

The Sheep Geek's Gazette

January 2017



National Guild Exhibition

Jane Ashley

We were on holiday in Devon in the summer so I called in to Killerton House to see the National Exhibition. The Guild was sent a brochure which had several photos of members' work so I didn't take any photos.

When you arrive at Killerton there is no obvious house, or sign of the exhibition, so I was a bit confused. However, a kind soul said "It's up that drive". It was a long walk!

When I finally arrived at the house I went into the room and my first impression was "It's quite dark ... and is that all there is?". The room was a bit dark, as National Trust Houses have to have reduced lighting to protect their precious exhibits. When my eyes had adjusted to the light, the pieces of work on show were stunning. The rest of the exhibition I discovered, was displayed in all the ground floor rooms, and the atmospheric surroundings added to the general wow factor.

My only disappointment was the display of bookmarks. They were displayed in their packaging which meant that it was difficult to see the detail that had been carefully worked into them and they were closely packed onto the display boards. There must have been a couple of hundred examples.

However, I came away impressed with the variety and level of the skills of members, such beautiful things. Does it inspire me or make me feel inadequate? Well, there's a question!



Demonstrating to the public—have a go, it's well worth it!

Sarah Gardner

In April this year, I responded to a request for volunteers to staff an exhibition stall at the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's Spring Fair at the Idle Valley Nature Reserve in Retford.

There are rare breed sheep at the Centre and they have a resident spinner, so our brief was to show the journey of wool from unwashed fleece to spun yarn, with weaving on a rigid heddle loom, plus some activities for children. Quite a tall order, but never fear—the Guild delivered the goods! The venue was a bright, modern visitor centre in beautiful surroundings. I met Sue Relf, Sue Routledge and Jane Ashley there and they had set up an eye-catching stall opposite the entrance. There were colourful skeins of yarn, weaving samples, plus Jane had brought her rigid heddle loom and drum carder with a bag of washed fleece to card, and samples of unwashed fleece.

Sue Relf had prepared a weaving activity on mini cardboard looms for older children, as well as some ingenious dragonflies ready for smaller children to create using colourful jumbo pipe cleaners and some printed acetate wings. The dragonflies were extremely popular, proving quite a draw to the stall, and they fitted in very well with the wildlife outside. I installed myself and my wheel at one end of the very well-dressed Guild table, with Sue Routledge and her wheel at the other end. She had drop spindles for people to try and a variety of people took the opportunity during the day.

As the public began to visit the different stall, I could see that we had something for everyone—children were drawn to the dragonflies, women were generally interested in the loom and the spinning while men couldn't resist asking about the drum carder!

It was quite easy to engage them in conversation as we could show them the “mechanics” of yarn production following the bag of raw fleece, the bag of washed fleece, the action of the drum carder and how I could use the batt to spin from. I am not yet at the stage where I can spin and talk at the same time, so I was honest with visitors and told them that I had a grasp of the basics but was not an accomplished spinner.

Nevertheless I got a lot of enjoyment from spinning and it didn't have to be perfect to be useable (art yarn anyone?!). It was easy to be enthusiastic about our Guild and I explained over and over how anyone with an interest could join and learn from welcoming, talented, generous people, as I had done.

Some people might find the idea of spinning in front of strangers rather daunting, if you aren't an expert, or perhaps they might feel that engaging the public in conversation might be difficult. However, I found that even if I was not feeling that confident to start with, the atmosphere was surprisingly relaxed and if I was asked a tricky question I knew I had Jane, Sue and Sue right there to help me out. After the event Jane shared some feedback she had received from the organiser: *Your contributions made our event such a success and it was great to see so many of those wonderful dragonflies being made as well as watching children spin wool. I hope you all had a good day ... Please forward my thanks to your wider Association members and I look forward to seeing you all again". Trish Evans, Audience Development Manager, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust.*

I'm so glad I volunteered. It was a very enjoyable experience in good company, and it felt good to be promoting the Guild. I recommend it to everyone, however experienced or inexperienced you are—have a go, you'll be very glad you did.



Eight interesting facts about sheep!

1. Sheep have a split in their upper lip, which allows them to select the preferred leaves off a plant.
2. The average body temperature for sheep is 102.5F.
3. The average respiration rate for sheep is 16 breaths per minute.
4. Sheep generally consume 2 to 4.5 pounds of food daily.
5. The fat (tallow) from sheep can be used to make soap, candles and in stained glass. Tallow is used as flux when soldering the lead.
6. Milk from sheep has higher levels of fat, protein, riboflavin, calcium, zinc, niacin and thiamine than milk from goats and cows.
7. The small intestines of 11 sheep are needed to make 1 tennis racket.
8. Sheep have a four chamber stomach that contains fermenting bacteria and protozoan that assist in breaking down their food.

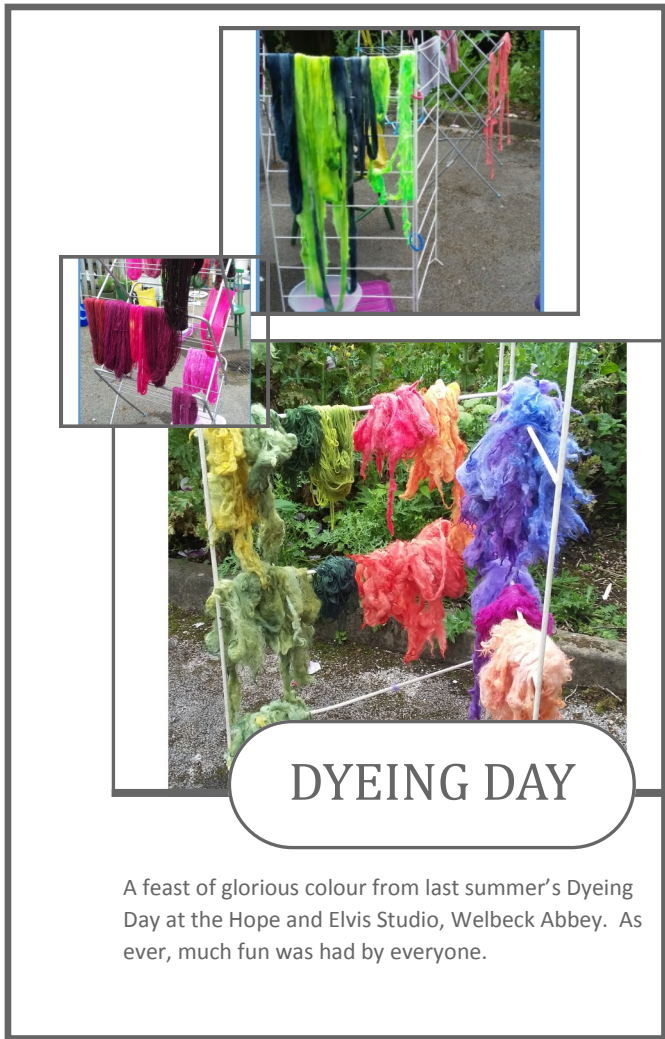
Felting on a shoestring

Sheila Markham

Around a dozen members of the Guild enjoyed a whole day's workshop with our own felting guru Patricia, who showed us how to make felted flowers with the minimum of outlay and maximum enjoyment and creative freedom. From simple rolling of a square shape into a conical petalled flower, to crafting individual petals, stems, leaves and applied stamens, all collected into colourful and fantastical brooches or corsages, several stunning pieces emerged.

We began by making felt, then embellished it with different fibres. In the morning, we rolled this square shape into a variety of flowers—personally, I think they resembled Lisianthus. We then moved on to use of resists, petal shapes, creating stamens from matches and wires, and somehow attaching the parts to make a bloom that was truly gorgeous and mostly the product of its creator's imagination.

We received clear instructions, loads of resources and lots of personal and individual help. We were encouraged to recognise that felting can be done with little outlay on equipment but can still achieve great results. We left inspired!



DYEING DAY

A feast of glorious colour from last summer's Dyeing Day at the Hope and Elvis Studio, Welbeck Abbey. As ever, much fun was had by everyone.



CHRISTMAS IS COMING...

If you missed the December Christmas activity, then google "book folding Christmas Tree" for simple instructions. Here's Kate's tree to inspire you - only 11 months till Christmas!

I've eaten too much!

If this is how you feel after Christmas, spare a thought for the Victorian poor. They were very undernourished, with rickets and anaemia being endemic. In towns and cities, most households relied on open fire pan cooking as they had no ovens and many had to contend with only one pot in which to produce a hot meal, often comprising such ingredients as tripe, slink (prematurely born calves), or proxy (diseased sheep) if they were fortunate enough to acquire it along with other rancid meat scraps they could get from the butcher.

For the unemployed, survival depended on whatever rotten vegetables and refuse scraps they could get their hands on. Therefore being placed in the workhouse, where at least they were provided with a diet of potatoes, cheese, bread and gruel, probably seemed preferable. Gruel consisted of cereal boiled in milk or water and is a thinner and less appealing version of porridge. In Victorian times it formed an integral part of any workhouse diet.:

- ◇ Mix 3 dsp of oatmeal with a little cold water to form a paste
- ◇ Boil a pint of water in a pan, add the mixture and boil for 10 mins
- ◇ Add a pinch of salt

Taken from Wool Magazine, Issue 4, by Polly Bloom

Let's do something for the kids!

On two of our demonstrations in 2016, Sue Relf and I had this thought. If Paul is with us, he usually brings a peg loom for folks to try, and occasionally spinners will let people have a go on their wheels. But Sue and I wanted something associated with our craft that was child friendly. But before I go any further, there are a couple of points to consider:

- There is a danger that some parents may see our activities as free childminding! Yes indeed, can you believe it!!
- The activity has to be quick to complete, otherwise parents can become bored!
- Not only must it be quick to complete, but it must also look brilliant.
- And it must have the correct level of skills for children aged 5-11 years.

So for the Idle Valley Day in April, Sue made dragonflies with wings, heads and pipe cleaner bodies. They were a great success and the children went off happily. My idea was to make simple small looms that held together, to get the warp the correct tension to be woven but loose enough to prise off the piece of work. Hour after hour I stood smiling encouragingly, but no-one wanted to play.

I took my box of tricks to Easton in September, with no more success. Sue however, had designed a sheep with a body made from a simple pom-pom, pipe cleaner legs and wobbly eyes. They looked great and we thought the children should be able to manage them. However, the skills required were shown up when a family of 3 children came along, aged around 7, 5 and 3. The 7 year-old almost managed by himself, the 5 year-old need a good deal of help and Mum had to make it for the 3 year-old. It wasn't just the children making sheep; certain spinners joined in and I must say I've never seen such bad sheep hair in my life.

We have been invited to Easton Walled Gardens for 3 years now. The show is held on the first Sunday in September. The venue is beautiful, the organisers incredibly helpful, carrying our equipment and providing free tea and coffee. Our party consisted of spinners, rag rug lady (aka Angela's Mum), me with felt and Sue with a peg loom. Visitors were very interested in us and there was a good deal of chatting going on. I heard someone say ours was the best stall there! We'll be attending again in 2017, so keep that Sunday free if you'd like to come along.



Jane Ashley

Some interesting facts about merino wool.

Soft: Merino fibres are extremely fine, enabling them to bend far more than traditional, coarser wool fibres. This makes Merino wool feel soft and luxuriously gentle next to your skin.

Elastic: Natural elasticity helps Merino wool garments stretch with you, yet return to their original shape. So Merino wool clothing is ideal to wear when exercising.

Breathable: Merino fibres can absorb large quantities of moisture vapour then move it away to evaporate into the air. So Merino wool clothing is extremely breathable and less prone to clamminess.

Warm and cool: In contrast to synthetics, Merino is an active fibre that reacts to changes in body temperature. So it helps you stay warm when the weather is cold, and cool when the weather is hot.

Static resistant: Because Merino wool can absorb moisture vapour, it tends not to create static electricity, which helps it to drape beautifully and be less likely to cling uncomfortably to your body than other fabrics.

Easy to care for: Gone are the days when woollen garments had to be hand-washed and dried flat.

Odour resistant: In contrast to synthetics, Merino wool can absorb moisture vapour which means less sweat on your body. Merino wool even absorbs the odours from sweat, which are then released during washing.

Stain resistant: Merino fibres have a natural protective outer layer that prevents stains from being absorbed. And because Merino wool tends not to generate static, it attracts less dust and lint.

Machine washable: Recent innovations mean many Merino wool garments can now be machine-washed and tumble-dried. It's very elastic too, so requires less ironing than other fabrics.



Anti-wrinkle: At microscopic level, each Merino fibre is like a coiled spring that returns to its natural shape after being bent. This gives Merino garments a natural resistance to wrinkles.

Fire Resistant: You are safer in Merino wool because it is flame retardant and doesn't melt or stick to the skin. A natural barrier to UV, Merino wool is much better at protecting you from UV radiation than most synthetics and cotton. So the whole family will be safer wearing it on sunny days.

Healthy: Merino wool regulates body temperature and heart rate to so that it actually improves sleep.

Completely natural: Australian Merino wool is an entirely natural and renewable fibre. Natural Merino wool is grown year-round by Australia's 70 million Merino sheep, consuming a simple blend of water, air, sunshine and grass.

Biodegradable: When Merino fibre is disposed of, it will naturally decompose in soil in a matter of years, slowly releasing valuable nutrients back into the earth.

Renewable: Every year Australian Merino sheep produce a new fleece, meaning Merino wool is a completely renewable fibre source.

Textiles at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

We visited the Yorkshire Sculpture Park on a very cold day in January, glanced at the sculptures as we walked Millie (dog) around the park, then hurried into the shop. Lovely things, but my eye was caught by some scarves folded up on a shelf. They would have been better hung up somewhere. I looked for website details on the ticket but there wasn't one—I finally found some info on the park's own website:

“Combining innovation with practical solutions, Wallace Sewell are known for their use of colour, structure and yarn in surprising geometric formats. Inspired by paintings, they create individual contemporary fabrics with strikingly bold, asymmetric blocks and stripes of varying scales, which bring together a plethora of elements within one piece. Strongly influenced by the Bauhaus for its aesthetic and design ideology, Wallace Sewell strive to unite craft and manufacturing, embracing traditional techniques. The initial design process begins on handlooms in the London and Dorset studios. Production then takes place in a family run mill, fusing tradition with state of the art technology, allowing flexibility in order to weave a variety of qualities from small batches to larger quantities. Fabric is then washed and pressed at the finishers to give the cloth a luxurious handle. Since Wallace Sewell's inception, Emma and Harriet are proud to have always worked in the UK, embracing the British Textile Industry for its wealth of expertise and production excellence.”



Lytham Silk and Linen Scarf: £85 Combining crisp, papery linen in the weft with a striped silk warp to create a wonderfully sculptural scarf. Materials: 50% Silk, 50% Linen Dimensions: 30cm x 158cm

The price of £85 seemed rather high to me. But isn't it always the way, it's so difficult to know what price to put on our work. Mike said he was going to diet, so I asked him what colour!!

Jane Ashley

The Yorkshire Sculpture Park (www.yssp.co.uk) is only 1 mile from Junction 38 of the M1. If you're planning a visit, why not combine it with a trip to World of Wool (www.worldofwool.co.uk), just a few miles away in Huddersfield!

Winter recipe. or comfort food!

Date loaf.

Ingredients:

Cake:

1 cup boiling water
1 egg beaten
1 1/2 cups flour
1 cup chopped dates
1 tsp. bicarbonate of soda
1/4 cup butter
1 cup sugar.
1 tsp. vanilla essence
1/2tsp. baking powder.

Topping:

5 tbsp. brown sugar
2 tbsp. butter
1 tbsp. cream
1/2 tsp. salt



Method:

1. Keep back a few dates and nuts for the topping. Add the boiling water to the dates and bicarb.
 2. Combine together the sugar, egg, flour, remaining nuts, butter and baking powder. Add to the date mixture and mix thoroughly.
 3. Grease a loaf tin, add mixture and cook at Gas Mark 4 / 350F / 180C for 40-45mins.
 4. Mix topping ingredients together and heat in a pan over a high heat for around 3 mins. Spread over the cake and sprinkle with leftover nuts and dates.
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The firewood poem.

Lady Cecilia Congrave

Beech wood fires are bright and clear
If the logs are kept a year.
Chestnuts only good they say
If for logs it's laid away.
Make a fire of Elder tree
Death within your house will be.
But Ash new and Ash old
Is fit for a queen with a crown of gold.

Birch and fir wood burn too fast
Blaze up fast and do not last.
It is by the Irish said
Hawthorn bakes the finest bread.
Elm wood burns like churchyard mould
E'en the very flames are cold.
But Ash green or Ash brown
Are fit for a queen with a crown of gold.

Poplar gives a bitter smoke,
Fills your eyes and makes you choke.
Apple wood will scent your room,
Pear wood smells like flowers in bloom.
Oaken logs if dry and old
Keep away the winter's cold.
But Ash wet or Ash dry
A king shall eat his supper by.



2017 Programme

28 January 2017: Table Top Sale and Unfinished Objects Day.

18 February 2017: Additional workshop to be held at Lowdham WI Hall.

25 February 2017: Silk Painting. Internal workshop hosted by Jenny Hempstead.

25 March 2017: Knitting Workshop. External workshop delivered by Alison Ellen of Alison Ellen Knitwear.

29 April 2017: Solar & Natural Dyeing. Internal workshop delivered by Sue Routledge and Karen Ashley.

27 May 2017: Starting & Finishing Techniques for Weaving. Internal workshop hosted by Chris Jesson.

18 June 2017 (Sunday): Dyeing Day. At the Hope and Elvis Studio, Welbeck Abbey.

29 July 2017: Table Top Sale and Using Hand & Drum Carders workshop.

26 August 2017: Chinese Tassels. Workshop delivered by former member Judy Somekh.

30 September 2017: Intermediate Spinning Techniques.

14 October 2017 (Note – not the last Saturday in the month): AGM and Open Afternoon.

25 November 2017: Tablet Weaving. Internal workshop facilitated by Sue Relf.

9 December 2017: Christmas Fuddle.

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Librarian	Sarah Gardner	

Want to see your words in print?

We're always on the lookout for items for future Newsletters, so if you've got something to contribute then forward your content to Jane.

It doesn't just have to be about what goes on at the Guild meetings. Been somewhere fibre-related lately? Found a good website that others might not know about? Or maybe you want to share a project that you've just completed? If it interests you then it's likely to interest the rest of us, so share it via the Newsletter.