

This summer has been absolutely glorious and frenetic offering many opportunities to exhibit, demonstrate and make Buttons. The exhibition at the Gold Hill Museum was a great success and I noticed at least five people sent Dorset Buttons to the Button Project at Macclesfield.

Together with like-minded individuals, I have been extremely busy with one-to-one workshops, events and commissions. Including one for a film shortly to be made in Dorset. My fingers haven't stopped as every time I get to the end of one order, another one comes rolling in!

Despite the disappointing number of entries this August, next year, the Dorset Arts and Crafts Exhibition organisers will be celebrating their 100th anniversary so lets make it a bumper year for entries of Dorset Buttons and show that this heritage craft is not a dying craft.

I know some you attended workshops during the summer and have been enthused to continue to make these lovely buttons. Please continue to contact me as I am always interested.

Best wishes

Anna McDowell

### Report on the First Dorset Button Exhibition held in May

This exhibition proved a great success with just under 800 visitors over the three days. Many very positive comments have been passed onto me including one asking when the next one planned for! The exhibition also helped to raise much needed funds for the Gold Hill Museum which relies on donations for its income.

Visitors came from a very wide area including a couple from Cornwall and another couple who lived in Winchester and picked up details of the exhibition at Killerton House whilst on holiday in Devon!

The exhibition was divided into four areas of interest. The history of the button industry, which included very interesting newly researched information and covered; the 'birth of a cottage industry', 'a Dorset family's business for over 200 years', 'the development of the button machine' and finally the decline of the Dorset Button industry. An artists' exhibition included contemporary works of art inspired by Dorset Buttons; including Sally Webster, textile artist, Anita Pullan, ceramist and Sarah Burnett, hand-knitted and naturally dyed jacket. Dorset Button enthusiasts' exhibition included a collection of how Dorset Buttons are used today such as Marion Howitt's (author of the Dorset Button Fact



*Marion Howitt's exquisite picture featuring Dorset Buttons*



*Workshops with Sally Webster*

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File) beautiful study of buttons, re-enactment costumes, clothing using Dorset buttons and samples on how they can be used for greeting cards. There were also items for sale including button making kits, corsages featuring Dorset Buttons and Dorset Button brooches.

Finally, a series of workshops organised over all three days enabled visitors to see how these buttons were made and have a go.

Thank you all for your help and support with this, the first, exhibition dedicated purely to Dorset Buttons.

### Buttons arrive in Macclesfield from all over the world!

The Macclesfield Button Project was a stunning exhibition of over 300 contemporary handmade buttons with buttons sent by buttoners from all over the world. From Australia to Norway, and all over the UK, artists and makers are translating their work into buttons for this exciting new event.

Artists were asked to work within the constraints of traditional button sizes and fixing methods, but from there, the imagination was free to roam. Each button is a miniature work of art in its own right and highly collectable.

The Button Project is intended to serve as a celebration of the heritage of Macclesfield. For Macclesfield, silk buttons are where it all began in around the 1570s. This cottage-based business flourished into major industry and shaped the town into what it is today. Macclesfield Museums, which recently have been designated the official western end of the Silk Road by the United Nations World Tourist Organisation Silk Road Project, present all aspects of silk use and production including fine examples of the local Macclesfield silk button as well as a nationally important collection of silk clothing, fashion and accessories from throughout the town's silk-making history.

I visited this exhibition just before it closed on Thursday 7th August. I was astounded by how many buttons had been entered and the high standard of workmanship including six Dorset Buttons. Craft practitioners and artists at the top of their field, plus our rising stars and many who make just for the love of it all mixed together to make the exhibition very memorable.

### Larmer Tree Festival

Earlier in the year I was invited to take a one-day workshop in the Adult Craft tent at the Larmer Tree Festival. Little did I know what I was letting myself in for when I accepted.

Each year trainers and crafts people are asked to organise a day where a table is set for twenty participants. Each participant is allowed to 'have-a-go' at any of the crafts on offer. Once finished they move on vacating their chair for someone else to take! This format meant that I had a number of people all requiring individual attention. I was also asked by the organisers to turn the Dorset Buttons into a 'rag' brooch. A real challenge in the time allowed!

I decided I definitely needed help so recruited my niece Harriet Page who is a teacher and Textile



*The Button Project display at Macclesfield*



*Sample of the buttons on display at Macclesfield*

Trainer by profession. Harriet was excellent as she had the patience and the skills necessary for the day. I was also lucky to have a young volunteer arranged by the organisers of the Festival.

The day started at 9.30am with the preparations and finished at 5.00pm when Harriet and I finally managed to drive from the grounds. The day was glorious and the atmosphere at the Festival very friendly and family orientated - only those who attend can truly experience it. So how many people chose to participate and make a Dorset Button? And how many buttoners did we have over the day? I do not know the exact figure as we were so busy that we were unable to count but think it must have been around sixty-five. This figure includes at least five men!

Would I do it again? Most definitely and both Harriet and I have put the date of next year's Festival into our diaries.



*Larmer Tree Button Brooch*

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### **In praise of the humble Singleton - a Button Challenge for 2014**

Whilst up in Macclesfield, I was inspired to see many buttons made on what looked like a piece of fabric around a round form with wonderful and sometimes amusing decorations in the centre. This inspired me to look at how this idea could be adapted to our own Dorset Button the 'Singleton'. When we talk about Dorset Buttons, everyone knows about the thread buttons and the High Tops and Dorset Knobs, even the Birdseye seems to have more popularity than the Singleton. So how can we make more of the Singleton?

The Dorset Singleton button was made using a ring covered in fabric stuffed with sheep's wool and secured with tiny stitches on the inside of the ring. Using thread, each button was then individually decorated. As can be seen in the sample on the right.



*Original Singletons*

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Here is a challenge to bring the humble Singleton into the 21st Century. Using 25mm ring the traditional method to make these buttons, buttoners are free to put their own individual decoration into the centre of these buttons. If any of you would like to participate please contact me by email at [henrysbuttons@aol.com](mailto:henrysbuttons@aol.com) or Tel: 01747 829010 and I will take this project forward. You never know I may be able to display your buttons at the next Dorset Arts and Crafts Exhibition!

### **News from buttoners**

#### **Hilary Mackenzie**

Hilary contacted me with this lovely story about her son.

"In May this year I visited my son, Ewan, who lives with his girlfriend in Cape Town. I took my threads and rings with me to practise. Ewan, who has always loved creating things had a go at the "wheel" and did pretty well. He then created another in the same colours as his Dorset tweed cap which he bought at Snooks in Bridport. When finished, he attached the button to the cap!

Ewan was determined to make something on a "larger scale" and sent me a photo of the finished button a couple of weeks later after I returned. He had taken the rim of a cycle wheel, used coloured rope for the casting, but was not able to get all the slicking on the inside.....however, it looked pretty in the way it just 'sat'. He then did the laying with the rope and to start the rounding, he then managed to get some leather strips which he used for the rest of the rounding. It looks really great on the wall of his balcony!"



*Ewan's Dorset Button worked on a cycle wheel*

### **Rachel Bowden**

Rachel has only just started to make Dorset Buttons. Her first attempt is well worth a mention. Rachel sent this picture of her Dorset Button necklace, made using DMC Pelé variegated thread and 30mm, 20mm and 15mm curtain rings. Well done Rachel and I look forward to to seeing images of your next project.



*Rachel Bowden's necklace. Congratulations Rachel*

### **New Book - Buttons: A Passementerie Workshop Manual by Gina Barrett**

In this workshop manual, Gina Barrett shows how to recreate the beautiful passementerie of the past and how to work modern designs. A large variety of techniques are explained, including thread wrapping, needlework, knots and embroidery. Working with beads and spangles, needle weaving and lace techniques are discussed, as are tools, materials, useful stitches and finishing. Instructions for over 100 individual designs are included - each clearly explained and illustrated with step by step drawings. Suggestions for many more variations are also given, with photographs and drawings for inspiration, enabling the reader to create a huge range of unique buttons. For full details go to Gina's website [www.ginabsilkworks.co.uk](http://www.ginabsilkworks.co.uk).

### **A note on thread**

I have just discovered the joy of working with a thread called Lizbeth. This is described as a high quality, 100% Egyptian Cotton, 6-cord cordonnet, specially developed for tatting and crochet. It comes in three sizes 10, 20 and 40. It is super-combed and gas-singed for outstanding body and picots that hold their shape, offers uniform colour throughout, a silky appearance and is easy to work, being less likely to tangle. There are two companies that I have discovered who supply over the internet [www.roseground.com](http://www.roseground.com) and [www.tatting.co.uk](http://www.tatting.co.uk). I would be interested to hear what your thoughts on the quality of this thread.

### **Events**

Please visit [www.henrysbUTTONS.co.uk](http://www.henrysbUTTONS.co.uk) for information on events and workshops.

Supported by



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