

The *N*eedlesmith

Journal of a creative



No: 2
June - August 2019

Interviews with Lottie Goodlet -
seaweed collector
& Jo McCarthy of 'Firain'

Everything You Need to Know
About Natural Fabrics

An indulgent strawberries & cream
dessert with
lavender shortbread recipe



A note from a Needlesmith

One day I thought I would have a writing day. I had a pile of planned blog posts, some poems that need pinning down, emails to write, the next edition of 'The Needlesmith' to plot, and I wanted to get back to my novel. The day started well if a little slowly, Mr B brought me breakfast and tea in bed, and I went to get my laptop and started work where I sat. Rosie on my feet was a bit hot but, on the whole, a very comfortable place to be. Some emails got written, a little read of email newsletters. However, I wanted to be more 'official and efficient' about my writing day and for that to happen I needed to sit at a table. I didn't want to sit in the kitchen as I knew I would get distracted, watching the birds coming to the feeders or, more prosaically, I would hear the washing machine in the back porch coming to the end of its cycle, which would mean I would have to get up and swap things over. I didn't want to sit in the sitting room as, when Mr B came home, he would interrupt, and Rosie would be bouncing around, on guard for anyone daring to walk past or the blackbird landing in the garden. My only option was the spare bedroom. Our guest room is mostly a depository for jumpers, drying washing, a wardrobe full of Mr B's jacket collection (called

such because he doesn't often wear any of them!) and Bodkin the cat. Rosie hates cats and attempts to eat him should their paths cross, so we are very careful to make sure that they don't.

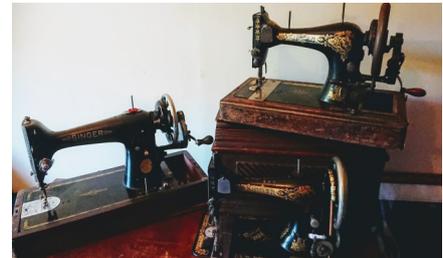
We have a small old fashioned, folding card table, just the right size for laptop and notebook which could be tidied away easily. I duly set up table and chair, organised my laptop, pen and paper by the window. That's when procrastination kicked in... I showered & dressed, dried my hair, fed Bodkin, decided to run around with the vacuum cleaner, tidied up the bedroom, sorted washing & the drying, put some away, put the recycling in the outside bin, cleaned out the fire, swapped the washing over.... Then I told myself to get on with it, made a cup of tea, went to the loo so that I didn't promptly have to stop when I did eventually get started, and began...

The novel is still waiting, although it is simmering, some of the planned blog posts happened, and 'The Needlesmith' was plotted and is now completed. It's a bit bigger than the last one, I hope you don't mind, and you enjoy it. Until September then, have a super summer.

With Love
Kate x

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Notes on Nature



Stellaria holostea ~ Greater Stitchwort

How could this not be my favourite spring flower? Greater Stitchwort is also known as Wedding Cakes, Star-of-Bethlehem, Snapdragon (because of its brittle stems, not the flower like the Antirrhinum) and the delightful, Daddy's Shirt Buttons. The name, sadly, has nothing to do with sewing but, apparently, using an infusion of the plant's leaves will help to treat the 'stitch' in one's side caused by walking or running. However, I think it looks like a series of long embroidery stitches.

-wort is a suffix that's derived from the Old English word *wyrt*, which is related to an even earlier term meaning root. *Wort* is generally used to indicate that a plant or herb that had some purported medicinal value, often attached to the word for the body part that it was believed to help, like *Lungwort* or *Liverwort*.

Stitchwort can be found in the verges and woodlands throughout the UK. There are five petals with long deep notches that can make it look as though there are ten petals. The flowers are typically 2 to 3 cm in diameter which are visited by Honeybees, butterflies and hoverflies looking for spring nectar. It is an edible plant which tastes a little like lettuce mixed with grass. The flowers have a mild taste but look pretty in salads.

Bizarre Fact: It was thought that picking the flowers would bring on a thunder storm.

Stitchwort is the perfect foil to the Bluebell which flower abundantly in Argyll in the spring. Their brilliant blue flowers seem to create a hovering haze under the trees above the fresh green of new grass and plant growth. The bluebell also has many other names including English Bluebell, Wild Hyacinth, Wood Bell, Bell Bottle, Cuckoo's Boots, Wood Hyacinth, Lady's Nightcap and, yet another haberdashery reference, the wonderful Witches' Thimbles.

Stitchwort and Bluebells really are my most favourite combination of spring flowers, best left in the wild to enjoy as neither last terribly long if picked. But towards the end of May beginning of June, as the bluebell season comes to an end, blooms the Red Campion. I loathe this combination! Mother Nature did not get this colour mix right at all. The bright pink (not red) of the Campion clashes dreadfully with the brilliant blue bluebells.

Well in my opinion anyway!

Never mind, the lovely daisy family will be in flower soon and that is my next favourite of the wild flowers to bloom. Look out for Oxeye Daisies in verges near you, Marguerites in the garden and take time to make a daisy chain whilst sitting on the lawn.



Emperor Moth— *Saturnia pavonia*



I found this female Emperor moth, at beginning of May, caught on our front door mat. The blood red spots on her wings caught my eye. I had no idea that we had moths of this size flying about. The males with their orange underwings fly during the day & can be mistaken for butterflies, while the females fly at night. So how there are any in existence at all is a surprise! Apparently, the males can scent a female up to 7 miles away. Look out for the caterpillars which are green with black hoops and yellow warts.



In the Garden, six years after it was planted our tree peony has flowered ... Paeonia lutea var. Ludlowii



JUNE

5th Wednesday www.worldenvironmentday.global

8th Saturday www.worldoceansday.org

8th Saturday Silverclay Pendant/Brooch Making Workshop 2-5pm MS Centre Lochgilphead

13th Thursday National Sewing Machine Day!

18th Tuesday International Picnic Day

21st Friday Longest day - Summer Solstice & also Bring your Dog to Work day (just like every day for Rosie!)

JULY

4th - 7th Fri -Sun Exhibition & Creative Textile Drop in workshops Craignish Village Hall 11am-4pm

4th + 5th Thur/Fri Lampshade Making Workshop, Craignish Village Hall 6-9 pm

6th Saturday Silverclay Pendant/Brooch Making Workshop, Craignish Village Hall 6-9 pm

July

20th Saturday Summer Holiday Creative Textiles Workshop 2-5pm MS Centre, Lochgilphead

AUGUST

3rd Saturday Summer Holiday Creative Textiles workshop 2-5pm MS Centre, Lochgilphead

23rd - 26th Artmap Argyll Open Studios w/kend 1

SEPTEMBER

31/8 & 1/9 Artmap Argyll Open Studios w/kend 2

7th - 15th www.perthshireopenstudios.com

27th -30th www.cowalopenstudios.co.uk

23rd Monday First Day of Autumn

23rd - 29th Recycle Week www.recyclenow.com

Autumn Workshops

Still to be finalised but will include more dressmaking, lampshade workshops, silver making & Creative Textiles in time for Christmas

Look out for the dates in the next Edition and also on Fbook & the website

I'm studio red dot 23 at the Studio Barn Argyll on the Tayvalljch road open both weekends

Artmap Argyll
OPEN STUDIOS 2019

Discover artists working in Argyll

- 23rd to 26th August
- 31st August & 1st September
- 10am - 5pm

www.artmapargyll.co.uk

Popping up in Ardfern....

I will be running some drop in taster sessions from Friday 4th to Sunday 7th of July at Craignish Village Hall as part of a small exhibition with artist Morag Lloyds & local basket maker Kathy Potter-Irwin.

Come along and try your hand at some creative textile crafts, fabric collage, pin loom weaving, punchneedle & more

Lampshade making workshop

Paint & stitch your own unique lampshade
Thursday & Friday 4+5 July evenings 5-8pm
£55 All materials, equipment & refreshments supplied
Limited numbers so book quickly
(This is a six hr/2 part workshop)

Silverclay Workshop

Make a pure silver pendant or brooch
Saturday 6 July 6-9pm £45
All materials, equipment & refreshments supplied

A quick make

Make a waterproof backed picnic cushion, garden kneeler, or for the boat



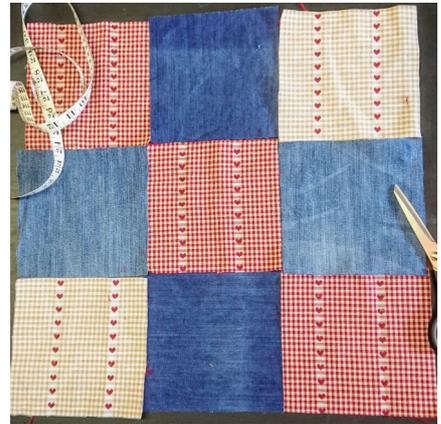
You will need:

- Pieces of heavy weight fabric eg. denim or upholstery fabric
- A piece of oilcloth/table cloth or a old waterproof jacket
- A hollow fibre pillow/stuffing/cushion pad
- Rope eg. washing line.
- Tape measure
- Scissors
- Pins
- Sewing machine
- Thread

This is a good project to use up some scrap fabric, off cuts from other projects, or to upcycle some old clothes, jeans & work shirts etc.

Cut the fabric into squares or rectangles to fit the size cushion pad/pillow size.

Include a 1cm seam allowance all the way around each piece.



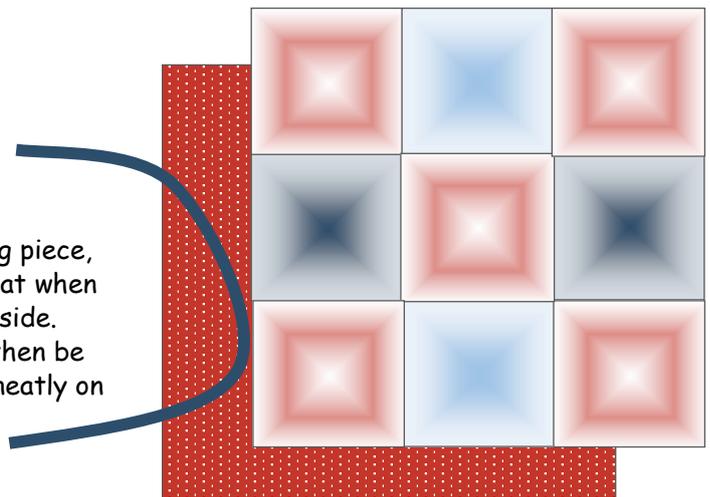
Pin and sew together to create the patchwork. Iron the seams out flat.

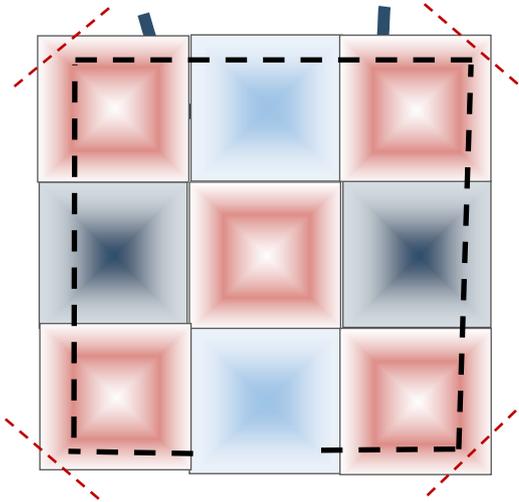
Cut a piece of the waterproof backing fabric to the same size.

With right sides facing, pin together

Pin the rope handle in place:

Put the loop of rope in between the front & backing piece, with the ends sticking out across the seam. So that when you sew around the edge the rope loop is on the inside. When you turn the cover through the handle will then be on the outside with the ends tucked and secured neatly on the inside.





Sew all the way around leaving a hole in the middle of one side, so that the cover can be turned the right way around and the filling can be pushed in.

Trim the corners & the seam allowance.

Stitch the edges together using a zigzag or overlock stitch.

Reinforce the seam where the rope is attached, by sewing over it a couple of times. You may want to untwist the rope a little so that it goes under the sewing machine presser foot more easily.



Turn the right way around and ease the stuffing/cushion pad/pillow inside.

Top stitch to sew up the hole, trim the threads.

& That's it! You are now ready to take your cushion out to the garden, or sling it over your shoulder and take it and the dog, for a walk. Find a lovely view, like the one at the top of the page opposite which was taken during a walk to Keils point near Tayvallich over looking the islands of Islay & Jura.

Don't let your dog sit on it, and take a pocket full of the biscuits found on page 25, or pack a picnic and celebrate National Picnic Day on the 18th of June.



The Green Pages

Organic Calico

The organic calico for making lampshades arrived and is lovely. Slightly heavier than the sort I have been using which is nice and it has the characteristic flecks in it. It's unfinished, not washed, softened, or treated, straight off the loom. Being that bit heavier it's more stable when it comes to sewing on it and it doesn't pucker. I will be now making all my painted lampshades & artwork using this fabric.



Gutermann's Recycled Thread

The German brand Gutermann's is the thread I use a lot of in my art work and on lampshades. Among many types of threads they make a variegated range of 100% cotton thread that I particularly like. When I saw that they also made a recycled thread I thought I would have to give it a go. Curious to find out more about the thread I found this information pdf on the Gutermann website. One plastic bottle can be made into 1000m of sewing thread, that's 10 of those cotton reels. At the moment they don't make the variegated

thread from PET and the single colours of the range are quite strong so not wholly suitable for use in embroidery but they are of a good thickness and the sewing machine seems to like them. I can get through 100m of thread quite quickly so I would like to see the reels come in the larger sizes and the colours in a more subtle range, but it is a start.

My order of a dozen reels arrived each in individual single use plastic bags and a plastic postage envelope and I have pointed out to the shop that it was unnecessary and rather defeated the object of the exercise of buying recycled plastic bottle thread! I will be looking for another supplier I think.

A rolling stone gathers no moss...

"A Good Company" www.agood.com

And there is no moss on my new 'stone notebooks'. Yes you did read that correctly, *stone* notebooks, notebooks made from 100% recycled stone. They have just arrived so I haven't yet had a chance to write in them. The brain child of a Swedish fellow named Anders Ankarlid & manufactured in China using a waterless processing system turning waste from the construction industry into usable paper. There are several articles on the website explaining how the product came about and much more. Waterproof & your ink doesn't run I'll let you know how I find writing in them & on it next time.

Revive-Eco : Scottish Entrepreneurs Who Aim to Replace Palm Oil with Used Coffee Grounds ...

Although I'm 100% a tea drinker and only 'eat coffee', by way of cake & ice cream, I was really interested in an article I came across on GlobalCitizen.org. It was highlighting the work of a young Glasgow based company that is working to produce high-value biochemicals from used coffee grounds — diverting thousands of tonnes of coffee waste from going to landfill in the process. The oils they hope extract from the used coffee grounds could potentially replace palm oil which would of course be a huge step forward. At the moment whilst they work hard to develop the extraction processes they are turning the coffee waste into soil improver. In August last year they worked with the Edinburgh International Book Festival to collect all of the coffee waste, and in September they reported that they had made 500 collections, recycling more than 8 tonnes of used coffee grounds.

If you know of a café that might like to send it's coffee waste to be recycled get in touch with Revive-eco.com to arrange for collection.

I reused a tablespoon of coffee grounds, which normally end up on our compost heap, by making a hand scrub. I used dried coffee grounds mixed into coconut oil. It worked brilliantly during April when it was so cold and windy. My hands became very dry and chapped. The coffee grounds rubbed off the rough skin and the coconut oil moisturised them. I also tried it as a face scrub but as Mr B (the coffee drinker) grinds the beans himself it was a bit too coarse. I did wonder if tea leaves might be a bit softer. Must remember to give them a go.

Going Plastic Free

Whilst I might have been disappointed with my sewing thread delivery, I was delighted with my recent plastic free shopping from www.plasticsfree.co.uk, which arrived in a small cardboard box with chobbled paper stuffing. My parcel included new bamboo toothbrushes (sadly plastic bristles but still better than plastic handle - I think) and natural solid bar shampoo for me and Rosie. She's not too impressed with anything to do with water and baths but I liked her shampoo as I didn't have to let go of her to squeeze a bottle. It has a slightly medicinal smell as it contains Tea Tree oil to help deter fleas and the dreaded tick. Looking disturbingly similar to the dog shampoo is my Argan Oil & Oatmilk shampoo bar. I have made sure to



keep them in separate places and pots. This one also foams up well and my hair feels very clean afterwards. I have a quickly irritated and irritating scalp so I'm finishing off the stuff in a bottle and breaking my head in gently to the new soap but so far so good.



I also got a trial pack of Soap Nuts, to replace powdered or liquid laundry products. I've seen these before but was a bit sceptical so when I saw a trial size for sale for £5.00 I thought I would give them a go. The soap nut shell absorbs water and releases saponins which circulate as a natural surfactant in the water, freeing dirt and oils from clothing. They're great! They arrived in a small cotton bag which you also put them in for popping in the washing machine. Soap nuts come from India from the *Sapindus Mukorossi*

which is a member of the Lychee family. The 'soap nut' is the dried berry of the tree. They do work best in warm/hot water but if doing a cold water wash you could make the liquid below. Our clothes come out smelling of ... well, nothing but clean really. There is no scent, and no dirt, they coped with the tomatoey sauce that Mr B dropped down his front, no sign of that. If I'd remembered I might have treated the spot with some extra soap or vinegar but I forgot. Soap nuts are all natural and non-toxic, which makes them especially good for sensitive skin and those prone to allergies. Also, due to the very gentle, mild detergent they produce they're safe for your delicates. They are 100% biodegradable so they can be composted at the end of their life, which is when they become shiny and no longer feel 'soapy'. Hang the bag with the soap nuts in to dry between washes & store unused ones in an airtight container.

To make an all purpose liquid for cleaning dishes, dog, car...
Add about 50g/12-15/two handfuls of Soap Nut Shells to appx 1L of water. Crush the shells into smaller pieces. Bring to boil, and simmer for about half an hour.
You can use the liquid immediately or let it steep overnight. Strain into an appropriate container and compost the used shells. With no preservative this has a limited shelf life so don't make than you'll use in a few days although refrigerating can extend it.



Soap nuts don't smell of anything so if you like your clothes or bed linens to be scented you might like to make a linen spray using essential oils.

Or make some dried lavender or rose petal bags to slip between layers of bedding and into drawers.



Lavender Linen Water Spray

50/50 neat vodka / water

10-15 drops lavender essential oil (not 'fragrance' oil as that is synthetic)

A glass bottle with a spray attachment.

Simply pour the water & the vodka into the bottle

Add the essential oil

Shake well to mix before use.

I used freshly boiled water and let it cool in the bottle but you could use distilled water, I've also seen recipes using witch hazel instead of alcohol.

This 250ml blue glass spray bottle came via Amazon, the coloured glass helps to prevent sunlight degradation to the oils. I made 200mls of linen spray.

The vodka acts as an emulsifier to help disperse the oil through the water. It's also colourless, odourless, evaporating quickly when sprayed, so it's an ideal choice for a linen spray that won't stain your clothes and sheets.

Take care when using essential oils as they are very powerful, Don't over do it.

A Natural Beauty Spot

When Mr B was on dialysis we used a 'dressing pack' at the start of the session and at the end. Contained in a plastic tray were two cups, square cotton swabs and swab balls, and two paper towels to place under the arm to create a clean 'field area'. We rarely used all the cotton swabs/balls and, because I am a frugal person, I would save the spare ones (& the plastic pots for using in workshops). I used the swabs for all sorts of things, cleaning ears & eyes on cats and dogs, when our cockerel the now late 'Urk' was bitten by a badger I washed his wounds with them, for art projects, all sorts of other things, and also for taking off my make-up. Since the transplant however, we have now run out of these useful swabs, it was such a shock when I realised that I was going to have to buy cotton wool balls. Mr B was in hospital and I was in Sainsbury's standing in front of the makeup removal products section looking at

cotton wool products. It felt wrong. I didn't want to buy cotton wool or wipes. I don't wear much make-up but I do wear a lot of waterproof mascara which needs taking off. Usually with baby oil (which I don't really like) or something similar. At that time, I bought the Fairtrade Cotton squares as I was away from home and needed something. The next time I was in needing the same thing they didn't have any of the FT pads so I came away with nothing. Then one day I asked a friend who crochets if she would make me some washable pads which she kindly did, but my mascara quickly made the pretty pink and white pads very grubby looking. Then I saw some washable bamboo-towelling discs in the beauty pages of the Sunday Times magazine.

Oh, thought I, those wouldn't be hard to make, I could use cotton towelling. The idea floated around as ideas do before I did anything about it. I rethought the disc, as with a square there isn't any waste (this is also why I don't buy round teabags...) and in a couple of hours had a pile of pretty, washable, fabric, make-up removing squares and a drawstring bag to put the used ones in and for washing so that they don't get lost inside the duvet covers etc. I made two sorts. Pretty flowery ones using white towelling – a small hand towel that I have used for felt making in the last ten years & some well washed poly cotton from an old duvet cover. And some darker flowery fabric with some dark green towelling, for heavy mascara days. The green towel had been left on the back of a bathroom door of a house we moved into 18 years ago, downgraded from a bathroom towel, to a gardening towel, to a dog towel and as



Gather together fabric, towelling, cotton & threads



Cut out 8cm x 8cm squares of cotton fabric



Cut out matching size squares from towelling



Pin both layers together



Sew around the edge with a 1cm seam allowance



Trim and neatening the edges



Using a zigzag stitch sew around the edges to prevent fraying



Then place in a pretty bowl ready to use

it is bald in parts it's not much use for that now! However, it is soft due to being so well washed and I cut out some bits that still had loops on and had plenty for this project. As I said, I don't like using baby oil and remembered that I had a sample of coconut oil that I bought from our local delicatessen Marmalade Deli. It made a brilliant eye makeup remover, the best I've ever used for removing waterproof mascara. This one smelt of coconut but I'm not keen on foodie smelling skincare products even if the smell is a natural

one and not synthetic, I didn't want to go about smelling like a pina colada! Back to Marmalade I went and bought some Biona Organic Odourless Coconut oil. It's a large jar costing I think £6.35, it will last me a very long time, making it an extremely cost-effective and efficient product.

(I recommend washing the cloths in a cotton bag on a hot wash to ensure that the oils dissolve and the cloths are clean)

Do have a look at these two articles for some further information on oils for skin and faces, and why you should wash your face (I made matching face cloths) after using coconut oil.

goodonyou.eco/natural-face-oils-for-every-skin-type/
www.byrdie.com/does-coconut-oil-clog-pores



Firain -

Whilst reading a newsletter (from [Jessica Rose Williams](#) - worth signing up for) I spotted a bar of soap on a rope that she said she had recently bought from a shop called Firain. I decided to have a wee nose and loved what I found. A few clicks later and I had bought not just soap on a rope but some cards and a magazine called 'Jwnal' too. I awaited the arrival of the postman.... & I was not disappointed. My shopping arrived in a cardboard box (is anyone else a sucker for a good cardboard box or is it just me?) and recycled & recyclable paper packaging. Beautifully parcelled up with a sprig of rosemary, it really was a box of delights. I instantly went shopping again and in moments I had bought a few birthday presents. I was equally delighted with the second parcel, from the hand drawn gold stars on the outside of the box to the lovely hand written card inside. I can thoroughly recommend shopping online with Jo at Firain for a beautiful selection of artisan pieces, made & packaged with care. I asked Jo if she would be kind enough to be interviewed for The Needlesmith and she said yes, so here it is...



What sparked the idea for Firain?

The idea for firain really started years ago as a child in Deal, Kent, where I loved to potter around the independent shops with my mum. I adored glimpsing into hidden galleries, thumbing the handmade cards in little boutiques and observing the interesting characters that sat behind the shop counters.

When I worked as a young estate agent, I

was often looking for ideas for what would now be described as a 'side-hustle'. My patient dad would humour me by looking at empty retail units where I dreamt of opening a bookshop/ community hub/ craft shop/ cake shop/ florist...he would analyse my drawings of the floor plans and listen as I passionately described the young artists I would represent.

The dream was never realised. I moved to London at 20, then to west Africa, then America, the Caribbean and now Wales! My dad passed away the end of January so his encouragement to follow my passions rings ever louder in my ears. firain is a tiny slice of this dream. I am treading very slowly, going very gently, finding fabulous makers and developing the kindest customer base.

(I have written a few journal posts about setting up firain that you might find interesting: [how to start an online shop](#) (an article for 91 magazine); [the firain six-month review](#); [how to celebrate the small victories when setting up a new creative business](#); [firain is open!](#))

What does Firain mean?

Truth be told, my husband Ben found the word 'firain'. It's ancient Welsh, meaning 'good, noble, fair and fine', and for us it evokes the feelings of provenance, integrity and authenticity. I thought it was a fitting name as I knew I was going to look for handmade pieces that are not only uplifting to use but are made in an ethical way by passionate creatives - many of whom run very small businesses themselves. if you want to sound like an ancient Welsh person, you might pronounce firain as 'vee-rain', but we will answer to anything really.

Some have said that the name firain is memorable and others have said that firain is forgettable and many say that firain sounds nice and a few say that firain sounds weird. what can you do?! so my tip is not to worry too much. Pepsi, Nike, Reebok and millions of other phenomenally successful businesses have unique names!

What's a typical day?

Like many freelancers and self-employed people, I don't have a typical day as such. I have a really 'baggy' schedule because I have found that being too rigid and inflexible causes me to over plan and stress out. I work all day, every day, but



on a wide variety of projects. firain is one of several income streams so I try to work on the shop a little each day. I tend to check Instagram first thing in the morning and throughout the day, uploading stories if I have something to share. I try to respond quickly to comments on my posts or direct messages. I like to check the website every day too, even if I don't have any orders to process. Do I need to update the inventory? Check my hyperlinks? If I do have orders to post, I like to get these processed in the morning then my husband, who works from home, pops to the post office for me as an excuse to take a break! We are a good team. One of my favourite jobs is to order stock. I love thinking about my customers and trying to imagine what they might like to buy. Once a month I aim to send a firain newsletter although I often don't meet my own targets for this.

[Firain—cont'd on pg 17](#)



LABEL LINGO:

Everything You Need to Know About Natural Fabrics

Words: Alexis Far

In many ways, natural fabrics are better for the environment. But simply saying that something is 'natural' shouldn't be an automatic green-light. Let's break down those natural fibres living in your closet.

Natural fabrics and fibres come from plants and animals. They are often touted as eco-friendly alternatives to the chemically-intensive procedures involved in synthetic fabric production. But if it takes nearly three thousand litres of water to produce just one cotton t-shirt, is it really more sustainable?



Label: Cotton

Humans have been growing, spinning and wearing cotton since Ancient times. From the Pakistani region in 3000 B.C.E to the fields of China, the US and Brazil, cotton has long been the world's most popular fabric. It may be light and breezy but cotton is not all white and fluffy. For many years now, cotton production has taken a serious toll on the environment. Cotton is a thirsty crop which grows in arid conditions. It can take 2,700 litres of water to make a single cotton shirt!

Cotton production also has a long history of worker exploitation. The industry has been most seriously corrupted in Uzbekistan, where the government conscripts millions of citizens to harvest their cotton. Companies and governments around the world are now boycotting Uzbek cotton in a stand against its forced and child labour practices.

The vast majority of cotton seeds today are also genetically modified (GM). GM cotton is pest resistant and weed resistant, but the plants cannot naturally reproduce, meaning new crops need to be bought and planted with every new season. Alongside the globalisation of the cotton industry, the introduction of GM crops poses a number of challenges in developing countries. But before you despair, there is a silver lining to this cotton cloud...

Label: Organic Cotton

There are no chemicals or pesticides used in the production of organic cotton. This makes it safer to harvest, safer to wear and much better for the environment. Look for organic clothing brands with accreditations from the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), Fairtrade or the Better Cotton Initiative.

One such example is Kowtow, a New Zealand brand that uses only fair trade organic cotton in their stunning and minimalist pieces.

Label: Hemp

Hemp – marijuana's 'sober cousin' – is a wonderfully versatile plant. While now its uses range from food to building materials, to body care, to biofuel, it has been cultivated and used for hundreds of years as a fabric. The more that you wash and wear hemp fabric, the softer it becomes. This efficient, nutrient-rich plant is much kinder to the environment than many other fabrics as it requires very little water, no pesticides and naturally fertilises the soil it grows in.

Label: Angora

Angora fur comes from a particularly fluffy species of rabbit. This silky fur is usually blended with different kinds of wool to make soft, warm clothes. Alt-

hough the hair of the rabbit will shed naturally, the large scale 'harvesting' of angora involves plucking the rabbit hairs out. This causes great distress to the animals, and when the hairs grow back too slowly the rabbits will be killed. How could anyone hurt this adorable fluff ball? Make sure you support brands that boycott angora fur!

Label: Wool

Any clothing made from wool can be a practical long-term investment for the winter months. It's biodegradable and if cared for correctly, a quality, timeless woollen garment will last a lifetime. As with any industry that uses animals for commercial purposes however, there are ethical considerations around their treatment. While most of the world's wool comes from either Australia and the US, and both these countries have fairly stringent standards of production, mulesing is still common. Mulesing involves cutting the sheep's skin at the hind legs and buttocks and causes sheep considerable pain.

Label: Silk

Silk has a long history as one of the most luxurious fabrics in the world. The fibres that make silk are spun from the threads of a silkworm cocoon. The worms subsist on mulberry leaves, which are resistant to pollution and easy to cultivate. However, silk produc-

ers need to boil the cocoon in order to extract the fibres, killing the worms in the process. There are cruelty-free options for silk-lovers – Ahimsa silk, also known as ‘peace silk’, allows the moth to evacuate the cocoon before it is boiled. Some silks that fall under the Ahimsa umbrella include ‘Eri silk’ and ‘Tussar silk’.

Label: Linen

Linen yarn is derived from the flax plant. The flax plant requires minimal water or pesticides and even grows in poor-quality soil. The long fibres from inside the plant stem are extracted, using moisture (water or chemical) to rot away the bark, and are then spun into yarn. When it’s untreated, linen is a biodegradable fabric, meaning you don’t need to worry about your clothing going to waste at the end of its lifetime! It is also highly durable, becoming softer and more pliable the more that you wash it, which is why it’s treasured as a luxury fabric for bedding. Linen will last a lifetime, so is definitely worth the splurge.

Label: Bamboo

Bamboo is marketed as a great natural alternative to cheap synthetics because it is fast growing and requires fewer pesticides than other natural fabrics. So when organically farmed and manufactured, bamboo fabric is an eco-friendly option.

However, when bamboo is grown in commercial quantities, farmers may use chemical fertilisers to increase their harvest. In order to create the soft bamboo derived that makes the popular silk alternative, viscose, most manufacturers also dissolve the bamboo wood in chemical solvents. Moreover, the increasing demand for bamboo means forest land is now being cleared in China to make way for bamboo crops, putting panda habitats at risk.

Keep your eye out for...

The innovative fabric, Tencel

On the bright side, you can now replace your old synthetic and viscose clothes with Tencel. This is actually the brand name for a type of material made from

lyocell which is derived from wood pulp or bamboo and is produced through a closed loop process to minimise toxic waste. Tencel requires less energy and water to produce than cotton, and one producer called Lenzing AG are now using renewable energy sources to minimise their impact. It’s also 50% more absorbent than your average cotton tee making it ideal for activewear!

Labels: an ethical dilemma

Every piece of clothing has an impact. While synthetic fibres are both chemically and energy intensive to produce, we shouldn’t see that as a hall pass to buy natural fabrics without consideration. As we have seen, our insatiable and growing demand for certain natural fibres, like cotton and bamboo, has given rise to different problems of sustainability and ethics. Our advice is to buy less and buy better. The Good On You app is here to help you make an informed decision.

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Printing course at the UHI.

Some more of my prints from my evening class. I really enjoyed having time out to do something totally different. Right, is a three layer reduction lino print. I think I might do more lino printing, I’d like to try in on fabric. Bottom left, Etching using an electric Dremel (this was so much fun!) to carve into the Perspex sheet, and at the back, (& inside the front cover) the printed etching in sepia ink



BOOKSHELF

'This is Home—The art of simple living'

Natalie Walton

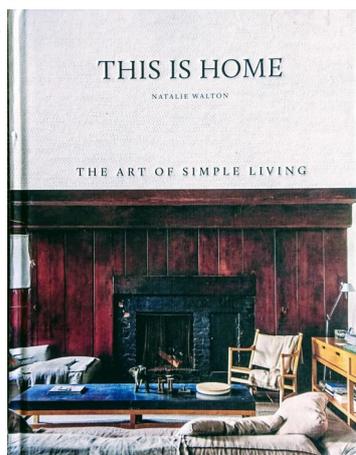
This is a beautifully written & photographed book, giving a wonderful peek into 16 homes across the world.

Split into three sections 'Create', 'Live' & 'Nurture'

The author interviewed the occupants of these homes to see if there is a common thread as to what makes us happy in the space we live in. What Home means to us.

It's for those interested in houses, in peeking behind doors, in finding out why people have/keep the things they have around them, in discovering how/why people live in the space they call home. And for those looking for inspiration & practical advice about making a home, then this book is a must.

Published by Hardie Grant Books



'The Sewing Machine'

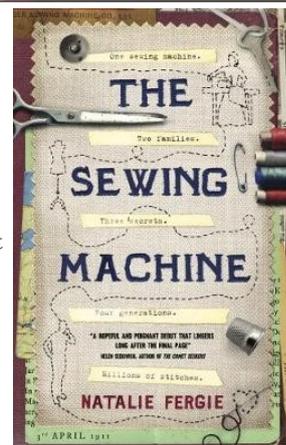
Natalie Fergie

I really, really enjoyed this. Read it whilst confined to bed and with no other distractions, which was just as well as I didn't want to put it down. I felt terribly regretful when I finished it.

Synopsis: It is 1911, and Jean is about to join the mass strike at the Singer factory. For her, nothing will be the same again. Decades later, in Edinburgh, Connie sews coded moments of her life into a notebook, as her mother did before her.

More than a hundred years after his grandmother's sewing machine was made, Fred discovers a treasure trove of documents. His family history is laid out before him in a patchwork of unfamiliar handwriting and colourful seams. He starts to unpick the secrets of four generations, one stitch at a time.

Published by crowdfunding publisher 'Unbound Books'.



Two radio programmes to catch up with



Ramblings with Clare Balding & Emma Mitchell (aka Silverpebble) + Annie the Lurcher. I met Emma electronically something like 10 years ago when I read her blog. Then met her in person a couple of years ago when I went on a creative retreat in a barn in Cambridgeshire that she organised. What a wonderful weekend it was, and although she doesn't know it that weekend was a contributing factor to many changes I've made, and several good friendships. In this interview Emma talks frankly about her mental health & how getting out & about in the coun-

tryside & looking for signs of the seasons as well as making things helps her cope with depression. www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0002zr2

Needles pulling thread I missed this so was grateful to a friend for alerting me to it. It is to quote the BBC 'a tapestry of fascinating stories about the place of the sewing needle in our lives. Sara Parker looks at what this powerful but tiny metal tool means to us at home and at work - in times of sadness and of joy'. It is really interesting.

www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04p7xls



Have you heard?

PODCAST: Creative Women International

The CWI is a woman only community created by Phily Page. She has created a global, supportive network, for creative professionals. Phily produces a blog, podcast & associated worksheet on all manner of creative entrepreneur issues, interests, challenges, articles & interviews with women from across the world. She has such an open & friendly manner sharing her own experiences good & bad. You can find more information about Phily & the CWI at www.CreativeWomenInternational.com & search for it on your podcast app & do follow on [Instg](#) or [Fbook](#).

BorrowBox.com, is a new app launched by the library service across the country.

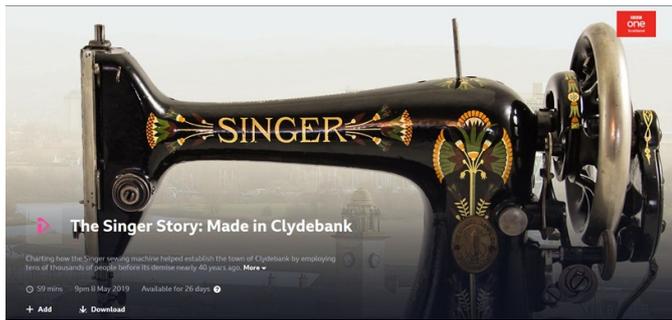
It enables you to borrow & download audiobooks and eBooks for

Borrow, download and enjoy here
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them can be expensive & free on to smartphones, a bit irritating if you only kindle, laptops etc. via want to listen to them your library card. I listen once. With over 500 to so many audiobooks, available this app will that our local library keep me quiet for some can't keep up, & buying time to come!

Did you see?



This astonishing Lion sewing machine was on the BBC Antiques Roadshow on Sunday 17 March.



It's a Kimball and Morton from Glasgow sewing machine dated 1867, and very rare, The expert, Jon Baddeley, said it was worth an incredible £10,000 to £15,000.

“The new company launched its first 'Lion' machine within a year of its foundation, as a 'Registered Design' in 1868. There is nothing novel about the mechanism (a simple transverse shuttle lockstitch) but the shape is unique with the top mechanism and needle bar hidden within a bronzed cast iron lion (Figure 1). When not in use, a dummy pair of front legs hid the needle bar and presser foot (Figure 2). The treadle has ornate end castings including a lion and an eagle and the legend 'Strength and speed' (Figure 3). Apart from this crazy machine, the company prospered on its good reputation for industrial machines for sewing sails, eyelets, grommets etc. It exhibited at the American Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 where it was the only British-made sewing machine to gain a medal.”



Taken from:
ismacs.net/kimball_and_morton/kimball_and_morton_history.html

The Singer Story: Made in Clydebank

The history of the Singer sewing machine is a really fascinating documentary of social and mechanical history. With footage from the time and interviews and memories from people who worked there and who still meet up for coffee. The Singer machine is an instantly recognisable symbol of the Industrial Revolution. Mr Singer targeted clothes making factories before he sold machines to the housewife. A clever tactic. The vast factory, of which nothing now remains, helped to put the town of Clydebank on the map alongside the ship building industry based at the Docks there. It employed tens of thousands of 'Bankies', men & women, and in 1911 was the first factory to have women striking over unfair pay & work conditions. It closed almost 40 years ago.

www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m00051z7/the-singer-story-made-in-clydebank?

There is a very interesting short clip here, acted & illustrated in a stitched animation, using the words & experience of one of the 1911 women Singer factory strikers, Jane Rae.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00n3qqv>

I found the link to this archive film in 'The Sewing Machine' by Natalie Fergie (opposite page).

Birth of a sewing machine is very much a 'through the arched window' of BBC's 1970's Playschool type of film. Lots of machines making bits of other machines. A fascinating glimpse of workers at their stations doing the same thing time and time and again. Each sewing machine is checked over many times, each cog and spindle tested.

A word of warning, and sadly, it is a silent film - no need to check if your computer is working, like I did!

<https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/1592>



And, apropos of nothing really, I'm really enjoying Stephen Poliakoff's 'Summer of Rockets' on BBC2. Worth looking for on iPlayer if you like vintage pieces. Good cast including an almost unrecognisable Timothy Spall, Claire Bloom, Keely Hawes, Ronald Pickup and Peter Firth to name but a few. Semi autobiographical, it centres around Poliakoff's family & his father's hearing aid manufacturing business. His father was accused of bugging Winston Churchill's hearing aid & gets involved with spies, MI5 & all sorts.

Coffee with another creative

In the second of my coffee with a creative series, we're meeting Charlotte Goodlett. Lottie & I met many years ago whilst walking our dogs often on the Taynish Peninsular. Lottie had two, well behaved, Labradors & I had 3 ruffians a Lurcher a Border Collie & a Whippet. Initially it was just a smile as we passed, then hellos, and then we would stand in the sun, or the rain, and chat whilst the dogs ran amok or lay patiently in the waiting. Our dogs and walk routes may have changed but happily our friendship has grown, and I was thrilled that she agreed to be interviewed. So, let's meet Lottie for coffee!

Where are we meeting & Why here?
On a warm day it would have to be on our balcony overlooking the glorious Sound of Jura. Built by my partner Dougie, it's my favourite living and working space at this time of year - and it's perfect for sleeping under the stars. Drinking our coffee, we'd be listening to the heart-warming sounds of early summer: lambs, cuckoos, lapping waves, and happy voices on the beach.



What will you have?

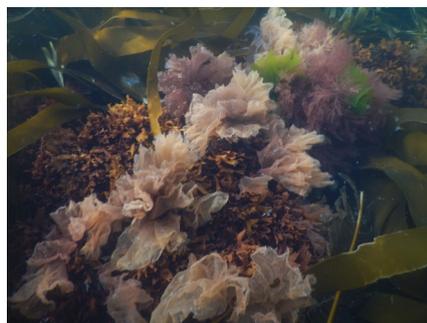
If it's the morning a very strong black coffee. Later in the day I'll have a brew with something picked from the garden - lemon balm, nettle, blackcurrant leaf, mint.... I'm afraid I'm hopeless at baking but would love a slice of Needlesmiths' cake!

Tell us a little bit about your business, what you do & where you work
Ever since I moved to the Sound of Jura 20 years ago, I have been seaweed obsessed. At first I was only

interested in eating it and taught myself to identify and cook the many delicious types. One summer I thought I'd have a go at selling it and set myself up as Sound of Jura Seaweeds. I have a licence from the Crown Estate and hand-harvest in the Sound from my kayak. As the whole process is manual and using the traditional method of drying the seaweed in the

wind and sun, I can only supply a handful of local shops and eateries. But I love being part of the seaweed movement and am proud that my enterprise is entirely sustainable and environmentally friendly.

I am also a very keen snorkeler and after splashing out on a prescription mask, I was dazzled by what I could see beneath me - an ocean



meadow swaying in the ebb and flow of the tide. Transfixed by its beauty I was compelled to explore and emulate the process of seaweed pressing - an activity popular in the Victorian era. On my snorkel forays I gather eye-catching specimens and take them home to press - a process which takes about three



weeks. Sometimes I layer or collage different types of seaweed to combine textures and shapes, or sometimes it is a single specimen that intrigues me. What I love about it is that this is nature, brought out of its environment and preserved, through this layering/collaging/pressing process for observation. For many people, seaweed is a nuisance, something to avoid, and yet, observed like this, the unexpected beauty shines through.

When I tell people I do seaweed artwork I nearly always get a quizzical look. It's only when they see the work it makes sense.



What are you working on at the moment?

I'm experimenting with making paper. I love native plants as much as algae and incorporate seaweed into the paper along with dried grasses, seeds, leaves, lichens and flowers. I have also just done an excellent printmaking course at the UHHI and am looking forward to trying out wood and lino cut printmaking with an oceanic theme.



Do you have a favourite tool or material?

My most useful tool is a pair of scissors! When I gather seaweed, to eat or make artwork with, it must be snipped rather than pulled so as to allow it to regenerate. My favourite material is, naturally, the seaweed



for its exquisite colour and extraordinary form.

We're coming in to spring now, what are you most looking forward to?

Warmer sea temperatures! It is absolute bliss. After a bracing winter, to be in water that is 13 or 14 degrees and rising! And I'm enjoying not frantically dashing home after a snorkel to get warmed up.

What is inspiring you?

Always nature and the seasons. I would say my artwork translates what I witness in the natural world and the wonder it evokes in me.

What would be your Desert Island must have?

Well I hope the island would have a rocky shoreline and a good surge so that it would have plenty of seaweed. A must have would be

Dougie. He's the most practical person in the world and is always up for an adventure.

Anything you'd like us to know? A guilty secret, special plans, or an announcement?

I'm endeavouring to have a 'no-spend' year - just food, bills and second-handbooks. A friend inspired me to do it. She said I would find life so much simpler and freer. And it is!

You can find Sound of Jura seaweeds on Facebook: at www.soundofjuraseaweed.com Lottie is also taking part in the Artmap Argyll Open Studios weekend in August & will be welcoming visitors to her home on Wednesdays and Sundays, 11am - 5pm, 30th June until 15th September



Firain—cont'd from pg 11

How did you find your first suppliers?

Before firmly deciding to open Firain, I went to the Pulse trade show in London and saw some wonderful makers and creatives there; some of them I had already found on Instagram so it was great to meet them in person! I knew I wanted to stock Join candles, for example, because a friend was already converted, then I saw Jen's vegan, natural products at the trade show and added them to my 'must order' list, if and when I opened a shop of course! I also found my first suppliers by looking at Etsy. I wanted to work with very small businesses who would accommodate my lack of experience and lack of

spending power!

Do you have a favourite product?

Oh this is impossible to answer! I am truly in love with everything I sell!

Can you sum up Firain style on three words?

Uplifting, creative, authentic.

Do shop online at www.firain.com follow on Instagram @firain_shop follow on twitter @firain_shop follow on Pinterest firain_shop



‘Connecting Threads’ an exhibition at Dunoon Burgh Hall

“An exhibition by 7 artists living and working in Argyll connected by the landscape and weather around them, and the use of ‘THREAD’ in all its manifestations. Binding, stitching, weaving, thick, thin, in and out, up and down” read the poster and, unsurprisingly perhaps, I really wanted to make the effort to get to see it.

It was a bad weather day when Mr B & I caught the ferry from Tarbert to Portavadie and drove across the Cowal peninsular to Dunoon to visit the ‘Connecting Threads’ exhibition at Dunoon Burgh Hall. Dunoon Burgh Hall is an impressive and beautiful Victorian building which has been saved by the community and restored into a creative arts & cultural centre on the Cowal peninsular.

This was our first visit to the Burgh Hall, and we were really impressed with everything about it. We were met by a smiling volunteer who welcomed us into the building and exhibition. The gallery space, with windows overlooking the main street at one end, is bright and well lit, high ceilinged and painted white with a wooden floor. There is a small shop area with art, crafts and



cards by local artists. A little further on in the building there’s a cosy café area, a separate area that is dog friendly with large armchairs, books, and a small display about the history of the Hall. The baking and lunches are home made and there was a huge selection of teas, which came in a pot with a lovely retro cup and saucer.

www.dunoonburghhall.org.uk

Below left Pip Weaser makes absolutely beautiful, functional and decorative objects in the tradition of “hedgerow” basketry, from plants often grown in her wild garden near Loch Melfort.

Louise Oppenheimer right a hand weaver living in Kilmartin Glen presented wall hangings and framed examples in her familiar style.

Ann E Ferguson below right displayed her stained glass to great effect in the windows of the gallery.





Left Fiona McPhail at Carry Farm produces knitted textiles using yarn from her own Hebridean sheep flock. The naturally dark fleece produces this very deep brown/black yarn.

She also showed a beautifully soft sheepskin that had been tanned naturally using tree bark.

Midge Gourlay's section below had some very varied styles and materials. It was heartening to see someone else, who, like me, works in different methods and styles. From this bright blue wall hanging which I think was made from dyed silk cocoons which were machine stitched together, paper and fabric shoes and a knitted and fabric applique wall hanging.



Sarah Sumsion left displayed some beautiful examples of her very fine woven silk wall hangings.

Marcia Clark's basketry, below right in Argyll grown brown willow showcased some small and medium-sized baskets and stylised fish shaped platters.





I spotted this tasty and seasonal recommendation in one of April's weekly newsletters from [Creative Countryside](http://www.creativecountryside.com).

And on the right the Sunday brunch version I made. Sough dough toast, some cream cheese,

British Asparagus lightly boiled then tossed in butter & lemon juice, roasted British tomatoes, topped with a local free-range egg. I could have eaten it twice!

<https://www.deliciousmagazine.co.uk/recipes/griddled-asparagus-goats-cheese-and-herb-oil-toast/>



Spring tides

The spring tides slide
us into summers balm.
Calm seas ease us through
to autumn's rough tough
surf. Winter's foaming froth
and roiling waters relentlessly
toss us unceasingly, carelessly,
until the spring tides swell again.

by Kate MacDonald

Introducing My Three Old Ladies

It must be confessed, I have a lot of sewing machines, as does my Dad, we must have something like 40 between us in various states of (di)repair! After watching the Singer Sewing machine documentary I decided to do a little research and to see if I could find out where my three oldest ladies were made.

My love of sewing machines started with this one, *right*. It belonged to my paternal grandmother and is the one I learned to sew on, I didn't have my own electric machine until my 19th birthday. It's a 'Hand-crank' machine, a model 16K, made between January & June 1906 in Elizabethport, USA. At the time it would have cost USA \$36.80 to 41.60 approx £28.39-£32.10 a HUGE sum of money then.



My maternal grandmother's, *below*, is a model 201K and to my delight was made in Clydebank, registered in October 1947. This is also a hand-crank and has a lovely curved, pressed wood cover. (The cover to Grandma's machine is in rather a sorry state having fallen prey to a nibbling, teething, border collie puppy some years ago.)



And then there's the highly gilded 'Victoria', *below*. She was registered in January 1904 and made in Elizabethport, USA. She is a treadle machine and was given to me by a cousin. I don't remember where she rescued it from but she & a friend carried it on the Glasgow Underground and through the streets before lugging it up two flights of stairs to

her flat. She then cleaned it up, named her 'Victoria' and offered it to me. I could hardly say no!

One of dad's is a treadle that has been 'electrified'. I remember it being in mum's work-room where she made costumes for theatre, TV & advertising. Many a teddy bear costume was made on it like this one for Hamleys toy shop in London. I credit learning how to do a hill start in a car on this machine. You had to balance the treadle very carefully or it ran away with you (me), I expect mum was fine!



Did you know that June 13th is National Sewing Machine Day?

There's a Day to Celebrate the Invention of the Sewing Machine. It really is a thing!

A day to celebrate the invention of the sewing machine of course. And why not? I've only just discovered this day, but apparently it is observed every year on June 13th. No-one seems to know why the 13th June, as September 10th is also known as National Sewing Machine day. That is the day that the sewing machine was patented. (I suspect both are an American 'invention' but I'm not going to knock it).

The sewing machine was invented Englishman Thomas Saint who applied for the first sewing machine patent, in 1790. Although this design was never taken any further, a working model of a sewing machine was made in 1874. William Newton Wilson found the drawings made by Saint in the Patent Office in London. Changing some of the engineering slightly, he built the first working sewing machine, this model is on display in the London Science Museum.

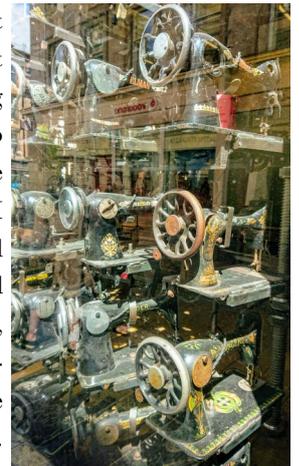
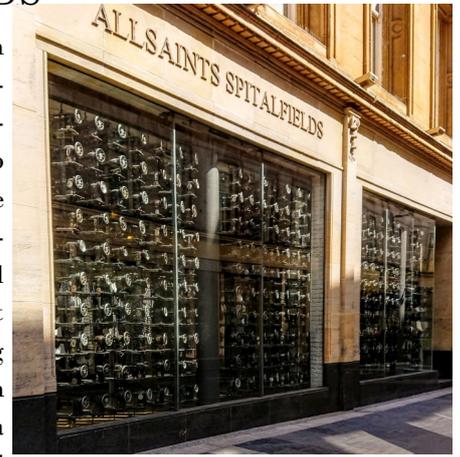


ALL SAINTS' SPITALFIELDS

I was ambling along Buchanan Street in Glasgow window shopping in the sunshine whilst waiting for Mr B and couldn't believe my eyes when I saw this shop window display. I didn't know what the shop sold, but excitedly I went in. Imagine my disappointment when I found it was just a clothes shop. I had hoped it would be a haberdashers or a sewing



machine shop, given that there was a couple of hundred sewing machines in all the windows it hadn't been such a daft assumption. I asked if I might take some pictures of the sewing machines and was told that so long as I didn't take any of the clothes that was fine to which I replied I really wasn't interested in the clothes and I couldn't tell you now what they looked like, however, I could probably describe each and every one of these lovely old sewing machines.



I did some Googling when I got home and found that all of the All Saints stores have sewing machines as window displays. According to one blogger, "these well-worn antiques represent the style of All Saints' washed-out looking fashions, but the machines are also a reminder that All Saints started life in Spitalfields, the historic tailors' and silk weavers' part of London."



The American flagship store open in 2010 on Broadway with 493 on display in the windows. I didn't have a chance to count how many were on display here I was too busy oohing and ahing at the different makes and designs and feeling a bit sad that they weren't

going to be used again and would probably be dumped in a skip when the shop closed. Also, they were very dusty!



Needlesmiths Classes

It's been a busy few months with various classes, courses & workshops, more about the Silver-clay workshops on page 24.

I'm teaching a couple of one-to-one classes currently; a Beginners course where so far we've made a, slightly unseasonal, draft excluder, applique cushion cover and a cafetière cosy; and dressmaking, as well as a group Beginners Dressmaking Course. C & I made a Cleo dungaree dress with the pattern from TillyandtheButtons.com. I had the denim fabrics in my stash and we've had a lot of fun making these dresses. However, they aren't the most flattering of garments and I rather think that very soon we will be making some adjustments.

The Beginners Dressmaking class have been making the Helena Tunic Dress by SewMeSomething.co.uk I met the designer, Julia, last year and she was wearing this dress at the Kirsty Allsopp Handmade Fair. After some searching through patterns I chose this one because there were a lot of processes within the one garment. Although this is marked as a 'Beginners' pattern, there are some bits that have been quite tricky. It includes pin tucks, inset pockets, interlined neckband, gathering, sleeves, sleeve placket & button holes as well as under-stitching and top stitching, new techniques for most of the group and quite a lot to take in. They've done brilliantly and I'm looking forward to seeing them all in their dresses on the last week.



Larking around on the day we completed our dresses.



The Beginners Dressmaking class getting to grips with their paper patterns on the first evening.



The blue fabric here is a heavy cotton vintage bed sheet that I dyed with Dylon washing machine dye I think it was 'Jeans blue'. It came out a little bit more 'Royal blue' than I would like, but the fabric took the colour well. I made the tunic ahead of the class and have been making another one at the same time as them in an antique linen bed sheet I also dyed, 'Vintage blue' this time, which is a lovely summery, china blue.

A lot of May got 'cancelled' due to catching flu - the real sort which wiped me out for the larger part of four weeks - I haven't done as much making of anything as I would have liked to/should have done, be it lampshades, cards or dressmaking. I have a pile of washed (but not yet ironed) fabric from my stash, some patterns I've purchased as pdf's printed but awaiting taping together that I am itching to begin sewing. Calico cut up ready for painting, painted calico ready for sewing, & some ready for card making. June is going to be a busy month!

Higher Art 'No-Sew' Dressmaking



I was asked if I might give Rebecca some guidance with finishing off her Higher Art submission which included making a dress without sewing it. Rebecca had ground to a bit of a halt and wasn't sure how to take her designs on paper into a dress. We chatted about how to develop her inspiration, into the finished item. We looked at Liz Hurley's safety pin dress and to Vivien Westwood for some creative ideas too. After a couple of sessions, and a nifty wee gadget that 'shot' little plastic stitches, Rebecca finished her submission on time and got a friend to model it with the aid of some judiciously placed safety pins. I really enjoyed these sessions with Rebecca and combined with one of my Junior Needlesmith being interested in taking her SQA Nat 4&5 in Fashion & Textile Technology, which isn't offered by the High School, I'm looking into whether it is something I can offer as an evening class. A case of Do let me know if you or anyone you know might be interested.



JUNIOR NEEDLESMITHS



This term, my Monday night group have been doing dress making. Learning how to place & cut out patterns, why cutting neatly is important, sew French seams, sewing channels to insert elastic, & hemming. Sheets were the fabric of choice. 'Retired' bed linen is a great fabric to learn to dressmake with. If a polycotton, it won't shrink & doesn't need a lot of ironing during the making process & it doesn't cost much so correcting any mistakes isn't too costly.



The Thursday girls have been making simple pyjama trousers & aprons.

Fabric upcycling in action again, Sophie chose to use a table cloth for her pyjama trousers and with just a little bit of assistance got the pattern matched perfectly. Rowan has grown out of hers already so will need to add an extension cuff! They both used remnant curtain fabric for their aprons with material from a shirt and a sheet for the pockets. The straps and ties were made using washing line.



Jamie comes up the hill to the Barn for an hour once a week, she has a few difficulties, but really enjoys sewing if there isn't anyone else there, as the noise of chatter and another sewing machine, can be too much for her. I'm delighted that she wants to come and spend an hour sewing with me & we do whatever takes her fancy that week. This term we've made a lavender filled purple owl for her sister, a gingham peg bag for mum, a shopping bag from curtain fabric covered in oranges for Granny and then recently she wanted to make a mini version of her white Highland pony Cameron. This was a challenge for me never mind Jamie! I haven't ever made a stuffed toy without a pattern before. We looked through my various toy making books and used a pattern for an elephant as a starting point with a little adjustment - no trunk if nothing else! Jamie auditioned quite a few fabrics to find one with the right 'feel'. He has a fleece undercarriage and a soft velvety topside. His mane and tail are a mixture of angora and a fluffy yarn and he's stuffed with pillow filling, big Cameron's hair and lavender. That big smile when she finished him absolutely made my day.



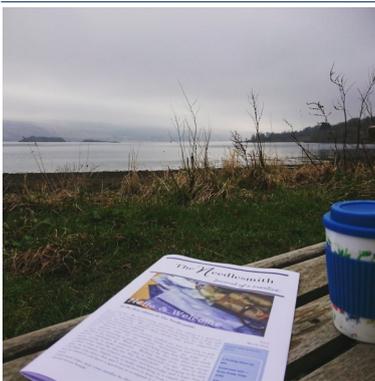
Silverclay workshops



Delivering a workshop to the ladies of the Lochgair craft group in March. They successfully applied to their local Wind Farm Community Fund for a micro grant to help with costs.

Silverclay is a recycled/upcycled product, so although at first it may seem like an odd thing for me to be interested in - I'm not a jeweller & have no training/experience in jewellery making - it does fit with my whole desire to use less, or to make more with what is already out there. I particularly like being able to make silver buttons and pieces of textured silver using lace or fabric like Jan did for her brooch far right. As an art student I fossilised fabric in ceramic slip, somehow it has a similar quality. I've been planning some silvery additions to lampshades...

Silverclay is made by retrieving the tiny pieces of silver from electronics, creating a silver powder and mixing with finely milled, recycled cotton & paper fibres and a non-toxic binder. Once a piece is modelled and dried it can be fired on an ordinary gas hob or a camping stove. The cotton fibres and binder burn away to leave pure silver. It can be sent away to be hallmarked if you wish.



Where did you read yours?

I will confess to a distinct feeling of pride when I collected the printed copies of the Needlesmith on publication day.

Not wanting to arrive early for the Silverclay workshop I was taking (see photo top left), I drove on until I found a bench with a view. Not the sunniest of days, and not much to see as I looked out across Loch Fyne, but five minutes to sit, breathe the sea salty air, drink tea and to pat the paper copy of my Journal.

I was delighted to receive some really lovely feedback from readers including these on the right. Do please let me know what you think of this edition - good & bad!

During a creative retreat weekend in Cambridgeshire three years ago we spent a morning making silverclay pendants. It was brilliant & I was hooked. I have been making silver pendants and teaching beginners workshops since then and still find the whole process from silicon mould making to magical. There is real alchemy at work turning a blob of grey clay to shiny silver. The best bit is watching students faces as they reveal the silver from under the white oxide coating. There is an enormous sense



I loved Angelica's expression of surprise and delight at finding silver!

Silverclay workshop dates:

*Saturday 8 June at the MS Centre, Lochgilhead from 2-5pm
Saturday 6 July Craignish Village Hall, Ardfern 6-9pm
£45p/p all materials, equipment & refreshments supplied.*

I can also do workshops for groups, for example, hen parties, craft groups, or a friends get-together, 'girls night in/out' event. This craft can be done in most venues.

Please email to book a place, or for more information



From silicon mould to solid silver pendant or brooch.

Congratulations Kate. What a beautiful journal - it has just been my bedtime reading! Well done. Anne

Oh, Kate, what a beautifully written and presented journal - so "you from the heart" and so informative. Podcasts are new to me too, so great to see your article with reviews on your favourites. "Bookshelf" is a lovely addition - like you, just love to have an insight into other people's reading habits and views. I am particularly inspired by "The Stitcher's Journal" to which you have subscribed.I am sorely tempted! Thanks for sharing - especially one of your lovely homemade cake recipes just discovered on the back page. I will enjoy reading all the detail again curled up in bed tonight. Jan

Absolutely excellent. I didn't think it was for me and passed it on to Doris.. but.. I read it from beginning to end and thoroughly enjoyed it. Brendan

The Adventure Of A Little Bear

A short story by Kate MacDonald

His golden eyes stared up through the branches to the quickly darkening sky. Large, fat raindrops started to fall landing on the sandy soil around him with a patter. A raindrop landed in the corner of one eye and ran down the brown cheek leaving a trail in the dust like the tracks of a tear. The blue of his jumper deepened, his hair flattened to his head as the rain got heavier.

Henry was on the beach crossly kicking at the pebbles. He didn't want to be there. It was a boring beach. There wasn't any sand or rock pools or, it seemed, any sea, as the tide had gone out so far. He didn't know why they were there. He had nothing to do, it was too cold for ice-cream, according to his mother, and they couldn't go out on a boat, because there wasn't any sea, and the little train wasn't running, because it was out of season. However, most of all he didn't know where Teddo had gone and no-one would listen to him.

It was all Thea's fault, he groused, kicking harder at the stones and wishing it was at his sister. She always gets carsick. If they hadn't stopped for her, the car dad had borrowed wouldn't have stalled and they would have got to the holiday cottage. If it wasn't for *her* he would be out playing on the sandy beach, or rock pooling, and Teddo would be safe sitting on his bed.

He gave a vicious kick to a particularly large and, as it turned out, immovable stone. The bitter taste of bile filled his mouth at the pain and injustice of it all. Tears ran down his face.

Suddenly there was a jerk, a swoosh of wind, and his arm was yanked almost out of its socket. Raindrops flew from his jumper and shook from his hair.

"Bingo! Here! What have you got there? Drop. Drop it!"

A little brown bear, with golden eyes and a bright blue jumper, sat on the window ledge of the cafe looking out towards the rainswept play park, empty swings swaying in the wind. He was a little battered, his left ear was crumpled, there was a hole in his right paw, his fur was still damp, but his jumper was dry and, in the gloom of a grey afternoon, the vivid blue fairly sang out.

Henry limped along behind his mother and sister, sniffing, occasionally wiping his sleeve across his tear streaked face. He would never find Teddo and nobody cared. Henry's mother glanced backwards at her unhappy son. She was at her wits end. James had gone off in the AA van and she didn't know when he'd be back, and the weather had taken a turn for the worse, so they couldn't stay on the beach. She glanced up and seeing the café, and deciding that ice-cream might help, steered her daughter towards it, calling behind her for Henry to hurry up.

Pages from my recipe files

Lavender Shortbread with an easy, indulgent, Strawberry Crème Dessert

The strawberry dessert can be made in advance, ideally in fact, the night before as this allows the strawberries to macerate and the sugar topping to dissolve. However, it can also be made moments before eating.

You will need:

Strawberries
Double Cream
Thick Natural Yoghurt
Caster sugar
Golden granulated sugar

For the Shortbread

225g / 8 oz Butter
125g / 4 oz Caster sugar
325g / 12 oz Plain flour
Tea spoon Lavender flowers

Pretty glass bowl/s
Mixing bowls
Rolling pin
Biscuit cutter



For the Strawberry Crème

1. You need equal quantities of double cream and natural yoghurt - a thick creamy one - no point using the fat free one here!
2. Whip the cream until it just starts to hold it's shape, be careful not to over whip.
3. Gently fold in the yogurt in till completely combined.
4. Chop the strawberries up and put them in bottom of the bowl/s and sprinkle with caster sugar. Toss lightly to mix.
5. Spoon the cream over the top of the strawberries.
6. Sprinkle a thick layer of the golden granulated sugar over the top of the cream, completely covering it. Place the bowl/s in the fridge until needed. If left over night the sugar will dissolve and mixing slightly with the cream. You can sprinkle the top with more sugar just before serving for some additional crunch.



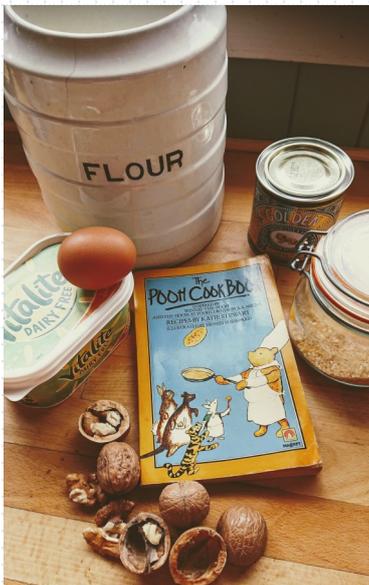
For the shortbread

1. Heat the oven to 190C/375F/Gas 5.
2. Soften the butter, then add the sugar & lavender flowers cream until smooth.
3. Stir in the flour to form a smooth dough. chill in the fridge for 20 minutes.
4. Turn on to a lightly floured work surface and gently roll out until the dough is 1cm/1/2in thick.
5. Cut into rounds or fingers and place onto a baking tray.
6. Bake in the oven for 15-20 minutes, or until pale golden-brown. Sprinkle with caster sugar whilst still warm
7. Then remove from baking tray and set aside to cool on a wire rack.
8. Serve with the strawberry crème for an indulgent, but simple, summer dessert.



As it was Mental Health Awareness Week in May, and it is a known fact that baking can improve your mood, here is a second recipe. Did you know that baking has long been recognised for its therapeutic qualities? Have a look at www.calmmoment.com/mindfulness/how-mindful-baking-can-improve-your-mood-and-reduce-stress/ to find out more.

Winne the Pook's Honey Cookies



I have been making these since I was given this book in 1979. I often use golden syrup instead of honey and swap the almonds in the recipe for walnuts, adding some chopped ones to the mixture as well as putting them on top. This is a really quick and easy recipe to bake, ideal if you're short of time and have friends coming for coffee. Or need something to do with a small person on a rainy afternoon. When I was a lot younger, I used to get very cross as the finished biscuits rarely made it to the biscuit tin, they never lasted more than a day as my father and brothers would eat them straight off the cooling rack!

4oz Butter/margarine
4oz Soft Brown Sugar
1 Egg
8oz Self-raising flour
Pinch of salt

1 rounded Tbl spn of runny honey or Golden Syrup
Vanilla Essence
Flaked almonds (as per original recipe) or chopped walnuts

1. Pre-heat the oven to 170°C/Gas 4
2. Start by beating or whisking the butter until soft, add the sugar, then cream together. Crack the egg into a small bowl, add the vanilla essence and lightly beat together.
3. Gradually beat the egg in to the butter & sugar with a little of the flour. Beat in the honey. Mix to a soft dough with half the add the rest of the flour to mix to a firm dough.



5. Or spread the mixture out evenly on the baking tray and sprinkle with flaked almond or chopped walnuts
6. Bake for 7-10 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from the oven and place the cookies on a wire cooling rack.
7. If made as one piece, score in to fingers whilst still in the tray and allow to cool a little before transferring to a wire rack.
8. Guard from potential biscuit thieves!

4. Either, scoop out walnut sized pieces and roll into a ball placing 6-8 on a greased/lined baking tray. Flatten slightly and press in flaked almond or walnut pieces

Once they've cooled, wrap them in a gingham napkin, make a cup of tea, find a patch of daisies in the sunshine and enjoy a quiet 10 minutes listening to the birdsong and enjoying the view. Ideal for International Picnic Day on the 18th of June.





Sunset in May at Crinan Harbour - no filters used or required

A note about the printed copies of The Needlesmith ...

If you have purchased a print copy of this Journal (Thank you very much indeed!) then it will have been printed by the very nice people at Anglia Print www.angliaprint.co.uk I got the first edition of 'The Needlesmith' printed at my local Council Print Room which, for the few I had printed, was perfectly adequate. However, for this second edition I really wanted to get a larger number printed, and it was important to me that it should be as environmentally friendly as possible. Inspired by the quality of the 'Creative Countryside' magazine & 'The Jwnl' I aspired to have my wee publication printed sustainably. So after some online research and website reading I found Anglia Print and liked what their 'About' page said...

“Printing with the environment in mind Our Eco-Friendly Printing

Powered by 100% renewable energy with investment in waterless printing presses, using non-soya vegetable oil

based inks and a zero waste to landfill policy since 2005, we have eliminated the use of all hazardous substances and water in production. Being certified Carbon Neutral, we use materials from eco-friendly, ethically and environmentally certified sources: 95% (by volume) of material purchased are Forest Stewardship Council-certified or recycled.”

They were happy to answer my (daft) questions, several email chats later and learning about what 'matt' means to the lay person & the printer, not the same thing, here it is; 'The Needlesmith', in all it's eco-friendly printed glory. I hope you like it and when you've finished with it, do pass it on, or add it to your recycling bin, or shred it and put it on the compost heap, happy in the knowledge that it will biodegrade.

Printed copies are available from Love Dove Studio, Lochgilphead & the Scottish Design Exchange, Buchanan Galleries Glasgow. Or send me an email & I will pop one in the post. Copies cost £3.50 each.



Printed by Anglia Print Limited
A climate positive printing company

You can follow me about, simply search for 'Needlesmiths' in all the usual places or click the icons on the right... If you have a question or want to drop me a line I'd love to hear from you, email me at needlesmiths@mail.com



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