

CYMDEITHAS GWISGOEDD A THECSTILAU CYMRU

THE COSTUME AND TEXTILE SOCIETY OF WALES

NEWSLETTER November 2015 – January 2016

19 November 2015

Sally Pointer *WW1 Knitting for Home and Country*

Sally Pointer has spent most of her adult life working in the Heritage Industry, at the National Museum of Wales and now as a freelance presenter, educator and lecturer. Her interests cover a wide range of subjects and when she spoke to us so engagingly on the subject of Roman costume and cosmetics we decided to ask her back to talk about another of her interests. Sally has studied textiles and knitting, has a portfolio of vintage and modern knitting patterns and makes hosiery for re-enactors. So we were pleased when she agreed to talk about knitting during WW1, bringing contemporary knitwear and to demonstrate her vintage sock/stocking machines.

During Victorian times knitting was a means of earning money amongst the working classes but it was leisure or 'Parlour Work' for middle class women to show off their skill at fancy stitches. When WW1 began there was a desire to 'be useful in times of war' and appeals appeared for women and girls to make warm clothing as part of the war effort.

The Queen Mary's Needlework Guild which had provided clothing for orphans



was now dedicated to supply clean linens for the boys fighting in the war. The Guild helped to organize knitting groups around the country and the medal was to show that the wearer was engaged in regular voluntary work. However some saw the Guild as a threat to women working on piecework for war contracts in the clothing industry.

The quality of knitting was not always consistent and cartoons appeared in papers and journals

making fun of the early attempts to make gloves and socks for servicemen at the front. Some of the items were sensible like balaclava helmets, hats, gloves and mittens, but some were strange chest protectors, kneecap covers and cholera belts to name a few!



When it became clear that the war would continue for years rather than months official appeals were made for women with access to knitting machines to produce socks on an industrial scale. (Machines were too expensive to buy outright, a deposit was paid for a machine and yarn then repayments were made in instalments from the sale of socks). These were difficult to master but were much faster than hand knitting and millions of socks were needed; stocking machines were also used as a therapy in hospitals by servicemen who made stockings and tubular bandages.



Two stocking machines were set up for us to examine, an early example from 1870 and a second dated to 1910. Both are still in working order and used to make socks and stockings for historical re-enactment clients. When Sally finished her talk she demonstrated how the machines worked and we each had the opportunity to try working a few rows, some finding it more difficult than others! Sally also encouraged us to handle and examine her examples of WW1 clothing and memorabilia, with great care of course.

Thank you Sally for an entertaining and informative talk and demonstration.

Ellen Phillips *Creativity from Conflict: First World War Textiles from the Collection at St Fagans*

Elen Phillips is the Curator of Costumes and Textiles at the National History Museum at St Fagans and has been a valued member of our Society, although she is no longer on the Committee she continues to talk to us about her work and the objects she holds under her care. In 2014 the world remembered the tragic outbreak of the First World War; to commemorate the war and the effect it had on soldiers and civilians alike the museum has opened its collections to the public at events, exhibitions and on line.

The images of over 700 objects have been put on the museum web site; users are invited to examine them and to contribute their own memories and family stories.

Elen gave us a card with the web site information it is very user friendly and for those of you who missed this talk it is as follows.

www.amgueddfacymru.ac.uk/rhyfel-byd-cyntaf

www.museumwales.ac.uk/first-world-war

#cymruncofio

#walesremembers

It took considerable time and effort for the museum staff to curate the objects in the First World War Collections, but a task that generated much enthusiasm and interest. The archives and Museum collections were examined to find relevant material, coming from several different departments so every item had to be re-catalogued. A new accession file was opened by the Curator containing relevant information about the origin, description, history, state of preservation etc. of the object, then it would go to the Conservator and finally to the Photographer to take an image to be placed on the web site.

On display were seven objects that Elen had selected to talk about.

She began with two poignant mementoes, decorated sweetheart cushions, made by young recruits at Training Camp, to be sent to a mother and a sweetheart.

The occupants of Plymouth Castle took an active part during the First World War giving part of the gardens to open an Auxiliary Hospital run by the Red Cross accommodating 40 then a further 30 patients. A Red Cross apron from the Collection belonged to Elizabeth Radcliff, who worked as a volunteer nurse at St Fagans from 1916 to 1919.

Patients came from all over Britain, they were able to use the gardens and library and Lady Plymouth would visit to play cards and bring her pet dogs for company. Craft was used to aid recovery and relieve boredom, a delicate beaded butterfly, made by Walter Stinson, illustrated the type of jewellery that was sold locally to raise funds.

A tablecloth purchased by Ray Coleman at Jacobs Market in the 1980's proved to be a particular find as it was embroidered by the staff and convalescing patients at the Welsh Metropolitan Hospital (later Whitchurch Hospital).

A Welcome Home Banner reflected the relief that civilians felt at the end of hostilities and it is planned to hold a re-enactment of the Victory Ball at the Oakdale Institute with people from Oakdale in 2019.

The last object that Elen had chosen was a large doll; depicting an elderly woman wearing traditional Welsh costume (a flannel petticoat, shawl and hat). It was made at a Toy Factory, in the Vale of Clwyd, set up after WW1 to assist the rehabilitation of returning wounded soldiers.

This was such an interesting talk and Elen asked us to spread the word about the collection and web site. It is hoped that users of the site may recognise some of the objects and be able to add more local and family information. Elen said that such memories and memorabilia from the First World War are always valued by the staff at the Museum.

A Special Day- meeting with Two Alumni of the Royal College of Music and Drama

It was unfortunate that when we met at St Fagans on Saturday **14 November** the first of the winter storms had arrived, with the wind gaining speed as the morning progressed several of our members felt it safer to return home so they had to miss our second speaker. Such a pity as Rachel and Kate gave us a lovely and inspiring day together.

Rachel Burgess - Talking about her career in the Theatre to owning her own Bridal Boutique

With the rain beating down outside and the wind whining around the windows we were joined by Rachel's parents, who had come down from Aberystwyth, and her husband, to enjoy her infectious enthusiasm as Rachel told us how she had embarked on her career. As a girl she had always pushed the boundaries with clothing, joining the after school club in the Aberystwyth Arts Centre and being a 'people person' she decided to apply for the Stage Management course at the Royal College of Music and Drama in Cardiff.

On leaving college Rachel enjoyed working as Deputy Stage manager, working with actors and assisting on productions such as 'Chicago' and 'Hairspray'. She worked at the Royal Opera House in London and on tour, all the time knowing how important a role that costume played in a show. Looking outside the theatre she saw that young women were also keen to shine in their own show. The idea of providing a bride with a pleasing experience, without undue pressure and supporting the local community appealed to Rachel and when she saw a little shop in Penarth that was available for rent she decided to open her own Wedding Boutique.

She met Helen Rhiannon a designer working from a studio on the Gower and they agreed that Quality not Quantity was to be the basis of their collection. The Boutique opened in 2012 with four of Helen's bespoke gowns (now increased to the top teens) and a selection of retro and vintage dresses. Helen Rhiannon has been joined by four other designers, all based in Wales. Claire Hill makes head pieces and bridal accessories and Kate Barlow also makes

accessories using vintage textiles and embroidery. Dresses with a bohemian vintage vibe come from Angharad Mullooly's 'Lost and Found Collection'. The 'Ears and Whistles Couture' feature show stopping gowns and Amy Hill designs dresses with subtle glamour made from silk and lace.



Rachel in her Boutique in Penarth

Rachel has given all her dresses names and she showed us three examples from her stock which illustrated the variety that she had to offer her clients.

She was so enthusiastic about her Boutique and obviously wanted to make her brides feel special, she stressed that each gown was unique and beautifully crafted and that every bride should feel comfortable on her special day. Many of Rachel's clients come recommended by word of mouth and she has stuck to her family principles of care and hard work, she also has created a lovely little Boutique and has been well advised on her website.

Finally she said she believed in Fate and to trust her instincts. It must have worked as Rachel has been shortlisted as a Finalist in the Cardiff Life Awards!

Kate Barlow - Talking about her career change as a Costume Maker to Study and Teach Embroidery at the Royal School of Needlework

It was a pleasure to welcome Kate Barlow to talk to us. We have been following her recent studies as she was the recipient of an award we made to celebrate the Thirtieth Birthday of our Society, but it was a revelation to see the quality of the embroidery she had brought to show us.

Kate became stage struck when she saw a production of '42nd Street'; she became involved with Amateur Dramatics working in Rhyl on a huge variety of events. She took the Theatre Design Course at the Royal College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, specialising in costume. After graduating she worked for the Torch Theatre, Glynbourne and then spent seven years touring with the WNO. It was while she was working in the Costume Department that Kate decided to follow her love of fine embroidery. She bravely asked for a sabbatical from her job, moved to London to live in a bedsit and gained a place on the Future Tutor's Programme at the Royal School of Needlework at Hampton Court.

The School of Art Needlework was set up by Lady Victoria Welby in 1872 to train gentlewomen to work hand embroidery for noble and wealthy clients in London. William Morris and the Arts and Craft Movement formed a close association with the school which received Royal patronage in 1875. Its workshops in Hampton Court continue to produce prestigious products from the gold work embroidery on the Coronation robes of Queen Elizabeth 11 to the lace work on the wedding gown of Kate Middleton.

The original apprenticeship scheme offered by the School has been replaced by a BA Hons in Hand Embroidery. With the foresight that needlework skills need to be perpetuated and taught to others the Future Tutors Programme has been set up for a limited number of students. Kate described some of the projects that have been undertaken at the Hampton Court site; students and tutors work together on restoration work on precious antique textiles and new commissions such as the Magna Carter Project and a gown to celebrate 'Made in Britain' for Vogue.

Illustrating her talk with images and samples of her work Kate described how her course was structured. Three days a week are spent in College, a topic such as Jacobean Crewel Work would be taught in eight lessons, then at least double the time would be spent working at home on a piece of embroidery which when mounted would be assessed and marked with great vigour by the Course Tutors. 'General Practise' covering costing, framing and exhibition display would be taught for a further two lessons a week.

Kate has now studied Applique and Stump work, her framed project of a Little Dancer was exquisitely detailed incorporating many different techniques.

During the Gold work Module students were introduced to different types of metal threads, padding, couching etc. For her Advanced Gold work project Kate designed a whimsical representation of Three Flying Ducks using kid leather, plate work and basket weave.

With each Topic following the same format with new techniques to be learnt and mastered and a test piece to be completed and presented for criticism, it must have taken enormous dedication and hours of intense stitching but Kate said that she enjoyed every aspect of her studies. She showed us her work for Black work,(precise counted work using different thicknesses of thread),Canvas Shading(a less formal form working by eye from photographs, using woollen thread) and Silk Shading(a technique to represent very fine brush like details on flora and fauna). Finally she told us the story about the exhibition piece that she had embroidered for the Advanced Silk Shading Module.



***Smuggler* (detail) 2014 Hand embroidery and silk shading**

'Smuggler' is the name Kate gave to this picture of a budgerigar that she stitched using a silk shading technique and took over 140 hours to complete using a size 12 needle and more than 50 stranded coloured silks. She stitched an outline referring to a photograph and by carefully building up the stitches

and mixing her colours created this beautiful alert little bird with its downy feathers and bright beady eye.

On an impulse Kate decided to enter it for the 2015 Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, somewhat to her surprise her entry was accepted. 'Smuggler' became the first piece of stitched work ever to have been exhibited at the Academy and his image has been sold as a card by the Academy. He has also been used to advertise the RSN in an Australian Magazine, quite an achievement for Kate and her little bird.



Thank you Kate we were overawed by the skill and beauty of your needlework and wish you all the best in your chosen career as a teacher and practitioner of exquisite embroidery.

Interesting Events for your Diary

The Royal School of Needlework will be exhibiting some of their work at the NEC **'Fashion and Embroidery Show'** 17-20 March 2016

'Peacocks and Pomegranates' an exhibition of colourful International Embroidery, at Hampton Court 27 January – 22 July 2016

To book online and for more information tel. 020 3166 6932

www.royal-needlework.org.uk/shop/index/60

Totness Fashion and Textiles Museum (*Home of the Devonshire Collection of Period Costume*)

To celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Collection in 2016 the Summer Exhibition is entitled: **'50 Shades of RED'**

(Pink through Burgundy to Scarlet – C18th – C21st)

17 May – 30 September 2016 Tuesday – Friday 11.00 – 17.00 hours

totnessfashionandtextilesmuseum.org.uk

Quilt Fest 2016

The Nineties Collection and More

Llangollen 10-21 February 2016

Wrexham Quilting Circle

On show at Llangollen 2 Feb – 1 March

www.quiltfest.org.uk

Asides

I saw an item in The Sunday Times 17.01.16 written by Sanya Burgess. '*Chepstow coat goes on display*'. It states that 'A rare Indian textile used as the lining in a Chinese coat is to go on display at the British Museum after being found in a small museum in Chepstow. The 17th-century textile, from Assam in northern India, was placed inside the coat which dates back to the beginning of the 18th century.' 'The textile will feature alongside the Vrindavani Vestra textile as part of a free exhibition, at the British Museum, about Assam art and design which begins on Thursday and continues until 15 August. 'I wonder if when the coat returns it will feature in an exhibition in Chepstow.

In December Louise and Gaye made trip to London with Gaye's husband John and her daughter Kate, the purpose to see the V&A Exhibition '***The Fabric of India***'. It was a sumptuous display of glorious textiles, looking at the range of India's woven, dyed and decorated materials and the local and global trade over millennia. We spent hours looking at the embroidery printed and embellished cloth and clothing finally giving up with exhaustion. Sadly the Exhibition has finished, I wish it could have travelled to Wales, but I do have the book and will bring it along to our ***Sampler Workshop Challenge*** on Saturday 6th February.

Gaye Evans Editor