

July's 2026

Our July meeting was nicely busy; there was no separate workshop in the morning but the sales table was full of amazing bargains, including a whole herd of six lovely spinning wheels! The Library seemed busy and the Show-&-Tell table too.

A good selection of Dyeing books from the Library.



Spinning wheels on the Sales Table



Three items from the Show & Tell Table



We had the second Gail Coldham Trophy competition for dyeing, in memory of Gail who sadly passed away a couple of years ago; this was won by Nicky Footer, with some fabulous multicoloured yarn knitted up, and including some sample balls, with Margaret Eaglestone coming a close second with some delightful Shibori-dyed items.

All of the entries deserved to win, as our speaker, Teresinha Roberts of Wild Colours fame, said.



Nicky Footer being presented with her trophy by Teresinha

Teresinha's talk, True Blue - Woad and Indigo, was, as ever, fascinating. We learnt that the dye Indigotine can come from a wide variety of different plants; Indigo itself is a bean! There are 8 or 10 varieties of Japanese indigo, which is closely related to rhubarb and dock. Woad is a member of the cabbage family.

Synthetic indigo, however, is made from oil, and is 98% pure, hence does not produce the subtle colours & depth of natural indigo, but a brighter, flatter colour. Natural indigo *may* be protective against insect bites; historically, the Japanese certainly thought so. Oddly, humans too can produce indigo, if suffering from Porphyria like King George III.



Teresinha's displays



Dyeing with natural indigo, once the dye bath is made up, is very quick; no mordant is needed, and a 10-minute bath is all you need for a crisp shibori image; any longer and the dye will start to "bleed" into your shapes. It also dyes at very low temperature, and just 10g of dyestuff can dye 1 kg of wool. Indigo is also the only way to produce a good green using natural dyes.

We have evidence of indigo being used for dyeing going back to at least 6,000 years ago, from Peru, though even older evidence has recently been found. Indigo seeds have been found associated with the Harrapan civilisation in the Indus valley from 5,000 years ago; indigo is an excellent trade commodity as it can be made into small "cakes" which are very portable and last for hundreds of years; some have been found in old shipwrecks and are still usable. Seeds have also been found in French caves from 7,000 years ago, and we have Iron Age pottery from the UK with woad seed impressions.



We learnt that Ancient Britons were not, in fact, tattooed with woad (what the Romans noted were probably old black tattoos that went blue over time) and that the chief commodity imported into Coventry in medieval times was woad.

Growing your own woad is a definite option, but woad has a massive tap root, is invasive, produces thousands of seeds & needs to be kept under strict control; it's classified as a noxious weed in the US. Woad leaves need to be processed very fresh, using lime or soda ash to raise the pH, and it takes 3kg of leaves to produce 8g of dye. Indigo though is soluble in alkaline.

Teresinha recommended using cotton batiste for hibori dyeing, with polyester thread. Use an iron vat for wool, but never for silk. She pointed out that indigo builds up in layers, so dip, allow to oxidise in air, then dye again. Pair with weld for green or cochineal for purple. You can use indigo to dye raffia, feathers, soap, leather, basketry cane, bone beads and buttons, even paper - now there's a challenge for those of us who have always stuck to dyeing yarn or fabric!

All in all, an excellent and informative afternoon! - Thank you, Tereshina

Shibori Workshop on the following day with Annabel Wilson

This workshop certainly had that 'Wow' factor and everyone present was thrilled with their pieces of Shibori which would be placed and sewn together to create a wall-hanging.

Thank you so much, Annabel.

Below are a selection of photos taken on the day.



The wall-hangings
begin to take
shape.



Some
interesting
arrangements
are created.

