

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

Threads



March 2018

Members of the Committee 2017/18

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Guild Website

www.westessexeasthertswsd.weebly.com

WHAT IS TAPESTRY?

Tapestry is one of the oldest forms of **woven textiles**. The techniques used have remained the same for centuries. Remnants of tapestries woven in ancient Egypt have been dated as far back as 3000BC.

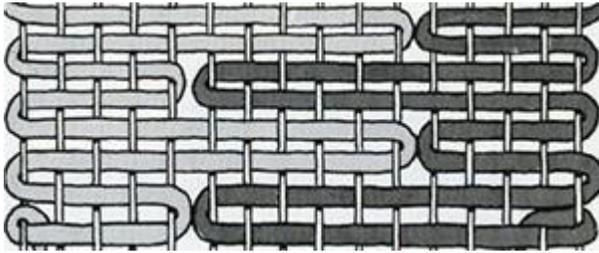
In the Middle Ages master weavers' studios designed and wove great, colourful tapestries for wealthy clients. In the Renaissance artists such as Raphael were commissioned to produce cartoons for studios to copy, giving weavers less freedom of interpretation. Surviving tapestries from these times can still be seen, though they sometimes look rather dull and predominantly beige, blue and red. That's because vibrant yellows, greens, purples and browns have disappeared as the dyes used have faded away.

Today, tapestry weaving is dominated by individual weavers producing their own designs, though a few studios where large tapestries are woven from artists' cartoons still survive. Traditional fibres (wool, silk and linen) continue to be used, together with cotton and other more modern materials.

What defines a tapestry?

Tapestries are hand woven on a loom. Tapestry looms are either vertical (high warp) or horizontal (low warp). The design is formed by the weft (horizontal) threads, which are tightly packed to cover the warp (vertical) threads. The warp threads are normally completely covered so play no part in the design. This is known as 'weft facing'. Each colour of weft is worked only in its own section of the design, so there are many different wefts on the go at any one time. Unlike other types of weaving, it is

rare for the weft to run across the entire width of the piece. This is known as 'discontinuous weft' as shown in the diagram.



Tapestries are usually made to hang on a wall (though rugs, cushion covers and three-dimensional installations can also be made).

What's not tapestry?

Fine tapestries take a long time to weave, so have long been rare and expensive. Perhaps because of this, the term 'tapestry' has been purloined by other techniques to produce textiles and wall hangings, often resembling tapestry but at a much lower cost. Common culprits are:

- *'Tapestry' chair-backs, screens, cushions etc., including those sold in kit form.* Needlepoint, canvas-work, woolwork (a design is inked onto canvas or a similar fabric, then stitched with a needle to create the patterns and pictures).
- *The 11th Century Bayeux 'Tapestry', The Quaker 'Tapestry' (completed 1989) and The Great 'Tapestry' of Scotland (completed in 2013).*
These are embroidered wall-hangings.

- *Grayson Perry's Walthamstow 'Tapestry' and the "The Vanity of Small Differences" series of six 'tapestries'* – **These are** computer-controlled jacquard weaving (the design is formed by intricately-coloured warp AND weft threads).
- *Large-scale 'tapestry' wall hangings and installations produced by various fibre-artists* – **These** can be a mix of any/all of (non-tapestry) weaving, threading, knotting, felting and embroidery.

How to recognise a tapestry

On any tapestry you'll see characteristic lines of ridges where the weft threads go over the warp threads. This tells you it's a genuine woven tapestry. During weaving, and sometimes when completed and hung, these lines of ridges run vertically from the top to the bottom of the tapestry.

But the lines of ridges may run horizontally. This is because tapestries, especially large ones, are often woven so that the warps will be horizontal when hung. This distributes the weight of the tapestry better and prevents the wefts sliding down the warps with time (as happened with the Christ in Glory tapestry at Coventry Cathedral). When hung like this, the design has to be woven sideways on.

Where to see tapestries locally:

- **Victoria and Albert Museum, London**
- **The British Library, London**
- **William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow**
- **Osterley House, Middlesex**

Courtesy of The British Tapestry Group

February 2018: Long Draw Spinning with Pam Austin



Long draw was the standard method of spinning in 14th century according to documents in the British Library and the library in France. The Luttrell Psalter is a good source of information on life in the middle ages.

Pam Austin learned to spin using the long draw method right from the beginning so it has become second nature to her. She set up the Guild of Long Draw Spinners with the ambition to have one long draw spinner in every guild, but is no longer part of that guild as she has subsequently set up her spinning school.

Her mantra is “Spin to suit you. The quality of yarn will depend on the quality of the fibre.”

Short draw spinning means that you push the yarn towards the wheel, whereas long draw it spins towards you and away from the wheel. Your lower hand controls the twist and the higher hand controls the thread.

Long Draw spinning takes place from the side of the roving as you pull twist and the twist will jump to the thinnest part. This traps air between the fibres to get a bouncy, woollen yarn. The spinning takes place between the two hands and not the wheel and hand. The lower hand needs to be placed so that it is over the yarn to make control easier. When the twist has jumped hold the yarn by the upper thin part that twisted and draw out the slub.

If you have been spinning for a while it is tricky to let go and have it spin towards you but Pam had broken down the process into simple stages to make learning easier

The morning of this workshop was spent learning the technique not in gaining quality of yarn. We started with commercially produced rovings and pulled off short pieces. A short length of yarn is tied or spun onto the bobbin. The tail of the yarn is placed across the fibres at right angles to them. As the twist catches the fibres, the hand holding them is drawn away and the twist allowed to travel upwards. It will always travel to the thinnest point first but as the fibres are extended, the twist become more even. Before allowing the thread to wind onto the bobbin, it needs a little more twist. Once the technique is learnt then you can learn to prevent or correct the flaws. To correct a slub – untwist then draw it out and roll in any loose fibres and pluck off what is left. To avoid a slub hold the yarn two inches below the slub.

The next stage was to work from rolags. Some of us avoid making rolags as they seem to take too long but Pam demonstrated how to do it properly and quickly.

Carding – place a lump of fibre on the carder and pass over with other carder 3 times. Then move the fibre from the carder that was used to pass over the top back onto the bottom carder and pass over a further 3 times (this will need to be repeated more for unprepared fleece) Then move the remaining fibre from the carder below onto the upper carder and swap places before repeating the last step once more and then place all the fibre on the back of one of the carders and roll into a rolag.

We then used the rolags, which she had already prepared but as the fibres went round rather than along the wool in the hand, we placed the leading yarn across the end of the rolag. It really proved that good preparation was so important.



Having arrived somewhat flustered because she was a little late, Pam managed to complete her schedule ahead of time. That included group tuition and short one-to-one sessions for everyone. There was even time to teach other skills.

Pam was a most personable guest and an excellent tutor.

Grayson Perry

To many people, Grayson Perry is the man who dresses up as a little girl but he is also a serious artist, who uses his work to illustrate or comment on life for ordinary folk.

The exhibition at Firstsite in Colchester was about his work on the fictional Julie Cope.

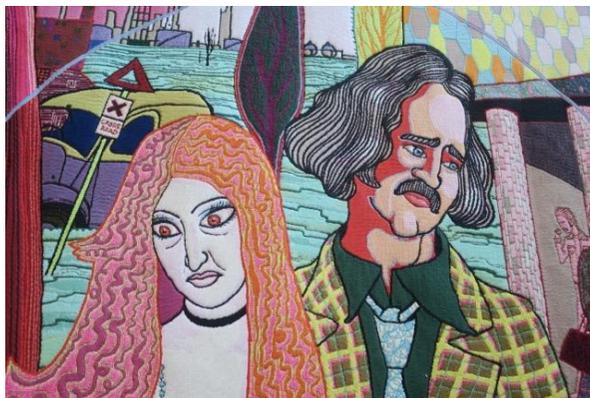
Some of you may have seen a programme about a house he designed and which was built near the River Stour at Wrabness in the north of Essex.

In a nutshell: Julie Cope, his heroine, was born on Canvey Island during the floods of 1953, married and moved to South Woodham Ferrers. She was divorced after her first husband had an affair. She moved to Chelmsford and went to college, where she met her second husband. They moved to Colchester, where they lived happily until, aged 61, she was knocked down by a pizza delivery driver. Their last holiday had been to India, where they had visited the Taj Mahal. Her distraught husband decided to build her a shrine; hence the building at Wrabness.



This I learned from 'The Ballad of Julie Cope', which Perry wrote and recorded for the exhibition.

The house was built to commemorate Julie and had artifacts and even part of the building's decoration designed to reflect her life. The large green glazed tiles on the exterior were each a portrait of Julie.



Inside the house were four large tapestries. The first one illustrated her early life growing up, marrying and bringing up her children, while the second one reflected her life with husband number two until her untimely death.

There were two smaller tapestries, which looked like giant wedding photos; one for each marriage.

Grayson Perry is not a weaver. Instead he makes copious designs in his sketchbook and distils them into a final design, which is sent to a specialist industrial weaver in Belgium. There the designs are sent digitally to a massive loom and woven in a couple of days. The result is a huge textile hanging, which is reminiscent of illustrations in a children's comic but with far more incisive meaning.

The house itself is available for holidaymakers to rent and stands near the station at Wrabness, where it has a good view of the river. The tapestries will be returned to the house to complete the project.

by Lesley Ottewell

The Rise & Rise of Crochet by Rosee Woodland

Crochet has seen a sharp increase in popularity in recent years. Rosee Woodland charts its history and looks at its place in the modern crafter's canon.



The origins of crochet are somewhat mysterious, and relatively recent. While knitting probably dates back at least 1,000 years, crochet seems to be a much newer craft. Some experts believe the first recorded mention of crochet is found in *The Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, by Elizabeth Grant. In a journal entry dated 1812 Grant references 'shepherd's knitting', a type of slip stitch crochet used by Scottish farmers to create garments that were then felted for extra warmth. But other textile historians believe that France is actually the birthplace of the art. Here, a form of embroidery called tambour was practised. Skilled artisans would work a chain stitch with a hook through a fine mesh to create complex and beautiful embellishments. Eventually, the theory goes, the mesh was abandoned to create what became known in France as 'crochet in

the air' and the patterns were allowed to stand alone. Backing up this theory, the name crochet is thought to come from the French for the word hook - croche, or crochet - little hook. Other crafters believe that crochet developed from earlier traditional textile arts in Iran, South America or China, but firm evidence has been hard to establish thanks to the delicate nature of the work produced, which rarely survived the ravages of time. Whatever the truth of it, there is no doubt that the hooking bug has well and truly bitten modern makers today.

Crochet was first popularised in mid 19th-century Ireland, when workers were encouraged to take up crochet lace work to help feed their families during the potato famine. Initially the lace they created was seen as inferior, but thanks to patronage from Queen Victoria, herself an avid crocheter, it soon became the height of fashion and Irish crochet lace was shipped to Europe and America, where the craft also took off. In the 1920s and 30s knitting and crochet patterns became widely available and crochet cloche hats were all the rage, while the make do and mend years of the 1940s saw crochet used to embellish and update garments that could not be replaced, due to rationing.

After WWII, crochet continued to grow in popularity, peaking in the 1960s and 70s, with mesh mini dresses and granny square homewares. But as interest waned in handmade in the 1980s, crochet slowly fell out of favour. And while knitting patterns remained widely available, it was usually harder to find their crochet equivalent. Thankfully, there was a new craft boom on the way. The 'stitch and bitch' knitting group phenomenon that began in New York in the early 2000s made knitting fashionable again, and interest quickly spread globally. Some years after this resurgence, knitters looking for a fresh challenge turned to crochet and demand for patterns and crochet-friendly yarns began to increase. It didn't

take long for high end fashion houses to cotton on to the new trend too. British designers Christopher Kane and Henry Holland both used the granny square motif in their Autumn/Winter 2011 catwalk shows and soon crocheted designs were all over the high street, cementing the craft's popularity. And, just as knitters had moved beyond the scarf and hat to socks, shawls and sweaters, lace, cables and complex colourwork, so the new crocheters began to experiment.

Soon modular designs, freeform crochet, amigurumi, and complex crochet garments were all gaining a following among yarn lovers. Designer Jane Crowfoot, author of the *Ultimate Crochet Bible* (Pavilion, 2010), was bitten by the crochet bug after decades as a knitwear designer, and finds she now devotes more time to crochet than knitting. "The last few years have seen a huge surge in the number of people wanting to learn to crochet or enhance their existing skills," says Jane. "Many are looking away from the humble granny square in a bid to make things that are more wearable and fashionable." Jane recently created some beautiful designs for Rowan Cotton Crochet, a new pattern book published this spring. "I am a big fan of shawls, scarves and wraps and I think the craft of crochet lends itself beautifully to the production of these," she adds, "especially as accessories are quick and relatively easy to make."



The Rowan Cotton Crochet book showcases just how versatile crochet really can be, with designs for dresses, skirts, tops, shawls and wraps. Jane's Wiremu shawl in Summerlite 4ply features a mesh main section with an ornate border, while Lisa Richardson's Pania dress, in the same yarn, has an all-over graphic pattern. It creates a totally modern look, while giving a gentle nod to those mesh styles of the 60s and 70s. Lisa's Marika wrap uses the modular technique to join pinwheel motifs into a beautiful statement piece. "We wanted a subtle look for this collection," says Lisa, "which came across in the colour palette as well as the design shapes and the stitches chosen. I really love the Summerlite range to work with when designing crochet as it retains a beautiful soft drape." Crochet continues to evolve as yarn-lovers expand their repertoire of skills and Lisa looked to the current vogue for weaving for her designs in the new Rowan Knitting and Crochet Magazine 63. "The theme for the magazine story was Modern Nomad and I wanted to interpret a very crafty hand-woven look," she explains. "Using filet crochet as the base, and then weaving through this, gave a really interesting texture and also was a different medium to work in. Weaving is becoming so popular, so it was nice to be able to incorporate this into the design." This woven look features both in the Eshana wrap by Lisa - a colourwork design in filet crochet using Creative Linen and Softyak DK, and Gayana, a sister pattern for a wrap skirt in a different colourway. Lisa also added touches of weaving to the Vanaja bag in Magazine 63, using Creative Linen to create simple stitches in a neutral shade, laced through with pops of colour in Summerlite 4ply for a fun effect that's surprisingly easy to achieve. With the potential to develop in new and exciting ways in the future, it will be fascinating to see where crochet takes us next.

Courtesy of Rowan Spring 2018 newsletter

Letter from the Editor

The Guild has been functioning for over 35 years and over this period has seen type-written, carbon copy, duplicated and photocopied editions of the newsletter. It has been my pleasure to continue the work of a long line of editors bringing our work online through the website and the electronic editions of 'Threads'.

Now it is time for me to move on and pass the mantle to another. The role as Publicity Officer involves collating articles from and about our Guild and looking out for interesting pieces that our members may like to read.

The website is managed simply by editing as items come up for sale/ get sold, a new edition of Threads requires uploading, photos require uploading, or the Guild programme changes.

The queries that come to us via the website are dealt with as they arise and usually forwarded to the Committee for action or comment.

If you think that this is something that would interest you and you would like more information please get in touch.

Nominations for the post of Publicity Officer will be open in September 2018.

Kind regards,

Asela Ali

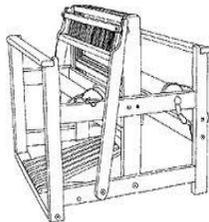
THREADS

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.