

EAST SURREY GUILD CREATIVE FIBRES

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2011



Acting Chairman Gill Blackmore
Secretary Betty Newman
Treasurer Janice Russell

RECENT MEETINGS



Jan Blight, “An Introduction to Hand-Painted Fibre” – Saturday 16th April

Judging by the colourful display of yarns and fibres on the table at the end of the workshop I think everyone went home happy after a very successful day.

Jan had made up seven stock dyes for us. The colours were red, magenta, orange, yellow, violet, blue and turquoise, which we then diluted and applied in different ways to our skeins or tops. It was very difficult to get our skeins the same colour as the dyes would blend making new colours. Jan advised us to leave a little gap between the colours. The skeins were placed in cling film and rested for 30 minutes after which a fixative was applied and the skeins were placed in a steamer or microwave. It was very frustrating having to wait for them to cool down before being removed from the cling film. They were then rinsed before seeing what we had achieved.

While these were drying on the ainer outside Jan showed us how to dye wound balls of yarn by dipping or by injecting different dyes and how to make false fair-isle yarn for knitting socks.

Most of us had brought natural white yarns but Kate had brought some grey skeins and I think they were the most beautiful after dyeing.

I am hoping to do some more of this type of dyeing this summer.

Betty



Chris Greenwood and Fran Melvin, “Fabric Figurines workshop” – Saturday 21st May

I'm sure I'm not alone in saying how very much I enjoyed this workshop. It is not always possible to finish a project in a day, but this one ticked all the boxes, and I saw only happy smiles when we left with our completed figurines. On arriving home there was quite a bit of 'tweaking' to do because transporting a fairly soft figurine is bound to end in some grief! (mine had her skirts squashed and she lost her hair).

However -

The day began with seeing all surfaces - floor, tables etc covered with tarpaulins and plastic sheeting to protect them from the lovely messy textile hardener. We were advised to remove watches and rings and to wear an apron – believe me, this is a very good idea!

We were all given a wire frame, foil, verbal instructions and lots of help covering the frames with strips of foil, making sure we made ample bosoms and really big enough bottoms (no wobbly bottoms please!) which we attached to the frame with masking tape.

From our old T shirts we then cut 8 squares, approx 7”, 4 of which were left whole and the remaining 4 were each cut into 4 strips. Then we painted the provided plinth with the hardener, adding our names to our plinth and leaving them to dry a little.

We covered the arms, legs and torso with the fabric strips soaked (but not dripping) in the hardener and finally the head and neck. Help was needed attaching the figure to the plinth with the long soaked strips after which the arms and legs were arranged into pleasing positions.

After a break for lunch we soaked our 4 whole squares and began the process of draping the skirt on the seated figure, adding a bodice and hair to suit our individual inclinations.

Some added flowers where they thought appropriate and even some soaked dishcloths were used for added fabric interest – a hat was also added.

We all ended up with very strikingly different figurines even though the basic idea was universal.

A really lovely workshop.

Eve



Our Guild's 20th Anniversary Celebrations

Visit to Parham House on Wednesday 27th June

The weather was kind for our group visit to Parham House and over 20 of us, including family and friends, enjoyed the day.

Our guide around the house was very knowledgeable and interesting, taking us on a tour that started in the hall and finished in the Long Gallery. Parham is apparently pronounced with a short 'a' as in 'cat', not a long 'a' in 'farm'.

Only three families have owned Parham House since 1577, the Pearson family having bought it in a bad state of disrepair in the 1920's, and slowly restored it. In the Great Hall we saw a Tudor fireplace which was only uncovered after three additional fireplaces had been removed. I was intrigued by a portrait of Queen Anne of Denmark, originally thought to be of Elizabeth I, as she is probably wearing one of the 2,000 dresses left by Elizabeth after her death. It has silk worms all over the sleeves, a reference to the attempt to introduce the production of silk into England at that time. The large south facing windows gave us plenty of light to study the paintings and restored wooden panelling.

Another portrait depicted Prince Henry Frederick, who was strongly Protestant, who if he had not died would have been king instead of Charles I. He had his own embroiderer, who presumably worked the richly embroidered coverings over his armour, and the horse, featuring an anchor (representing stability) and the rising sun (the Prince). The peculiarity of the picture is that the background was covered up after the prince's death, as it depicts him leading 'Winged Opportunity', or Father Time, by the forelock, presumed to be representing his father, with whom he had many disagreements.

In the next room, which is seventeenth century, we saw an unusual portrait of Charles I as a young man, dressed very casually for his rank. The story behind this attire is that at one time he was betrothed to the Infanta of Spain, and wished to meet her. So he set off to the Spanish Court with only the Duke of Buckingham accompanying him, disguised as Mr Smith and Mr Jones. When this was discovered on his arrival, there was a terrible furore. Philip of Spain was appalled at the informality and refused to allow him to meet his daughter, the Infanta. So Charles climbed over a wall to see her, whereupon she screamed and ran away. Needless to say the marriage never took place, and instead he married the French princess, Henrietta Maria.

Other portraits showed beautiful velvet dresses and lace collars. In one, a leather thong around the wrist held a large ring on the lady's finger. This apparently indicated status, in that the ring was too big, therefore probably inherited, therefore the family was 'old money' instead of 'new'.

Around the house are many examples of fine needlework, because Mrs Pearson collected it, and was herself a skilled needlewoman. In the saloon we saw an 18th century chair and a 20th century copy of it alongside, which had been worked by her.

Interestingly the old natural dyes had kept their colour better than the modern aniline dyes.

Upstairs we saw a wonderful old four poster bed with Florentine patterned hangings in Hungarian point stitch, sometimes called the bargello pattern. The outer hangings are from about 1620, stitched with wool on linen, whilst the bed covers are silk on satin, possibly from the 1580's, and may have been commissioned by the French queen, Marie de Medici. The beautifully embroidered cream covers are covered with a fine net mesh to protect them. The bed itself is heavily restored, but the end bed posts may have come from the court of Henry VIII.

In the same room, a cushion for a prayer book was embroidered by a young girl in Tudor times, with 30 stitches to the inch. It portrays ladies finding Moses in the bulrushes- the ladies with double raised eyebrows to indicate their amazement. Surrounding them are large scale butterflies, grasshopper, fish and birds. This is a charming piece of work, which we were able to look at through a magnifying glass. A similarly charming piece of embroidery is in the next room, of Adam and Eve with lots of animals; also an early beadwork picture of animals from the time of James I. However, the main item in this room that our guide told us about was a portrait of Sir Ralph and Lady Asshton of Middleton, in which Sir Ralph is shown with his foot firmly upon the bottom of his wife's dress and holding onto her hair. Apparently she married at aged fourteen, and was very unhappy, so ran away. She had to return and subsequently this portrait was commissioned. Later her husband died and she remarried, one hopes more happily.

As we continued through the house, we saw a picture of Charles I grandly dressed and decorated with tassels and lace; some remarkable blue and gold English Florentine work from the time of Charles II; a portrait of Omiah, the South Sea Islander brought to the UK by Joseph Banks; and a portrait of Henry VIII copied from one by Holbein, dressed in richly decorated garments.

Our final stop was in the Long Gallery, at the top of the house, which was without a ceiling when the house was purchased in the 1920's. The Pearsons replaced the ceiling with one designed by Oliver Messel, featuring intertwining leaves and branches. In a small room off the gallery is a fascinating wax effigy of a baby in a cradle, which is very rare. The cradle is hung about with embroidery, large tassels and over the child is a quilted satin coverlet. Such items were carried in a funeral procession in Victorian times, or were made to comfort the bereaved mother.

Alongside is a whole wall of Stewart needlework and stumpwork pictures, from about 1635, mostly of religious themes, such as The Judgement of Solomon, Cain and Abel, and Susannah and the Elders. I was particularly interested in a depiction of the Five Senses, having recently visited Paris and seen the 'Lady and the Unicorn' tapestries on the same theme. This little English version showed the lady with a mandolin for sound, accompanied by a stag; holding a mirror for sight, with a griffin; flowers for the sense of smell, with a greyhound alongside; spinning for touch, showing what looked like a web, plus a bird on the lady's hand; and finally fruit for taste, with the lady, rather fat, and a small monkey, eating lots of fruit. Altogether, I thought it a rather engaging and amusing picture.

The Pearsons also seemed to be fond of lions, as they are found in many forms throughout the house. One I particularly enjoyed was in a case in the gallery: a small lion and what may have been a cat with long whiskers, made entirely of small shells. Finally in another glass case is a long shawl or 'rebozo' from Mexico, dated to about 1750, a unique, richly embroidered version of an apparently ubiquitous item of apparel worn by all classes at the time. It is covered with tiny vignettes of people, fountains, soldiers on horseback, travellers in coaches, in boats, people on foot, in gardens, playing, sitting, talking. They are all part of a scene of the population enjoying themselves on high days and holidays. Four geometric bands run horizontally the length of the shawl, dividing the embroidered panels, and at each end are striped zigzag fringes.

The colourful shawl was a suitable end to a most enjoyable tour of the house. We all then retired to eat lunch, some in the cafe, and some in the grounds. After lunch many of us wandered in the gardens and mooched in the garden shop. Then after tea and cake we made our way home, having had an excellent day out. I am sure we would all like to give many thanks to Gill for organising it.

Jennifer

FUTURE MEETINGS

Saturday 20th August - Our guild's 20th Anniversary Meeting

This meeting will be a general meeting and will include a light lunch.

Saturday 17th September - "Spindling with Spindlers2" Carol and Pete Leonard

There are still places on this tutored workshop. Please contact Janice treasurer@creativefibres.org to book your place.

Saturday 15th October - Open Day

As part of Mole Valley Arts Alive this meeting is open to members of the public to visit and 'have a go'. More details later.

FOR YOUR DIARIES

20th May - 22nd October - Tommy Nutter: the rebel on the row - London, The Fashion and Textiles Museum, 83, Bermondsey Street, London SE1 3XF

For more information phone 020 7407 8664 or visit www.ftmlondon.org

7th July - 23rd October - Woven Threads - London, Stables Gallery, Orleans House Gallery, Twickenham TW1 3DJ

For more information visit www.britishtapestrygroup.co.uk

22nd - 28th September - Origin - London, Old Spitalfields Market, Brushfield Street, London E1 6EW

Crafts Council Annual Exhibition Open 11am – 7pm daily

For more information phone 020 7739 5561 or visit www.originuk.org

If you have any comments, tips or interesting items for future newsletters please send them to treasurer@creativefibres.org

Janice Russell