

CETG ARCHIVE

Meeting Report

14th November 2016

Speaker: Margaret Armstrong

Margaret Armstrong gave an entertaining talk about patchwork and quilting, the history of the techniques and how it came to take over her life. Brought up in North Wales, she was a sickly child in a family of crafters and learnt many needlecrafts while resting, being able to knit socks on four needles at the age of nine. Her father worked for an oil company and brought textiles back from Persia which opened her eyes to the wealth of textile beauty overseas. She would have a go at any craft, but once she had mastered one, she wanted to move on to the next. A visit to the first Quilters' Guild Exhibition changed all that, she had found her metier. She joined the Quilters' Guild and set up the Chesham branch, and has never stopped. Quilts for Margaret are meant to be used, she has given most of hers away to family and friends and feels no sadness if they wear out; that is their purpose.

A brief outline of the history of quilting and patchwork taught us that quilts were found in the Egyptian pyramids, that quilted clothing was widely used under suits of armour for warmth and protection and that the first dated English quilt is from 1718 and is in the Embroiderers' Guild collection. When most people think of patchwork they assume it started in America, but it was widespread in the UK beforehand; the US settlers took their skills with them across the Atlantic. There, life was hard and every scrap of fabric was used and reused until it fell apart, patchwork was one way to make it last even longer. They even made clothes and quilts out of feed sacks, with the feed merchants producing printed sacks both as advertising and to encourage loyalty to the particular patterns on their sacks. Each state had its own pattern and patchwork became a valued social activity for women. Why did it die out in the UK? With improved heating in homes, multiple layers of quilted petticoats were no longer needed, and after the Industrial Revolution it was cheaper to buy machine-made blankets. It persisted longest in the mining areas of northern England and south Wales. With many men injured in pit accidents and unable to work, the women became breadwinners, producing simpler quilts on commission for major hotels and home furnishing stores.

Margaret had brought along a number of samples, showing how inspiration for patchwork patterns can come from anywhere; a Bargello pattern is easy to construct from strips of toning colours, the Daily Telegraph crossword produced a striking quilt in pink and black, the rose window in York Minster inspired her entry to the Quilters' Guild exhibition in 1991 at the Bath Assembly room. As a past President of the Quilters' Guild, she also gave us an insight into the pressures of judging exhibitions and the difficulties of storing the Guild's collection of over 800 items. Among the last pieces she displayed was a gorgeously coloured freestyle quilt she had

bought at the Harrogate quilting show, made by two South African patchworkers and entitled "Road to Umtata". This quilt became even more precious when she learnt that Umtata is the village where Nelson Mandela lived as a child and is buried.



Terry Stevenson, leading her first meeting as Chairman, introduced herself to members and laid out her plans for her year in office. She is hoping to increase practical activities, with small groups getting together to chat, stitch and learn new techniques from the wealth of expertise within the group. Workshops will be reintroduced with internal and external tutors, and it is hoped the existing subgroups of hand stitching and knitting/crochet will be augmented by groups for other skills. Members were encouraged to hand round the printed posters and business cards to people they meet who may be interested in joining us.

Members were reminded that the small stitched pieces begun at the October meeting, intended for the background fabric of bunting, should be

returned at the December meeting. Also for December, members were invited to bring in for display any Christmas-themed items they have produced. Entries for the Rose Bowl Competition should be brought to the January meeting, where members will vote on the winner. Rosemary Mason asked for volunteers who would be willing to join her and other fundraisers at a charitable parcel-wrapping stall in the Watford Harlequin centre on 17th December, with all proceeds going to Cure Parkinson's Trust.

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