild posts. You can also post your own photos when you are out and about. Remember to hashtag with where we are and what we are doing e.g. #millgreen, #leevalley, #spinning, #dyeing, #weaving and if you tag the guild account we will repost with that.

Remember you can only post pictures of persons who have given their permission to use their image.

To avoid embarrassment we suggest you only post pictures of work/ processes.

“Courtauld’s: A talk by John Miners



John introduced himself as the chairman of the Halstead Historical Society and a man with a long-term connection to Courtauld’s. As a child he moved out of London, when his father took a job at Courtauld’s. The family lived in one of the company’s houses opposite the factory and it was this proximity to work, which persuaded John to find work there rather than leave home and find employment further afield.

As an apprentice, John worked in almost every section of the factory, which gave him a first-hand understanding of the whole process of silk weaving. When the factory closed, he used that knowledge to set up his own business, which was to commission exclusive fabrics for organisations such as the Royal Palaces and the National Trust. These were such commissions as those with Richard Humphries at Braintree, where he was responsible for organisation the replacement of the textiles lost in the fires at Windsor and Hampton Court.



John began his talk with the medieval wool trade, which was well established in East Anglia with strong links to the Low Countries. This accounts for an influx of Dutch weavers settling in the county in 1500. Chelmsford was the hub for London with many of the spinners working in the surrounding villages. Many family names in the region, such as Draper, Fuller, Burrell and Dyer, have their origin in the woollen trade. Woollens were produced in South Suffolk and Essex, and worsteds came from Norfolk and North

Suffolk. In the Book of Trades of 1568, it mentions two different weaves, known as Bays (plain weave) and Says (twill weave), which were the speciality of the region.

He showed us pictures from a variety of contemporary sources. These contained images of such equipment as tenter frames and teasel hands. There is a real teasel hand from Whitney in a museum and Johnson's of Elgin still use teasels to raise the nap on cashmere.

The wool trade in East Anglia suffered a huge decline with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution. All the perfect conditions could be found in the north of England, where the entrepreneurs set up purpose-built factories with near-by housing for the workers.

In France, the Edict of Nantes had allowed people freedom to follow their own beliefs but this was revoked in 1685 resulting in religious persecution for the Huguenot weaving population. They arrived in Spitalfields, where they set up their silk weaving workshops. Even now, the streets bear names relating to the French weavers.

One such family were the Courtaulds. George Courtauld was born in 1761, to the daughter of a Huguenot silk merchant. He was apprenticed to a throwster, where the fine silk threads are doubled and redoubled until they are thick enough for weaving. He later spent some time in the United States, where his son Samuel was born in 1793.

By the time of his return to England, the Spitalfields Acts had come into force, where wages were fixed, which made the production of silk very costly. George, like other silk merchants, looked for places with a weaving tradition and found the ideal locations in Essex. George converted a corn mill in Pebmarsh, whilst Samuel took over a grain mill in Braintree. Samuel later fell out with his father and

built a new mill in Braintree. Another silk manufacturer, Daniel Walters then built a new mill opposite, which is now Warners Textile archive.



Samuel then took over the Remington Wilson Mill in Halstead, which became the centre for the production of crepe fabric then used in mourning. In Victorian times there were very strict rules of

etiquette in mourning clothes, which fuelled massive production of the fine black fabric. The crimp was achieved by using alternate 'S' and 'Z' twist yarns in both the warp and the weft. The cloth was then subjected to imprinting with paper or metal rollers.



A census of the work force at the time showed that there were far more women than men. At one time there were only 11 men compared with 1650 women. The girls came from the villages and would lodge near the factory. They had to be very clean so as not to spoil the silk. The Factory Terrace was built in 1872. There were earth closets built behind them. These had buckets, which were lined with wool and grass and had lime sulphur to remove the smell. John read us a detailed account from a young woman's journal of life at the mill and in a factory house. It was very personal and was most evocative in summing up the period.

As the silk industry declined, Mr Tetley from Yorkshire was brought in to improve production. He bought the right to produce artificial silk and this section of the company moved to Coventry.

The Halstead Mill finally closed in 1982, bringing to an end a long textile tradition in the area. The site has now been developed, by adapting the existing buildings for offices and dwellings.

John finished his talk by showing us some of the wonderful fabrics, which he has commissioned over the years. Because of his experience and expertise, he was able to explain how and why each piece was created.



This was a most interesting talk and it was a pleasure to be able to handle the fabrics, which these silk manufacturers had produced.

Lesley Ottewell

Association Conference (and AGM) 2018

Kents Hill Park Training and Conference Centre, Milton Keynes

“Then and Now”

The Association’s 2018 Conference, organised by the Guilds in Region G (London and Northern Home Counties), was on the theme of “**Then and Now**”. Its aim was to look at the origins of craft and artisan production in Britain, tracing forwards through revivals to the latest resurgence of interest, and how past practice affects the present.

This was the 14th Biennial Conference organised by the National Association. On alternate years the AGM is held in London. I have enjoyed all the Conferences I have attended and, also, the AGMs (although I have not always gone to the actual AGM). This year I undertook to be our Guild’s official delegate so did, indeed, attend the Meeting.

Kents Hill is a cut above some of the other venues I have visited, most of which have been at colleges with the usual student accommodation. This year the rooms had complimentary toiletries, tea/coffee making facilities and TV: such luxury. The food was also excellent and the whole complex linked by covered walkways.



The first of the five lectures on the Friday evening was given by Dr Susanna Harris, Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow and Dr Mark Knight, Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge on **The Bronze Age Fabrics of Must Farm**. The settlement of Must Farm provides a remarkable window into the fabrics people made in Bronze Age Britain, around 900 BC. The two speakers presented the site and ongoing research into the rich evidence for plant fibre fabrics made by weaving and twining. The talk was just fascinating!

<http://www.mustfarm.com/progress/site-diary-6-textiles/>

There were two lectures on Saturday morning. Dr Dinah Eastop, textile conservator, talked about **The Board of Trade Design Register, 1839-1991**. This register, which I'd not heard of, includes nearly three million designs registered for copyright protection between 1839 and 1991. Many classes of textile design were registered, and the records include samples of dyed yarn, knitting, straw-work, woven cloth and printed cloth, as well as complete artefacts and accompanying descriptive text. The archive is held at the National Archives at Kew in over 11,000 boxes!

The second lecture: **The Art of Liberty** was presented by Anna Buruma, Head Archivist at Liberty's. The talk covered the origins of the famous shop, its textile design archive and its uses up to the present day.



The Annual General Meeting took up the afternoon. It was very interesting and highlighted just how much effort is put in by all the volunteers who make the Association work.

The After-dinner Speaker was Alain Rouveure, who is best known for his gallery near Moreton-in-Marsh. He talked about his funding initiatives in Nepal to provide education in poor rural communities.

On Sunday morning dye researcher Isabella Whitworth's talk was entitled: **Seen through Purple**. Her ten years' research into a 19th Century archive led in unexpected directions: from Leeds to Lima, from Sudbury to 6th Century Syria. It was a journey traced through purple dyes, including murex and orchil.

The last lecture was by John Miners, the textile consultant who came to talk to us in May. This time his presentation was: **Horsehair Tales - The History of John Boyd Textiles**, a story of continued innovation by the only remaining haircloth weavers in the UK, established in 1837 and still very much in business today, using looms from the mid-19th century.



Then lunch, and home. This is such a brief account of all the activities of the weekend but I am in danger of missing the deadline for *Threads*. I can only recommend attendance at the next Conference in 2020...

By Mary Hicks

“Ebb and Flow“ at Parndon Mill

I nearly missed this Exhibition. It was only when trawling through Mary’s messages before the last meeting that I spotted the invitation to the preview evening and here I was on the last day. I had no idea even of Parndon Mill itself so it was a double pleasure to visit such a lovely spot as well as see the exhibition.



Ebb and Flow is a lovely theme to work on. It lends itself to so different interpretations and is a natural for textile artists. It was also very appropriate because of its location on the banks of the River Stort.

The exhibition contained thirty-two pieces, which were well laid out. The mill owner felt there could have been many more on the grounds that visitors looked round very quickly. I think that while that was true, I think that everything was given due prominence and to have many more items would have made it rather crowded.

We have met Connie Flynn at Guild meetings. Her work was very different from most in that she used natural fibres in neutral tones and sourced her materials from round the mill. Even the fleece had come from the Suffolk sheep at Parndon Mill. I particularly liked her notebook, which was the only one on display.



Stephanie Edwards is another familiar name. The imagery in her woven tapestry was based on photos taken while walking along the New River. Her work reflects the devastating effect of plastic packaging from 'fast foods' when they find their way into the river.

There were fifteen artists in all and I enjoyed nearly all the pieces. I preferred the more abstract pieces rather than the pictorial ones and particularly liked those of Felicity Cook, who is interested in the surface patterns on the water at the shoreline, where water meets

the sand. She particularly enjoys the way the unpredictable nature of the dyeing process echoes the ripples left in the sand.

I was interested in the little notebooks made by Joanne Bowes. She has used natural dyes with ecoprinted leaves to embellish them. We have an ecoprinting workshop in July, so it has given me some ideas as to a possible outcome for the day.



I had an ulterior motive for going to Parndon Mill. As a small secure venue, we could possibly use it for a Guild exhibition in the future.

Lesley Ottewell

“I need a break...

...from the job as Secretary and will not stand again at the AGM in October. Eleven years in the role is too long! It's not particularly onerous but it would be good if it were approached through a new set of eyes. It could be split, if necessary, with someone taking responsibility, say, for keeping tabs on the Guild, and someone liaising with the National Association. Our Publicity Officer responds to queries from the website and Hilary is doing a sterling job organising people to demonstrate at the various events we attend.

I think the job gives a great insight into what's going on in the world of our crafts, and if you're interested you can pick up all sorts of bits of information that would otherwise probably pass you by. That's what I would miss most but I would still like some time off - to just turn up and spin!”

Mary Hicks

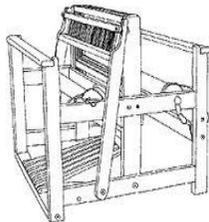
THREADS

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.