

# Readers' Showcase: Blood, Sweat and Tears

## Jo Lilley, Dorset Guild

Winner of the Lylie Smart Trophy,  
National Exhibition 2022

Ever since seeing a rug weaver at her studio during Dorset Art Weeks in 2008, I have wanted to learn to weave. Once retired from teaching, I was able to return to my creative side and experiment and explore many mediums before falling in love with wool. I finally joined the Dorset Guild in 2018 and was put in contact with two amazing ladies – Mildred Cox and her daughter Liz Charlton. Mildred was a spinner and weaver, and had been a member and President of the Dorset Guild for years. Liz, also a weaver (having been taught by her mother) is also a Guild member. After several exploratory chats both very kindly offered to teach me, and my weaving journey began late in 2018.

I had expected to start on a simple pattern on a small loom but NO! Mildred simply asked what had inspired me, so I told her 'a rug' and that is where we started. My very first project was a rug woven in Krokbragd structure, with a pure linen warp and 100% wool weft. It had many colours and patterns, so I named it *Dolly Mixtures*. I would visit Mildred most weeks, learning about yarns, warping mills, warps and threading up a huge colonial floor loom. Week by week my rug would grow along with my enthusiasm and love for weaving. Mildred and Liz were so patient and generous with their knowledge – keen to pass on traditional skills.

Our friendship grew and grew, as did Mildred's years, so our lessons became chats on techniques, problem solving, and searching for new and varied projects that I would attempt to undertake by myself at home, having bought my own floor loom in June 2019.

Covid then hit and visits to my mentors came to an end. I decided to challenge myself and move from rugs to scarves, requiring a whole different understanding of appropriate yarn for warp and weft. I taught myself to read a draft and quietly read up on different techniques. Only able to access yarn from the Internet due to all wool fairs and shops being closed, I bought some disastrous yarn and some wonderful yarn – all part of the learning curve.

As restrictions lifted, I was able to show my efforts to Mildred and Liz, who both encouraged me to put in an entry for the National Exhibition. Huge pride and joy were shared when I learnt that my piece had been accepted. Sadly, Mildred passed away just before I was told that I had won the Lylie Smart Trophy, but I know she is looking down and smiling from ear to ear – this is dedicated to you both, with thanks and gratitude for your continued patience, support and friendship.

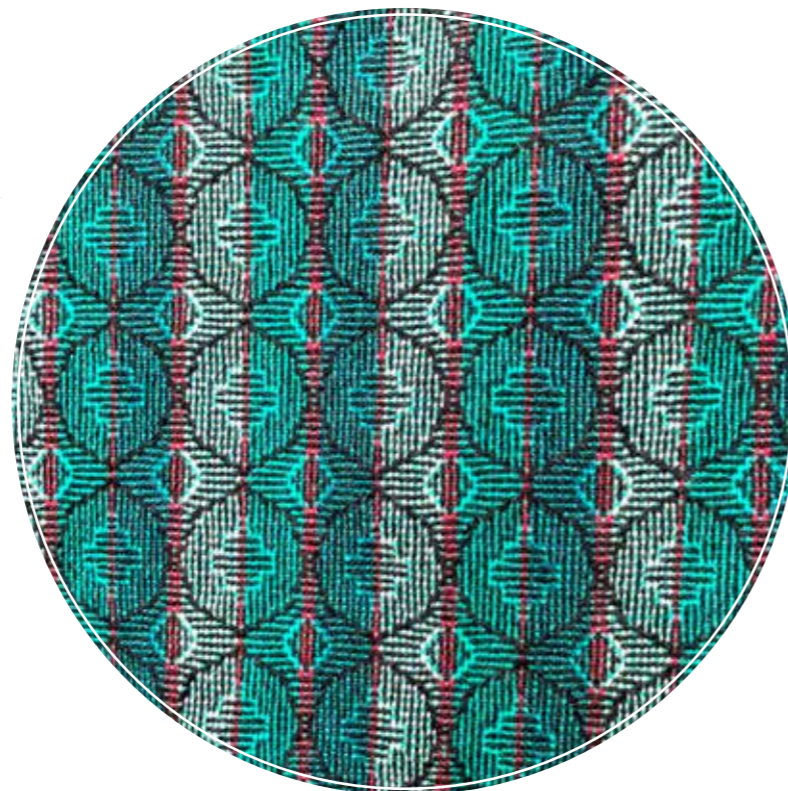
### Materials and Construction

This is a luxurious shadow weave shawl made from 45% Cashmere (2/28nm) and 55% merino wool (2/17nm), incredibly soft with a fabulous drape. It was made on an eight-shaft floor loom and finished with a twisted fringe. It has 442 ends, with every single warp thread changing colour



Blood, Sweat and Tears shawl

Photos: Jo Lilley



Close-up of the pattern

per length, requiring knotting at each end. It was woven at 18epi and 18ppi. The pattern was taken from a draft in *Handwoven* magazine (Dec 2019).

### Inspiration

I fell in love with the design, and felt that it portrayed the sheer hard work that a coal miner endured. This was particularly important to me, as my grandfather worked down the pits all his life. The black circles show the coal being transported along the canals by barge – slow and steady, yet the black coal dust infiltrates every aspect of its journey from the coal face to the fire and furnace. Intertwined with this is the pale colour representing the sweat of the miner. On the reverse the circles change from black to pale showing the many tears shed in its production. The red was put in to represent blood in respect of the many accidents and deaths that occurred over the years. Finally, the diamond shape stands for the sheer determination of the workforce – strong, hard and united.

### A footnote

In making the shawl not only did it pay homage to my grandfather, but challenged my personal weaving ability – I had never woven shadow weave before and never created such a complicated warp. My journey became emotional, frustrating, determined and proud – a bit like a miner's!



Dolly Mixtures rug

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