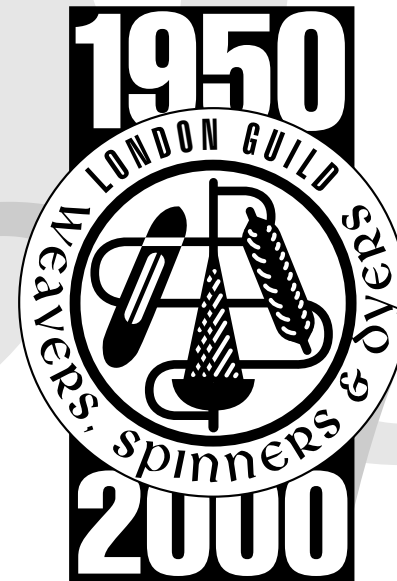


LONDON GUILD OF
WEAVERS, SPINNERS & DYERS

A HISTORY OF THE GUILD BY
AILEEN KENNEDY AND MARY SMITH



ANCIENT Craft RETURNS TO W.I.

WEAVERS ARE TO FORM A GUILD

"Evening News" Reporter

THE old craft of cloth weaving might be one of the last home industries you would think of finding within a few hundred yards of Oxford-circus.

But in a flat near the B.B.C. in Portland-place Mrs. Gwendoline Shaw spends most of her spare time working a full-size hand and foot loom which fills the whole of a window space overlooking the heart of the West End.

Mrs. Shaw, a widow, is helping in the formation of a guild of weavers, spinners and dyers which it is hoped to establish this week to serve London and the surrounding counties for the benefit of people engaged in the crafts.

At a meeting at the International Broadcasting Club, below her flat, about 70 experts will exhibit examples of their work, show how they weave, and hear an address on the activities of the Dorset Guild on Saturday.

Mrs. Shaw, who was engaged in clerical work in the diplomatic service before she became secretary of the International Broadcasting Corporation, said that the initial cost of a loom was about £50.

*Published by the London Guild of Weavers Spinners and Dyers
Designed and produced by Brenda Gibson*

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The 50th anniversary: a day to remember. Pictures speak louder than words.



INTRODUCTION

As part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the London Guild of Weavers Spinners and Dyers, we are publishing this booklet of the history of the Guild from its formation in 1950 to the present day. The material is largely drawn from a series of articles that appeared in Warp & Weft from 1988 to 1990, written by Aileen Kennedy. Mary Smith has written a survey of the last decade to bring the account fully up to date. I have also been able to draw on photographs and other memorabilia which members provided for the exhibition at our 50th anniversary meeting to illustrate the text.

I hope long-standing members will enjoy re-reading Aileen's original Warp & Weft articles, and to have this booklet as a reminder of their Guild over the years. Newer members will undoubtedly be fascinated by this historic account, and to learn of the great devotion to the Guild shown by Gwen Shaw.

Long may we thrive and prosper.

Brenda Gibson

because of 'building problems'. Even with the later date and our items ready and submitted, the exhibition space was still a building site - what to do? Warp and Weft no.181 March 1996 tells it graphically. For a week twenty gallant volunteers cleared rubbish, cleaned the floor, struggled with display plinths and lack of lighting AND it was freezing. The exhibition was in the undercroft, except where the building was still open to the elements and unfinished with bales of thatch, building materials, rubble and dust. So in this very rough and unready site Melanie and troops set about hanging a superb exhibition. Once again the Worshipful Company of Weavers gave a grant towards expenses. The really sad note was that Sam Wannamaker had died and so could not see his wonderful Globe Theatre nearly finished. We would have loved him to have been with us to declare 'Textiles 95' open. It was a superb exhibition, again we had a popular sales area, we survived the cold and we enjoyed ourselves.

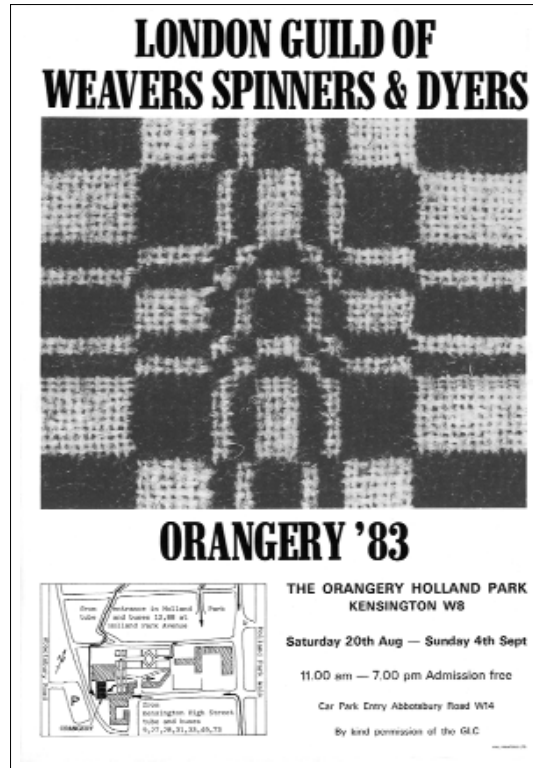
We may have difficulties with finding affordable venues for meetings and for holding workshops but we still have two really valuable assets. One is our quarterly newsletter, Warp and Weft, listing our meetings, reporting on activities and generally keeping us in touch, now benefiting from computer skills.

The other asset is our library, with so many books out of print and with public library funds much reduced, its value to us increases all the time. There is another asset not yet mentioned, this is the core of committee members who give time and energy to see that we survive. They have our grateful thanks as the London Guild of Weavers reaches FIFTY YEARS.

Mary Smith 2000

sub committee set about searching and in 1991 suggested the Globe Museum, Bear Gardens, Bankside. The setting was to be in the museum's replica of an Elizabethan Theatre, a daunting task to transform a gaunt old auditorium into a feast of colourful textiles but this is what Melanie Venes and her tireless crew did. We were concerned as always with financing such a project and were very grateful to the Worshipful Company of Weavers for a grant of £250 to help with our costs. Everybody was encouraged to take part and submit work and they did, so that we had some two hundred entries. Sam Wannamaker wandered in from his nearby office where he worked on his Globe Theatre project and was amazed at the transformation, so he was promptly invited to our private view. The exhibition was a great success.

1993 found us having a second exhibition at the Shakespeare Globe Museum but this time had two rooms on the ground floor instead of the 'Elizabethan' theatre. There was much less space but it was important to continue exhibiting and demonstrating techniques. We had the use of a large room upstairs which we were able to use as a sales and information area. Once again the Worshipful Company of Weavers gave us a grant towards our expenses. The exhibition was



opened by Sam Wannamaker, still working away on his Globe Theatre project. He always encouraged us and made us feel really welcome at the museum.

Two years later in 1995 we were again planning a public exhibition. The venue this time was to be in a temporary exhibition area of the Shakespeare Globe Theatre itself, overlooking the river. However between the original plan and finally setting the exhibition there were many changes. First 'difficulty' meant postponing the exhibition from June to November

A history of the London Guild, 1950 onwards

BEGINNINGS

"A Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers for London and the Home Counties is now in being. Held in February, the preliminary meeting surprised everyone by its large attendance. There were too many to be accommodated at 35, Portland Place, W.1. and the overflow had to listen through open doors from adjacent rooms to the talk given by Miss Hester Viney, honorary secretary of the Dorset Guild, who had with her several members of that Guild. Men and women, beginners and advanced workers, all were keen in their determination to see the London and Home Counties Guild well and truly launched."

Such was the opening paragraph of an article which appeared in an edition of 'Country Living' in 1950. Announcements of the forthcoming meeting had appeared in the 'Evening News', 'Country Living', the 'News Chronicle' and the

'Sunday Times'. Dorothy Wilkinson of the London School of Weaving also gave it much publicity. It was thanks to Mrs Gwen Shaw that this meeting was held. She was a keen pupil at the London School of Weaving and as Company Secretary of the International Broadcasting Club was able to use its headquarters at 35, Portland Place. Here also she had set up her Douglas Andrews loom which she proudly showed off to all visitors. A photograph of Gwen Shaw at her loom appeared in the 'Evening News' and from then on she was the recipient of many, many letters from interested people and organisations.

Professor Harold Nason of the Canadian Ministry of Education, here to study British educational methods, chaired the meeting at which there were 139 weavers. Hester Viney spoke of the Dorset Guild which had been founded in October 1947, of its work, its emphasis on exhibitions, meetings, teaching of children and courses for teachers. She explained that with its growth of membership and the widening of its scope, the Guild was finding it difficult to give a full service to members living at a distance. It had been

suggested that independent Guilds should be formed and this had resulted in the formation of the Somerset Guild, followed by Devon, Kent and other counties.

At the end of this meeting the following resolution was passed by unanimous vote 'That this meeting decide to found a Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers to

“That this meeting decide to found a Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers to serve London and the surrounding counties in the interest of craftsmen and women engaged in these three crafts.”

serve London and the surrounding counties in the interest of craftsmen and women engaged in these three crafts.' Mrs Shaw was asked to act as local correspondent for the Guild until its formation.

At the next meeting held in March at the Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, there was an even larger attendance of 210. Mrs Fisher who had greatly assisted Gwen Shaw with setting up the Guild, took the Chair. At this meeting a constitution was

formed, officers elected and the annual subscription settled at 5/-. With the help of a solicitor the meeting went through each clause of the constitution which was modelled on that of the Dorset Guild. Mr Wingfield Digby, Keeper of Textiles at the Victoria & Albert Museum was elected as President with Mr Goodale (later to become Sir Ernest Goodale) as Vice-President. One of our present day Vice-Presidents, Mrs Dorothy Humphry, and her husband Edwin Humphry had also helped Mrs Fisher and Gwen Shaw with the formation of the Guild and Mrs Humphry was one of the first Executive Committee members. Another of our Vice-Presidents, Miss Raie Barnett was also involved with the Guild from the outset as the Honorary Registrar, an office which she held until 1984.

One month later it was agreed to hold 'instructive' meetings regularly and in May the very first of such meetings was entitled 'Fleece to Yarn via Spinning', the speaker Miss Ella McLeod. During these first few months of the Guild's life, Gwen Shaw continued to receive a staggering amount of correspondence and the membership rose to 250. Much of the correspondence asked for help with finding an outlet for weaving. In fact, Gwen Shaw had been approached by several firms in England and the U.S.A. (the latter

and Stitching Shows at Alexander Palace, with weaving and spinning demonstrations. These public events can be very useful, making us known to a wider audience and encouraging new members



Most years there have been visits either to the National Exhibition or some other place of interest. We went to the silk mill at Braintree (1994), Kew Gardens to see plants which give dyes or fibres (1995) and the Red House, Bexley Heath (1996) in William Morris' centenary year.

Each year we have continued with the competition for the Gwen Shaw Cup. It taxes the ingenuity of the committee to set themes or subjects with wide appeal and looking back over ten years there has been no repetition - Fabric to Wear (1985), Small is Beautiful (1988), London (1990) Dye it Yourself (1993), In the Spirit of William Morris (1996), Inspired by Bonnard (1998) are just some of the recent themes. In 1987 we had our first Lore Youngmark

memorial competition for a woven rug and in 1992 the first spinning competition for the Kennedy Cup. We try to encourage all aspects all levels and interests.

Exhibitions have been real



Demonstrating hand spindle spinning at the Globe Theatre Exhibition

highlights for the Guild. Our last public exhibition had been in 1983 at the Orangery in Holland Park. As with venues for meetings, it has been even more difficult and more expensive to find suitable places. A

A survey of recent happenings

Aileen Kennedy's "A History of the London Guild 1950 onwards" appeared in parts in Warp and Weft. It took events to 1984 when our meeting place changed from Caxton Hall to Baden Powell House.

Now we are fifty, mention must be made of the many memorable events which have taken place since then. This is a survey of recent happenings rather than a history.

Moving is certainly memorable, especially for those "doing" the move, but also for members negotiating stairs, corridors and lifts to find the lecture hall for the first time. Baden Powell House had its limitations but enabled us to meet and to exist. Then we had to move again, to St. Stephen's House. Finding an affordable meeting place is a big problem, apart from the expense, we need a room that can be blacked out for slide projection, a kitchen to make

refreshments and absolutely vital is a cupboard storage space for our library,

A regular event is taking part in the National Association Exhibitions of work. These take place every two years at different venues, depending which Guild is hosting the event. We are allocated a certain number of exhibits to be considered for selection and we always submit our full number. Our selection takes place at one of our regular meetings, by members votes, often followed with comments by an invited speaker. Our members choice is pretty sound and usually most of our submissions are selected.

From time to time we are invited to demonstrate weaving or more often spinning at some particular event or function. In 1984 a group went to the British Craft Show in Syon Park. 1985 found a group spinning at the London Zoo. 1987 was Shakespeare's London Fair to mark the inauguration of the Globe Project at Bankside. Here some members were dressed in costume to 'look the part' while the rest of us looked after leaflets, spinning wheels and information. More recently the Guild organised a splendid display at two Knitting

through an acquaintance at the American Embassy) who wished to place orders for suit lengths and genuine handwoven materials. Members of the Guild were sent a questionnaire asking if they were interested in a market for selling and were invited to send small samples of cloth, but strangely the response was small. From the records it is not possible to discover whether Guild members did receive such orders.

Other letters requested the Guild to undertake projects, such as the bulk buying of yarn, a craftsman to go round mending looms and to help the disabled. A craft shop in the West End was also suggested, but with funds after the first month of only £50. such ambitious ideas had no chance of getting off the ground. However, such was the enthusiasm of Gwen Shaw that one learns from her letters of her hopes for the Guild's future, including the bulk buying of yarn and in particular that one day there would be sufficient funds to employ someone to visit and help the disabled. Another financial worry for the Guild in those early days, and one which is still with us, was the cost of hiring a room for meetings. Rents were in the range of six guineas upwards which the Guild simply could not afford. Eventually, premises were hired through the L.C.C. at Addington Street School, near Waterloo station and remained the

Guild's meeting place for three years. The use of the school was obtained by Mrs Fisher through her contact with the L.C.C.. With weaving being taught in its special schools and centres for the disabled and handicapped, the L.C.C. was particularly interested in a Guild in London.

The following year, 1951, the Guild installed a loom in the textile department of Harrods for three months, when lengths of cloth were exhibited and sold. Mr Edwin Humphry managed this exhibition and an account of this important event is in the next chapter.

Aileen Kennedy March 1988

1951 Harrods exhibition

It is difficult to establish how the Guild came to receive an invitation to hold an exhibition at Harrods. There are no letters to or from Harrods in the Guild files so one can only assume that these remained with Mr Edwin Humphry, organiser and manager of the exhibition. The only reference to be found is in one of Gwen Shaw's letters in which she mentions that she made contact with Harrods as one of its shareholders.

The exhibition was held for three months during the Festival of Britain, 1951. Only materials suitable for sale in the Woollen Dress Material department were acceptable i.e. the display would not include other handwoven articles such as scarves, rugs, curtains etc. The following suggestions from Harrods were given as guidance: tweeds to weigh 11-12 ozs. per yard; width of materials 28ins.; lengths of 7 1/2 yards for ladies suits and coats and 4 1/2 yards for men's jackets in typical British colours and patterns, checks preferred to stripes; woollen material of lighter character and tweed weave would be acceptable, also silk; suggested average price to weaver 20/-, maximum 40/-. Lengths were

accepted on a sale or return basis, commission 5% on sales.

In view of the importance of the exhibition, other Guilds and weaving organisations from all parts of the British Isles were invited to join the event. Contact was made with weavers living as far afield as the Shetland Isles and the Isle of Harris.

The Guild held an informal exhibition of lengths and samples in October 1950 at which an advisory panel judged the work and helped members with advice on pricing. The reports of the judges make interesting reading. Mary Kirby strongly criticised the finish of the fabrics, too much pressing flattened the cloth, with not enough shrinking and felting. She also felt that the most disappointing feature of the display was the lack of complete individuality of work, with very poor colour sense. Hilary Bourne credited the majority of lengths as being well woven, but she also criticised the finishing. She thought it a creditable showing and with care in the choice of design and finishing the display should be a credit to the Guild. Elsie Davenport's report criticised the poor handle of the majority of pieces which, she said, emphasised

Guild. It was interesting to read in the minutes of a Committee meeting held in 1981 that Officers of the Guild were concerned about the volume of paper and correspondence accumulating in their homes. It was agreed that all papers before 1970 should be destroyed, official minutes only being retained. As Guild Secretary at that time, I duly turned out the back papers and as one does at such times, browsed through them. I realised that the early correspondence was far too interesting to destroy and would be invaluable one day should anyone write the Guild's history. Little did I know then that this would be me and that I would derive such enjoyment from going through the files and particularly through the back copies of Warp & Weft. The latter hold a wealth of technical information and perhaps someone could be persuaded to document this so that the bound copies held in the library could become useful reference material for members.

Aileen Kennedy June 1990



Sheep to shoulder in the 'Pebble Mill at One' programme

within the Guild during those last years at Caxton Hall. Membership was just over 300 and various additions were made to the programme of meetings. Occasional Saturday morning sessions, prior to the afternoon meetings, were held at which practical demonstrations and help were given. Hospitality in the homes of members, giving other members, particularly new ones, an opportunity to get to know one another were held about four times a year. Sometimes a special subject would be chosen, otherwise it was simply an opportunity for the exchange of ideas. Some meetings were held in

an evening during the week, others on a Saturday and for a few years established themselves as an important and valuable part of the Guild's programme. A problem corner was also held at the Saturday afternoon meetings. A list of the special interests and knowledge of Committee members was compiled so that whoever was manning the problem corner could direct a query to the right quarter.

With the Guild's move from Caxton Hall to Baden Powell House in 1984 I feel that events since then are too recent to be called 'History' so this is the final episode of the History of the

that the Guild had a definite duty to perform in setting and maintaining standards.

The materials were then shown to the Senior Buyer from Harrods. His comments, likewise, were not too favourable - too many conventional designs which could be made on a power loom and bought at any store; colours were dull and would not appeal to

“ For each day of the three months a weaver worked on the loom with an 'expert' to answer questions. A spinning wheel was also in use and vegetable dyes displayed. ”

visitors from abroad; in many cases the wool used was too harsh and coarse. Finishing was criticised yet again. However, in conclusion, his report says that there were a good number of satisfactory pieces and that members were 'on the right track'.

In spite of the criticisms the exhibition went ahead and was proclaimed to be a great success. There were 204 lengths for the opening day and promise of 106 monthly. Looms from well-known suppliers were installed for three

months, in May a loom from the London School of Weaving, in June from Mr Wiltshire of Petts Wood and in July a Douglas Andrew's loom. For each day of the three months a weaver worked on the loom with an 'expert' to answer questions. A spinning wheel was also in use and vegetable dyes displayed. Harrods undertook the selling side of the exhibition, weavers were just there to demonstrate. The Guild instructed its members demonstrating that no mention was to be made that the London Guild had organised the exhibition but that it was sponsored by Harrods for the benefit of weavers all over the British Isles. Fears were entertained that the Press would make use of the name of the Guild (whatever this meant!)

Gwen Shaw did everything possible to publicise the exhibition, informing newspapers, periodicals, also the American Woman's Club, the American Embassy and the Overseas Club to interest foreign tourists. Through her broadcasting work she had met Lady Claud Hamilton who had visited the studios to make a recording for a charity ball. Lord Claud Hamilton was Comptroller to Her Majesty Queen Mary, Mrs Shaw wrote to Lady Hamilton asking her to bring the attention of Her Majesty to the exhibition but it so happened that Harrods had only fifteen minutes notice of

Queen Mary's visit, so no V.I.P.s from the London Guild were present.

Harrods store staff was most interested in what was



going on in its materials department and the Chief Buyer remarked - 'the weavers have quite demoralised the entire staff who pop up to watch the weaving and spinning whenever they can escape from their own departments'.

Sales were slow but satisfactory.

After a few weeks only £120 worth of goods had been sold. With much cloth on hand Harrods suggested that members should refrain from sending in any more for a fortnight. By the end of the exhibition £639 had been taken.

Reporting on the event, Mr Humphry said that the Guild had been rather misled by the optimistic demand from Harrods for such large quantities. The store was rather disappointed with the amount of sales, but as Mr Humphry pointed out such a prestige store thinks only in terms of thousands, rather than hundreds. The benefit to the Guild, he said, was considerable and the benefit to the public obvious.

Aileen Kennedy June 1988

using a special pattern. Several members took part in a trial run to assess who were the fastest spinners and knitters. A team of six was chosen, six being the number stipulated in the rules, and they did successfully beat the record by 8 minutes. A brief slot which appeared in the television news that same evening resulted in a request from the BBC to make a further attempt at record breaking in its 'Pebble Mill at One' programme. With all expenses paid by the BBC, a coach starting at Bromley at 6a.m. went round London picking up spinners with wheels. We were to be filmed at the start around 10.30a.m. so that the finish would fall during the programme at 1p.m.. Once again the Guild achieved fame when it knocked a further 6 minutes off its previous record. This record has since been beaten by other groups on several occasions but it was an exciting time for the team and gave the Guild much publicity with photographs appearing in the daily press and a long article in Farmers Weekly.

Always with an eye on what is going on nationally, the Executive Committee of the Guild, in 1982, was concerned that the Association, although doing an admirable job of keeping in touch with Guilds, was not actively giving Guilds an opportunity to be in touch with one another. Some Guilds had a feeling of isolation,

the only opportunity for meeting other Guilds being at the Annual Council Meeting each year when time is mostly taken up with business affairs. It was to hear the views of others on this subject that our London Committee invited each Guild in the South East to send two representatives to a buffet lunch at Caxton Hall followed by a discussion on various topics concerning the Association. Tim Searcy, the Association's Secretary at that time, also attended. At the end of the day the London Guild was asked to put forward a proposition on regionalisation of Guilds at the next ACM. This was received favourably and led to Umbrella Groups being formed with each member of the General Purposes Committee being responsible for one region, attending various Guild meetings, gathering and passing on information. For some years this umbrella link was kept up but is now no longer practised. It was agreed by all attending the meeting at Caxton Hall that the friendly get-together had been an enjoyable and rewarding occasion. Representatives were invited to talk about their own Guilds, their subscriptions, newsletters, programmes, exhibitions etc. and individually there was much exchange of information, particularly on speakers and tutors for workshops.

Much seemed to be happening

Farewell to Caxton hall

The Guild, as well as being in the public eye at its bi-annual exhibitions held at the Orangery, Holland Park 1979-83, was also putting on displays at the Lambeth Country Show, Brockwell Park each year. Under the organisation of Steve Kennett spinning and weaving demonstrations were given at these two day shows which attract an enormous number of people. Sheep shearing was demonstrated by the National Farmers Union and the Guild was invited to spin the fleece as it came off the sheep. It was all good

Breaking the world record for 'sheep to shoulder'

fun and much enjoyed by those who helped to man the stand. Our attendance at the Show came to an end in 1983. Few members came forward to help that year, but with an exhibition at the Orangery and a demonstration stand at the British Craft Fair, Wembley, perhaps too much demand was made on members' time.

The ultimate publicity for the Guild was in 1981 when it was invited to help the British Wool Marketing Board with a publicity project at the Fabrex Exhibition, Earls Court. We were asked to make an attempt to break the world record in producing a knitted jersey from the fleece,



'Now anyone can make cloth'

During the course of its second year the Guild continued to expand with membership reaching well over 300. Monthly demonstrations and lectures were given by such well known weavers as Hilary Bourne, Elsie Davenport, Mary Kirby, Sheila MacEwan and Ella McLeod. All also served on various Guild Committees.

In June 1950 it was decided to form a library when the sum of £10 was voted for the purchase of books. Mrs Johnson, the Librarian, conducted a postal service, much appreciated by disabled members and those living in isolated areas. The first issue of *Warp & Weft* appeared in 1951, then a mere 16 page publication but enthusiastically received by members. It remained at this size until 1962 but there was one issue when it fell to the dangerous level of just 4 pages!

At this time the Guild gave its support to a joint Guild magazine called the *Quarterly Journal for the Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers*. Ten Guilds supported the launch of the *Journal*, the London Guild subscribing £30 to help its funds. This publication as we know it today is more simply entitled '*The Weavers Journal*'.

In letters to her weaving friends and acquaintances Gwen Shaw wrote that because of the volume of Guild correspondence she had no time for weaving. Little did she know what was in store for her when an article appeared in the *Readers Digest* entitled 'Now Anyone Can Make Cloth'. A Mr Elpherge Nadeau living in Rhode Island had invented a new loom. With no pedals, made of tubular aluminium and portable (it weighed 35 lbs.), it fitted comfortably on a kitchen table. The article states: 'Any resemblance between the new hand loom and most of the looms that have persisted through the centuries is like the similarity between a hippopotamus and a race horse. The old fashioned loom, virtually unchanged since the 18th century, is noisy, clumsy and a lethargic producer of cloth even in the hands of experts. Its pedal system is as intricate as a church organ and few people can play it'. The article goes on to say that the loom will 'weave any kind of material from delicate silks to the heaviest of rug braiding. Even in amateur hands it will turn out tweed, twills, cheviots, herring-bones and other suitings as fast as a yard an hour'. Mr Nadeau said

he was trying to revive weaving in the home and wanted to make his loom as common place as the sewing machine. With his 'formula' for each type of weave, together with his recipe for yarns, almost anyone could turn out superlative cloth. He emphasised that the loom was not an amateur's toy. It was designed to produce cloth of professional quality.

A small inset in the article talked about hand weaving in Britain, mentioning that several types of looms similar to the American

model were on the market. It also said that Guilds of Weavers had started up in many counties and gave the address of the London Guild, Gwen Shaw's office at Portland Place. Mrs Shaw knew nothing about this article until the first batch of 42 letters appeared on her desk one morning. She was totally unprepared for the avalanche of letters which eventually numbered over 1100! To begin with these letters came from all over Great Britain, followed by ones from abroad, Africa, Asia,

Members of the London Guild taking part in the film "Alive and kicking"



more sympathetic to the display of textiles than the Royal Exchange. Holland Park is widely used by the public and the number of visitors to the exhibitions was considerably higher than expected. Many favourable comments were received. As at previous exhibitions, demonstrations of weaving and spinning were given but it was difficult to find sufficient members willing to help with the stewarding and demonstrating.

At the 1981 exhibition the Guild also had use of the small Ice

House nearby in which were displayed the non-selected items and any other work which members wished to offer for sale. This was a successful addition to the exhibition in the Orangery and sold £650 worth of goods, whereas only £241 worth had been sold at "THREAD '77". Both the 1981 and 1983 exhibitions were run at a loss, £341 and £295 respectively and since then no further prestige exhibitions have been held.

Aileen Kennedy March 1990

Thread '77: invitation to the private view



You are invited to the private view of
an Exhibition of Weaving
organised by the London Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers

THREAD'77

at the **ROYAL EXCHANGE** Cornhill EC3
on Monday 27 June at 5.30 pm

selection committee, headed by Marianne Straub, chose 115 exhibits for hanging. The Royal Exchange is a vast area and it was fortunate that several extremely large hangings and tapestries were submitted and selected. With so much spare space to fill it was an ideal opportunity to put on plenty of demonstrations. With the help of the Handweavers Studio and Gallery there were two floor looms, a table loom and a rug loom in constant use. Many members of the Guild brought their own spinning wheels and with tapestry frames and an inkle loom there was much for the public to see.

Being a public thoroughfare there was no charge for the use of the Royal Exchange but even with the grant for the purchase of equipment and the income from submission and hanging fees, it was difficult to foresee how the Guild would come out of this financially. We were, of course, allowed to charge for the catalogue, the responsibility of Steve Kennett. Not only did he sell advertising space to suppliers of spinning and weaving equipment, but successfully persuaded large commercial firms, such as the British Wool Marketing Board, Courtaulds, Thomas Cook and William Glyns Bank to take advertising space, bringing in much needed extra income.

By the time the exhibition took

place we were all aware that Ione Dorrington was a very sick person and sadly she died a few years later. But it was entirely due to her original enthusiasm and under her guidance that the exhibition was ever held, successfully making a profit of £463.

The success of "THREAD '77" led to the Guild's decision to hold prestige exhibitions every alternate year and in 1979, '81 and '83 exhibitions were held at the Orangery, Holland Park. These were not open exhibitions as in 1977, but were purely for the display of work by London members. Strange to say there was a remarkable lack of work submitted for all three exhibitions. In 1979, only 35 members from a total membership of 350 submitted items. There were 80 entries, 60 of which were wall hangings or tapestries, not exactly representative of the work of members. 40 items were selected for hanging and in 1981 only 36 items were selected, the selectors being disappointed not only with the lack of entries but with the quality of a number of submitted items. In 1983 there were so few submissions that the final selection was cancelled and all but one or two pieces of work were hung.

However, in spite of all this, the exhibitions were a credit to the Guild and its organisers. The Orangery is a most attractive setting for an exhibition and far

Australia, America and Europe. Secretaries of Guilds are used to receiving letters of enquiry but on such a scale it must have been quite overwhelming. In fact Gwen Shaw wrote in one of her letters that it was a very worrying and difficult situation.

Letters from Great Britain made more demands on her than the foreign ones, asking so many different questions. Apart from wanting particulars of looms, they wanted to know where tuition was to be found; were private or evening classes better; cost of tuition; cost of yarn; would an English model be a practical proposition and which did she recommend; was it possible for one who knows nothing to make a profitable hobby; is there any delay in delivery of looms; what about directions and patterns. Many of the letters were from men who for health reasons had had to discontinue work and wanted to earn a little more money; from occupational therapy departments of hospitals and from retired people anxious to supplement a very modest pension. All had to be answered and to each was sent literature giving the addresses of the four loom makers, George Maxwell, Douglas Andrew, Mr Wiltshire and the London School of Weaving. No-one in this country had seen this American loom and the inventor was unable to export. After receiving 700 enquiries, it

occurred to Mrs Shaw that it would be a more friendly gesture if she passed on the names and addresses to the loom makers. They in turn, if they so wished, could send details of their

“ Handloom weaving is India's second biggest cottage industry, second only to handspinning. Millions of our people in the villages would benefit greatly from any invention that will improve their skill ”

products. This she did, regularly long lists of addresses. The questions from abroad were very different, being more of a commercial nature and involving community workshops. Could she send samples of work? What is the normal output per man-hours and the ratio of material required for the finished product? Others wanted to know how long it would take to learn and were there any looms with electrical drive.

The Government of India was interested in the purchase of looms. In fact, there were far more letters from India than from any

other country, many offering to act as agents for the import of looms. This is not surprising for as one letter states: 'Handloom weaving is India's second biggest cottage industry, second only to handspinning'. Millions of our people in the villages would benefit greatly from any invention that will improve their skill'.

There are a few tragic stories behind some of the letters. One from a Technical School for disabled soldiers in Poona, men who had lost one or both of their lower limbs. Another from South Africa begins

'Please read this and help an

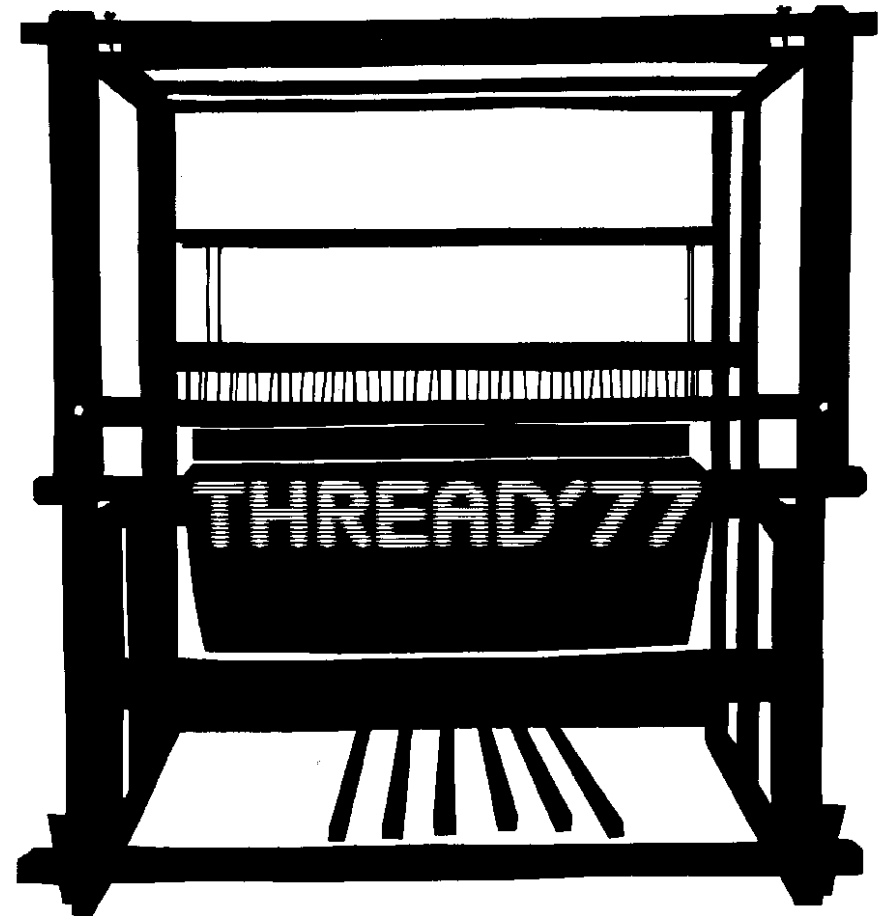
unhappy man who was good all his life to other people - and goes on to explain that once he was a 'somebody' but after years in a concentration camp his is now a 'nobody'. Not all the 1100 letters are in the Guild files, but I have read through some 300 which have been kept. What one wonders was the outcome of this correspondence? Did the loom makers receive orders for looms? How many were satisfactorily installed to give pleasure to the weaver and perhaps augment his income? This, unfortunately, we do not know.

Aileen Kennedy September 1988

A weaving centre and open days

Since my last article in *Warp & Weft*, 'Now Anyone Can Make Cloth', I have discovered in an early edition of *Warp & Weft* that by 1956, five years after the article in 'Readers Digest', the London School of Weaving had despatched over 1,000 looms, more than 100 spinning wheels and much other equipment to Ceylon. Occasional letters concerning the Nadeau loom were still arriving on Gwen Shaw's desk until 1957 and in the two years after the article appeared she had received over 2,000 letters.

During the 1950s the Guild with a membership of over 300 and an average attendance at meetings of 130 had settled down to a programme of regular monthly meetings and an annual exhibition. The latter was originally held in October, but thinking that members were unlikely to weave during the summers months, the Executive Committee changed the exhibition month to May, which remains today. The Guild's meeting place moved to the Mary Sumner Hall, Tufton Street, Westminster in 1954 and this



LONDON & HOME COUNTIES GUILD OF WEAVERS, SPINNERS & DYERS

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

27 JUNE – 8 JULY

10p

programme thus giving it great publicity. It is most likely the latter which accounts for the many overseas visitors who signed the visitors book. It was impossible to know how many people visited the exhibition

during those two weeks as the Royal Exchange is used as a public thoroughfare during the day, locked securely at night.

With good support from Guilds and other weavers over 300 items were submitted from which the

Exhibitions 1977 - 1983

Two years after the 1973 Chelsea Exhibition and Sale organised by the London Guild on behalf of the Association, the Executive Committee was considering another public exhibition. It was Ione Dorrington, a member of the Committee and a well-known embroideress with much experience of organising exhibitions, who suggested that the Guild should hold an Open Exhibition of weaving in London. This, she suggested, should be held in 1977 the year of the 25th anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne. Many interesting and important events were taking place in the City as part of the Festival of the City of London and the venue chosen for the exhibition was the Royal Exchange. From then onwards plans were laid for what was probably one of the most ambitious of Guild functions. It could not have been a better time to stage an exhibition when London was full of visitors. Entitled "THREAD '77" the exhibition was open to the public for two weeks. Application for financial assistance was made to the Crafts Council but the Council was not in favour of supporting the exhibition. It felt that the site

was not a good one and that the standard of exhibits was likely to be low because of the nature of the exhibition. The Guild's Committee was none too pleased with these remarks! However the Crafts Council expressed a wish to assist the raising of the standard of future exhibitions and awarded a grant of £560 towards the

“With good support from Guilds and other weavers over 300 items were submitted from which the selection committee, headed by Marianne Straub, chose 115 exhibits for hanging.”

purchase of display equipment and lights.

The London Celebrations Committee for the Queen's Silver Jubilee was also approached. The Guild was too late for any financial aid but was delighted to be granted a licence to use the Jubilee symbol, a silver crown, on all its publicity material and catalogues. The exhibition was also listed in the official Jubilee



On the set of "Alive and kicking" again

became its home for the next twenty years.

In 1952 there were plans to hold a Summer School at the Hornsey School of Art, but after a great deal of work on the part of Miss Sheila MacEwan, only 40 members applied to attend, too few to make it possible to run the school at the low fee suggested.

Not strictly a Guild matter, but something of interest to all members of the Guild and other weavers at that time, was the effort of Gwen Shaw to find permanent headquarters in the West End for a Weaving Centre. She was much embarrassed when she had to tell visiting weavers, particularly those from overseas that, apart from the

London School of Weaving, there was no place in London where they could call and actually see weaving in progress with work for sale. In fact the Guild was accused of backwardness by American weavers in having no permanent headquarters to which Gwen Shaw took great exception, especially when asked if the reason for not having a show-place was that we

“During the 1950s the Guild with a membership of over 300 and an average attendance at meetings of 130 had settled down to a programme of regular monthly meetings and an annual exhibition.”

were such poor workmen.

Such was her enthusiasm and dedication to weaving that she proposed to provide a large part of the capital for the purchase of premises from the sale of her house. The Centre was to be a separate organisation from the Guild, the Guild in no way being responsible for the running or the financing of it. Six members of the London Guild were behind the scheme which was to be on a commercial basis with paid staff. Gwen Shaw wrote to Sir Ernest Goodale, the Managing Director of Warners and President of the Guild

at that time, outlining her plans. His reply was most encouraging, suggesting that a circular letter should be sent to all Secretaries of Guilds of Weavers. The Centre was to provide for the sale of weavers' work, yarn and equipment, with continuous demonstrations of weaving and spinning. It was also envisaged that there would be one or two reception rooms for the use of members where they could have refreshments and meet friends. In fact, to treat the Centre as a 'Club', paying an annual membership subscription of about £1. Guilds were to be encouraged to join at a higher subscription, about £5, and in turn would be able to arrange exhibitions and sales of their own work.

There are only two or three letters of reply in the Guild files and one from a Guild Secretary said that there had been little response from members, London being too far away to be visited regularly and too few of its members turning out sufficient work to make use of such a Centre. There are no papers or letters which give any definite reason why the scheme was abandoned. It must have been a great disappointment to Gwen Shaw especially when, two years later, she was approached by the BBC for details of the London Guild and hand weaving in England. The French Service of the BBC was giving short talks aimed

about the Tudor Room as a suitable place for meetings. Being centrally placed Caxton Hall was easily accessible by public transport but parking was difficult for those with cars. We had the use of the kitchens for making our own refreshments and there was adequate storage for all our equipment. But the Tudor Room was panelled with oak thereby making it dark, particularly for exhibitions when spotlights had to be used. With wooden rafters leading into a high roof acoustics were bad. Membership in the early 1970s was around 350 and rising, with an increasing number attending meetings. At times it was difficult to find a seat for everyone in the Tudor Room particularly when we had a popular speaker. One of the perks of Caxton Hall was being spectators of weddings held in the Registry Office, often of well-known people! Before leaving Mary Sumner House, there was an amusing, though embarrassing episode. The roller towel from the ladies cloakroom was always missing after our meetings. The Guild, of course, reimbursed the Mothers Union, but the culprit was never caught.

When Caxton Hall was sold by the Westminster City Council the Guild once again had to find a new home. A small group of Committee members looked at many premises, a most depressing job as some of the halls were very

dirty and gloomy. Others which could have been suitable were expensive and well beyond the means of the Guild. Fortunately we had Rita Willis as one of our members. She had worked in the Scout movement and was able to put in a word on our behalf. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Rita who solved our problem by introducing us to Baden Powell House.

Alieen Kennedy December 1989

there were plenty of scarves, many very reasonably priced, only two were sold. The exhibition and sale was open to the public for three days and sales amounted to £145. The Crafts Council had helped with a grant of £100, much appreciated as without this the sale would have made a small loss. Mr Walter George had retired as Secretary of the Guild that year and I had filled the vacancy. Karin Plough and I organised the Chenil

“The Association wanted to give members of all Guilds the chance to display and sell work in London and invited our Guild to make the necessary arrangements.”

Gallery exhibition and sale and one of my most vivid memories is of fire-proofing the Guild's display hessian to conform with the fire regulations of the Chelsea Town Hall. This was done with an evil smelling, obnoxious liquid!

A new society, the Federation of British Craft Societies, was formed in 1970. The Association of Guilds of Weavers became a member of the FBCS and the London Guild was therefore affiliated with it. The Federation, which employed a full-

time Organising Secretary, aimed to help craftsmen. Services offered included the use of an accommodation address at its headquarters in Queen Square (used by both the Association and the Journal); publicity; a quarterly newsletter; a library of colour transparencies (many of these were of work of our own Guild members) and rooms that member societies could use for meetings. As the Association's representative to the FBCS, Dorothy Wilmshurst worked tirelessly and enthusiastically on our behalf, attending many meetings and speaking up for weavers. With an initial grant of £10,000 from the Crafts Council and subscriptions from member societies it was hoped that the FBCS would eventually run free of any government backing. Unfortunately financial difficulties led to its disbandment in the early 1980s. It held one exhibition, in 1975, when Guilds of Weavers submitted 15 items for display, London's contributions being a length of hand spun cloth and a kaftan.

In the early days of the Guild Mr & Mrs Humphry had been very keen to use Caxton Hall as the meeting place of the Guild and as many of you will know this is where the Guild met before we came to Baden Powell House. The move to the Tudor Room, Caxton Hall took place in 1975. There were many different opinions

at interesting French tourists in the rural and traditional sides of English life, including handicrafts. The broadcasts, in French, went out through the Overseas transmission and naturally Gwen Shaw was concerned that tourists would wish to see weaving in progress but not know where to go. She supplied lists of names and addresses of all Guilds and other hand weaving centres to the Embassies to be handed out to interested visitors. In a letter to Sir Ernest Goodale concerning the broadcast she wrote: 'How unfortunate it has been that we were unable to put through our scheme of a weaving show-place in London. But there was no enthusiasm from the Guilds.'

Open Days were held during this period, which were the forerunners of the bi-annual exhibitions held by the Association today. With the help of London Guild members, the 'Quarterly Journal of the Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers' (now the 'Weavers Journal') held an Open Day at the Mary Sumner Hall in 1956. Weaving, spinning, dyeing, warping and beaming demonstrations were given in the morning followed by a lecture in the afternoon. Guilds were invited to attend but accommodation was limited to 350. Following the success of this, the London Guild held its own Open Day in May 1959. Home Counties Guilds and

those within a 100 mile radius of London were invited to take stands and to arrange their own exhibits which could be for sale or display. Because of the extra space needed the Open Day was held at the Queen Mary Hall of the YWCA, Tottenham Court Road. Seven other Guilds took part, each allotted a 10ft. x 10ft. space. Sir Ernest Goodale opened the exhibition and an additional attraction was a display of fabrics designed and woven by Warners, including a sample of the velvet woven for the train of the Queen's Coronation gown. This was the first of many informal displays and talks given by Sir Ernest to Guild members during his Presidency. He enlivened many an AGM by bringing samples of the beautiful fabrics woven by Warners, many of which had associations with Royal events.

Aileen Kennedy December 1988

The loss of Gwen Shaw and into the sixties

During this last year, Gwen Shaw's name has featured many times in the articles on the history of the Guild and it is clear that the success of the Guild in the 1950s was due in no small measure to her unceasing efforts and devotion to the work of the Guild. So it was of great concern to members when towards the end of 1959 she became very ill and was ordered to take three months complete rest away from London. Nearing the age of 70, she decided to retire from her exacting job in the broadcasting world. As a senior executive she was often working to 4 a.m. No wonder she was so frustrated at having no time to weave. She was looking forward to resuming weaving and Guild activities on an even larger scale when restored to full health, but sadly the following year she died at her brother's home in Devon. Her death was of great sadness to members. Reading through her letters in the Guild's files one becomes increasingly aware of why she was such a popular and well loved Secretary. Her letters are so warm, full of enthusiasm and encouragement. Mr Humphry, as assistant Secretary, took on the full duties of Secretary until a replace-

ment could be found and immediately opened a subscription list to purchase something which would perpetuate her memory. This, as we all know, is the Gwen Shaw cup awarded at the Guild's annual competition. It may be of interest to know that the very first competition was for an article woven on a straight, 1234 entry, using any material.

On a brighter note, a new experiment was started in 1959 with the introduction of midweek meetings into the Guild programme. Miss Raie Barnett, one of our Vice-Presidents, was responsible for this venture and the popularity of such meetings remains to this day. From the start they have provided a programme of visits and day schools and in those early days when hire of a room in London was not too expensive, 'Members Afternoons' were very well attended. Work was brought along, shown and discussed, the informal atmosphere making these small meetings most enjoyable.

During the 1950s new Guilds were springing up throughout the country and in 1954 the idea of forming an Association of Guilds was first suggested. At a meeting of

Into the 70s with a summer school & exhibition

After nearly 20 years as President of the Guild Sir Ernest Goodale retired in 1971. He had offered to retire on several occasions but each year was persuaded to continue in office. We were fortunate that his nephew, Mr L. St. J. Tibbitts was prepared to follow in Sir Ernest's footsteps and proud that once more the Managing Director of the firm, Warner & Sons Ltd. was our President. Like his uncle Mr Tibbitts was always willing to give us his support and help.

It was with Sir Ernest's encouragement that the Guild held its 1969 Autumn School at which it became apparent that there was a great need for further tuition in weaving and spinning in London. The Guild undertook to run another one-week school in the summer of 1973, this time at Highbury Manor Adult Education Institute where the resident tutors were Lore Youngmark and Mike Halsey. With Raie Barnett they organised the School. Lore was interviewed by the BBC for the Woman's Hour programme which resulted in fifty to sixty enquiries from the general public. Seventy students, many from overseas, attended the three weaving

courses, the dyeing and the spinning courses. Shorter courses were also held, a one-day school in tablet weaving and rug finishing and a two-day school in knotting. Once again the Summer School was a great success, also making a profit for the Guild of £143.

Many Guild members had helped with the provision of lunches for tutors and students at the Summer School and their services were again willingly given three months later when the Guild held an exhibition and sale at the Chenil Gallery, Chelsea Town Hall. The Association wanted to give members of all Guilds the chance to display and sell work in London and invited our Guild to make the necessary arrangements. Having used the Town Hall premises for three annual exhibitions, the Chenil Gallery, with its ample display space, was the Guild's natural choice of venue. Sadly only 11 Guilds from a total of 25 responded to the invitation to submit work and the number of articles was much lower than anticipated. These ranged from domestic items to wall hangings and it is interesting to note that the best selling lines were ties and traditional table linens. Although

exhibitions. Being in the basement of the building, lighting was poor and the enormous portraits of previous Presidents of the Mothers Union arranged round the walls were particularly oppressive. Thanks to Raie Barnett and Lore Youngmark with their Chelsea Fairs, a good relationship between weavers and the Chelsea Town

School, was ever hopeful that she would be able to re-open elsewhere, but at the age of 86, this of course never took place. The Guild was most concerned about the closure and particularly the further depletion of teaching facilities available in London. The Executive Committee held a special consultative meeting with Sir Ernest Goodale, its President, and together they decided that they Guild should hold its own one-week school. In both 1960 and 1961 small schools had been held in conjunction with the London School of Weaving, but this time the school was to be a much more prestigious affair. Held at the Chelsea Town Hall in the Autumn of 1971 the organisation was managed by Raie Barnett and Karin Plough who had the enormous and unenviable task of finding, borrowing and then arranging transport for all the equipment necessary for the five weaving courses which catered for beginners, intermediate and advanced students. There was also a spinning school and three one-day schools. Reports in Warp & Weft indicated the enormous success of the School which led to a profit of £103 for the Guild, 18 new members and pleas for further schools to be held.

Aileen Kennedy September 1989

“Reports in Warp & Weft indicated the enormous success of the School which led to a profit of £103 for the Guild, 18 new members and pleas for further schools to be held.”

Hall staff had been built up. The Guild was able to hold its own exhibitions here in 1969, 70 and 71, privileged to be charged only half the hire cost. The Mary Sumner Hall was eventually redecorated, new lights installed and the large portraits removed. Once more the Guild was able to hold exhibitions at its regular meeting place.

A sad announcement in August 1970 came as a blow to weavers in the London area. Due to increased rental and rising costs, the London School of Weaving was closing. Dorothy Wilkinson, head of the

representatives from the 10 Guilds who had contributed to the setting up of the Quarterly Journal plus representatives from six other Guilds, a small committee was formed 'to explore and expound the advantages'. Hilda Breed from the London Guild served on this Committee and the following year, 1955, the Association of Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers was founded. Each Guild agreed to contribute 10/- towards expenses but later, when the Constitution was formed, it was ruled that each Guild should pay according to the total of its registered members, a capitation fee of 6d. From the start the London Guild's Executive Committee did not support the Association, expressing its

disapproval at the way the Association was developing. Nevertheless the Guild was invited to send an observer to further meetings of the Association so that it could be kept fully informed of developments. By 1960 there were strong feelings within the Guild for and against joining and a special discussion was held at a monthly meeting. Those against argued that as the aims of the Association were similar to those of Guilds, there was nothing it could achieve which was not already being done by existing organisations. Guilds, they said, were being very well associated through the pages of the Quarterly Journal. The matter was finally settled at the Guild's A.G.M. in

Monday, April 16, 1990

Come in spinners: they're racing in the sheepstakes



Jumper leads ... Des Debell starts the process by shearing the sheep then Geraldine Dearing spins it, Margaret Rolandson knits it and Jeanette Ashurst models the finished product.



By JOHN STAPLETON
The whole process takes place in front of your eyes: the sheep bleats as the wool is shorn off. Nearby, women card the wool then spin it until there is enough to start knitting.
In under four hours one kilogram of wool is transformed into a garment.
The 12 teams...

"The women are tremendously keen and get very involved. Most are already involved in the production of wool-crafted garments of high quality, which is a lucrative hobby rapidly becoming an industry. This competition is the pinnacle of it."
Competitors are given 50 minutes for shearing on time and producing a finished garment. Five...

WHAT'S ON AT THE SHOW
CATLE: flowers, gourmet, eye-shine, jump, helms, ladders, horse...
DOG: toy, bond, silly, non-sporting, terrier, gas dog, working dog, best in show.
HORSE: hacks, gallopers, riding classes, show vehicle, pony club teams, period transport, rider and equipment, show jumping.
SKILL, 10am, 7.15...

Simon, 57, said she liked the competition and enthusiasm from other competitors.
"There is a lot of skill involved," she said.
"These ancient arts are tending to get lost, and it is important to keep them on. It is a challenge to see if you can do it better than this machine."
Showbag charges
Four cleaners at the Royal Easter Show have been charged with stealing up to £100,000 of...

1961 when a proposal to join the Association was put forward by Lore Youngmark. The voting turned out to be equal but the Chairman with his casting vote decided the matter. The London Guild became a member of the Association of Guilds.

Another matter affecting the Guild at this time was a financial one. Unwilling to raise the subscription but wanting to bring in more outside lecturers rather than depending on its own members to speak at monthly meetings, a search for cheaper accommodation was made. Meetings had been held at the Mary Sumner House, Westminster, since 1954 but in January 1962 the lecture theatre at the V & A Museum became the Guild's meeting place. Rent free, with a mere charge of 5/- for electricity, it seemed an ideal solution to the financial problems. The move was not popular. The tiered seating in the theatre and a cup of tea in the cafeteria did not compare favourably with the more friendly atmosphere of the Mary Sumner and after ten months the Guild returned to its former home.

More money was now required and reluctantly the Guild raised its subscription to £1.1.0. from the 10/- which it had been since 1952. At the same time, an appeal for financial help was made to the Worshipful Company of Weavers and the Guild was more than

grateful to receive a donation of £50 enabling it to engage the services of professional lecturers. This donation was, without doubt, due to the help given by Sir Ernest Goodale, the Guild's President.

"Warp & Weft" was also in difficulty. Its Editor, after a lengthy illness, was giving up. It had not been easy to obtain copy, the Editor remarking that he was unable to make four pages stretch to sixteen. Further appeals for copy were disappointing and the number of pages gradually decreased. Faced with this problem the Executive Committee decided that "Warp & Weft" should cease and be superceded by a Newsletter which would contain notes and news of past and coming events collected by Mrs Humphry, also one of our Vice Presidents. This newsletter appeared in March 1962, but even so managed to run to twelve pages. Fortunately for the Guild a new Editor was found and the very next issue saw the drop of the title 'Newsletter'. Since that day we have been most fortunate to have Editors who, with the help of members, have maintained a high standard and produced a magazine full of information. Not once has it lapsed to the mere four or eight-page publication of the 1950s.

Aileen Kennedy March 1989

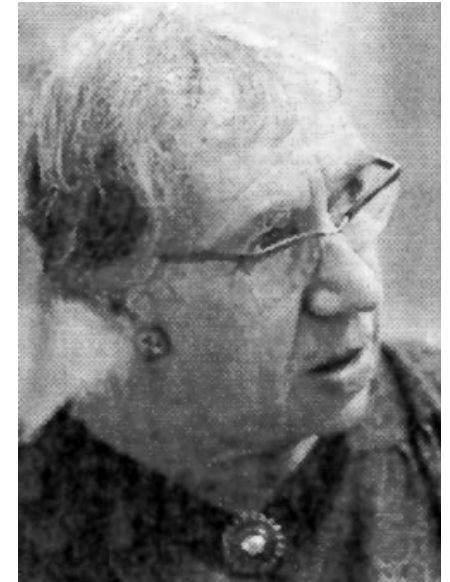
weaving exhibitions. Many well-known weavers were invited to display work at the Building Centre, including Tadik Beutlik, Peter Collingwood and Theo Moorman. Unfortunately a rail strike coincided with the exhibition, preventing many weavers from other Guilds attending. However, members of the general public visiting the Building Centre for new ideas for their home, were surprised to see an exhibition of weaving and expressed warm appreciation of all they saw

In line with its policy at that time to hold exhibitions annually, the Association organised yet another exhibition in London the following year at the Geffrye Museum. Not the responsibility of the London Guild this time, although many members helped with the stewarding and demonstrations. The items displayed were much the same as at the Building Centre and included tweeds, curtain lengths, floor rugs, knee rugs and wall hangings. Called "Weaving Now" it was not considered to be a successful exhibition. There was no criticism of the exhibits but rather of the lack of space given to the exhibition in a dismal, depressing hall with insufficient lighting.

With its ambition for weavers from all over the country to have the chance to meet up, and because the party arranged for the opening of "Woven Textiles" had

been poorly attended (due to the rail strike), the Association arranged an Open Day for all Guilds at the V & A Museum in 1970. In the morning the Indian Rooms were open to the public, followed by two lectures in the

**Below:
Theo Moorman**



afternoon, one from Madeleine Mainstone of the V & A staff speaking on early tapestries and the other from Lore Youngmark on hand weaving techniques.

The following week saw the opening of the second Chelsea Fair, once again a successful event, with all submitted items exhibited. The Guild was not happy with the Mary Sumner Hall, its meeting place, as the venue for its annual

Exhibitions and an autumn school

When another rise in the Guild's subscription became necessary in 1967, it was agreed by the Executive Committee that this should take into consideration the need for a paid clerical assistant to the Committee. She would be expected to prepare and send out minutes, prepare agendas and write letters under instruction, address envelopes for Warp & Weft and the Journal and prepare the paper-work for the A.G.M. It was fortunate that Mr George's wife was able to take on this position with an honorarium of £75 per year. The Guild's papers were in a very muddled state when Mr & Mrs George took over and it is to them that we owe a debt of gratitude. They worked together sorting and refileing the back papers, making it easy for me when I took over from Mr George as Secretary and, more recently, for me to go through them in orderly fashion to compile these articles on the history of the Guild. Sadly, neither Mr nor Mrs George are alive today. It should be pointed out that all the above duties allocated to Mrs George are now ably carried out by members of the Executive Committee and other

Guild members.

As in the earlier years of the 1960s, the latter part of the decade had yet more opportunities for weavers to show their work publicly in London. The Building Centre Trust invited the Association to hold an exhibition at the Building Centre in 1968. Entitled "Woven Textiles" and open for 2 weeks, the emphasis was on interior design. There were five categories of weaving: lengths of furnishing fabric, wall hangings, rugs, table mats and stools or small chairs already upholstered. The London Guild was once again responsible for the organisation of this exhibition, but due to the venue not being as ideal as the previous one at Digby Stuart College, there was not the opportunity to hold the variety of activities as before. The opening ceremony was performed by Henry Rothschild, Secretary of the British Section of the World Craft Council. He spoke of the continued progress away from weaving by the yard towards 3-dimensional decoration of the room, using primitive techniques in a creative way. At that time, wall hangings and tapestries were very popular items and much displayed at

Guild involvement in the 1960s

For two or three years after the death of Gwen Shaw a great deal of help in the running of the Guild was given by Mr and Mrs Humphry. A replacement Secretary was appointed in 1963, yet another in 1965 until Mr Walter George took over in 1967. He held office for 6 years, once more giving a more stable background to the Guild. Fortunately these rapid changes of Secretary did not affect the Guild. With its membership remaining fairly constant at around 300, it was always supported by a keen Committee and a well-established programme of monthly and mid-week meetings.

As the Guild was now a member of the Association of Guilds it was ready to take a full part in the Association's activities. At that time the Association held an exhibition every year and at each of these there was a special Open Day to which Guilds were invited giving them the opportunity to meet together informally for the exchange of ideas and information.

The first of these exhibitions in which London took part was held at Gloucester, followed the next year by one in York. Sadly at the latter there was a delay in transport of London's exhibits

which did not arrive in time to be shown. In 1965 the Exhibition and Open Day were held on the final day of the Association's Summer School at Digby Stuart College, Roehampton. The arrangements for the Exhibition and Open Day were the responsibility of the London Guild and it launched itself enthusiastically into the

“ It was a tremendous amount of work for the Guild's Committee as this was a one-day affair. There are glowing reports of the Open Day which by all accounts was a happy and enjoyable occasion. ”

occasion. It was a tremendous amount of work for the Guild's Committee as this was a one-day affair. There are glowing reports of the Open Day which by all accounts was a happy and enjoyable occasion. Well-known weavers were invited to send exhibits and 12 Guilds sent their selected items, all of which were displayed. Zoe, Lady Hart

Dyke performed the opening ceremony with Sir Ernest Goodale introducing her as the “Queen of Silkworms”! An afternoon lecture was given by Dorothy Wilkinson of the London School of Weaving who spoke on her recent trip to America. Members demonstrated double weave, tapestry weaving, flax and wool spinning. There was a special display of Oriental rugs woven by Aristide Messineri who

thread in any other way than weaving, so in 1966 it was back to tradition with the competition for a tweed length.

Two other major exhibitions took place in 1965. The V. & A. Museum in co-operation with the Association held a travelling exhibition of modern wall hangings and rugs. Guilds were invited to select entries and from the 11 hangings and 4 rugs from London, 5 hangings and 3 rugs were accepted for exhibition. It is recorded that the Museum was surprised and delighted with the excellence of the work submitted. Selected exhibits were displayed at the V& A. for four weeks and then went on tour of other museums for two years. During the London showing a special day was set aside for members of Guilds when Marianne Straub gave a talk on the selected items, followed by comments and discussion from the floor.

Another wonderful opportunity for display of weaving that year was through the first of the Chelsea Spinning and Weaving Fairs. This was not a Guild venture but one organised jointly by Raie Barnett and Lore Youngmark with many London Guild members assisting. The organisers were keen to reach as wide a public as possible and weaving came from all over the country and some from as far afield as America. It was an

“Two other major exhibitions took place in 1965. The V. & A. Museum in co-operation with the Association held a travelling exhibition of modern wall hangings and rugs.”

had been a Vice-President of the Guild and had recently died. There was also a Trade Exhibition and entries for the Quarterly Journal ‘A Non-woven Form’.

Annual competitions were being held by the Quarterly Journal in the 1960s, previous ones having been for wall hangings, floor coverings and a spinning competition. It is pleasing to read that our own May Gower, who died last year, was one of the prize winners for a non-woven form. There was some controversy over the subject for this competition when weavers were asked to think of using

enormous task for the organisers and without doubt did much to promote weaving in the 1960s. It gave weavers a chance to show or sell their work, with every item submitted being displayed. It was enthusiastically received and supported and the success of the Fair led to a further two in 1967 and 1969.

It is interesting to see how things have changed and improved over the years. For example the Trade Exhibition at Roehampton in 1965 had 9 stands taken by suppliers. At present day Association Summer Schools and Exhibitions we are used to having, and expect to see, a much greater number than this. Entries for the Quarterly Journal competition for floor coverings in 1963 were considered on the whole to be unadventurous and lacking in new ideas. The majority were woven in the Rya technique which was the fashion at that time. When one considers the standard of the rugs entered in our Lore Youngmark Competition this year and those brought along by Nancy, in no way could these be given the above description.

Aileen Kennedy June 1989

“the Museum was surprised and delighted with the excellence of the work submitted. Selected exhibits were displayed at the V. & A. for four weeks and then went on tour of other museums for two years.”