Private View — Old Church Studios

Linda More, York and Online Guilds

The start of it all (top) to the finished studio — snug in the corner of the garden waiting for Spring 2020

My workspace is a long-awaited purpose-built room situated in the corner of our garden within the curtilage of our Grade II listed small village church. Acquiring the planning consents ten years ago to convert a redundant church with subsidence into a modern eco-friendly home was a rollercoaster. Hence the eight year wait before we tentatively applied for planning permission to construct an eco-friendly cedar-clad, glass-fronted garden studio.

The requirements were many – an area for dyeing, space for looms, sewing cabinet, desk room and most importantly, from my husband's point of view, storage for the myriad of textile and fibre items that were slowly dispersing and settling throughout our living spaces.

Looms

I have two 90cm Louet floor looms, a 12-shaft Spring and a lockdown acquired 16-shaft computerised Megado – part of my future-proofing plan, as there will be a day when I can no longer get down on the floor to tie up treadles. Both looms sit on gliders allowing me to pull them in and out for easy access when dressing them. The Spring faces my wonderful opening wall of glass; as as long as it's not raining or too cold, I simply open up the doors to gain access to the back, or to weave in the fresh air.

Loom with a view – sitting at the Louet Megado

A fantastic workspace built around my sewing cabinet and looms

All photos: Linda More

Storage

The rear wall and half the side wall are given over to storage. My sewing cabinet opens to reveal a large fold-out work area with plenty of storage, and fits snugly against the rear wall with an inch to spare. Strong open shelves make up the rest of the storage. I've opted for clear plastic boxes in an attempt to consolidate and organise my stuff! However, I still struggle to contain those bits and pieces – odd ends of handspun, the mass of dyed fuchsia silk that tangled when the swift collapsed, half-spun bobbins, plus a collection of spindles that have yet to find their place. Not to mention the innumerable partly wound weaving bobbins that surface in the most unlikely places.

Not all is neat and tidy – the messy corner

Messy Play

One of my best second-hand finds was the butchers' block which forms part of my dye area. Not only is it a useful mobile work area; removing the solid top reveals a two-hob electric stove – heating and storage sorted in one fell swoop. For small dyeing batches and sampling, I use a tiny slow cooker, found in a charity shop, that sits on top. The sink – another small ad find – is located next to the door so I can spill out onto the decking and garden, especially useful when washing fleeces.

The dye area with bargain sink, butchers' block and slow cooker

A magnetic knife block keeps weaving essentials close to hand

Best Buys

Each of my floor looms has a magnetic knife block attached to the castle. That way I always have scissors, needles, sley hooks and other items to hand. It also acts as a holder for threading patterns and the post-it notes that I use to remind me of where I am in a weave. Complex or long treadling patterns are written out on a note, and I use a pin stuck in it to remind me of where I am if I get interrupted. I've also added strip lighting under each castle to aid visibility.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my play room with you – if you are ever passing please come in and share the fun.

About the author: *Linda More is an ex-journalist who now spends most of her time investigating the centuries-old traditions of handspinning, dyeing and weaving, creating modern interpretations using luxurious silk, sustainable wool or practical linen. Linda is a member of the York and Online Guilds, and the Journal's Feature Editor for dye.*
www.oldchurchstudios.co.uk

Two hand-dyed, handwoven brushed mohair blankets sitting in the sun

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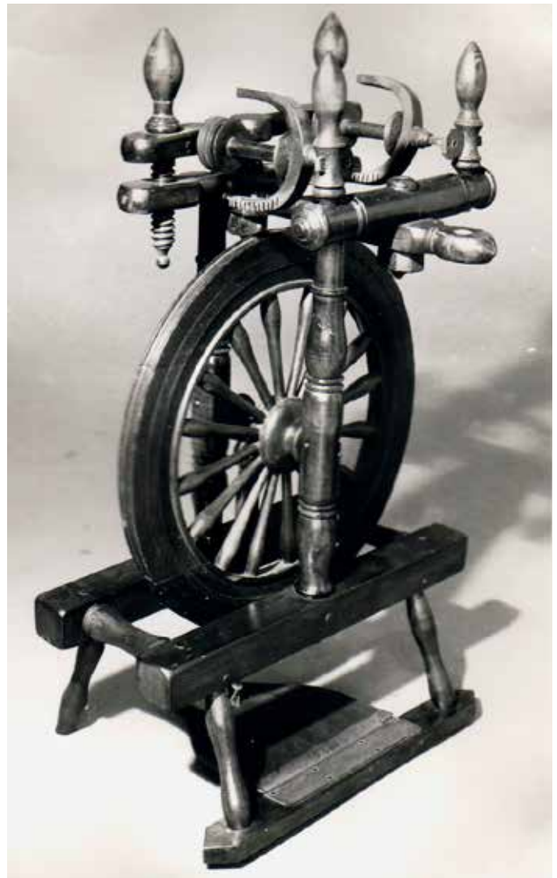
A Window Onto the Linen Industry in Eighteenth Century Scotland

Hilary Miller, Gwynedd Guild

Single flyer spinning wheel with a distaff for linen spinning made by James Peebles in Ayrshire, dated 1813 or 1815.
Source: National Museums Scotland



Double flyer wheel from Aberdeenshire. This wheel has a distaff which is not shown. Undated, but it is similar in style to one at Snowshill Manor, Gloucestershire (National Trust) which is thought to have been made between 1750 - 1850 (possibly earlier as there is no maker's mark, which should have been shown after 1751).
Source: National Museums Scotland

If you think of textiles in Scotland, the first thought is likely to be wool: tartan and tweed, or the cotton or jute mills of the nineteenth century. But in the eighteenth century linen was the major industry – handspun and handwoven. Economic histories give us an idea of the volume of production and its value, but there is a contemporary source that can tell us something about how this very dispersed and rural industry operated. This is the Statistical Account of Scotland – initiated by Sir John Sinclair, MP for Caithness, and published in 21 volumes between 1791 and 1799. He set out to collect information from every parish in Scotland by producing a questionnaire which was sent to all Church of Scotland ministers. The exercise was repeated in the late 1830s, so that the two accounts are known as the Old Statistical Account (OSA) and the New Statistical Account (NSA); between them they cover the height of the Scottish linen industry and its transformation from rural craft to a factory-dominated process.

Taking a small group of parishes in eastern Perthshire, both highland and lowland, in an area where the linen production was widespread, we can learn quite a lot about the handspinning of flax.

Spinsters

The OSA report from Moulin, a highland parish, is particularly detailed and is a good starting point. The spinning of linen yarn is given as the principal manufacture of the parish, as it is in many other parishes. 'Women from 10 years old and upwards employ themselves in spinning linen yarn almost wholly for sale from the beginning or middle of November, till about the end of March.' On average a spinner was said to spin 16 cuts a day and produce a spindle[1] from 1lb of lint (flax), which took about three days. It was estimated that married women with children to look after earned about 1s (i.e. one shilling) per week from spinning, but a woman who was a good spinner and employed in nothing else might earn 3s a week. The minister estimated that the parish produced about 23,000 spindles of yarn per year, using about 2,200 stones of flax.

A stone of flax from the mill cost 13s 4d and yielded about 11lb of dressed flax. The short and rough fibres which were removed by hackling formed tow, and this could be spun for a coarse yarn. About 75 acres of flax were grown; the parish had seven lint mills and four flax dressers. There were also 28 weavers. The linen yarn had been sold at an annual fair in the village in February, but by the 1790s yarn was being bought by merchants