

THE MAKERS GUILD IN WALES

The Beginnings

In the early 1980's there seemed to be almost a trend for Fairs of some sort or another -Antique Fairs, Craft Fairs, Farmers Markets - providing a means for interested craftsmen and other people to show their wares in an otherwise difficult market. I first met a number of the original members of the Makers Guild in Wales at these fairs and markets, although I already knew most of the Spinners, Weavers and Dyers from all parts of Wales and beyond. At this time I also had a workshop in the Old Wool Barn, Cowbridge selling my own work and handspun and woven pieces of others plus spinning and weaving equipment.

Craft Fairs were organised (or not) by a variety of people - some good and well advertised, others with poor attendance and no publicity and a sheer waste of time and effort. At this time the Craft Council of Wales was started, with headquarters in Newtown under the Chairmanship of Malcolm MacIntyre-Reid, to which craftsmen were invited to join for an annual fee and in return received a limited opportunity to attend events organised by them.

Other fairs were arranged by the more ambitious crafts 'individuals' - one I recall was held in the Town Hall, High Street, Kensington, which included a hired coach to take us there and back and the option of overnight accommodation in the nearby College of Art residencies. The Design Council was also represented in Cardiff to which you could submit individual items of work for their selection and if approved receive a Tarian Label on the item and the opportunity to exhibit in their showroom and at events organised by them. I found this a good opportunity as the work was also displayed in London.

Some of the events we attended were very well publicised, well attended and worth all the effort involved - some had no publicity and were a frustrating waste of time. It was after one of the worst events that craftspeople were complaining, when Molly (and others) said they could organise an event much better themselves - to which came the response 'Well, why don't you then?' and the prompt reply "Alright - I will".

Preliminary meetings were held and possibilities researched in various peoples houses but I think the first 'official' meeting was called and held in the Friends Meeting House off Newport Road, attended by 22 craftsmen. The possibilities of an organisation were discussed and it was enthusiastically decided to go ahead - Molly Curley (Potter) was elected as Chairman, Linda Lazenby(Jeweller) - Vice Chairman, Kathy Williams (Weaver) - Honorary Secretary, Lorraine Voisey (Woodturner) - Honorary Treasurer. Publicity was discussed and a decision taken, after considerable debate to call the organisation **The Makers Guild in Wales**.

Not all the craftsmen in the area were delighted when they heard of our venture and many quite obviously considered it audacious and were so angry that they approached Malcolm McIntyre Read, Chair of the Crafts Council of Wales, who made contact with Molly to ask for further explanation with an invitation that we should be present at a meeting to explain ourselves. The late Anna Adam and I represented the Guild at this meeting and I was amazed at the hostility which faced us! I explained the system of Craftsmens Guilds which I was familiar with in England where selection was carried out in order to bring integrity to the standard of craftsmanship. We

also stressed that membership (after approval) was open to anyone should they wish to apply. It was quite a surprising meeting and Anna and I were relieved when Malcolm McIntyre-Reed suggested that our presence was no longer necessary.

The initial activities were mainly Craft Fairs, the most memorable of which to me was held in St. David's Hall. I recall only tables were provided and I remember taking my own screens which were made of wooden panels which fitted on to chromium plated frames. All very heavy, noisy and difficult to manage up to the third floor of St. Davids Hall! Cars were only allowed to unload near to the entrance in the Hayes before 9.30 a.m. and no return until after 6.0 p.m.

Molly's ambition had always been to have our own premises and although this resulted in a somewhat nomadic few years in the Old Library in the Hayes, the old Techniquet Building in the Bay, where the name Craft in the Bay was adopted, then onward to 57 Bute Street, all of which we rented, then finally to the Flourish, where we are today and which we own.

I feel none of this would have come about without the determination of Molly and her initial team, plus the tireless work of Kate Bosset who fought so hard for the building and even the land on which it sits to give us this present gallery, of which we should all be so justly proud today.

Margaret Hansford

Founder Member

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