

**CYMDAEITHAS GWISGOEDD A TECSTILAU CYMRU**  
**THE COSTUME AND TEXTILE SOCIETY OF WALES**  
**Newsletter September 2008**

**Meetings are held at the National History Museum, St. Fagans.**

**Located in the Committee Room of the Office Block unless otherwise advertised.**

**Doors open 10.30am for coffee. 11am Morning Lecture 2pm Afternoon Lecture**

**20 September 2008**

11.00 am **Megan Davies Ngoumtsa** : *'The Relationship between Women and the Needle'*

2.00 pm **Dr Elinor Kapp**: *'Ruffians and Loose Women' – unpicking words we derive from textiles*

**8 November 2008**

11.00 am **Jane Meredith**: *'Dyed in the Wool – the Alchemy of Plant Dyes'*

2.00 pm **Moirra Thunder**: *'The Story of an Eighteenth Century Silk Gown'*

**21 February 2009**

11.00 am **Jill Salen**: *'Corsets – hidden truths*

2.00 pm **Elen Phillips**: *A tour of the new Costume Store at St Fagans*

This Newsletter will be rather less formal than usual as I am preparing it in somewhat of a hurry as John and I are about to embark on our travels again, this time to Kashmir and Jammu to walk in the mountains, see the ethnically diverse people of Leh and to attend the Ladak Festival. Unfortunately I will be missing the September meeting.

A week before the February meeting Elizabeth Friendship asked if I would take her place as a speaker as she was having problems with the designers and printers for her new book, of which we will hear later in the year. So it was that, with the aid of Elen Phillips at the computer and my daughter Megan and Stuart who acted as models, I spoke about a Wild Frontiers trip *'Under a Pagan Moon'* that we had undertaken in December 2007.

**The Kalash People of the Hindu Kush** are a unique minority community living in the southern gorges of the Hindu Kush mountain range near Chitral in the Northwest Frontier Province. It was once part of an area known as Kafiristan, the border with Afghanistan is only a few miles to the west and while the Afghan Kafirs were forcibly converted to Islam those in

today's Pakistan retained their Polytheistic religion, culture and habits.

We had been given permission to stay in the village of Balanguru in the Kalash valley of Rumbor and to take part in the winter solstice festival of Chaumos. After a purification ceremony the women visitors were expected to wear Kalash clothing which was provided at the guesthouse while the men changed into cotton shalwar kameez made up in the market at Chitral, swathed in a woollen shawl topped off with traditional flat roll brimmed woollen hats. The Kalash men have adopted the same clothing as their Muslim neighbours, but the women wear long black robes with an elaborate headdress and thick strings of multi-coloured beads around their necks.

Women go unveiled and take a very active and visible part in their community. The *pirhan* is a long black cotton dress decorated at neck and hem with machine applied woollen yarn in bright primary colours each designed and made by the wearer to display her skill and personality. Worn over long black shalwar trousers the *pirhan* is pulled up to form a pouch over a *pati*, this is long cotton and wool fringed band wound tightly around the waist. Many strands of orange and yellow glass beads are

worn piled high at the neck, with an ornament or key hanging in easy reach and in the winter cold coloured shawls are wound around head and shoulders, these like the beads are purchased from the merchants in Chitral,.



Megan and Stuart model Kalash clothing

Women and girls all wear their hair in five plaits, only unbraiding their hair at funerals as a sign of mourning. The *shushut* a minor headdress is worn constantly attending to domestic chores inside and while working in the fields, it is a wool or cotton ring decorated with cowrie shells, beads, and chains, the tail hangs half way down the back and is also decorated with cowries, buttons and small bells, it ends in a deep fringe of threads.

During the festival when there were rituals to attend and friends and families join in singing and dancing the women wore a ceremonial headdress over the *shushut*. The *kupas* an oval length of fabric was also elaborately decorated with rows of cowrie shells, beads, metal buttons the edges were tightly stitched to curve up like a pie crust topped by a woollen pompom. These were worn with considerable grace by the Kalash women, but we decided that it was the result of years of practice!

I was fortunate to have been able to buy a complete traditional costume and knowing the names of the women who

created it I want to return during the summer months to see them working at their crafts and to express my admiration for their creative powers.

We saw some harsh and unforgiving but spectacularly beautiful landscapes, visited the Khyber Pass, looked for the elusive snow leopard and finally drove out of Chitral over the Lowari Pass just before it was closed by snow for the winter. It was an amazing trip and the vibrant scenes and hospitality we experienced in the Kalash valleys will stay with us forever.

**Gaye Evans**

In the afternoon **Gail Forrest** made a welcome return visit to talk on the subject of '*Japanese Textiles – Fabrics from the Floating World*' illustrated with many beautiful pieces from her own collection. Unlike in other industrialised countries the traditional arts have flourished in Japan. Following a brief account of the history of Japanese clothing Gail spoke about the enormous variety of textiles that have been used in their creation. The important role of the craftsman is recognised in Japan, their skill was obvious, in the embroidered textiles, lightweight silks and ramie fibres embellished with *shibori*, tie and dyed patterns bearing subtle symbolic meaning. Many textiles are so difficult to make that they are hung up as a work of art. Gail visited the Uzenzomi workshops to see how silk was stretched and painted with rice paste, then dyed and washed in river water, the process repeated many times to create extremely detailed patterns.

In Okinawa the Royal Family used yellow dyes on their Court dress which combined Chinese and Japanese influences; these have become very desirable objects and can be astoundingly expensive.

Ikat dyed and woven fabric can be simple as in *kasuri* or form complex pictures as in the *kasuri aigi* form.

Hand-woven kimonos made on a narrow loom can be purchased from a shop or made to commission. Summer wear often features stencilled designs and block print is popular too, Japanese fashion magazines featuring elegant ensembles are carefully scrutinized by their sophisticated readers. Today vintage textiles are often mixed with new pieces and scraps become accessories, incorporated in patchwork and rare and valuable pieces have been collected from temples and remade into almost complete kimonos once more.

Wax resist textiles are padded into garments as a wedding present and can be used as bedding. Old sumptuary laws forbade the use of silks, gold embroidery and stencilling so in rural areas *fuji* or wisteria fibres, hemp or *asa*, cotton and rice straw have all been used for clothing. The indigenous people have their own distinctive robes, such as the chain-stitch designs of the Ainu of Hokkaido and *sim-oogi* a very rare slub silk made in the Southern Volcanic Islands of Japan.

Gail had some wonderful textiles to share with us and we took great pleasure in hearing about and examining the fine work on display.

Many thanks to Lindsay Evans Robertson for raising £88 for Society funds from the sale of donated books and costume items which he brought along to the meeting.

The AGM was held on 12 April, our finances are healthy ,but it is difficult to encourage new people to come onto the committee. We need some new ideas for speakers and want to continue to offer our members a varied and high quality programme of speakers.

After lunch our Guest Speaker was **Gina Corrigan** whose lecture on '*Costume and Textile Techniques of South West China*' was a masterly discourse on the Miao

people, their customs and superb costumes and textiles.

Using material from *The Gina Corrigan Collection* and her own photographs she explained how the Miao people had come to inhabit the remote high limestone plateaus of Guizhou Province. Despite the harsh environment, forced to farm on poor soils and steep terraced hillsides, often existing below the poverty line the Miao still manage to produce exquisitely decorated objects to use in their daily lives.

Communities were isolated and developed their own customs and identity .Two plants were cultivated for bast fibres these were hemp and ramie. They were processed spun and woven by hand, this was women's work and very labour intensive. Indigo is still actively grown and used as a dye, the Dye Vats and traditional techniques were described although chemical dyes are used by professional dyers.



**Miao embroidery and applique**

It was customary for young girls to learn to sew, making their costumes for the festivals were they would display their skills and find a husband, this still happens at the Shedong Festival.

Today the tradition of embroidery still exists but decoration is less detailed and more modern materials are used and many Miao girls attend school and are no longer learning the traditional skills.

However it is still possible to see extremely fine pieces and Gina has collected complete costumes and examples of the various embroidery patterns and techniques. Two books have been published based on the collection and individual pieces were discussed in depth. A heavily pleated skirt was examined yards of indigo dyed cotton, had been wrapped around a barrel then pleated and stitched in parallel lines, soaked in Soya starch to retain the pleats the skirt is left to dry before a waistband is attached and it is ready to be worn



**Indigo dyed and pleated skirt and silver jewellery**

The use of 'silk felt' as decoration and the minute stitches used on the edges of jackets and baby carriers must have been unbelievably difficult to achieve. Folded silk work using tiny pieces of ribbon, couching and silk floss satin stitch over paper outlines, appliqué work and 'tin' embroidery all attested to the incredible skills of the Miao women.

In winter they do a lot of wax work using a ladao after drawing the design with a fingernail. Hand weaving and braiding methods were also illustrated. The pictures showed how distinctive were the Miao minorities and how truly amazing are their textile techniques.

I purchased the two books on Miao Embroidery and Textile Techniques and have read and re-read them with growing amazement!

In May we held our **'Look and Learn Day'** next to the Restaurant in the Main Museum Building at St. Fagans.

It was an opportunity to see some of the work of our members and to try out some new techniques. Verna Turner worked at her lace pillow and displayed a wide variety of pieces made by herself and Caroline Marshall.



**Verna working at her lace**

Mary Thompson displayed her rag rug work. Several of us had attended Jane Dorsett's workshop in Oakdale after she spoke to the Society in February 2007, but only Mary had enthusiastically pursued the craft. Adapting and personalizing the technique to make bags and accessories which she has sold to raise funds for charity.

Ruth and Sarah Woodington showed a collection of Period Bonnets and ran a workshop providing a pattern to make a piped sun bonnet. These were taken home in various stages of completion.



**Bonnet from Ruth's collection**

Helen Aanensen set up her spinning wheel and we were able to try to spin a length of yarn, it's much harder than it looks! She also had on display pieces of her knitted and crochet work.

Caroline Vincent talked about the raised buttons that she has made for her Re-enactment Costumes and she demonstrated braiding techniques. Elizabeth Friendship also demonstrated finger braids and how to make Chinese knots.

Gaye Evans showed examples of her patchwork and quilts inspired by Welsh and Indian textiles and we talked about different techniques and design ideas.

**2008 Summer Outing**

Finally on 28<sup>th</sup> June, on what turned out to be one of the rare sunny days this summer a group of seventeen of our members met at Berrington Hall near Leominster.



We were met by Althea McKenzie who is in

charge of the conservation and recording of the Wade Collection which is stored in Berrington Hall.

Charles Paget Wade amassed more than 22,000 items during his lifetime and many of them are on display in his home at Snowhill Manor. It was considered necessary by the National Trust to remove the costumes and textiles to be catalogued and conserved, but once boxed the collection proved too large to return to Snowhill, so it remains behind the scenes in several spacious rooms at Berrington Hall. Althea generously gave up her time on Saturday to show us some of the collection which is not normally open to the public. We split into two groups which gave everyone the chance to examine up close the pieces Althea had selected. Wade had been a discerning collector concentrating on items from the 17 and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and on pieces which displayed fine craftsmanship. He and his friends had dressed up in some of the costumes for their entertainment but the items we were shown were in remarkably good condition.



**Fine white work embroidery**

There were so many beautiful things to look at and something special for everyone. A gaming purse, a quilt that had been dated precisely by the printed patterns of it cottons, a gauzy dress we thought far too daring for a young woman, fine

embroidery and a cut velvet man's suit scattered with spangles and edged with swirls of stranded silk flower and leaf patterns.



**Dorset button on mans waiscoat**

Caroline has more photographs which she is willing to show at the next meeting.

Later we had a chance to see the rest of the house and some of the gardens, it had been a lovely day and I understand from Elizabeth that the Costume Society will be holding next years' Symposium at Berrington Hall, I am sure they will find as much to delight as we did.