

## THE COSTUME AND TEXTILE SOCIETY OF WALES

### **NEWSLETTER** September 2014 – January 2015

On the **26 July 2014** we successfully held a second **Vintage Village Bazaar** in St Fagans Village Hall. Tables were taken by members, friends and relatives who wanted to clear and re-cycle the contents of their wardrobes and work boxes; stalls also offering vintage clothing, books, ornaments and Japanese textiles.

A thank you is due to the members who were busy in the kitchen serving refreshments, organizing the raffle, looking after the bank and to everyone who worked so hard to make the event a success.

After the summer break we met at the Museum on **20 September** to welcome some new faces and to confirm that details and application forms for the Student Bursary, discussed at the AGM, have been advertised and that the recipient would be announced at the November meeting.

#### **Clare Stoughton-Harris** *Dolls as evidence of Welsh Costume*

Clare Stoughton-Harris is a freelance Textile Conservator, also employed by the National Trust with responsibility for their properties in South and Mid Wales. Most recently she has directed conservation projects in Tredegar house and at Dyffryn House and Gardens. Clare proposed to talk to us about a National Assembly funded project on which she and Emma Telford had collaborated, together with Michael Freeman from Ceredigion Museum, examining the origins of the Welsh National Costume.

18 and 19th Century travelogues depict Welsh costume as unusual and quaint and a generic style has been recreated for use in Pageants, as Fancy dress and for Folk dance. The project involved a detailed study of approximately forty dolls kept in collections at St Fagans, Bangor, and Hereford and at the Museum of Childhood in London. Dolls have been used as toys, but also to illustrate new fashions and as souvenirs. Each doll was examined minutely and details of

materials and garments were recorded, followed by a detailed analysis of the data; early examples of Welsh flannel were used to help to date the dolls.

The dolls clothing consisted of several items, a hat, cap, apron, shawl, skirt, a jacket or bet guwn (bed gown), stockings, chemise etc. Four types of bet guwn were recognised, an early example from 1840's has the remnants of a bustle pad and many examples have the long skirt pinned or tied back with ribbons. A second version always made of printed cotton, cut short with set in sleeves in a T shape and often tucked into the skirt. A third and later type like a Kimono cut in one piece and finally a short highly tailored jacket reminiscent of a riding habit.

Hats were tiny scaled down versions of adult bonnets and stove pipe hats made of silk plush. Cloaks all made in red plain weave cloth and all decorated with black feather stitching, the use of red flannel was very popular as it was considered to have health giving properties. Aprons were made of flannel composed of a cotton and wool mix in a plain or twill weave. Clare identified approximately 400 different types of textile on the dolls she examined and this led to detailed discussion on the methods of manufacture of different fabrics, the use of wool, linen and cotton yarn and speculation on the source of materials and the trade and commerce in Wales during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The dolls often carried items depicting an occupation, nine dolls had knitting, seven had a baby tucked into a shawl others carried baskets which contained wool, cloth and a back basket full of seaweed. The details were often executed with great skill and the dolls have yielded up a wealth of information. They are now housed back in their original collections, but we were fortunate to see the St Fagan dolls which the Textile Conservator Kim Thusing had retrieved from the Museum Stores. Each doll carefully padded out and nestling in acid free tissue in their individual boxes. It was a fascinating insight into the Project on the Evolution of the National Costume of Wales.

In the afternoon there was a change to the advertised programme, because due to ill health Michelle Griffiths was unable to talk about her collection of Japanese clothing and textiles. So we held a **Show and Tell** session.

We examined a *shibori* jacket that Gaye Evans had purchased from Michelle's studio in The Model House, while attending an Indigo Dying course and Eirlys Davies showed her padded and quilted embroidery work on Japanese material.

Caroline Vincent had chosen to bring a splendid suit belonging to William D F Vincent, the great grandfather of her husband Geoff. The formal black dress suit consisted of a tail coat and knee length britches, made and worn to formal functions by Mr Vincent who was a Master Tailor. He was the editor of the *Tailor and Cutter Magazine* and had developed his own cutting system, details of which Caroline knew he had published, but sadly the family no longer had a copy. He examined and signed off the work of trainee tailors and his signature can be seen on the Apprentice Certificate which is displayed on the wall of the Tailor's Shop in the grounds of the Museum at St Fagans. The suit generated considerable interest both for its close local and personal provenance and how it reflected the style of dress worn today by the County Sheriff and Court Officials.

Jill Salen had selected special pieces from her teaching collection to show us. She described how in 2011 she had been contacted by Michael Freeman, Curator at the Ceredigion Museum, asking if she would like to look at and select pieces from the *Margaret Evans Costume Collection* stored in Aberystwyth. Mrs Evans had been an avid collector and had amassed an extensive range of items illustrating changing fashions from 1880's to the 1980's, the Museum could not store all the garments and wanted to make them available for teaching design and fashion and for display in NT properties and Museums in Wales.

Jill spoke of her amazement when she saw the extent and quality of the collection and described how she had selected 70 items, choosing them for their interesting cut and construction as well as their beauty. It was obviously a difficult task and she had to leave lovely things behind, but the collection is proving invaluable in teaching her students at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

Angharad Gamble had also picked out pieces that she uses to inform and inspire her work as a costume designer and maker. We were seriously running out of time and so did not do justice to her collection, I would really like to

hear her talk at greater length about her work if she could fit us in to her increasingly busy schedule. Last but not least Ann Fowler showed us the purchases she had carried back from her trip to Morocco, mineral and henna make-up and brightly striped woven scarves. She challenged us to identify the yarn from which they were made, after some consideration we decided that the shiny reflective fibres came from cactus or agave plants.

**15 November 2014 Today we celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of Cymdeithas Gwisgoedd a Thecstilau Cymru , the Costume and Textile Society of Wales**

We have had so many wonderful and inspiring speakers. Offered workshops



and visited collections and exhibitions together and we felt we should mark the occasion with a special birthday cake. Specially commissioned by Jill Salen, the edible sewing basket and almost too good to cut, it was much admired, photographed and enjoyed by us all at the end of the afternoon.

**Bettina Reeves *Textile Art Instillations for the Abergavenny Food Festival – The Journey***

Bettina is a Senior Lecturer in Theatre Design at the Royal Welsh Collage of Music and Drama, she is also an artist in residence and workshop leader for textile art projects, with a special interest in the creation and use of puppets.

When the 1st Food Festival was held in Abergavenny in 1999, Bettina was approached to decorate the Market Hall. Working alone she made a number of Corn Dollies which proved to be a success and she has continued every year,

with a band of helpers, to create large scale, food-themed art installations suspended from the roof of the Market Hall.

Working at the Arts Alive Wales studio in Crickhowell, Bettina has inspired a team of 60 volunteers to work upon a new theme she devises each year. They are a mixed group professional and amateur artists and craftspeople and some people who just want to be involved and they have grown in numbers, skill and



ambition each year. After the Collage term ends and during her 'holiday' Bettina works on ideas for the next instillation, drawing and painting pictures to inspire her team, who work tirelessly for 3 to 4 weeks before the Festival begins in September.

Silk painted banners hung from the glazed ceiling in the early years, replaced by giant vegetables made of white fabric, dyed and painted and as the team learned new skills the

projects became more ambitious. In 2005 eight foot wide painted plates appeared covered with a full Welsh Breakfast complete with bone handled knives and forks; the following year the plates were laden with fresh fish. 'Angelic Chefs' was a witty celebration of famous chefs both national and local. Bettina is inspired by the rural environment around Abergavenny so 'Bees and Flowers' were the theme in 2010 and 'Poultry' in 2008. Cedric the cockerel and his chicks marched above the Hall, their bodies covered in strips of dyed material and rucked netting, their wire legs tightly bound with orange plastic.

The 'Sheep' in 2009 were sculpted from card and chicken wire and padded with fleece made of hundreds of knotted strips of cream fabric, one enthusiastic craftswoman learnt to crochet so she could make the lambs their coats. Attention to detail was impressive and I can see why the volunteers returned every August, first to crumple piles of newspaper as filling for the

sculptures and then to paint, dye, weave, knot and stitch the materials to create models to delight visitors, locals and stallholders for the next twelve months.

Bettina showed us some of her watercolour paintings that had inspired the 'Leaping Hares and Gamebirds' hung in 2012, they were beautiful. To raise

money for the project and to help with the cost of materials, some of her artwork had been auctioned and several of the sculptures have also been sold on E bay to collectors across the UK.



The most recent instillation in 2014 entitled 'Pigs and Garlands' posed greater challenges to the ingenuity of the team, but once these giant padded porcine figures were hung up festooned with strings of bunting they looked spectacular. We were delighted with the 'Leaping Hares and Game Birds' when we visited the Market hall last year and will be returning to see the Flying Pigs in 2015.

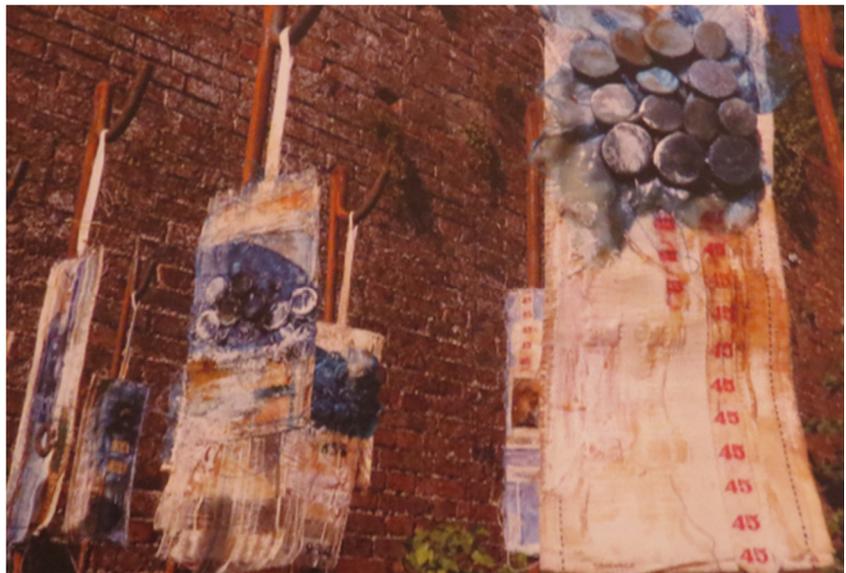
Bettina gave us such a lovely talk and we could only admire her artistic vision, the skill and hard work that had gone into the execution of those instillations.

### ***Lisa Porch Miss Willmott: A memoir – textile instillation at the National Botanic Garden of Wales***

Lisa was brought up in a family of makers, was taught to knit and sew as a child and believes that a love of textiles is an integral part of all our lives. Having gained a Masters in Contemporary Craft at Hereford she married and had a family , but continues to lecture at Coleg Morgannwg and Coleg Y Cymoedd and creates her textile art work in her studio at home. Lisa is a fine artist who produces detailed sketchbooks to inspire her work, which combines dye, paint, machine and hand stitch and print, in the past she found this to be a cathartic

activity in trying to record a tragic family event and to assist in the grieving process.

Joining the **Fibre Arts Wales** gave her the chance to create work to a schedule and to interact with the other members of the group, which was stimulating and opened new avenues for her work. In 2009 at 'Warp and Weft', a conference held in West Wales, Lisa was approached by a representative of the National Botanic Gardens of Wales who wanted textile installations to be displayed in their gardens. A site visit was arranged in the depth of winter in the first few days of 2010. The ground was water logged, the plants looked bedraggled with few flowers to be seen but, there were lots of labels and they made a starting point for the project.



The Botanic Gardens lie within the grounds of an older estate, a collection of Mediterranean Plants grow in the Domed Greenhouse and outside in the double walled garden plants from around the world are arranged in genetic families. Lisa decided to examine the life of Miss Willmott, an Edwardian horticulturalist and recipient of the RHS's 1<sup>st</sup> Victoria Medal of Honour in 1897. She spent her considerable fortune creating a sumptuous garden at Warley Place in Essex, funded plant hunting expeditions to China and the Middle East and had many plants named for her and cultivated new strains of scabious, anemone and sweet peas. She had the habit of scattering seeds of *Eryngium giganteum* around gardens that she visited so when they later appeared growing amongst the formal planting they became known as 'Miss Willmott's Ghost'. She died penniless in 1934, having spent most of her money on her garden.

This story inspired Lisa to design "Miss Willmott: A Memoir", a work that would pay respect to her memory. She collected seed packets, pictures and text, made sketchbooks to illustrate the flowers that Miss Willmott loved and

found quotations recording her obsession - '*my plants and my gardens come before anything in life for me*'. Then using curtain 'Rufflette' to make 60 'labels' she covered them with acetate prints, machine embroidered text distressed them with paint and dyes and finally painted them with resin to protect the labels from the elements.

Metal stakes, sponsored by Artworks of Abergavenny were hammered into a rectangular earth plot, excavated with difficulty by Lisa's husband from the grass turf. The labels were tied on with cotton tape and left to move with the wind to suggest past and future, memorial and resurrection.

Throughout the autumn and winter Miss Willmott's Memoire resisted the wind and rain, examined and pondered on by visitors and when it was finally dismantled only one label had vanished, the rest lay on the ground or clung to



their stakes. Those labels that were retrieved were handed around for us to examine as Lisa talked about her project. We missed seeing the art at the Botanic gardens, but it was interesting to be guided along the creative path that Lisa had taken and we will have another chance to see her textile work at a

new exhibition in 2015 at Craft in the Bay.

### **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Student Award**

The award was given to Kate Barlow, originally from Rhosemor, near Mold. She worked for nearly 8 years as a maker for the Welsh National Opera, but decided retrain to follow her passion for Needlework. She has had to leave her home in Cardiff for lodgings with a family in East Molesey to become a student on the Future Tutors Diploma at the Royal School of Needlework. The course

will give an over view of technical and embroidery skills and a knowledge of teaching theory and practise. Kate has completed modules in Canvas work, Stumpwork, Blackwork, Quilting, Beading, advanced Goldwork and advanced Silk Shading, gaining merit and distinction grades for her projects. She has worked in a quiltind shop, as a class assistant and made accessories for Rachel Burgess Bridal Boutique in Penarth, but funding is always uncertain so this bursary will help towards her expenses. We wish Kate Barlow every success in her venture and look forward to hearing of her progress in the future.

Gaye Evans (Secretary and Editor)