

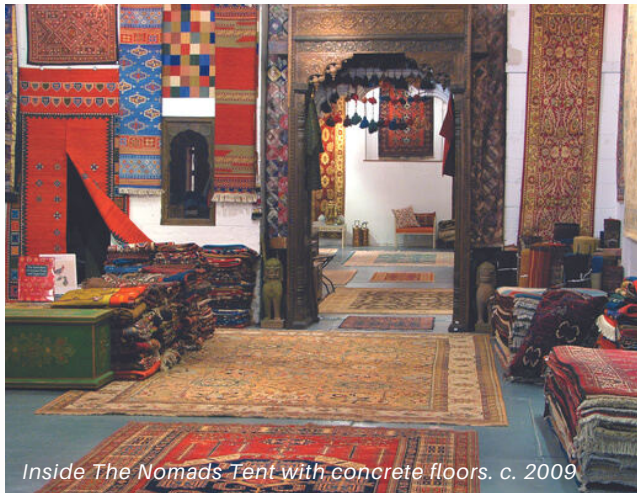


## Intro

BY ANDREW HAUGHTON

Welcome to our autumn newsletter. We are delighted that our first Zoom lecture back in May, by historian Dr Philip Mansel, was a resounding success raising £674 for Mercy Corps thanks to the generosity of our customers. We are looking forward to our upcoming August Fringe exhibition in which we pay tribute to the last four decades of travel and trade with The Nomads Tent. Read on to discover the history of our St Leonard's Lane premises, staff favourites from our collection of textiles from past buying trips, a wonderful article highlighting the history and culture of Indonesian barkcloth from the NMS department of World Cultures, and a peak at where one of our rugs now calls home.

## 30 Years of The Nomads Tent



Inside The Nomads Tent with concrete floors. c. 2009



New shop front 2021

In 1991, *Out of the Nomads Tent* moved into the premises we now know on St. Leonard's Lane. At their late autumn opening exhibition they ordered in the latest *Beaujolais Nouveau* to mark the occasion of shifting from Rufus and Susie Reade's own home where he'd been trading for the previous 8 years.

The new building was in pretty ropery order, with cracked ceilings, a leaking roof, poor insulation and generally neglected! Rufus bought it from the University who'd been going through a financial crisis. As a result they sold off buildings which were surplus to requirements. Rufus had been looking for a building for three years, wanting ground floor access, and ceilings high enough to show off kilims (and later carpets) on the walls.

The building has had an interesting history: originally built at the beginning of the 20th century as a joinery workshop over the drying green of the

flats, it later became a private garage for a collection of valuable motorcars, a washing machine assembly workshop, the upholstery workshop for a department store, and latterly the University's store for their curtains, bedding etc from halls of residence and the throne used in graduation ceremonies. In those early days there was no money for proper heating, so a very noisy gas heater, balanced on the top of the gas cylinder would fire its jet engine into the space to take the chill off the space.

The thirty years have seen the place get tidier, warmer, and the old concrete floor (seen pictured) is now covered with nice wooden boards! You may wonder what happened to the drying green that was usurped by the building in 1901. The drying green is now on The Nomads Tent's roof!

## Our Vintage Textile Picks!



Above: Child's Dress from Gujarat, West India.

Often adorned with dense embroidery and characteristic Gujarati mirror-work, the charm of this delightful child's tunic lies in its relative simplicity. One of our favourites for its contrasting vibrant colours, endearing design, and delicate embroidered stitching details, this vintage tunic was purchased on a buying trip to India back in 2011. You can imagine it would still be worn with joy today!

Below: Antique Toran, from Kutch, West India. Purchased on a buying trip to India in 2011.

This lovely Gujarati toran from our tribal textile collection is a fine example of the traditional Kutch mirror embroidery used to make these decorative door hangings, typically seen above doorways and arches in many Indian households as well as at The Nomads Tent. It is a joy to admire this intricate craft that has been passed from one generation to the next by local village women to their daughters. We particularly enjoy the sheer abundance of mirrors in this example!





# Indonesian barkcloth at National Museums Scotland

WITH THANKS TO THE ASIAN SECTION, DEPARTMENT OF WORLD CULTURES AT NATIONAL MUSEUMS SCOTLAND.

The Department of World Cultures at National Museums Scotland looks after many different types of textiles from Southeast Asia. One of the most intriguing and diverse types is barkcloth, a non-woven textile produced from the inner bark of trees. Barkcloth was once produced throughout Southeast Asia and the NMS collection contains many different examples, including a baby sling from the Andaman Islands, a blanket from Borneo, and a sleeveless jacket from Java. Few, however,



are as colourful and highly decorated as the barkcloths from the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. Recent research at the museum has explored one particular set of garments from Central Sulawesi that was collected in the 1930s and brought to Edinburgh by British missionaries. This collection of colourful head-dresses, tunics and cloths shows us how ancient textile production techniques have survived through centuries and continue to hold relevance for people in the region today.

## WHERE IS SULAWESI? HISTORY, TOPOGRAPHY AND CULTURES

The island of Sulawesi forms part of the Greater Sunda islands along with Sumatra, Java and Borneo. It is the fourth largest island in the Indonesian archipelago and the eleventh largest island in the world. The island has a long colonial history and was named *Celebes* by the Portuguese in the early 16th century. The Dutch and English followed in the early 17th century and the island was part of the Netherlands East Indies between 1905 and WWII, when it was occupied by Japan. Sulawesi finally became part of the newly independent nation of Indonesia in 1950. The island has an unusual shape and is often compared to an orchid. It has vast lengths of coastline and a mountainous, volcanic interior.

This topography has meant that the inland and highland populations remained isolated until the 20th century, when colonial led missionary activity saw these areas become predominantly Christian. In contrast, people living in lowland and coastal areas had access to long-distance trade networks and are predominantly Muslim.



1. Halili, or women's blouse of black barkcloth decorated with coloured patches and embroidery: Indonesia, Central Sulawesi, Kulawi or Bada, early 20th century. Museum reference V.2019.34.30



4. Siga, or men's headdress of barkcloth, painted with a brightly coloured pattern, worn at feasts: Indonesia, Central Sulawesi, Kulawi or Bada, early 20th century. Museum reference V.2019.34.25

## THE ROLE OF BARKCLOTH IN CENTRAL SULAWESI

Over centuries, different regions in Sulawesi have developed distinctive and varied forms of traditional dress that continue to be worn today for special occasions such as weddings. The barkcloth garments in the NMS collection come from the highland communities of Central Sulawesi, where barkcloth was commonly used for everyday and ceremonial clothing until the end of the nineteenth century. Multi-layered skirts, tunic-shaped blouses and loincloths for daily use were made from a plain, brown barkcloth that was durable and warm. In contrast, clothes for special and religious occasions were made from soft, fine, white barkcloth and painted with bold, symbolic designs and bright colours.<sup>1</sup> The NMS collection contains intricately patterned sigas (men's headdresses) and halili (women's blouses), that were designed to be worn at feasts and important life events. They are decorated in different ways, sometimes painted with dye, others sewn with applique and some embellished with sequin-like flakes of a mineral called mica. Styles varied between regions, but often included

geometric motifs and symbols of buffalo horns, four-petalled flowers, diamonds and suns. Colours and patterns are thought to have been associated with important ideas, such as courage, vitality and prosperity and the cloth also contained important spiritual and protective values. Men's headdresses often denoted rank and status and women wore particular garments for transitional life events, such as childbirth or periods of mourning. The barkcloth tradition of Central Sulawesi is notable as being one of the most refined barkcloth production systems ever developed.

## HOW WAS IT MADE?

Making barkcloth, or *fuya*, was a long process that took several weeks and was completed mainly by women. It started with identifying suitable trees, often a variety of *ficus*, and stripping lengths of inner bark from branches and trunk. The bark was boiled, beaten, soaked and left to ferment for several days. This process rendered the bark pulp sticky and malleable and this substance was then beaten vigorously to fuse it into a smooth cloth-like material. The barkcloth would be flipped and rotated, beaten with wooden mallets, and the process would often end with small stone beaters to refine the finish. Strips were beaten together to make larger pieces and the finished cloth would be painted with a type of plant sap or resin to preserve and strengthen the surface. Finished cloth could not be washed and although daily wear could last for seven or eight months, ceremonial clothing only lasted for short periods of time before it disintegrated.<sup>2</sup>

“for some its continued production became a symbolic form of resistance against colonial intervention.”

In Central Sulawesi, barkcloth production began to dwindle from the early twentieth century when imported cloth became more widely available. This woven cloth was often preferred as it was less labour intensive and lasted for longer as it could be washed. The decline of barkcloth was also due to an increased Dutch colonial presence in the region and the establishment of Christian missions. Pre-existing belief systems and ways of life, including the production and use of barkcloth, were discouraged. Many began to view barkcloth as old fashioned and embarrassing, although for some its continued production became a symbolic form of resistance against colonial intervention.<sup>3</sup> During WWII, Japanese occupation of the island created textile shortages, and many women returned to making barkcloth to clothe their families.<sup>4</sup>



2. Tali, or headdress of barkcloth, worn in fan shape at the back of the head, with brightly coloured stripes of pink, orange, green and black: Indonesia, Central Sulawesi, Kulawi or Bada, early 20th century. Museum reference V.2019.34.20

## BARKCLOTH IN CENTRAL SULAWESI TODAY

Today, the Lore region of Central Sulawesi is one of the last places that still produces barkcloth in Indonesia, a tradition that dates back 4,000 years.<sup>5</sup> Predominantly produced by senior women in a few remote communities, barkcloth is still worn for special occasions and has become recognised and appreciated as a distinctive cultural heritage. Promoted as part of governmental development and tourism projects, makers from Central Sulawesi have exhibited their cloth in National museums and private galleries in Jakarta.<sup>6</sup> The rich history of Sulawesi barkcloth has also caught the attention of contemporary artists and has featured in international exhibitions. Inspired by historic collections in European museums, Indonesian-based artist Mella Jaarsma has used barkcloth from Sulawesi to create costumes and installations. Her work explores colonial processes of classification and how barkcloth production acted as a form of resistance against colonial and religious intervention. Although industrial textile production has contributed to the decline of barkcloth's traditional use as everyday clothing, small scale producers are finding new markets for their cloth that value natural and sustainable materials. Bali-based Cinta Bumi Artisans partner with barkcloth co-operatives in Central Sulawesi and buy sheets to make them into bags and accessories.<sup>7</sup> Their work promotes barkcloth as a positive alternative to the pollution and exploitation of mass produced 'fast' fashion. In this way, the story of Indonesian barkcloth continues as it finds new relevance and value in the contemporary world.



3. Siga, or men's headdress of barkcloth, painted with a brightly coloured pattern, worn at feasts: Indonesia, Central Sulawesi, Kulawi or Bada, early 20th century. Museum reference V.2019.34.24

1. Lorraine V Aragon. "Barkcloth production in Central Sulawesi : a vanishing textile technology in Outer Island Indonesia", Expedition, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1990) Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania University Museum: 35  
 2. Lorraine V Aragon. "Barkcloth production in Central Sulawesi : a vanishing textile technology in Outer Island Indonesia", Expedition, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1990) Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania University Museum: 46  
 3. Mella Jaarsma, 'Barkcloth, Indonesia', <https://www.thetextileatlas.com/craft-stories/barkcloth-indonesia>, accessed 30.11.2020  
 4. Lorraine V Aragon. "Barkcloth production in Central Sulawesi : a vanishing textile technology in Outer Island Indonesia", Expedition, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1990) Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania University Museum: 45-46  
 5. For a recent account of makers in the region, see: Windy Ariestanty, "Fuya: More Than Fashion and the Art of Dressing", Indonesia Design, 26/06/2018, <https://indonesiadesign.com/story/fuya-more-than-fashion-and-the-art-of-dressing>  
 6. Ruslan Sangadji, 'Ivo bark clothing makes its way to wider audience', The Jakarta Post, March 18 2016, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/03/18/ivo-bark-clothing-makes-its-way-wider-audience.html>, accessed 30.11.2020  
 7. See: <https://cintabumiartisans.com>





# Culross Palace

BY ANDREW HAUGHTON

Early in June we supplied a small carpet for the parlour in Culross Palace, built by the merchant George Bruce in 1597. It was my first visit to this completely enchanting and not at all palatial house. On approach through the very pretty village of Culross, the narrowing windy road turned to cobbles and I found myself in what was once the quayside in front of Culross Palace, facing out over the Firth of Forth. The sea has receded several hundred metres since the days when the house was the centre of a busy trading point but the sense of a marine frontage lingers.



I turned up the track towards the house and carried the carpet through a small gateway into the courtyard. From there, up the worn stone steps, I entered the low doorway into the main house. Here time folded up or seemed to step aside, and the voice of this gentle, intimate building began speak to me.



Inside the light was dim. Antonia Laurence-Allen, regional curator for the National Trust for Scotland, walked me through the many rooms and winding stairs of this gorgeous house in which each room is a story in itself of the spirit and practicalities of life in a merchant's home and place of business 400 years ago. Wandering from panelled room to panelled room, I walked on the same floors, and under the same painted ceilings as George Bruce, and heard the same sounds that he would have heard.

## Chai Talks

WITH PAT ARCHIBALD

Helen, Pat, Amit, and Roshni have been successfully leading specialist textile tours to India for the last few years. Their programme of tours has been interrupted by the pandemic so instead of taking people to India they are bringing India to you. Join them on a monthly basis over chai/coffee to hear their threads of conversations and a mixture of other related items.

If you would like to join *Time for Chai* please send an email to Pat at [info@patarchibald.com](mailto:info@patarchibald.com) and you will be sent the details and Zoom link to the next Chai Talk.



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