

CETG ARCHIVE

Report

10th December 2018

Speaker: Freya Jones

Talk: Fabulous fibres and their uses

Freya is the Chair of the Bucks Guild of Weavers, Spinner and Dyers and runs her own shop in Stoke Mandeville next to Fabric HQ and the Bucks Goat Centre. She introduced us to a whole array of fibres - who knew there were so many!

Protein fibres

All fibres made from protein use low amount of energy to produce. Keratin, found in hair strands, is one example. Protein fibres are the most popular fibres used. Wool fibres are solid; hair fibres and hollow fibres help keep animals warm.

Sheep

There are hundreds of breeds of sheep. Merino sheep are the only sheep bred for their wool/fleece as their fleece is very high quality. Most other breeds are bred for meat and the wool is a by-product. Mountain sheep produce coarser, harder wool which is perfect for hard-wearing uses i.e. carpets. Merino is good for felting and spinning and thrumming (unspun fibre).

Freya told us that there are records of wool being used 20,000 years ago. A lot of sheep breeds wouldn't survive now without the use of their wool. Sheep have now evolved so that they do not shed their fleece so the wool is longer in length. It is a long process to get from the sheep to wool. The production of wool originated in Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.

Goats

Using goat hair originated in Asia Minor. It is strong and is used for rope making for tents etc. The finest wool from goat hair is cashmere from the Cashmere goat which started life in Ankara, Turkey. Africa and Texas are the main producers of mohair. Mohair comes from the Angora goat. Cashmere is best known as a luxury fibre, it is a type of fibre (from the undercoat of the goat) and not a specific breed. The demand for cashmere outstrips supply which keeps the price high. Cashmere must come from the undercoat of the Cashmere goat to allow it to be known/sold as cashmere.

Camelids

The group of animals known as Camelids include Alpacas, Llamas and Camels: they originated in North America. The two hump variety of camel is the only one used for its fleece - the outer coat is used for rope and string and artist's brushes, the medium fleece is used as knitting yarn and the undercoat is a fine fibre though not as fine as cashmere. It is the youngest animals that are usually used as they have the softest fleece.

Alpacas and Llamas

Alpacas originally produced about 20 varieties of colours of Alpaca wool. Now there are only 3 colours of Alpaca. Alpaca is a hair, not wool, with little natural oils. It is stronger than wool even when wet. It should be used blended with another fibre; it has no memory so a jumper when washed could become a dress i.e. it would not spring back into its original shape. Rare breeds of camelids are Bison, Yak, Musk Ox and Tibetan Antelope. The Musk Ox fibre is the most expensive fibre available.

Silks

Fibroin – one variety – is made from many insects including spiders, ants and moths. Mulberry silk – from the silk moth that eats white mulberry leaves allowing it to produce natural white, very soft, silk. The silk moth species would not survive without mulberry silk production. China and India are the main producers; the moth wouldn't survive in our climate. Tussah silk is any other silk except for mulberry silk. This is a much tougher silk and not a natural white colour.

Cellulose fibres

Cellulose fibres are fibres made from plants i.e. linen flax. Other examples are Hemp (from the family of cannabis plants). This is coarser than flax and very hard wearing and made for limitless uses including rope production. Hemel Hempstead was a large producer of hemp. The smoking variety, however, has given it a very bad press so it is not used for fibre production very much any longer.

Cotton

Cotton is a seed hair fibre from the cotton plant. It can also be mercerised by adding caustic soda, giving incredible lustre and strength, and used for sewing thread. Mercerised cotton is not used for t-shirts. White is the natural colour.

Unusual fibres

The majority of unusual fibres use the rayon process which is made from cellulose (it starts its life as a plant) and mimics the silk making process.

Regenerated cellulose fibres are the legal name for rayon. Viscose is also plant-based.

Bamboo is another. It is naturally shiny (like a natural silk), very absorbent and also hypo-allergenic. It is vegan silk!

Other examples:

Tencel - made from wood pulp, Seacell – made from seaweed and Lyocell – also from wood pulp – which is wrinkle resistant.

Soybean bean fibres made from the soypulp produced during the making of soy milk.

Acrylic, nylon and polyester are made from petroleum based fibres and are entirely synthetic.

Freya told us that any hair can be used for spinning into yarn, even dog hair. Heather mentioned that her mother used her dog's hair for wool! Apparently male dogs usually smell of wet dog – something to watch out for!

Freya concluded her talk by demonstrating spinning yarn from a wool top using a hand held drop spindle. A spinning wheel is much quicker than this, taking the yarn into the bobbin for you ready for use. Plying (twisting the yarn) whilst spinning adds strength to the yarn/thread. The twist is what makes fibre yarn. The weight of the spindle is important - Freya was using a 30 gram weight to demonstrate.

There was so much information to absorb in Freya's talk and it was obvious that she is passionate about fibres, spinning and everything connected with wool and yarn. Her talk was animated and amusing and so informative. It was a very good evening.



Photos of members entering into the Christmas spirit – and some of the wonderful materials for sale on the evening!



