

“From Fleece to Finish” at May’s WI meeting

Our May meeting in Woodhouse Eaves village hall had a warm and woolly feel to it!

After all business formalities were completed by President Hilja Skorupa and team, the members sat back to listen to our guest speaker, Angela Dewes, talking about and demonstrating how beautiful fleeces can be turned into both carpets and hand knitted garments and accessories.



Angela began by telling members a little of her background and how, as a very keen knitter, she got into her life-long work which started as a hobby. Conveniently married to a farmer, she initially had sixteen sheep of her own but now the flock numbered over seventy-five. With the aid of a slideshow everyone could see her beautiful sheep including well known pedigree and rare breeds. Her original little flock comprised of Jacobs: pretty cream sheep with brown spot markings. Then over the years she added Black Leicester Long Horn, Cotswold and Cheviots.

Much hard work goes into looking after sheep to ensure they produce the finest of fleeces: a good diet of oats and grass and a great deal of work to keep them clean! If sheep are unwell their fleece will snap.

Angela said that in recent years natural fibres had very much come back into vogue and there was a

demand for a variety of types of wool from coarse fibres needed for carpets to obviously softer ones used for knitted garments.

Professional sheep-shearers were used to relieve the flock of their wool. There was some irony in the fact that last year individual fleeces could sell for 29p each when it had cost several pounds to fleece each animal!

After quite a lengthy cleaning process, which involves getting all the sheep-muck and grime out, the fleeces are then washed in hot water and washing- up liquid followed by spin-drying. The finished process results in a fleece weighing about 1.5kg.

To achieve the huge variety of colours of the skeins of wool that Angela had brought with her, she said she used everything from food- colourings to synthetic dyes and even plants such as eucalyptus.

Demonstrating various techniques to achieve varying strengths of wool, she showed us how carding and spinning could produce anything from worsted wool, which has a tighter twist for strength to a looser twist producing a more 'stretchy' result.

At the end of her talk members were then invited to inspect her spinning wheel and admire the many different coloured samples of her wool and the resulting knitted items.

Her life-long work and hobby means Angela now teaches spinning and yarn- making and for anyone interested in pursuing their own interests in this skilled craft Angela can be contacted on: www.barnspun yarnandfarm.co.uk

Our thanks to Angela for an interesting and informative talk.

NEXT WI MEETING- WEDNESDAY, 19th JUNE AT 7.30PM IN WOODHOUSE EAVES VILLAGE HALL.

There is always something for everyone. New members of all ages are very welcome. For further details visit our WI website: www.wewi.org.uk

Deirdre Thomas