October's Meeting

The last day of National Wool Month was marked in style with 70 members filling the hall. Spinning, weaving, inkle looming and felt making abounded, with several of the new members from Open Day working their way from group to group, eager to get started on their creative journeys.

Frances Fletcher gave an introductory class in Saori weaving – throwing out all the rules and relishing just going where your fancy wanders. The results were a riot of colours & textures, just crying out to be stroked!



Saori Weaving



Sprouts anyone!



A skein of spinners



One I made earlier!



A rainbow of silk scarves

Chairman Nicky Footer gave members the chance to get ahead of the Christmas shopping, taking them through the techniques of microwave dyeing on silk. Two hours later a rainbow of intricately patterned scarves fluttered in the autumn breeze drawing admiring – and covetous –comments from members.

The Fortescue Trophies for spinning 25g skeins of either hand prepared or commercially prepared fibre drew plenty of entries. President Kath Sanderson assisted by Pene Blogg, assessed all the submissions, eventually agreeing on the 2 winning skeins, both entered by Jenny Lang – well done Jenny! Carly Hall was a worthy runner up for the hand prepared skein and Viviane Bernard took second prize for her commercially prepared, and gloriously colourful, skein.

Tim Parker reminded the meeting of the wonderful prize winning items that we've all admired throughout this year, and that many more members should consider entering the DACA competitions in 2027.







From left to right - Kath and Nicky with winner Jenny and runners-up, Carly and Viviane

Flax - a talk about the history and revival of flax

In the afternoon Simon and Ann Cooper of Flaxland gave a fascinating overview of their work attempting to reinvigorate the British flax production industry. Initially drawn in through their interest in historical artisan fishing boats, and needing to produce flax based sails, ropes and hull coverings, they started growing flax on their farm in Stroud. Simon's carpentry skills allowed him to make the tools, now obsolete but still needed, to process the flax. He and Ann then started to explore the other uses this fine, but immensely strong, fibre can be put to. There was an impressive display of woven fabrics, knitted socks and jumpers, thread, twine, lace, nets and ropes – all made from homegrown linen. Simon's passion and expertise was the perfect lead-in to the next day's workshop

Workshop on the following day—Flax Preparation and Spinning

In the morning Simon took the group through the initial processes needed to turn field flax into fine fibre ready for spinning – rippling (removing the seedheads); breaking (crushing the stems to loosen the outer casings – shiv); scutching (hammering the stems to remove the shiv); and hackling (repeatedly passing a handful of stems over gradually finer beds of nails to remove the waste fibre – tow) – resulting in a strick of shiny golden fibres. Participants then had a go at hand processing their own strick and twisting it into a mini rope.



Breaking the flax



Breaking, scutching and hackling



Skiv, tow, strick and rope

The afternoon started with the intricacies of taking a strick and laying it out in order to dress a distaff. Once suitably beribboned, members took their distaffs and commenced spinning, some onto a spindle others onto a wheel. Silence settled on the room as everyone wrestled with the very different techniques needed, but within an hour bobbins and spindles were filling up and distaffs emptying. Everyone went home with their own ball of linen, maybe not all suitable for lace making but definitely the poshest garden twine ever!



Dressing the distaff



A forest of dressed distaffs



Drop spindling from the distaff



Having fun spinning from the distaff