



Dorset Buttons past and present by Anna McDowell

Since I discovered Dorset Buttons, I have been fascinated by how they are applied to garments, both in the past and today in this time of mass produced buttons.

Earlier this year, the Sturminster Newton Town Museum mounted an exhibition on Rural Crafts which included a large section on Dorset Buttons.

They had borrowed samples of buttons from the Dorset County Museum, and this lovely linen waistcoat from Salisbury



Linen waistcoat with corded embroidery and Dorset Buttons. 1760s. Salisbury Museum.

Museum. This waistcoat demonstrated how the humble Dorset Button worked in linen can look so much part of the garment.

These buttons blended in and matched the fabric



Dorset Button worked in vintage thread and jasper beads.

Mr Charles William Wapshare. I wonder who Mr Wapshare was, what he did, and why he had this lovely waistcoat.

I use Dorset Buttons to transform an otherwise ordinary garment into something special. Just a few days ago, on the Saturday of the Dorset County Show, a lovely lady

was looking for that statement outfit for her daughter's wedding. When she saw my vintage coat and dress with Dorset Buttons worked with jasper beads, she just had to have it. She returned the next day to say she was

thrilled with the outfit which fitted her perfectly.

A lovely example of Dorset Buttons applied in the past as well as today.

Dorset Skills winner Dorset Arts & Crafts Annual Exhibition

The Dorset Arts & Crafts Annual Exhibition had its largest number of exhibits in this years annual exhibition.

Maureen Edwards won Gold for this collection of Dorset Buttons mounted onto a wooden Sculpture, in the Dorset Skills section.

The majority of buttons have been worked on rings but Maureen has cleverly inter spaced them with Birdseyes. The buttons are worked in cotton thread using a mix of both stranded and twisted.



Inside this issue:

My Dorset Button journey	2
Living Crafts at Christchurch	2
Growing up in Dorset	3
Inspiration	3
A weaving project	3
2017 Events & Workshops	4

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My Dorset Button Journey So Far by Tania Ashton Jones

My fascination & love of Dorset Buttons began early in 2012 after a friend organised a demonstration at our knitting group. Brought up in



Byatt Shawl Dorset Button Brooch

Dorset I felt disappointed I'd not learnt about the Dorset Button cottage industry during my schooling. I headed off to the Dorset History Centre to try to find out more

information & visited Thelma Johns at the Old Button Shop in Lychett Minister.

I attended one of Anna's High Top Button workshops later in 2012 — think I need a lot more practice on these! Later in 2013 I met Anna again at the Dorset Button Exhibition at the Gold Hill Museum where there were several



Cushion Commission

Dorset Buttons on display including work by Anna, Marion Howitt & Sally Webster. By now I was starting to make lots of Dorset Buttons using different threads & yarns & experimenting with different designs as well as delivering a few

workshops locally on the Crosswheel design.

Since then I've moved from the South Coast of England and am now

living on the Isle of Skye, off the North West Coast of Scotland. I am spreading the word of Dorset Buttons through wool festivals, craft shows, workshops, talks & demos both home & abroad. It often bemuses people that I live on Skye yet do a Dorset traditional craft, until they learn more about the history & how I came to be making Dorset Buttons. It is a small world as a lady who lives 3 miles down the road from me here on Skye once lived next door to a Dorset Button maker back in the 1960's just outside of Shaftesbury. I'm looking forward to the day when we sit & chat over a cuppa about what she remembers.

I particularly enjoy sourcing wools & thinking about how best to showcase them in a Dorset Button design. I'm very fortunate here in Scotland to be surrounded by some talented independent yarn businesses, especially hand dyers, who I like to support.

I contributed this thistle inspired Singleton Dorset Button to the Singleton Challenge set by Anna back in 2015, which raised money for the Dorset Archives Trust. Standing only 3cm from the bottom of the shank to the top of the thistle, made with Shetland wool & tweed, it certainly was quite a challenge albeit one I relished doing.

One of my main aims is encouraging people to think how a beautiful Dorset Button could be used

to finish off their own handmade projects either as an embellishment or a practical addition. Whether that be buying a kit, being shown how to make a Dorset Button, so they can make it themselves, or commissioning me. I enjoy the process of being part of a special personal project however big or small. Although it was a huge surprise and personally very satisfying the first time I saw one of my Dorset Buttons on the runway as part of a Di Gilpin hand knitted



Di Gilpin Grainne Frock Coat DB

collection. I am an avid knitter myself so always use that last bit of wool left from shawl projects to make a Dorset Button Brooch.

I'm aware there is still so much for me to learn on my fascinating journey with Dorset Buttons. I hope in some small way I'm adding to raising awareness of this traditional craft that can be utilised functionally & aesthetically in our modern world.

Living Crafts at Christchurch Priory Church

In June, Jennifer Bluck sent a Tweet of an exhibition she had just visited in Christchurch, Dorset.

Christchurch and District Arts had organised a living crafts exhibition of original paintings, textiles and crafts and amongst the exhibit she saw this

tree of life with Dorset Buttons worked onto the leaves. This picture features a variety of Dorset Button designs all based on the Cartwheel.



Growing up in Dorset by Anna McDowell

Memories of growing up in Dorset and learning the skills of Dorset Buttony are always of interest. My parents moved to a small village just outside Shaftesbury during the 1950s



Donhead St Andrew where Abraham Cast, who founded the Dorset Button Industry, met his wife.

and so I grew up in the area. I remember seeing a television programme on Dorset Buttons presented by Jack Hargreaves during the 1980s and

my interest in Buttony was born. I was lucky to meet the lady, Elizabeth Gilbert, featured in this programme two years ago. Seeing this episode again set me thinking about growing

up in Dorset and learning about Dorset Buttons and I would love to hear your stories.

When I received this email from Veronica Copping it conjured up a wonderful image of growing up in the county.

“I found your item on Pinterest, and yes I have a small collection of Dorset buttons. I will take some photos and send to you. I have lived in Norfolk since 1972 but was born in 1942 in Boscombe Hospital and brought up in Bournemouth. My father was the sales administrator at F English, Main Ford Dealers for Dorset, and he dealt with nine small garages across the county. As a child I used to go to visit them sometimes with him so I got to know the county really well. Happy memories the long row of beech trees by Kingston Lacey, early primroses, catkins and

pussy willow at Tarrant Rushton, and the stories I was told about St. Peter's Finger and the Dorset buttons, and of course Shaftesbury itself.

My parents continued to live at Southbourne until they died in 1982 and 1983 and I continued to visit them and visit my old haunts. I remember my father telephoning me with great excitement to tell me that the Old Button Shop had reopened and I went down to visit them and we went to the shop. I bought some buttons and a book and still have them. I also bought some more many years later at an auction.

I belong to Norfolk Quilters and last Saturday attended a practical day course with them on Dorset Buttons. I talked to the course organiser and took in my collection.”

Please share your stories me and send them to [Dorset Buttons -](#)

Inspiration is what it's all about by Anna McDowell



As some of you may know, I run Dorset Button workshops where I aim to teach the skills of Dorset Buttony and inspire participants to use

their newly gained skill to experiment with yarns, threads beads etc.

I was invited by the Marlborough &

District Embroidery Guild and the New Forest Textile Group to run an all day workshop. Participants had a variety of skills in Dorset Buttony from beginners to advanced. To organise a day that would interest all was a challenge.

One button that I covered was the Singleton. Each participant was given instructions and the necessary material to make one of these

buttons and then encouraged to embellish their button with their own embroidered design. Both groups enjoyed this challenge, so much so that I received an email from Linda Wells, from Marlborough, with the following message and images of her buttons. ‘Thank you so ever much for a super workshop at Kennet Valley Hall a thoroughly inspiring time. I have finally gotten round to my Singletons ...’ Thank you Linda.

A weaving project by Natalie Drummond



I have been so excited to share my project with you! I live in Fort Wayne, Indiana USA and have recently started teaching how to make Dorset Button to craft clubs and weaving guilds. The style of buttons I enjoy making often include beads and space dyed 5/2 perle (mercerized) cotton. I am a weaver and have been incorporating larger buttons

into a hand woven Japanese Market Bag. The market bag is woven, sewn, and hand finished by me. It has drawstrings on each side and I like to wire a special Dorset button on the side.

I am including special process photographs to show you my Dorset Button work with my handwoven cloth. The Dorset Button adorned Japanese Market Bag will be exhibited in June 2017 at the

Midwest Weaver's Conference as part of the guild exhibit 70 years the Road 'Weave' traveled. It will also be on display at the Fort Wayne History Center September/October 2017 as part of a guild 70th anniversary exhibit.

I recently purchased brass rings from you and have been sharing the history. I enjoy your newsletters and hope to make a jewellery project of Dorset Buttons in the future.

Events for 2017

Tuesday 26th September 2017 Dorset Button Master Class with Anna McDowell

This workshop was requested by experienced buttoners who want to test their skills with a new challenge. The workshop will be centred on the Dorset 'thread' Button. Participants will be able to experiment with different yarns and threads including ribbons and lace and the differing properties and effects they make when working a Dorset Button. The challenge is to incorporate the minimum of four

different yarns to show off their individual properties into the overall design of the finished button. The use of beads will also be covered. This workshop is for experienced buttoners.

Venue: Hardy's Birthplace Visitor Centre, Higher Bockhampton, near Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 8QJ
Time: 10.00am – 12.30pm
Entry and Details: Tel: 01305 251228, [Hardy's Birthplace](#) on Facebook or hardysbirthplace@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Tuesday 3 October 2017 Talk to the Breast Cancer Support Group

Venue: Pimperne Village Hall, Newfield Rd, Pimperne, Blandford Forum DT11 8UZ
Time: 2.30pm

Monday 17th October 2017 Dorset Button Workshop for beginners with Anna McDowell

Learn a traditional Dorset craft in the lovely woodland setting which inspired the writer Thomas Hardy. This workshop will be run by Anna McDowell (from Henry's Buttons) who will share her creative flare with attendees to create their own traditional Dorset Button, with a modern twist of colour and different threads.

Venue: Hardy's Birthplace Visitor Centre, Higher Bockhampton, near Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 8QJ
Time: 10.00am – 12.30pm
Entry and Details: Tel: 01305 251228, [Hardy's Birthplace](#) on Facebook or hardysbirthplace@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Monday 20th November 2017 Dorset Button Workshop - Advanced with Anna McDowell

Extend your skills of Dorset Buttons with new designs such as the spiral and daisy.

This workshop will be run by Anna McDowell (from Henry's Buttons) who will share her creative flair with attendees to create their own traditional Dorset Button, with a modern twist of colour and different threads.

Skill level: Advanced. Knowledge on how to make a Dorset 'cartwheel' Button essential.

Venue: Hardy's Birthplace Visitor Centre, Higher Bockhampton, near Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 8QJ
Time: 10.00am – 12.30pm
Entry and Details: Tel: 01305 251228, [Hardy's Birthplace](#) on Facebook or hardysbirthplace@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Tuesday 5th December 2017 Workshop - Sparkle and Shine Christmas Decorations with Anna McDowell

Enjoy traditional Dorset craft of Dorset button making in the lovely woodland setting which inspired the writer Thomas Hardy.

Anna McDowell (from Henry's Buttons) will share her creative flair with attendees to create 'Dorset Buttons' which sparkle and shine and can be used to help decorate your home this Christmas.

Using original methods Anna combines contemporary materials and designs to help keep the tradition of Dorset Buttons alive. With Christmas around the corner, this great workshop will enable you to learn a new skill or refresh old ones while creating a truly bespoke item to bring out every Christmas.

Venue: Hardy's Birthplace Visitor Centre, DT2 8QH
Time: 10.00am to 12.30pm
Entry and Details: Tel: 01305 251228, [Hardy's Birthplace](#) on Facebook or hardysbirthplace@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Monday 11th December 2017 Workshop - Sparkle and Shine Christmas Decorations with Anna McDowell

See above for details.

Venue: Hardy's Birthplace Visitor Centre, DT2 8QH
Time: 10.00am to 12.30pm
Entry and Details: Tel: 01305 251228, [Hardy's Birthplace](#) on Facebook or hardysbirthplace@dorsetcc.gov.uk



Share your news, views and projects

I'm always interested to hear your news, views and especially any projects you may be involved in featuring Dorset Buttons. From the emails I have received in the past, I know there are many talented buttoners amongst you. If you would be willing to share your Dorset Button news with other like-minded people, I would welcome contributions to this eNewsletter. Please email your information preferably with an image to Anna McDowell at dorsetbuttons@henrysbuttons.co.uk

For full details of all events please visit the Events Page on my website
[Henry's Buttons](#)