



Yarn Club – Winter’s Just Desserts

The first skeins for the new Winter’s Just Desserts Club were despatched last week. This club is now closed for subscriptions.

The Sky’s (Not) the Limit

The yarns for the previous Club, The Sky’s (Not) the Limit were very well received. These were (top to bottom at left):

A Bit Black over Will’s Mothers in Merino Silk Sparkle

Fiery Summer Sunset in Baby Alpaca Silk or Suri Alpaca Merino Silk

On a Clear Day in Falklands Merino

Elaine from Bedfordshire, an aerial photographer by profession, couldn’t resist this club. When she received the third skein she commented:

“I laughed out loud when I opened it – clear blue skies are what I spend my working life looking for (as most of the customers don’t want cloud shadows on their photography)!”

Special Offers

We’ll be posting a series of special offers over the coming weeks, leading up to Christmas. Each week we’ll be reducing the price of a number of yarn bases by at least £2 per skein. You’ll find these listed on our Sale Items page, so check back regularly to see what’s available. Yarns will include some of our limited editions, as well as more popular repeatable bases, and will cover various weights so we’ll try to include something for everyone!

If you like one of the bases we list on sale but prefer a different colourway to those shown, then please get in touch to request a custom order - we’ll honour the sale price on any base requested during the week it’s on sale. (Please note that we no longer have stock of some of the limited edition bases.)

Did You Know - #68 - History of Knitting - Part 2 - 20th Century

We are taking a very short break from our steady examination of sheep breeds – and other animals that produce usable yarns for knitting and crochet. Back in October 2018, we covered Crochet and we have also looked at Lace-style knitting in detail (Dec 2015 and Jan 2016). Now we are looking at the history and development in knitting itself. Finishes next time.

Importance in Scottish History

Knitting was such an important occupation among those living on the Scottish Isles during the 17th and 18th centuries that whole families were involved in making sweaters, accessories, socks, stockings, etc. Fair Isle techniques were used to create elaborate colourful patterns. Sweaters were essential garments for the fishermen of these islands because the natural oils within the wool provided some element of protection against the harsh weather encountered while out fishing.

Industrial Revolution



The stocking frame or mechanical knitting machine was invented in 1589 by William Lee, an English clergyman. After receiving a pair of black stockings from William, Queen Elizabeth I ultimately declined to grant him a patent for his invention. She complained that his machine-made wool stockings that were far too coarse for royal ankles. She didn't like the feel of the stockings or their crude form and she was afraid that the machine would take away jobs from her people. However, France's King Henri IV saw the opportunity William's invention provided and offered him financial support. The inventor moved to Rouen where he built a stocking factory. Before long, the French spread the knitting loom throughout Europe. When the device came back to Great Britain, the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters was incorporated in 1657 in London. Framework knitting was predominantly performed at home, often with the entire family participating.

The city of Nottingham, particularly the district known as Lace Market, was a major producer of machine-knitted lace. Leicestershire and neighbouring counties had long had an association with the hosiery industry. This continued growing with the invention of portable circular knitting machines. Machines could be hired and worked from home rather than relying on a large stocking frame or the much slower hand knitting. One manufacturer of these machines was Griswold, often called Griswold knitting machines. The design of this English sock machine originates from the British inventors, Hainsworth and Griswold.

Some framework knitters were among the Luddites, who resisted the transition to factories. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the knitting industry had still not made the transition to factories. With the improvement of steam-powered knitting machines in the mid-nineteenth century, machine knitting increasingly shifted to factories to accommodate the larger machines.

By the mid-nineteenth century, hand knitting was declining as part of the knitting industry but was increasing as a hobby. Printed patterns and yarn were produced for leisure as well as for industrial use by authors such as Jane Gaugain.

1914-1918: Knitting for the War Effort

During World War I, men, women, and children knitted large quantities of clothing and accessories to help the war effort on the Allied side, supplementing the soldiers' uniforms with socks, hats, scarves, sweaters, mufflers and balaclavas. Knitting and women's magazines - along with the Red Cross - published pamphlets and patterns specifically for sailors and troops. Popular magazines and songs treated knitting as a craze that had swept over Britain in the effort to support the military forces.

Conditions of trench warfare led to a shortage of socks in particular, and the Allied home front was encouraged to support the troops by knitting. Home knitting grew in popularity, especially as fashion fully embraced knitwear. Companies started, or expanded, to meet the demands of home knitters, producing patterns, yarn, and tools.



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1920s: the Russian Civil Wars and China

After the White Russians' defeat in the Civil War, many units retreated into China's Xinjiang and were interned there. As China was about to descend into a civil war of its own, the Russian internees were transported by camel caravans to Eastern China. According to Owen Lattimore, it was then that they passed on the art of knitting to the Chinese caravan men, who had a ready supply of camel hair from their animals. In 1926, Lattimore was able to observe camel-pullers "knitting on the march; if they ran out of yarn, they would reach back to the first camel of the file they were leading, pluck a handful of hair from the neck, and roll it in their palms into the beginning of a length of yarn; a weight was attached to this, and given a twist to start it spinning, and the man went on feeding wool into the thread until he had spun enough yarn to continue his knitting." This way the camel men not only provided themselves with warm camel-hair socks, but were able to make knitwear for sale as well.

1920s: Fashions

The 1920s saw a vast increase in the popularity of knitwear in much of the western world. Knitwear, especially sweaters/pullovers, became an essential part of the new fashions of the age for men, women and children, rather than mostly practical garments associated with particular occupations (eg fishermen). The late teens and early 1920s saw a fashion for knitted neckties. Knitwear was often associated with sport and leisure. Garments often became associated with particular sports; for example, white sweaters/pullers, often with coloured stripes (club colours) in the collar, became common for tennis and cricket.

Fair Isle knitting enjoyed a golden age during the 1920s, reputedly started by the Prince of Wales (future Edward VIII) wearing a Fair Isle pullover to play golf. Both Fair Isle and Argyle styles have since been associated with the sport. High fashion also embraced knitwear, with Coco Chanel making prominent use of it and Vogue magazine featuring patterns.

Before the 1920s, the majority of commercial knitting in the Western world had centred around production of underwear, socks and hosiery. This vastly expanded as the public taste for knitted fashion did also. Both hand and machine knitting were commercially active on a large scale prior to the Great Depression.

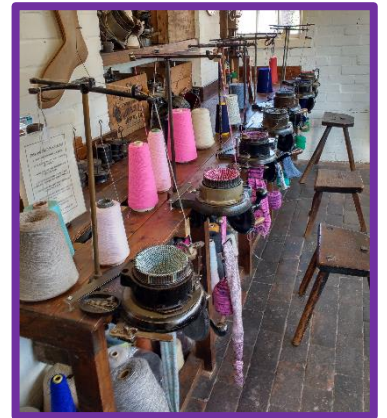
1930s: The Depression

The prominence of knitwear in the 1920s continued but reflected the changes of fashion. Combining traditional methods in new ways became more common and new technologies such as zip fasteners began to be used in knitwear. New synthetic yarns started to become available.

The hardship experienced by many during the Great Depression meant some turned to knitting through necessity. It was much cheaper to knit your own garments than to buy hand (or even machine) knitted products. Skills were needed for repairs to existing garments, socks and underwear. Patterns, now often included in popular women's magazines, frequently reflected this need. Socks with replaceable toes and heels were common. Some hobby knitters took to part-time work, hand-knitting for extra income.

The 1930s also saw a rise in the popularity of commercial machine knitting. Much commercially sold knitwear during the 1920s was hand-knitted, however the costs of this and other pressures of the time saw a large shift in consumers towards cheaper machine knitted products.

Next time: In the final part of this history, we will mention the developments in the 21st century.



On the Road ... 2021

As we go to press – some good news and some bad news. We are anticipating that from Monday, 2 November, we will all be in lock-down again, with journeys restricted as they were back in April.

On the other hand, a rare glimmer of hope is that we have just heard from the organisers at Wonderwool that they are planning to run their show at the end of April next year – if possible. We have confirmed our booking, so let's hope we will see some of you there - 24 and 25 April 2021 at Builth Wells!

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