

# Threads

**Lea Valley Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers**

**March 2022**

## **Summer School 2021**

### **Spinning exotic fibres**

**by Sharon Wallin**

**Having looked through the Summer School brochure many times, I finally decided upon Spinning Exotic Fibres with Andrew Johnson. I found the title and description intriguing and was looking forward to attending my first Summer School ever! (I know!). The equipment list was extensive- why do I need polystyrene balls and a floor length apron? But all was soon to be revealed...**



**On a typical day, Andrew presented the group with an average of five fibres, all of which needed to be carded, spun and plied into mini skeins. We were encouraged to card the fibres in a particular manner and use long draw to spin. It quickly became apparent that speed and organisation were of the essence! At the end of day 1, I had not succeed with either- I went home with a couple of tiny unlabelled skeins ( what were they??) and a bobbin with the remainder of the Day 1 spun fibre, yet to be plied and organised.**



**Throughout the week, we spun a total of 28 plant and animal fibres and were encouraged to try to blend fibres as well as spinning singles. I loved spinning what I consider to be “true exotics” such as cashmere, yak and alpaca. Blending alpaca and even mink with wool fibres produced fantastic results and added softness and luxury to the bouncy wool fibres. I also discovered that I also really enjoyed spinning cotton from cotton seed bolls.**

**I found bamboo lovely to spin and was surprised by banana and rose fibres, both of which had quite a bit of lustre and softness. My least favourite? Indian corn! I also don't really want to admit this to fans of linen and hemp, but they also go into my least favourite category! Maybe I just need more time..?!**

**We had the opportunity to use full sized English Wool Combs- a really interesting experience. I also tried spinning off the point borrowing an attachment for my wheel. I found it easier than I had expected and this encouraged me to give the Great Wheel ( made by Michael Williams) a go. Best bits?**

**Trying so many fibres and just having a whole week to play! Worst bits (by far) tumble drier fluff and dog hair from a very, very old smelly dog.**

## **Eco Printing**

**By Michele Turner**

**I wrote about Summer School in an earlier issue of Threads, but as there is a Summer School feature, I am going to add a little about technique.**



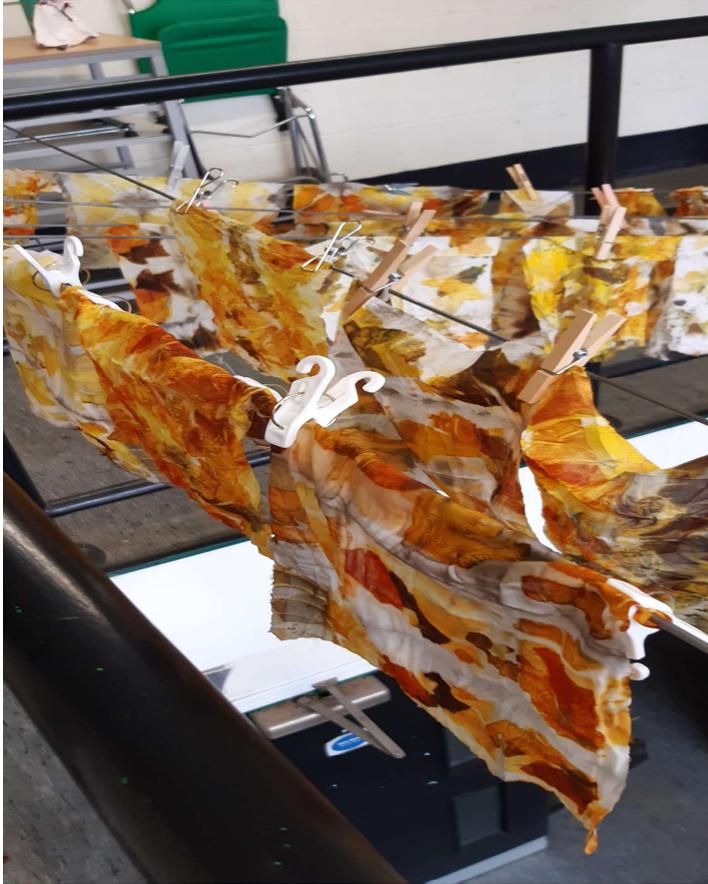
**Those of you who were with us for the Eco Print playday a few years ago will remember the basic method – beginning with onion skins, because they reliably produce a print. Lay out some damp**

**natural fabric – silk is best – but cotton works fine, especially if pre-mordanted with Alum.**

**Lay your onion skins on half of the fabric, then fold the other half over to make a sandwich. TIGHTLY roll around a pipe/stick and wrap with string, again as tightly as possible. The tighter you wrap your fabric, the better the contact with the print material. Once wrapped, boil or steam for at least an hour. Cotton will need longer and ideally should be left until cool before unwrapping.**

**The water will change colour but can be used to start ‘The Dirty Pot’. This will create interesting effects on exposed areas of fabric of future wraps. You can also use tiles and clamps, as well as fold fabric or paper into a pressed and clumped sandwich – the areas which are exposed at the sides will pick up dye eg. If you use the ‘dirty pot’.**

**'Blankets' can also be made, in which fabric is prepared in dye/mordant (especially Iron) and instead of folding, you take your**



**layer of fabric, lay it out, add leaves, add the blanket on top , then roll tightly and steam. Logwood and Cochineal make fabulous blankets and there are further permutations in which the fabric can be dyed and then printed, or dyed and then printed in a blanket. If you add into the creative mix, that some plants print, some discharge dyes and some (like Honesty and Grasses) make good resists, the**

**range of possibilities is tremendously exciting.**



## **Inkle Weaving at Summer School, 2021      By Mary Hicks**

**The 2021 Summer School was held at Writtle University College, near Chelmsford - so close to home!**

**I decided on the residential option, however, as Summer School is so much more than the class you are actually doing. You are fed and watered for a week without having to make any plans, there are evening events and lectures and there is ample opportunity to talk to members of other Guilds and find out what everyone is doing. A really immersive experience.**

**I've fiddled about with weaving for about 40 years (!) without ever really getting to grips with it. I enjoy using the rigid heddle loom but have found that I am not interested in complex weaving: too much maths, too much sampling, too much room for error. So, I thought that I might like using an inkle loom which produces warp-faced bands and ribbons. They're small and portable and capable of producing very intricate patterns using just your hands to raise and lower the warp threads.**

**The tutor, Anne Dixon, is an authority on inkle weaving and her book on the subject painstakingly detailed. She has taught at previous Summer Schools and I was very pleased to get a place on the course. However, the class was large and the room we were in fairly cramped. (I think several potential tutors had dropped out due to Covid and attendees were therefore allocated places on a reduced number of classes.) It was not easy for Anne to get around and talk to people and I spent a couple of days really struggling before the penny dropped.**

**Anne sent us detailed instructions for the first warp and suggested we put this on the loom in advance if we felt able to do so. We spent a couple of days working on this warp using a thread pick-up technique (it's a slow process!) and then carefully tied the warp so we could remove it from the loom and replace it later.**

**There were many options for a second warp and I chose to do 'Baltic style' where the patterns are created with thicker (or doubled) warp pattern threads.**

**As so often with Summer School you return home with a tiny amount of work, to be met with "Is that all you've done in a whole week??"**. But starting from scratch with a new skill does take time and I found that I do, in fact, enjoy weaving on the inkle loom. I may not play with it a lot but if I need a strong, narrow band as a trimming or a bag handle or for some other purpose, I would certainly feel comfortable in using the inkle loom.



### **Further memories from our members, past and present**

**Once upon a time.....**

**by Carolyn Green**

**Before I became a spinner, the only fleece I had encountered was still attached to a sheep. In 1989, I began to help in the animal feed shop at a local sheep farm. It was inevitable, when lambing came round, that I was roped in to assist. It was also inevitable that, at the end of the feverish activity this entailed, I would have two pet lambs in my garden!**

**At some point, a fellow worker asked what I was going to do with the fleeces. It hadn't crossed my mind, but the offer of spinning lessons from his wife, Marilyn, sparked my interest – I had long been a yarn addict. I arrived at the house early one morning and, in the evening, I left with a hank of plied, washed woollen yarn, a chunk of raw fleece and the loan of a Wee Peggy Wheel.**

**I had learned to make rolags and to Navaho ply, which was remarkable, as Marylin couldn't do it herself but knew how it worked. I had discovered my drug of choice! When not at the farm, I sat at the wheel. Having to cook, clean, tend to a 12 year old son and a husband was an unwelcome intrusion. I ordered a Wee Peggy and carding combs and waited impatiently for the shearers to arrive at the farm. By this time I had adopted a third lamb.**

**I set up my wheel in the farm shop and got on with my spinning when nobody was around. The customers enjoyed seeing it. By now I was feeling the limitations of white fleece. I wanted colour! I bought four in lamb ewes, two Jacobs and and two Manx loughtans which I was allowed to keep on the farm. One of my customers had a small flock of Jacobs and invited me to go to the Mid Herts Guild with her. I didn't need my wheel for either meeting, I'm glad to say, and there were a lot of people there. I didn't feel very confident and it would a long drive on dark winter evenings so I didn't join.**

**Another customer, who occasionally came in to buy hay for her Angora rabbits, saw me spinning and began to nag me to join the West Essex and East Herts Guild in Harlow. I was hesitant but Anita Wright was a very determined women. My resistance crumbled under pressure and I turned up one Thursday evening, with my wheel, feeling a total fraud and certain I'd be rumbled by all these confident, experienced women.**

**This feeling never quite went away, but I think I got away with it most of the time. I never stopped being in awe of the talented spinners, weavers, dyers and knitters I met and enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and (most of the time) lack of pressure. I always preferred to observe and then try new techniques in my own time. However, visits to Members' homes and gardens were always fun, even if I didn't get much done – and the food was always worth the effort! The best part was that I met people I still count as friends and cherish the knowledge that they shared.**

## **Saturday 26th February Meeting**

**By Michele Turner**

**We had a very busy meeting in February. Sue had put together a fun project to make a Kese (a Turkish back scrubber) from hand spun hemp. We learned how to make a boucle yarn with hemp fibre - first spinning it as a singles, then plying it twice. The first ply - to shuggle up the spun singles onto a fine commercial yarn, then a second plying , to lock the resultant loops in place.**

**The aim was to finish the yarn off at home, and then to knit or weave a strip using our yarn, adding rope handles at either end to make a back scrubber. There was also an alternative pattern for a little bag to put a soap into, for use as a handheld scrubber.**



**Five of us took part, and hopefully we'll see some finished objects at show and tell later in the year.**

**I found it extremely pleasing to tackle a different fibre, especially for a nice small, accessible project like this.**



**We were also joined by three new faces, which was very cheering after the strangeness of recent times. Hopefully all the newbies will join us in our quest to turn the world woolly!**

## **Christmas Meeting**

**by Billy Turner**

**An impressive number of us braved the ongoing omicron crises and the inclement weather to meet up at a rather cold church Hall – the**



**heating had not been switched on! After a much needed coffee, the meeting began with our traditional Christmas bring and share, where everyone brings a contribution of food and drink. It was a magnificent spread and the hall was soon filled with a happy hubbub of eating and**

**chatter. A special thank you to Sue Pryor for organising this tasty feast.**

**Once fed and watered, we moved on to our Annual Mini Make, this year led by Michele Turner – A Christmas decoration, using Hemerocallis leaves. Michele showed us how to twine these into a small hoop, which we decorated with mini tinsel ribbon, before attaching tiny beads and bells, according to our own creative wishes.**

**It was wonderful to see everyone again, after weeks of being cooped up at home. An added bonus for me was being able to thank**



**some of the wonderful contributors to Threads personally, including Tordis, for the first time!**

**After another period of happy chatter, we exchanged cards, wished each other a Merry Christmas before going back home, happy and full of renewed hope for a Christmas free from Covid restrictions.**



### **Waltham Abbey Wool Show**

**by Michele Turner**

**We were invited to demo at Waltham Abbey Wool Show again this year, and it was really lovely to be at a show in the real world again after all this time.**

**This year I was only teaching one class in the morning, which was the ever popular drop Spindling. However I had a chance to catch up with other members at lunchtime, and stopped on the guild stand briefly, before joining the Grindle Dorset Button class in the afternoon.**

**As ever we had a decent sized well placed spot in the main area, and a fantastic turn out to man the stand. My class was very enjoyable, and extremely well taught by Jen Best of Beaker Button. I'd done traditional Dorset Buttons many years ago, and was fascinated by this alternative technique, using scraps of fabric and thread to create a little spherical Button.**

**Jen was enthusiastic and very knowledgeable, and told us some of the history of this industry while we worked. I was pleased to be able to finish my Button in the one and a half hour class, and made a second one when I got home.**

## **Programme of Events**

**Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> April 7.00 – 9.30pm**

**AGM and Spin and Chat**

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May 7.00 - 9.30 p.m.**

**Spin and Chat**

**Thursday 9th June 7.00 - 9.30 p.m.**

**On the trail of a Foundation Certificate in Spinning' a talk by Louise Edwards**

**Saturday 2nd July 10.00 a.m.- 4.00 p.m.**

**Natural Dyeing Workshop at Bucklers Hall Farm, Perry Green**

**Meeting charges are £2.00 for members and £5.00 for visitors, unless stated otherwise.**

**Tea and coffee is provided at all meetings. For all-day workshops, please bring a packed lunch.**

### **Message from the Chairman**

**Is everyone is aware that Sue has been trying to organise a visit to Nature's Rainbow in Hitchin? Quite a few people showed interest when this was mentioned in the WhatsApp group, but when possible details were suggested there was a less response.**

**Could those who showed interest let Sue know their current interest status. Also if there's anyone who hasn't already joined the conversation, but would like to go, please let Sue know, as it currently isn't looking viable as a planned visit.**

## Members of the committee 2021

<b>Chair</b>	<b>Michele Turner</b> <a href="mailto:shelly.elly@live.co.uk">shelly.elly@live.co.uk</a>
<b>Vice Chair</b>	<b>Teri Malakouna</b> <a href="mailto:tmalakouna@gmail.com">tmalakouna@gmail.com</a>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Asela Ball</b> <a href="mailto:secretary@leavalleyguildswd.uk">secretary@leavalleyguildswd.uk</a>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Cate Barnett</b> <a href="mailto:familybarnett24@hotmail.com">familybarnett24@hotmail.com</a>
<b>Publicity officer</b>	<b>Deb Cunningham</b> <a href="mailto:deb Cunningham@virginmedia.com">deb Cunningham@virginmedia.com</a>
<b>Programme secretary</b>	<b>Sue Prior</b> <a href="mailto:sprior@bucklershallfarm.com">sprior@bucklershallfarm.com</a>
<b>Committee outside events</b>	<b>Chris Lane</b> <a href="mailto:Chris.e.lane@btinternet.com">Chris.e.lane@btinternet.com</a>
<b>Committee member</b>	<b>Audrey McNeill</b> <a href="mailto:jamaud@aol.com">jamaud@aol.com</a>

The next issue Of Threads is due on or about 9<sup>th</sup> June. Deadline for copy to reach me by 26<sup>th</sup> May, or as close as possible thereafter. Many thanks! Billy Turner



## **Additional photos not included in Paper Edition**

### **Horsehair talk**



**Pictures, by Hilary Hedderick,**



**were taken at a Mid Essex Meeting**



**Show and Tell Meeting**

