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March 2016



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Newsletter

Janet Maher
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All email to: secretary@somersetguildwsd.org.uk

✉ Copy deadline for June issue is Friday 10th June 2016. Please email Janet Maher at secretary@somersetguildwsd.org.uk

Front cover: Exmoorino sheep in North Devon

Message from the Chair

Hello Members,

We have had the worst possible weather since I last wrote. I have lost two trees in the last three months through wind and am heartily sick of muddy dogs and washing dog towels! The positive news is that Spring is almost with us and lots of little shoots are appearing in the greenhouse. A warm day spent sowing seeds raises the spirits so much.

There has been a lot happening at the Guild despite the weather. We have two new committee members after the AGM – Steph Williams and Sue Coates. Caroline, Willow and I were re-elected to serve another year as officers. The full committee is listed later on so do feel free to approach any of us with ideas or comments on how we can make the meetings more productive for you.

Caroline, our Treasurer, has joined Paddy and myself on the National Exhibition planning committee. She has taken on the role of Treasurer for the event. September will soon be upon us and we are all working hard to make the exhibition a success for this region. We do want you to contribute by entering the selected section.

I was extremely pleased with the results of our small group discussions from the last meeting where everyone contributed ideas for the future programme of the Guild. The feedback was excellent and has given us plenty to work with. We will be using some of the feedback in planning the skills day in April.

There will be a full report of all the feedback in the June Newsletter once we have had a chance to pull it all together. Please look at the website as the report will be posted there well before the next Newsletter is due.

I wish you a very creative crafting Springtime.

See you Saturday.

Janet Maher
Chairperson

Guild Committee for 2016

Janet Maher	Chairperson
Caroline Murray-Gourlay	Treasurer
Willow Iredale	Secretary
Helen Cridland	Deputy Chairperson
Sue Coates	Tea/coffee supplies
Sophie Fovargue	Raffle prizes
Brenda Hamblin	General
Debbie Hills	General
Pat Ilsley	General
Caroline Maltby	General
Lesley Took	Programme organiser
Steph Williams	Facebook/newsletter

Other Guild roles: Librarians are Hilary Bonney and Thalia Skeath

If any member would like to support the committee with any of the roles listed, please do get in touch. We need people to learn some of the roles in an apprentice capacity so that new members can take on roles in the future. Please support your committee.

Tea and Coffee Rota 2016

The new tea rota for 2016 is below. If you cannot fulfil your turn, please make arrangements for someone else to be there. Please let Janet (Guild Secretary) know of any changes.

K Dumbill T Clark	March	Rev G Vye J Field	July
Y Jones J Mabbott	April	J Newton P Smith	September
A Thacker L Mckenna	May	J Calderbank J Clark	October
H Cridland M Anderson	June	D Hills E Kingston	November

Yandles Membership Cards

Following a recent query, I can confirm that Yandles membership cards are undated and will continue to be valid on production of your current 2016 Guild membership card. New Yandles cards are not required.

Janet Maher

Weaving Competition 2015



There were ten entries to the weaving competition. Ann Thacker won the competition in the 'not-so -novice' category with a beautiful scarf. Paddy Bakker presented the trophy commenting on the quality and number of entries.

Caroline Maltby won the novice section with her pin loom squares.



Chairperson Challenge: Bookmarks



There were twelve entries, all of which will go to the National Exhibition in September 2016. Linda Lemieux, our speaker at the January meeting, was asked to judge the challenge. She said it was very difficult as the level of skill and creativity was high.

She chose a bookmark made by Sue Coates who had felted and dyed Cotswold fleece and decorated the bookmark with crewel embroidery.

Primitive Sheep of the British Isles: Mary Gibbings

21st November 2015

Mary Gibbings from Yeovil is the South-West's representative on (and chair of) The Shetland Sheep Society Wool Group and she is one of this country's foremost experts on Shetland and other breeds of primitive sheep. She knew very little about them when she joined the Rare Breeds Survival Trust in 1981 and adopted a few lambs but Mary now travels nationally and internationally to judge animals and fleeces at livestock shows and to advise on Shetland breeding issues. Along the way she has met several members of the Royal family and found them to be knowledgeable and approachable on the subject of rare breeds and rare sheep in particular and feels that her beloved Shetlands have given her an exciting career and life experiences far beyond what she would have expected as a Somerset farmer's wife.

Sheep-like animals called *mouflon* were originally hunted by our ancestors for their meat but about 10,000 years ago, men realised that they were manageable beasts and began to domesticate them. Soon afterwards their fleece started to be used to make clothing and it was plucked or cut for spinning, weaving and felting. About 5-600 years ago, people started to select and breed their sheep to obtain particular colours in the fleece. Most of our contemporary sheep both the primitive and the modern breeds are still descended from the *mouflon*.

In 1973 seven breeds were identified as both primitive and rare breeds and special measures were taken to try and preserve them. They were the Soay, North Ronaldsay, Manx Loughtan, Shetland, Hebridean, Caslemilk and Boreray.



Soay sheep are known to have existed 5-600 years ago on the islands of the St Kilda group (off the north-west coast of Scotland). They are probably our oldest sheep and have several primitive features, including a double fleece with waterproofing guard hairs in the outer part and a warm, fine inner fleece. Their fleece sheds naturally or can be plucked (*rooed*). They have horns, are short-tailed and come in a number of colours from black to blonde.

North Ronaldsay sheep are found in the Orkneys and N. Ronaldsay, where they became isolated on the seaward side of the sea wall so that they did not interbreed with the white sheep being farmed on the island. They had always eaten seaweed but this now became their sole diet. They are also coloured and have a primitive stripe down their backs.

Manx Loaghtan sheep have been known on the Isle of Man for 1,000 years and are polycerate (having several horns). They have been officially extinct three times but were rescued by a breeding programme at London Zoo. They are reddish (moorit) in colour.

Hebridean are sometimes called St Kildas. They are very fast, dainty little sheep that may be related to the Manx, having horns and tails. They behave like primitive herd animals, moving as one.

Boreray sheep may be a cross between the Hebridean and the Lewis sheep. They were left behind when the inhabitants left Boreray and the population fell to seven individuals. They were rescued and brought to the mainland, where the population was bred back up.

Castlemilk sheep originated in the 1930s near Dumfries when a man called Jock Buchanan-Jardine bred some Manx and some mouflon or Soay with his flock of Shetlands. They became established and bred true with mouflon markings. However, after their owner's death the flock was at risk. In 1970, Joe Henson of the RBST took 6 ewes and a ram and a farmer in Dumfries took the other 4 ewes. They were listed as critical on the RBST register in 1973. They have a lovely fleece which is short, fine and soft with no kemp.

Shetland sheep are a 1,000-year old breed, known to have come with the Vikings and bred with the local dun-faced or Soay-type sheep. They lived on the islands for many years and formed the basis of the Shetland woollen industry which thrived in the 17th to 19th century, but a number of individuals were removed when other sheep were introduced "to improve the flock" and a number came to England between 1974 and 78, so they were still very unusual when Mary got hers in 1981.

The Shetland breed standard was set in 1927 and Mary upholds it fiercely. She has learnt to manage her flock with a quiet manner so that they bred well, lambing indoors safe from foxes and other hazards. Mary learnt to spin so that she could show off the products that could be made from Shetland fleece and to interest the public in the welfare of the breed. She has been active at shows, sales and exhibitions and has sat on numerous committees on their behalf. In 1990 she was able to see Shetlands come off the rare breeds register and to know that the breed is safe for the foreseeable future.

Lesley Took

Rush Cutting and Basket Weaving on the River Isle: Linda Lemieux

16th January 2016



Common club rush (not to be confused with bull rushes) grows naturally in slow flowing rivers in England. Our River Isle here in Somerset is especially high in natural silica, making the rush a much softer material than the Dutch or Spanish rush that is often imported. It spreads naturally by enlarged roots known as rhizomes.

Harvesting takes place during June and July, just before the brown flowers open. Linda uses a coracle, which she made herself from hazel and willow, and paddles out onto the water. The rush stems are cut under water as close to the rhizome as possible. The rush is strongest at the rhizome end. Linda uses a 2 to 3 year rotation to allow the plants to recover. The rushes are gathered into “bolts” and balanced carefully on the coracle until she can paddle back to shore. The bolts are then tossed onto the river bank.

She harvests 50 to 60 bolts per year. They are sorted according to quality: the thickest are used for hats and chairs whilst the thinnest are used for baskets. The bolts are put to dry as soon as possible. They are dried upright in a barn and turned every 4 to 5 days to ensure they dry evenly. It is important that they are dried in the dark to preserve their colour. They are then kept until needed. Each rush is sprayed with water just before use to make it pliable, and pressed with a damp cloth to exclude the air trapped in each stem.

The majority of Linda’s work is replacing rush seats. A good rush seat can last for 50 years, however modern central heating may reduce that. She demonstrated how she weaves a new seat on an old chair. Each strand is tightly twisted and coiled, especially round the corners, in a methodical pattern. The spaces that form between the top and bottom layers of the seat are stuffed using a “stuffing stick” (apologies for the technical terminology) and rush off cuts, so there is no waste!

Linda had many of her hand made pieces on display and for sale. They ranged from baskets and bags to hats and babies rattles. They really were beautiful and I did spot at least one significant purchase being made.

Linda runs workshops for both adults and children, and if there is enough interest, we may be able to organise a guild day out to harvest our own rush and create something beautiful. Lets hope for a nice, warm summer.

Caroline Maltby

English Long Draw Workshops: Amanda Hannaford

21st February 2016

Two three-hour workshops were held as there was so much interest in this topic. Amanda started by explaining the importance of preparing rolags correctly to be successful with long draw. Quite a few of us realised we had not been preparing rolags in the most effective way.

Long draw is considered to be the method of choice for spinning fibres of short staple length. Long draw gives a woollen preparation, which is full of air, soft and springy – perfect for light-weight, warm garments. We also learned the difference between American long draw and English long draw. English long draw is the true woollen long draw. American long draw is really a series of short draw drafts. I thought I was doing English long draw only to realise I was actually doing American. American is much easier to master than English in my opinion but gives a semi-worsted rather than woollen yarn. Amanda was very patient with us as we struggled with the draw of a longer length than most of us were used to.

Although I managed the long draw in the end without it snapping, it was still too slubby for my liking so a lot of practice will be needed as I saw others master a much more even yarn.

You can see from the photo below the intense concentration on our faces as we focus on the drafting process – a very good learning exercise. Thank you Amanda.



National Exhibition 2016: Items for Selection

The exhibition will be held 8 – 18 September. Selected entries are those that are juried. We will be seeking entries from Guild members. Details of the selection criteria with some tips can be found in the Selection Booklet on our website. The closing date for selected entries is 6th May 2016.

We will put entries in as a Guild and will collect entries at the April meeting. Entries are by photograph and a 'feelie' piece. The better the quality of the photograph and the 'feelie' sample, the more the judges have to make an informed decision. We will take photos at the April meeting if you cannot take your own.

Entry forms were emailed just after the February Guild meeting. If you need more or have any queries, please talk to Janet.

Christmas Meeting December 2015

There were 22 of us at this social event. Good food and a little drink made for a merry occasion with lots of laughter and crafting. The Secret Santa was a success as was the creativity of the Xmas Hat participants!



Guild Competitions 2016

The theme for our competitions in 2016 will be “**Recycling**”. As always people can interpret the theme in any way they like. The competitions dates are:

Dyeing:	September Meeting
Spinning:	October Meeting
Weaving:	November Meeting

Fleece Fair 2016

As members will see from the programme, our annual Fleece Fair takes place on 18th June 2016. We will need lots of helpers on the day for the following activities:

- Kitchen rota – Helen Cridland will run the kitchen
- General help setting up and taking down
- Demonstrating a wide variety of skills – please tell Brenda Hamblin if you are prepared to do anything
- General advisers for people buying fleeces – a new role and we will give volunteers a badge so advisers can be identified

We have agreed to give a £1 discount to any member buying a fleece – Caroline will give people the £1 back on production of the fleece. Also to support members in buying fleeces we will have two meetings dedicated to using fleece:

- May meeting – we will do a tutorial on what to look for in buying a fleece
- July meeting – people can bring their fleeces along and we do a general session on skirting, sorting and washing together with advice on how best to prepare the fleece you have bought

We want members who have never bought a fleece to experience the pleasure and satisfaction of taking the process from the raw fleece to a finished item – lots of entries to the spinning competition then!

Janet Maher

Weaver's Coffee Morning & Discussion Group

Saturday 2nd April 2016
9.45am—12.30pm
Broadwindsor Craft Centre
DT8 3PX.
£10 to include tea & cake.



"Thank you for this mornings get together. I drove home on a real high with renewed enthusiasm and many new ideas filling my head" J.P

Contact Louise Cottey for more information or to reserve your place.

loucottey@gmail.com

07527 248178



Programme 2016

Meetings begin at 10.30am at
Hatch Beauchamp Village Hall
Talks begin at 1.45pm

16th January

Rush cutting and basket weaving on
the Isle
Linda Lemieux
AGM 11.00am
Chairperson Challenge: Bookmarks

20th February

Travels in Afghanistan
Amanda Hannaford
Fibre Sales
Committee Meeting

21st February

AM: Long draw spinning workshop
PM: Long draw spinning workshop

19th March

Spinning a Yarn: Spinning wheel
surgery
Spinning wheel and fibre sales
Joan and Clive Jones, Woodland
turnery (Timbertops)

16th April

Members Skills Day
Soup and Bread Lunch
Fibre sales: Jean Field

21st May

Kersey: The history of our local fabric
Louise Cottey
Committee Meeting

18th June

Fleece Fair
Skills demonstrations

16th July

My adventures with a rigid heddle loom
Helen Brotherton
Weaving yarn sales

17th September

The history of the Paisley shawl
Valerie Reilly (formerly curator of textiles
at Paisley museum)
Dyeing competition
Committee meeting

15th October

Stranded Knitting (Fair Isle)
Fiona Morris
Spinning competition
Soup and Bread Lunch

19th November

Ukrainian crafts
Nataliya Cummings
Weaving Competition
Committee meeting

17th December

Social event
Shared lunch and Secret Santa