

ONLINE TALK: KNIT ALONG

List of speakers:

Di Gilpin and Sheila Greenwell

Di Gilpin is the founder and creative director of **Di Gilpin Ltd**, the hand-knit design studio which has been based in Scotland for more than 38 years. Di Gilpin studied history and politics at university and started work as a teacher. In 1983, she took a year-off to travel, and arrived on the Isle of Skye with little more than a rucksack containing a tent, wool and knitting needles. Inspired by the nature, landscape, sea and people around her, she developed her knitting expertise, experimenting with different processes, styles and stitches. With her business growing, she moved to Fife and established **Di Gilpin Ltd**.

Di works with many Fashion designers to push the tradition of Hand knit in new creative directions. She reconstructs and challenges convention in the tradition of knit and creates couture pieces with precision and care. At the core of her work is the love of Gansey knitting and its unique construction techniques which she recreates to enable a perfect fit!

Sheila Greenwell learnt knit at three or four years old, born into a family with close ties to wool and the Borders town dominated by textile industries. Having spent much of her career teaching French, Sheila returned to Scotland where she met Di Gilpin. Recognising they had a lot in common (including a love of colour knitting), they began working together. Since their meeting, Sheila has been Production Manager for **Di Gilpin Ltd** for over 10 years. They have recently collaborated in writing *The Gansey Knitting Sourcebook*, as well as consulting for a project with the Scottish Fisheries Museum, helping to catalogue their collection of historical Ganseys. Di and Sheila are also working on a project with the Ettegui Foundation and the Princes Foundation to create a Knitting Library at Dumfries House in Scotland.

Description of talk:

Di and Sheila will explore the rich history of Gansey Knitting in the British Isles with an introduction to all the special techniques involved in the creating of these utilitarian, unique and beautiful garments. Their conversation will draw attention to the love Fashion designers have for these unique pieces and how they draw on them for inspiration in collections as diverse as hand knit trainers for Nike, Gansey dresses and tights for Meadham Kirchoff, the fabulous work of April Crichton at La Fetiche and their recent menswear collection for Paul Smith.

Donna Wilson

Donna Wilson is a Scottish textile and product designer with a career spanning three decades. She established her studio in 2003 after a sell-out show at the Royal College of Art, London.

She has since collaborated with renowned retailers and global brands including Hermes, LeSportsac, Penguin Random House, Mamas & Papas and the V&A Museums, and her work has been exhibited around the world.

Donna's colourful, distinctive designs are inspired by a love of nature and a life-long passion for craft and making. They've won her a string of awards including Elle Decoration's Designer of the Year at the British Design Awards.

Despite her success, Donna Wilson has maintained a niche appeal and has a devoted following of design enthusiasts, collectors, and the young at heart. As a forerunner of the contemporary craft movement, she has always remained true to her principles, using traditional techniques and locally based suppliers wherever possible.

The Donna Wilson studio is based in East London where she and her talented team knit, sew and ship her designs to stockists and fans worldwide.

Vawn Corrigan

Vawn Corrigan is an author with a passion for textiles. She is based in Ireland's former textile hub, the Liberties area of Dublin, from where she organises textile-related events, collaborates with makers, and presents slide shows around the country. Vawn enthusiastically shines a light on the hitherto overlooked role that textiles played in the everyday lives of generations as well as their place in the current resurgence. Becoming part of the global textile community has provided many opportunities for this. Vawn's two textile heritage books - *Irish Aran: History, Tradition, Fashion*, and *Irish Tweed: History, Tradition, Fashion* - are both by The O'Brien Press.

Description of talk:

Aran grew up in the harsh environment of the Aran Islands where every-day wear consisted of home-spun fabrics and knits. Today it thrives as part of a rich craft heritage and as high and slow fashion on the catwalks of the world. Casting off into the world, the classic Irish Aran never lost its twin associations of comfort and resilience. Its narrative carried it across the world as much as its sculptural beauty. Vawn Corrigan explores how this proves to be a quintessential example of textiles ability to communicate globally.

Vawn will also discuss the historic value of the cottage industry across generations, what form the living tradition takes today and what the future might hold for this ever-evolving knit.

Lesley O'Connell Edwards

Lesley O'Connell Edwards is an independent scholar who researches the history of hand knitting, drawing on both archival sources and extant artefacts as part of her research. She has presented papers and published several articles in academic journals and specialist publications. She is part of the Holy Hands project, led by Dr Angharad Thomas and mentored by Dr Jane Malcolm-Davies, which is the first systematic study of knitted liturgical gloves from the twelfth to the nineteenth century. She wrote the literature review for the project, and contributed to the database of extant gloves now available at www.kemerresearch.com. Her work to replicate details of the glove patterns can be found on the [KEME](http://www.kemerresearch.com) site. Lesley has also published on the project in the late autumn issue 2021 of the online Journal of dress history and in *Piecework* (Spring 2022).

Her other research interests include hand knitting in Tudor England, especially hand knitters as an occupational group, and the production and the trade in hand knitted stockings. Her most recent article in this field is on the later 16th century stocking knitting industry in Norwich published in *Textile History* in 2021.

Description of talk:

This presentation will discuss the work of the Holy Hands project, which is the first systematic study of knitted liturgical gloves. The project was funded by a Janet Arnold Award from the Society of Antiquaries of London. These gloves are finely crafted ornamental symbols of high ecclesiastical office, which were created from the twelfth century onwards, and used in religious ceremonies by senior churchmen. Most have a ground fabric of silk, and are usually patterned with metal thread, either as a knitted-in pattern, or as embroidery, lace, or other embellishments: some have very ornate patterning. The [Holy Hands](http://www.kemerresearch.com) project located ninety-six artefacts held in museums and other collections in both Europe and North America, and made the data about these gloves available on the Knitting in Early Modern Europe (KEME) database (www.kemerresearch.com) managed Dr Jane Malcolm-Davies and developed by Jodie Cox. The presentation will set the gloves in their historical and theological context, before going on to discuss their construction and patterning, and the skills needed to create them.

Lynn Abrams of *Fleece to Fashion* research project

Lynn is Professor of Modern History at the University of Glasgow and lead investigator for the [Fleece to Fashion: Economies and Cultures of Knitted Textiles in Scotland](http://www.kemerresearch.com) project. Her

research ranges across modern gender, social and oral histories. Until now her textile-focused research has largely been based in Shetland, published in *Myth and Materiality in a Woman's World: Shetland 1800-2000* (2005) and in articles in *Textile History, Gender & History and Signs*. With Marina Moskowitz she was responsible for two knit-focused projects including **Knitting-in-the-Round** which employed a knitter-in-residence and a project on authenticity in knitted lace which recruited amateur knitters to undertake practice-based research.

Description of talk:

Histories of Knitted Textiles tend to treat hand knitting and machine knitting as separate. Studies of hand knitting focus on the techniques and motifs of the hand knitter whilst studies of machine and factory production tend to subordinate hand knitting as an outmoded and non-economic practice superseded by mechanisation. The **Fleece to Fashion** research project at the University of Glasgow looks at the production of knitted textiles in the round and questions the bi-polarity of that framework. In this talk Lynn Abrams will discuss the interconnections between hand and machine knitting in the context of 19th and 20th century Scotland and argue for the mutual dependence of both modes of production, challenging interpretations which assume craft production for the market was automatically replaced by the machine.

Betsan Corkhill

Betsan Corkhill is a Lifestyle Health Coach who specialises in working with people living with long-term health problems, particularly pain. She has many years clinical experience as a former senior physiotherapist and is regularly asked to speak at medical conferences and knitting events.

Betsan is the recognised world expert on the use of therapeutic knitting for improving health, wellness and managing illness and founder of **Stitchlinks**. **Stitchlinks** is the home of Therapeutic Knitting. Her book, **Knit for Health and Wellness – How to knit a flexible mind and more**, is sold worldwide and has been translated into German and Spanish.

As a published author she has also written, contributed to, or featured in, articles for hundreds of magazines and newspapers internationally as well as online platforms and radio. Her work was recognised in 2015 when she was nominated as one of the UK 'Women of the Year' for her contribution to society.

Description of talk:

Betsan specialises in the therapeutic nature of knitting and has been researching the meditative, creative and social benefits since 2005 when she happened to stumble across a large number of

stories about its benefits. As a former physiotherapist, Betsan wanted to know what was happening and the science behind what large numbers of people were saying about it. In this presentation, Betsan will talk about her research into the therapeutic nature of knitting; how its rhythmic repetitive movements are calming and the health benefits of the process of knitting rather than the end product.

Panel discussion speakers:

Hélène Magnússon

Hélène Magnússon is a French-Icelandic designer with a degree in fashion design. She believes the best way to preserve traditions is to keep using them, giving them new life. A former lawyer, shepherdess and mountain guide, she established her knitting design studio in 2010 and gained international recognition with her distinctive style inspired by tradition, with a modern twist. She is the author of numerous books on Icelandic knitting and her patterns are published in magazines, books, on Ravelry and on her website, where she also sells a large selection of Icelandic yarns and kits, as well as sock blockers.

In the hope that it would help revive some of the old knitting traditions, she created her own line of soft and fine Icelandic yarns (Love Story, Gilitrutt and Katla). She shares her passion for the rich Icelandic knitting heritage on the hiking and knitting tours she organises and guides all year round in Iceland. She lives in Reykjavík with her family.

John Arbon Textiles

John Arbon Textiles is an independent family run business making Yarns and Fibre Tops in a small scale, worsted spinning Mill in North Devon (one of only a handful still operating in the UK). Where possible they source fibre locally, or through trusted suppliers in the Falklands and worldwide. They use predominantly vintage machinery that they have lovingly restored and maintained to create wonderful artisan goods using a hands-on approach to production. All of their Yarn and Tops ranges are blended and designed by their small team at the Mill, inspired by the natural world around us and our interests in art, music and nostalgia.

Sonja is the co-owner and director of **John Arbon Textiles**, a worsted mill in the heart of Devon. She has been working in the small-scale fibre industry for almost a decade and is passionate about using traditional production methods to create quality yarn emphasising sustainable materials and locally sourced fibre. She is enthralled by colour and the aroma of proper woolly wool, is bound to get her needles twitching.

Amy Swanson of June Cashmere

Amy Swanson is Creative and Operational Director of **June Cashmere**, a socially - minded business that works directly with Kyrgyz shepherds toward economic development in Kyrgyzstan through the ethical and sustainable production of cashmere yarn. With a Ph.D. in Spanish/Second Language Acquisition, Amy transitioned from a career in academia to follow her passion for textiles and making, joining June Cashmere in 2017 to build the young yarn company. Amy finds that her academic background helps her teach others about the importance of sustainable cashmere production, the work of June Cashmere in Kyrgyzstan, and knitting with cashmere. Amy recently began designing knitwear patterns for hand knitters to be used with **June Cashmere** yarn.