

## November Newsletter 2011

Since the AGM in April we have offered our members a workshop, an outside visit and the more usual dual Saturday lectures.

On Saturday 11 June, **Michelle Griffiths** ran a Master class on Shibori, the Japanese art of shaped resist dyeing.

Michelle has her own workshop at the Model House Craft & Design Centre in Llantrisant, but as 18 people had signed up for the class we used The House of the Future, Education Centre at St Fagan's Museum. The day commenced with slideshow on the history of *Shibori* in Japan. Then we examined the variety of techniques used around the world by craftsmen to heat-set and dye materials by wrapping, binding and stitching. Michelle brought many samples of her own exhibited and experimental work together with pieces that she had collected on her visits to Japan, to illustrate her talk and to inspire us.



Each student was provided with their own piece of Habotai silk and a polyester fabric and a variety of small glass, metal and wooden objects were available for wrapping to create different textures. After an intensive session of binding and painting our polyester samples were wrapped in tinfoil and placed in a pressure cooker to be heated to 200-220°C for 20-30 minutes to permanently heat set the texture in the fabric. Once cooled and unwrapped we applied more silk paints and embellished the surface texture with oil paint sticks. Further stitching methods were demonstrated on muslin by Michelle, who was generous with her advice as we worked on our samples and maintained a tireless enthusiasm throughout the day. Some of our work is illustrated below.





The day was an intense introduction to a fascinating and complex subject, providing us with the inspiration and techniques to develop our own projects.

Saturday 9 July 2011

**Abergavenny, a visit to Saint Mary's Priory Church and the Tithe Barn to see the Abergavenny Tapestry.**

Sir Trefor Morris, Chairman of St Mary's Development Trust, took seven of us around the Benedictine Priory Church, sharing with us his enthusiasm for the history of the building and its contents. The 15<sup>th</sup> Century Jesse figure was amazing, carved from a massive section of oak, it is one of the finest pieces of Medieval sculpture remaining in England and Wales and forms a central motif in the Tapestry. Built the year King William died the Church had survived the depredations of the Reformation and the Civil Wars. Of particular interest to us were the wooden and stone effigies recording the powerful local families who lived around Abergavenny. These figures displayed many symbols depicting status and rank, weaponry, heraldic animals even a squirrel, on the tomb of 13 year old Margaret, which was said to have caused her death in a fall from the castle ramparts. However it was the fine detail rendered on the garments and accessories that caused us to re-examine the effigies. One figure in particular, providing enough information for the reconstruction of a Tudor gentleman's coat and tunic, now on display in the Education Room in the Tithe Barn.

On returning to the Tithe barn we went upstairs to view the Tapestry. Sheila Bevin, who proposed the idea in 1999, was on hand to explain how the tapestry representing local history over the past 1,000 years was created to celebrate the Millennium.

The Tapestry, 24 feet long by 6 feet high, is a breathtaking spectacle. Conceived as a community project it was worked in tent, straight and petit point stitches by people of varying abilities and experience. Abergavenny is renowned for the many designers and craftspeople who live and work in the area and the tapestry is a testimony to the skills of local tapestry experts and to the history and beauty of the landscape. The tapestry was worked in the Lewis Chapel over the course of nearly four years and open to numerous visitors from around the world. Stitchers used hundreds of colours of crewel wool to 'paint' the design onto five panels of linen canvas which were later joined together to form a seamless panorama.

If you have not already managed to see the tapestry I thoroughly recommend a visit to the Tithe Barn to examine it for yourselves and to be impressed. With time passing we had a brief walk around

Abergavenny noted some interesting shops/galleries on the main street and went into the Market Hall where the Craft Fair was closing for the day, all worth a longer visit and we made contact with a craftswoman who later agreed to speak at the September meeting in St Fagans.

24 September 2011

**Ellie Donald** *From Hobby to Insanity and Beyond*

Many of us remember learning to knit at home taught by mothers and grandmothers who wrapped us up in cardigans, mittens, hats and more exotic garments! *Woman's Weekly* centenary edition has a page entitled 'Bathing Beauties' devoted to pictures and vivid memories of knitted swimsuits and reproductions of old patterns frequently turn up on cards, books and magazines.

It is possible to buy both expensive high fashion knitted clothing and cheaper mass produced everyday wear, but there has been a resurgence in interest amongst a new generation of young women in this craft. People are interested in learning new skills, creating something which we hope to be useful and beautiful and in sharing that enthusiasm with others. So it was with pleasure that we listened to Ellie Donald talk about her introduction and involvement in the world of wools, dyeing and knitting.

Ellie explained that the brilliant hanks of wool displayed around the room were the results of her experiments with both natural and chemical dyes. Using a microwave and small batches she keeps a careful record of the dye mixes to create random rainbow coloured yarns that knit up into Fair Isle like patterns. Her interest was sparked by joining a knitting group otherwise known as Stitch and Bitch at Chapter in Cardiff and she now uses the internet to exchange ideas, sell her yarns and to display the range of knitting patterns she has designed. The lacey shawl/scarf was particularly intriguing as were the sock and glove designs.

When she is not dyeing, knitting, on the computer and selling her wares at the market in Abergavenny Ellie teaches special needs pupils at a local school. This she finds particularly rewarding as the children respond well to the lessons. I am sure that they are carried along by her enthusiasm for her craft we certainly were! The colours alone were enough to brighten up ones day and I will ask at next meeting if anyone looked out their needles and yarn.

I had a special wedding to attend in the afternoon so regretfully I missed our afternoon speaker, but as she stayed at our house she kindly showed me some of her collection on Sunday.

**Angela Thompson** *Silk Road Treasures from Central Asia*

Angela has spoken to our Society on two previous occasions on subjects as diverse as Gold Embroidery and a Historical collection of Family Clothing. This talk embraced her travels on the Silk Road with her daughter and the hats and garments she had collected along the way.

She has spent half a lifetime collecting beautiful textiles and started travelling seriously after her mother died, at a time when Central Asia was just opening to tourists. Many of the garments that Angela displayed were rare and unusual; she had hunted them down in markets and by seeking out contacts with local craftspeople. It was a treat to examine these items and to see how they had been constructed, many were fragile and worn but that made them more interesting.

The market places are now filling with imported goods from China and cheap manufactured textiles from Russia and India, increasingly while women retain their traditional costumes men and especially children are clothed in denim, polyester cottons and acrylic knitwear. Traditional cotton shalwar kurtas and embroidered hats are ubiquitous but so too are puffer jackets and plastic trainers and sandals. Elaborate hand silk and bead embroidery is replaced with machine work and brightly coloured synthetic prints, ribbons and plastic buttons and beads.

Such is life, but the skills are not dead and Angela's daughter is using some of the techniques witnessed in China, India and the ancient Khanates along the Silk Road to inspire and inform her own work and to teach workshops which she runs in this country.

Some enterprising individuals and communities continue to practise their crafts, for their own use and as a source of revenue to be sold in the markets and to tourists. This was brought home to me when a visit to the Craft Museum in Delhi this October coincided with Dastkar's Nature Bazaar. This is an annual event, now in its nineteenth year, to showcase the work of over 160 craft groups from 19 states across India. There were demonstrations and workshops on offer and in an interview about the importance of encouraging local crafts Laila Tyabji Chairperson of Dastkar said 'We must go on inculcating and encouraging an empathy for handmade, eco-friendly, environmentally sustainable products. Scores of these living craft traditions are unique to India. If they live on and flourish, so will we.'

19 November 2011

**Sarah Keep** *HET couture millinery Hats, Fascinators and Tiaras*

Sarah Keep is a designer and Milliner who works in Cowbridge and will talk about how she creates hand crafted head turning accessories for special occasions

**Jane Pritchard** *DIAGILEV and the Golden Age of the Ballet Russes 1909-1929*

Jane Pritchard was Co-Curated the prestigious exhibition DIAGILEV and the Golden Age of the Ballet Russes 1909-1929 held at the V&A between Sept 2010- January 2011. As Editor of the accompanying publication she may give us an insight as to the influence the Ballets Russes had on 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre, fashion and daily life.

**Footnote**

Did you see the article in the Western Mail on 26 October about the enormous clothing collection amassed by Mrs Margaret Evans and held in Ceredigion Museum in Aberystwyth? The museum has reviewed its collections and can no longer house all the clothes so they will go to other museums, theatres historic houses and collages. Some of the clothes will be used to study design and construction methods at the Royal College of Music and Drama. Jill Salen was delighted to have been able to select 70 items which will be preserved for teaching and she has promised that she will come to talk to our Society about the collection.

**Gaye Evans Chairman** November 2011